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Q1(a)

Europe was the first and the only place where modernity emerged. Comment

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- Europe was the first and the only place where modernity emerged. Comment
- Keep the comment within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Modernity is a cluster of capitalism, state, science, and clock time.

Europe was an early combination, as **Weber**, **Marx**, and **Giddens** show.

"Only" ignores colonial modernity, Japan, and multiple modernities.

Wallerstein places Europe inside a world-system.

- **Comment:** first is historical; only is false.

Introduction

Modernity names industrial capitalism, the nation-state, science, and a disenchanted, clock-timed everyday life. Europe was an early cluster of those forms. Calling it the only birthplace turns a historical sequence into a civilisational monopoly.

Body

Europe as an early cluster

- **Max Weber** tied Occidental rationalisation, the Protestant ethic, and legal-rational bureaucracy to a distinctive European path, not to a racial essence.
- **Karl Marx** located the first full capitalist mode in Western Europe, then showed that capital must expand as a world market.
- Anthony **Giddens** lists industrialism, capitalism, surveillance, and industrial war as institutional dimensions that first densified in Europe.

Why "only" fails

- S. N. **Eisenstadt**'s multiple modernities treats Japan, Turkey, and postcolonial states as modern in their own institutional mixes, not as failed copies of Paris.
- Colonial rule exported factories, censuses, and law to India while blocking full citizenship. That is a dependent modernity, not the absence of modernity.
- Meiji Japan, Soviet planning, and later East Asian developmental states show industrial-rational orders outside the North-West European core.

Comment

- "First" is a careful historical claim about sequence and combination.
- "Only" is Eurocentric. It ignores colonial co-production and later centres of accumulation.
- Immanuel Wallerstein already placed Europe's rise inside a world-system, not inside a sealed continent.

Flow diagram

European cluster -> Capitalism state science
Colonial and Asian paths -> Capitalism state science
European cluster -> First as sequence
Only as monopoly -> Fails empirically

Conclusion

Europe was a first dense site of capitalist-industrial modernity. It was never the sole possible site. Weber and Marx explain the European lead; Eisenstadt, colonial India, and later Asian paths refute the monopoly.

Facts & figures

Weber

Linked legal-rational domination and inner-worldly asceticism to an Occidental path of rationalisation.

Giddens

Four institutional dimensions of modernity: industrialism, capitalism, surveillance, and military power.

Eisenstadt

Multiple modernities: different civilisations institutionalise the modern programme in plural ways.

Wallerstein

European modernity is a world-system event, not a self-contained continental miracle.