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'Urban Studies' Project

MIT's Friedmann Guides Development Of Venezuela

By Anthony Pappas

For many years the development of hardward regions has been denoted primarily in economic terms. Policy aims have generally been either to raise per capita income or to increase a nation's productive capacity. In a lecture last Thursday Professor John Friedmann of the Department of City and Regional Planning discussed some of the factors which must be considered when a program of development is evolved. In particular, he stressed the inter-regional effects and the importance of spatial organization.

Last summer Professor Friedmann was in Venezuela where he was associated with a regional development plan. The Venezuelan government had formed an autonomous body, patterned somewhat on our own Tennessee Valley Authority, to develop an area in east-central Venezuela. The region was potentially rich in natural resources. Two nearby mountains were the site of mining operations by American steel companies. A large area to the south was sparsely populated and seemed to afford further opportunities. The moment seemed propitious for the establishment of an industrial center in the region. The proposed city would serve as a magnet for people and capital. Finally, it was expected to increase the rapid growth of Caracas and the consequent overpopulation. Venezuela turned to the Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT and Harvard University for assistance in this project. As a result, Professor Friedmann proceeded to work on the problem. Professor Friedmann analyzed the historical and demographic trends in Venezuela. Using the available data, he made projections for the end of this century and used these in his recommendations.

In colonial times the pattern of development in Venezuela was simple. There was a few small cities on the seacoast which traded with the hinterland to the south. Each city was an autonomous and self-sufficient unit. Contacts among the cities were marginal.

During the next period, into a good part of this century, the capital city of Caracas overall owed the others. The pervasive influence of Caracas was reflected in the slow growth of the rest of the nation. As people migrated to and capital flowed into the capital, the concentration of the nation's affairs was accentuated.

For the past few decades another pattern has been emerging. A few cities like Maracaibo and Valencia have begun to develop. Valencia, for instance, is in the center of the rich oil-producing region.

Professor Friedmann hopes that by the establishment of new growth poles Venezuela can become a mature industrial nation. He envisages the complementary development of new regional centers and their beneficial linkage to the older, more developed cities.

By 1960, Professor Friedmann predicts Venezuela will have a population of approximately twenty-five million. Such a large increase from the present population of six million necessitates great changes in the present structure. If the problems are sufficiently understood by economists and regional planners, Professor Friedmann thinks they can be overcome.

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