

Chapter 1

Revisiting Urban Theories: Their Impacts on the Developing World's Urbanization

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ABSTRACT

Urban theory has been dominated by the accumulation of social theories and has significant impact on global urbanization. The urban is becoming more complex and more global due to the contesting technological, political, social, economic and environmental forces. These disciplinary forces may be added to the global shifts in population and political power from rural to urban and from the developed to the developing nations, creating new global challenges. To cope with these challenges, the prevailing urban theories need a shift. By critically revisiting urban theories and testing them against emerging challenges, this chapter is advocating for and pointing to a new direction. The chapter revisits urban sociological theories, those global theories advocating planetary urbanization, the models responding to global forces as well as those promoting world systems. This is followed by an outline of the proposal for Activity Theoretical Framework. Possible future research direction for the inclusive and universal urbanization is identified.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this Information Age, there is a pressing need to revisit urban theories that were the abstraction of the conditions of cities in the early Industrial Age. Most of the classical urban sociological theories emerged from the experiences of the industrial revolution in Europe and USA cities. The ecological urban theory of the Chicago School is an important example (Tonkiss 2005). Similarly, the theories of urban and regional spatial structure have been influenced by ideas of the garden city (Howard, 2016), from which new towns theory emerged (LeGates, 2004). From their European and American roots, these theories

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spread their influences to developing regions, in ways to solve the problems triggered by colonization, and globalization (Cohen, 2006). In addition to the local impact of technological transformations, there are indications that increasing globally interconnected world creates major theoretical, methodological and empirical challenges to theories based on a few Western cities (Jayne& Ward 2017).

There are many types urban theories (Wikipedia, 2017a) and theorists (Wikipedia, 2017b) to select from for the review, however in this chapter, the selection, categorization and analysis of the theories is based on their impact on global practice, especially in developing regions. The main targets are theories, not theorists, and they may be from sociology, economics, political science, urban planning, urban design, or other fields. The key criterion is not theory's elegance but its demonstrated- or the potential to- impact on urbanization or urban development. The emphasis on practical value of the selected theories is justified by the need to respond to scale and speed of urbanization facing developing regions in the next three to four decades, by the level of backlog of lacking facilities, and by our understanding that theories and practice need to strengthen each other. Therefore, the treatment of theories here is not linear or puritan – we combine classical and emerging paradigms, movements, concepts and even indices- but based on the pragmatic needs of the developing regions to analyze, understand, predict and direct future of urbanization, guided suitable existing and new theories, in ways avoid the risks to critical infrastructure and of deep social instability.

The scale and the speed of urbanization in developing regions are indicated by the projected additional 2.5 billion people in urban populations by 2050, with about 90% of the increase in Asia and Africa (UN-DESA, 2014), and that cities like Lagos, Delhi, Dhaka were growing at 85, 79 and 74 people/hour respectively in 2015 (Urban Age, 2015). The impacts are that the request for services is instant, but the tax revenue to pay for them will be much later. Also, globalization forces them to compete with more matured cities worldwide for capital and creative workers.

1.1. The Analytical Framework

To deal with the complex global issues identified in the previous section, this chapter proposes a value-laden theoretical framework that views urban development as the cumulative effect of the diverse activities of the wide array of urban actors who are motivated into action by their values or goals (Chapin 1968, 1974). In this framework, all cities are viewed as the function of values/goals driven cumulative actions by diverse urban actors using place-based and digital based interaction tools to create an urban system at the desired rate, spread and specified locations. Similarly, urbanization is the result of the intensification of these activities by the rising public, private and social sector actors moving from rural to urban areas, or as they migrate from one city to another within a nation or across national boundaries.

This chapter, therefore, seeks to revisit the existing urban theories- those influenced by the industrial technology and by information technology -using the proposed theoretical framework. It will also revisit global theories advocating planetary urbanization; those responding to global and local (glocal) forces as well as those promoting world systems. Section 4 follows by an outline of the proposed Activity Theoretical Framework. Section 5 will identify possible future research directions for the inclusive and universal urbanization, the type advocated by Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century (Chabane, 2008, Ibn Khaldun, 1377).

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