

Environmental Vulnerability vs Increasing Urbanization in Developing World: A Sociological Appraisal

Mohammad Taghi Sheykhi

Dr. Mohammad Taghi Sheykhi, Professor Emeritus,
Department of Social Science,
Alzahra University,
Tehran, Iran
Tel: 009821-22859416,
Email: mtshykhi@alzahra.ac.ir, mtshykhi@yahoo.com

Abstract

The paper explores how population growth and urbanization affect the environment. The process of industrialization rapidly contributes to more urbanizing societies. Such a scenario as the engine of growth, promotes scientific, technological and socio-cultural development. The whole interaction is one of the main causes of environmental destruction and pollution. Almost all the developing societies started their modernization since 1950, to be able to meet the increasing needs of their people especially those residing in urban areas. Though urbanization started with the high hopes of more security for human beings, it soon turned into a nightmare of environmental destruction. Through that, green lands turned into buildings and industrial installations. That is, units which produced further air pollution, waste, sewage etc. However, environmental stress, hunger and poverty are huge icons of the increasing developing countries, and by far worse in the African continent. China too, as a newly industrializing country is widely facing environmental problems and challenges. Key words: Urbanization. Modernization. Industrialization. Environment. Population growth.

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Objective

One of the topics closely related to sociology is urbanization. Population shows the objective relationship between urbanization with the environment. Any change in population in quantitative or qualitative terms, while impacting urbanization, affects the environment too. Nowadays, the factor of population, and as a result, increasing urbanization has endangered the environment. Therefore, governments and the decision-making systems need to make proper decisions to keep the environment safe and clean. Environmental safety widely impacts the population; in that, babies, mothers and the aging people find more security.

Probably, most of the problems and challenges of the 21st century are the results of the 20th century problems which were not administratively and politically observed and paid attention to, sufficiently. Weaknesses and shortcomings pertaining to policy-making have contributed to the 21st century challenges as stemmed from population, urbanization and the environment. Those are the key points to be explored in the present article.

Introduction

The premier question in this article is how and why urban inhabitants increased in the past 300 years, and when and why the urban growth happened? The process of urbanization gradually and widely affected the environment. Also, the expanding urbanization will lead to how the conditions will be in the years to come? It is expected that sociology and physical sciences will answer such questions.

However, the expansion of the world cities in the past three centuries happened because of more population growth rate. The response to why the number of cities increased, is because industries, economic exchanges, application of expertise and skills, competition and economies grew. Such a multi-dimensional process largely impacted the environment. Environmental status has deteriorated in an unprecedented manner; a phenomenon that needs more social studies,,

application of scientific plans and methods, and other approaches to be able to keep the environment safe and healthy. However, through catalyses and other relevant means, urban environments could be benefited and kept under control.

Up to the mid 20th century, levels of urbanization were lower, and the number of cities was smaller; the conditions created almost safe environments in cities. Due to industrial and economic development however, cities have physically witnessed various changes. Emergence of industrial installations, birth of motor vehicles, and increasing consumption, have all variously endangered the urban environment. In addition to that, physical expansion of cities continued during the 20th century; a phenomenon which needs multiple therapies. Cities need therapies in order to be successful, and for that, they need change; every successful city must be competent in its competition and sustainable in its entrepreneurship. Such a process has been recognized in the past few decades (Harvey, 1989).

Following the expansion of urbanization and environmental reforms, much of the agricultural land, mines and forests were opened up for use. In this way, the exploiting of mines and forests, while it had economic benefits, led to degradation of the environment, destruction of forests, over-exploitation of resources, and depletion of resources etc. Such a scenario not only affects the current generations, but it will affect the next generations too, so far as security and natural resources are concerned. Therefore, demographic, social and environmental planners must predict and project the future in an integrated manner. By the year 1900, there were only 43 cities in the world with a population of over 500 thousand, and also only 16 cities with one million settlers registered (Berry, 2013). From the year 1400 onward, population increase, enlarging cities, and appearance of industries in cities, all brought vulnerabilities and dangers to cities that was increased over time. Hence, city planning, cities and the environment must be the priority of social planning, and if not, environmental safety will be in critical danger.

The number of one-million-resident cities has been on the increase since 1950, and today there are more than 400 of them in the world. That is because of expansion of industries in cities followed by economic development, and an increasing number of people have migrated to cities. Such cities need more transformation rather than resilience (Pelling, 2011).

The consequence of such a situation is pollution of the environment and other side effects. Currently, in countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Dubai and Iran the consequence of such migration is obvious and reflected in environmental pollution. Therefore, and sociologically speaking, environment and the balance between population and urban space must always be kept in mind by socio-environmental planners.

Method of Research

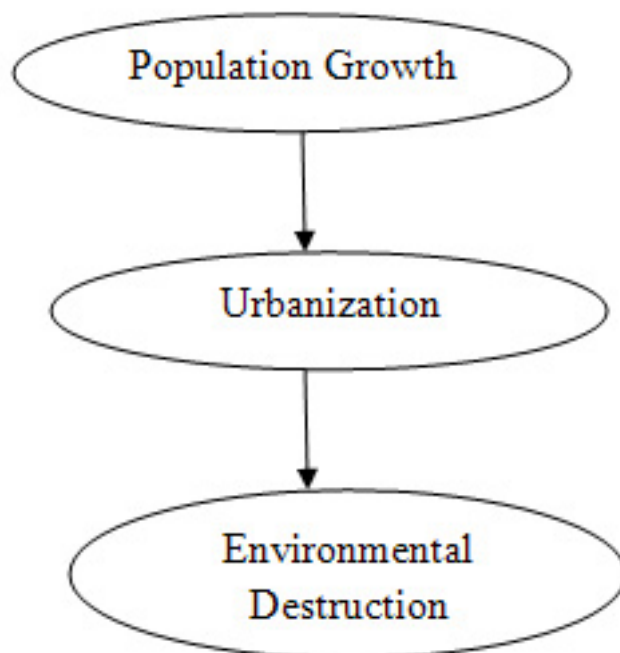
Methodology used in the present article is of the qualitative type, in that, various paradigms have been used to find facts. Qualitative research usually studies people or areas in their natural settings. In finding facts for the research, the researcher engaged in careful data collection and thoughtful analysis of what was relevant. In the documentary research applied in the present article, printed and written materials were widely regarded. The research was performed as a qualitative library type in which the researcher had to refer to relevant and related sources. In the current research, various books on environment were thoroughly investigated, and the needful inferences were made. The data fed by the investigator into the present article is reliable. Though literature on environment is very limited, yet the author tried to investigate many different resources in order to elicit the necessary information to build up the text.

Modernization and Expansion of Cities

Expansion of large cities followed by modernization has led to environmental change and increase of more cities; further endangering the environment. Due to the development plans and modernization, many green spaces have been destroyed, and that has culminated in shortage of green space in city areas. Similarly, due to the density of population in cities and shortage of water, air pollution is observed too. Risks of such kind have been encountered by social planners with limitations in many developing countries. As a result of which reversal plans of migration are encouraged in those countries to send migrants to rural areas. In the meantime, in case of expansion of cities, necessary infrastructure of water networks, sewage systems, roads, electricity, transportation services, hygienic services and the like must be thought of, and planned for. To process the above networks well, national and technical potentialities need to be thought of (Taylor, 2012).

In developing countries currently modernizing, their urbanization process is expanding, and because of that environmental destruction is happening in various dimensions. While industrial and economic investments do not take place in all cities in developing countries, increasing citizens migrate to large cities in search of jobs. Such type of increasing urbanization leads to numerous social disorders, environmental pollution, crimes etc. In such a process, safety of the next generations will be negatively affected too.

Therefore, environmental destruction in urban spaces of the developing world is far larger than that in the developed countries. Some such examples are Egypt in Africa, United Arab Emirates in the Middle East and China in Asia. Density of population in such areas is accompanied by environmental change in the same areas. Demographically speaking, a sort of balance between population and environmental potential must be maintained in order to protect the natural resources for the next generations.

Figure 1: Impacts of the Three Main Variables

Urban Ecology

Urban ecology includes investigation into ecological systems pertaining to human beings living in cities and urban land spaces. Urban ecology as an interdisciplinary subject investigates how human processes can coexist with the systems in which human beings dominate. Coexistence of man with nature is currently the agenda of scientific and academic schools of thought. Population of different age groups have been migrating to cities in the past few decades; such a process has endangered urban ecological balance. On the contrary, the environmental advocates are generally of the opinion that exploitation of resources must so happen in an orderly balanced manner. For example, migration should not happen to particular areas to exert pressure on the environment. Therefore, balance between population and environment contributes to sustainable resources for the next generations. To control environmental damage, social ecologists believe in a decentralized society in which citizens at urban and regional levels regulate the industrial and production processing appropriate to the local resources (Bookchin, 1990) and in this way the environment could be better protected. The theory of ecological modernization emphasizes on suitable application of technologies to better exploit resources (Spaargarten, 1992); (Mol, 1997). Application of intermediate means and technologies to clean up the air, means to control pollution and as a result, it could play a good part in safeguarding the environment.

Population and Productivity

To better understand the role of population growth, it is advisable to study the high population growth in some of the Southern countries of the MENA region. In those countries, production of goods, and services are not proportional to the rate of growth of population; leading to increasing number of social and economic challenges such as migration within these countries. Many countries in the Middle East and East Asia are currently facing the mentioned challenges. The set of countries that we mentioned have been in a better state in terms of food accessibility, quality of healthcare systems and had lower mortality rates since World War II.

Consequently, the young age population is emerging in those countries and they have a better chance of giving birth to more children, in the upcoming years. Prior to that, the children who were born usually did not have as great a chance of becoming parents as a result of early mortality. Eventually the urban environmental destruction took place. Generally speaking, the countries that experienced the highest economic growth rates, had the lowest population growth rates in the 20th century. The scenario caused better preservation of the environment. Based on estimations, till 2025, about 84% of the world population will be living in the developing World (Encarta, 2001).

While facing high urban growth rate, the developing countries cannot manage their economies. Under such circumstances, and due to low wages more flexible laws in environmentalism prevail as the other Western countries largely produce their products in those countries; the countries which must tolerate more pressure on the environment (Vakkilainen, 1999). Therefore, a considerable portion of environmental destruction or pollution in the developing world is caused by industrial countries. However, the priorities for planning in the developing world should properly utilize water and land in order to provide suitable and sufficient food (UNEP, 1999). Similarly, mounting evidence suggests mental and physical health issues are related to the built-environment, such as human modified places like workplaces, homes, schools, industrial areas, farms, roads, and highways etc. The built-environment depends on quality of mediating and moderating factors (Srinivasan, s., et.al.,2003). However, developing countries that are following further modernization in different areas, are confronting environmental pollution, shortage of water and many more challenges in social health.

Conclusion

Environmental vulnerability is on the agenda worldwide. Not only, the developing world is facing it, the industrial countries too are confronting environmental challenges. Factors of population growth and migration widely play a role in environmental destruction in developing countries. Environment as a matter of discussion has attracted the attention of experts. Sociologists too are expected to play a great role to address the issue, and create an improved environment for the future generations. Because of industrialization, the changing lifestyles, more consumption, the never ending modernizing efforts and other factors, the environment is highly vulnerable specially in the developing societies. Densely populated urban areas are suffering from pollution of water, air, housing and waste. They are facing the shortage of food, medication and low job openings. They face high rates of crimes, corruption etc. Therefore, sociologists need to constantly appraise and predict the existing and future needs of environment. Modifications and reforms are always needed to provide a safe environment for all ages.

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