

## *Extension and the Urban Environment*

City people live in an environment different from that of rural people—they have different interests

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ONE criterion of organizational effectiveness is the extent to which it adapts to the environment in which it functions. The Extension Service began in a rural society—today it exists in a highly urbanized one. The purpose of this paper is to identify the major characteristics of this urban society which need to be considered in urban Extension programming.

There is considerable evidence that Extension is already serving urban people. In 1962, 21 per cent of 4-H members were urban. In 1959, 21 per cent of the women in Extension homemakers' clubs were urban. Mass media methods of teaching—especially newspapers, radio, and television—do not separate rural from urban audiences. As long ago as 1949, a survey of Extension work in urban areas of the Northeast documented the extent to which Extension programs were already being geared for urban areas. Practically all counties in the Northeast with a city of 2500 or more had agents carrying on a program in some urban areas.

What are the characteristics of urban society which differ from rural society? In general, urban society is one of mass industrialization with bureaucratic forms of organization; people are heterogeneous and are ecologically separated. Social relationships tend to be impersonal and anonymous. Organizations and agencies specialize in goal achievement. There is a greater density of population.

### COMPLEX ORGANIZATIONS

Decision making in urban areas is more organizationally cen-

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tered than in rural communities. Hence, there is widespread apathy in large cities. There is a greater separation of private from public solutions to problems. The needs of people are largely satisfied by private and public agencies. People as individuals tend to have less control of their destiny because decisions which affect them are often made at remote centers. Social control in urban society can be traced primarily to large-scale, specialized organizations and governments.

Individuals who comprise the power structure in urban areas are difficult to identify; they are influential because of positions in labor, government, and industry. Most of these influentials have little direct interest in agricultural matters. In fact, leaders in Extension are seldom well acquainted with the urban power structure.

Hence, a complex set of large public and private organizations make decisions about solutions to various problems of the urban society. These organizations provide programs in the areas of public health, juvenile delinquency, welfare, urban renewal, recreation, education, transportation, family counselling, etc. There is an intense specialization of governmental as well as private services. Most of these organizations are staffed by trained experts. In less densely populated areas, fewer private and public agencies exist—and those that do are smaller and less likely to be staffed by professional experts.

#### *Educational Organizations*

There is no vacuum of educational organizations in urban society. A variety of informal and formal educational programs are available—sponsored not only by public school systems, but also by government, labor unions, city colleges and universities, churches, libraries, and others. Many national youth organizations have operated in urban areas for many years. Adult home economics courses are usually given through the school systems or through city governments. Dissemination of agricultural information is more likely done through private enterprise. People in urban areas are more willing to pay for information concerning lawns, flowers, shrubs, etc.

#### *Governmental Organizations*

Local government in the urban areas is large, impersonal, and bureaucratic. More and more government positions are being staffed with professional specialists. Any metropolitan area has a

complex number of local governments, authorities, commissions, etc. Lines of authority and responsibility are more clearly defined within these organizations than between them. Cities exist within counties and the division of responsibilities between these municipal governments are not clearly defined. Emerging problems constantly require a reappraisal of responsibilities.

Urban areas also have a whole complex of planning agencies staffed by experts. In more rural counties, Extension often has an opportunity to be a leader in over-all planning; this responsibility is usually assigned to other bodies in urban areas.

Cities have rarely provided a stable basis of financial support for Extension. In fact, Extension staffs are rarely acquainted with city officials. Contrast this situation with local governments in rural areas where relationships between staff and county officials are more likely on a personal basis. Staff members usually are well acquainted with county officials and keep them informed about the Extension program. In rural counties, Extension is a dangling part of local government and its place in the structure is diffusely defined. In urban areas, Extension responsibilities and lines of authority are more formally defined.

#### *Mass Media Channels*

The many communication channels in urban society are controlled by large, complex organizations. Staff are trained communication specialists. Extension staffs have less access to these communication channels than they do in rural areas. Television and radio stations and newspapers have their own farm and home editors so that Extension news releases are adapted to the program interests of the specific medium. Since there are many newspapers, and radio and television stations in metropolitan areas, one message will not meet the needs of all these competing organizations. Many of them are programming for specific clientele. In addition, these channels reach into a number of counties, and even states, so that the county staffs have a more serious problem of coordination than exists in rural areas.

#### ECOLOGICAL SEGREGATION

Ecological segregation is a dominant process in urban society. There is a widespread tendency for persons to select as associates other individuals with whom they share similar interests, values, and perhaps social positions. Urban residential areas tend to be-

come segregated. This is generally unplanned and occurs over a period of time. These areas of segregation become highly visible. The core of most cities have become low-income, minority group ghettos. Through the process of urban decentralization and migration, residents of suburbs generally are quite different from those in the inner city. The centrifugal metropolis is symbolic of people moving from the center of cities to the outskirts as they are displaced by groups moving into the center.

Inner cities generally have people with these characteristics: low-income, little education, Democrats, Catholics and Negroes, lower-class values, transitory, heterogeneous, and blue collar workers. Labor unions are strong, government is likely controlled by labor, and a large percentage of women work. In contrast, people living in outer areas of cities tend to have these characteristics: high income and education, white collar occupations, nonpartisan in voting (but really Republican), and commuters. Women are active in organizations and raising families. The inner city is not growing in population while the suburban fringe areas are experiencing fast growth.

In rural areas, people are less segregated on an ecological basis. Poverty families are usually interspersed with higher status families. Pockets of poverty are almost always socially visible in the urban metropolis.

#### URBAN PEOPLE

Urban people are more mobile than those on farms. In 1960, 71 per cent of the farm families had lived in the same house for five years, compared with 48 per cent of the urban families.<sup>1</sup> Hence, urban people are more transitory. Extension groups in urban areas would experience a much higher turnover in membership and leadership.

Urban people are better educated than rural people. The urban adult had an average of almost 11.1 years of schooling in 1960 compared with about 8.8 for the farm adult.<sup>2</sup> The content taught in urban areas would need to be at a higher level than in farming areas. (These average figures mask the fact that some poverty groups in the core of cities have extremely low levels of education.)

Urban society is heterogeneous with respects to occupations and socio-economic status. In farming areas, the dominant occupation is farming. Farming community centers have a vested interest in agri-

<sup>1</sup> U. S. Census of Population, 1960, General Social and Economic Characteristics [PC (1)], Table 71, Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce.

<sup>2</sup> U. S. Census of Population, 1960, General Social and Economic Characteristics [PC (1)], Table 76, Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce.

culture; this is not part of the urban culture. In urban society there is a broad spectrum of occupations. Extension planning and advisory committees in agricultural counties are dominated by farmers and their wives. To a certain extent, these groups represent the primary interest of the people. It is impossible to think of one occupational group as being representative of urban areas. A person's style of life is somewhat dependent upon his occupation. Hence, the occupational specialization contributes to heterogeneous interests.

Urban women are more likely to be in the labor force than rural women. About 37 per cent of urban women 14 and over were in the labor force in 1960, compared with 23 per cent of women in farm families.<sup>8</sup> These urban working women are less likely to be available for local leader responsibilities and daytime meetings.

Because city people live in a different environment from those in agricultural areas, they have different interests. While some urbanites have lawns, shrubs, and gardens, others have no space for such interests. Women in cities are interested in homemaking; but the city has more incomplete families than rural areas. Interests of urban homemakers probably vary more in degree than kind.

#### *Objectives for Farmers not Applicable*

Efficiency in agricultural production has been the main objective of Extension programs. Farmers participate in Extension primarily because of an economic motivation. Hence, as an individual entrepreneur, the farmer has something to gain from Extension. Approximately 85 per cent of the U. S. people in the labor force work for salary or wages. Urban people generally work for someone else. There are relatively few family enterprises in cities. Businesses are generally managed by expert administrators who are not the owners. Motivation sources are related to positions within the organizational structure. Also, problems facing urban businessmen are not the same as those facing farmers.

With the disappearance of family enterprises in urban society, two important organizational systems of human society have been separated, that of the family and place of work. Of 47 million wage earners in 1960, 2.9 per cent worked at home. A person lives in one part of the city, his place of work is in another, and the owners of industry in probably another. Identification is with place of work and family rather than community. Social contacts are usually not prescribed by geographic location. This is in sharp contrast with the

<sup>8</sup>U. S. Census of Population, 1960, Detailed Characteristics [PC (1)], Table 106, Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce.

farm situation where place of work and place of residence are co-terminous.

A major Extension program area has been in marketing. In agricultural areas, agents have worked primarily with farmer producers on marketing problems. In cities, marketing problems center around processing and distributing. The client must be the marketing firm. Urban marketing firms are likely to be on a much larger, complex scale than those in rural areas—most would be staffed by marketing experts.

#### POPULATION SHIFTS

A few figures document the degree to which this country has become so urbanized in a relatively short period of time. Less than 7 per cent of our people live on farms—and a large share of them are working off the farm. About 40 per cent lived on farms when Extension began. In 1960 about 70 per cent of the people in the United States were urban—this includes people in areas with 2500 or more people, plus the built-up areas around cities having 50,000 or more. In addition, many people living in rural nonfarm areas, those living in "string villages," and those just beyond urbanized areas are more oriented to an urban way of life than to agriculture. Much of rural nonfarm growth can be attributed to urban decentralization.

There has been a tremendous concentration of people in and around large urban centers. This trend will continue. Almost two-thirds of our population live within the 212 metropolitan areas of the United States. Approximately one-fourth of the rural population is included within the standard metropolitan statistical areas, and this proportion is growing. Farm residents in these areas reflect urban influence to which they are exposed in respect to such characteristics as education, fertility, women working, mobility, and family income. Few people in our society live much beyond metropolitan areas. Less than one-fifth of the farm population lives as much as a hundred miles from a metropolitan area.<sup>4</sup> Rural communities remote from large metropolitan areas have generally declined in population.<sup>5</sup>

The urbanizing process is reaching into the hinterlands—and it is impossible to draw a definite line around what is urban and what is

<sup>4</sup> Conrad Taeuber, "Demographic Patterns in American Rural Society," paper presented at joint session of the American Sociological Association and the Rural Sociological Society, Montreal, Canada, September 1, 1964.

<sup>5</sup> See Glenn V. Fuguitt, "The Small Town in Rural America," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, III (Spring, 1965), 19-26.

rural. There is an intermeshing of the two. Program emphasis in Extension has focused on efficiency in agricultural production. When considering adaptations of the Extension program, rural nonfarm people are probably more similar to urban people in their interests than to farmers.

#### IMPLICATIONS

Urbanization of the United States is occurring at a rapid pace. Most rural areas are declining in population while metropolitan areas are increasing. Large city areas are faced with problems of expansion while more remote, smaller towns and villages are faced with problems of adjusting to a declining population. It is no longer possible to draw a definite line between urban and rural.

Extension might perform several alternative functions in urban areas: (1) disseminate agricultural information to individuals, groups, and businesses; (2) teach home economics knowledge and skills to homemakers or agency personnel; (3) assist in community development by helping people become more involved in making decisions about community improvement; (4) consult various governmental bodies and agencies; and (5) develop an urban youth program, either by organizing clubs or providing services to other youth serving groups.

An appraisal of Extension resources and how the organization fits into the total university will be necessary in order to determine the most feasible program objectives appropriate to cities. The following tentative guidelines apply to Extension work in cities and densely populated areas:

1. An analysis of social organizations in each urban area will help to delineate natural communities, organizations and agencies, communication channels, and key influentials.
2. The existing complex set of organizations and agencies provide ready access to large segments of the urban society. New organizational machinery will likely be necessary to reach those who are not participating in organizations.
3. The wide diversity of publics in urban areas necessitates a program with many facets if Extension is to contribute to solutions of problems peculiar to each type of public.
4. Staff with specialized competencies in subject matter and methods of communication are needed to satisfy the needs of various interest groups and publics.
5. Since most metropolitan areas include a multiple number of counties, greater coordination of staff efforts between counties

will be required not only in planning but in conducting programs.

6. There is need to convey Extension to urban people with symbols that create an image of an organization relevant to the needs of urban society.

In the process of defining goals and methods, much experimentation will be required. The optimum contribution of the university to urban areas has not yet been determined.

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I SOMETIMES THINK that when I die the epitaph will simply read, "He spent his life attending committee meetings." President Roosevelt told America during the depression years that some generations have a rendezvous with destiny; my generation has a rendezvous with a committee, and if destiny is to get a hearing, it will have to ask for a place on the agenda.

I think I believe in democracy as devotedly as anyone, but I'm sure that the present fascination with committees is a case of democracy gone to seed. It has come to the place where a single individual is all but worthless; we wouldn't think of attempting anything unless we could appoint a committee of three or more. And if the committee can include a few cross-reference personalities from other committees, true Believers in Committees are made almost ecstatic.

The evil is not only that we sometimes spend five man-hours where one man-hour would suffice, nor that we happily substitute cumbersome inefficiency for action. Worse yet, we have become deluded into thinking that when a committee has been appointed, something has been accomplished. We are startled some time later, when the committee brings back its report, to discover that the original task still waits to be done. And by that time, in many instances, the impetus for achievement is exhausted.

I know that in history's good time the pendulum will swing back from committees to an honorable respect for the individual. But I'm afraid that by that time my epitaph will already be written.—REV. J. ELLSWORTH KALAS in *The Chimes*, XXI (January 21, 1965), The First Methodist Church, Madison, Wisconsin.