



THE STUDY OF SOME METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES OF MODERN CITIES

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Abstract

Based on a variety of literature, the article analyzes issues related to some methodological approaches to the study of the socio-economic life of modern cities. In particular, the author on this issue gives a special place to the interdisciplinary approach.

Keywords: city, methodology, interdisciplinary approach, classification, typology, geo-urban studies, urban settlements, economic regionalization.

In Uzbekistan, the current stage of historical science increasingly demands the use of interdisciplinary methods. This is especially relevant across all aspects of modern and contemporary history. On one hand, the interdisciplinary method facilitates the comprehensive exploration of previously unexplored facets and less-known aspects of modern history; on the other hand, it enables the study of Uzbekistan's history in harmony with global and regional developments.

From the second half of the 19th century to the early 21st century, research focused on the socio-economic processes—including the history of cities—necessitates, above all, an integrated approach combining multiple disciplines (such as history, economics, sociology, political science, geography, demography, and others). This period in human history is recognized as the zenith of industrial society, while in developed countries the transition to post-industrial society began in the second half of the 20th century. In contrast, in Uzbekistan, which belongs to the group of developing countries, the shift to an industrial society began later. Taking this into account, there is now an opportunity to deeply and comprehensively analyze the



historical processes of that period, including the socio-economic transformations that occurred in the cities of the republic.

One of the most pressing issues requiring an interdisciplinary approach is the history of cities—especially the formation and development of industrial cities. The literature reveals that this subject has primarily been studied by geographers, economists, and historians.

It is important to note that many scholarly works by historians on urban topics have not treated industrial cities as a separate object of study. Additionally, many of these works reflect a narrative approach and lack analysis based on a combination of disciplinary perspectives. Researchers have generally approached urban history holistically, focusing on empirical generalizations and historical facts. These studies mostly present positive experiences collected over short historical periods [4]. In this regard, it is clear that many of these works do not meet the modern requirements of academic inquiry.

Considering the above, and based on the goals, objectives, and subject matter of our research, it is essential to examine several theoretical aspects related to methodological approaches.

In the system of modern sciences, economic and social geography—and the geo-urban studies derived from them—play a vital role in studying population dynamics, settlements, and, in particular, cities. Therefore, theoretical concepts and views developed within this discipline serve as the methodological foundation of this research.

Scientific literature and studies offer various interpretations of the concept of “city,” and despite the widespread presence of cities and the ubiquity of the term “city,” there is still no universally accepted definition or criterion that accurately defines it. Taking this into account, we consider the definition provided in the glossary “Socio-Economic Geography: Concepts and Terms” compiled by geographers and economists, based on modern requirements, to be optimal. It defines a city as a settlement that is classified as such by national legislation and possesses legal urban status [5. Gorkin 2013: 73].

Typically, cities (in contrast to rural settlements) are distinguished by their high and dense population, employment in non-agricultural sectors, the type of residential



buildings (usually multi-story), and urban lifestyle. A commonly accepted criterion is population size, with the minimum threshold generally ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 people [5. Gorkin 2013: 73].

In the study of urban topics, one of the fundamental methods of inquiry—especially within the social and human sciences and geography—is comparative analysis. This method plays a crucial role due to the limited application of experimental methods in these disciplines. Considering this, in studying the history of cities in the Zarafshan economic region during the independence period, we aimed to compare regional indicators with other regions of the country, and where relevant, with international experiences.

One widely used method in geo-urban studies is typological analysis. Typology is a method of studying complex objects by identifying their key characteristics. Typology is particularly important in studying cities, as it helps determine the position of a particular city among others. In short, the "city type" is a highly compact classification formula. This is because a city, as an object, is a synthesis of common and individual features [3. Lappo 1997: 39–40].

Classification is considered the precursor or initial stage of typology. While city classification considers only one criterion (e.g., population size), typology uses a combination of multiple criteria to categorize cities by type. In this sense, typology is a higher-order form of classification [3. Lappo 1997: 40–41].

Several types of city typologies have been developed and applied in geo-urban studies. It is important to note that urban typologies were developed primarily from the standpoint of economic rather than social geography, which is particularly relevant to our research. These include: genetic typology; functional typology with several subtypes; and synthetic (integrated) functional typology. Among these, functional typology based on economic-geographic location (EGL)—closely aligned with the regional focus of our research—served as a methodological guide in analyzing the cities of the Zarafshan economic region.

In this regard, the fundamental research project "History of the Cities of Uzbekistan: Traditions, Urbanization, and Transformation Processes (From Antiquity to the Present)," conducted under the leadership of Prof. D.Kh. Ziyayeva at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, is noteworthy. The monograph



published as a result of this research explores urban history and examines several methodological approaches from the discipline of geography.

In particular, in studying the history of ancient cities, the concept of "urban genetics"—the origin and developmental history of cities—is considered of utmost importance. Regarding functional typology, the monograph highlights that the emergence of the first cities in the territory of Uzbekistan was historically shaped by the division of labor, natural and geographic conditions, and economic factors. In contemporary times, factors such as natural resources, territorial labor distribution, logistics and transport systems, and industrial development play a key role in defining cities' functional typologies [9. Ziyayeva 2017: 6–7].

Modern cities, depending on their functional roles, are divided into multifunctional political-administrative centers (regional centers and capital cities), large multi-sector industrial centers, cities specialized in one or several industrial sectors, transport and logistics centers; agro-industrial cities, recreational cities, scientific centers, and university towns [9. Ziyayeva 2017: 7].

In general, the classification of cities is one of the important methods of the science of economic geography, and it implies the classification of cities based on a particular feature or a combination of features. The most commonly used classifications of urban settlements are the following: by size (population number and density); by function; by participation in the territorial division of labor; by origin; and finally, by economic-geographic location [2. Internet source].

It can be observed that in various countries of the world, different criteria have been adopted for city status based on quantitative indicators of population size. For example, the lowest indicator is found in the state of Uganda—where settlements with more than 100 people are granted city status (along with the requirement that it serve as an administrative or commercial center). Similar situations are observed in countries with sparsely populated territories (in Greenland and Iceland, settlements with more than 200 people are granted city status). Japan can be cited as the country with the highest threshold. According to the legislation of this country, the population must exceed 50,000, and at the same time, 60% of the population (based on households) must be employed in non-agricultural sectors [5. Gorkin 2013: 73].



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In the national legislative system as well, a quantitative criterion for population size has been adopted. At present, the regulatory documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan in this regard are undergoing an evolutionary process. In particular, Article 2 “Basic Concepts” of the “Urban Planning Code” adopted in 2002 did not provide an explanation of the concept of a city [7. Internet source], whereas in the new draft version of the “Urban Planning Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan,” under discussion since June 2019, this gap is being addressed. It proposes the following version:

“City – ... a structural part of the administrative-territorial structure of the Republic of Uzbekistan, characterized by a dense concentration of residential buildings, social, production, transport, engineering, and other buildings and structures, as well as having specific economic, historical, scientific, and cultural significance, where the majority of the population is employed in industrial enterprises, government administrative bodies, general secondary and higher education, science and culture, financial and banking institutions, and where the population exceeds ten thousand people” [8. Internet source].

Importantly, the current Code also does not explain the concept of “urban-type settlement.” In fact, on March 13, 2009, Resolution No. 68 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Additional Measures to Improve the Administrative-Territorial Structure of Settlements in the Republic of Uzbekistan” was adopted [1. Internet source]. According to this resolution, the number of urban-type settlements in the republic increased several times, and 965 large rural settlements were granted the status of urban-type settlements.

This issue is also planned to be resolved in the new draft of the revised Law. According to it, an urban-type settlement is defined as follows: “A structural part of the administrative-territorial structure of the Republic of Uzbekistan, whose name, status, and boundaries are defined by the legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, characterized by the presence of residential buildings, social, production, transport, educational, engineering, and other buildings and structures, as well as having specific industrial or scientific importance, where the majority of the population is employed in industrial enterprises, scientific and government institutions, and where the population exceeds two thousand people



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(urban-type settlements that serve as administrative centers of districts or are proportionally related to the main field of employment of the population: industrial, resort, scientific, railway economy, fishing, mining, field house settlements).”

Article 9 of the Urban Planning Code outlines the principles for the classification of settlements in the republic, including the following quantitative hierarchy for cities and urban-type settlements [1]:

The largest settlement – with a population of more than 1 million people;

Large settlement – from 250,000 to 1 million people;

Medium-large settlement – from 100,000 to 250,000 people;

Medium settlement – from 50,000 to 100,000 people;

Small settlement – up to 50,000 people.

Indeed, in the practice of many countries, particularly in the classification of cities, the second category of settlements is defined as those with a population ranging from 500,000 to 1 million. In Uzbekistan, however, due to specific conditions, there are almost no cities with a population of 500,000 or more (with the exception that in the near future, Samarkand and Namangan are expected to join the list of such cities). This situation gives rise to a range of issues related to the limited ability to modernize territories and attract labor migration.

In the language of specialists, Uzbekistan is considered a country that possesses one large megapolis and many small towns, without any major cities with a population exceeding 500,000 [6. Urbanization: 16]. The Zarafshan economic region is no exception to this trend.

Another significant proposed change to the national legislative framework concerning urban planning is the classification of urban-type settlements. In the aforementioned draft law, the proposed changes define the following categories for urban-type settlements based on population size [8. Internet source]:

Large settlement – with a population exceeding 7,000 people;

Medium-large settlement – from 5,000 to 7,000 people;

Medium settlement – from 3,000 to 5,000 people;

Small settlement – from 2,000 to 3,000 people.

Thus, it can be said that modern historical research is increasingly integrating interdisciplinary research methods. This innovative approach envisions the broad



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mutual utilization of the practical results of the humanities, social sciences, as well as natural and exact sciences. From this perspective, the study of urban history particularly benefits from the application of achievements in the field of geography, along with economic sciences and methodological approaches, thereby deepening the scientific outcomes of the research. Importantly, this method not only provides a depiction of the past and the present, but also offers the opportunity to forecast the future on a scientifically grounded and accurately calculated basis.

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