UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL

SEMINAR ON URBANIZATION PROBLEMS IN LATIN AMERICA

Jointly sponsored by the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United
Nations Bureau of Social Affairs and the secretariat
of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin
America, in co-operation with the International
Labour Office and the Organization of American
States

Santiago, Chile, 8-20 December 1958

THE MAIN ARGUMENTS CONCERNING URBAN SOCIOLOGY
PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED AT THE SEVENTH
NATIONAL CONGRESS ON SOCIOLOGY

by Lucio Mendieta y Núñez

Director of the Social Research Institute,
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México,
and Chairman of the Mexican
Sociological Association

CONTENTS

I. DEFINITION OF URBAN SOCIOLOGY

The first problem considered by the Seventh National Congress of Sociology was how to define urban sociology. It was decided not to regard it as a separate discipline but rather as a branch of sociology in general.

The various theoretical studies submitted did not venture to give any clear-cut definition of urban sociology, but from the ideas expressed in them it may be taken to mean that part or branch of general sociology which is concerned specifically with towns and the socio phenomena peculiar to them.

In his paper entitled The town as a subject of study[*], Dr. Gustavo Mario de Luna Méndez of the Social Research Institute of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, stated that the urban community, with its economic basis and its cultural and ideological superstructure, was the focal point of studies in urban sociology. Clearly, social phenomena in urban communities were no different from those in any other environment – family, work, economic activities, criminality, etc. –, but large numbers of people concentrated in a relatively small area tended to produce important and far-reaching changes in all such phenomena. The peculiar function of urban sociology was to study those changes.

The subject-matter of urban sociology may be gathered from the definition, or, to be more exact, the concepts put forward at the Congress: it is the same as that of general sociology but is specifically concerned with urban communities.

The same participant said that urban sociology comprised:

(1)   The study of the urban community in the geographical setting which provides its material and spiritual background or, in other words, of the relationships between the physical and biological environment and the town;

(2)   The study of population problems, taking into account volume, density,

---

[*]   Translator's note: For the reader's convenience the titles of, and extracts from, the numerous Spanish and other papers and publications quoted here, for which, presumably, no official translations are available, have been translated.

/distribution, mobility,

distribution, mobility, social and political structure, racial

composition and psychological elements, etc.;

(3) The study of urban economic processes;

(4) The study of ideological and cultural aspects.

Urban sociology thus attempts to formulate scientific principles

concerning urban communities which may serve as a basis for administrative

and political activities designed to transform and improve the town in all

its aspects. As a branch of science, urban sociology is not concerned with

ideal conditions and how to achieve them, but with facts as they are. Once

these facts are systematically established, a clear picture will be obtained,

by implication, of the objectives that are desirable and the methods of

attaining them.

After the position of urban sociology as a branch of general sociology

has been determined and its meaning, subject-matter and aims defined, the

pressing sociological problems must be studied. These Dr. Emile Sicard

stressed in an interesting paper. He said that (a) a preliminary survey

should be made in order to trace the dividing-line between "urban" and "rural",

and decide at what point a community ceased to be a village and became a

town; (b) once the dividing-line between town and country had been established,

the various types of community that came under the heading of "urban" must be

strictly defined in order to eliminate the element of uncertainty from one of

the vaguest terms in sociology, namely, "the town"; (c) lastly, field

research should concentrate on conceptualizing the different phenomena and

categories considered as specifically urban, since the lack of precise

concepts was a grave defect in general sociology and more especially in

urban sociology.

Among similar studies on the theory of urban sociology, the paper on

The need for conceptualization in urban sociology by Mr. Pierre Hadji Dimu,

a law graduate and lecturer in the Faculty of Economic Sciences, University

of Athens, warrants attention. He considered that, while precise definitions

of the salient points in general sociology were lacking, the need for

conceptualization in such a newly created branch as urban sociology was even

more urgent and obvious.

/There were

There were no universally accepted concepts in this field because the relevant facts were ill-defined and the subject-matter was still vague. Nevertheless, urban sociology offered optimum general conditions for an immediate attempt at pre-conceptualization. Of course, the present approach was empiric and hence the terms used were those of every-day speech. But, as large towns were a fairly new phenomenon and more were constantly springing up, their formation and development could be studied at first hand. Simultaneous conceptualization in the field of urban sociology was thus facilitated.

The author suggested in his paper that the Congress should set up a Standing Committee on Conceptualization in Urban Sociology to collaborate with the Social Research Institute of the <u>Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México</u>.

The study by Mr. Hadji Dimu was approved in principle by the Congress, but the project of a Standing Committee was rejected for want of sufficient funds. It was felt that one person, or even a group, would find it hard to formulate concepts in urban sociology and that such concepts might best emerge as scholars in this branch of general sociology realized the need for them and tried to work them out.

II. THEORETICAL STUDIES ON THE TOWN

Theories on the town attracted the attention of most of the participants, a large number of papers having been devoted to that subject.

1.   Professor Roberto Macleán y Estenós of the <u>Universidad Mayor de San Marcos de Lima</u>, Peru, submitted a short monograph on "The origins and characteristics of the town". In it he pointed out that the origins of an urban community were manifold. After examining each one, he posed two questions of great interest to Latin America: the first referred to the fact that, on several occasions, towns had been founded in the region, i.e., created in accordance with the wishes of the governing authorities; the second concerned a phenomenon already observed by sociologists in Mexico.

/It might

It might be termed "repugnance for the town" and was in direct contrast to the lure of towns in a European culture. This phenomenon appeard in Latin American countries with a large indigenous population. Far from being attracted by towns, the Indian was actually repelled by them, since his culture, which still retained many basic ancestral traits, was diametrically opposed to urban life.

2. Professor Paul Meadows of the University of Nebraska, United States, discussed the two extreme views on the subject of the town. One, based on cultural primitivism, considered it as a centre of corruption wherein the social values usually identified with primitive or rural ways of life were destroyed. The other extolled the town as a power for good, which created, upheld, developed, re-affirmed and, often, revived basic human principles. A third view, mentioned by the author and tacitly accepted by the participants, regarded the urban centre as a social phenomenon conducive to "the edification of the community" and influencing it in many ways. The town engendered technology and social order the effects of which were felt beyond its own limits and which raised the material and spiritual levels of the people in general.

3. Professor José Barrales V., of the National School of Political and Social Sciences, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, submitted a similar study entitled Industrialization and urban development. He considered that the town was "both the cause and effect of the progress of civilization". One of the principal causes of urban development was industrialization, the source of technical knowledge which played a major role in the formation of towns. He concluded that industrial development, being one of the mainsprings of urbanization, should be closely studied, alongside other equally important social factors, "in order to plan both the industrialization of urban zones already existing as well as that of emergent zones beginning to develop their industry, so that all the requirements for sound community development might be simultaneously fulfilled".

4. Dr. Rose Hum Lee of Roosevelt University, Chicago, Illinois, submitted

/a paper

a paper called <u>A more conclusive approach to the study of towns</u>[*]. The significance of this work lay in its comparison of Western and Eastern towns. Hitherto, students with a European cultural background had concentrated their attention on those towns which had emerged and developed in accordance with what might be termed the Western pattern, while overlooking communities in Asia or other parts of the earth, to which European criteria were not entirely applicable. She began by defining the town and then compared the United States approach to statistics with that of India. She stressed the essential differences between them and the need to make a comparative study of non-industrial factors which had stimulated urban growth; ecological organization and spatial grouping; and rural survivals and institutional adaptation. She considered, quite rightly, that such studies "would fill the gaps in our knowledge of urban formation and development".

5. In his study entitled <u>The cement of the towns</u>[*], Dr. Raymond Lenoir, Laureate of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, Paris, said that sociologists were confronted with a welter of monographs on the town and related questions. It was therefore essential to establish a working hypothesis "which would permit a periodic regrouping of the facts" and thereby supply helpful suggestions for urbanization. Somewhat pessimistically, he felt that all attempts to improve urban development were limited because "plans were doomed to be left half-finished" owing to wars and other calamities.

Dr. Lenoir raised other important theoretical questions in relation to towns, but the Congress welcomed in particular his proposal of a "working hypothesis" as a necessary step towards the systematization of studies and research in urban sociology from a purely scientific viewpoint and without any direct connexion with urbanization itself.

6. The main theoretical objective of the thesis submitted by Professor Oscar Uribe Villegas, of the National School of Political and Social Sciences,

---

[*] <u>Translator's note</u>: The texts of the English and French papers and publications quoted in this document are not available in ECLA. The titles and extracts have therefore been translated from the original Spanish of this document.

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, was to establish the boundary-line between urban geography and urban sociology. In that study, which also touched upon a number of other interesting topics, he reached the following conclusions:

(a) Urban geography is concerned with the human milieux resulting from the convergence of man's physical environment and his efforts to transform it. It throws particular light on the man-environment relationship;

(b) Urban sociology deals with certain types of human inter-relationships as they appear in the social milieux resulting from the convergence of man's physical environment and his efforts to transform it. It throws light not only on the man-environment relationship but also on the relationships between men themselves within the urban framework.

7. The study by Mr. Francisco Carmona Nenclares on The town throughout history also pertained to urban sociological theory. He drew a lively picture of the development of urban communities from earliest times to the present day, and in this respect made a contribution of undoubted sociological value. His final conclusions, which were pessimistic, were inclined to be of a personal and philosophical nature and, as such, outside the realm of urban sociology.

8. Mr. J. Semler-Collery, member of the International Institute of Diplomatic Studies and Research in Paris, dealt with theoretical points of urban sociology in his essay on The consumption levels of urban wage-earners, in which he analysed, with the aid of copious data, "the influence of the town and of each type of town on the behaviour of wage-earners living in them". He concluded that "the town conditioned their needs and created new ones. It also fostered a desire for social advancement and luxury. Wage-earners, in their turn, influenced the physiognomy of the town through their social behaviour which largely depended on their level of living". In other words, the town and the urban wage-earner were to some extent inter-dependent. Their relationship should be studied by special methods of inquiry such as market studies, accounting techniques, personal interviews and the United States market survey system.

9. Social groupings in the town were studied by Mr. Antonio de P. Moreno,

/Chief of

Chief of the Legal Department of Petróleos Mexicanos. He reviewed the special characteristics acquired by social groups and quasi-groups in towns and their social influence, with particular reference to families, societies and trade unions. Trade unions were an urban phenomenon resulting from the concentration of capital in towns and the creation of large industries and business enterprises. Under the influence of the town, the trade union became a political force. According to the same author, social classes were a necessary consequence of urban life, since any disparity in levels of living was sharply defined in large urban communities. The town was distinguished from any other form of social life by the large number of voluntary associations which grew up in it. Mr. Moreno emphasized the importance of exhaustive study and detailed research on the characteristics of social groups and quasi-groups in the town and their mutual influence as being one of the central topics of urban sociology.

10. Mr. Carl C. Zimmerman of Harvard University presented the findings of a survey of 60 000 families, which was carried out in six large towns in the United States. It showed that the vocational and cultural interests of children and young people were influenced by their family and groups of friendly families whom they saw frequently, since it was "through such relationships that the children apparently identified themselves with their parents' wishes that they should reach a higher standard of education than the legal minimum." The author believed that "The renaissance of the family in United States urban life", as he headed his statement, was brought about in the way he described. Mr. Zimmerman's contribution is an example of one of the many surveys that could and should be carried out on the repercussions of urban life on the family, and through the latter, on its individual members.

11. The study entitled Some considerations regarding the methods of urbanizing the countryside and the effects of the existence of a town in its midst marked an important trend in urban sociology. It was submitted by Mr. Henry George Muller, a graduate of the Institute of Political Science, Strasbourg. Although his material was gathered from surveys made in the

/neighbourhood of

neighbourhood of Strasbourg, its value was more than purely local, since it enabled the author to enunciate the following general sociological principles:

(1) In a certain number of cases - to be specified later but which already appear to be very numerous - there is no dividing-line between urban and rural sociology;

(2) Two conflicting principles are involved as between the town and the country - that of tradition and organization, and that of empiricism and scientific planning;

(3) The economic aspect takes priority in the above-mentioned conflict.

On the basis of those principles, the author made some practical suggestions which no longer came within the scope of theoretical urban sociology.

III. STUDIES ON PROBLEMS OF URBAN SOCIAL LIFE

1. Dr. Luis Garrido, former Rector of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, forwarded to the Congress a study on the influence of town life on delinquency, in which he emphasized the following points:

(a) Population density is one of the causes of the increase and diversification of crime;

(b) Another cause is over-crowding and promiscuity in the poorer districts;

(c) Some crimes or offences such as fraud, prostitution, gambling, and theft by domestic servants are typical of urban life;

(d) The criminological factors responsible for juvenile delinquency are the product of urban conditions;

(e) Urban crime has special distribution patterns. In some towns, theft is more common in the centre, while murder, assault and rape usually take place in outlying parts;

(f) Urban crime distribution is influenced by standards of civilization, local customs, climate, type of inhabitants, population zoning and municipal services.

The chief problem arising from urban social life was therefore the unduly high delinquency rate.

2.   Mr. Desiderio Graue Díaz González, Professor of Sociology at the
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and official of the State Counsel
General's Department (Ministerio Público Federal), referred to the sources
of urban crime, in his study on Urban social pathology, citing the following
in particular:

(a) Crowding and anonymity which enable criminals to act with impunity;

(b) Extensive spread of population which facilitates evasion of the law
-enforcement authorities;

(c) Rapid communications;

(d) Multiplicity of dwellings;

(e) Complicity of persons connected with delinquents;

(f) Publicity given to delinquency;

(g) Frequent corruption in the police force;

(h) Large number of legal loopholes protecting delinquents;

(i) Greater opportunities for delinquency owing to:

A. Recurrently favourable conditions;

B. Concentration of wealth;

C. Ostentatious display of riches which engender illicit ambitions;

D. Vast differences between social classes;

E. Immoral literature;

F. Yellow press;

G. Crime films;

H. Radio and television crime programmes;

I. Indecent shows;

J. Drinking establishments, cabarets and brothels.

As a result, the town was a crime-producing influence in social life
and a powerful stimulus in the emergence and spread of delinquency. In the
light of the above-mentioned circumstances, which are of a general sociological
nature, the author examined the case of Mexico City in particular.

3.   In his study on The problem of social control in the town, Mr. Stuart A.
Queen, Professor of Sociology at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri,

discussed the differences to be observed in the rural-urban continuum as regards the forms and methods of social control. His study was based on a survey carried out in 100 towns picked at random out of the 3 300 that exist in the United States. Its aim was to "confirm the hypothesis that some, though not all, social features and problems gradually changed in a specific direction as the country gave way to the town".

With particular regard to the central theme of his study, Professor Queen found that "as the scale of urbanization increased, social control became progressively less effective". Indeed, the unofficial controls exercised by parents, family, neighbours, the community and the church, which, in the country, were knit into a single whole, tended to lose their force in the town, while those exercised by cliques and other small rival groups increased. At the same time official controls exercised by governmental authorities, trade unions and business associations acquired greater importance, though without much sucess. Towns also lacked additional secondary and official controls designed to reduce delinquency, replace individual efforts at mutual help, reach general agreement on aims and values and, by means of collective action, further the community's aims. These circumstances were attributable to two factors: demographic heterogeneity and social mobility, which were stronger in urban than in rural life. Social control would therefore appear to be one of the most serious problems in urban life.

IV. THEORETICAL STUDIES ON TOWN-PLANNING

As was only to be expected, the architects and town-planners present expressed several important points of view on urbanization and urban sociology.

1. Urban sociology is closely linked with town-planning and hence with the training of students who are to grapple with urban problems and try to solve them. Thus, the paper by Mr. Domingo García Ramos, Director of the Urbanization Seminar in the School of Architecture, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, on A socio-economic functional approach to training in town-planning aroused great interest and received general

/support at

support at the Monterrey Congress.

Mr. García Ramos considered that town-planning should not be simply part of an architect's training, but taught as a special course to any post-graduate students who wished to study the subject.

He stressed that "town-planners should be trained at the post-graduate level and recruited from each of the activities which together made up town-planning. The final task of synthesis would, however, be left to an architect who, as a designer of habitable dwellings and an expert in architectural composition, would have most of the qualities required for such a task."

He concluded that town-planning by one individual was inconceivable; it should be undertaken by a team of specialists representing all the activities involved. Their plans should be synthesized and put into effect by an architect who had followed a post-graduate course of study and acquired practical experience by taking part in actual projects.

2.   Mr. Alonso Mariscal, Director of the School of Architecture, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, submitted a study entitled The human scale and cellular organization, in which he made the following introductory statements:

"Architecture does not exist in a vacuum and is as much a product of sociological as of physical environment, or even more so".

"The primary aim of a prospective architect should be to familiarize himself with sociology, particularly urban sociology".

Mr. Mariscal then laid down important principles on the relationship between sociology and urbanization, using biological similes which met with the Congress' full approval, especially his idea of what he called the "human scale". He asserted that "man had well-defined physical dimensions and anything which transcended them would be 'outside the scale'". The "human scale" was meant to represent the relationship between man's dimensions and the elements which surrounded him and remained within his reach. Any disturbance of that relationship would be apt to create grave urban problems. Man resembled the nucleus of a cell whose protoplasm

/maintained a

maintained a measured relationship with the nucleus on a scale appropriate
to that 'nucleus, which it nourished and for which it lived. Any increase
in the protoplasm beyond that scale would endanger the life of the nucleus.
If the optimum dimensions of the nucleus were exceeded, the protoplasm
would divide and generate a new cell. The same balance should be preserved
in town-planning, since the family, the block, the "super-block", the unit
of accommodation, the colony, the zone and the town were all cells which
could live organically only if their human scale was preserved. This
"sociologico-urbanistic" process allowed differentiation and cellular
organization to take place within the town and, while avoiding the atrophy
and rigidity characteristic of urban growth, enabled constant increases to
occur without endangering the stability and life of the community. To
maintain the "human scale" and to foresee and solve urban problems only
one thing was required: sociology, sociology and yet more sociology.

3. Mr. Desiderio Graue Díaz González submitted a study entitled
Co-ordination between sociologists and town-planners in their approach to
urban problems, which expressed the same views as that of Mr. Mariscal.
Among other points, he established the following general principle, which
was endorsed by the whole Congress:

While the purpose of sociology was to analyse, study and interpret
social facts, urbanization could be considered as "a body of knowledge
pertaining to the creation, development, reform and improvement of
communities and towns, the object of which was to adapt them better to
material conditions and to fulfil the collective needs of human life".
It should be primarily based on sociological knowledge of those social
facts. Its starting-point was an awareness of social reality which could
be obtained only from sociology. The contribution of urban sociology was
indispensable because it dealt with the town from its remote origins to
the present day, as well as its environment, growth, institutions,
population mobility and characteristics, crises, social maladjustments
and urban pathology.

4. Mr. Lazzaro Devoto, an architect and town-planner, agreed in principle

/with the

with the views of the two authors mentioned previously, while stressing
the practical execution of town-planning schemes. In his paper entitled
The search for urban sociological principles governing the formation of
urban centres, he examined the relationships between the town, the
national territory, urban structure and social structure. He considered
that the general relationship "between cultures and morphological
creations made the town-planner's activities centre around the relation-
ship of man to his habitat". Hence, town-planners and sociologists must
collaborate to ensure that urban development schemes were always
cultural and unified, for societies had to progress in a balanced way.
The practical methods of co-operation he suggested fell outside the
Congress' purview.

5. The Spanish architect and town-planner, Gabriel Alomar, studied
The human element in urbanization techniques, from the theoretical and
practical points of view. He defined planning as "the form of social
control designed to improve man's life and communal behaviour through
the satisfactory organization of his environment". This concept of
planning required "the union of thought, philosophy and pure sociology
with actual facts" so that "practical ways and means might be found to
meet the recurrent case of the architect or engineer who found himself
before the drawing-board with the task of designing, almost in a vacuum,
a work which would have to become a reality, and which, with its burdensome
errors and splendid achievements, would have to serve men for centuries".
The author then touched upon certain aspects of general and urban sociology,
deriving from them certain eminently practical rules to be observed in what
he called "social town-planning".

6. Another leading town-planner and architect, Mr. Paul Lester Wierner,
who graduated from the Royal Academy of Vienna and founded the New York
Town Planning Office, submitted a paper on Social changes and town planning.
He stated that town-planners should bear in mind the sociological phenomenon
of social changes in order to adapt towns to them. "The dilemma of our
times could only be solved through integrated master plans which took into
account the whole range of present and future problems".

/7. In his

7.   In his study on Urban services in urban sociology, Mr. José Paz Maroto, a town-planner from Madrid, defined town-planning as the science which aimed at encouraging the physical, moral and economic development of towns and peoples and at promoting social welfare on the largest possible scale. He added that such a definition covered a number of partial techniques, which were all co-ordinated with the central idea, and determined the relationships between urban sociology and various other branches of sociology which, although similar, were not exactly alike. On the basis of those ideas, he then outlined a town-planning programme which did not altogether come within the scope of urban sociology, although it was closely linked to it.

The studies prepared by architects and town-planners even when, strictly speaking, they went beyond sociology proper, were significant for sociologists because they emphasized that practical work and actual town-planning should be based on a knowledge of general sociology, and especially urban and rural sociology, since it was commonly agreed that the town could not be studied in isolation but only with constant reference to its environment and from a completely scientific viewpoint.

Monographs on the following specific towns or certain social aspects of them were submitted to the Congress: Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro and Caracas (Dr. Mestre Fuenmayor), Montevideo (Dr. Aldo E. Solari), and urban and rural sociology in Chile (Dr. Oscar Alvarez Andrews), as well as on towns in selected countries such as Guatemala (Monteforte Toledo).

All these monographs are a valuable source of information for urban sociology but have to be compared with a great many other studies, if general sociological principles are to be drawn from them.

A number of other works on various subjects related to urban sociology were also submitted to the Congress, but it was materially impossible to deal with them in this paper which had to be kept within prescribed limits.

To sum up, the Congress reviewed theoretical studies on urban sociology, on the aims of this discipline and on the social problems to be dealt with in any theoretical work on the subject; studies establishing the relationship

/which should

which should exist between urban sociology, planning and urbanization; and, lastly, monographs on specific towns.

As stated at the outset, these contributions, though valuable, did not exhaust the agenda, which covered urban sociology as a whole. But they were useful in pointing out the topics which had been most thoroughly studied and the gaps to be filled. In other words, they indicated the lines to be followed by future Congresses in the same field. These should deal successively with subjects not touched upon this time. They should be arranged systematically in order of importance so as to afford a complete picture of urban sociology, which is destined to play a leading role in the life of human societies.