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Abstract

Urbanization is not only a modern phenomenon; it represents a rapid and historical transformation of the fundamental aspects of human social life on a global scale, where a predominantly rural subculture is swiftly replaced by a dominant urban subculture. Close-knit relationships among residents characterize the rural subculture, while more impersonal interactions and competitive behaviors define the urban subculture. Throughout the urbanization process, significant social, economic, and environmental changes unfold, creating opportunities for sustainability through the efficient use of resources. Through the method of literature review, this paper aims to highlight and emphasize specific issues of urban development because of urban processes, while also analyzing active participation in city life. The study focuses on the causes of urban development, migration, and the importance of active participation. The valuable perspectives of Louis Wirth on urban development and urban life will be essential to this paper.

Keywords: urbanization, city, active participation, migration, and civil society.

Introduction

One of the most significant phenomena influencing the urbanization of Albanian society after 1990 is internal migration. The political and economic transformations that occurred in Albanian society during 1990 - 1991 were accompanied by a series of demographic, social, and cultural phenomena. Internal migration in the Republic of Albania has stimulated an uncontrolled process of urbanization and the development of informal areas. In an urban area, diverse individuals live together, some of whom are students, artists, intellectuals, professionals, single individuals, and married couples with or without children, who choose to live within the city because they find it highly attractive (George Ritzer; Kenneth Kammeyer; Norman Yetman, 1979:277). According to the latest data from the World Bank, the urban population in Albania in 2024 is 59 percent (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS).

Referring to Albanian society, a particular historical background of migratory movements within the country is evident. In the book *Rural Sociology* by Elidiana

Canaj, it is written that during the years 1923 - 1945, there were massive internal population movements from isolated areas toward the coastal regions (Canaj, E.; Mazniku, L., 2008:338).

After 1946, there was a change in the direction of population movement within Albania's borders, a trend that also determined the percentage of its urban population. During the years 1947 - 1964, according to sociologist Zyhdi Dervishi, in addition to the 24 cities founded in the first millennium BC through the end of the 19th century, 26 new industrial cities were added. Meanwhile, during the 1970s and 1980s, the party state's policy on population movement changed radically. The respective party and state structures not only ceased to encourage the relocation of the population from rural to urban areas, but also strictly restricted and controlled such movements (Dervishi, Z., 2001:34).

Artan Fuga argues that substantial population growth also harms the metropolitan population, as the labor force increases at staggering rates while the economic structure remains overwhelmingly service oriented. There are not enough jobs; people crowd together, the city becomes overcrowded, loses its green spaces and landscape, noise levels rise, and social tensions and stress intensify (Gazeta Standard, 2009:15).

Thus, population migration from all cities and regions of the Republic of Albania toward the metropolis would be accompanied by a wide range of problems, beginning with urban infrastructure, roads, sewage systems, and drinking water supply and extending to increased construction, the demolition of old buildings, shortages of kindergartens and schools, unemployment, rising crime, and so on. The city, as a historical developmental process, has been formed by individuals who are not necessarily united by blood ties, but by the temple where they gather to perform spiritual practices and other shared activities. The temple conveys the presence of a particular spiritual and cultural orientation. As Johan Pelushi writes, no civilization exists without experience expressed in its culture (Pelushi, J., 2000:5).

Jacques Ellul (1970:9) argues that the city exerts a spiritual influence capable of transforming a person's life. It uses its power to hold the individual within its sphere and reshape not only their dwelling, but their entire way of life. Saskia Sassen, analyzing the contemporary development of the global economy, highlights the new strategic role of major cities such as New York City, London, and Tokyo. These cities, once primarily international commercial centers, have acquired new characteristics. They have become key sites for shaping global economic policy, major locations for financial firms and specialized service companies, hubs of production and innovation within these newly expanded industries, and markets where financial and service sector products are bought and sold. The distinctive feature of the global city lies not in the production of material goods, but in the creation of specialized services

demanded worldwide, as well as in the development of financial innovations and markets (Sassen, S., 1991:10–12).

Urbanization According to Louis Wirth

The article *Urbanism as a Way of Life* by Louis Wirth, published in 1938, is one of the most influential works in sociology. In it, Wirth outlines a research program aimed at examining how cities generate forms of social interaction distinct from those found in rural areas, and more broadly delineates the differences between urban and rural ways of life. Wirth wrote this article at a time when the dominance of the Chicago School was particularly evident. He sought to analyze urban culture through three independent variables, such as size, population density, and heterogeneity which he regarded as key determinants of urban life (Savage, Warde, Ward, 2003:108). Since then, global urbanization has undergone profound transformations across nearly every sphere of social life. In recent decades, the accelerating pace of urbanization has exposed the severity of urban problems and the persistent lack of adequate awareness and preparedness in addressing them. Approximately eighty years ago, Wirth described global urbanization at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century as one of the "most impressive facts of modern times," emphasizing the profound changes it brought to the social and economic life of cities and states (Wirth, L., 1938:4).

According to Wirth, urbanization was not defined only as the process of living in an urban environment, but as the development of a broader system of social relationships emerging in response to the overall emphasis of urban conditions. Urbanization, in Wirth's view, should not be confused with physical (spatial) processes or with the local administrative organization of cities. Wirth's ideas have been widely used and remain highly relevant. In cities, there are many examples of indifference and a lack of cooperation among residents. Everyday indifference in modern cities is undeniable, and, to some extent, this also applies to social life in modern societies in general. Wirth's theory is important for recognizing that urbanization is not only a part of society but often influences the nature of the broader social system itself. The aspects of the urban way of life are characteristic of social life, not simply the activities of those who reside in cities.

Louis Wirth observes that the extent to which the contemporary world can be described as urban is not fully and accurately measured by the percentage of the total population living in cities. The influences cities exert on human social life are greater than what urban population ratios alone would suggest. The city is not only increasingly the dwelling place and workplace of modern individuals, but also the initiating and controlling center of economic, political, and cultural life. It has drawn even the most remote communities of the world into its orbit and woven diverse regions, peoples, and activities into a single cosmos (Wirth, L., 1938:8).

His theory is important for recognizing that urbanization is not only a part of society but also expresses and influences the nature of the broader social system. The aspects of the urban way of life are characteristic of social life, not simply the activities of those who reside in cities. He explains several typological characteristics that distinguish urban life from rural life.

This does not mean that residents of urban areas possess less knowledge than those in rural areas; indeed, the opposite may be true. Rather, it means that, in terms of the number of people they see and meet in daily life, they know a smaller proportion of them and their knowledge of others is less intensive (Wirth, 1964:57). Characteristically, people living in urban areas encounter one another in highly segmented roles. They generally depend on a greater number of people for the satisfaction of their life needs than those living in rural areas and are therefore connected to a larger number of organized groups. On the other hand, they are less dependent on specific individuals, and their dependence on others is limited to highly fragmented aspects of the other person's activities (Wirth, 1964:12). The superficiality, anonymity, and transitory character of urban social relationships also make more understandable the complexity and rationalization generally attributed to city dwellers.

Contemporary sociologist Zyhdi Dervishi, in the article *"Urbanization of Rural Population Life or the Ruralization of Cities? The Case of Tirana,"* argues that such indifference is not only an expression or consequence of the gradual increase in individualism in urban lifestyles. Rather, it is largely imposed by the rise in highly dangerous violent crimes, and especially by the transfer of many sharp conflicts, acts of revenge, and blood feuds from villages to the city of Tirana (Dervishi, Z., 2001:39).

Louis Wirth writes that urbanization is a form of social organization that can be detrimental to culture. According to him, in the city, kinship ties weaken, primary contacts are replaced by secondary contacts, the influence of the family declines, and social solidarity is reduced. Wirth was concerned that urban living weakens family unity, contributing to lower birth rates. Families in cities tend to have fewer members, the age of marriage is increasingly postponed, leading residents toward greater isolation, and daily interactions become less frequent (Wirth, L., 1964:85). Families are smaller in size.

The family, as a unit of social life, becomes emancipated, and the individuals within these families are more individualistic in their relationships with relatives. The urban family differs from the large kinship groups that dominate rural communities, as individual members pursue their distinct interests in professional, educational, religious, recreational, and political life.

Active Participation in the Socio-Cultural Life of Tirana

For residents who settled in Tirana after 1990, it is evident that after assessing the infrastructure and the socio-economic conditions in which their families would live, they chose their new place of residence, although at times memories of their previous home may return, since complete detachment from one's birthplace is impossible. People begin to adapt to the conditions and subculture of the new settlement, engaging in mutual exchange with neighbors, friends, and acquaintances from different regions. In this process, involvement in the public life of the city also emerges.

The importance of social problems in the life of every society has encouraged many sociologists to seek the causes of these phenomena and the paths toward their resolution. This occurs because sociology "is a general social science whose subject is the study of society and its general laws" (Dida, A., 1997:21).

Civil society represents the sphere of organized social life that is voluntary, largely self-sufficient, and autonomous from the state. According to UNESCO, civil society refers to the self-organization of society outside the framework of the state or the market, that is, a set of organizations or groups formed more or less formally that belong neither to the government nor to the commercial sphere. The role of civil society in a decentralized governance system encompasses four functions: the advocacy function, representing the interests of their communities; the service-delivery function at the local level in areas such as education, health, and sanitation; the partnership function with government in development planning, resource mobilization, and the promotion of better understanding of decentralization; the oversight function of monitoring governmental activity.

City residents may differ from one another in their opinions on public and common issues. Publications on democratic civic education also emphasize the importance of cultivating a critical social consciousness, namely, an awareness that embraces belonging to the wider world and a concept of citizenship that implies a citizen who is conscious of all their responsibilities and capable of distancing themselves from purely personal interests when necessary. To live means to think and to act (Audigier, F., 2000, p. 31).

According to academic Artan Fuga in his book *Shoqëria periferike* ("Peripheral Society"), cities have recently received a rural population arriving from peripheral areas. In most cases, this population has descended from remote parts of Albania, from mountainous or hilly regions, from villages in the North or the South of the country. The newcomers are highly dynamic individuals, actively seeking employment, full of physical and moral energy. They strive at all costs to find their place in the social life of cities, precisely within a reality that is often hostile and oppressive toward them (Fuga, A., 2004:32–33).

By encouraging active participation in democratic developments, education for democratic citizenship simultaneously fosters citizens' responsibilities for social sustainability, which today is closely linked to peace at the global level. A culture of rights and responsibilities and a culture of peace mutually reinforce one another (Audigier, F., 2000:44).

Citizens must participate actively in shaping political opinion. In other words, a fundamental distinction between totalitarian or authoritarian states and democracy lies in the fact that democracy cannot function without interaction between citizens and their elected political representatives. When many individuals agree on a common goal, they possess the power to influence political discussions. Democratic states that value the work of interest groups make public financial resources available for this purpose, without conditioning the content or political orientation of these groups.

Durkheim argued that primitive societies possessed a stronger collective consciousness. In contrast, modernization and social development make individuals more individualistic. At this stage, members of each social group perform a more limited number of tasks, unlike earlier stages of socio-economic backwardness when primary activities were largely similar. As a result, they need to cooperate with many others in order to live normally (George R.,; Douglas J. G.,, 2008:82–89). In sociological studies of social movements, collective action is also given priority. Collective action is carried out by a group of people and aims to promote or prevent specific social changes (Dervishi, Z., 2024:488).

Conclusions

In the neighborhoods of the capital, all public and private educational institutions are present across all levels, from nurseries to high schools. With the expansion of the city's urban boundaries in recent years, the number of educational institutions has increased. However, as the number of apartment buildings and consequently residents has grown in several areas of Tirana, existing schools conduct classes in two shifts and accommodate a large number of students per classroom.

A similar issue appears in kindergarten groups, compelling many parents to choose private institutions so that their children can be placed in smaller groups, especially since the time a child spends in kindergarten is often longer than the time spent in school.

In the capital, the dominant family model is the closed nuclear family, typically consisting of a small number of members. However, there are also families with two or three married couples living in the same dwelling, whether in limited-space apartments or in two or three-story houses.

The development of civil society is still viewed with a degree of skepticism, and it remains unclear whether a consolidated civil society is fully present. Urbanization is not a process connected solely to a change of residence, but also to significant processes that primarily involve culture and its characteristics.

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