

# Textbooks that moved generations

**Kasperson, Roger E. and Julian V. Minghi** (eds) 1969: *The structure of political geography*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company. (Also London: London University Press, 1970)

In summer 1973, I had to order a textbook for the senior undergraduate and graduate-level political geography course which I had foolhardily claimed as my initial instructional offering for the Fall semester at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Preparing a syllabus for the class whilst also rushing to finish my dissertation before I started an assistant professorship in mid-August did not leave a lot of time for either considered deliberation of the text options nor of the proposed course content. I had never taken a political geography class as either an undergraduate at University College, Dublin or as a graduate student at Penn State. It was a rare institution that regularly offered a formal class in the subject and consequently, there were few course models to emulate and frankly, a meager accumulation of substantive research to draw on for the syllabus. With the benefit of almost four decades of hindsight, it is evident that, through a combination of ignorance, naiveté, bravado, and rebelliousness, I had chosen a career specialty which had been marginalized in the geographic community and in the wider academic enterprise of the day. Political geography was only then beginning to discover its potential to make meaningful contributions to the major social, economic and political issues of the United States in the late 1960/early 1970s.

The textbook choice was easy; there was only one that offered significant conceptual context, theoretical propositions, historical context, references to parallel work in other social sciences, and agendas for further research. That book, *The Structure of Political Geography*, had been published four years earlier and luckily for me, was far more than the sum of the parts of political geography that had been produced at the time of its publication. I had first seen the text in 1970 and my initial foray into electoral geography for a Masters thesis was inspired by a

couple of the chapters in it, especially the selections from the political scientists whose works had clear implications for geographers who saw cartographic displays as the end-product of their labors, and not as the beginning of further exploration of the processes underlying the patterns,

Though saving me from designing a course *ex nihilo*, the Kasperson-Minghi text struck me then and, even more so, now as a bit of an anachronism in two respects. It did not seem to recognize the social upheavals and political turmoil of the American society of the mid-late Sixties nor did it relate political geography research questions to the methodology of spatial analysis that had quickly become prominent in the US, and stereotyped as the instructional model for some institutions, including Penn State. It was there that the contemporaneous Abler, Adams and Gould text, *Spatial Organization: The Geographer's View of the World* (1971), which certified that the “clear and unambiguous goal of geography, as a science, was the search for laws of spatial organization” (Palm, 2003, 517) had been written. While student activism about the Vietnam war and American social and economic injustices had belatedly reached Penn State, by the 1969-1970 academic year (my first in the US), this large but geographically-isolated student population, like those on other college campuses, was also engaged in the kind of protests that had started at Berkeley about five years before. It is ironic that the Abler, Adams and Gould text contains more examples than the political geographic work on the key debates of the time with applications to urban housing provision, the expansion of ghettos, destination choices of Southern migrants, models of the location of urban riots, and the power of neighborhoods in determining the locations of insalubrious infrastructural projects. Of course, these and other applications were all enshrouded in the languages of locational efficiencies, economic maximization and individual optimization in the *Spatial Organization* text; only the three electoral geography chapters in the *Structure of Political Geography* by Roger Kasperson on Chicago, by Peirce Lewis on Flint, and the review of the specialty by J.R.V. Prescott evince any

sense of the possible engagement of political geography with local politics and its myriad of conflicts.

As the Kasperson-Minghi text was moving from conception to publication between 1966 and 1969, papers by Dick Morrill, Kevin Cox, Julian Wolpert and Dave Reynolds appeared in the journals, portending a recognition of the discipline's contributions to the key issues of the fairness of political representation, fair access to governmental services, and the roles of formal and informal institutions in producing the inequalities that were evident in American society. The contrast between the contents of the Kasperson-Minghi book with that of Cox, Reynolds and Rokkan (1974) is a dramatic reflection of this shift to the "locational conflict" model. Comparison to the contents of *Antipode* which first appeared in 1969 also indicates the anachronistic nature of the *Structure of Political Geography* text as the new radical and locational traditions quickly dominated the small circles of political geography. In writing a dissertation on "spatial justice for the Black American voter" by analyzing malapportionment and gerrymandering in US cities, and exploiting the spatial analytical training of Penn State for understanding contemporary territorial inequalities, I was trying to marry these traditions.

Interviewing Julian Minghi exactly 40 years after the original 1966 meeting that formulated the proposal for the book, he agreed there was not a lot of political geography on which to build (Minghi, 2006). His analysis of a letter from Isaiah Bowman to Derwent Whittlesey in 1945 that strongly urged Whittlesey not to start a journal of political geography since there was not enough high-quality work to merit one indicates clearly that Bowman was correct. Only 8 of 102 dissertations in the previous decade (that included World War II!) were in political geography (Minghi, 2002). Calling the Kasperson-Minghi text "premature", a similar conclusion was reached by David Reynolds (1969) on the basis of the lack of research in the spatial analytical tradition that he and others were then pioneering.

When the text appeared, it was viewed by the editors, reviewers and potential class adopters as suitable only for graduate-level and advanced undergraduate classes; its sales thus were limited and a second, paperback edition pursued by the publisher and targeted as a less advanced level was never taken up by the editors (Minghi, 2006). By presenting mostly primary materials (the original texts, often abridged), accompanied by extensive introductions to each section and a bibliography for further work, the editors clearly had a research audience in mind rather than the watered-down secondary literature that is typical for the mass textbook market in American universities, then and now. The book's genesis lay in the context of the wider efforts in the mid 1960s by Saul Cohen, Nick Helburn and others in the Association of American Geographers to re-think the nature of the discipline and to re-assert the centrality of geography to the American teaching and research enterprise; both editors attended these meetings of the High School Geography project and the Commission on College Geography (Cohen, 1967).

The *Structure of Political Geography* was designed to "provide a sense of purpose and order to the study of political geography" (p. xii) by producing a "balanced book" (p. xii) while aspiring to be a "stocktaking as of 1969, emphasizing particularly past contributions, related interdisciplinary efforts, and profitable new approaches and lines of inquiry" (p. ii). The book is organized by five sections, which have 6-10 articles in each, comprising 40 chapters *in toto* with an annotated bibliography by Jeanne Kasperson completing the volume. Of the chapters, 24 are written by geographers (14 of these by individuals who could be classified as "political geographers", by my count) and 16 by non-geographers, mostly political scientists. With a deliberate and understandable (given the paucity of high-quality empirical works) emphasis on theoretical and conceptual works, the editors also preferred to include papers "never before printed, difficult to find, or not generally known or included in courses" (p. ix). Individual papers were reduced slightly in length and in references/footnotes. What strikes me as remarkable but logical, given the conceptual emphasis, about the book, is its lack of graphics, including maps;

only the empirical electoral geographies of Chicago and Flint by Kasperson and Lewis, respectively, and by John House on the evolution of the Franco-Italian border are map-intensive. Other “empirical” chapters typically have only an introductory map of locations mentioned in the text.

The “Heritage” section which opens the book contains *inter alia* selections by Aristotle, Derwent Whittlesey, and the first English translation of Friedrich Ratzel’s “The Laws of the Spatial Growth of States”. These selections are designed to link political geography’s content to intellectual traditions that date back to the Classical period whilst also indicating 1950’s efforts to pull the field together with interlinked theories-methods (Hartshorne’s functional approach and Jones’ unified field theory). The second section, titled “Structure”, considers classic concepts of political geography including territoriality, nodes/networks, frontiers/boundaries, and classic geopolitics. While there are selections from Mackinder, Spykman, Cohen, and F.J. Turner, there is nothing from the *Geopolitik* school (Karl Haushofer) or indeed from any non Anglo-American author, though the checkered history of *Geopolitik* and the ideas of Rudolf Kjellén and Karl Haushofer are presented in the introduction to the section. In fact, of the 40 contributors, only two were never associated with a British or US university.

The middle section of the book contains two sections titled “Process” and “Behavior” that contain selections that elucidate the processes that produce the kinds of structures that are described in the previous section. These sections are quite ill-focused as they contain diverse examples of political processes and behavior, including electoral geography, mental maps and perception of places, processes of political integration, and voting in assemblies. Articles by prominent political scientists like Karl Deutsch, Bruce Russett, and Richard Merritt are supplemented by other major social theorists of the day (Immanuel Wallerstein on African independence, Kenneth Boulding on the formation of national images, Anthony Downs on metropolitan growth, and Amitai Etzioni on political unification). Proportionately, these

sections contain more inter-disciplinary contributions, reflecting the editors' interest in certifying political geography's credentials in the wider social scientific enterprise and in drawing the attention of political geographers to related work there.

The last section is titled "Environment" and draws attention to nature-society relations through a political geography lens; these selections would today fall generally under the rubric of political ecology. Selections range from technologically-determinist arguments (Karl Wittfogel) to policy strategies for vexatious management dilemmas. Like other sections, while offering a range of approaches, it does not plunk for any one of them and curiously omits the classic Sproutian model of the context of environmental politics, certainly well-disseminated by 1969, though their key works are listed in the annotated bibliography for this section (Sprout and Sprout, 1965). The "Aids to Research in Political Geography" chapter which ends the volume lists numerous bibliographic sources to trawl for political geographic papers, as well as national and international statistical sources of data, that include electoral and public opinion polls.

One of the key aims of the Kasperson-Minghi text was to conduct a *tour d'horizon* of political geography as it stood (unsteadily) in the mid 1960s, before tackling the other aims of suggesting a conceptual scheme for the field and to link the sub-discipline to contemporary research in the other social sciences. I agree with Fielding (1970) who concluded in his review that the editors succeeded in the first aim, that they failed in the second (as indeed have all others who came after them) and that they partially succeeded in the third one. An example of the lack of depth of consideration of some key concepts can be seen in the consideration of scale in political geography. Saul Cohen in his essay (p. 58) states that "the territorial phenomena of political systems include the a) supra-national, b) national state, c) domestic-regional political (provinces, states, counties), d) urban-community or other organized densely settled area, and e) local or regional special-purpose districts." Neither in this essay nor in the introduction by the editors to the section is there any further development of the concept of scale; the vision of the mid 1960s is

akin to the “levels of analysis” classifications to which international relations and comparative politics scholars typically resort. Notions such as scale-linkages, or the theoretical heft of Peter Taylor’s (1981) materialist framework for the discipline integrating the world-economy, nation-states, and localities, or the current sophisticated debates on the subject were well into the future.

In evaluating the book after the passage of four decades, it should be remembered that the late 1960s was a time when Brian Berry (1969) dismissed the field as “moribund” when comparing its output to that of quantitative international relations. But in fact, the Kasperson-Minghi book appeared the same year as key works in electoral geography were published by Kevin Cox (1969) and Dave Reynolds (1969) that certified the credentials of political geographers to contribute (tardily) to the quantitative turn in geography then in full swing, but still contested mightily (Gould, 1979). Like Gould, Ron Johnston (2001), in reviewing the development of political geography from the late 1960s to the 1990s through the lens of Peter Taylor’s career, noted the rapid appearance of Marxist and other theoretical perspectives in American geography about 1970-1972. The timing of the publication of the Kasperson-Minghi book thus marked the end of an era, or better yet, the beginning of a revival of political geography from which it has never faltered. The book was indeed “premature” when considered in the light of the explosion of interest in the field in the two decades after its publication and the dearth of research in the previous two decades, but it nevertheless remains the milestone from which the distance that political geography has traveled should be measured.

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Williams, my advisor at Penn State, first showed me the Kasperson-Minghi book and affirmed that there indeed might be an academic future in the specialty, though no others seemed engaged with it.

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