



A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF URBAN PROBLEMS

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Abstract

Urbanization and the related industrial or technological forces that accompany it are often referred to as major sources of disruption in Western society. While there is some truth in this judgment, it is not the city or metropolis as such, any more than it is technology, that, directly causes such problems as racial tensions, crime, or poverty. Problems such as these are aberrations of a process that on the whole

Produces more in the way of stable and constructive changes than the reverse. Inherently, there is no more reason for urbanism to be associated with social disorganization or personal pathologies than there is for rural life. Studies have concluded that rural environments are as prone to manifestation of social and personal disorganization as are cities and metropolises.

KEYWORDS: Social Problems; Urbanization; Industrialization; Institutions; Mobility; Anomie; Individualization.

Even though the physical facts of urbanization and industrialization are not themselves necessarily involved in creating social problems, certain historically related social processes definitely can be implicated. Merton and Nisbet (1990) have identified four such processes that are particularly significant. 1) conflict of institutions; 2) social mobility; 3) individuation; and 4) anomie. Although these processes are rarely found in isolated, distinct forms, they will be discussed separately for clarification.

Conflict of Institutions

What has emerged in modern urban society is a plurality of social institutions, each with its own authority and functions, each limited or constrained by the presence of others, with all forming together the larger pattern of authority, functions, and allegiances by which a society comes to be known. Such pluralism has certainly been a major feature of American urban society. Kinship and religion are the dominant institutions that wielded the greatest influence on the lives of people in preindustrial urban communities. Since the advent of industrialization, economic, political and social service oriented institutions have separated from kinship or religious groupings to become competing institutions in their own right. Self-contained local communities



or neighbourhoods have become engulfed and transformed by larger, more complex, and more elaborately differentiated forms of urban organization.

Institutional pluralism cannot be overlooked as a background to modern urban social problems, for it is frequently at the bottom of the conflicts and dislocations forming the substance of many kinds of deviant behaviour. The resultant conflict of institutions is deeply involved in the migration of peoples from the old world to the new; in the passage of American society from rural to urban; in the changed position of the generations and the sexes to one another; and in the rise of such institutions as the corporate bureaucracy, public education and welfare, mass communications, political parties, labour unions, and the suburban complex. This pluralism is characterized by a wide range of competition and social strain, leading to an almost endless conflict of goals and behaviour patterns.

Nowhere has such conflict been more vivid and agonizing than in the transplanting of peoples from Europe, Africa, or Asia to the U.S., or from rural to metropolitan areas (Johnson, 2003). These dislocations are often reflected in the minds and personalities of the people concerned, sometimes in epic and compulsive degree as they react to changes involving intrusions into, or alterations of, their social and physical environment. The conflict between established habits and new values, between old and new allegiances, often becomes incorporated in people's personalities and thus comes to exert confusing or ambivalent influence on their behaviour.

Social Mobility:

With the advent of modern democracy and legal egalitarianism and a general rise in in human humanitarianism in advanced urban-industrial societies, rigidly fixed social status has been supplanted by a high degree of geographic mobility and vertical social mobility for thousands of groups. Geographic mobility has released many groups from social and cultural isolation, as have the newer forms of mass communications. Throughout history there has been a striking tendency for religions, ethnic groups, social classes, and other social groups to maintain privacy from one another and to guard their respective cultures from externally produced changes. In rapidly growing urban communities, such previously isolated often find themselves in direct competition for living space or for access to the rewards and amenities of urban living. As groups having different backgrounds converge on the same neighbourhoods or areas of the metropolis, misunderstandings, suspicion, and hostility often develop among them. Whereas assimilation or integration of racially, religiously, or ethnically distinct groups previously may have been forbidden by law or custom, new and uncertain rules or understandings must be worked out by trial or error. In this process, the legal, economic, and social classes have been profoundly changed; and patterns of influence, prestige, power, or wealth have been transformed or sharply modified. These changes have afforded a relatively high degree of vertical mobility



gor countless numbers of individuals, but not without a real or threatened loss of social status and influence for countless others(Levin,2007).

With the blurring of traditional social class lines and the removal of the more flagrant legal and economic privileges of certain classes, a marked change has occurred in the whole status structure of modern urban society. As fixed social status is displaced by emphasis on upward mobility and the ethic of success, intensive striving for status naturally becomes an obsession for large numbers of people, not all of whom are successful.

Individuation:

One of the fundamental characteristics of urban society is the relatively high degree of people's legal and moral autonomy. Tonnies, Durkheim, and Simmel were among the first sociologists to foresee a decline or a weakening of the individual's ties to such social groups as the extended family, neighbourhood, guild., or parish, and the maximization of the autonomous individual and the impersonal, atomistic, and mechanical relations of contract or of the marketplace. While it has meant greater freedom of personal choice, detachment from the traditional forms of association has also led to loneliness, depersonalization, and alienation for many. As people seek new identities, statuses, or affiliations of their own choosing from among the identities, statuses or affiliations of their own choosing from among the wide variety of new social forms available in urban communities, which are in themselves not necessarily deviant or pathological, many will fail to make stable social ties and will succumb to patterns of alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness, or other patterns of illegitimate or delinquent behavior(Gist and Fava,1974:Dentler,2007). While it would be easy to exaggerate the extent of excessive detachment from meaningful social groups or its negative consequences, it is nevertheless true that such estrangement is not uncommon in modern urban communities and is regarded as problematic.

Anomie:

All human behaviour is normative. It is directed to goals or values, and draws its meaning and importance in terms of those values. When moral values are widely accepted in a society, they form the basis on which the society achieves consensus and integration. Such values are also essential to the integrity and success of individual personality. When values become confused, when they are in conflict with one another, or when they lose their immediacy to human beings, the resultant condition can be referred to as a state of normlessness, or anomie(Butler;1997,2004)

Much of the history of modern urban society is the history of the breaking up of traditional values. The rise of capitalism, religious individualism, and kinship, and such urban-industrial doctrines as critical rationalism, utilitarianism, and science also have challenged traditionally



sacred value system. The conflict between the old and the new or the sacred and the secular are just a few of the many value conflict, alienation, and meaninglessness, is a notable and persistent aspect of modern urban societies and communities to the creation of their widely recognized social problems.

Conclusion

What is common to the major social processes discussed above is that all imply rapid and massive change. Largely unplanned and unanticipated, such change moves unevenly through society, affecting some parts differently than others. The speed and unevenness of social change rather than urbanization per se underlies most of the social problems commonly identified as characteristics of modern urban living. Even the most stable and unchanging societies could never be completely problem free, since any particular type of social structure tends to generate its own particular type of social problems. But one would expect the problem to be far different from those that have been generated in the rapidly urbanizing society. While the problems of crime and racial or ethnic conflict are complex and have a multiplicity of causes, one can understand them at least partly in the context of the tumultuous social changes that have accompanied the urbanization process .

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