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## **BETWEEN CITY AND VILLAGE: THE SEARCH FOR SOCIAL IDENTITY AMONG AZERBAIJANI RURAL YOUTH AND IMPACT OF URBANIZATION**

**Summary:** In recent decades, the urbanization process has become a serious factor affecting not only the world, but also the social and cultural spheres of Azerbaijan, influencing its formation. Such changes are especially observed among young people. The article examines the search for social identity, the experience of familiarization and adaptation with urban culture of Azerbaijani youth from villages and regions in the urbanization process, the impact of these experiences on their value system and behavioral models. It also examines the adaptation difficulties of young people migration from villages and regions, the struggle between their “rural” and “urban” identities, and the problems of adapting to new social realities.

Based on the results, it was determined that the urbanization process is not only an economic, but also a socio-psychological process, directly affecting the formation of youth’s worldview, self-awareness and identity.

**Key words:** urbanization, rural youth, socialization, social identity, adaptation

In recent decades, the process of urbanization has become one of the main factors shaping the social and cultural landscape of modern Azerbaijan. The rapid development of cities such as Baku, Ganja, and Sumgayit has not only resulted in economic progress, but also created fundamental changes in people's mindsets, values, and social relationships. For young people moving from rural to urban areas, this process means not only a change of residence, but also a reshaping of their worldview, lifestyle, and sense of identity.

As in every other part of the world, rural youth in Azerbaijan often find themselves caught between the city and the countryside, uncertain about which direction to choose for their future. On the one hand, they are exposed to

traditional family and collective values, and on the other hand, they are exposed to the attractive, noisy, and bright urban culture built on individualism, modernity, and competition. This dual position becomes a complex process that shapes and changes their social identities. Thus, while some young people aspire to urban culture and want to be integrated, others are faced with negative feelings such as alienation, nostalgia, and loneliness.

The main goal of the study is to analyze how the urbanization process affects the cultural values, social relationships, and self-perceptions of rural youth. Like many other places in the world, Azerbaijan is also rapidly urbanizing. This, in turn, accelerates the flow of young people from regions and villages to cities.

Several sociological and psychological factors influence the rapid flow of young people living in regions and villages to megacities:

### **I. Social factors**

1.Limited educational opportunities: The lack of higher education institutions in rural and regional areas, their quality differences from those in urban areas, and the lack of absence of courses and development centers to support career choices drive young people to cities;

2.Economic factors and employment: When young people who have received higher education in urban areas return to rural and regional areas, they either have difficulty finding a job that matches their qualifications, or the salary offered to them is quite low (1). The hope of finding a high-paying, socially secure, and promising job drives young people to cities;

3.Developed infrastructure and better opportunities: Considering the characteristics of the youth period, it should be noted that better developed infrastructure, culture and entertainment sector, developed healthcare and transportation opportunities directly affect the quality of life of young people and direct them to live in the city.

4.Opportunities for advancement: Since all businesses centers are concentrated in cities, there are more opportunities for advancement here. Since such opportunities are few in villages and regions, young people turn to cities;

5.Desire to gain social status: There are more opportunities for social advancement in cities. The desire to get acquainted with new cultures, live a more active life, and communicate with different social classes draws young people to cities;

6.The influence of mass media: Urban life is idealized through social media and various social networks. Thus, in turn, it affects the social expectations of young people, making them inclined to urbanization.

7.Changing work priorities: Modern youth do not see earning a living and gaining social status through physical labor in the agriculture sector as a realistic prospect. They are not interested in activities that require physical labor and provide long-term results, preferring the comfortable and dynamic opportunities provided by the urban environment. This trend is among the main factors determining the orientation of young people to the city.

## **II. Psychological factors**

1.The need for self-realization of young people: Since cities and megacities provide young people with greater opportunities for self-realization, young people who want to develop their skills and feel the need for self-realization turn to cities.

2.Desire for freedom: Since the control mechanisms of family and society are stronger in villages and regions, young people turn to cities with a desire for personal freedom and independent life.

3.Search for identity: Forming their own personal identity, searching for their identity is one of the priorities of young people. Cities have ideal opportunities for such searches (2).

4.Social comparison and claims: Since young people living in cities are always considered more ‘modern and successful’, and since there is a comparison between “rural” and “urban”, rural and regional youth also want to win this comparison and get rid of the expressions “villager, rural, country person”, which are sometimes used as a derogatory term, and for this purpose they move to more modern and developed cities..

Such factors further increase the urbanization tendencies of rural and regional youth. These tendencies, in turn, pose several problems for them.

But moving from rural to urban areas is not easy. The first months are often filled with psychological stress, loneliness, and a sense of “not belonging”. Being away from a familiar support system, expensive rent, crowded transportation, school or work, and learning new unwritten rules can be exhausting. Dialect bias, subtle status differences, and sometimes discrimination can undermine self-confidence. Cultural misunderstandings about time, formal behavior, or gender can also create tension, even when intentions are good.

Rural youth are often caught “between the city and the countryside,” exposed to traditional community, family, and collective values on the one hand, and urban culture built on individualism, competition and modernity on the other (3). This dual position creates a complex process that combines elements of both continuity and change in the formation of their social identities. While some youth strive to integrate into urban culture and acquire new social roles, others face feelings of alienation, nostalgia, or marginalization.

Young people who move from their native villages to larger cities such as Baku, Sumgayit or Ganja are confronted with cultural norms, communication styles and lifestyles and cultural contexts. The country’s urbanized youth face challenges such as adaptation, socialization, social isolation and identity confusion (4). While cities offer opportunities for creativity, education and self-discovery, they also expose young migrants to class discrimination, competition and pressure to conform to urban norms. Both losses and gains are reflected in the changing identities of these young people: the acquisition of new, modern and individual civic identities and the loss of long-term community ties. In this sense, urbanization in Azerbaijan is not only a demographic and economic phenomenon, but also a profound human process that affects the self-awareness of young people and their position in a rapidly changing society (3).

In addition, the violation of the sense of belonging is one of the problems encountered. According to H. Tajfel and J. Turner’s “Social Identity Theory”, a person’s identity is determined by their relationship with certain social groups such as family, community, ethnicity and traditions. For young people living in rural areas of Azerbaijan, these group affiliations are deeply rooted and give them a sense of security and belonging. However, when people move to cities, these relationships are disrupted, and young people are faced with new expectations and cultural norms. (Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). *An integrative theory of intergroup conflict*. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.). *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole) City life usually favors individualism, competition and modernity, which is completely different from their acquired values of collectivism and traditionalism (4).

Young people who adopt urban norms and rules are trying to form a hybrid identity by mixing their rural knowledge and urban experiences. A few steps should be taken to solve the problem.

Universities and training centers can offer tailored orientation programs for newcomers, mentoring and alumni networks with students from similar regions, culturally sensitive psychological services, and career counselling that explains the job market in the city. Employers can provide a clear onboarding process, inclusive communication guidelines, and anti-bias training, and value bilingualism and rural labor as advantages. Municipalities can invest in affordable housing for students and young workers, safe and accessible public spaces, as well as cultural centers that combine regional heritage and contemporary art. Community organizations and youth clubs can organize affordable social activities, reduce loneliness and build new bridges. Digital platforms can be used for online communities for verified information, mentoring and problem solving, reducing the negative impact of narrow groups that only share the same ideas (6).

It is also important to see the different experiences within the group. Young women may face greater control and restrictions on movement. Young men may feel pressured to enter fast paced but unstable job. First generation students in their families may need guidance on academic and professional norms. Policies that address these intersecting challenges – scholarships, safe transportation, flexible work – study opportunities, and targeted mentoring – can transform this difficult transition into a powerful tool for inclusion, social trust, and national development (7).

In addition to psychological difficulties, systematic barriers such as lack of housing, limited access to quality education, and precarious employment are also widespread for migrants from rural areas. These challenges affect not only their financial situation, but also their sense of self-esteem and sense of belonging to society. For many young people, adapting to urban life requires learning new social skills, adapting to different cultural norms, and adapting to fast paced daily routines. Some build networks, gain self – confidence, and successfully integrate by joining youth organizations, participating in volunteer programs, or being active in educational institutions. But others remain caught between two worlds: neither fully urban nor fully rural, living on the fringes of urban society. Against the backdrop of rapid urbanization in Azerbaijan, this psychological and social duality highlights the need for inclusive policies and strong community support networks that address both the material and emotional needs of young migrants.

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**Vəfa Dadaşova Vüqar qızı**

### **Şəhər və kənd arasında: Azərbaycanda kənd gəncləri arasında sosial kimlik axtarışı və urbanizasiyanın təsiri**

**Xülasə:** Son onilliklərdə urbanizasiya prosesi təkcə dünyada deyil, Azərbaycanın sosial-mədəni sahəsinə də təsir edən, onun formalaşmasına təsir göstərən ciddi amilə çevrilmişdir. Belə dəyişikliklər xüsusilə gənclər arasında müşahidə olunur. Məqalədə urbanizasiya prosesində kənd və rayonlardan olan Azərbaycan gənclərinin sosial kimlik axtarışları, şəhər mədəniyyəti ilə tanışlıq və uyğunlaşma təcrübəsi, bu təcrübələrin onların dəyər sisteminə və davranış modellərinə təsiri araşdırılır. Məqalədə həmçinin kəndlərdən və rayonlardan miqrasiya edən gənclərin uyğunlaşma çətinlikləri, onların “kənd” və “şəhər” kimlikləri arasındakı mübarizə, yeni sosial reallıqlara uyğunlaşma problemləri araşdırılır.

Nəticələr əsasında müəyyən edilmişdir ki, urbanizasiya prosesi təkcə iqtisadi deyil, həm də gənclərin dünyagörüşünün, özünüdərkinin və şəxsiyyətinin formalaşmasına birbaşa təsir edən sosial-psixoloji prosesdir.

**Açar sözlər:** urbanizasiya, kənd gəncliyi, sosiallaşma, sosial kimlik, uyğunlaşma

**Вафа Дадашева Вугар гызы**

### **Между городом и деревней: поиск социальной идентичности среди азербайджанской сельской молодежи и влияние урбанизации**

**Резюме:** В последние десятилетия процесс урбанизации стал серьёзным фактором, влияющим не только на мир, но и на социокультурную сферу Азербайджана, влияя на её формирование. Особенно ярко эти изменения проявляются в молодёжной среде. В статье исследуются вопросы поиска социальной идентичности, опыт приобщения к городской культуре и адаптации к ней азербайджанской молодёжи из сёл и регионов в процессе урбанизации, влияние этого опыта на их систему ценностей и поведенческие модели. Также рассматриваются трудности адаптации молодёжи, мигрирующей из сёл и регионов, борьба «сельской» и «городской» идентичностей, проблемы адаптации к новым социальным реалиям. В результате исследования установлено, что процесс урбанизации является не только экономическим, но и социально-психологическим процессом и напрямую влияет на формирование мировоззрения, самосознания и идентичности молодёжи.

**Ключевые слова:** Урбанизация, сельская молодёжь, социализация, социальная идентичность, адаптация

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