



Post-Industrial Societies

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Abstract

This article presents an overview of the tenets of postindustrial societal theory and examples of post-industrial societies and their structures. Additionally, contrasts are made to better explain post-industrial societies. Also presented are insights into ways post-industrial societal philosophies impact current sociological thought and an examination of transformed ways of thinking for sociologists viewing societies through the Post-Industrial Societal lens. Insights into different models of thinking are offered through the tenets of politics, religion, culture, economics, work force, traditions and values, and the family. A conclusion is offered that describes solutions for conceptualizing post-industrial societal theory into current societal practices. The most riveting aspect of post-industrial society and current societal practices is an overview of declining birth rates and fertility and present impacts on post-industrial societies.

Overview

Daniel Bell's Post-Industrial Society

Daniel Bell was the initial proponent of the idea of the post-industrial society promoting the idea through his 1973 book entitled: *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*. After experiencing and analyzing the radical societal changes brought on by the 1960s, Bell (1973) argued that a radical transformation of economic and political structures was underway in societies like the United States. He further indicated that changes in occupational structure, demographic patterns, and government funding to science and education would precipitate a shift to a society where theoretical knowledge was central and experts would be the primary advisors to government and business (Townsend, 2000, p. 739). This theory supported an earlier notion that the importance of academics, scientists, and professional experts in government would continue to grow and this idea was echoed in a wide range of scholarly work that was written and published at the time (p. 741).

Bell was the catalyst of three substantive ideas including the end of ideology, the post-industrial society, and the cultural contradictions of capitalism. All three of these ideals merged into a collective notion that seems to underscore society's present condition, not only in the United States, but in other highly

Keywords

Counterculture

Incrementalism

Industrialization

Modernization Theory

Post-Industrial Society

Post-Modernist Theory

developed nations. Bell argued in 1955 that party politics was entering a phase in which it would no longer be governed by extremist ideology of the left and right, but would instead require a mixed economy, a welfare state, and liberal democracy.

Bell's later work (Waters, 1995) proposed the idea that the post-industrial society was precipitated through socio-economic structures that were entering a major historical shift from manufacturing goods to the production of services. Bell argued that this paradigmatic shift would be accompanied by "an intellectualization of technology, the rise of a scientific knowledge class, and a renewed communalism in politics" (Waters, 1995, p. 12-13). Bell further contended that capitalist societies were driven by threatening and disruptive contradictions at a cultural level. He indicated that capitalism originated because of the combination of a work discipline and a Protestant culture based on "frugality and abstemiousness." He flagrantly claimed that within the system of the continued stress on discipline and the emphasis on gratification, an eventual deterioration of the culture would occur unless there was a fundamental reversal. He further indicated that not all theorists agreed with this notion (Waters, 1995, pp. 12 – 13).

The 1960's & the Counter Culture

The 1960s has been reported to have played a significant role in creating post-industrialism. Rossinow (1997) wrote that the feelings surrounding the dissidence of the 1960s were and remain intense, "often intensely hostile." To conservative Americans especially, the cultural and political rebellion associated with this time were closely integrated and ultimately advanced a revolution against the underpinnings of advanced industrial capitalism resulting in developing an oppositional consciousness and a new society within the old (p. 80). The counter-culturists determined to develop counter-institutions in which ordinary citizens would accept "responsibility for the world we live in and accepting the responsibility for changing it." These groups "emphasized recycling and established refuse collection sites around town" (p. 101). In the later 1960s, social change brewed freely and ideals from this time predicated that white college-educated youth would be the agent of radical social changes which evoked a "new working class" theory (p. 103). These primary tenets of societal discord, new campus radicalism, and a rising "technocracy" were identified in sociological literature as

the underpinnings of a new movement and a new way of thinking, which would shift thought and work from a manufacturing mindset to a service of "authenticity."

The post-industrial society was a new way of thinking and acting which arose from a counterculture revolution brought about by a changing society and societal mindset. The result of the post-industrial society can be found not only in the society of the United States but in other industrial nations. The hallmarks of the post-industrial society have produced lasting social, economic, and cultural impacts which are the result of our own growth and development as a society, but are not without conflicts and discord which theorists argue produce long-term threats and sustenance for the continuation of the world's great, industrialized societies.

Applications

The Present Framework of Post-Industrial Societies

For purposes of better understanding the tenets of the post-industrial society several factors should be identified, categorized, and described in their evolved states. These categories include, but are not limited to, politics, religion, culture, economics, work force, traditions and values, and the family.

Politics

Within the framework of the post-industrial society, economic and physical security become less pressing political concerns while other issues, like self-expression, subjective well-being, and quality of life, become more politically important (Inglehart, 1977, 1990, 1997). These values then place a growing emphasis on environmental protection, the womens' movement, and increased participation in shared political decision making (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, pp. 27 – 28). Central to the political decisions and expressions of post-industrial societies are survival/self-expression values and outlooks (p. 31), which also conveys societal beliefs toward abortion and euthanasia (DiMaggio, Evans, & Bryson, 1996; Hunter, 1991; Williams, 1997). After analyzing these internal values, Inglehart and Baker argued that historically Protestant societies rank higher in this outlook than former Communist societies and these cultural influences strongly dictate political characteristics. Moreover, a resurgence of fundamentalist Islam has changed political actions in international politics (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 19). The long-term impacts of these influences have not been fully studied.

Religion

As an agrarian society transitions into an industrial economy and people feel more physically and economically secure, traditional religious beliefs become less important. However, in the post-industrial society, people continue to seek answers to life's essential questions. These questions underscore the human outlook and while traditionalist denominations may decline, new theologies, such as environmentalism or New Age beliefs emerge (Baker, 1999). The spiritual outlook in post-industrial societies tends to change from a "spirituality of dwelling" to a "spirituality of seeking" (Wuthnow, 1998). The post-industrial

society member may spend less time in church, but are more likely to “spend time thinking about the meaning and purpose of life” (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 47).

Culture

When the survival of society wanes from being the centerpiece of existence, as it has been described in pre-industrial societies, ethnic and cultural diversity become increasingly acceptable and much more tolerable. Within pre-industrial societies basic survival is strongly emphasized, and several factors such as poor health, low interpersonal trust, intolerance toward out-groups, and favoritism toward authoritarian governments dominates the cultural framework. Oppositely, in post-industrial cultures environmental activism, self expression and diversity are not only tolerated, but are appreciated for their high interest and stimulation.

Further described within the post-industrial societal culture are changing gender roles and reframed sexual norms. The past few decades have witnessed the emergence of new gender roles, which has enabled women to enter the same occupations as men. Within this new structure, equal rights for women, the acceptance of gays and lesbians, a newly cherished acceptance of foreigners, and an emphasis of self-expression characterizes the new ways.

Economics

Economics is one of the main factors in determining post-industrial society outcomes and economic growth espouses predictable cultural and political consequences. Industrialization typically leads to occupational specialization, increased educational levels, rising income levels and eventually results in alternative gender roles, changed attitudes toward authority and sexual norms, declining fertility rates, expansive political participation, and a changing work force (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 21).

One caveat of the changing economic structure of the post-industrial society is the cultural heritage of the civilization undergoing the change. Hamilton (1994) argued: “What we witness with the development of a global economy is not increasing uniformity, . . . but rather the continuation of civilizational diversity through the active reinvention and reincorporation of non-Western civilizational patterns” (p. 184). In other words, while the economic landscape may be shaped by specific post-industrial tenets, economic outcomes are constructed and heavily dependent on historical and cultural inputs.

Work Force

Life in post-industrial societies is constructed around services advancing a “game between persons” in which people “live more and more outside nature and less and less with machinery and things; they live with, and encounter only, one another” (Bell, 1973, pp. 148 – 149). A more highly educated society generally allows workers to deal more with people and concepts, “operating in a world in which innovation and the freedom to exercise individual judgment are essential” (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 22). Rather than a strong reliance on agrarian components or manufacturing, the post-industrialist workforce places an emphasis on subjective well-being and quality-of-life (Inglehart,

1977, 1997). More time in the workforce seems to be spent more on the quality and service of the work for humankind, rather than the difficulty of labor.

Traditions & Values

Within the post-industrial society, a coherent shift takes place from traditional value systems encompassed by absolute norms and values “toward a syndrome of increasingly rational, tolerant, trusting, postindustrial values” (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 49). However, these modified values are path dependent relying strongly on religious, economic, and cultural factors. Multiple factors are involved with this societal tenet, and traditions and values must be viewed within a historical context (p. 49).

However, six predominant values portrayed by the media: sex, violence, the idealization of maturity, materialism, hedonism, and commercialism have been argued to have shaped the post-industrial society’s values, and one of the new traditional pastimes of the new modernistic society is a “one-eyed babysitter” – the television (Gunter & Moore, 1975, p. 202). Additional research has been conducted and published which describes the impact of television on society.

Family

In the post-industrial society, changes in family structure were reported in various forms. These changes are evidenced as triad living arrangements, “trial” marriages, living together before marriage, pre-marital sex, and non-marriage families (Gunter & Moore, 1975, p. 204). In addition to changes within the marriage and family structures, family planning has changed and now includes emotionally charged issues like abortion and euthanasia (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 19). Another aspect of the post-industrial societal family is lower rates of reproduction. Families intentionally decide not to have children, because societal survival is not dependent upon families opting for large families. Additionally, the need to produce workers is diminished, because in a service-based society, children are valued for their unique skill set and diverse perspective.

Viewpoints

Sociologists play a key role in determining social, culture, and societal norms within the context of modernization, industrialization, and urbanization. In order to better analyze the post-industrial society, sociology students need to understand and relate to these three concepts, because they are the driving force propelling the discipline of sociology. Each of these three theories was used as a pre-determinant in determining the definition of the post-industrial society.

Modernization Theory

Modernization Theory has been described as a theory that links economic development with changes in culture and social and political life. Karl Marx was considered to be one of the theory’s most influential proponents, and he claimed that economically developed societies showed the future to less developed societies (Marx, 1973). Implied within this construct, modernization theory further indicates that as societies develop economically, their cultures shift

in a predictable pattern of events, leading to industrialization.

Industrialization

Industrialization can be described as a societal and cultural change leading “to occupational specialization, rising educational levels, rising income levels, and eventually bringing unforeseen changes in gender roles, attitudes toward authority, and sexual norms” as well as other societal transformation (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 21). Maas and van Leeuwen (2002) indicated that

“in industrial societies, production methods are continuously changing, requiring employees to change jobs during their lifetime, and children to have jobs that are different from those of their parents. Instead of traditional caste, racial groups, gender, or family status, education becomes the principal means of assigning persons to occupations. Industrial society thus becomes an ‘open’ society” (p. 179).

Urbanization

Urbanization during

“the Industrial Revolution produced large cities – dense, spatial concentrations of economic activity, workers and households – and began when fertility rates rose dramatically and technology enabled the production and control of large amounts of inanimate energy. Industrial urbanization ended when these technologies reached their limits” (Beauregard, 2006, p. 219).

Presently, every place has become at least symbolically urban, and at the center of these conditions is a new, ‘tangibly disrupted and disordered’ (Soja, 2000, p. 397) urbanization process.

Through these theories, we must examine the post-industrial society of the United States. One of the most interesting insights in undertaking further study into post-industrial society is that United States is not considered to be the archetype of cultural modernization for other post-industrial societies to follow, which is in contrast to the assumptions made by writers of the postwar era. Instead, after analyzing the United States in terms of each of the substructures of politics, religion, culture, economics, work force, traditions and values, and the family, theorists determined that the United States has a much more traditional system of values compared to other advanced societies. These values include a strong sense of religiosity and national pride (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 21; Lipset, 1990, 1996; Baker, 1990). Moreover, while the United States was ranked as one of the most advanced societies in terms of survival and self-expression, the Swedes and the Dutch ranked higher in terms of cultural transformation (p. 31).

Issues

In post-industrial societies, one of the main issues of concern is declining fertility rates. Caldwell and Schindlmayr (2003) argued that education and urbanization enabled women to work in the urban labor force for most of their adult lives, while the women’s movement has offered the justification for declining

birth rates, and huge growth in the tertiary sector of economies has given women the opportunity to be active participants in the workplace.

Women actively contributing to the workforce enable them to plan their own lives, especially their pregnancies (p. 243). With the development of the new contraceptives of the 1960s and parallel attitudinal and legal changes concerning sterilization and abortion, Murphy (1993) described that the impact of the birth control pill on British fertility, describing the process as ‘irreversible’, but did not elaborate on how the societal changes that near-perfect birth control allowed. Additionally, theorists claimed that social changes were spurred on by increased secularization and a weakening in the influence of organized religion (Lesthaeghe 1980, 1983; Lesthaeghe & Meekers 1986; Simons 1986; Lesthaeghe & Surkyn 1988; van de Kaa 2001). The economic crisis of the mid-1970s helped to instill low-fertility attitudes (Teitelbaum & Winter 1985, p. 115).

Excepting perhaps the inability of society to reproduce itself, these developments had largely not been foreseen. Writing in 1937 on the relationship between low fertility and economic depression, Kingsley Davis (1997) wrote “the family is not indefinitely adaptable to modern society, and this explains the declining birth rate.” Revisiting the issue of declining fertility in 1984, he saw it as an outcome of women’s entry into the workforce and the societal shift toward sexual egalitarianism. He detected that this shift was producing a demographically important conflict between women’s roles as mothers and their roles as workers (Davis, 1984). Davis, with van den Oever (1982), echoed this view, writing that if “women in industrial societies today are not motivated to achieve replacement fertility . . . the social order that gave rise to it will be replaced by another—either one that supports traditional sex roles or some new order that rewards women adequately for reproduction” (p. 511). Despite achieving a near perfect societal framework, threats to maintaining the culture directly points to declining birth rates in post-industrial societies

This issue is considered to be important, because of sustainability and ongoing capacity building for societies engaged in meaningful transformation and on going societal industrialization. Unless birth rates increase in these cultures, societies will not survive. For sociologists, this problem may be one of the great dilemmas of our time and threatens to be a destructible and irreconcilable force. A recommendation for further research into ameliorating this decline is proposed in order to bolster declining populations or increasing industrialization in pre-industrial societies still reproducing heavily, but not yet ready to engage in post-industrial societal dialogue. Totally unexamined in this work were the impacts of post-industrialization on the environment or the costs of post-industrialization on individuals unable to participate in service oriented societies, in which education is needed to ensure the full participation of individuals.

Terms & Concepts

Counterculture: Counterculture has been described as a white youth movement against racism and imperialism and for radical democracy that flourished at U.S. colleges and universities in the 1960s.

Industrialization: Industrialization has been described as a societal and cultural change leading “to occupational specialization, rising educational levels, rising income levels, and eventually bringing unforeseen changes in gender roles, attitudes toward authority, and sexual norms” as well as other societal transformation (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 21).

Modernization Theory: Modernization Theory implies that economic development is linked with changes in culture and social and political life.

Post-industrial Society: Post-industrial society has been described as a radical transformation of economic and political structures promoting a dramatic shift in societies in which theoretical knowledge was central and experts would be the primary advisors to government and business.

Post-Modernist Theory: Post-modernist theory is a general and wide-ranging theory that has been applied to a variety of fields like philosophy, literature, art, and cultural criticism. It is skeptical about the existence of objectivity and objective facts and prefers to instead view epistemological efforts as fallible and truth as relative rather than certain or universal.

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