

Industrialization  
change society and  
the economy  
sociology essay



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Industrialization is a period in time in which economic and social changes lead a pre-industrial agrarian society into an industrial one. During this period, both economic and social changes are paired with technological innovation, leading to a massive manufacturing growth, where the economy itself, is organizing for the purpose of manufacturing.[1]Industrialization is also defined as the replacement of farming and resource extracting by manufacturing and the growth of the service industry.[2]

Industrialization started with the industrial revolution, around 1760, in Britain. It is considered to be a huge turning point in history; Daily life of everyone around the world changed because of industrial revolution. Average income and population underwent a sustainable growth that was never seen before. Nobel Prize winner Robert E. Lucas, Jr. said: “ For the first time in history, the living standards of the masses of ordinary people have begun to undergo sustained growth ... Nothing remotely like this economic behavior is mentioned by the classical economists, even as a theoretical possibility.”[3]

I believe, along with literature evidence, that industrialization impacted the society and economy of the countries in which it occurred in so many ways. Industrialization caused or at the very least heavily participated in the shift from rural to urban our current society is a result of, it also changed the family structure as argued by many scholars, along with many other changes. I will first discuss the different views on the social impacts resulting of industrialization, before moving on to the economic ones.

The most widely agreed upon social impact of industrialization is urbanization; urbanization is the increase (both in population and in size) in the urban area. It is caused by rural migration, which is itself caused by the increasing concentration of labor into factories.[4]I personally believe that industrialization is the direct cause of urbanization. Since most of pre-industrialization societies were only based on subsistence, where each country would produce what it needed to “ survive”, and that was mainly food, which made most of these countries rural; based on their own agriculture to create their means of survival. This is what we call subsistence agriculture. But with industrialization, a lot more goods were able to be produced and traded, so less and less subsistence agriculture was needed, and more people to work on the factories were needed.[5]Those workers needed houses to live in with their families, shops to buy the goods needed for their well-being and that of their families, etc. These needs caused large towns to be created as the number of workers needed to operate factories kept on increasing as industrialization started setting its roots deeper and deeper within the societies it started in.

Along with urbanization, industrialization caused the family structure to change heavily. In the pre-industrialization era, extended families used to live together in the same place for generations (uncles, grandparents, etc.), but with industrialization, men had to go work in the factories far away from home, so their nuclear families (parents with their growing children) eventually had to move depending on where work was available, making the extended family bonds less and less significant.[6]Talcott Parsons also argues that in the modern industrial society, individuals gain more by

rejecting extended families relationships than by holding on to them, as an evidence of this, he shows how the only families maintaining kinship relationships are from the upper-class, where such connections have direct economic benefits, while in lower classes, nuclear families lived by themselves, as their extended families did not bring anything to them but obstacles.

Another social impact of industrialization has to do with women's place in the society. It is argued in the literature that industrialization is the "real" beginning of women's participation in the labor force; however, women were always expected to work, some of them were working on farms in agricultural oriented societies, else they were either heavily involved in textile work, or they were working alongside with their husbands in their shops, this while giving birth, raising children, and running the house. These kind of jobs could be done from home, since they did not require any heavy kind of equipment. Maxine Berg quotes an observer in Scotland: "Here as in all semi-barbarous countries, is the woman seen to be regarded rather the drudge than the companion to the man. The husband turns up the land and sows it - the wife conveys the manure to it in a creel, tends the corn, reaps it, hoes the potatoes, digs them up, carries the whole home on her back, when bearing the creel she is also engaged with spinning with the distaff"[7]With industrialization, women were expected to work outside of their homes, with completely different conditions. With strict work hours, women could no longer pace themselves, and find that balance between running the house, raising the children and doing work. Plus, the conditions under which they worked were a lot tougher, even dangerous. But they were

still earning less than men even working equal hours. Due to these new conditions, women were no longer able to raise their children, so they were sending them to be nursed in the countryside: "" close to one third of all babies born in Lyons (some 2, 000 of 5, 000-6000) were carted off to the countryside" to be nursed." [8] Based on the different opinions in the literature, I came to the conclusion that women's working conditions changed with industrialization, for the worst during the industrial revolution (considering the fact that women now work outside their homes for the " first" time, and the fact that they were working in terrible and dangerous conditions), but as conditions got better with time, industrialization's effect on women's work conditions definitely became positive. One might even argue that the only reason women are now working in the same condition as men is industrialization.

Industrialization also had a direct impact on income and income distribution; a perfect example is the increase in income observed especially in Europe directly following the industrial revolution. The following graph describes those increases in income levels:

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/44/Maddison\\_GDP\\_per\\_capita\\_1500-1950.svg/350px-Maddison\\_GDP\\_per\\_capita\\_1500-1950.svg.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/44/Maddison_GDP_per_capita_1500-1950.svg/350px-Maddison_GDP_per_capita_1500-1950.svg.png)

The graph is showing the gross domestic product per capita starting from year 1500 till 1950. The unit used is 1990 International dollars. [9] We can clearly see that following the industrial revolution, which started during the

second half of the 18th century, income levels skyrocketed to the roofs in the countries that took part in the industrialization process.

Ronald Hsia and Larry Chau discuss in their journal article how industrialization in Hong Kong affected income and income distribution. Unsurprisingly, income levels rose as industrialization set foot in the country, but the authors argue that the increase was far more important for “ the poorest” of the country, this is explained by the fact that a lot more jobs were created for those who were looking, and getting a job in a factory at that time only required to be physically capable to do the work.[10]With this disparity in the increase of income levels, income distribution got significantly narrowed as the poor are making “ a lot” more money, while the rich are only making “ a little bit” more. I believe this to be true in all countries affected by industrialization, while this might not hold for every single industrialized country; it is at least a direct consequence of a rapid industrialization.

It is also heavily discussed how much industrialization impacted the economy of the societies it reached, and even the world economy. Pollard argues in his article that the major economic impact of industrialization is time-space compression, which is something I agree with. Time-space compression means that with industrialization, it now takes a lot less time to travel the same distance compared to the pre-industrialization era.[11]One might wonder how is travel time relevant to the economy, it is pretty simple, since it now requires less time to travel, it also takes less time to trade, which directly makes the global economy more active. With this reduced “ trade time”, countries no longer have to be subsistent, they can produce <https://assignbuster.com/industrialization-change-society-and-the-economy-sociology-essay/>

what they excel at and sell what is left, while buying other goods they need and don't produce. Another thing time-space compression allowed was the access to previously unavailable regions; some of these regions had many resources to be used to expand the economy, plus the population growth could be better managed with the increased available space.

Industrialization impacted the society and the economy of the countries in which it set foot in so many ways. Industrialization caused the massive urbanization we can still witness today, it caused the family structure to be changed (dominance of nuclear families), it had to do with how women's place in the society changed. Industrialization was also a catalyst for the income levels increase, and arguably for the decrease in the income level distribution, and it also, among other things, cause the time-space compression that now allows trade to be such an important part of the economy. To put it in a nutshell, industrialization had many impacts in the societies in which it was introduced, although some impacts seemed negative at first (like the working conditions in the factories along with the child labor with all the dangers involved in such conditions), it was all for the best in the end.