

Unit 4

Rural-Urban Continuum

Contents

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Approaches to the Study of Urban Phenomena
- 4.3 Explanation
- 4.4 Critique
- 4.5 Conclusion
- 4.6 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- outline the approaches to the study of urban phenomena ;
- explain the trait complex approach;
- discuss the non-polar approach;
- describe the rural-urban continuum approach or the polar approach to study urban phenomena;
- discuss the explanation given by Redfield regarding the 'ideal type' of folk society and its characteristics; and;
- analyse the critique of the rural-urban continuum approach.

4.1 Introduction

The world can be broadly divided into two types of human settlements, rural and urban. A variety of conceptual approaches has been applied to determine the essential social characteristics and dynamism of urban-industrialism. These approaches include the formulation of typologies and the presentation of evolutionary frameworks, approaches that are often related. The detailing of social complexity is a key feature of analyses and is dealt with in several major ways. Another important methodological problem is the separation conceptually and, if possible, empirically of the social effects of urbanism and industrialism (Gist and Fava 1974).

4.2 Approaches to the Study of Urban Phenomena

There are two three major approaches for the analysis of urban phenomena. These are:

1) Trait complex approach

In this approach empirical attributes generally quantitative traits are taken for analysing differences like, occupation, size, density, homogeneity and environment etc.

Box 4.1 Ideal Types

“Ideal types are constructed to facilitate the analysis of empirical questions. Most researchers are not fully aware of the concepts they use. As a result their formulations often tend to be imprecise and ambiguous, or as Weber himself says, ‘the language which the historians talk contain hundreds of words which are ambiguous constructs created to meet the unconsciously conceived need for adequate expression and whose meaning is definitely felt, but not clearly thought out’. (Weber 1949 : 92-3).

We can therefore say that ideal types are a methodological device which not only help us in the analysis of empirical questions, but also in avoiding obscurity and ambiguity in the concepts used, and in increasing the accuracy of our analysis.

Ideal type, a key term in Weber’s methodological essay has been used by him as a device in understanding historical configurations or specific historical problems.” (IGNOU 1991, ESO-03 Sociological Thought, Block 4, Unit 14).

2) The Ideal Type

There are two types of ideal type approaches, i.e. non polar and polar.

a) **Non-Polar:** The concept of an “Ideal Type” has been applied to communities as it has been applied to the study of other social phenomena. This conceptual device is a constructed proposition, which designates the hypothetical characteristics of a “Pure” or “Ideal “ type. As used in this sense the terms pure or ideal have nothing to do with subjective evaluations of phenomena being studied. The technique of ideal type analysis is a form of comparative method. Actual empirical instances are compared with the ideal type to see how closely they approximate the ideal type. This type of approach is known as non-polar ideal type approach.



b) **Polar or Rural Urban Continuum Approach:** This is also known as polar ideal type analysis, which compares empirical cases with the two logical extremes. It generally assumes that there is continuum between the two polar types along which empirical cases order themselves. Continuum is an uninterrupted series of gradual changes in the magnitude of a given characteristic forming a linear increase or decrease through a series of gradual degrees. Rural and urban communities cannot be placed in watertight compartments. There is continuity between the two. As a community moves from the folk to the urban end of the continuum, there occur shifts from:

- 1) cultural intimacy and organisation to disorganisation
- 2) collective or community orientation to individualisation; and the sacred to the secular.

Redfield's speculations about what he saw as the significant changes from the folk to the urban end of the continuum are based on studies conducted in the Yucatan during the early 1930s in the city of Mérida, the town of Dzitas, the Maya peasant village of Chan Kom, and the "tribal" hamlet of Tusik.

Reflection and Action 4.1

Find out from the elderly members of your family about the number of people who have either migrated from your area (if you live in a village or semi-urban area) and for what reasons. If you are a city dweller, interview at least ten families in your neighbourhood about when they came to this city and how many members of their family are still in their native place.

Based on your findings, write a report on "Migration and Rural-Urban Continuum". Discuss your report with the Academic Counsellor and other students at your Study Center.

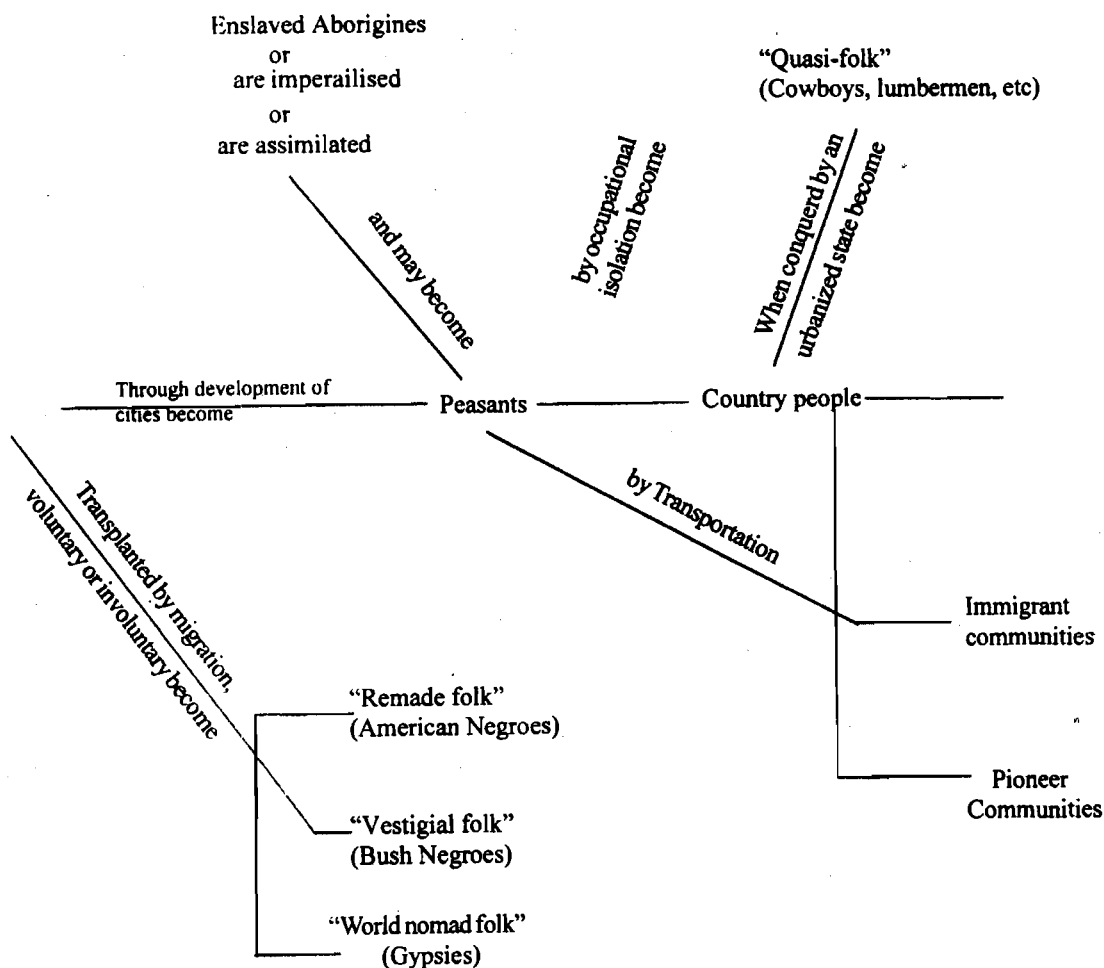
4.3 Explanation

Briefly stated, Redfield's scheme defines an ideal type, the folk society, which is the polar opposite of urban society. The ideal type is a mental construct and "No known society precisely corresponds to it" It is "created only because through it we may hope to understand reality. Its function is to suggest aspects of real societies which deserve study, and especially to suggest hypotheses as to what, under certain defined conditions, may be generally true about society (Redfield 1947)."

The folk society has the following characteristics

It is small, isolated, non-literate, and homogeneous, with a strong sense of group solidarity. The ways of living are conventionalized into that coherent system which we call "a culture." Behaviour is traditional, spontaneous, uncritical, and personal; there is no legislation or habit of experiment and reflection for intellectual ends. Kinship, its relationships and institutions, are the type categories of experience and the familial group is the unit of action. The sacred prevails over the secular; the economy is one of status rather than of the market.

Redfield concerns himself largely with the folk pole of the continuum. It is the characteristics of the folk society which receive his descriptive attention. These are derived by discovering the common traits of those societies which are not like our own. The definitive qualities of the urban type are then left as the logically opposite ones to those which characterise the folk. Urban society is never actually discussed here as an ideal type and is not explicitly named. Redfield usually refers to it as "modern urbanised society" or some variant of the phrase. Implicit in the use of this pole as an ideal type, however is the idea that it stands for urbanised society in general and that modern western society represents the specific case most closely approximating to the polar category. The term "urban society" would appear to represent the content of the ideal type more adequately.



The Tribal Urban Continuum

Redfield also prepared a diagram for his course, "The Folk Society" at University of Chicago(Fig. 4.1).He named this diagram **The Tribal-Urban Continuum**. In this figure those societies which are more characteristically "Folk" appear at the left. Reading from left to right one may trace some of the principal historic ways in which primitive societies have become converted into urbanized societies or into other and special types of societies. These types are diagramed as to their genetic relationship to one another (Erickson,1954).

Earlier conceptual schemes given by Maine, Tonnie, and Durkheim contributed important dichotomies of societal characteristics. Redfield's

formulation took elements of these characteristics and others which he saw to be related and put them together as the definitive traits of the polar types. A factor influencing the research work of Redfield was that of concern with empirical method. To this interest must be attributed the fact that he executed, in Yucatan, one of the rare field projects in which a series of communities were selected and studied to test a specific hypothesis. Consistent with the express purpose of the formulation of the ideal type, its characteristics suggest the hypothesis.

Reflection and Action 4.2

Read a novel like "The Tale of Two Cities" by Charles Dickens or Khushwant Singh's "Delhi" or any other novel with a description of major city of the world.

Write an analysis of the way the city in this novel has been described with reference to the Study Material you have just read. Share your analysis with those of other learners at your Study Center.

4.4 Critique

Lewis points out that the folk concept is an ideal and hence a matter of definition. It is upon its heuristic value that is its value as a research tool, that the type and its related continuum must be judged. He criticised the conceptual framework with regard to its utility for the study of culture change and for cultural analysis (Miner, 1952):

- 1) The folk-urban conceptualisation of social change focuses attention primarily on the city as a source of change to the exclusion or neglect of other factors of an internal or external nature.
- 2) Culture change may not be a matter of folk-urban progression, but rather an increasing or decreasing heterogeneity of Spanish rural elements, such as the plow... did not make Tepoztlan more urban, but rather gave it a more varied rural culture...
- 3) Some of the criteria used in the definition of the folk society are treated by Redfield as linked or interdependent variables, but might better be treated as independent variables.
- 4) The typology involved in the folk-urban classification of societies tends to obscure.... The wide range in the ways of life and in the value systems among so-called primitive peoples.... The criteria used... are concerned with purely formal aspects of society....Focusing only on the formal aspects of urban society reduces all urban societies to a common denominator and treats them as if they all had the same culture.
- 5) The folk-urban classification has serious limitations in guiding the field research because of highly selective implications of categories themselves and rather narrow focus of the problem. The emphasis

upon essentially formal aspects of culture leads to a neglect of psychological data and, as a rule does not give an insight into the character of the people.

- 6) It is a system of value judgements which contains the old Rousseauan notion of primitive people as “noble savages”, and the corollary that with civilisation has come the downfall of mankind.

4.5 Conclusion

This unit presented you a clear and concise picture of the rural-urban continuum. This continuum is based on the notion that human settlements are broadly divided into two types: the rural and the urban. These two types are polar opposite to each other you have learnt in this unit about the two main approaches to the study of urban phenomena. One is the trait complex and the other the ideal type. The ideal type approach is further divided into the Non-polar and the Polar or Rural-Urban Continuum approach. You learnt about the contribution of Robert Redfield to the study of ‘folk’ society and the rural-urban continuum and finally, the critique of this approach is given for your complete understanding of this topic.

4.6 Further Reading

Erickson, E.Gordon, *Urban Behaviour*, The Macmillan company.

Gist, N.P. and Sylvia F. Fava, (1974). *Urban Society*, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York.

Redfield, Robert. (1941). *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Redfield, Robert, *The Folk Society*, American Sociological Review, January 1947 cited from American Sociological Review, Vo.17(5), October 1952.