The urban-rural continuum – a function of the general development of society

The following article refers predominantly – due to the background of the author – to the situation in the highly industrialized countries of Western Europe and Germany in particular. It is, however, very likely that similar tendencies will emerge in other regions undergoing rapid industrialization. Doubtless circumstances differ very much and the European development is not more than an example, especially because developing countries enter world society at a much later stage. Nevertheless, the basic pattern of this process seems to be universal.

For a long time it has been widely accepted, by sociologists in particular, that there is provoking contact between city and country. However, Sorokin and Zimmelman as early as 1929 pointed out that the relation of these two socio-economic spheres is a function of the development of society in general. They were of the view that the differentiation process of city and country can be seen as a kind of parabola. In the beginning stage of a society’s development there is practically no difference between the two sectors because cities do not come into being before a differentiation of the agricultural and non-agricultural professions starts. The difference, rather small in the beginning, becomes more and more marked. However, after a certain peak has been reached it shows a tendency to lessen again.1

There are good reasons to believe that the climax of this differentiation process between city and country has already been passed in the industrial societies, and the trend is toward a comprehensive urbanization of non-urban areas. Thus, among others, Wirth speaks of “urbanism as a way of life,” and Anderson speaks of the urban community from “a world perspective.”2 Doubtless, cities and metropolitan areas today are indeed radiation centers exerting a

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growing influence on their surrounding hinterlands. This is due to more than mere quantitative growth of urban agglomerates. Although migration of rural dwellers to cities (without reverse migration) still plays a considerable role, and the city itself spills over into its suburbs, this is not all of urbanism as a way of life. It also moves rapidly, extending into the rural regions themselves. This is because contacts between city and country are getting to be more and more numerous. Particularly, this is due to the extension of communication facilities and the effects of the mass media. However, while intruding into rural areas, urbanism itself undergoes certain modifications. As Rogers observes, "Life in the suburban fringe around our metropolitan areas is probably a combination of some rural and urban elements of our culture." This is similarly true for rural regions, *stricto sensu*. Many city-country contacts have a continuing, periodic, rhythmic character e.g., people may not move from the original milieu but they have intensive communication through different channels. There is the rural commuter with employment in the city and there are the periodic contacts of rural people with urban tourists. The continuous streams of urban influence are the press, cinema, radio and television touching the urbanity and the "last village in the woods" with the same stimulations.

Obviously, this flow of urban influence favors and induces socio-cultural change much more than irreversible migration movements. Urbanism is no longer a matter of geographical location, something confined to urban places. It is characterized by a certain mentality and way of behaving. It is not difficult today to find urban behavior in rural areas, but also rural characteristics can be found among individuals and groups in urban settlements. It is possible, however, that in the so-called fringe area where city and country meet new kinds of social organization tend to emerge which are neither rural or urban in the original meaning of these terms.

Perhaps Galpin's term "rurbanization" corresponds most closely to the social reality. By it he means that not only urban structures and behavior influence the countryside, but vice-versa rural elements - although not with the same intensity - become evident in the urban sphere. To Niehaus, "City and countryside are two phenomena of basically the same cultural and socio-economic development process." Comparisons are made in these meetings of rural and urban and the rural may be called backward. Backwardness in rural areas is classified as such only because it is being compared with the overall

4 K. G. Grüneisen, *Landbevölkerung im Kraftfeld der Stadt*, Darmstadt, 1962, pp. 87f. This is sometimes called the ruralization of the city.
5 C. J. Galpin, "Rural Life," acc. to Sorokin and Zimmerman, *op. cit.*