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SPECIAL FEATURES OF URBANIZATION IN URUGUAY

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I

Urbanization in the Republic of Uruguay displays certain characteristics which set this country apart from the rest. They may, however, be of interest for other areas as a sort of large-scale social "experiment", which enables certain social effects of urban society to be studied in a microcosm with a similar environment.

The special features of urbanization in Uruguay may be briefly outlined as follows:

- (a) The urban sector has been numerically larger than the rural ever since the eighteenth century, and the social effects of urbanization have therefore been making themselves felt for several generations;
- (b) Uruguay is at the present time the most highly-urbanized national society in Latin America, and this produces a set of very clearly-defined and stable social situations;
- (c) Urbanization in Uruguay is further characterized by the predominance of one metropolitan city, Montevideo;
- (d) The country's agrarian structure is dominated by livestock-producing latifundia;
- (e) These phenomena occur in a small country of 187,000 square kilometres, with an estimated population of 2,600,000 inhabitants, and a useful territory of 17,536,000 hectares.

II

In almost all the countries of Europe, and even in some of those of Latin America, such as Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, etc., the towns of to-day are based on a dense and long-established population of agricultural workers, strongly attached to the soil. When the Spaniards first began to found these towns, stable agrarian societies with a high cultural index were already in existence.

In Uruguay the situation was very different. The country was peopled by very small groups of indigenous inhabitants whose stage of culture was that of nomads, who did not submit peaceably to the conquistadores and who maintained their resistance virtually until their final extermination in 1842.

But, in addition, Uruguay, which at that time, as a province of the River Plate, was called the "Banda Oriental" (Eastern Belt), was a veritable "boundary mark" between Spain and Portugal.

In the struggle between the colonial empires of the Iberian powers for access to the River Plate, the geographical position for which they were contending represented territories in part of which Uruguay is situated. After the foundation of the Colonia del Sacramento by the Portuguese in 1680, the urban population settled in strongholds or fortified towns, the site of which was dictated by immediate or fairly short-term strategic motives. For much of the Colonial period, and even subsequently during the Independence, up to at least 1851, the pivot of Uruguay's social problems was constituted by the frontier and by military requirements.

If these circumstances are taken in conjunction with the facts accounting for the structure of agrarian society, it is readily understandable that by the end of the eighteenth century the majority of the population was living within the walls of Montevideo, or had taken refuge in such towns as Maldonado, Colonia, Canelones, Salto, Melo, Paysandú, San José, Florida, Minas, Rocha, etc.

Later, when the country was opened up to immigration from Europe, this latter contributed Uruguay's largest volume of population. The writer has established that in about 1830, at the time it became independent, Uruguay had only some 74,000 inhabitants, but from that date

up to 1930 it received an inflow of approximately 1,000,000 Italians, Spaniards, Brazilians, Frenchmen, Argentinians and other European nationals.^{1/}

With the sole exception of the Brazilians, who settled in rural areas in the north, this tide of humanity surged into the towns, and almost exclusively into Montevideo. The 1908 population census registered 309,231 inhabitants for Montevideo out of a total population of 1,042,680, but while in the country as a whole there were 82.62 per cent Uruguayans as against 17.38 per cent foreigners, in the capital the corresponding figures were 68 and 32 per cent respectively. If a new census had been taken in 1913, the proportion of foreigners in Montevideo would have exceeded 40 per cent, since it was precisely in 1908-13 that the maximum immigration from Europe took place, and the new population continued to settle mainly in the capital.^{2/}

Although a halt was called to immigration as from 1934, it may still be noted to-day, as a field study carried out under the author's supervision shows, that in a break-down of manual labour by place of origin, such proportions as the following appear: Montevideo 32, interior 45 and external sources 18 per cent.^{3/}

In other words, even at the manual worker level, and in contrast to the situation in other large Latin American towns, the proportion represented by rural migration from the Uruguayan hinterland falls short of 50 per cent, and therefore does not exceed the worker population born in the city itself or of foreign birth.

The age and firmly-established character of the towns in Uruguay is also linked to the early introduction of industrialization, especially in the capital.

In a report submitted to the Fifth Latin American Congress on Sociology (Montevideo, July 1959), the present writer called attention

1/ Carlos M. Rama, Ensayo de Sociología Uruguaya, Montevideo, Medina, 1957, chapters V and VII.

2/ For the pertinent data, see Eduardo Acevedo, Anales Históricos del Uruguay, volume V, pp. 435 et seq.; and Economía Política y Finanzas, pp. 30 et seq.

3/ From the report to the V Latin American Congress on Sociology entitled Actitud Política de los Obreros Montevideanos (mimeographed edition). The methodological premises of this study had been presented at the IV Latin American Congress on Sociology, held at Santiago, Chile, in 1957.

to the following stages in the history of industrialization in Uruguay:

- (a) Introduction of steam-driven machinery in factories and transport media, when Uruguay was incorporated into the great international trade flows, together with the emergence of a free labour force trained for industrial work. This took place in the 1840's.
- (b) Appearance of a Uruguayan bourgeoisie; application of the first protectionist policy; the earliest trade unions; establishment of State primary and industrial education; and rapid development of the manufacture of popular consumer goods. This second stage corresponds to the 1870's.
- (c) A third phase coinciding with the Batlle Administration (1904-23, approximately) during which the active population engaged in commerce and industry began to exceed the agricultural labour force. Manpower was supplied by substantial immigration from across the Atlantic and a democratic political system was introduced.

The State began to purchase or install industrial and commercial enterprises which were to give the Uruguayan economic structure its very special pattern.

- (d) The period 1936-58, when Uruguay's industrialization process acquired its present characteristics, and during which there was likewise an increase in the extent and importance of State intervention in the economy.

Owing to the interaction of all these factors, urbanization in Uruguay is particularly firmly established, as urban society has been formed and integrated for several generations.

It is common knowledge that Uruguay not only is the most highly urbanized country in Latin America, but also figures among those parts of the world where the urban population is proportionally largest.

/According to

According to the author's estimates for 1958, Uruguay's urban sector accounted for 2,046,000 inhabitants out of a total population of 2,600,000; or, in other words, its rural sector comprised only about 554,000 persons, that is, 21 per cent of the total for the country. ^{4/}

The resulting urban population figure of 78 per cent slightly exceeds that of 75 per cent used by ECLA for 1950, although it is much higher than the 55 per cent cited by Kingsley Davis and Ana Casis in their 1946 study, which is by now a classic. This latter estimate, however, was based on data for 1931-44, and took into account only towns with more than 5,000 inhabitants. ^{5/}

Among the countries of Latin America, or at any rate some of them, the position of Uruguay is outstanding, as can be seen from the following table:

LATIN AMERICA: PERCENTAGE OF URBAN POPULATION ^{6/}

Country	Gross per capita product (in dollars)	Urban population	Percentage in towns with over 100,000 inhabitants	In other towns
1. Uruguay	(1958) over 400	78	43	57
2. Argentina	(1947) " 400	66	57	43
3. Chile	(1952) 300-400	59	49	51
4. Cuba	(1953) 300-400	55	40	60
5. Venezuela	(1950) over 400	54	31	69
10. Brazil	(1950) 200-250	33	40	60
20. Haiti	(1950) under 100	12	37	63
LATIN AMERICA	(1950) 250	42	43	57.5

^{4/} These are estimates made by the present writer, in his as yet unpublished work Ias Clases Sociales en el Uruguay. Estructura-Morfología, mainly on the basis of the partial censuses taken for agriculture and industry, since there has been no national population census since 1908.

^{5/} Urbanization in Latin America, which the present author consulted in the anthology compiled by Hatt-Reiss, Cities and Society, Elencoe, Free Press, 1957, p.142. See also the same author's "Recent populations trends in the new world: an over-all view", The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, volume 316, Philadelphia, March 1958; and, in collaboration with Hilda Hertz Golden, "Urbanization and the development of pre-industrial areas", Economic Development and Cultural Change, volume III. N°1 Chicago, 1954.

^{6/} See ECLA, Study on manpower in Latin America, tables VI-1 and VI-6, supplemented with the present author's estimate for Uruguay for 1958.
/Uruguay's

Uruguay's position would seem to be analogous, not only to that of Argentina, where conditions are much the same in many respects, but also to that of other countries which have a similar agrarian economy (Australia, New Zealand) or a similar type of European immigrant population (Canada), or where the population has traditionally (as in the United Kingdom) or more recently (as in the United States) tended to concentrate in towns.

A table grouping Uruguay with the countries mentioned gives the following figures:

URBAN POPULATION: PERCENTAGES IN SELECTED COUNTRIES^{7/}

Country		In towns	In largest towns	In towns with over 100,000 inhabitants
1. Uruguay	(estimate for 1958)	78	43	43
2. Argentina	(1947)	66	25	43
3. Australia	(1939)	62.1	13.4	47.3
4. New Zealand	(1941)	43.8	13.7	31
5. Canada	(1946)	43	7.8	23
6. United Kingdom	(1946)	81.7	20.5	45.2
7. United States	(1946)	52.7	5.7	28.8

The foregoing table shows Uruguay to be the most highly urbanized country in the world next to the United Kingdom, which is traditionally adduced as a typical example of this social phenomenon. Although if these figures were brought up to date considerable changes might have to be introduced, Uruguay would still be among the countries in the world that are outstanding in this respect.

Similarly, Uruguay seems to be among the four countries in the world - the others being Argentina, Australia and the United Kingdom - where over

^{7/}In default of strictly contemporary, recent and fully comparable data, the author has used those supplied in the study by Jack P. Gibbs and Walter T. Martin, "Urbanization and natural resources: A study in organizational ecology", American Sociological Review, volume 23, N°3, New York, 1958; for data on Latin American countries, ECLA, op. cit.; for Canada, United Kingdom and the United States, Kingsley Davis, Urbanization in Latin America, op.cit.; and for Uruguay the estimate cited above.

40 per cent of the population lives in towns with more than 100,000 inhabitants. Contrary to what the United Nations experts assert, it is apparently the only Latin American country where an absolute majority of the population lives in towns with over 20,000 inhabitants. ^{8/}

But the most remarkable of the unique features distinguishing urbanization in Uruguay is the role played by a single city (Montevideo) in urban society and in the country as a whole. Study of the statistical tables of percentages given above reveals that the one town with over 100,000 inhabitants is the home of 43 per cent of the country's total population, the corresponding figures for the United Kingdom being thus doubled. If attention is confined to "towns with over 100,000 inhabitants", however, Uruguay appears exactly at the level of the Latin American average and below that of the percentages registered for Argentina and Chile.

This is no new development, and stress must again be laid on the fact that up to 1951 Montevideo was a fortified town, and almost the only safe place in the country in the event of the wars between Spain-Portugal and Argentina-Brazil being waged in Uruguayan territory. From 1951 to 1904, during which period the country was ravaged by civil war, Montevideo was still the only centre which constituted a safe refuge.

All this has been intensively discussed (although not studied) by Uruguayan writers, and "macrocephalic centre", "the giantism of Montevideo", "oil-stain that threatens to spread over the entire country", are only a few of the epithets with which the capital has been stigmatized. Uruguayan politics are to a considerable extent centred around this problem, and it deserves detailed scientific study.

The present author shares the view of Bert Hoselitz - expressed in his essay Generational and Parasite Cities (1954) - that a town which has lived and developed for centuries in these conditions is self-justified. Were Montevideo merely a parasitic centre, it could not have survived for decades, particularly since it is situated in a small country with very limited natural resources.

As regards the factors accounting for its size today, although many of these are identical with the features of any typical metropolitan city, the author has previously developed the following points:

^{8/} The nearest percentages would seem to be those registered for Argentina (48), Chile (40), Cuba (33), and Venezuela (31). See Report on the World Social Situation (E/CN.5/324/Rev.1 - ST/504/33), p.173.

(1) It is the political and administrative capital of the country; (2) it is the cultural centre of Uruguay; (3) it is the agricultural centre, especially for the surrounding districts; (4) it is the country's communication centre; (5) its industries appropriate 80 per cent of the capital, production and employment of the whole of Uruguay; (6) it has the only complete services (commercial, professional, community resources, etc.); (7) as the place where most European immigrants settle, it is the cosmopolitan centre par excellence.^{9/}

A few precise details are needed so that a clearer idea may be formed of the position of Montevideo within Uruguay. According to an estimate prepared by the Regulatory Programme Department of the Departmental Council of Montevideo, (Dirección del Plan Regulador del Concejo Departamental de Montevideo), in 1958 the population of the department of Montevideo numbered 909,616, 663,675 inhabitants, representing the strictly urban and 296,198 the suburban population. Hence the estimated figure of 900,000 which we have been using here is conventional.

A study, not of the departmental administrative division, but of the metropolitan area, as defined by the United States Bureau of the Census, suggests that since 1950 the population of Montevideo (now a standard metropolitan area) has greatly exceeded 1,200,000. If in addition Mc Kenzie's newspaper circulation techniques and those of Dickinson and others were strictly applied, the startling conclusion would be reached that for all practical purposes THE WHOLE OF URUGUAY IS INCLUDED IN THE METROPOLITAN AREA OF MONTEVIDEO. ^{10/}

The explanation is that Montevideo is the only metropolitan city in Uruguay, and the expansion of its services has no competition to face, except, very erratically, from the Argentine city of Buenos Aires in the area bordering on the River Plate (the western zone and the River Uruguay). Another determining factor is that all these issues arise in a small territory of 187,000 square kilometres (500 x 400 kilometres approximately North-South by East-West), where communications are easy and the

^{9/} Las Clases Sociales en el Uruguay, op.cit., chapter III.

^{10/} R.D. Mc Kenzie, The metropolitan community, New York, Mc Graw Hill, 1933, p.107 and Robert E. Dickinson, City, region and regionalism, New York, Oxford University Press, 1947, chapter VI, p.170.

characteristics registered are virtually those of a single geographical area. The United States writer K.H. Silvert has adduced weighty arguments in support of the thesis that Uruguay is a "city-State" like the Greek polis or the city of Renaissance times.

This unique urbanization pattern is also linked to the special features of agricultural production in Uruguay. ^{11/}

From a study of the social strata in rural areas the present author has drawn the conclusion that the characteristic features of rural society in Uruguay are determined by the following circumstances:

- (a) predominance of stock farming (out of the 17,536,000 hectares farmed in Uruguay, 16,703,000 are used for livestock production);
- (b) concentration of land ownership in the hands of a few;
- (c) low productivity;
- (d) shortage of services, communications and transport facilities;
- (e) marked cultural backwardness.

Except for the first of these features, the position is much the same in the other Latin American countries, but a variety of factors combine to aggravate the situation in the case of Uruguay. ^{12/}

In the first place, the very preponderance of urban society is constantly enhancing the value of farm property, upon which it depends for its subsistence and even for its supplies of foreign exchange. Due account must be taken of the small size of the country, its lack of mineral resources and the relative maturity of its industry.

Particular importance attaches to the combination of stock farming with the predominance of large latifundia. It is calculated that to date about 600 families own 35 per cent of the national territory. The rural upper class, while representing only 2 per cent of the agricultural population, has control of approximately 75 per cent of the exportable production of wool, hides, meat, etc. The rural economic enterprise

^{11/} This is noted by Harley L. Browning in "Recent trends in Latin American urbanization", page 116, published in The Annals of the American Academy, etc., op. cit. (The March 1958 issue dealing with A Crowding Hemisphere; population change in the Americas).

^{12/} The study by Thomas Pompeu Accioly Borges, Relationships between economic development, industrialization and the growth of urban population in Brazil (E/CN.12/URB/7, UNESCO/SS/URB/LA/7), calls attention to the similar characteristics of his country's "antiquated and defective agrarian structure".

which is most typical of Uruguay is the large estancia, and this is almost always a socio-economic machine run by routine methods and conducive to depopulation, as only one shepherd or cowherd (a labourer or gaucho) is needed per square kilometre. An establishment worth several million pesos in land, livestock and installations is regularly looked after by a permanent staff of 4 or 5 workers.

Many workers are employed only when sugar-cane and other crops are being harvested, or at shearing and branding time, etc., and live in underdeveloped hamlets known as rancheríos, the total population of which is estimated at 100,000 inhabitants.

Again, this type of enterprise does not oblige owners to live on their estates, and absenteeism is common among landed proprietors, who reside in the departmental capitals or in Montevideo and visit their establishments periodically.

Needless to say, this type of socio-economic structure promotes the depopulation of the rural areas, accounts for the low density of inhabitants per square kilometre in the interior of the country, and constitutes a sort of pressure pump which forces a voluminous and steady stream of country dwellers into the towns.

III

The study of long-term statistics relating to these problems in Latin America shows a fairly constant trend which is bringing the situation in other countries daily closer to that registered in Uruguay. As was noted at the outset, in many respects Uruguay would seem to be a kind of forerunner, a veritable "social experiment" on a large scale, which should rather be studied as an object lesson than held up to notice as an original and unique situation.

The following are, in essence, the major trends registered in Latin America in this field:

- (1) The steady upward trend followed by the proportion of the population living in urban areas in the Latin American countries;
- (2) The special tendency towards expansion observable in the case of large towns with over 100,000 inhabitants; ^{13/}

^{13/} See Simon Rottenberg, Note on the economics of urbanization in Latin America (E/CN.12/URB/6, UNESCO/SS/URB/LA/6), pp. 13 et seq.

- (3) The steady decrease of the rural population in both absolute figures and percentage terms;
- (4) The emergence of a rural-urban environment, that is, a way of life presenting some of the features of urbanized society, although the built-up areas concerned do not, strictly speaking, constitute towns. 14/

The fact that Latin America is in general progressing in the direction that has already become traditional in Uruguay also calls for some mention of the interest attaching to the social effects of Uruguay's urbanization process, and particularly the relevant problems.

It would be very useful to analyse how far political and cultural life, living conditions, public opinion, etc., owe their existence in Uruguay to the size, the deep roots and the antiquity of urban society, especially in the capital.

Perhaps for foreign readers it is of more value to emphasize those of Uruguay's problems in the mid-twentieth century which are directly linked to the development of urbanization. These vary in nature and calibre.

Thus we have, for example:

- (1) Problems deriving from the unplanned growth of the metropolitan urban nucleus (especially transport, vocational training, housing, etc.);
- (2) The small number and relative vitality of the local economic, cultural and administrative centres appearing as towns of medium size;

14/ In the light of Uruguay's experience, the present author has made a critical study of the classic theory of the opposition between urban society and rural society, in Ensayo de Sociología Uruguaya, op. cit., chapter XII, page 303. While the two preceding trends are almost universal, the last is for the moment apparent only in specific countries - e.g., Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, and Argentina, where it is confined to the province of Buenos Aires and the seaboard - while it is also registered in France, the United States, etc.

- (3) The rapid rate of internal migration, which takes place almost entirely away from the rural areas and towards the towns;
- (4) The critical situation of the agricultural sector, to the effects of which such decisive importance attaches not only for the towns but for the entire country. ^{15/}

It would be well worth while to devote a separate report to these topics.

^{15/} The present author shares the views of the United Nations experts when they assert: "Perhaps the most intractable problem for the Latin American countries is not the growth of cities but the relative stagnation of the countryside - a phenomenon deriving partly from the urban bias of Latin American civilization. Measures to improve agricultural productivity and raise rural levels of living have received much less attention than measures to stimulate industry and benefit the city populations. Without a steady improvement in rural productivity and levels of living, the continued growth of Latin American cities will rest on increasingly precarious economic foundations." (See Report on the World' Social Situation, op. cit., pp. 171-172.)