Use of Theory to Explain an Aspect of St Augustine Florida

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# Abstract

This paper examines the issue of homelessness in the city of St. Augustine, Florida. The theoretical framework for this analysis is the Globalization Theory. This analysis is based on the view that there is a link between globalization and homelessness. The paper has found out that city planners at St. Augustine are enthusiastic about embracing the ideals of globalization, which do not necessarily translate into solutions into housing problems facing the city’s homeless population. The paper concludes that the globalization-inspired 2030 Comprehensive Plan benefits the private sector more than it does homeless people. The city’s strategic plan has little room for welfare programs such as low-cost housing programs, which would go a long way in dealing with the problem of homelessness. In conclusion, the case of St. Augustine, Florida demonstrates that there is a link between globalization and homelessness.

**Key words:** globalization, Globalization Theory, homelessness, homeless people, housing, market economy

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# Introduction

Today, the debate on globalization has attracted a lot of attention from sociologists. They are interested in examining how people’s social lives continue to change in efforts to adapt to globalization. At the outset, it is evident that globalization has brought about numerous advantages to the human society. However, it has also come to be associated with several problems, one of them being homelessness. The aim of this paper is to use Globalization Theory as a basis for an analysis of homelessness in St. Augustine, Florida. The objective of this analysis is to investigate whether there is a link between globalization and homelessness.

# Globalization Theory

The emergence of Globalization Theory is largely attributed to growing concerns regarding the dramatic transformations that are attributed to globalization. Globalization is the spread of consciousness, practices, relations, and organization of social life to different parts of the world. Proponents of this theory normally tend to be expressing reactions to the modernization theory (Fiss and Hirsch, 2005: 30). Globalization is a multidimensional concept that can be looked at from different perspectives. In the context of this paper, analysis is based on the sociological perspective. In other contexts, scholars might decide to adopt political, economic, or cultural perspectives. In the political perspective, emphasis is on the emergence of a single governance model. In the cultural perspective, researchers focus on the impact of cultural imperialism on globalization. From the economic perspective, focus is primarily on the dominance of the market economy. Nevertheless, in all these perspectives, researchers seek to determine whether globalization leads to homogeneity or heterogeneity of socio-cultural, economic, and political structures.

In sociology, investigations on Globalization Theory mostly focus on its human consequences. For example, globalization is seen to have an impact on mobility and social stratification. The current growth in globalization has led to a corresponding growth in mobility across geographical borders. Such mobility undoubtedly has repercussions on existing human relations in different parts of the world. The possibility of “space wars” as a result of this mobility constitutes an important area of inquiry for sociologists (Shamir, 2005: 203). It is important to examine who will win and who will lose when the world becomes fully globalized. The ability to move from one place to the other and to fit into the new environment is important in the context of globalization.

In the current world of globalization, people are sometimes said to live in time as opposed to space. People are able to “move” virtually from one part of the world to the other by using technology to do things that would in the past have necessitated a trip to a foreign country. For instance, through video conferencing, business executives are able to hold meetings with associates and partners in different parts of the world. In such contexts, time becomes more important than space as far as day-to-day activities are concerned.

At the same time, people are able to move freely from one country to another as tourists. This is because of the high level of interaction that creates an endless stream of information across geographic and demographic borders. Sociologists who view the challenge of globalization from the viewpoint of physical mobility reckon that it creates a burden of unending choices, being always on the move, as well as the dangers and risks associated with visits to unfamiliar territories. These problems are contributed to by the desire and attraction that is caused by the constant, minute-by-minute flow of information about different aspects of the world via contemporary information and communication technology infrastructure.

For vagabonds and homeless people, globalization has brought about a new challenge. In the context of globalization, the question of homelessness and increasing numbers of jobless people who are always on the move has gained prominence. The resulting impression is that globalization has a hand in influencing (perhaps in a negative manner) the way the less fortunate people in society lead their lives. In many cases, the impression of dwindling fortunes for jobless and homeless people arises from the air of uncertainty and uneasiness that comes with the fast-paced world of globalization. In Globalization Theory, a direct link between globalization and homelessness is assumed to exist (Hasegawa, 2005:992). According to Hasegawa (2005: 989), the level of homelessness in Japan has increased dramatically in recent times because of the globalization-related structural changes that were introduced during the 1980s. These changes were characterized by urban redevelopment, massive shift to the service economy at the expense of the manufacturing economy, and the government policy of privatization and deregulation (Hasegawa, 2005: 989). These changes have turned out to be hostile to the country’s low-income workforce, which has since continued to be excluded from employment, welfare, and housing.

# Homelessness in St. Augustine, Florida

St. Augustine is one of oldest cities in Florida and it is in St. Johns County. Like other urban areas in the United States and indeed the rest of the world, St. Augustine continues to grapple with the problem of homelessness (Randall, 2013: 19). Since the city is an integral part of the larger globalized society in the contemporary era, it is important to examine the extent to which the Globalization Theory can provide an explanation for the problem of homelessness.

Although St. Augustine is famous for tourism, it has also gained notoriety for its numerous homeless camps. It is intriguing how the wealth generated by tourism has failed to translate into better fortunes for the residents of this city. The extent of this wealth is demonstrated by the recognition of St. Augustine as a city where tourists sometimes outnumber residents. Yet the problem homelessness in this city remains somewhat elusive because these less fortunate citizens tend to live on street corners where they are hidden in some way from the lavish sections of St. Augustine.

According to a 2012 Census of homeless people in St. Johns County, there were about 1,300 homeless people but only one homeless shelter with the capability of housing only 60 people (Clark, 2013: 2). These statistics provide an idea on the gravity of the problem of homelessness in St. Augustine. Stories of homeless people provide an impression of the air of uncertainty and uneasiness that is created by the fast-paced environment of globalization and the unwillingness and/or inability by authorities to provide welfare and safety-net programs to its most vulnerable citizens. For example Clark (2013: 2) narrates the story of homeless people’s ordeal in the hands of attackers who commit rapes and murders in homeless camps in the city, which are attributed partly to inaction and complacency on the part of local authorities.

Municipal authorities operate in a fashion typical of a globalization-era post-modern metropolitan regime. The St. Augustine City Commission, which is the city’s governing body, places a lot of emphasis on the need to position the city in a strategic position to operate like a globalized metropolitan area. For example, in its 2030 Comprehensive Plan, the Commission focuses primarily on open space and recreation, infrastructure, capital improvements, historical preservation, inter-governmental coordination, private-sector housing and future land use (The Northeast Florida Regional Council, 2011: 6). Although all these components of the strategic plan are important, they are all inclined towards the promotion of the market economy, such that they are ultimately geared towards economic globalization. The social aspect of this globalization process seems to have been neglected by this plan. In the section on housing, focus is primarily on private-sector developments (The Northeast Florida Regional Council, 2011: 45). This means that in the future, the city is unlikely to promote full-scale welfare programs aimed at providing shelter to homeless people in preference for globalization-inspired housing master plans. Ironically, many of the city’s vulnerable people are homeless because of numerous globalization-era problems such as alcoholism, mental illness, depression, economic recessions, domestic violence, and unemployment.

Rezoning efforts in St. Augustine’s housing sector are geared towards allowing private investors build condominium-types of houses for both commercial and residential development. Although such efforts are in tandem with globalization, they are completely out of sync with the immediate needs of homeless people such as shelter, food, clothing, security, rehabilitation, and employment. Globalization theory best explains this situation by reinforcing the notion that today’s information society risks leaving vulnerable people behind in the rush to embrace the symbols of globalization such as the dominance of the service industry, take-over of the market economy, and information technology. The place of welfare programs for low-income workforce such as low-cost housing is increasingly being phased out as demonstrated in the case of St. Augustine. Consequently, one may expect the city to continue grappling with the problem of homelessness in the foreseeable future.

# Conclusion

Globalization Theory explains how globalization has brought about dramatic transformations to virtually all aspects of human life. From a sociological perspective, focus is on the human consequences of globalization. The case of St. Augustine demonstrates that there is a link between globalization and homelessness. As the St. Augustine City Commission looks forward to the implementation of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan, the city’s homeless population has nothing much to hope for. The city’s strategic housing plan is likely to benefit private-sector participants at the expense of homeless city residents. To improve the lives of homeless people, the Commission must avoid the temptation to blindly embrace the emblems of globalization because this may tempt them to push aside welfare programs that are beneficial to homeless people such as low-cost housing projects.

**Word Count: 1567.**

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