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Richard P. Devine
St. John's University

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The Micro-City Project: A progress Report

RICHARD P. DEVINE *

ABSTRACT—This is a report on social science aspects of the Micro-City Project conducted at St. John's University at Collegeville, Minnesota. The program began in June, 1968, and this report covers activities which range from attitudinal survey research to mathematical models.

The Micro-City Project is a research center directed by Edward L. Henry, chairman of the Government Department at St. John's University and Mayor of St. Cloud, Minnesota. Funded by a grant of \$182,000 from the Ford Foundation, the Project encompasses several types of research designed to gather data on micro-cities and to develop additional data sources. The Project staff also is engaged in social scientific analyses of variables which appear to condition social and governmental processes and outcome in micro-cities.

Combined with those research purposes is an action-emphasis, since the data and analysis can potentially be utilized for the development of practical recommendations for city officials and others concerned with micro-cities. An important objective of the program is to serve as a catalyst that will stimulate interest in and further research on micro-cities elsewhere. A grant of \$60,000 from the Louis W. Hill and Maud Hill Family Foundation of Saint Paul supports a companion project of enlisting co-operation of other Minnesota colleges which are not already so engaged to do research on their local communities.

For purposes of the Project, "micro-city" is defined as a city between 10,000 and 50,000 population. Attention is being focused on 12 such Minnesota cities: Albert Lea, Austin, Bemidji, Fergus Falls, Hibbing, Mankato, Moorhead, New Ulm, Red Wing, St. Cloud, Willmar, and Winona.

Although the Project is headquartered at St. John's University near St. Cloud, social scientists from several other state colleges are also associated with the project. The central staff includes the director, Edward Henry, a political scientist and mayor of St. Cloud; three additional political scientists, John Redmond, Robert Weber, Edward Vogt; two sociologists, Richard Devine, Robert Olesen; and a mathematician, Franz Peters.

Their counterparts at other state colleges also are involved in research sponsored by the Project. Interest in the results already has been expressed by city officials, businessmen, educators, and city leaders from many areas around the nation. This is believed to be the only U.S. municipal research center focusing attention on

medium-size (10,000 to 50,000) cities. Most current urban research centers are concerned with problems of "micro-cities," while small towns (below 10,000) have been studied extensively by agricultural extension and rural sociology departments.

Social and Research Problems

Micro-cities are faced with a continuous series of social problems, as are all societies. Social problems are often "solved," if at all, by the application of traditional methods, "prejudice" (in the Burkean sense), and intuition. While these methods have appeared adequate in the past, increasing reliance is now being centered on systematic methods to solve social problems. This reliance may be partly a result of the increased perception of the complexity of modern-day society, characterized by a series of social structures in which communication and feedback is seldom optimal. The Micro-City Project is one attempt to respond to the perceived necessity for developing programs in a rational manner on the basis of adequate factual data.

Some of the potentially researchable problems for the Micro-City Project include:

HOW CAN DISPERSION of population be maintained or perhaps increased in the face of an increasing centralization of resources and services in large metropolitan areas? A host of questions are related to this issue, some of them implying value judgments on the "goodness" of life. The Micro-City Project assumes it reasonable to suppose that medium-size cities serve a relevant function in our city-state-national system, but the Project is not committed to any particular method of maintaining or increasing the number of such micro-cities. Alternative possibilities to be examined would include the maintenance of present micro-cities accompanied by natural population growth; accelerated population growth; further development of smaller cities served by "micro-city," the "mother city" concept; or the establishment of new micro-cities, whether they be developed on a pattern similar to existent cities or totally planned new environments.

A MAJOR PROBLEM facing all cities is the provision of governmental services. The research question here is the development of strategies for cooperative arrangements between the cities and governmental units such as regional planning areas, county-city mergers, inter-city sharing of services, and similar proposals. It appears evident that micro-cities can achieve greater efficiency in their use of personnel, services, and expertise; but the

* Richard P. Devine has been a sociologist with the Micro-City Project since its inception in June of 1968. He is also a staff member of the Sociology department of St. John's University and is a doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota, where he received an M.A. degree in 1967. Prior to his present assignment, he supervised one social survey in the "macro-city" of Minneapolis and another in St. Cloud, a "micro-city."

feasibility of various methods for doing so remains to be intensively studied with specific reference to the problems of cities in this population range.

SINCE CITIES CONSIST OF PEOPLE as well as physical structures, it becomes relevant to raise questions about the residents and users of these cities. Are micro-cities too homogenous in social characteristics? If so, is social change thereby inhibited? Do micro-city residents have firm attitudes concerning the directions they wish their cities to take? Do they have a progressive or a status quo orientation toward change? What is their attitude toward community leaders? Are they satisfied with present policies and governmental arrangements? What are citizen priorities for expenditures? Scientific answers to such questions would facilitate an analysis of the relations between attitudes and actions. Practically, such answers will provide city leaders knowledge of citizen attitudes which may either impede or hasten urban change, depending on the nature of the results and the uses to which they are put.

DIFFERENTIATION OF MICRO-CITIES by their leadership, tax bases, physical facilities, the availability and training of their personnel, and similar conditions is possible. Consequently, it becomes important to know the present status of city governments. What facilities do they possess? What are their projected needs? How will these needs be met, financially and otherwise? A comparative analysis of these variables for several cities may determine crucial factors which affect a city's ability to plan and provide for the future.

A **GENERAL PROBLEM** in the study of cities is to determine their "meaning." This is problematic since the meaning of a city is expressed in the way in which persons relate to it as well as in the city's manifest functions. Thus analysis of the meaning of a city can involve determination of citizen perceptions of the city, an analysis of implicit citizen criteria for evaluating "goodness of life" in their city, analyses of the ecosystem of the city as well as the larger ecosystem within which the city is a unit, empirically developed typologies of cities or other analyses.

Some, but not all of the above questions are being investigated by researchers in the Micro-City Project in approximately 14 studies.

Research Projects

On-going research projects at the Project Center focus primarily on the present, social, economic, and governmental characteristics of the micro-cities under study. One project, however, is attempting to create a "model" useful in forecasting future population trends of smaller cities while another is planning to examine historical attributes of such cities. On-going research and the chief researchers associated with current projects include:

ROBERT OLESEN of the sociology faculty at St. Cloud State College is directing a research inventory of city governments. This will attempt to compile a record of physical and financial assets of 112 Minnesota cities, projected demands for services and personnel, and ad-

ministrative responses to perceived needs. These characteristics will be compared and analyzed in relation to other variables such as the attributes of the city officials.

RICHARD DEVINE of St. John's is directing a survey of attitudes of citizens toward their cities in cooperation with Laurence Falk and Roger Spilde of Concordia College at Moorhead and James Cecil of Bemidji State College. This interview study is asking 300 respondents for their orientations toward the city, city government, and toward specific elements of the city. Additional questions concern citizen perceptions of the power structure, their communication behavior in regard to public issues, and their characteristic personality orientations.

An investigation of empirical differences between micro and macro-cities also is being conducted by Richard Devine. This study investigates differences and similarities between cities not only by size but also according to such attributes as city facilities, social and attitudinal characteristics of residents, and behavioral differences between residents of micro and macro-cities.

EDWARD HENRY is directing a series of case studies of St. Cloud to be the basis of the first book-length publication of the Project. The studies will concern the dynamics of policy-making in such issues as franchise fees for public utilities, problems in establishing and maintaining a sanitary land fill, social and legal difficulties in air pollution, and other problems facing city governments. These case studies will analyze the complex series of decisions leading to certain political outcomes and may assist in identifying significant factors in influencing social and political change in the medium-size city.

JOHN REDMOND, political scientist at St. John's, is investigating the community leadership stratum of St. Cloud. His research design involves a three-step sampling method in order to identify similarities or contrasts between different levels of the citizenry. The first step is based on interviews with a random sample of St. Cloud citizens, the same as used in Richard Devine's survey. The second stage will reach a selected panel of community "knowledgeables" who will be used as informants in order to identify the community "influentials" of the city. The final stage will involve direct interviewing of these influentials. Each group will be questioned concerning the respondent's perceptions of city problems, orientations toward public policy and community decision-making, and their personal socio-political values which help define the political culture of the city.

ROBERT WEBER of St. John's and James Cecil of Bemidji State, both political scientists, are investigating expenditure patterns in Minnesota micro-cities. Their analysis involves a comparison of Minnesota micro-cities with the intent of seeing whether the form of city government is related to city expenditure patterns. Methods of multiple regression and correlation, such as path analysis, are being used in an attempt to isolate critical and non-critical variables related to municipal spending patterns.

FRANZ PETERS, mathematician at St. John's, is testing the applicability of mathematical formulae to the

prediction of micro-city population change. Existent formula, developed primarily through studies of macro-cities such as Chicago, San Francisco, and New York, will be examined for their applicability to cities in 10,000 to 50,000 population range and refined when possible to render better predictions. Peters is concerned with the projection of population change, stemming from both natural growth and immigration, the impact of the city on its surrounding population area, and the prediction of the extent and source of commuting for employment in the city.

THOMAS TRISKO is conducting an analysis of city councilmen and mayors in all of the 12 Minnesota micro-cities in the project. Personal interviews were conducted during January 1969 by a team of four interviewers traveling to each city. Data collected center on the social and psychological characteristics of these office holders, including their motives for participation in civic and political activity, perceptions of their constituency, their social background and present occupational and avocational activities, and their policy orientations. This information will be related to other characteristics of the cities, especially policy outcomes and processes of decision-making.

Several other lesser exploratory studies also are under way in connection with the Micro-City Project. For example, statistics concerning inter-city telephone communication have been made available by the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company and are under analysis to indicate patterns of city interactions and dependencies. The electric companies of Minnesota have provided data concerning the rates of electricity usage in the cities they service. This information will allow a comparative analysis of Minnesota micro-cities; electricity usage rates may provide some measure of the relative "activeness" of the cities under examination.

In addition to the researches outlined above, Mankato

State College is also conducting research on the problem of micro-cities. With the aid of a grant of \$10,000 from St. John's Micro-City Project, Robert Barrett of Mankato State's political science department is co-ordinating three investigations entitled: (1) "The nature and sources of political leadership in micro-city"; (2) "The impact of colleges on micro-cities"; and (3) "Suburban sprawl in micro-cities."

Purposes and Programs Summarized

As the above description has indicated, the Micro-City Project research approaches are both "pure" and "applied," with the general aim of providing social scientific assistance to micro-cities. The Project also has established several sub-goals. The first is the gathering, systemization, and analysis of data on micro-city life.

A second goal of the Micro-City Project is the development of policy recommendations from the researches. Such recommendations should assist city officials and others to make more realistic and farsighted plans for social and political changes. The gathering of data will in itself help city officials, since planning as now practiced must often proceed without adequate factual knowledge. Policy recommendations can be wide-ranging and may involve suggestions for innovations, major revisions in current policies, or perhaps the maintenance or acceleration of current trends which appear generally beneficial for the city.

It is hoped that this and other investigations may lead to additional programs for the development of medium-size cities. If so, it may be possible to siphon off some of the pressure from the increasing clash of unequal interest groups, a sometimes heavily skewed distribution of power and resources, and the crowding of people and buildings which leads to a perceived decline in the quality of life in larger cities.