

Concept of Quality of Urban Life and Its Impact and Benefits

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Abstract

Urbanization is a natural consequence of economic changes that take place as a country develops. At the same time, urbanization helps to contribute to the growth process at large. This article deals with the theoretical concepts related to the topic defining urban area, international criteria, major classifications of cities and towns. The article also attempts to record the historical background of urbanization, housing and urban policies across the nations and highlighting various urban development programmes in the light of impact on the people. The principal aim of this article is to review how urbanization affects the urban quality of life with strong theoretical models and approaches.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is a word with two different meanings. According to the United States Postal Service, 'Urbanization' is an 'area, sector or development within a geographic area'. More commonly, and for the rest of this entry, we are concerned with a different meaning. Urbanization is the name for the movement of people from rural to urban areas, and the resulting growth of cities. Urbanisation is a process that has occurred, or is occurring, in nearly every part of the world that humans have inhabited.

Simply defined, urbanization is the process of growth in the proportion of the population living in urban areas. It is distinguishable from the term "urban growth" which refers to the proportionate growth of urban areas themselves, that is, annual net additions to urban population divided by the size of the urban population (Preston, 1982). To clarify, "growth of the urban population can be looked at in two ways: on its own, in which it is described as urban growth, and as a proportion of the national population, in which the term urbanization is used" (Ouchou and Gould, 1993).

Urbanization may simply be defined as the process of growth in the proportion of population living in urban areas. It occurs because people move from rural areas (country side) to urban areas (towns and cities) in search of better social life and economic opportunities. The term urbanization has been defined in different ways by the scholars of various disciplines. Kingsley Davis has explained urbanization as a process in which there is marked.

spread out pattern of human settlements to one of concentration of population in larger urban centers. The demographic interpretation of the concept of urbanization relates it with a process by which the population of an area gets concentrated into urban places with an increasing proportion being concentrated in the largest urban centre. Urbanization is a process of agglomeration of people and concentration of economic activities in geographical space. The process of urbanization takes place when the proportion of urban population is increasing. The rural to urban migration is the chief component of the urbanization and an essential mechanism by which the urban trends are accomplished (Reddy, 1970). According to Bose, A. (1978) urbanization in the demographic sense is an increase in the proportion of the urban population to the total population over a period of time. Chand and Puri (1983) argued that urbanization is the proportionate increase of the urban population in relation to the total population in a given territory. Urbanization is a process whereby transformation of society (from rural to urban, agrarian to industrial and traditional to modern) takes places. Precisely, it may be defined as "an increase in the proportion of the total population that lives in urban areas" (Pacione, 2008). The simplest and the most accepted definition of urbanization refers to the proportion of total population living in the urban settlements or else to a rise in its proportion. In geographer's view, urbanization is a process of concentration of population in human settlements either through multiplication of the points of concentration or through increase in size of existing points of concentration.

1.1 Components of Urban Population Growth

There are three important components of urban population growth: the natural increase (the difference between the number of births and deaths in a population), rural to urban migration,

and the classification of rural settlements as urban or a change in the definition of urban centres. The main cause of urban growth today is movement of people (from rural to urban areas), with significant variation among countries. In some parts of the world, the primary cause of urbanization is of the movement of people uprooted by drought, famine, ethnic conflicts, and civil strife. Cities have enormous potential for improving people's lives, with urban areas offering better access to healthcare services, education, basic infrastructure, entertainment, security and various economic opportunities. On the other hand, large population size, overcrowding, high residential density, and great social heterogeneity associated with urban life etc are expected to destroy the primordially based social supports and close relationships, characteristic of rural and small-town life and replace them with formal social control mechanisms and impersonal, bureaucratic organizations (Ramachandran, 1989).

1.2 Measures of Level of Urbanization

Urbanization is considered to be an important process of socioeconomic and cultural development for any geographic region. There are various methods to measure the level of urbanization. Most common of them is the percentage of urban population to total population. However, there are some alternative measures of urbanization. The total urban population of an area, divided by the number of urban places can be regarded as convenient measure of level of urbanization of that area. Rajbala (1986) calculated density of towns per thousand square kilometres to measure degree of urbanization. Another alternative measure of urbanization is the area of the rural hinterland served by an urban centre. This concept is based on the premise that urban centres work as the foci of their rural hinterland. The larger the size of the rural hinterland, the lower the level of urbanization would be and vice-versa.

2. CAUSES OF URBANISATION

People move into cities to seek economic opportunities. In rural areas, often on small family farms, it is difficult to improve one's standard of living beyond basic sustenance. Farm living is dependent on unpredictable environmental conditions, and in times of drought, flood or pestilence, survival becomes extremely problematic.

Cities, in contrast, are known to be places where money and wealth are centralised. Cities are where fortunes are made and where social mobility is possible. Businesses, which generate jobs and capital, are usually located in urban areas. Whether the source is trade or tourism, it is also through the cities that foreign money flows into a country. It is easy to see why someone living on a farm might wish to take their chance moving to the city and trying to make enough money to send back home to their struggling family.

These conditions are heightened during times of change from a preindustrial society to an industrial one. It is at this time that many new commercial enterprises are made possible, thus creating new jobs in cities. It is also a result of industrialization that farms become more mechanized, putting many labourers out of work.

3. EFFECTS OF URBANISATION

While it is true that opportunities exist in cities, it is also true that the competition for these opportunities is fierce. Very few people make their fortunes, and the rest must still find ways to eat and sleep while they wait for their chance. This leads to one of the most obvious effects of urbanisation - the growth of slums.

3.1 Slums

Slums are areas where large populations of extremely poor people live in sub-standard conditions. Common features of slums include:

- **Land Insecurity** - Slum dwellers are often 'squatters', living on land that they do not officially own. The land is often owned by the government, and there is a constant danger that it may be sold out from under its powerless inhabitants. These displacements exacerbate a poverty that is already oppressive.
- **Poor Living Conditions** - The houses in slums are often made of any materials at hand, which could include mud, sticks, sheet metal, cartons, and other waste materials. Crowding is typically extreme, with entire families living in one-room structures, and very little space between one structure and the next. Sanitation is often very poor, which contributes to the

spread of diseases such as cholera, typhoid, tuberculosis, diphtheria, and bilharzias. Utilities such as electricity, water and sewage disposal are either not available or only available on a very unreliable basis.

- **Unemployment** - Since there are more people competing for jobs in the city than there are jobs available, unemployment is a constant problem. Those who are unable to find jobs find themselves wandering the slums, looking for some income-generating activity, which leads to...
- **Crime** - Slum conditions make maintenance of law and order extremely difficult, and patrolling the slums is not usually a priority for law enforcement officers. Crime is typically rampant, and common activities include drug trafficking and abuse, weapons trafficking, burglary, and prostitution. Criminal elements are sometimes organised into gangs, and are sometimes independent.
- **Accelerated Population Growth** - Recent arrivals in the city often retain the habit of having large families, which makes sense in a rural setting. In the slums, where education about family planning is not readily available, this leads to the population ballooning far beyond the capacity of the environment to support it adequately, which in turn exacerbates all of the above problems.

3.2 Environmental Impacts of Urbanisation

The growth of cities can have significant impact on the surrounding environment:

- **Temperature** - Due to several factors, including the paving over of formerly vegetated land and the high concentration of heat sources, cities tend to be warmer than surrounding countryside, sometimes by a difference as large as 10° Celsius. Large cities become 'regional heat islands', which can alter local weather patterns.
- **Air Pollution** - One of the most obvious differences between an urban and a rural area is the air quality. Due in large part to heavy motor vehicle traffic, and also to energy production, a blanket of smog hangs over many cities. This polluted air is, in addition to being quite ugly, a public health problem.
- **Water Issues** - When an area is urbanised, the water cycle in the area changes dramatically. First of all, cities have more precipitation than surrounding areas, with pollutants and convection currents serving as magnets for raindrop formation. Once the water falls, instead of being absorbed by the soil, it is instead channeled into run-off systems, picking up ground pollutants along the way. This pollution is added to that brought about by industrial waste and sewage disposal, which is often untreated, especially in cities of the developing world.
- **Destruction of Habitat** - The conversion of a natural area to an urban area means the destruction of whatever was there previously. When wetlands, for example, are paved over, an ecosystem is lost, and any species dependent on that ecosystem die out in the area. A less drastic example is that of erosion - valleys tend to contain fertile topsoil, which tends to get washed away if the valley is urbanised.

4. IMPACT OF URBANIZATION:

To understand the impact of new urbanization on the environment and people, it is crucial to examine these processes in medium and small cities and not restrict our inquiries to the largest and most often-studied mega cities. Urban growth relates to four basic processes:

1. Rural to urban migration has been key source of urban growth since the origin of cities. Varied factors such as perceived economic opportunity, climatic or economic problems in the countryside, political programs of resettlement, insecurity in the countryside, and perceived "excitement" of city life drive rural-to-urban migration. The migration rate varies over time and space and, in the developed world, may be balanced by reverse migration. In addition, there is some evidence that congestion-related disbenefits, especially related to health, and possibly transportation gridlock, are leading to migration out of mega-cities (MacKellar, cyberseminar comments).
2. Natural increase due to the combination of increased fertility and decreased mortality is probably the greatest numeric contributor to urban growth. The dramatic increase in global life expectancy from 46 to 66 years over the past 50 years reflects major reductions in infant

mortality and extensions of the normal life span. The recent decrease in fertility, especially in cities where more women are educated and enter the workforce, somewhat balances this figure.

3. Cross-border immigration impacts urban growth in the developed and semideveloped world. Economic opportunities and perceived lifestyle improvements are major attractors for these migrants as are push factors of local unemployment or underemployment, environmental degradation, civil strife, and political instability.
4. Reclassification of land from rural to urban categories is both a real process of urbanization and a record-keeping shift that may or may not reflect current reality (Hugo et al, 2003). Many cities are rapidly growing at their fringes, engulfing former villages and farmlands, transforming them into dense, industrial areas, shantytowns, or less-dense suburban developments. The other process, which can take the form of annexing rural lands to ensure control when they become urbanized in the future or redefining what constitutes urban communities by national census takers, does not reflect the same demographic reality, complicating the comparative databases we all use. Although these processes are widespread, there are also countervailing patterns that contribute to the complexity of the urban phenomena and require caution when applying generalizations. Whereas urbanization in general is leading to aggregation of population, many cities are deconcentrating. The benefits of agglomeration have been eroded by information technologies and by transportation networks. The very economies of scale that favor urbanization also favour commercial and industrial facilities that require large tracts of land, hence new locations are often far away from the central cities, with residential developments following employment to the fringe (Fulton et al, 2001; Irwin and Brockstael, 2004). Another assumed pattern that requires scrutiny is that cities are driven by and in turn drive regional economies.

5. BENEFITS OF URBANISATION

From the above, the growth of cities sounds rather grim. Why should such a destructive process be allowed to continue? One should not, however, be misled. There are many benefits to cities as well.

1. **Efficiency** - Cities can be tremendously efficient. For example, imagine 100 families living in 100 separate houses spread out over many acres of land. Now imagine the same 100 families in a single block of flats. Obviously, in the flats, far less effort is required to supply energy, water, heating, and waste disposal to these families. Additionally, only in cities are such things as recycling programmes possible, because collection can be made so efficient.
2. **Convenience** - In a city, everything is nearby. Access to education, health, social services and cultural events is much more readily available in a city than in a rural setting. Because things are located so closely, cities can make motor vehicle use unnecessary for many citizens. This is especially true when a city has efficient mass transportation systems in place, systems which are not feasible for rural populations.
3. **Concentration of Resources** - Because of the density of people, wealth, and other resources in cities, many institutions become possible that would not be in areas where such things are more spread out. Basically, when enough people are put together in a small area, they start coming up with ideas to do things - cultural, political, commercial and social activities that just do not occur outside of cities. For example, without cities, there never would have been universities.

6. CONCLUSION

Urbanization is considered to be an important process of socioeconomic and cultural development that leads to concentration of urban growth population at certain points irrelatively small areas. It is a natural consequence of economic growth that takes place as country develops. Economic activities (non- agricultural) are better performed in, urban areas to better infrastructure and services and consequently, urban density has been increasing continuously. Indeed, there exists a very close relationship between urbanization and economic growth and good examples are the many developed or industrialized countries and also a few developing countries. As a result, large population are living in urban areas. The urban

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