

Transformations of modern society sociology essay



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Modernity is a period of time within the world that started for many around the seventeenth century. It was accentuated by the shift from a move from a feudal system to a system we know as capitalism and the nation state which gained influence throughout the known world. There was a shift in focus from agricultural work and employment to Industrial and town based focus. Many commentators have looked at modernity and what was meant by modernity. This report focuses on modernity from the perspective of Giddens, his opinion of what its key institutional factors were and those of globalisation. For Giddens modernity as a simple explanation is, “ ways of life for groups of people which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards. This consequently, moved on and became a way of life around the world. Thus modernity is located within a specific time period and a starting geographical position, the features of modernity can be explored later”. (Giddens, 1990, p. 1)

Modernity changed the way people around the world were connected to each other, this in turn had a profound effect on the personal level. On the one hand modernity gave people the more chances to live a more rewarding life, yet the dangers that came with that were greater in Giddens’s opinion. He states, “ modernity was a double edged sword of security versus danger and trust versus risk, this is seen in the fact that more people died in the wars of the twentieth century than in the previous two centuries even if you allow for the increase in population over this period” (Giddens, 1990, p. 7). The move from agrarian based production to the industrialised production that catered not only for local but international markets produced more variety of products. However, at the same time human labour power became

commercialised. Capitalism became the way of life not only in modernity's economic system but all its other institutions. Giddens, 1990, p. 11 explains this as, "the social order of modernity is capitalistic both in its economic structures and other institutions. This created a cycle of investment profit investment meaning profits declined and meant a need for a continual expansion of the system." However for Marx though the "modern era's rapidly changing characteristics were not derived from a capitalist order but an industrial order, one characterised through the harnessing production to human needs through the industrial exploitation of nature" (Morrison, 2006, p. 78)

Having looked at modernity it is briefly time to explore what Giddens calls the key features of modernity these are, "the separation of time and space, disembedding mechanisms and the reflexive appropriation of knowledge" (Giddens, 1990, p. 53). These three features were interconnected and could be found in all. So for Giddens modernity had multiple layers especially on the institutional level, the introduction of a world clock and time zones along with a move from Gregorian to Julian calendar gave us uniformity the world over.

Here we will look at the next focus of Giddens in terms of modernity, mainly this will explore his perspective on the institutional dimensions of modernity. The four institutional dimensions Giddens 1990 identifies are, "Capitalism; industrialism; military power and surveillance" (p. 59). The first institutional dimension Giddens 1990 deals with is capitalism, capitalism is the making of useful items based around those who have the means of production and those who have no such capital and sell their labour, this creates the axis of

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a class system. This system requires good to be made for competitive market with price being a guide for buyers, sellers, investors and producers of goods alike.

The second institutional dimension Giddens identifies is industrialism, Giddens 1990 sees Industrialism not necessarily as the move to big factories using machines and electricity and or steam power but something more. For Giddens it affects every day life not only the work place but, how we interact with each other and how we travel. It also impacts on the home and leisure life of all individuals. Capitalism and industrialism may be two distinct dimensions but they are inter-related for Giddens, they are in fact so closely linked distinguishing the two from each other is difficult.

The third institution dimension explored by Giddens is that of surveillance, this he explains is the role the nation state a phenomenon seen in all modern societies in one form or another exercises control and social regulation. Giddens 1990 sees the administrative system of nation states having coordinated control over areas of territory it has gained, no pre-modern state were able to achieve this level of administrative control. Giddens 1990 (p. 58) is directly interested, “ in the supervision of the activities of a population, this can be directly as Foucault discusses through prison or education systems, or more directly in the way information is controlled”.

The last institutional dimension that Giddens identifies is that of military power. For Giddens 1990 the nation state and modern societies are unique in the fact that it was able not only able to create the means for war in weaponry and machines but also had the support of the military, in most

pre-modern societies the central political figure had to make alliances with princes warlords clan chiefs to gain their support. He also points out how, “ industrialism permeating both the organisation of the military and the weaponry at their disposal. The “ industrialisation of war” radically changes the character of warfare, ushering in an era of “ total war” and a nuclear age” (Giddens, 1990, p. 58). This point is highlighted in (Hopkins, Evans, & Norton-Taylor, 2012) “ Senior military officers and ministry officials have taken up more than 3, 500 positions in arms companies over the last 16 years”. So for Giddens all four institutional dimensions of modernity were interconnected with each other and can not be separated from one another.

Lastly we will explore what Giddens means by the term ‘ Globalisation’, Giddens 1990 (p. 64) defines globalisation as, “ the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happening are shaped by events occurring many miles away”. As a definition of globalisation this is one of the better ones available. However, the definition of globalisation by Trevillion 1997 in (Lyons, 2006, p. p. 122) “ that globalisation has both subjective and objective meanings, to embrace both the objective social, economic and technological changes associated with the dismantling of national and regional barriers to trade and communications and the subjective shifts in consciousness associated with the growth of global concerns and global sensibilities.” What Trevillion is arguing is that globalisation through social, economic and technology changes have made it easier to trade and talk to anyone in the world, but at the same time issues like global warming and child poverty have become a worldwide not just localised concerns any longer.

For Giddens there are four dimensions that create globalisation similar to his ideas on modernity. Giddens 1990 (71) shows us that, “ the nation state, world capitalist economy, world military order, international division of labour. He claims that the chief form of production is economic enterprise and this has definite class related issues. Each state develops a local and world economic policy which involves regulating the economic activity. But the administrative organisation of these states means that they are able to separate the economic from the political.”

The second dimension for Giddens is “ world military power. For Giddens trans national companies may have more economic power than certain nations and are able to use this economic power to influence political issues to their favour, however they do not control the means of violence or territory that states do. Most states have either total or majority control for the means of violence within their state. Trans national companies can accumulate all sorts of economic power but, they are not military organisations” (Giddens, 1990, p. 71).

The other area that occupies Giddens 1990 (p. 72) in terms of globalisation is the international division of labour. He claims that, “ nation states are the main drivers in global politics whilst trans national companies(businesses) are the major players in the world economy. This is especially true when looking at how they trade with other companies, states and individuals. Manufacturing banking and other financial institutions depend on production for profit. Which is why the influence they carry brings the worldwide extension of commodity and financial markets. However, even from its beginnings the world capitalist economy was not just about the trade of

goods and services. It involved and involves still the commodification of labour power, this separates the workers from control of their means of production. This of course has consequences and means class divisions widen and global inequalities become more pronounced.”

So in summary we are now all more connected especially through the use of global media and the world wide web. We are aware of things happening in other countries yet at the same time we may feel the effects of those things. The recession and possible collapse of Greece's, spains and portugal's to name a few economies will have an effect in the united Kingdom and other places around the world who trade with these countries.

We have explored Giddens perspective on modernity and the institutional dimensions that are present, before looking at Giddens Views on globalisation and the institutional dimensions of globalisation. Modernity in Giddens eyes is denoted by the move from agrarian community to industrialisation based in the city, with the move to a world time system and time zones and a world calendar. The key instutionial dimensions identified by Giddens were, capitalism, industrialism, military power and surveillance each were interconnected. Finally we looked at Giddens views on globalisation and the institutional dimension found within it not suprisingly the institutional dimensions to globalisation are nearly identical to those of modernity. What he pinpointed within globalisation is that inequalities that were already present have not only persisted but expanded and can be found globally.