Aspects of Urbanism and Urbanization

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In writing the introduction to this collection of articles and reviews in the field of urbanism the highest praise that can be given is to call them worthy, timely, pertinent, and as cosmopolitan as urbanism itself. They lend these qualities to this Urbanism and Urbanization number.

We speak of a country as being advanced or developing mainly in terms of its level of industrialism. These levels can be measured and compared from one country to another. Not entirely by coincidence, it follows that a country with a high level of industrialism also possesses a high level of urbanism. Levels of urbanism can also be visualized by various concrete types of evidence, although the measure normally used is the number of people living in urban places. Degree of urbanization is usually a dynamic evaluation, meaning at the same time the number of people living in cities and the number recently moved into cities. We also tend to associate with urbanization some notion about the rate at which people are moving from rural to urban places. Also, it means the process of becoming urbanized.

When we speak of urbanization the assumption is often implied that there is a two-fold change; people change from agricultural work to industrial work, while at the same time changing from rural to urban residence. We need to keep in mind, however, that one can become quite urbanized without changing from agricultural work and without changing to urban residence. Typically, however, such a two-fold change means transition for the individual from agricultural to industrial work ways and also a change from rural to urban ways of living. The social implications of urbanization as a two-fold change may be considerable, if not disturbing, both for the individual and for the community.

Interest in urbanization at this time is considerable, precisely because the rate of urbanization, when we consider all of it in all regions, has never been greater. In some regions the rate of urbanization has reached the point of pain and mass suffering. Urbanization is usually painful to some degree. It is well known that throughout the world big cities grow bigger and hundreds of small cities are growing into big ones. Often the rate of growth is fastest in the less developed countries, if not in absolute numbers, at least in terms relative to the resources of such countries and in relation to the civil and industrial organization
for coping with unaccustomed amounts of urban growth. Excessive urbanization in any country tends to be in relation to the situation, and it usually means an excess of urbanization over industrialization.

For such reasons this urbanization publication is timely, and we can speak of the articles which follow as timely and pertinent. They are especially pertinent because they approach the phenomena of urbanism from a variety of angles, reminding us that there is much more to urbanism than urbanization, about which so much is being written. For example, the point of transfer from agricultural work marks the beginning of a new learning; the values and habits of industrial work are different, and job relations are different from those in agriculture.

For example, urbanization concerns the rural people who move into the city and the need of leaving much of their rural culture behind. Urban living calls for very different relations to time, space, spending and people. Newcomers must become acquainted with and enter into new types of social organization as they learn to live conveniently and with minimum frustration in the mass society. Urbanism is seen by many as a special way of living, although types of urbanism have existed for centuries. Always, however, urbanism has been dynamic, always to some degree extending its influence outward. But modern urbanism is even more dynamic and more outraching in character.

This outward extension of urbanism, thanks to technology in the spheres of transportation and communication, becomes more powerful and more varied in its forms. Modern urbanism tends to be much less urban-confined than ever before, becoming more global than was ever possible. One can no longer escape its influence by living in a village. Whether he wishes it or not, urbanism comes to him through all the channels of trade and communication; the food and drinks processed by industry, the medicines, the ornaments, the clothing and shoes, style in dress and manners, jokes, songs and music, news and forms of entertainment coming over the radio or on the printed page, utensels for the kitchen, implements for the farm, tools for the work place; any or all of these things in ever new form coming pouring out of the city. To accept them even partially and with reservations is to become urbanized to a degree; to reject them is to be socially isolated.

Becoming urbanized or not is no longer a matter of personal or group choice. The rural village within the influence sphere of a city, however firmly resolved it may be to maintain its social and cultural isolation, can neither keep all of its people in nor of the unwanted influences out. If such a village cannot find employment for all who must work, some will feel compelled to migrate. Under some such conditions millions are moving from villages to urban places, most of them with little to offer in the way of skill or “know-how.”

The more we learn about urbanism the more firmly becomes our awareness that the problems of urbanism are never finally solved. To wish for final and complete solutions is to ask for a state of things in which change does not take place except under conditions of absolute and errorless control in which the new must always adapt itself to the old. The creativity and inventiveness, always