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A Radical Journal of Geography

Felix Wiegand, *David Harveys urbane Politische Ökonomie: Ausgrabungen der Zukunft marxistischer Stadtforschung*, Münster: Verlag Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2012. ISBN: 978-3-89691-922-9 (paper)

David Harvey's work has been discussed intensively by scholars in the area of human geography for over forty years. Before the publication of Felix Wiegand's new book there had been some important contributions such as Noel Castree and Derek Gregory's (2006) anthology, but few systematic representations of his work (see, for example, Jones 2006), and none written in German.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Harvey was rarely discussed in Germany. One of the few publications that did address his work at the time was Stefan Krätke's (1991) interpretation of the secondary circulation of capital in the real estate business. Of course, Harvey's approach, which derives the spatial economic structure from the categories of general accumulation theory, is difficult to apply to German society. Unlike in the US and UK, processes of privatization and deregulation in the 1980s and 1990s had little effect in Germany, so social and economic geography research on spatial structures had to focus primarily on the welfare state, urban planning, and regional policy. While one strand of the academic debate in Germany in the 1970s was based on Marxist theory (see Hein 1978; Brake 1980), in the late 1980s its focus shifted to regulation theory. One of the seminal works that best represent this trend is Stefan Krätke's (1995) textbook from the mid 1990s, the first of its kind in German economic geography to use Marxist categories as its basic concepts.

Not until the policies of the red-green coalition from 1998 to 2005, which led to an increase in company and property incomes, did the trends that underlie social development in

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capitalist societies become more clearly apparent again. These developments had a major influence on the academic debate, with the result that David Harvey's work became the subject of scholarly attention in Germany. Notable publications that stimulated the debate were an issue of *Geographische Revue*, 'Marxism in Geography' edited by Bernd Belina (2001), and an anthology on critical geography (Belina and Michel 2007) and Belina's (2003; 2007) comprehensive reviews of *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* and *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* made Harvey's work known to a wider audience.

At the same time, elements of Harvey's work became the subject of human geography studies. Susanne Heeg (2008), for example, used the idea of the entrepreneurial city, and Christian Zeller (2004) discussed the concept of accumulation by dispossession. Since 2005, as many as ten publications by Harvey have been translated into German, including *The New Imperialism*, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* and *The Enigma of Capital*, and this year, *Rebel Cities* was (re)published by Suhrkamp, one of the most prestigious publishers in Germany. The anthology *Kritische Regionalwissenschaft* (Krumbein *et al.* 2007), the most comprehensive overview of critical approaches in the area of human geography in German, contains two very detailed contributions about Harvey. However, the discussion in Germany has been focused on only a few specific aspects of Harvey's work rather than on his body of work as a whole.

The aim of Felix Wiegand's monograph is to provide a critical, comprehensive discussion of Harvey's works, but as he does so the author is not interested in following each and every twist and turn in Harvey's writings. His basic hypothesis is that at the centre of Harvey's work is the question of the structural features of capitalist societies and underlying spatial patterns and dynamics. Wiegand focuses primarily on the 1970s, which might be said to have ended with the publication of *The Limits to Capital* in 1982, and he regards the period from 1989 – the year of

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the publication of *The Condition of Postmodernity* – to about the year 2000 as a phase of opening, enlargement of scope, and self-reassurance, as he shows in his discussion of constructivism and post-structuralism, and of social differences and new challenges resulting from class politics. According to Wiegand, the third major phase in Harvey's work began with the publication of his writings on globalization and neoliberalism from the perspective of political economy (*The New Imperialism* and *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*), and Wiegand shows that it is in this phase that Harvey reaped analytical fruits, the seeds of which he had sowed with his interpretation of Marx in the 1970s.

The book begins with an overview of the individual steps in David Harvey's academic and personal development that have affected his approach and provided the themes guiding his theoretical work. In Chapter 3, Wiegand discusses the three cornerstones in Harvey's work: [i] the development of a methodological foundation for the study of human geography; [ii] the major influence the writings of Karl Marx have had on his theoretical perspective; and [iii] his attempt to develop a conceptual framework for the study of spatial issues. Chapter 4 is devoted to Harvey's theory of capitalist urbanization, which naturally comes in the form of an interpretation of *Social Justice and the City*. Chapter 5, the most extensive part of the book, focuses on the issues and approaches discussed in *The Limits to Capital*, which is known to be Harvey's attempt to integrate spatial aspects into the analysis of the capitalist mode of production. Wiegand traces Harvey's discussion of the three volumes of Marx's *Capital* and presents the theory of the three forms of capital circulation. He then describes the structuring of space resulting from the interplay of equity immobilization and the movement of capital to find profitable investment opportunities. In Chapter 6, the final part, Wiegand focuses on specific analyses of urban development to discuss the relationship between accumulation and social

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struggle which Harvey described in *The Urbanization of Capital*. To illustrate his point, he provides examples of connections between the fundamental categories of Harvey's theory and the development of property markets and the city as arenas for the struggle for the dominant mode of social reproduction. With its brilliant comprehensive discussion of a wide variety of theoretical aspects and its knowledgeable and insightful references to the literature, this chapter is the best evidence of the theoretical involvement and motivation of the author.

Wiegand's book presents a precise reconstruction of David Harvey's work, demonstrating a truly impressive knowledge of Harvey's writings as well as of secondary sources. Its immediately understandable structure and clear style make this book a highly readable guide to Harvey's work, particularly for German-speaking readers. It is a text-based interpretation, so controversial aspects in Harvey's work are only occasionally addressed, such as when Wiegand discusses Harvey's fundamental hypothesis of his theory of secondary capital circulation in relation to empirical research on urban geography. This is an aspect about which the reader would like to read much more. However, in his critical discussion of the contentious issue of secondary capital circulation, just as in other parts of the book, Wiegand remains true to his general approach of advocating Harvey's interpretation.

However, the difficulties in the reception of Harvey in Germany mentioned above have not been resolved. Not only have some of his concepts and ideas, such as his interpretation of 'dispossession' as a new type of accumulation (Görg 2004), been met with fundamental objections; it has even been questioned whether an approach such as this can be applied to German economic and societal structures. For example, after the economic crisis of 2008/9, the corporatist structures in Germany were able to regenerate themselves, which has widened the gap between Harvey's idea of general trends of spatial structure in capitalist societies and the analysis

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of specific issues again. Nevertheless, this book is a much-needed and highly valuable addition to the literature on the place of Harvey's approach in the theoretical tradition of human geography and the social sciences.

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