

URBAN-RURAL DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Keywords: Rural-urban continuum, mega-urbanization, rural development, modernization, Modernism, world-system approach, Post-modernism, Information Society

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Summary

Social scientists have reflected on the concepts of urban and rural development and have developed diverse perspectives on the issue. This contribution examines past research and debates on the rural–urban continuum, mega-urban development, rural diversity and development. It illustrates how the main theoretical perspectives on these topics have evolved from a dichotomous treatment of urban and rural societies into perspectives more appropriate to analyzing a complex multidimensional rural–urban continuum, urbanization and information society. The authors argue that the current trend toward globalization has led to the establishment of a network society that excludes certain areas and groups, and that the contours of this emergent world order are just beginning to be clarified.

1. Introduction

Social development is sometimes perceived as a uniform process of modernization in which some sectors or areas are probably hampered in the making of steady progress, but the general movement in the direction of overall modernity is not doubted. Reality, however, is much more complex and varied than is premised in this simple unilinear development model. We would like to refine this crude perception of modernization by presenting case studies specified for urban and rural areas in both developed and

developing countries. By doing so we will be able to specify current processes of social development. Moreover, we will show that even these generally accepted basic distinctions are neither sufficient nor adequate to describe contemporary social realities. At present all peoples and societies on the globe are experiencing a period of turbulent transitions and transformations. Since 1988 the world community has witnessed a series of massive social changes and reforms, including the disappearance of the bipolar world order of the Cold War era, the widespread adoption of market economic policies to replace centrally planned ones, and the democratization of authoritarian regimes. Large-scale monetary, political, social, and economic crises have left an indelible stamp on these changes. Looked at from a historical perspective including previous periods of transition and transformation, what seems to be going on may be a historic rupture with the past one. Tiryakian in 1994 described this as “the death of a social world and the emergence of a new world on the historical stage.” According to Tiryakian, what is happening at first sight appears to be an extremely complex, almost inextricable “admixture of processes of de-structuration and restructuration and new patterns of differentiation and de-differentiation.” The whole process seems so upsetting that people sense a loss of direction and a proper definition of the situation. These transformations appear to be setting the stage for a wide range of social developments currently taking place in different sections of humankind, particularly among the masses of people living in the various urban and rural areas spread over the globe.

2. Rural–Urban Differences

The differences between rural and urban society constitute a classic topic in sociology. Several famous scholars have tried to characterize both types of society by putting them in opposition to each other, implying a rural–urban dichotomy. Examples are Tönnies (1887) and Durkheim (1893). Tönnies makes a distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. *Gemeinschaft* relationships are found mostly in the countryside and are characterized among other features by mutual help and dependence as well as communal feelings rooted in family and neighborhood relations. In contrast, *Gesellschaft* relationships are considered to be more individualistic in nature. They are often based on functional and contractual agreements and imply tension, sometimes culminating in conflict. Tönnies agreed that in the course of time *Gemeinschaft* relationships are replaced by *Gesellschaft* relationships. Durkheim also distinguished two types of relationships which he labeled as mechanic and organic solidarity. Traditional society in his view is characterized by mechanic solidarity rooted in correspondences between individuals in a society. These correspondences between individuals diminish when society becomes more differentiated as the consequence of an increased division of labor, eventually leading to organic solidarity between individuals. The opposition between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* and between mechanic and organic solidarity are analytical constructs used to understand the social transformation occurring in an industrializing and urbanizing society. These generalized constructs or models were put to the test in the 1930s by the scholars of the Chicago School, who developed a more empirical approach.

It was Wirth, particularly, who opened the way for empirical testing of the rural–urban dichotomy when he defined the city as “a relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals” (Wirth, 1969: 148). His thesis was

that a community changes character when size, density, and heterogeneity increase. A large size leads to potential differentiation and more secondary contacts, which are impersonal, superficial, and segmented. They also imply a greater freedom from family and neighborhood obligations. Increase in density leads to specialization and the segregation of people and functions, including the separation of place of work and place of living. Growing heterogeneity also entails further differentiation in society with higher mobility between groups and loss of overview and orientation eventually causing depersonalization and massification. Aware of its hypothetical nature Wirth stressed the need to test his theory. In 1956 he pointed out that empirical research on urban–rural differences in the US had encountered important difficulties. The concepts of town and countryside had to be re-evaluated as cities sprawled into the countryside and many suburbs had assumed a rural atmosphere. The matter was complicated even more because the researchers used the arbitrary census districts as bases for their data, which implied a defective identification of town and countryside. Notwithstanding these problems, the research results pointed to a number of differences between town and countryside in family size, mortality, level of education, ethnicity, and marital status. Yet, these researches only amounted to a number of differences on distinct variables that were not considered in their context. Therefore, Wirth stressed the need to reject the idea of a dichotomy. As a response to the problem he formulated the notion of a rural–urban continuum to pose the questions of how the characteristics are associated with each other and how they pass through the continuum.

This idea of a continuum was congruent with the study of Redfield (1947) in Yucatan, Mexico. Redfield chose four communities of different size, homogeneity, and isolation for comparison. His conclusion was that an increase in cultural disintegration did indeed occur when the continuum ran its course from village to city. Secularization and individualism also increased as one moved towards the city. This meant that the idea of a gradual transformation along a continuum was accepted and that the changes from rural to urban occurred as expected. The characteristics formed one cluster on the scale from rural to urban, so that the continuum had to be considered unidimensional.

This unidimensional nature of the continuum was disputed by Sol Tax. He described an Indian village in Guatemala that was “small, stable, unsophisticated, and homogeneous in beliefs and practices,” and possessed a local, well-organized culture. However, relationships were impersonal, with formal institutions dictating the acts of the individual. Unexpectedly, family organization was weak, and life was secularized. It seemed that the individuals were acting more with an eye to economic or other personal advantage than from any deep conviction or thoughts about the social good. Sol Tax also pointed out that in these Guatemalan societies a “primitive world view,” “with a disposition to treat nature personally, to regard attributes as entities, and to make ‘symbolic’ rather than causal connections,” was combined with “a tendency for relations between man and man to be impersonal, commercial, and secular.” These observations led to questions about the unidimensionality of the continuum. The disintegration of the family was not confined to the Western urbanized world, it was also prevalent in villages in Guatemala and Italy. Max Weber described how the capitalist ethos was combined with strong religious beliefs in the worldview of highly urbanized Jews. Hauser pointed out that many characteristics to be expected on the basis of the rural–urban continuum idea were not present in the metropolises of developing

countries. McGee (1971) not only specified the variables on the metropolitan side of the continuum, but in his typology of rural and urban societies he also made a distinction between different types of rural communities.

To refine the rural–urban continuum idea, the concepts of primary and secondary urbanization of Redfield and Singer (1969) were introduced. These authors distinguished two phases in the urbanization process. The first phase is constituted by the process of people becoming urban: primary urbanization. The second phase is an infinite process of continuous change in the thinking and acting of the urbanites: secondary urbanization. The rural–urban continuum is concerned only with primary urbanization and suggests that nothing will change again once this phase is completed. The development of the city itself, which is part of secondary urbanization, is not included in the concept of unilinear continuum.

These ideas and research results have enervated both the rural–urban dichotomy and the unilinear rural–urban continuum. It is now generally accepted that social development can be represented best by a multidimensional continuum, in which the continuous transitions from rural and urban societies find their starting points in certain specific configurations of sociocultural elements that differ from each other and in the course of time result in new combinations of these elements.

3. Mega-urban Development

It should be borne in mind that the changes along the multidimensional continuum do not stop after the urban phase has been reached and that the urban world assumes new forms which cannot be explained by the concepts of town and countryside. A new conceptual framework is required to explain these forms of urbanization which incorporate a great variety of urban elements on a regional basis, such as old inner cities, metropolises, suburbs, villages, recreational areas, agricultural domains, natural territories, and transport corridors. These integrated zones have been dubbed *desakota* zones by T. G. McGee (McGee and Robinson, 1995), a term based on the Bahasa Indonesian words for village and town. McGee and Robinson point to new forms of urbanization, which are called “region-based urbanization” as opposed to “city-based urbanization.” According to these authors, the major urban regions have three components, namely the “city core,” the “metropolitan area,” and the “extended metropolitan area,” the latter constituting a patched area of mixed agricultural and nonagricultural activities. In Southeast Asia these urban regions follow divergent patterns of spatial growth, namely the “expanding state model” as in the growth triangle of Singapore, the “extended metropolitan regions” as in the case of Kuala Lumpur, and the “high density extended metropolitan region” as exemplified by Jakarta, Manila, and Bangkok.

These categories furnish an initial impression of the diversity that the urban side of the continuum may display. They are specifications of the older concept of megalopolis brought to the fore in relation to the US conurbations which were the first forms of region-based urbanization recognized as such and were opposed to the concept of metropolis which is more city- than region-based. It is clear that extended mega-urban regions form a major challenge to empirical research and conceptual thinking. This is

even more so when these region-based transformations are put in a global framework. In the 1970s the Greek architect C. A. Doxiadis developed a model for the future world city, which was called “ecumenopolis.” This city consisted of one large, grid-shaped urban tissue covering almost the whole world. Besides the barely populated inner parts of the grids, it left untouched the uninhabitable areas of the world which were too high or too dry or for other reasons unsuited to intensive human settlement. The great diversity of the grids in this global framework of interlocking extended metropolitan regions is still to be conceived. The examples presented by McGee and Robinson must be considered a first stimulus in this direction.

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