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FROM POSITIVIST GEOGRAPHY TO MARXIST GEOGRAPHY: AN ENGLISH GEOGRAPHER DAVID HARVEY

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the transition of David Harvey one of the leading geographers of our time from the positivist paradigm to the Marxist paradigm through the method of document analysis, and to analyze the factors that played a fundamental role in this transition by investigating Harvey's paradigmatic shift process. As David Harvey is one of the most prolific and industrious geographers today, the literature includes a significant number of both primary works by Harvey and secondary studies that engage with his scholarship. Therefore, since it is not possible to review and analyze all of these works in detail, this study focuses on key works that reflect Harvey's paradigmatic transformation. The scope of the study is thus limited not to Harvey's geographical perspective or his broader body of work, but specifically to those works that illustrate his transition from the positivist paradigm to the Marxist paradigm.

Today recognized as one of the leading figures in Marxist geography, Harvey was, in fact, one of the most ardent proponents of positivist geography during the early years of his academic career. From the early 1960s to the 1970s, over approximately a decade, Harvey produced works grounded in positivist philosophy and directed serious critiques toward the idiographic approach of traditional regional geographers. In 1969, Harvey authored *Explanation in Geography*, a methodological book in which he offered recommendations for the application of positivist methodology in geography. In this work, he advocated for the use of positivist philosophy in the study of geographical phenomena, aiming to liberate geography from the idiographic approach of traditional regional geography and transform the discipline into a more "scientific" and nomothetic structure.

By the 1970s, after relocating from the United Kingdom to the United States (Baltimore), Harvey was deeply affected by the urban injustices, racism, and uneven spatial development he encountered there, which led him to question the inadequacy of the positivist paradigm in analyzing sociospatial processes. In addition to these experiences, his encounter with a group of Marxist academics and graduate students at his new position at Johns Hopkins University brought about profound transformations in his geographical perspective. During this period, Harvey began reading Marx and, in the following years, produced studies centered on sociospatial processes grounded in Marx's ideas. In 1973, he consolidated these studies in his work *Social Justice and the City*, thereby laying the foundations for a sharp turn from positivist geography to Marxist geography.

Key Words: David Harvey, Marxist Geography, Positivist Geography, Paradigm, Explanation in Geography, Social Justice and City

POZİTİVİST COĞRAFYA'DAN MARKSİST COĞRAFYA'YA: İNGİLİZ COĞRAFYACI DAVID HARVEY

Özet

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Bu çalışmanın amacı, doküman analizi yöntemi ile günümüzün önde gelen coğrafyacılarından biri olan David Harvey'in pozitivist paradigmadan Marksist paradigmaya geçişini ele almak ve bu geçişin gerçekleşmesinde etkili olan faktörleri temel düzeyde inceleyerek, Harvey'in paradigmatic değişim sürecini analiz edebilmektir. David Harvey, günümüzün en üretken ve çalışkan coğrafyacılarından biri olduğu için literatürde hem kendisine ait hem de Harvey'in çalışmalarını ele alan çok sayıda ikincil çalışma bulunmaktadır. Bu nedenle, bahse söz konusu bütün eserler incelenip, detaylıca ele alınamayacağı için çalışma, Harvey'in paradigmatic dönüşümünü yansıtan temel eserler üzerinden işlenmeye çalışılmış, çalışmanın kapsamı Harvey'in coğrafi perspektifinden ve çalışmalarından ziyade, pozitivist paradigmadan Marksist paradigmaya geçişini yansıtan çalışmalar ile sınırlandırılmıştır.

Günümüzde, Marksist coğrafyanın önde gelen isimlerinden biri olarak bilinen Harvey, aslında akademik kariyerinin ilk yıllarında pozitivist coğrafyanın en ateşli savunucularından biri olmuştur. Harvey, 1960'lı yılların başlarından 1970'li yıllara kadar kabaca on yıllık bir zaman diliminde pozitivist felsefeye dair çalışmalara imza atmış, geleneksel bölgesel coğrafyacıların idiografik yaklaşımına ciddi eleştirilerde bulunmuştur. 1969 yılında, coğrafyada pozitivist metodolojinin kullanımına yönelik önerilerde bulunduğu bir yöntem kitabı olan *Explanation in Geography* eserini kaleme alan Harvey, bu eserinde, coğrafi fenomenlerin incelenmesi için pozitivist felsefeyi önermiş, böylece coğrafyayı geleneksel bölgesel coğrafyanın idiografik yaklaşımından kurtarıp, disiplini, daha "bilimsel" ve nomotetik bir yapıya büründürmeyi hedeflemiştir.

1970'li yıllara gelindiğinde, İngiltere'den ABD'ye (Baltimore) taşınan Harvey, burada karşılaştığı kentsel adaletsizlik, ırkçılık, eşitsiz mekânsal gelişim gibi unsurlardan oldukça etkilenmiş ve pozitivist paradigmanın sosyomekansal süreçlerin incelenmesi konusundaki yetersizliğini sorgulamaya başlamıştır. Tüm bunlara ek olarak, yeni atandığı Johns Hopkins Üniversitesi'nden bir grup Marksist akademisyen ve lisansüstü öğrenci ile de tanışınca coğrafi perspektifinde köklü değişimler meydana gelmiştir. Harvey, bu yıllarda Marx'la ilgili okumalar yapmaya başlamış ve daha sonraki süreçte Marx'ın fikirlerini temel alarak sosyomekansal süreçleri odak noktasına alan çalışmalar üretmeye başlamıştır. 1973 yılında, bu çalışmalarını Sosyal Adalet ve Şehir isimli eserinde toplamış ve böylece pozitivist coğrafyadan Marksist coğrafyaya doğru keskin bir dönüşün temellerini atmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: David Harvey, Marksist Coğrafya, Pozitivist Coğrafya, Paradigma, *Explanation in Geography*, Social Justice and City

Introduction

David Harvey was born in 1935 in Gillingham, Kent, England. Today, he is regarded as one of the most frequently cited geographers and social scientists in the world (Akbulutgiller, 2015). Raised in a working-class family, Harvey completed his primary and secondary education in public schools. In 1954, he earned a scholarship to study geography at the University of Cambridge. After graduating with honors in 1957, he immediately began his postgraduate studies at the same university (Sheppard & Barnes, 2019). He completed his doctorate at the University of Cambridge with a dissertation titled *Aspects of Agricultural and Rural Change in Kent, 1800–1900*, which examined agricultural and rural transformation in the Kent region of England. After receiving his PhD, Harvey began working as a lecturer in the Department of Geography at the University of Bristol (Castree, 2019).

After beginning his academic career, Harvey adopted two distinct philosophical approaches that effectively divided his career into two separate phases. In the early years of his academic life, roughly from the early 1960s to the 1970s, he embraced positivist philosophy; however, after the 1970s, he adopted a Marxist philosophical stance. Harvey's *Explanation in Geography* (Harvey, 1969), a methodological work closely associated with positivism, is a proposal for the use of the "standard model," a framework derived from the ideas of leading



figures of logical positivism such as Braithwaite, Carnap, Hempel, and Nagel, and based on quantitative methods. In contrast, his 1973 work *Social Justice and the City* (Harvey, 1973) marks a clear break from positivist philosophy, representing a Marxist-based study that shifts the focus from quantitative analyses in geography to sociospatial processes (Gregory, 2006). For this reason, the present study specifically focuses on these two seminal works that reflect Harvey's transition from the positivist to the Marxist paradigm and concentrates on the factors that played a role in his philosophical transformation.

1. Harvey's Positivist Geography and the Search for Spatial Science

In the literature, David Harvey recognized as one of the foremost advocates of Marxism and considered the founder of Marxist geography originally began his academic career as a positivist geographer. During the 1960s, he criticized the idiographic approach of traditional regional geography, which was dominant within the discipline at the time, and argued that geography should adopt a more "scientific," theoretical, and generalizable understanding. Harvey's identification as a positivist geographer is most often associated with his 1969 work *Explanation in Geography*. Although this is primarily due to the book's systematic and comprehensive adaptation of positivist philosophy to geographical methodology, it is known that Harvey had already been producing studies linked to positivist thought as early as the mid-1960s. For instance, in 1965 four years before the publication of *Explanation in Geography* he presented a paper in Sweden titled "*Monte Carlo Simulation Models*," in which he argued for the creation of universal geographic models that could be used to predict future conditions (Harvey 1965; cited in Paterson 1984, p. 25). Similarly, in his 1967 work *Behavioural Postulates and the Construction of Theory in Human Geography*, Harvey proposed the use of theory and models in geographical studies and emphasized that geographical principles should include geometric expressions such as location, proximity, distance, pattern, and morphology (Harvey 1967a). In his 1966 publication titled *Theoretical Concepts and the Analysis of Agricultural Land-Use Patterns in Geography* (Harvey, 1966a), Harvey initiated a discussion on the use of theory and models in land use studies within geography. In another work published the same year, *Geographical Processes and the Analysis of Point Patterns: Testing Models of Diffusion by Quadrat Sampling* (Harvey, 1966b), he employed quadrat sampling to subject certain theoretical diffusion models to mathematical testing, using Hägerstrand's doctoral thesis *Innovationsförloppet ur korologisk synpunkt* (The Diffusion of Innovations from a Chorological Perspective) (Hägerstrand, 1953, cited in Harvey, 1966b) as a reference framework.

In 1967, Harvey contributed another article titled *Models of the Evolution of Spatial Patterns in Human Geography* (Harvey, 1967b) to the seminal volume *Models in Geography* (Chorley & Haggett, 1967), edited by two leading positivist geographers of the period, Chorley and Haggett. In this article, he asserted that the fundamental components of geography should be theory, model, and statistical analysis. However, what stands out even more in this article is Harvey's proposal of a sharply defined epistemological and methodological roadmap for students of history and geography. In this proposal, Harvey offers an implicit critique of the idiographic approach, characterizing it as unscientific and accusing those who adopt it of not



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being true scientists. He makes a clear call for students to embrace a positivist scientific understanding:

He can either bury himself in the idiographic human history of a unique geographical area, sneering at broad generalizations, and produce a skillfully descriptive thesis that recounts what happened, where and when. Or he can be a scientist, and, by using scientific research procedures, attempt to verify, refute, or modify the exciting ideas put forward by previous researchers. (Harvey, 1967b, p. 551)

Although Harvey published two articles in 1968 expressing similar ideas (Harvey, 1968a; 1968b), his truly significant work *Explanation in Geography* was completed in 1969. As mentioned above, the influence of prominent positivist geographers of the period, such as Richard Chorley and Peter Haggett, played a major role in the publication of this work. Drawing on their ideas about quantitative geography, Harvey published his first book, *Explanation in Geography* (1969) (Harvey, 2021). In *Explanation in Geography*, Harvey presents an alternative methodological roadmap for geographers confined within the limits of traditional regional geographic thought, discussing a wide array of topics ranging from hypothesis formation to testing, from law-making to the application of existing theories, and from geometric location analyses to measurement methods. He argues that while geographers frequently engage in debates about the aims, scope, and nature of geography, they tend to adopt an “isolated” stance when it comes to the methodology of the discipline. According to him, geographers avoid engaging in philosophical and theoretical debates concerning the structure and methods of scientific explanation and tend to focus directly on their research goals without critically examining how scientific studies should be conducted within their discipline. Harvey contends that this situation weakens both the scientific character and the intellectual engagement of geographical studies. He also states that geographers who undertake such studies often rely on a very narrow literature base, frequently failing to adequately reference even the most fundamental sources related to the subject (Harvey, 1969).

Harvey takes the issue even further by stating that there is no inclusive and integrative methodology among geographers. He notes that a climatologist is, methodologically, largely influenced by physics or atmospheric physics; a biogeographer by biology; and an economic geographer by the methodologies of economics. Another point emphasized by the author is that these subfields do not share any common methodological ground, and as the number of specialized subfields in geography increases, so too does the methodological divide (Harvey, 1969).

According to Harvey, in order for geography to rest on more original and solid methodological foundations, it must evolve from the descriptive understanding of traditional regional geography toward a more “scientific” and nomothetic methodology that includes the production of laws, theories, and models. Indeed, for Harvey, developing theory is critically important both for making satisfactory explanations and for recognizing geography as an independent scientific discipline. In his view, the acquisition of a scientific identity by geography is directly proportional to its ability to construct theory. Geographical phenomena that are not associated with a theory cannot be explained on a consistent and rational basis. Therefore, Harvey opposes geographers who argue that the highly variable nature of geography



makes it unsuitable for producing laws, and he maintains that although not as rigid as in the physical sciences geography should aim to produce laws with more flexible criteria that reflect its own nature (Harvey, 1969).

Harvey attributes the distant attitude toward the production of laws in geography to the overly rigid interpretation of the concept of law. According to him, the application of excessively strict criteria for defining scientific laws makes it difficult for geographical statements to attain the status of laws (Harvey, 1969). He notes that human geographers, in particular, have opposed the production of geographical laws, although recently more human geographers such as Bunge (1966) and Haggett (1965) have begun to base geographical phenomena on laws. While Harvey argues that the use of laws in geographical explanation should become more widespread, he also acknowledges that in practice, producing or applying laws especially in human geography may present certain difficulties. For instance, he states that the proposition "Towns of similar size and function occur at similar distances" may not often be valid as a law in human geography, but with certain adjustments, a law like "All towns contain clusters of buildings" could be considered valid (Harvey, 1969).

Harvey's positivist views are not limited to the production of laws, theories, or models in geography. He also believes that geographical studies should be expressed in a mathematical and geometric language. While Harvey sees the language of science as mathematical, he more specifically regards the language of geography as geometric. According to him, geometric languages such as Euclidean geometry and topology, which are commonly used in the natural sciences, can also be employed to explain geographical phenomena. For example, he suggests that topology can be used to analyze connections between settlements or transportation networks, while Euclidean geometry may be useful in studies involving collective human behavior or transport cost relationships (Harvey, 1969). Indeed, according to Gale (1972), this shows that Harvey tends to view geography as a kind of "interpreted geometry." Gale states that Harvey's *Explanation in Geography* was developed largely based on a positivist philosophy. He notes that Harvey believed the standard model of the natural sciences that is, positivist methodology should be adapted to the social and human sciences, and that he built his work according to this strategy. In fact, throughout the book, Harvey explicitly proposes that the "standard model" used in the natural sciences, particularly in physics, should also be used in the social and human sciences and thus in geography (Harvey, 1969). This is further supported by an examination of the references in Harvey's work, which includes key figures of logical positivism such as Rudolph Carnap, Carl Hempel, and Ernest Nagel (Paterson, 1984). Notably, Harvey refers to Carnap 43 times, Nagel 73 times, and Hempel no fewer than 77 times in *Explanation in Geography*, which reinforces Paterson's observation.

In conclusion, it is evident that the works David Harvey produced over roughly a decade from the early 1960s to the early 1970s are closely associated with positivist methodology. During this period, Harvey undertook various studies aiming to move geography away from the methodology of traditional regional geography and toward one that embraces laws, theories, models, and statistical methods, thereby clearly articulating his positivist views. However, this ideal of quantitative geography would not span many years. His relocation from England to the



United States (Baltimore) would fundamentally alter his intellectual trajectory, leading him to abandon the positivist paradigm and continue his academic journey as a Marxist geographer.

2. Harvey's Critical Transformation and the Turn to Marxist Geography

In the 1960s, Harvey argued that the vast majority of geographical studies and the methodologies employed within them were flawed, believing that geography had become trapped in a shallow and descriptive cycle. His sharpest criticism was directed at the idiographic approach of traditional regional geography, and during those years, he effectively declared war on this dominant paradigm in the discipline:

Traditionally, geographical knowledge had been extremely fragmented, leading to a strong emphasis on what was called its 'exceptionalism'. The established doctrine was that the knowledge yielded by geographical enquiry is different from any other kind. You can't generalize about it, you can't be systematic about it. There are no geographical laws; there are no general principles to which you can appeal all you can do is go off and study, say, the dry zone in Sri Lanka, and spend your life understanding that. I wanted to do battle with this conception of geography by insisting on the need to understand geographical knowledge in some more systematic way. (Harvey, 2000, p. 76; cited in Goonewardena, 2023, p. 420)

The clearest traces of Harvey's battle against the traditional regional geographical approach are found in his 1969 work *Explanation in Geography*. In this book, Harvey explicitly argues that geographical methodology should be grounded in the principles of positivism. However, subsequent developments in his intellectual journey would lead to profound changes in his geographical perspective. *Explanation in Geography* would come to represent both the beginning and the end of Harvey's ambition to idealize geography as an "elite science."

Shortly after publishing *Explanation in Geography*, Harvey transitioned from the University of Bristol and began a new role as an associate professor at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. This transition brought about profound changes in both his philosophical and geographical orientation. Several factors contributed to the radical shift in Harvey's thinking: the urban injustice, poverty, and racism he encountered in Baltimore; the social movements organized in response to these issues; and his engagement with a group of Marxist academics and graduate students at Johns Hopkins (Castree, 2019). Indeed, in his article *Reflections on an Academic Life* (Harvey, 2021), Harvey acknowledges that witnessing the poverty of the Black population in Baltimore and observing the mass protests organized by Black communities had a significant impact on his transformation. So deeply affected was Harvey by the social unrest in Baltimore that he joined a group of faculty and students from Johns Hopkins University in sleeping on the sidewalks in front of the local office of the Black Panther Party to protect it, even standing guard outside the building for weeks (Harvey, 2021).

In the literature, Harvey's transition from positivist philosophy to Marxist philosophy is largely associated with his work *Social Justice and the City* (Harvey, 1973), published after *Explanation in Geography* (Harvey, 1969). In fact, just as Harvey made pioneering contributions to positivist philosophy before *Explanation in Geography*, he also published early articles reflecting Marxist philosophy prior to *Social Justice and the City* (Harvey, 1970; 1971; 1972a; 1972b). However, since he later compiled these articles in *Social Justice and the City*,



his shift to Marxist geography has come to be primarily linked with this work (Castree, 2019). For example, one of the articles Harvey wrote before publishing *Social Justice and the City* is titled *Social Processes and Spatial Form: An Analysis of the Conceptual Problems of Urban Planning* (Harvey, 1970). In this article, he mainly addresses the relationship between sociology and geography in urban research and urban planning processes, emphasizing that the integration of sociology and geography is important for developing a philosophy of social space and, through this, understanding social space. Moreover, he highlights the differences between physical and social space, frequently warning that social space cannot be examined by the same criteria used for physical space.

In another pioneering study (Harvey, 1971), Harvey examines the relationship between the income levels of different groups living in cities and urban planning. According to Harvey, any change in urban planning will have varying effects on individuals with different income levels living in the city. For example, due to lower transportation and access costs, low-income individuals tend to prefer living in the city center, while higher-income individuals residing in the suburbs have different levels of access to urban resources and income sources. Harvey points out that as new investments begin to develop mainly around the suburbs, the poor population living in the inner parts of the city faces limitations in benefiting from new employment and social resources. In contrast, higher-income individuals residing in the suburbs are more advantaged both in accessing the city's central business districts thanks to developed transportation systems and in reaching new investment areas emerging around the suburbs. The important point here is that while high-income individuals can easily access the city's central business districts where the poor population resides, low-income individuals face restricted access to the suburbs and the new employment areas developing around them. Harvey emphasizes the significant role of transportation policies in the emergence of this situation. According to him, current transportation policies do not eliminate this unequal and unjust distribution but rather reinforce it. Harvey also points out that the uneven distribution in transportation systems, investments, or the housing market in other words, this differentiating condition in planning can influence the income distribution among urban residents. He argues that wealthy individuals, who have easier access to resources and greater spatial and economic mobility, benefit more from the urban ecosystem. In contrast, poorer individuals, whose mobility is restricted due to economic conditions, derive less benefit from the urban system and its resources. This situation, according to Harvey, can lead to social, economic, and spatial injustices in access to resources and income.

In another work titled *Social Justice and Spatial Systems* (Harvey, 1972a), Harvey examines the spatial and regional distribution of social justice-based services such as food, housing, health, education, transportation, and environmental services. He discusses how these distributions can be achieved in a fair manner and offers suggestions on this issue. In the same year, in his article *Revolutionary and Counter-revolutionary Theory in Geography and the Problem of Ghetto Formation* (Harvey, 1972b), Harvey began to move away from positivist methodology and increasingly incorporated Marx's ideas into his work. Indeed, according to Peet (1977), this article marks the beginning of many radical geographers adopting Marxist



philosophy in their studies. In this article, Harvey argued that positivism and phenomenology were insufficient for explaining geographical phenomena; however, he did not completely reject these approaches. Harvey's proposal on this matter involved an approach that integrates the common aspects of materialism, positivism, and phenomenology. Additionally, in this work, Harvey addressed the processes of ghetto formation, discussing factors related to this issue such as urban land use, competitive bidding methods, and free market dynamics, thereby focusing on ghettoization and uneven spatial development. As seen, in *Social Justice and the City* (Harvey, 1973), Harvey examined a wide range of topics from urban planning and urban income distribution to the economic use of urban land and the problem of ghettos through a Marxist lens, largely viewing urban structure as an economic and political process. Considered one of the most significant transformations in Harvey's intellectual journey, *Social Justice and the City* also holds particular importance for centering the concept of social justice and analyzing it through a philosophy of space (Mitchell, 2023). Indeed, with this work, it became very clear that, aside from Henri Lefebvre, no Marxist has grasped as deeply as David Harvey the vital role that space plays in the process of capital accumulation (Castree et al., 2023).

Harvey rejected the narrow and exclusionary definition of positivist science (Harvey, 2021) and, after embracing Marxist philosophy, began to focus more on the social reflections of space. Instead of using the methods of the positivist paradigm to study geographical phenomena, he adopted a Marxist approach centered on socio-spatial processes. Indeed, while Harvey (1970) argued in the 1960s that space should be studied using the methodology of physical sciences, by the 1970s he began to criticize the fact that most spatial studies were based on concepts from modern physics. Similarly, as a positivist geographer, Harvey had claimed that the language of geographic studies should be mathematical, employing tools such as topology and Euclidean geometry. However, after becoming a Marxist geographer, he stated that while mathematical languages could be used to analyze physical space, they could not be applied to the analysis of social space. According to Harvey, every society produces its own space. Therefore, social space is not equivalent to physical space and cannot be analyzed in the same way. In this context, Harvey (1970) emphasizes that social space is at least as important as physical space. By doing so, he also criticizes the reductionist approach of positivism and challenges traditional urban planning practices which aim to reshape the physical face of urban areas in order to establish a new social order (thus reinforcing the capitalist system) by quoting Gans:

There is considerable evidence that the physical environment does not play as significant a role in people's lives as the planner believes. Although people reside, work and play in buildings, their behaviour is not determined by the buildings, but by the economic, cultural and social relationships within them. Bad design can interfere with what goes on inside a building, of course, and good design can aid it, but design *per se* does not significantly shape human behaviour. (Gans, 1969, pp. 37-38)

Harvey (1970) notes that social space is highly complex, irregular, and heterogeneous, and therefore contains much more marginal characteristics than the physical spaces typically addressed by planners and engineers. However, at this point, Harvey does not only criticize engineers and planners, but also geographers themselves. According to him, while current social conditions push geographers to say something about social processes, in practice, this



effort faces certain challenges. This is because dominant paradigms within the discipline such as positivism and phenomenology do not function well and are insufficient in explaining socio-spatial processes. Because of this, Harvey (1972b) argues that dominant paradigms in geography must be blended with Marxist thought, and that geographical phenomena should be analyzed through a Marxist-synthetic approach. Indeed, looking back, Harvey who in the 1960s had considered geographers who rejected positivist philosophy as “unscientific” and had made explicit calls for studying geographic phenomena with a positivist methodology was, by the early 1970s, advocating for a Marxist-synthetic approach and was clearly declaring that the quantitative revolution in geography had come to an end:

The quantitative revolution is now over, and diminishing marginal returns are becoming evident; for yet another factorial ecology study, another attempt to measure the distance decay effect, another effort to define the market area of a commodity, says less and less about anything important. Moreover, there exists a younger generation that is not as ambitious, somewhat hungry, and lacking in doing interesting things, unlike the quantitative geographers of the early 1960s. Therefore, voices of discontent are rising within the social structure of the discipline against the strong dominance of quantitative geographers over graduate student 'production' and the curricula of various departments. (Harvey, 1972b, p. 6)

The indifference of positivist geographical methodology to social, economic, and environmental problems, as well as its weakness in explaining sociospatial processes, began to be significantly discussed not only by Harvey but also by other geographers of the period. Conflicts occurring in Third World countries, the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War, and social movements particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom pushed geographers to engage more deeply with social issues. Especially in the early 1970s, many geographers began to view the positivist approach with a more critical eye. Perhaps the most prominent among them were influential figures within the discipline such as Harvey and Bunge who, like Harvey, once advocated that “geometry is the language of geography” (Holt-Jensen, 2014). Similarly, other figures such as Folke (1972) also criticized the detachment of geographical studies from social events. Folke described geographers and other social scientists as overly sophisticated, technically oriented, and largely uninterested in the problems of society, portraying them as descriptive disciplines. He argued that the theories they produced reflected the values and interests of the ruling class. This critique by Folke (1972) is echoed by Holt-Jensen (2014), who notes that theories such as Central Place Theory, Land Use Theories, and Industrial Location Theory which constitute much of the quantitative work were associated by Marxist geographers like Harvey with capitalist relations of production. Indeed, although he does not state this explicitly in his work, Harvey (1972b) implies that scientific activities are directed by the interests of those who control production through funded research. In this sense, scientific endeavors are governed by the ruling classes. Consequently, material activities involve the manipulation of nature in line with human interests, and scientific progress cannot be considered separately from this manipulation.

Harvey and other radical geographers of the 1970s, who conducted similar studies, argued that urban spaces are not neutral arenas but are instead continuously reproduced through various economic, political, and social processes (Belli & Taşkesen, 2024). For this reason, radical geographers of the time felt the need to distinguish the production of geographical knowledge



from the dominant scientific paradigm, leading to the establishment of the journal *Antipode* in the 1970s. In its early issues, the journal made a significant impact with its socially-oriented and anti-positivist contributions, addressing topics such as the spatial dimensions of social welfare, poverty, minority rights, and spatial disparities in access to public services some of which were authored by Harvey himself (Özgüç & Tümertekin, 2000).

By establishing a direct link between the formation of urban systems and capitalist organization, Harvey positions urban space as a central element in maintaining the continuity of capitalism's cycle of production and profitability. According to Harvey, the shaping of urban space is closely tied to the locational investment strategies of large financial enterprises, industrial institutions, and administrative structures. This cycle not only plays a pivotal role in the configuration of urban space but also influences multiple aspects of the lives of individuals and communities residing within it such as social relations, income levels, and access to resources (Çebi & Kavukçu, 2024). Therefore, Harvey argues that an exclusive focus on quantitative methods and statistical data in the study of geographical phenomena may lead to the neglect of the underlying social dynamics that drive spatial inequalities (Belli & Taşkesen, 2024). Indeed, Harvey criticizes positivist methodology for focusing more on form than content, arguing that it is inadequate for addressing the complex structure of cities and the urban problems they produce, merely offering simplistic predictions about the future (Paterson, 1984). Over time, Harvey further developed these critiques and eventually abandoned the rigid positivist philosophy he once staunchly defended, increasingly incorporating Marx's ideas into his geographical studies. Especially from the 1980s onward, Marxist thought became more central in Harvey's work, with his spatial and political analyses grounded in Marxism. Two seminal works mark this paradigmatic shift in Harvey's career: *Explanation in Geography*, a strictly positivist methodological text devoid of concerns about sociality and justice, and *Social Justice and the City*, which focuses on sociospatial issues such as urban poverty, spatial violence, discrimination, and poor housing conditions (Sheppard & Barnes, 2019). After publishing *Social Justice and the City* (Harvey, 1973), Harvey increasingly focused on sociospatial issues, continuing to publish articles and books on the subject. From the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, the central focus of his geographical work became thoroughly rooted in Marxism. Notably, *The Limits of Capital* (1982) and *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005) are widely recognized as the peak of Harvey's scholarship following his adoption of the Marxist paradigm (Castree, 2019). Following these two significant works, Harvey attracted attention not only from geographers but also from multiple disciplines such as sociology, architecture, urban planning, anthropology, and economics. This interdisciplinary impact has contributed substantially to his reputation as one of today's leading geographers and social scientists.

Conclusion

David Harvey, who began his academic career in the early 1960s, is one of the most influential geographers whose productivity and diligence have left a profound impact both within the geography community and the broader scientific world. Although he is widely recognized, especially among social scientists, as a Marxist geographer, Harvey was actually at the forefront of positivist geography during the early years of his academic journey.



In the 1960s, during his early years at the University of Bristol, Harvey was influenced by leading positivist geographers of the time such as Haggett and Chorley, and aimed to transform geography into a more “scientific,” systematic, and elite discipline. Considering the dominant geographical approach of the period traditional regional geography as descriptive, superficial, and limiting, Harvey emphasized the necessity of applying positivist methodology to place geographical studies into a more “scientific” framework. He argued that geographical phenomena should be examined through laws, theories, and mathematical and geometric methods. Harvey’s ideal remained current for roughly a decade, from the early 1960s to the 1970s, during which he published multiple works on the subject. By 1969, he consolidated his ideas and proposals regarding the use of positivist methodology in geography in his book *Explanation in Geography*. In this work, Harvey advocated that geographical studies should be conducted based on positivist principles such as hypotheses, theories, laws, and mathematical expressions, while regarding the traditional geographical approach as an unscientific field.

By the 1970s, Harvey had left his position at the University of Bristol and moved to the United States (Baltimore), where he began a new appointment as an associate professor at Johns Hopkins University. This career move was a turning point that contributed to Harvey becoming one of the most recognized and respected social scientists of today. After relocating to Baltimore, the urban and socio-spatial issues he encountered there profoundly transformed his geographical perspective and orientation. Harvey was deeply affected by the social and spatial injustices, poverty, and racism he witnessed in the streets of Baltimore, and he began to consider how, as a geographer, he could approach these problems with spatiality at their core. At his new institution, he also connected with a group of Marxist scholars and graduate students, which prompted him to explore how Marx’s ideas could be applied in geographical research. As a result of his readings, he began writing articles on topics such as uneven geographical development, the unequal spatial distribution of social justice, and the varying degrees to which communities of different income groups benefit from spatial resources. In 1973, much like in *Explanation in Geography*, he compiled his works grounded in Marxist philosophy in the book *Social Justice and the City*, providing striking examples to both the geography community and other disciplines on the applicability of Marxist philosophy in spatial and urban geographic studies. Harvey’s writings and numerous later works deeply influenced many geographers and social scientists, and he became recognized as one of the leading figures in Marxist geography and urban theory.

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