

SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CITY POPULATIONS AS AN OBJECT OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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Abstract:

This article discusses the importance of the socio-cultural and urbanization process of small and medium-sized cities, the approaches and views of classical sociologists, modern foreign scholars, and scientists from CIS countries and Uzbekistan, who have conducted research in various areas of urbanization.

Keywords: monofunctional, polyfunctional, urbanization, cultural heritage of small towns, socio-cultural image of urban population.

Introduction

Cities, as an object of social sciences, are studied by classifying them into types or categories based on qualitative and quantitative indicators. The specialization of cities (monofunctional and polyfunctional) and their unique socio-cultural and demographic characteristics are determined by their resident population size. Accordingly, they can be studied as industrial cities, transport hubs (ports, railway centers), scientific cities, tourist cities, historical cities, and resort cities.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

From a sociological perspective, looking at the history of human and urban development, it's evident that the urban environment has both positive and negative impacts on human life. As urbanization is an inseparable part of our lives, it's crucial for urban sociology to continuously study the development and impact of regions on the population. Finding and implementing solutions that protect the human living environment and its socio-cultural image is a vital issue. In our view, the main outcomes of urbanization processes are related to the following:

- Ensuring **sustainable economic development**;
- **Improving the quality and raising the standard of living** of the population;
- Large-scale construction of **housing, production, and social infrastructure facilities**;
- **Efficient use of land plots**;
- **Integrated urban development** considering economic, social, and ecological factors, as well as existing conditions;

- Solving priority tasks of **industrial-innovative development** and applying **digital economy**;
- **Optimizing the development of large, medium, and small cities**;
- Implementing **effective forms of locating productive forces** through urban agglomerations;
- Establishing **industrial zones, technoparks, and innovation centers in cities**.

The history of cities in Central Asia dates back thousands of years. During the development of the Great Silk Road, cities like Tashkent, Osh, Khujand, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Termez, and others became centers for intercontinental trade, interactions, and the mutual recognition and understanding of world cultures. In the current stage, historical conditions, as well as the economic, cultural, and social environment, have certainly changed, impacting the structure and significance of cities in the region. In the last century, new cities were established in Central Asia primarily to satisfy the complex needs of the former Soviet Union's centralized economy. Most of these towns were built around a single urban-forming enterprise. Starting from 1991, a decline in economic activity occurred in most cities of Central Asia, along with a corresponding decrease in local budget revenues and the deterioration of urban infrastructure. The capabilities of urban governance were limited under market economy conditions.

Central Asian states adopt different approaches to urban development in their attempts to create urban planning systems and support the socio-economic development of cities. Each country has successes and shortcomings that deserve careful study by governments and development partners to improve their policies and find answers to the future challenges of urban development in Central Asia.

In our country, 17 of the existing cities are considered large cities, while more than two hundred others are **medium (16) and small cities**. Therefore, it's crucial to study the **socio-cultural changes** experienced by the population of small cities as a result of urbanization and industrialization. The **socio-cultural image of cities** and the **urbanization process** are a pair with a two-way interaction.

The problems of cities and urban life have been extensively studied by many renowned scholars in the field of sociology. These include figures like **M. Weber, E. Durkheim, F. Tönnies, G. Simmel, R.E. Park, E. Burgess, McKenzie, and L. Wirth**. Within contemporary sociological knowledge, this issue has also been investigated by several scholars from various approaches and perspectives. Among these, the approach that examines the development of cities and the lifestyle of the population through the **socio-economic essence and cultural potential** of these regions is particularly intriguing. Scholars such as **J. Id, D.A. Hicks, and D.H. García** have conducted research in this area.

Today, in foreign sociology, it is common to compare the process of urbanization with social evolution, assessing **urbanization as a cyclical process dependent on social**

evolution. Proponents of this direction, including **J.V. Beaverstock, R.G. Smith, P.J. Taylor, R.B. Cohen, J. Friedman, P. Knox, P. Marcuse, R. van Kempen, A. Sachar, J.R. Short, Y. Kim, M.P. Smith, and S. Sassen**, have gained significant recognition for their works.

Research by foreign scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries reflected issues of **population migration, social adaptation, individual behavior in the urban environment, the lives of ethnic groups, and urbanization processes.** Representatives of the **Chicago School**, such as **E. Burgess, F.W. Znaniecki, L. Wirth, R. Park, and W.A. Thomas**, serve as examples. Their successors, **W. Firey and A. Hawley**, focused their attention on matters of **culture, values, and socio-cultural institutions** within the context of urbanization.

Contemporary foreign sociologists, geographers, philosophers, political scientists, and economists such as M. Castells, H. Lefebvre, D. Logan, H. Molotch, J. Macionis, R. Pala, D. Ricardo, A. Scott, J. Farley, and D. Harvey are studying the phenomenon of urbanization based on the evolutionary development of Western countries. In their research, they examine the influence of various levels of power structures, economics, politics, urban landscape, and cultural factors during the pre-industrial, industrial, and post-industrial eras.

Scientific literature has primarily focused on and heavily emphasized the development of large industrial cities. Here, the main emphasis has been placed on their economic-geographic location relative to raw materials, energy resources, transport arteries, and major centers, as these factors determine the fundamental and important characteristics of cities. Sufficient experience has been accumulated in studying the socio-economic problems of urban populations. However, the cultural heritage and values that define the unique characteristics of small cities have not yet been fully analyzed and studied. Examining this criterion as a basis for urban typology would also be appropriate and represent a novelty in the field of science.

The essence of the concept "cultural heritage of small cities" is reflected in UNESCO Conventions on intangible cultural heritage, cultural diversity, and the development of cultural tourism, as well as in the legislative acts of our country dedicated to preserving the intangible cultural heritage of our peoples. Urban development processes have also been widely researched by CIS scholars. These primarily include G.M. Lappo, Ye.N. Persik, B.S. Khorev, A.A. Mins, V.V. Pokshishevskiy, N.N. Baranskiy, and I.M. Maergoyz.

In our country, this issue has been addressed by E.A. Akhmedov, O.B. Otamirzaev, A.S. Soliev, A.A. Qayumov, Z.R. Rayimjonov, S.S. Zokirov, Z.T. Abdalova, and others. Since the socio-cultural development of the population is a multifaceted process, it is investigated from the perspective of almost all social sciences. Disciplines such as philosophy, history, cultural studies, and sociology directly study this process using their own methods. In the doctoral dissertations of A. Qo'ziev and A. Mirzaahmedov, the impact of the urbanization process on the national values of the population has been theoretically examined.

In our country, prominent scholars such as L.I. Maslyakova, H. Ismoilov, M. Inomova, M.M. Mamatova, K. Mahmudov, U. Mahkamov, A. Munavvarov, M. Rasulova, E. Yusupov, and others have studied the **negative moral and ethical consequences of urbanization**, as well as its impact on **spiritual values and national traditions**.

In recent years, a number of studies have been conducted in our country regarding the development of small and medium-sized cities and the **economic, psychological, and socio-cultural profiles of their populations**. For instance, in 2010, a project titled "**Life of Small Towns in Uzbekistan: Socio-cultural Aspect**" was carried out by a group of Uzbek oral historians led by Alisher Sobirov. The results of this research revealed a common problem in all small cities across Uzbekistan: the **loss of socio-cultural identity**.

Since 2011, the Centre for Economic Research (CER) has been implementing the "**Developing Sustainable Urban Infrastructure**" project with the support of ESCAP and UNDP Uzbekistan. The first phase of the project (2011) was dedicated to the development of cities in Uzbekistan, and its findings were presented at an international seminar held in Tashkent on July 5-6, 2011.

Among the young scholars in our country, M.M. Egamberdiyev, B.D. Eshov, and Yo. Ro'zimova have conducted their scientific work in areas such as the **formation of urban culture** in Uzbekistan and the **development of cities under market economy conditions**.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the **impact of urbanization and globalization on the lifestyle and socio-cultural identity of the population** cannot be overlooked and requires comprehensive study. This situation affects the positive and negative social relations, lifestyle, and worldview within the social profile of the population. This highlights the necessity of implementing practical measures in small and medium-sized cities to **preserve urban history, culture, and traditions**. To achieve this, it becomes essential to implement measures such as "restoring" the memory of the population living in small and medium-sized cities.

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