

What is modernization? – Attempts at a definition

I. Chris Barker's definition of modernity [*dt. Moderne*]

Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: theories and practice* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 444.

“Modernity typically refers to a post-traditional, post-medieval historical period, one marked by the move from feudalism (or agrarianism) toward capitalism, industrialization, secularization, rationalization, the nation-state and its constituent institutions and forms of surveillance (Chris Barker 2005, 444).” (See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernity>)

post- (Latin prefix)	nach-	constituent (n.)	Teil, Bestandteil
toward (prep.)	American form of 'towards'	constituent (adj.)	einen Teil bildend

II. The definition of modernization by Krishan Kumar

Krishan Kumar, *Encyclopædia Britannica* (2009 Ultimate Reference Suite), s.v. 'modernization'.

“*Modernization*: in sociology, the transformation from a traditional, rural, agrarian society to a secular, urban, industrial society.

Modern society is industrial society. To modernize a society is, first of all, to industrialize it. Historically, the rise of modern society has been inextricably linked with the emergence of industrial society. All the features that are associated with modernity can be shown to be related to the set of changes that, no more than two centuries ago, brought into being the industrial type of society. This suggests that the terms industrialism and industrial society imply far more than the economic and technological components that make up their core. Industrialism is a way of life that encompasses profound economic, social, political, and cultural changes. It is by undergoing the comprehensive transformation of industrialization that societies become modern.

Modernization is a continuous and open-ended process. Historically, the span of time over which it has occurred must be measured in centuries, although there are examples of accelerated modernization. In either case, modernization is not a once-and-for-all-time achievement. There seems to be a dynamic principle built into the very fabric of modern societies that does not allow them to settle, or to achieve equilibrium. Their development is always irregular and uneven. Whatever the level of development, there are always “backward” regions and “peripheral” groups. This is a persistent source of strain and conflict in modern societies. Such a condition is not confined to the internal development of individual states. It can be seen on a global scale, as modernization extends outward from its original Western base to take in the whole world. The existence of unevenly and unequally developed nations introduces a fundamental element of instability into the world system of states. Modernization seems to have two main phases. Up to a certain point in its course, it carries the institutions and values of society along with it, in what is generally regarded as a progressive, upward movement. Initial resistance to modernization may be sharp and prolonged, but it is generally doomed to failure. Beyond some point, however, modernization begins to breed discontent on an increasing scale. This is due in part to rising expectations provoked by the early successes and dynamism of modern society. Groups tend to make escalating demands on the community, and these demands become increasingly difficult to meet. More seriously, modernization on an intensified level and on a world scale brings new social and material strains that may threaten the very growth and expansion on which modern society is founded. In this second phase, modern societies find themselves faced with an array of new problems whose solutions often seem beyond the competence of the traditional nation-state. At the same time, the world remains dominated by a system of just such sovereign nation-states of unequal strengths and conflicting interests.

Yet challenge and response are the essence of modern society. In considering its nature and development, what stands out initially at least is not so much the difficulties and dangers as the extraordinary success with which modern society has mastered the most profound and far-reaching revolution in human history.

This article discusses the processes of modernization and industrialization from a very general and primarily sociological point of view. It does so also, it should be remembered, from a position within the very processes it describes. The phenomena of industrialization and modernization that are taken to have begun some two centuries ago and that were not until much later identified as distinct and novel concepts have not yet arrived at any recognizable closure. The end of the story, if there is one, is thus not in sight, and the question of an ultimate judgment on the nature and value of this vast historical movement is unanswerable. [...]"

inextricably (adv.)	<i>unausweichlich</i>	persistent (adj.)	<i>anhaltend</i>
imply (v.)	<i>implizieren, beinhalten, voraussetzen</i>	strain (n.)	<i>Anstrengung, Belastung</i>
core (n.)	<i>Herzstück</i>	breed (n.)	<i>ausbrüten, hervorbringen</i>
encompass (v.)	<i>umfassen, umschließen</i>	discontent	<i>Unzufriedenheit</i>
comprehensive (adj.)	<i>umfassend, umfangreich, gesamt-</i>	array (n.)	<i>Feld, Anordnung, Anzahl</i>
fabric (n.)	<i>Struktur, Gewebe</i>	distinct (adj.)	<i>deutlich, eindeutig, klar ausgeprägt</i>
equilibrium (n.)	<i>Gleichgewicht</i>	novel (adj.)	<i>neuartig</i>
peripheral (adj.)	<i>peripher, dezentral, am Rande liegend</i>	closure (n.)	<i>hier: Ende, Abschluss</i>

III. Arthur G. Neal's definition of modernization

Arthur G. Neal, *Sociological Perspectives on Modernity: multiple models and competing realities* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 4-5.

"The past 200 years have witnessed remarkable developments in human affairs. Never before in human history had so much happened in such a short period of time. [... But] [b]oth the prospects and the limitations of the human condition are evident in the modernization process. The effects of modernization reach into all sectors of society. The political system, the economy, the family, the forms of entertainment, and all other basic institutions are affected. While the sophisticated forms of transportation and communication are the facilitating forces, the secular values and motives of the marketplace produce the momentum. The many phases and aspects of modernity frequently seem to be confusing, chaotic, and lacking in an identifiable source of unity.

There were several major developments that played primary historical roles in moving the world into the modern age. The first of these was the unfolding of the age of enlightenment in Western Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. The age of enlightenment was one in which intellectual discourse was directed toward new and innovative prospects for the human condition. Primary emphasis was placed on the use of reason and rationality for deriving new and valid knowledge to improve the quality of life for both individuals and social systems (W.W.H. Lecky, 1955).

It was the factory system that played a primary role in the Industrial Revolution and provided the basic model for the development of modern economic systems. The new employment opportunities provided by factories led to a widespread movement from rural areas to new industrial towns and urban centers. In this new environment materialistic values became prominently emphasized. Under the profit motive, a premium was placed on inventions and the elaboration of new forms of technology. The forces set in motion had dramatic effects on incentives for investments, the production process, the quality of work

experiences, the availability of goods and services, the diversity of occupations, the social class structure, and virtually all other aspects of social life.

Modernization may be regarded as a permanent revolution without a single goal or direction. As an on-going historical process, modernization represents a continuous departure from the past and an emphasis on change and development. The endless quest for higher levels of efficiency in goal attainment places a premium on innovation. The underlying assumption holds that in specific areas of social life and in the performance of specific tasks, the future potentially offers an improvement over anything that existed previously. Through an emphasis on modernization as a process, the concept of “development” is not limited to the aspiration of third-world countries. Instead, all countries of the world are caught up in the process of development. For example, there is nothing in modern perceptions that resembles the notion from ancient China that their society was fully mature, and that the borders of China constituted the boundaries of the moral universe (C. Wright Mills, 1963). None of the industrialized countries of the world regard their society as fully mature and developed. As a result, each generation assumes the responsibility of taking the social heritage from the past and working to improve it.”

prospect (n.)	<i>Ausblick, Perspektive</i>	premium (n.)	<i>Bonus, provision</i>
sector (n.)	<i>(Teil-) Bereich</i>	incentive (n.)	<i>Anreiz</i>
sophisticated (adj.)	<i>hochentwickelt, verfeinert, anspruchsvoll</i>	investment (n.)	<i>Geldanlage, Investition</i>
momentum (n.)	<i>Schwung, Impuls, Impetus</i>	assumption (n.)	<i>Annahme</i>
reason (n.)	<i>Vernunft</i>	aspiration (n.)	<i>Hoffnung, Sehnsucht, Streben</i>
rationality (n.)	<i>Rationalität, Vernunft, Vernünftigkeit</i>	perception (n.)	<i>Wahrnehmung</i>

IV. Modernization according to Alberto Martinelli

Alberto Martinelli, *Global Modernization: rethinking the project of modernity* (London: Sage, 2005), pp. 5-9.

By modernization we mean the sum of the processes of large-scale change through which a certain society tends to acquire the economic, political, social and cultural characteristics considered typical of modernity.

The concept of modernization implies, therefore, the concept of modernity in the meaning it acquired in the eighteenth century, even though its origins go back many centuries. The late Latin *modernus* derives from *modo*, which means ‘now, recently’, and dates back to the end of the fifth century AD. It was used in an antinomic sense compared to *antiquus*, particularly by St Augustine to contrast the new Christian era with pagan antiquity. More generally, it was used as a means of describing and legitimizing new institutions, new legal rules, or new scholarly assumptions. Thus, from its very inception, the term modern has been carrying some normative implications, insofar as it implied a depreciation of the old and traditional. [...] With the Enlightenment the fundamental identification of the modern with the *here and now* is established, and from then on *modern society is our society*, the society in which we live, whether we are citizens of the late eighteenth century or citizens of the early twenty-first century. [...] Since then and after the American and French Revolutions, the modern world was considered a world open to the future, and the term modern carried the normative implication of a depreciation of the old or traditional. [...] If the French Revolution gave modernity its form and characteristic conscience based on reason, the Industrial revolution gave it its material substance. [...] And since Western societies show the greatest differences and contrasts with preceding societies in economic and social organization, political relations and cultural features, they become the symbol of modernity. Modernization tends to identify itself with Westernization, in the sense that Western society becomes world civilization (...). Modernity also comes to signify, as [Jürgen] Habermas

argues (1985), the establishment of rights and freedoms. The modern project is a universalizing project of emancipation and, at the same time paradoxically, a legitimating ideology for the expansion of the first modern Western societies. [...] Modernization is the specific sum of the large-scale social, economic, political and cultural changes that have characterized world history in the past 200 years and that originate from the multi-faceted revolution (economic, social, political, cultural) of the second half of the eighteenth century. It is a process that tends to be global in two senses: it affects all aspects of the involved societies, and it progressively extends to the rest of the world from its birthplace in Western Europe. [...] The concept of modernization establishes itself in the social sciences in the decades after the Second World War (taking the place of concepts of industrialization and capitalist development) in order to interpret, in a coherent and broad way, at first the common processes and then increasingly also the varying responses of different developing countries to the challenges of the global economy. The study of the formation of modern society is a sociological topic par excellence, from the moment that the fathers of social science, from de Tocqueville to Marx, [Max] Weber to [Émile] Durkheim, from [Vilfredo] Pareto to [Georg] Simmel, focused their attention on analyzing the modern break and the contradictions and problems that spring from it. [...] [Modernization] does not signify any type of change, evolution or social progress (such as the invention of the wheel or the compass) but it defines the combination of social, economic, political and cultural large-scale changes that have characterized the past 200 years and that are by now taking over the entire world. Such changes originate from the two-fold revolution of the second half of the eighteenth century: the political-cultural revolution in its French and American versions and the economic-social revolution in its double aspect of the systematic introduction of industry and the development of the world market. It has to do with a set of changes that were made over a period of many centuries (according to some scholars, starting from the proto-capitalist system of bankers in the twelfth century, according to others, from the great maritime explorers of the fifteenth century, and according to still others, from the great scientific discoveries of the seventeenth century) and that culminated in the revolutionary eighteenth-century processes. The progressive formation of modern democracies (through the demand for natural rights and popular sovereignty) and of a world market (through intensifying long-distance commerce and European expansion in other continents) is a centuries-old process that precedes the technological and industrial revolution. [...] Common directions of modernization are those toward innovation and unceasing change through the processes of creative destruction, the growing structural differentiation of society (economic production and distribution that separate from family and community, politics separating from religion), and the formation of sovereign nation-states. [...]

imply (v.)	<i>implizieren, beinhalten, voraussetzen</i>	signify (v.)	<i>bedeuten</i>
antinomic (adj.)	<i>gegensätzlich</i>	originate (v.) (from)	<i>stamen (von)</i>
scholar (n.); scholarly (adj.)	<i>Gelehrter (Geisteswissenschaftler); gelehrt</i>	multi-faceted (adj.)	<i>facettenreich, vielfältig</i>
assumption (n.)	<i>Annahme</i>	coherent (adj.)	<i>zusammenhängend</i>
inception (n.)	<i>Anfang, Beginn</i>	par excellence (French)	<i>modellhaft</i>
normative (adj.)	<i>normative, setzend, 'gesetzgebend'</i>	proto- (Greek prefix)	<i>first, earliest</i>
depreciation (n.)	<i>Abwertung</i>	culminate (v.) (in)	<i>gipfeln (in)</i>

Task: Summarize these concepts of modernization and compare them.