

URBANIZATION OF THE RURAL AREAS IN THE  
U.S.: SOCIOECONOMIC AND NORMATIVE CHANGES,  
1950-1970

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Abstract

Urbanization has brought about rapid changes in the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of rural areas in the United States. These changes are believed to lead, in turn, to cultural changes of the rural areas. This study first describes the changes in the socioeconomic characteristics and normative traditionalism that have taken place during 1950 and 1970. It then ascertains the empirical relationship between socioeconomic changes and normative change.

Census data on population density, percentage of rural farm population, median age, and median education were used as indicators to measure change in the socioeconomic structure of rural areas. Normative traditionalism was indicated by 12 item-scores derived from attitude surveys of adolescents of 68 rural high schools in Pennsylvania. Change in the 12 item-scores between 1950 and 1970 was viewed as measure of normative change. Various multi-variate analysis techniques were used to assess the relationship between socioeconomic changes and normative change in the rural areas of Pennsylvania.

It was found that the normative traditionalism of the rural areas studied has changed significantly from more conservativeness toward more permissiveness. Moreover, the more urbanized the socioeconomic structure of the rural areas in 1950, the more likely the change in their traditionalism toward more liberal. Consequently, the degree of urbanization appears to be more important than the rate (or rapidity) of urbanization in influencing the normative change of an area. This finding was compared with other findings dealing with rural-urban difference to suggest the continuing utility of the rural-urban construct in sociological analysis.