

QUARTERLY
THE NORRISTOWN STUDY

Goldstein, Sidney: *THE NORRISTOWN STUDY: AN EXPERIMENT IN INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH TRAINING*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961, 361 pp.

AS is indicated by its subtitle, this book is a report on an experiment in interdisciplinary training. The combination of the main title and the subtitle encompass the two-fold purpose of the research project. The goals were interdisciplinary training of graduate students of the University of Pennsylvania and the actual study of the relation of social adjustment to technical change in an American community.

The project was organized as an interdepartmental seminar on "Technological Change and Social Adjustment," sponsored by the university's departments of history and sociology. The members were students of history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, American civilization, law and marketing. The organization and theme were chosen because it was felt that effective training could be accomplished only by a large and diverse research project in which staff, experienced personnel and students would be able to work constantly together. Only by close association and common interests would they be able to learn the various research methods used by the different social sciences.

The author states that the two major objectives of the seminar were:

- (1) . . . the better understanding of continuous processes of readjustment by which individuals and groups accommodate to material (technological) change, and (2) the search for trends and differentials in adjustment that have meaning for general behavior study or for the understanding of overall social change. (p. 2)

Toward these ends, the seminar undertook to study the changes and adjustments which had taken place in the borough

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of Norristown, Pennsylvania from 1900 to 1950. Norristown was chosen because it was accessible; stable; a central community with its own hinterland; populated mainly by "old Americans" but had its share of migrants of different nationalities, religions and races. Furthermore, records were available which provided superior statistical, historical and ethnographical material, and the citizens seemed to be cooperative.

The author explains that the students were allowed to pick their own subjects so long as they fell well within the broad category of technical change and social adjustment. There was, therefore, no set pattern for research. However, certain necessary basic data were available from past and current records. After these basic materials were gathered, and after the prospective study was publicized and explained in Norristown itself, a random sample of households was chosen for a comprehensive survey. In appendices to the book the author provides complete copies of the questionnaire and publicity materials used in the survey. The researchers found that the local people were very cooperative and were willing to help in any way they could. An historical series of fairly comprehensive city directories, as well as school, birth, death and marriage records were made available to the researchers. The householders were generally quite cooperative when the students and professional staff asked them for personal interviews.

The various types of studies included in the project give some idea of the scope and freedom which it permitted. There were studies on population, economic structure, individual workers, acculturation, and communication. The studies cover aspects of all the social sciences, and the fifty year time factor gives some historical depth to each one.

Most of Norristown's growth occurred before the turn of the century and continued through the 1920's. However, the relative stability of population size from 1930-1950 does not mean that there was no change during those twenty years. There were large in- and out-migration rates which balanced each other. In fact, it was shown that most of the people who moved in were those who moved out, which left Norristown with about a two-thirds stable and continuous population.

Fertility ratios dropped during the period, but those segments of the population which had relatively high ratios in earlier years were characterized by the same relatively high ratios in the later years.

During the time migration decreased, occupational mobility was increasing. This suggests that instead of new people taking new types of jobs, the original labor force was changing its skills to handle the new situation. Another factor which affected the labor force was improved methods of transportation. The worker in Norristown was now willing to travel further to and from his job. Therefore, he would maintain a residence in Norristown even though his place of employment might move to the outlying area.

The economic structure of Norristown was affected most by the disappearance of various industries. The problems of unemployment and technical changes within plants brought further problems of labor-management relations.

In analyzing the social and ethnic structure of Norristown, the author points out that the various older minorities had become integrated into the larger community. Nonetheless, distinct groups persist. Members of both majority and minority groups felt that distinctiveness has some positive value.

The author acknowledges that the study has not been thorough. There are large gaps in the areas of social structure, relations to other communities, and to suburban areas. The analysis of adjustments to technical change by both industry and workers has not been completed. However, future studies will be facilitated because the data which have been collected for 1950 afford an excellent base.

The author concludes his book with the following appraisal:

The research project has been and probably will continue to be of highest value in itself, but it is also essential to the interdisciplinary program for training students. Experience indicates that students coming in contact with new methods and concepts learn them best by using them for practical purposes. The intellectual interests necessary for rapid assimilation of two or three new disciplines can be stimulated by a research project that is

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interesting and important to all involved. For this reason the value of the project and the value of the seminar for interdisciplinary training are closely allied. (p. 313)

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INDIA'S URBAN FUTURE

Turner Roy (Ed.): *INDIA'S URBAN FUTURE*. Selected Studies from an International Conference, sponsored by Kingsley Davis, Richard L. Park, and Catherine B. Wurster. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1962, 470 pp.

URBANIZATION in the newly developing densely populated countries poses a challenge to the policy makers and planners. The process of urbanization is stimulated by and in turn advances economic development, but has not received the discrete recognition it deserved in the national plans so far. The international conference, or rather the U.S.-India seminar organised through Ford Foundation support at California in July, 1960, on which the present volume reports, was thus timely. The purpose of the seminar was to get the social scientists, the planners and policy makers together, and try to move to some consensus regarding the nature of the processes at work, the probable outcome of the current trends, and their implications. Though India was chosen for the case study and much of the deliberations are specific to Indian conditions, the formulation of the problem, the alternative forms of urbanization visualized and the operational priorities discussed, will find application to most developing countries at the threshold of industrialization.

The volume contains 23 selected papers contributed for the seminar (including the editor's post script), a preface from