

# **Urbanization in the World-Economy**

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**Edited by Michael Timberlake**

**STUDIES IN SOCIAL DISCONTINUITY**

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# URBANIZATION IN THE WORLD-ECONOMY

Edited by

**Michael Timberlake**

Department of Sociology and Social Work  
Memphis State University  
Memphis, Tennessee

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# PREFACE

The processes of urbanization have long been regarded as integral to socioeconomic development. However, scholarly opinion about global urban patterns is divided, ranging from claims that the growth of urban population in a given region is an inevitable concomitant of modernization to assertions that too-rapid urban growth, especially in a region's largest city, may actually impede balanced development. Despite this diversity of opinion, observers agree that there is tremendous global unevenness in patterns of urbanization.

Our understanding of uneven development has been transformed in recent years by the emergence of the world-system perspective, which, however, has until now illuminated aspects of dependency and development other than urbanization. The purpose of this book is to use the world-system paradigm to systematically interpret processes of urbanization. The book is directed toward students of urbanization and development who may approach their subject from a variety of academic disciplines, including anthropology, political economy, geography, history, political science, and sociology.

The general contribution of the world-system approach is that it allows us to see how some urban processes at the local or regional level are shaped, in part, by global structures and processes. For example, the growth and decline of particular cities is influenced by their involvement in, and function for, this worldwide social system. The changing character of the urban labor force of particular cities is similarly influenced by global processes: Changes in the world-economy have an impact on core cities, such as New York City, and on peripheral cities, such as Manila. We also interpret differences among countries in levels and rates of urbanization, degrees of urban primacy, and characteristics of the urban labor force in terms of the structural features of the encompassing world-system. In so doing, the authors of chapters in this book do not abandon traditional concerns of scholars of urbanization. Rather, these traditional concerns are approached in a new light, one that has shone on other aspects of social change but that has not yet been cast directly on urbanization.



Because of its systematic approach to urbanization from the world-system perspective, this book is much more than a collection of loosely related essays. It addresses several conceptual and theoretical issues that are pertinent to our task and then presents several examples of concrete research on urbanization from the world-system perspective. The book contains the work of members of a network of scholars who, to varying degrees, have communicated with one another about their research as it has developed. The idea for the book was conceived at The Johns Hopkins University by participants in the research project on urbanization in the world-system, headed by Christopher Chase-Dunn in the Department of Sociology. As a postdoctoral fellow in the department, I had the good fortune to participate informally in this project. Several of the chapters in the book are contributed by people who have worked directly with this project. These include the chapters by Kentor, Sokolovsky, Walters, Chase-Dunn, and myself and Lunday. Earlier versions of several of the other chapters were presented as papers at sessions organized by Chase-Dunn at an annual meeting of the American Political Science Association (Portes, London, and Firebaugh) or organized by me at an annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (Nemeth and David A. Smith, Sassen-Koob, and Ward). Carol Smith presented work related to her chapter in a colloquium sponsored by the Department of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins. Finally, I had been in contact with Clark since our graduate school years at Brown University, where our interests in urbanization and development had been kindled by Sidney Goldstein, Robert Marsh, Dietrich Rueschmeyer, and Basil Zimmer, and where Peter Evans sparked our concern with the world-system and dependency approaches to development.

Although this is an edited collection, it has not been an easy project. I have benefited from the help of many people along the way, none of whom, of course, are responsible for any of the book's shortcomings. Participants in Chase-Dunn's project were very helpful in the early stages. In addition to those who contributed chapters, I appreciate the support, criticism, and inspiration of Patricia Arregui, Doris Cadigan, Carin Celebuski, and Vicki Walker. I thank Charles Tilly, editor of this series, for recognizing the book's promise and helping to make it better than it otherwise would have been.

For their help in typing parts of the manuscript and for other efforts related to the manuscript's eventual publication, I am grateful to Pam Skalski and Shirley Sult in Baltimore and to Janice Barnes and Elise Flowers in Memphis. Much of my time in preparing the book was supported by a 1980–1982 postdoctoral traineeship in the Department of Sociology at Johns Hopkins from the National Institute of Mental Health (Grant #5 T32 MH14587-06), and I am thankful for the support of Edward McDill and

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PART I

# INTRODUCTION



# 1

## THE WORLD-SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE AND URBANIZATION

**Michael Timberlake**

### INTRODUCTION

Urbanization processes have typically been studied by social scientists as if they were isolated in time and explicable only in terms of other processes and structures of rather narrow scope, limited to the boundaries of such areas as nations or regions within nations. However, within the past 15 years, the study of large-scale social change has been transformed by the emergence of the world-system theoretical perspective. World-system scholars have adumbrated properties of the modern world-economy that allow us to view it as a coherent whole. Much of the research pursued from the point of view of this perspective has been historical, and it has dealt with either the system as a whole or how local social formations (e.g., class relations, social movements, states) are transformed as regions of the world are first incorporated into the structure of the system, and then become subject to processes that reproduce it (cf. collections edited by Bergesen, 1980; Goldfrank, 1979; Rubinson, 1981). The claim is not that world-system processes determine everything. Rather, the fundamental lesson is that social scientists can no longer study macrolevel social change without taking into account world-system processes. Specifically, processes such as urbanization can be more fully understood by beginning to examine the many ways in which they articulate with the broader currents of the world-economy that penetrate spatial barriers, transcend limited time boundaries, and influence social relations at many different levels.

Urbanization has been one of the most frequently studied features of the modern world. Since the dramatic growth and spread of urban agglomerations beginning in the nineteenth century, scholars have concerned themselves with documenting, for different countries and regions of the world,



such aspects of urbanization as the size and growth of the largest cities, the relative size of urban populations, and changes in urban hierarchies (e.g., Weber, 1967; Davis, 1972; Berry, 1973; Goldstein and Sly, 1977). These phenomena have then been related to other developmental processes, such as level of economic development and differentiation (e.g., Davis and Golden, 1954; Gibbs and Martin, 1962; Hill, 1974) or political change (e.g., Pye, 1969). With few exceptions, there have not yet been attempts to interpret patterns of urbanization in light of a world-system perspective. The aim of this book is systematically to apply elements of this broad perspective to certain macrolevel dimensions of the urbanization process. We attempt to specify theoretically and examine empirically some of the ways in which urbanization patterns articulate with the morphology and dynamics of the world-economy.

## THE STUDY OF URBANIZATION

Within North American social science the process of urbanization has conventionally been viewed as an evolutionary outcome of, first, the elaboration of trade relations among relatively isolated localities, and then of industrial development within regions or nations. As in other fields of sociological interpretation, the organic analogy and functionalism have been brought to bear on interpretations of the process of urbanization. The conventional understanding of the growth of ancient cities, for example, stresses as fundamental such general processes as growing specialization and the evolutionary nature of technological change that induces specialization and, thus, promotes some degree of urban concentration. The importance of trade, especially long-distance trade, in giving rise to towns and diffusing technology is emphasized. Such approaches are particularly useful in identifying limitations on urban growth (e.g., limitations placed on the food supply by the level of technical development in agriculture). This general approach has been applied intensively to analyzing the connection between urbanization and industrialization.

Written at the turn of the century, Weber's (1967) seminal statistical study of nineteenth-century urbanization employed an explicitly Spencerian interpretation of city growth. The growing concentration of the population in cities is viewed as a "natural" outcome of economic growth and differentiation (Weber, 1967:154-229), having to do with factors such as the application of machine power for agricultural production (in the United States) and the attendant job-displacing effects that "encourage" migration to cities, as displaced farm workers seek employment. Market forces (even those of the world market) are taken into account, but more or less as natural forces would be:

economic development, or the integration of isolated social and economic groups, demands the concentration of a portion of the population in commercial cities. Similarly . . . the enlargement of the market, which is one aspect of the process of growth of industrial society from the village economy to the world economy, has brought about centralization in the manufacturing industries and enforced the concentration of another portion of the population in industrial or . . . commercial cities. (Weber, 1967:185)

Cities are the reflections in space of the division of labor brought about by industrialization.

The approach taken by Weber turned out to be far from barren. His study itself is highly useful in documenting the rise and spread of urban agglomerations around the world in the nineteenth century. Research on urbanization spawned by both early and more recent “Chicago School” sociologists and human ecologists has also used an evolutionary–organic framework and has yielded a wealth of descriptive and theoretical material on the spread of urbanization over time and space (e.g., Davis, 1972; Hauser and Schnore, 1965; Hawley, 1981), the relationship between urbanization and other aspects of the industrial division of labor (Hawley, 1981; Gibbs and Martin, 1962), urbanization and regional development (McKenzie, 1933), and regional development and the elaboration of city systems (McKenzie, 1929; Bogue, 1949; and Duncan *et al.*, 1960).

From this general perspective urbanization, or expansion of the local community, and integrated regional development result from ecological processes.<sup>1</sup> Regionally, urban growth is seen as a process of centripetal movement, but from the point of view of each urban center growth is viewed as centrifugal expansion. Cities expand by growth away from centers. It is

<sup>1</sup>Human ecologists define their task as one of studying the human population as a system with emergent properties. The “ecological complex” is composed of the four main referential concepts of human ecology: population, organization, environment, and technology (Duncan and Schnore, 1959). Furthermore, the unit parts studied are “patterns of activity” that, when ordered as a system, emerge as “organizations of activities” (Duncan and Schnore, 1959:136). Human ecology is macrosociological, avoiding the reductionism inherent in social psychology and “psychological sociology” (Schnore, 1961). Hawley describes the field as the “study of territorially based systems, of which the urban community is a prime example” (1981:9). Human populations “develop” by organizing in response to environmental changes. *Environment* is used in its broadest sense, and includes other organizations. *Organization* is also used very broadly; “it refers to the entire system of interdependencies among the members of a population which enables the latter to sustain itself as a unit. The parts of such a system—families, clubs, shops, industries, for example—cannot be self sustaining; they can only survive in a network of supporting relationships” (Hawley, 1981:9). Processes that human ecologists have studied include the changes communities undergo as interdependencies are elaborated; “the ways in which the developing community is affected by the size, composition, and rate of growth or decline of the population”; the significance of migration to community change and stability; and changes in the nature and structure of the functions performed in communities (Hawley, 1944:404–405).