

Introduction

Societies have grown more complex with time. As people grouped together into densely populated cities, these grew ever upward and urbanization accelerated across the 20th century. As populations increased, social problems also increased. In this module, you will learn about the scientific approach to understanding population changes, social movements and the effect that humanity has on the environment. You will learn about challenges that result from group dynamics and living arrangements in the modern era. In assessing these societal relationships, you will come to grips with the realities of modern life as you conclude your study of sociology and the social world.



Crowded City Street¹

Demography

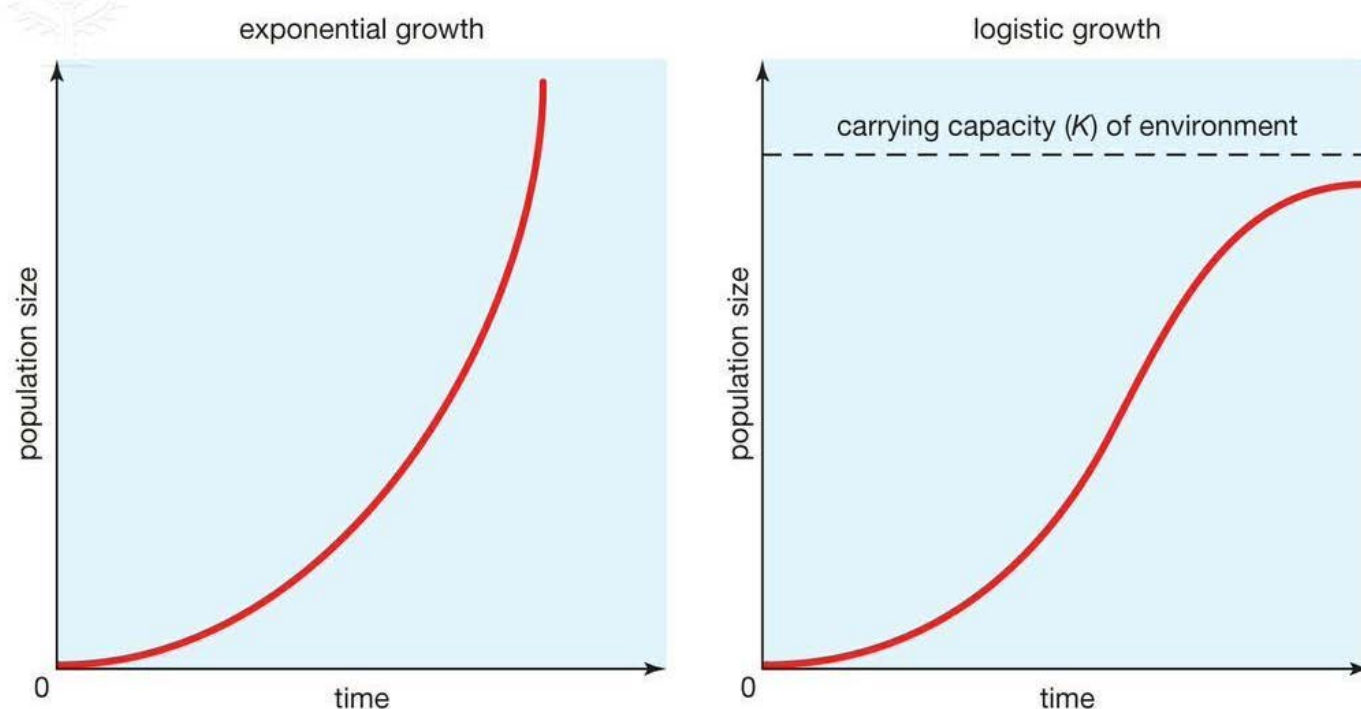
[Demography is destiny, or so the story goes](#) [Video embedded in page, 12:56 mins]. Demography is essential to the understanding of any society. Demographers study the size, composition, distribution and changes in human populations. They focus on fertility rates (the number of births per 1,000 people) and mortality rates (the number of deaths per 1,000 people). They have found that [infant mortality](#) [Video, 3:04 mins] rate (the number of deaths per 1,000 live births) and life expectancy (how long you are expected to live) are important indicators of the health and development of a society. For example, developing nations have the highest infant mortality rates and the lowest life expectancy rates. Poor urban areas in developed nations have worse outcomes than wealthier regions in their countries. And these statistics then beg the question of why societies have such inequalities and what are their key drivers and consequences. Demographers also study migration patterns, the process of people leaving one geographical location for another. This includes [immigration](#) [Video, 3:59 mins] (entering a new country), [emigration](#) [Video, 3:26 mins] (leaving a country), as well as internal migration (moving from one area within a country to another).



Immigrants at Ellis Island²

Theories of Population Change

Exponential versus logistic population growth



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Graphic Depiction of Population Growth³

One of the most well-known theories of population change, and most contested, is the Malthusian Theorem. In 1798, Malthus argued that population grew exponentially while food production did not. For example, a rural couple might have ten children that survived to adulthood. This is a 500% increase in the family's population (from 2 to 10), while the land and food production that they contributed would remain relatively stable. If each of those children had ten children the effect on the population would soon be catastrophic. His recommendation was that humans should limit their population growth. [Neo-Malthusians](#) [Video, 2:51 mins] argue this today. [Anti-Malthusians](#) [Video, 5:54 mins] argue that human societies mature and experience a demographic transition. As technology increases, food production and birth control methods become more efficient and productive, supplying ever more to the many, and these all result in a longer life span and a lower birth rate, as excessive children for agricultural subsistence living goes away. This has happened in most developed nations. Anti-Malthusians argue that as globalization increases, this demographic transition will spread until the entire world experiences lower birth rates.

Cities

Human settlements are divided into three types of living communities: [urban](#) [Video, 2:25 mins]; [suburban](#) [Video, 4:13 mins]; and [rural](#) [Video, 2:39 mins]. Rural areas are sparsely settled and reliant on agriculture or some other harvesting of natural resources typically. Cities are more densely populated


Strip Mall⁴

and rely on industry, commerce and information services, as so many peoples' needs within such a small space have to be met by many services. The city itself is an invention of technology and the capacity to build upward, [enabled principally by the elevator](#), a seemingly small thing, but [pivotal to the process of urbanization](#). Suburban areas are fringe or edge areas off cities where people relocate to escape the population density and social problems that often concentrate in cities. Edge Cities develop when the suburban populations grow large enough to require their own sources of commerce, production and social life necessities. During the Industrial Revolution, industrialized nations began to experience rapid urbanization, the movement of people from rural areas to urban areas, and this process has unfolded in recent decades in China on a scale not seen anywhere else. Suburban development along these lines began after World War II and was driven in part by the wholesale change in transportation with the interstate system's spread and massive highway and automobile development. As populations became denser, cities became plagued with myriad [social problems](#) [Video, 4:14 mins]. These include overcrowding, sub-standard housing, and large areas of poverty, higher crime rates, racial tension and increased risk of disease. This encouraged [White Flight](#) [Video, 2:55 mins] and rural rebound. White Flight reached its height in the late 60s through the late 70s. This is the phenomenon of whites with resources leaving urban areas for suburban or rural life. This magnified the problems in many cities as the tax base shrank.

Urban Sprawl and Urban Renewal

Another negative consequence of urbanization is [urban sprawl](#) [Video, 4:15 mins]. Urban sprawl refers to the poorly planned expansion and development of urban areas. This often results in unsightly areas that are populated with housing subdivisions where multiple houses are built on one set of blueprints, numerous strip malls and office complexes, and a lack of green-space. It leads to traffic snarls as the new communities are not accompanied with well-planned roads.

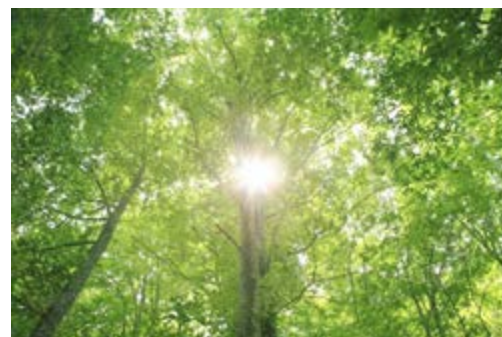

Urban Sprawl⁵

You have probably seen an area like this and may live in one yourself. You may have noticed a lack of trees or public parks. You may have experienced a difficult commute or heavy traffic congestion. Urban planners often argue for [smart growth](#) [Video, 4:49 mins] and urban renewal today. Smart growth requires carefully planned decisions on how and when to expand urban and suburban areas. Urban renewal focuses on fixing the issues within

the existing urban areas before expanding the boundaries of development. One consequence of [urban renewal](#) [Video, 2:47 mins] is [gentrification](#) [Video, 2:59 mins]. This happens when people with resources move into a poor urban area and increase the cost of living so that the poor residents are forced to relocate. Critics of gentrification argue that this gives the appearance that the urban problems have been fixed when they have merely been relocated.

The Environment

Sociologists study the environment, especially how humanity interacts with and changes the environment as human populations move, make and remake the natural world around them. An important area of environmental sociology today is [sustainability](#) [Video, 2:05 mins]. Humans have certainly had a [negative effect](#) [Video, 2:08 mins] on the environment, and many sociologists argue that humans need to [develop sustainable ways](#) [Video, 6:04 mins] of interacting with the environment. This means that human consumption should not deplete the natural resources base of the local and global environments around them. However, it is also applied to increasing outcomes for poor communities and developing nations by teaching them sustainable technologies and skills for developing more harmoniously with the environment. For example, one focus of the sustainability sub-discipline is educating communities in the sub-Saharan region to develop sustainable sources of clean water. Urban sociologists have focused on urban farming. This focus encourages poor urban dwellers to farm vacant land that was once dedicated to housing. The food grown in these community gardens is used to nourish the community, which is often located in a “food desert”. Surplus is sold at local farmer’s markets to provide income for the community. While this trend is catching on, it has also led to the growth of gentrification as people with resources take advantage of low property values and available land to engage in urban farming nearer to so many more consumers than in rural areas.



Forest View⁶

Social Change

Cultures change over time. Sometimes this change is intentional and sometimes it is the byproduct of something else within a society. For example, [compulsory and free education](#) [Video, 1:38 mins] developed because of changes in industry. Labor became more organized and technical which meant that the country needed to have a trained labor force. Prior to this, education was only available to those with resources. This meant that culturally, it had little value beyond basic abilities necessary to communicate for much of the



Elementary Classroom⁷

population. Reading skills and math were viewed as important only for successfully managing community finances and religious training. These institutional changes create changes in the culture of education, and the societal expectations for a more educated population. Today's society sees education as a measure of value, prestige and opportunity. Every child learns the culture of education even though they may not pursue or even excel at education. Regardless of the motivation for change, sociologists define any transformation of culture as social change and are interested in studying its mechanisms and consequences.

Collective Behavior

[Social change](#) [Video, 0:50 mins] is inspired by collective behavior. This means that people come together in a group or crowd. One theory is that behavior is contagious. One person makes a change and others "catch" that change and increase it. Another theory argues that norms emerge within groups. A person makes a change and watches reactions. If they are favorable, the change becomes a new norm that catches on. If they are not favorable, that behavior is dropped and another change is attempted. This can be seen in crowds, mass behavior and social movements.

Crowds

Crowds form when a large number of people come together. This can be a random event or it can be by choice. For example, when a sporting event is held in a city, people make the choice to attend. They become a crowd when they enter the arena or stadium. The majority of the time, this is peaceful and fun event for participants. Sometimes however the event can turn into a violent or dangerous situation called a riot.

[Riots](#) [Video, 2:51 mins] occur when the crowd becomes destructive. This can happen as a result of anger or frustration, such as recent protests against police brutality or racial profiling. It can also happen as a result of intoxication or over exuberance of young people. This occasionally happens when a sports team, such as a college basketball team, wins or loses a national competition. Riots usually result in injury (possibly fatalities), arrests, curfews and destruction of property.



Police in Riot Gear⁸

Mass Behaviors

Mass behaviors occur when a large group of people follow the same patterns of behavior without necessarily being in the same place. [Fads and fashion](#) [Video, 1:11 mins] are good examples of this. One recent fad is the game Pokémon Go. This game has caught on in the younger population and

resulted in worries about health and social consequences for players. Several months after the game began players are starting to lose interest. This is the natural life cycle of a fad. It is very popular for a short period of time before dying a natural death. Another example of a fad is the proliferation of selfies being posted to the internet. Fashion is associated with time and place. Typically fashion is thought of as the way society dresses, speaks and consumes products. For example, it is in fashion to wear jeans. In fact this has been stable for many decades. However, the style of the jeans that is fashionable changes dependent on the time and place.



Historical Fashion⁹

Social Movements

[Social movements](#) [Video, 2:11 mins] are organized groups that develop a bureaucracy to either bring about or resist social change. There are several theories about the motivation for social movements. Mass society theory argues that people seek them out to be part of something bigger than them. This theory grew from observing negative social movements, such as the growth of the Nazi regime. Relative Deprivation Theory argues that social movements are a mechanism that oppressed groups use to gain equal access to rights and opportunities. This theory grew out of observing positive social movements such as the Civil and Equal Rights movements. Social movements develop in four stages. The incipient stage is when the problem gains attention. They coalesce in the second stage when they begin to organize and gain momentum. The third stage is when they become bureaucratized. Stage four is when they begin to decline.



Suffragist Rally¹⁰

Promoting and Resisting Change

[Activism](#) [Video, 1:43 mins] is the practice of promoting social change. Recently two high profile areas of activism have been the movements to obtain marriage rights in all 50 states of same sex couples and the Black Lives Matter movement.


Protest Against Gay Marriage¹¹

[Regressive movements](#) [Video, 3:35 mins] are resistant to social change. For example, in contrast to the Gay Marriage activism, religious groups argued for the status quo based on Family Values. The All Lives Matter and the Blue Lives Matter movements grew out of resistance to the Black Lives Matter movement. Sometimes regressive movements are motivated by prejudice, racism or maintaining the status quo. However, this is not always the case. The Voluntary Simplicity movement encourages people to “live simply so that others may simply live”. This movement urges a return to a less complex and technologically dependent generation where consumerism was less apparent.

Technology and Social Change


Teen with iPod¹²

Technology grows rapidly. You are likely to have seen many technologies become obsolete in your lifetime. For example, if you are a Baby Boomer, you were born in a time when music consumed on vinyl recordings. In your teens, the 8 Track tape was introduced and quickly made obsolete by the cassette. Recording and playing devices became very inexpensive and vinyl was quickly replaced. By your late twenties, CDs were introduced and this was quickly followed by shareware such as Napster. This created an issue of cultural lag. Cultural lag occurs when technology changes too rapidly for culture to keep up. Teens always shared music. Vinyl was loaned and tapes were copied. This was not a problem because teens limited their sharing to their closer friends. The internet made it possible for one copy of a song to be uploaded and shared freely with hundreds of thousands of teens. That caused a dramatic decrease in sales which led to criminal charges of copyright violation and theft. The result of this was a new culture of inexpensive accessibility such as iTunes. Technology forces culture to change to accommodate new expectations and behaviors.

In the module notes you learned about the processes of urbanization and social change, and now you will be able to apply your knowledge in two discussions.

Image Citation:

- 1 http://quest.eb.com.vlib.excelsior.edu/search/102_519954
- 2 http://quest.eb.com.vlib.excelsior.edu/search/140_1630295
- 3 http://quest.eb.com.vlib.excelsior.edu/search/309_1156316
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