

Programme : B.A. (Third Year)

Subject : Sociology

Semester : VI

Course Code : SOC 109

Course Title : Urban Society in India

Unit Number : III – Theories of Urban Growth

Module Name : Contemporary Theories: Manuel Castells

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Notes

MANUEL CASTELLS: THE RISE OF THE NETWORK SOCIETY

Manuel Castells is a Spanish Sociologist born on 9 February 1942 in Spain. Most of his research work is on urban sociology, organizational studies, social movements etc. One of the most prominent contributions of Castells in the field of Urban sociology is „The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture published in 1996. He discusses in this book how society is interconnected and the network society is shaped around logic of flows: resources, information, technology etc.

A network society, according to castells, is a society whose social structure is made of networks powered by micro-electronics- based information and communication technologies.

The revolution in information and communication technologies and its widespread has led to structural changes in the late 20th century. Castells highlighted two specific features of the network society i.e. “**space of flows**” and “**timeless time**”.

The space of flow is made of electronic circuits and information system, but it also made of territories, physical places, whose functional or symbolic meaning depends

upon their connection rather than on its specific characteristics as localities. The space of flows is made of bits and pieces of places, connected by telecommunications, fast transportation, information, airports, and international hotels. For instance, "New York" is a global city because it has powerful organizations that are linked to the other parts.

Digital ICT (Information and communication technology) allows a detachment from the rigid spatial temporal limits and patterns that conditioned daily activities. It helps to reduce the importance of the spatial frameworks that are socially accepted for carrying out an activity. For example, emails enable us to work from home, from the office or from a public square. It helps us to alter the dynamics of a work schedule and a location, just as we can alter leisure activities with these work spaces and times. For Castells, the space of flows involves the emergence of a „timeless time“ that becomes more flexible due to disappearance of temporal sequences.

Time, in social terms was defined as the sequencing of practices. The social time was called bureaucratic time, which is the organisation of time, in institutions and in everyday life; in the industrial age clock time gradually, emerged; time was stated as disciplinary time. (the famous statement, time is money and money is made over time is an example of industrial clock). In the network society, the emphasis on time based sequences is reversed. The relationship of time is defined by the rise of information and communication technologies and its efforts to overpower the negating sequencing .i.e. on one hand, compressing time by squeezing more activity into a given time on the other hand, by blurring the sequence of social practices.

According to Castells, despite the disappearance of capitalists and the proletariat, exploitation and differentiation remain. The labour is fundamentally divided into networked labour, which serves the goals of the network and switched off labour which has nothing to offer to the network.

The de-localization of production centers, workplaces and capital resources transformed into the reorganization of urban form. This space of flow produces a new spatial model that manifests itself in the urban form, which now becomes an informational city with exclusive spaces for the elites and subareas leading also to the phenomenon of mega cities. The proliferation of screens, video surveillance camera, Wi-Fi or multifunction mobile devices which allows interactions is the basis of urban space.

Though Castells work paved the way for many to study the effects of technology on social organisation, his work has been criticized by some scholars. One main critique to castell"s theory is the belief that technology shapes social and cultural structures; he gives too much importance to

technological determinism. Another critique is that Castells states that there is an emergence of a new type of social system i.e. information system, but some scholars" states that it is not actually a new society but a continuity of the "corporate capitalist.