



Course Name Rural and Urban Sociology








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Module 1:From rural to urban

Lecture 1:What is 'urban'?

The course revolves around the theme of the city as seen through **the lens of sociology**. It captures how the concept of urban is intertwined with what we **understand** by **modernization and development**. The concept of urban is not only about rural areas changing in size and density but also about changes in way of life. We agree that there is something distinctive about the city. But sociologists have debated about the nature of its distinctiveness. Social thinkers studying the city in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had proposed their own observations and predictions. Did the built environment of the industrial city reflect the 'hypocrisy' of the capitalist system or was it a novel social formation that congealed rationality in the artifacts of money and watch? As Simmel had pointed out in his celebrated essay, our task is not to condone or condemn but to understand.

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Module 1:From rural to urban

Lecture 1:What is 'urban'?

We begin with theories of the origin of the city. While the first module discusses the works of **Lewis Mumford, V. Gordon Childe, Max Weber** and **Charles Cooley** on the rise of the city, the second module briefly outlines the urban history of India. We show that the concept of 'urban' undergoes a critical change in the post Industrial Revolution period and we attempt to understand its full significance (Module Three). The concept of urban was no longer a site (of political power or the market) but it was a worldview and an ideal. It was the face of the future. After exploring the theoretical underpinnings of urban sociology we move on to discuss the relation between urbanization, technology and planning. We discuss how the concentration of technology in the city contributed to its dominance. Moreover, how the urban community was shaped by technology and at the same time also negotiated and questioned it (Module Four). Module Six explores the sociological aspects of urban planning. Following a timeline, it discusses the imperatives behind urban planning in pre-imperial port cities, the imperial reconstruction of a *nawabi* city and the construction of a post-Independence capital city in India. In the last lecture we discuss **the ideas of consumption, urban renewal** and the **'divided' city**.

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We also discuss the poetics and politics of urban spaces as created through the dynamics of cultural and political factors. Here we use the examples of the old neighbourhoods and ghettos to illustrate our sociological claims. Though titled 'rural and urban sociology' the course does not subscribe to the binary framework. Rather, it aims to unravel the relationship between the *gemeinschaft* and the *gesellschaft* in the context of the city (Module Five). You will find that it is a theme that runs through the course. In this course the city is cast under the sociological lens to appreciate its societal, ecological and planning aspects. We begin the discussion by looking at the three inter-related concepts of urban, urbanization and urbanism.

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What does the word urban mean?

In this lecture I will discuss the concepts of **urban**, **urbanism** and **urbanization**.

Etymology of the word

- The word urban is derived from the Latin urbanus, urbs meaning city.
- While the Latin word for city was urbs, the resident was civis or townsman.
- Interestingly, civis is also the root of the word civitas from which the word citizenship has been derived.
- As it has been pointed out by scholars, it is not easy to define what is urban. John Palen has pointed out that there are about thirty different definitions of the urban population and none of them are completely satisfactory. “Urban settlements have been defined on the basis of an urban culture (a cultural definition), administrative functions (a political definition), the percentage of people in nonagricultural occupations (an economic definition), and the size of the population (a demographic definition)” (Palen 2008: 7). In this lecture while mentioning the administrative and demographic definitions of the urban, we will try to understand the usefulness of the very term in the Indian context.

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In contemporary times the term urban can be defined both from a demographic as well as administrative perspective.

Administrative Definition of Urban

All places with a **Municipality, Corporation, Cantonment or Notified Town Area** is designated as **urban** in the census of India.

Demographic Definition of Urban

- i. a minimum population of 5,000.
- ii. at least 75% of the male working population was non-agricultural.
- iii. a density of population of at least 400 per sq. Km. (i.e. 1000 per sq. mile)

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Urbanization: What does it mean?

- A process by which **rural** areas become transformed into **urban** areas
- Refers to the **changes in the proportion of the population** of a nation living in urban areas and to the process of **people moving to cities** or other densely settled areas.
- Urbanization is also defined by the United Nations as **movement** of people from **rural** to **urban** areas with population growth equating to **urban migration**.
- The term is also used to describe the changes in social organization that occur as a consequence of population concentration in urban areas.
- The exact definition and population size of urbanized areas vary among different countries.
- It refers to the **growth of cities**.
- Today half of the world population live in **urban** areas.

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What defines Urbanism?

- Refers to **social patterns** and **behaviours** associated with living in **cities**.
- Seen as one of the consequences of **urbanization** with its changes in values, mores, customs and behaviours of population.
- Implicit premise in much writing about **cities** today is that cities produce a characteristic way of life known as **urbanism**. We will discuss it in details in the section on the theories of urban sociology.

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Antinomies of Urbanism and Urbanization

It is interesting to note that it is not only that urbanism and urbanization will always go hand in hand.

- A low level of urbanism (**urban behaviours**) and a high degree of urbanization (**population concentration**) can be present.
For example, large cities in the developing world where the city is filled with immigrants who reside in an urban place but remain basically **rural** in outlook;
- Less commonly found is a low level of **urbanization** and a high level of **urbanism**,
for example, decentralization in the US where there is decline in urbanization but urban lifestyles are prevalent with city people living on edges of **suburban areas**..

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Module 1: From rural to urban

Lecture 1: What is 'urban'?

Nature of the urban in the context of developing nations required special attention.

In India, the majority of its people are involved in service and small industry, making this very different from the heavy-industry based

cities of the West which evolved under very different conditions.

Puzzling question:

Is **rural** / **urban** a valid differentiation in the Indian context?

or

Do we need to rely on a **neologism** such as **rururban**?

First, we will trace the origin and development of the city in history in order to show the history of the city prior to the advent of industrial capitalism.

Though just like the discipline of sociology, modern cities also arose in the nineteenth century.

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References

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- Palen, John J. 2008 (1975). *The Urban World*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

