SOCIETY IN TIME AND SPACE

A geographical perspective on change

Society in Time and Space is an important and innovative book which offers a geographical perspective on societal change, and sets out to show how understanding the geography of such change enables us to appreciate better the basic processes involved. Robert Dodgshon argues that, as a first step, we need to clarify the circumstances under which society becomes inertial and finds change difficult. Using a range of historical and contemporary examples, he shows that society's use of space is a powerful source of this inertia. Different sources of geographical inertia are explored, including society's symbolization and organizational structuring of space, together with its capitalization of landscape. Building on this mapping of inertia, Professor Dodgshon shows how society has long steered radical change around such space.

Society in Time and Space will be of interest not only to geographers but also to historians and social theorists.

ROBERT A. DODGSHON is Professor of Human Geography at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. His other books include, as author, The European Past (1987) and From Chiefs to Landlords (1998) and, as co-editor, An Historical Geography of England and Wales (1978 and 1990) and An Historical Geography of Europe (1998).
Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography 27

Series editors:
ALAN R. H. BAKER, RICHARD DENNIS, DERYCK HOLDSWORTH

Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography encourages exploration of the philosophies, methodologies and techniques of historical geography and publishes the results of new research within all branches of the subject. It endeavours to secure the marriage of traditional scholarship with innovative approaches to problems and to sources, aiming in this way to provide a focus for the discipline and to contribute towards its development. The series is an international forum for publication in historical geography which also promotes contact with workers in cognate disciplines.

For a full list of titles in the series, please see end of book.
SOCIETY IN TIME AND SPACE
A Geographical Perspective on Change

ROBERT A. DODGSHON
Contents

List of figures ix
List of tables x
Preface xi

1 Human geography and societal change 1
2 Establishing a taxonomy of societal change 21
3 The experience of change: world systems and empires 51
4 The experience of change: states and regions 84
5 Sources of inertia: the cultural construction of landscape 104
6 Organizational sources of inertia 123
7 The built environment as a source of inertia 139
8 Conceptualizing inertia: the first step towards a geography of societal change 162
9 The geography of societal change: a concluding synthesis 181

References 202
Index 223
## Figures

3.1 How core and peripheral areas differ within a capitalist world system  
3.2 Mesopotamian civilizations and empires  
3.3 Changing configurations of the Chinese Empire  
3.4 The dynamics of a capitalist world system  
7.1 Fixed reproducible assets and national wealth, Great Britain 1760–1860 (at constant prices, 1851–60)  
7.2 Fixed reproducible assets and national wealth, United Kingdom 1850–1920 (at constant prices, 1900)  
7.3 Net stock of fixed reproducible assets by sector 1760–1860 in Great Britain (at constant prices, 1851–60)  
7.4 Net stock of fixed reproducible assets by sector 1850–1920 in the United Kingdom (at constant prices, 1900)
Tables

2.1 The dynamics of societal systems  page 23
2.2 Sources of societal change  31
2.3 The product of societal change  45
2.4 The morphology of societal change  48
Preface

In origin, this book arises from my longstanding interest in the institutional basis of landscape development. Its precise roots lie in work which I first carried out over twenty years ago on how far-reaching changes in medieval land tenure exploited space strategically by working their way around established customary patterns of tenure. Subsequent work made me conscious of how the broad principle involved, the opportunistic use of space to develop new institutional forms, could be developed at other scales and in a wide variety of other contexts. Examples of such change were discussed in my European Past (1987) book, including a detailed case-study of how the decline of feudalism could be analysed in such terms. The aim of this book is to develop this geographical perspective on change in a more direct and systematic way. It will address three broad themes. First, I want to provide a more extended synthesis of historical examples and to show how they feature in debates that range across social, political, economic and cultural change. Second, I want to explore how the foundations for the strategic use of space by society derive from society’s tendency to become inertial through its use of space. Third, I want to explore the problems posed by trying to conceptualize this inertia and its effects on the geography of societal change.

Though the book is a study in large-scale synthesis, or ‘big-picture’ history, from the perspective of historical geography, it is not written against or as a challenge to historical geography’s abiding concern for a more reductionist methodology or its supposedly new-found concern for the situatedness of all knowledge. Rather is it my conviction that historical geography should operate at different scales, even if the different scales involve different problems and methodologies. Indeed, in its final stages, this book has been produced alongside another that deals with my research on the western Highlands and Islands of Scotland during the early modern period and which takes a more reductionist approach.

The drafting and redrafting of the text has been drawn out over a number of years, but the first really acceptable version of the manuscript benefited
Preface

from research leave granted during 1995–6. I am grateful to my former Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Kenneth O. Morgan, for his support with this leave. I am also extremely grateful to two anonymous referees, and to one of the series editors, Dr Alan Baker, for their valuable comments on drafts of the book. Thanks are also due to my departmental cartographers, Ian Gulley and Anthony Smith, for drawing the diagrams. As with my other books, my wife, Katherine, has provided the kind of support that goes beyond in-text citations and references.

Over the past decade, parts of the book’s argument have been presented in various guises to seminars at Bristol, Cambridge, Cork, Exeter, Liverpool, London and Lund. I am grateful to all those whose questions and comments served continually to remind me that large open-ended topics like societal change are really intellectual journeys without hope of a final destination. Rather must we be content with developing insights into those landscapes through which the debate may pass more slowly.