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Nexuses Between Structuration Theory And Urban Planning

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Abstract

Much of the research in Urban and Regional Planning both in the developed and developing worlds have been skewed towards positivism as against the humanistic tradition. Developments in research in the humanistic tradition have not received much attention until recently. In contemporary urban scholarship, there is a growing recognition of the need to integrate humanistic and structural perspectives in explaining urban transformation. While positivist traditions have long dominated urban and regional planning, the emerging relevance of theories like structuration has created new opportunities for bridging agency-structure debates. This paper extends Giddens' structuration theory by embedding it within broader paradigms of urban sociology, urban theory and citizenship. The main focus of this paper was to examine the nexuses between structuration theory and Urban and Regional Planning as well as some of the limitations. Drawing on contributions from the Chicago School and the culturalist and community study traditions, the study reinterprets urban life as a co-construction of institutional systems and individual agency. The paper relies mostly on literature survey to establish a link between structuration theory and Urban Planning using search engines and research databases like SASTRA, Google Scholar and Scopus. The paper also explored how structuration interacts with spatial planning, social norms and political citizenship in urban environments. The paper concludes that in spite of the criticisms against structuration theory, it offers a compelling lens for analyzing urban transformation and participatory planning enriched by sociological and urban-theoretical insights.

***Keywords**: Agency, Structuration, Urban Theory, Urban Sociology, Citizenship, Actors.*

1.0 Introduction

Structurationist thinking can be traced to the writings of Berger and Luckmann in the 1960s. However, the theory is linked to Anthony Giddens based on his writings between 1976 and 1984 and it was hinged on the idea that society existed neither independently of human activity nor as a product of it, rather, there was an inherent spatiality to life. The theory sought not just to discover the underlying pattern of life but to also unravel how social systems were bound together in time and space (Dyck and Kearns, 2006).

Giddens' structuration theory was based on a theoretical critique designed to reconcile phenomenology, interactionism and ethnomethodology with Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber (Sewell, 1992). According to Onokerhoraye (1994) Anthony Giddens' early writings criticized Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim because they were hinged on the idea that structure occupied

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a position of primacy over agency and acted as constraints upon action. Structuration theory sought to address the inherent exclusivity of some variants of Marxism and humanism through the reconstruction of the importance of both structure and agency. The theory incorporated human action as something that could be rationalized and ordered by human agents who were seen as knowledgeable and capable subjects rather than being structurally determined.

Moos and Dear (1986: 231) notes that structuration theory was hinged on the idea that "the production and reproduction of social life is the accomplishment of skilled knowledgeable actors living in society". Both the social system and individual actors played crucial roles in the explanation of social phenomena. The theory acknowledged the beneficial aspects of both the structural relationships of society and the individual in society. Similarly, Dyck and Kearns (2006) notes that the theory emphasizes the knowledgeability of individual agents especially in the reproduction of social practices, the time-space contextually of social life as well as the hermeneutic or interpretive theory of analysis. Structuration theory was therefore an attempt to "account for the ways in which people learn about and transform social structures" (Onokerhoraye, 1994: 199). It was assumed that one's context was a major influence on individual development.

The main purpose of structuration theory was to address the classical problem of social order. This was because explanations of social life privileged either agency or structure. Anthony Giddens' structuration theory sought to rise above this problem by treating the production and reproduction of social life as an ongoing process of structuration (Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts and Whatmore, 2009). In the 1960s and 1970s, there were a variety of competing theoretical perspectives like critical theory, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, language philosophy among others. Anthony Giddens distilled these varying theoretical perspectives and identified three major themes typifying his structuration theory: an emphasis on the active reflexive character of human conduct, language and cognition in life, and the recognition of the declining importance of empiricist philosophies (Giddens, 1984).

There has been a raging debate over the interaction between agency and structure as well as their superiority over one another in the interaction process. The debate also interrogated the fundamental and distinctive characteristics of individual action as well as the nature of

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social structure and the production and reproduction of social relations in time and space until they became social structures (Morselli, 2014). Structuration theory can be seen as an alternative platform wherein the agency-structure debate has played out in Urban Planning discourse. Urban Planners have drawn extensively from structuration theory in order to "capture the relationship between individual actions and institutional context" (Purkarthofer and Stead, 2023: 571).

The nexus between individual agency and structural constraint is central to contemporary debates in urban theory and sociology. Traditional urban planning has often been dominated by positivist paradigms that prioritize empirical objectivity over the interpretive, subjective dimensions of urban life. However, emerging contributions from the culturalist school of thought and community studies tradition have reignited interest in how meanings, identities, and localized practices shape the urban experience. The culturalist school, with its emphasis on meaning-making, cultural symbols, and every day practices, provides a valuable lens for understanding how urban dwellers negotiate space, power, and identity (Jensen, 2020). Similarly, the community study tradition, which focuses on the microstructures of social life, underscores the role of interpersonal networks and localized institutions in shaping urban trajectories (Simone & Bhan, 2021).

Giddens' structuration theory, while rooted in sociological critique, complements these schools by emphasizing the duality of structure—wherein individuals are both shaped by and actively reproduce social systems. It serves as a reconciliation of the epistemological divide between phenomenology and structural determinism, arguing for the co-constitution of agency and structure in space and time. In urban settings, this duality is particularly salient, as residents, planners, and institutions continuously reshape the built environment through interaction and interpretation.

This paper reinterprets structuration theory within the broader terrain of urban sociology and citizenship. It highlights how urban actors citizens, planners, civil society groups assert agency within institutional structures, reflecting broader themes of participation, power, and spatial justice. Drawing on the Chicago School, particularly the works of Robert Park, George Simmel, Robert McKenzie, and Louis Wirth, the paper explores how structuration can be a bridge theory for understanding the socio-spatial constitution of modern cities.

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2.0 Research Methods

The paper relies on literature survey and empirical interrogations of past works on structuration theory and Urban Planning research. Secondary data and information found in the literature were utilized. Secondary data were accessed through research search engines and databases like SASTRA, Google Scholar and Scopus using keywords like urban theory, urban sociology, citizenship, agency, structure and structuration.

3.0 Conceptual Clarifications

Structuration theory is conceptually dense. The three major concepts regarding the society as identified by Anthony Giddens were system, structure and structuration (Morselli, 2014). Others include agency, reflexivity, recursiveness and regionalization. The central thesis of Giddens' structuration theory is the duality of structure which emphasizes the fact that "social life displays an essential recursiveness" and that in the reproduction of social life, "actors routinely draw upon interpretative schemes, resources and norms which are available by existing structures of signification, domination and legitimation" (Gregory, 1981: 8).

Agency refers to the "individual and relates to the motivations behind the action, the will and the choice, the freedom and the intentionality" (Morselli,2014: 6). Gregory (1981) notes that human agency is concerned with what the human person is and can do. Man is part of living creation and is the most active collaborator. He seeks to humanize the environment for his own ends and in the process humanizes himself. Moos and Dear (1986) sees the individual in structuration theory as an active, knowledgeable and reasoning person. Even though the social system presents condition that bound the action of that agent, it does not determine the agent's activity. Agents are seen as key actors because institutional components are affected by the actions ofindividuals who reproduce them.

Human agency identifies human beings as makers of their milieu within unequal power relations. Power is generated from "the expansion of social systems and structure over time and space that are simultaneously experienced and drawn upon as the rules and resources on particular locales" (Dyck and Kearns, 2006: 88). Giddens (1984: 9) notes that agency "concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently. Whatever happened would not have happened if

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that individual had not intervened". An individual must be capable of making a difference. An individual ceases to be an agent if he loses the capability of making a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs or if he cannot exercise some sort of power. However, Sewell (1992) notes that all members of society exercises some measures of agency in the discharge of their daily activities although the agency exercised by individuals varies in both kind and extent. Urban and Regional Planning involve a number of actions and interactions that bring several stakeholders including individuals and organizations together. Public servants, citizens, politicians and several professionals in the built environment also provide some form of agency in the planning process (Purkarthofer and Stead, 2023).

Structure includes the rules that govern society and is both influenced by and influences social change. In other words, it is recursive. According to Giddens (1984: 23) structure consist of rules and resources which are "recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems". It allows the binding of time-space in social systems, exists as memory traces, serves as basis for human knowledgeability and is instantiated in action. Kipo (2014: 20) notes that structure is external to human agency and serves as "constraint on activities of an independently constituted object". Structures are made, maintained and changed through human agency and would cease to exist if all agents involved disappeared. In other words, structure and agency are intrinsically linked. According to Dyck and Kearns (2006: 87) structure can be seen as "rules and resources, which only exist temporally when presented by actors; that is, when drawn upon as stocks of knowledge in day-to-day activity". They exist through the concrete practices of competent and knowledgeable human agents who reproduce social life through routine daily encounters.

Anthony Giddens identified structure in terms of rules and resources. Rules are seen as those generalizable procedures that are applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices and could be categorized into formulated or bureaucratic rules. They relate to the constitution of meaning and the sanctioning of the modes of social conduct (Giddens 1984; Cloke, et al, 1991)Resources on the other hand, are seen as "the power invested in authority and property to enable and constrain certain social interactions through the exercise of control over people and over the material world" (Cloke et al, 1991: 101). Similarly, Giddens (1984: 15)

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sees resources as "structured properties of social systems, drawn upon and reproduced by knowledgeable agents in the course of interaction". Power is exercised through resources as media. Rules restrict actions while resources facilitate it (Lamsal, 2012).

There are three kinds of structure in a social system: signification, legitimation and domination. Signification is concerned with meaning through organized webs of language as well as the ways in which structure and agency interact with each other to create shared meaning. Legitimation create moral order through societal norms, values and standards. It is also concerned with the ways through which the norms are maintained within structures and reproduced. Domination refers to the exercise of power through material and economic resources as well as the capacity to generate and control resources (Giddens, 1984; Lamsal, 2012). Actors draw upon rules and resources through structures of signification, legitimation and domination which are in turn reproduced through those social practices (Gregory et al, 2009). Gregory (1981) notes that the relations between agency and social structure as well as between man and nature are conceived as simultaneous equations that cannot be solved separately. The agency-structure divide is seen as a mutually interacting duality. In other words, our daily interactions roll into larger social rules which then play out in our daily interaction (Lock, 2015).

The duality of structure captures the fulcrum between human agency and social structure while acknowledging that there is recursive relationship between agency and structure as well as individuals and society which is a constant feature of human existence (Gregson, 1987). According to Giddens (1984: 19) the notion of duality of structure presupposes that "the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction". In addition, duality of structure relates to the recursive character of social life and expresses the mutual dependence of structure and agency which constantly interacts with each other in order to influence change in the society (Wolfel, 2002). Dyck and Kearns (2006) notes that the duality of structure accords primacy to neither human agency nor structure. Rather, structure is seen both as the medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices that are fueled by both the intended and the unintended consequences of human conduct. Anthony Giddens' structuration theory represents a middle ground in sociological

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theorizing, situated between the determinism of structuralism and the voluntarism of action theory. However, the relevance of this theory in urban contexts becomes more profound when examined through the lens of urban sociology, particularly the seminal contributions of the Chicago School.

The Chicago School, led by scholars such as Robert Park, George Simmel, Robert McKenzie, and Louis Wirth, emphasized the city as a social laboratory. Their work saw urban environments as both containers and producers of social behavior. Park (1915), for instance, viewed the city as "a state of mind," an ecological system of interrelated parts shaped by competition, succession, and adaptation. Simmel (1903) explored the mental life of the metropolis, highlighting how urbanization alters social interaction, intensifies individualism, and creates new forms of alienation. Robert McKenzie's theory of urban communities focused on spatial differentiation and the spatial organization of life, drawing parallels with Giddens' notion of *regionalization* the differentiation of space and time in structuration processes. Similarly, Louis Wirth's (1938) classic essay "Urbanism as a Way of Life" examined how population size, density, and heterogeneity influenced social life insights that align with Giddens' ideas about locales, reflexivity, and distanciation.

The central tenets of structuration theory namely structure, agency, and their duality find complementary elaboration in the Chicago School's interest in spatiality, routine interactions, and the production of urban norms. Giddens (1984) defined structure as rules and resources recursively implicated in social reproduction, while agency refers to the capacity of actors to make a difference in the world. The duality of structure suggests that these two are not separate but mutually constitutive. Building on this foundation, recent scholars have reinvigorated the structuralist tradition with empirical grounding and critical insight. For example, Edensor and Jayne (2019) argue that urban rhythms, daily practices, movements, and routines mediate how individuals reproduce and resist structural constraints. Similarly, Koch and Latham (2020) explore infrastructural citizenship, revealing how urban dwellers make claims on the city through everyday interactions with infrastructure systems, echoing Giddens' emphasis on localized practices.

Furthermore, Adkins and Lury (2023) stress the temporal structuring of inequality through urban systems, proposing that structure is not static

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but dynamically reshaped by economic, social, and cultural temporalities. Their findings align with Giddens' notion of recursive social practices that reproduce structures across time and space. In line with Ogboi's (2003) work on the Niger Delta which illustrated how macro-level structures (federal control, multinational corporations) curtailed community agency, Adetunji (2021) similarly found that urban residents in Lagos faced severe constraints in influencing infrastructural decisions, despite being framed as "beneficiaries" of inclusive planning. Such works reveal that structuration is often skewed, with power asymmetries distorting the supposed duality between agency and structure.

The dialogue between urban sociology and structuration theory underscores the need for a more grounded understanding of how cities function as spaces of negotiation, control, and resistance. Urban environments are not merely backdrops for social interaction; they are active sites of citizenship, where individuals and groups contest, comply with, or reshape institutional norms and urban policies (Purkarthofer & Stead, 2023; Chatterjee, 2022).As such, urban planning, when approached through the structurationist lens enriched by Chicago School insights and contemporary structuralist theory, becomes a practice not only of spatial ordering but of citizenship construction, participatory negotiation, and socio-political structuring.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the agency-structure debate raises questions on how social structure influence individual action, how individual action create and transform social structure and the causal link between them as well as the one that is dominant over the other (Morselli, 2014). Structuration is seen to be continuous while the interconnecting process of reproduction and individual socialization are spelt out by the intersecting paths as individual action and institutional activity in particular times and spaces (Cloke, et al, 1991). Sewell (1992) notes that structure as conceived by Anthony Giddens shaped people's practices while people's practices constituted and reproduced structures. In other words, human agency and structure rather than opposing each other, presupposed each other. Structures are enacted by knowledgeable human agents who acted by putting into practices their necessarily structured knowledge. Knowledgeable and creative human agents through their actions transform the structures that empowered them to act in the first place.

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4.0 Structuration Theory and Urban Planning: Nexuses

The engagement of Urban and Regional Planners and other spatial scientists like Geographers with structuration theory dates back to the 1980s when it became imperative to explore the "ways that social theory could inform understandings of the socio-spatial dialectic" (Dyck and Kearns, 2006: 86).It was adopted to "explain the connections between situated interactions and social structures" (Atiyaye, 2022: 10). Structuration theory therefore became a veritable avenue for them to join the agency-structure debate especially with historical materialism struggling with humanism to theorize the recursiveness of social relations and spatial structures. The major proponents of structuration theory in Urban and Regional Planning were Heather Campbell, Bob Jessop and Patsy Healey. Others in Geography were Derek Gregory, Allan Pred and Nigel Thrift. By integrating agency and structure in bridge building between humanism and Marxism, they brought in notions of structuration into various subfields of Urban and Regional Planning and established a relationship between human agency and the constraints of structure which ushered in a common ground for a deeper inquiry.

The theory of structuration emphasizes the interdependence of human agency and social structure in time and space. Gregson (1986) notes that there are links between structuration theory and time-space relations. Structuration theory emphasized time-space relations and accords importance to the graphical notation characteristics of time geography which is used for visualizing the connections between everyday material life and structuration. Time – space relations share with structuration theory an emphasis on the significance of the practical realities of daily activities in circumstances of co-presence as well as the constraints that shape the routines of day to day life and the constitution of social conduct. For example, Urban and Regional Planners have utilized ethnography, storytelling and shadowing to explore lived experiences of people in their research (Purkarthofer and Stead, 2023).

Dyck (1989) and Dyck (1996) through in-depth interviews and diaries kept by study participants explored various aspects of women's everyday routine. Utilizing Giddens' time-space maps, it was possible to show where the study participants visited, when, with whom and why. Through the results of the study, it was possible to examine the interplay of agency and structure as well as the capacity of the women to

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transform the meaning and practices of mothering. The regionalization of locales, the rules and resources they drew from, the unintended consequences of the study participants, actions and their combination of mothering work and paid labour were also observed.

Tivers (1988) in Cloke et al, (1991) in another study lit up questions of agency and structure by tracking the experiences of four hundred (400) women in the London Borough of Merton. Some of the daily experiences of the women include housework, shopping, school runs, child minding among others. The study revealed that women's lives were spatially localized and their range limited by physical constraints arising from the management of city spaces. These constraints were seen as products of societal structure especially as it relates to gender. The study was a demonstration of how the women under study were shaped by the sedimented structure of gender relations which was bound up with the time-geography of the everyday lives of the women.

Structuration theory provides an understanding for the behavior of actors and their influence in the structure of society through time-space relations (Lamsal, 2012). For example, in a study on social groupings and housing selection, it was observed that low income housing projects and gated communities grouped people together based on their relative market value. The agent was subjected to the institutional capital market in order to determine settlement location based on resource allocation. Agents that lived close to each other, connected better, bonded more and had similar shared experiences. Similarly, Moos and Dear (1986) applied structuration theory in the development of a framework to understand urban phenomena. They utilized structuration theory to construct a structurationist model of urban space by selecting various ideal type categories of agents and institutions. Some of the agents include politicians, bureaucrats and other interest groups while the institutions include political, economic and communicative institutions as well as those involved in the legitimation of activities (legal and arbitration apparatus).

Ogboi (2003) applied structuration theory in explaining community development in the Niger Delta region and found out that the interplay of the economic system, power structure, resource exploitation, environmental degradation, community development and community responses came into play using the lens of structuration theory. He found out that

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power was increasingly concentrated and centralized while communities on the other hand, were stripped of their control of resources within their area. The Federal Government appropriated the oil resources meant for the development of the communities while the existing structures limited community need identification and consequently limited access to the resources (Ogboi, 2003).

The intersection between structuration theory and urban planning has deepened over the past few decades; particularly as planning scholars seek frameworks that reconcile top-down structures with the bottom-up practices of everyday urban life. In this context, urban citizenship defined as the practices through which urban residents assert rights, access infrastructure, and influence governance becomes a crucial lens through which structuration theory can be applied in planning practice (Chatterjee, 2022; Purkarthofer & Stead, 2023). At its core, structuration theory, with its emphasis on the duality of structure, provides a valuable tool to understand the reciprocal relationship between planning institutions and urban actors. It explains how institutional systems shape urban behavior, while also being shaped in turn by the everyday decisions and actions of urban dwellers (Giddens, 1984). In the context of urban planning, this duality manifests in the interactions between planners, citizens, and the built environment, where decisions made in boardrooms reverberate through community spaces, and resident responses often feed back into institutional reforms.

One of the most profound contributions of structuration theory to urban planning lies in its capacity to explain how agency emerges despite structural constraint. For instance, Koch and Latham (2020) describe how urban residents, particularly in informal settlements, exercise infrastructural citizenship by engaging with and negotiating the very systems that marginalize them. These everyday engagements like filing complaints, forming cooperatives, or renegotiating access to water or electricity are not merely acts of compliance but instances of structuration, where agents draw upon and reshape institutional resources.

Building on Giddens' notion of locales, Edensor and Jayne (2019) stress that urban spaces should not be seen as passive containers but as active sites where meaning, power, and identity are constantly produced. This resonates with the work of Heather Campbell and Patsy Healey, who emphasize the importance of understanding planning as a communicative and

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interactive process rather than a technocratic one. Structuration theory thus informs participatory and inclusive planning, advocating for planning frameworks that recognize the agency of marginalized voices and embed their experiences into policy design.

The study by Ogboi (2003) remains a pioneering application of structuration theory in the Nigerian context. His analysis of community development in the Niger Delta illustrated how macro-structural dynamics, state policy, multinational interests, and institutional frameworks interacted with grassroots agency. Communities, despite being subjected to environmental degradation and disempowerment, exercised agency through protest, negotiation, and re-appropriation of development tools. This form of resistant citizenship reflects the structurationist view that actors are knowledgeable and capable even in structurally skewed environments.

Recent studies echo Ogboi's findings. Adetunji (2021) explored how Lagos residents challenged the narratives of inclusivity embedded in urban infrastructure projects. Despite formal channels for participation, structural limitations (e.g., technocratic bias, elite capture, and opaque governance) constrained genuine citizen input. Nevertheless, residents engaged in informal practices such as community mapping, protest, and tactical urbanism to assert their presence in planning discourse. These actions exemplify structuration-in-action, where citizens navigate, reinterpret, and potentially transform urban governance structures. Furthermore, Healey and Barrett (1990) applied structuration theory to land and property development, mapping how actors such as developers, landowners, public officials, and community groups are shaped by institutional arrangements yet pursue independent strategies. Their work anticipates contemporary challenges in land governance, particularly around gentrification, land grabs, and exclusionary zoning practices. Through the structurationist lens, these processes can be seen as products of recursive interactions between agency and structure, not merely top-down impositions.

In the current urban landscape marked by climate vulnerability, housing inequality and digital surveillance, structuration theory encourages Urban planners to consider how citizenship is enacted beyond formal channels, often through affective, material, and spatial practices. Whether through neighborhood cleanups, community gardens, or digital activism, urban residents continuously negotiate

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their place in the city, illustrating that planning is not only a technocratic task but a relational and socio-political practice. In addition, structuration theory enables a richer understanding of the politics of space, the dynamics of participation, and the contested nature of urban citizenship. By incorporating both the constraints of institutions and the possibilities of human action, the theory offers a robust framework for reimagining planning as an inclusive, reflexive, and adaptive process.

Structuration theory provides the means to transcend the structure and agency dualism while at the same time "recapturing spatial structure through social theory" (Moos and Dear, 1986: 238). In addition, a blending of structuration theory and time-space relations can assist in the reformulation of the concept of a sense of place. The sense of place is seen as the emotional bonds that unite people and place (Chokor, 1986). It is what makes an environment distinctive and different from others. Bryant (1999) notes that structuration theory in the resolution of the dualisms of structure and agency, determinism and voluntarism as well as order and change, greatly assisted Urban and Regional Planners in resolving past deficiencies and the provision of a theoretical framework for empirical projects.

5.0 Nexuses between Structuration Theory and Geography: A Contemporary Critique

Anthony Giddens' structuration theory has been criticized by different scholars on a number of grounds. McPhee, Poole and Iverson (2014) criticized the theory on the grounds that the theory:

- Underplayed materiality and material constraints thereby neglecting the contextual factors that influenced actors' abilities to transform or resist structures;
- Overemphasized action at the expense of structure by granting too much power to individuals; and
- Recognized only individual human beings as capable of acting as agents.

In other words, collectives such as groups, organizations cannot be agents in the literal sense.

Cloke et al, (1991) notes that structuration theory has more or less appeared as a loose-knit web of propositions constantly being reworked conceptually and developing unevenly. In other words, it cannot be seen as a total theoretical treatise in its own right. Similarly, Pozzebon (2013) sees the theory as conceptually complex and not easily coupled with any specific method. There has been more focus on the

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theoretical and philosophical issues surrounding structuration theory with little exploration into its empirical viability for Urban Planning research. In addition, it is seen as suffering from serious gaps and logical deficiencies because some of the concepts especially from structure were not sufficiently clear or robust enough to serve as foundations of a theoretical system (Moos and Dear, 1986; Sewell, 1992). Scholars have criticized structuration theory on the grounds that Anthony Giddens did not exemplify the use of the theory in empirical enquiries of his own or employ it explicitly in analyses of particular substantive areas. In other words, there has been a patent inability of the theory to illuminate empirical research (Bryant, 1999; Gregson, 1989).

Dyck and Kearns (2006: 92) notes that Anthony Giddens' structuration theory has been criticized on the ground that there was "a marginalization of culture and gender". Furthermore, the globalization of trade, advances in transport and communication technology as well as economic restructuring seem to have significantly punctured the agency-structure problematic. Some critics argue that Anthony Giddens has not been able to transcend the Marxist and humanist theories he sought to merge in structuration theory. In fact, Marxist and humanist traditions are so fundamentally opposite in terms of method, substance and political implications that attempts to merge them will end up being incoherent, eclectic or outright denaturing of one or both (Cloke et al, 1991).

Gregson (1986: 196) criticizes structuration theory on the ground that the "treatment of time-space says very little of real substance about the spatial and temporal constitution of present day society". It remains peripheral and provide little in terms of analytical grip to either societal or individual reproduction of temporal and spatial organization in contemporary capitalism. The portrayal of the connection between agency and structure is indeterminate in character because there is no concrete statement as to when and in what circumstances either agency or structure will dominate. Some scholars have criticized structuration theory on the ground that the production of a form of fusion between the twin concepts of agency and structure does not solve the agency/structure problem (Gregory, 1981).

While structuration theory has provided valuable conceptual tools for bridging the gap between structure and agency, recent scholarship has raised important critiques particularly regarding its empirical

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applicability, analytical ambiguity, and insufficient engagement with material, cultural, and institutional specificities in contemporary urban contexts. One of the primary criticisms sustained from earlier literature but rearticulated by scholars such as Adkins and Lury (2023), is that Giddens' theory underplays the structural rigidity and temporal durability of inequality. Although structuration acknowledges the recursive reproduction of social systems, it often lacks sufficient explanation of how certain structures such as racialized housing markets or neoliberal urban policies persist despite recurring agented interaction. Adkins and Lury argue that urban systems are not merely reproduced through practices but are historically encoded with power asymmetries that demand more than interpretive frameworks to disrupt.

Similarly, Madden (2020) critiques structuration theory for failing to adequately theorize urban capitalism and state power. While the duality of structure provides a compelling model for understanding urban interactions, it remains analytically vague on when and how structural logics (such as capital flows or colonial legacies) dominate over agency. Madden opines that Giddens' model is overly optimistic about the capacity of knowledgeable agents to reshape urban structures in the absence of institutional support or political will. This concern is echoed by Schindler and Kish (2021), who argue that planning discourse, when filtered through structuration theory, often neglects the coercive dimensions of technocracy and state violence. They contend that while structuration theory usefully foregrounds the agency of urban actors, it insufficiently addresses the institutional closure that defines many urban governance frameworks especially in the Global South.

In terms of methodology, Pozzebon et al. (2020) highlight that structuration theory continues to pose challenges for empirical research due to its conceptual abstraction and flexible logic. They suggest that while the theory is rich for theoretical integration, it requires methodological triangulation such as combining ethnography with spatial analytics to become practically usable in planning research. This reflects the enduring critique that Giddens provided few applied case studies or empirical exemplars, leaving much of the operationalization to secondary scholars.

From a culturalist and feminist standpoint, Amin and Thrift (2021) suggest that structuration theory marginalizes affect, embodiment, and non-human agency, making it

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less suitable for analyzing the full spectrum of urban life. Urban interactions, they argue, are not just produced through intentional action and institutional rules, but also through emotional atmospheres, bodily encounters, and ambient materiality factors under-theorized in Giddens' original formulation. However, rather than abandoning structuration theory altogether, scholars increasingly advocate for hybrid approaches. For instance, Edensor and Jayne (2019) propose blending structuration with urban rhythm analysis to capture how temporalities and repetitions shape urban order. Similarly, Chatterjee (2022) proposes combining structuration with theories of political society and informal governance to account for citizenship practices beyond the scope of formal democratic institutions.

In spite of these critiques, structuration theory continues to serve as a productive provocation, inviting urban scholars to confront the entangled dynamics of control, consent, resistance, and change. For example, in revisiting Ogboi's (2003) study of the Niger Delta, one sees that despite the rich insights into the interaction of structure and agency, the theory does not sufficiently address the institutional violence and environmental racism embedded in extractive urbanism. More recent structuralist work, such as Akindès and Fourchard (2021), builds on this by examining how postcolonial state structures constrain urban citizenship in West African cities, showing how historical legacies of control are deeply embedded in planning processes.

The challenge with Anthony Giddens' structuration theory is linked to the fact that the theory cannot be divorced from the diversity found within is major tenets. It is almost impossible to rework radically opposing ideas into a coherent whole. It is therefore imperative to note that even though the theory remains influential, its application must be critically adapted and expanded to engage with contemporary urban realities especially in cities marked by deep inequality, contested governance, and spatial injustice. The future of structuration-informed research lies not in theoretical purity but in dialogue with intersectional, materialist, and postcolonial perspectives that better reflect the complexity of urban life today.

6.0 Conclusion

In spite of the numerous criticisms of Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, the theory has played significant role in researches relating to institutions and their management as well as individuals and their choices. Gregson (1986)

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notes that society can be seen as either structurally deterministic or voluntaristic whereas structuration theory was a conscious attempt to effectively address the structure agency debate as well as bridge the gap between the associated poles of determinism and voluntarism. In addition, Wolfel (2002) notes that the theory was not just an attempt to fuse structuralism with humanistic social theories, rather, the theory sought to rise above seeming deficiencies by emphasizing relations between the agent and structure to bring about social change. Equal attention was placed on both the social structures and human agency.

Anthony Giddens' structuration theory has made a significant impact in Urban and Regional Planning and ushered in a socio-spatial dimension especially in "conceptualization of the contextuality of social life that admits the human agent and structure in an integrated structure" (Dyck and Kearns, 2006: 94). In addition, the introduction of work on relationships among agency, structure, the recursive constitution of people and places has been a significant milestone in Urban and Regional Planning research. The beauty of structuration theory is that it is a noble attempt to bridge the structure-agency gap. Some scholars have found it a viable way to rise above the dichotomy between Marxist and humanistic thoughts as well as illuminate the roles that time and space play in the constitution of social life (Cloke, et al, 1991). The theory remains an invaluable metatheory and tool that will continue to inform Urban Planning research now and in the future.

This paper has reviewed and extended the relevance of structuration theory in urban planning by embedding it within broader paradigms of urban theory, urban sociology, and citizenship studies. Drawing from both classical sociological perspectives, particularly those of the Chicago School, and more recent structuralist and postcolonial critiques, it has been argued that structuration theory provides a valuable lens through which to understand the reciprocal dynamics between agency and structure in the production of urban space. The integration of structuration theory with insights from community studies and the culturalist school of thought illustrates how social practices, cultural meanings, and localized interactions contribute to the shaping of urban environments. Giddens' core ideas especially the duality of structure, reflexivity, and regionalization help to explain how individuals and communities both reproduce and transform

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urban systems through everyday acts of navigation, negotiation, and resistance.

More importantly, the paper has highlighted how structuration theory can deepen our understanding of urban citizenship not simply as a legal status but as a lived and negotiated relationship with the city. Whether through infrastructural interactions, planning participation, or informal governance, urban residents continually exercise agency in ways that contest or reshape institutional power. The experiences of communities in places such as the Niger Delta or Lagos demonstrate how structurally marginalized groups assert presence and power in planning processes, underscoring the recursive relationship between systemic constraints and human conduct. However, contemporary critiques rightly caution that structuration theory must be adapted to confront the realities of institutional exclusion, material inequality, and postcolonial urbanism. While Giddens provided a foundational framework, its practical application requires integration with more grounded and critical approaches that account for affect, embodiment, temporal inequality, and the politics of recognition.

In this light, structuration theory should be seen not as a complete explanatory model but as a bridge theory, a dynamic and reflexive tool for understanding the complex entanglements between individuals, institutions, and space. Its true strength lies in its ability to incorporate diverse ontology of urban life, enabling planners and scholars to re-imagine planning not just as technical procedure but as socio-political negotiation grounded in everyday life. As cities worldwide grapple with challenges of inequality, informality, climate stress, and governance deficits, structuration theory, updated with contemporary insight remains an essential part of the theoretical toolkit for critical, inclusive, and human-centered urban transformation.

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