

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Geography Faculty Publications

Geography Program (SNR)

5-1972

Review of *Spatial Organization: The Geographer's View of the World* by Ronald Abler, John S. Adams, and Peter Gould

S. M. Bhardwaj
Kent State University

Robert Stoddard
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, rstoddard1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/geographyfacpub>

 Part of the [Geography Commons](#)

Bhardwaj, S. M. and Stoddard, Robert, "Review of *Spatial Organization: The Geographer's View of the World* by Ronald Abler, John S. Adams, and Peter Gould" (1972). *Geography Faculty Publications*. 15.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/geographyfacpub/15>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Geography Program (SNR) at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Geography Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Published in *The Professional Geographer* 24:2 (May 1972), pp. 168-169.
Copyright © 1972 by the Association of American Geographers; published by
Wiley-Blackwell. Used by permission.

REVIEW

Spatial Organization: The Geographer's View of the World

Ronald Abler, John S. Adams, and Peter Gould

Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971. xix + 587 pp.

Most introductory textbooks in geography are content-oriented, some pay lip service to basic concepts in geography, and still others are like tombstones conveying concepts and content of a bygone era. Abler, Adams and Gould have presented an introductory text that is rich in concepts, is rooted in contemporary scientific thinking, and conveys a dynamic, futuristic view of geography. The basic thrust in the book is "the circularly causal relationships between spatial structure and spatial processes." Geographers with a "lands-and-peoples" view of geography will be disappointed.

The book is organized in five parts. Part one sets geography within the broader field of science, scientific thinking and explanation. The function of geography, according to the authors, is the "explanation of classes of events by demonstrating that they are instances of widely applicable laws and theories." The "classes of events" to be explained by geographers refer primarily to "locations of peoples and their activities." Thus the authors make explicit the fact that geography is not unique in terms of its method; it uses the *scientific* method. There is however the distinctive geographic question, *viz*, "why are spatial distributions structured the way they are." The emphasis is on *why*, not simply on *how*.

Part II is devoted to the problems of measurement, relationship and classification. These are not peculiar to geography nor are they novel to this field, yet they are far from being universally and explicitly recognized by members of the profession. These three problems are so fundamental, the authors rightly argue, that scientific growth of the field is impossible without the achievement of precision in tackling them. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of Part II may thus be collectively considered as an introduction to quantitative geography. The focus throughout however is not on specific method but on how to solve a given problem, and a veritable battery of statistical methods is marshalled towards this end. The numerous illustrations are chosen from a wide variety of spatial processes, including many examples from everyday spatial experience. To those students unacquainted with quantitative methods the plethora of "new" terms and probabilistic expressions may seem forbidding, but the authors have tried to convey their meaning in simple, straightforward everyday language.

Parts III, IV, and V of the book, in one form or another, are really concerned with spatial structure and process, whether the focus is on location and spatial interaction, diffusion process, or decision process. The

location of human activities and spatial interaction are examined at the macro level, Industrial, agricultural and social processes and resulting patterns are analyzed. The section of the book dealing with spatial diffusion process is largely based on Gould's *Spatial Diffusion* (AAG, Commission on College Geography, Resource Paper No. 4). It stands by itself as the fourth part of the book, not by any necessity of logic, but simply it seems as a matter of convenience for the authors.

Spatial organization and the decision process form the subject matter of the last part of the book with a capstone chapter, "The Geography of the Future and the Future of Geography." Individual spatial decisions are examined in the normative and descriptive framework, thus bringing the analysis of the spatial structure and process to the micro level.

The last chapter expresses the philosophy of the authors, their convictions regarding the geography of the future and the direction that geography is likely to take as a discipline. Problems of future spatial organization are briefly outlined under "Short-Term," "Intermediate-Range," and "Long-Term." Convinced that communication revolution will produce an "everywhere" world within the next hundred years, the authors exhort geographers to prepare for forecasting the problems arising from ecumenical levels of spatial organization.

In this otherwise fascinating introductory text, one finds a few irksome details which perhaps may not appear significant from the theoretical-philosophical perch of the authors. For example, "Modern Geography (Ca 1800-1950)" is disposed of in about two pages and, as though by design, not a single name of any twentieth century geographer occurs there. Could some geographers like Sauer and Hettner measure up to the authors' view of geographers worth mentioning?

Throughout the text, but more explicitly in Chapter 15, the authors stress, and rightly so, the need for geographers to develop predictive capability because future is not an exogenous variable. And yet one searches in vain for even one real map which portrays any pattern of the future. While the futuristic views are commendable, it is precisely extrapolations into the future that the authors have chosen to avoid except in the opinionated last chapter.

Despite the apparent ecumenical philosophy of the authors, the one fact that strikes a non-westerner about the book is the almost religious belief of the authors that the whole world is going to be following a western model of human interaction in which the geographers will be practicing "preventive spatial medicine." Perhaps geographers from China or India would hold different views.

The index of the book is somewhat curiously selective when it comes to including the names of geographers. Several geographers referred to in the text and/or chapter-end bibliographies do not appear, *e.g.*, Ibn-Khaldun, Ratzel, Wolpert, Lukermann, Pred, Warntz, and Zeiinsky to name only a few.

The few shortcomings of the book, however, are more than compensated by the enthusiasm of the authors throughout the book. Spatial Organization is a competent introductory text for theoretical geography, and despite liberal usage of contemporary jargon and mathematical formulae, an earnest effort has been made by the authors to clarify concepts related to spatial structure and organization. Whether or not the dedication "To the generation before us" is meant to convey a hidden sentiment

for the “defenders of old order,” the *now*-generation of geographers will find the book a most useful addition to their bag.

S. M. Bhardwaj
Kent State University

Addendum from Robert H. Stoddard, *University of Nebraska–Lincoln*:

This book “puts it all together.” It brings the concepts, the methods, and the perspective of contemporary geography together in a single, interesting textbook. Instructors who previously have introduced the spatial perspective to college students by summarizing ideas scattered in professional journals will welcome this text. In a refreshing style and with contemporary illustrations, the authors have presented the geographer's view of the world in a manner that challenges all readers: the casual student, the serious scholar of behavioral science, and the potential geography specialist.

The authors have put it together in an approach that is both exhilarating yet somewhat confining. By integrating statistical techniques with the discussions on concepts and methods, the authors logically reveal the procedures used for establishing spatial principles and for solving locational problems. Yet this integration makes it difficult to adapt the text for a less mathematical audience, and instructors who wish to assign selected themes from the book may be frustrated by the lack of distinct topical units. Also some students experience difficulty in finding concise explanations of concepts that are presented in several sections of the book. Nevertheless, these are minor inconveniences for any instructor who wishes to introduce the basic ideas of contemporary geography and is seeking a textbook that will reveal the exciting aspects of the discipline.