

TRENDS IN EUROPEAN URBANISATION

A number of trends may be seen in European urbanisation. Each has its own geographical significance. This essay outlines these trends. It also provides a cause and effect analysis of the trends.

European urbanisation has its roots in ancient Greece. There, towns developed in response to the need for effective **administrative control** over a large population (Athens held 100,000 people at the height of Greek civilisation). Towns also developed at coastal locations where **trade** through ports led to the development of **markets**.

Following the decline of Greek civilisation, the urban tradition in Europe was continued by the Romans. They established cities west of the Rhine and south of the Danube (Trier, Cologne, Augsburg) in addition to maintaining existing Italian cities. Cities were also established in Britain, for example, London and Bath. These towns served primarily **administrative, trade and defensive** purposes.

Urbanism (the spread of towns) and **urbanisation** (the percentage of people living in towns) declined with the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century. Existing towns, like Cologne, became Bishopsrics but essentially they stagnated. It was not until the 11th and 12th centuries that pre-urban nuclei evolved in the Germanic lands. This occurred in response to a need for **defence** of rural hinterlands. Evidence of this is seen in German towns with names ending in **-burg** and **-berg** (Hamburg, Nurnberg, Magdeburg) denoting the presence of a fortified **castle** or stronghold.

These nuclei developed into proto-urban centres as they attracted firstly **market trade**, and later, **craftsmen**. These craftsmen settled beyond the walls of the castle and gave permanency to the markets. With the advent of long distance trade, these centres became firmly established and grew under the influence of **in-migration**. This growth was periodic and resulted in an irregular street pattern. Later, the castle **walls** were extended, furthering the protection of the lord of the castle and leading to further town growth.

So far, the trend was for the establishment of defensive sites which grew as a result of their attraction to merchants and craftsmen. Even at this early stage, there was **residential segregation**, with many European towns containing Jewish and Slavic **ghettoes**.

The Renaissance saw a new trend in urbanism. Territorial rulers built **formally planned** and laid out towns and cities. Versailles in France is one of the best examples of this. Cities were designed to reflect the ultimate **order and symmetry** of the universe, a discovery resulting from the Age of Reason in which science was God. Towns were designed at the behest of rulers who wanted their towns to reflect their divine nature. Trade resulting from the long drawn out Age of Discovery created the need for adequate port facilities. This led to another trend – the creation of **port cities** specifically designed to cater to the needs of ship owners and sailors. The earliest port cities were also the location for the development of **banking and financial services**. The golden age of Genoa, Lisbon, Venice and Amsterdam occurred during this period.

Up to the Renaissance, cities grew largely without the interference of rulers. However the 17th and 18th century witnessed a trend towards active **government intervention** in the development of towns. In England, Parliament was directive in the rebuilding of London following the Baker Street fire of 1666. Frederick II of Prussia is probably the best example of central administrations' attempts to influence the growth of cities. His campaign, best seen in his phrase 'City Air Makes Free', provided enticements such as religious tolerance and freedom for rural serfs to encourage the settlement of his cities. At the same time he implemented stiff penalties for people wishing to leave his cities.

Despite this, it was not until the 19th century that the trend towards urban growth accelerated appreciably. **Land enclosure** brought about in an era of agricultural improvement dispossessed many tenants. The Agricultural Revolution also led to a **decrease in demand for farm labour**. These **push factors**, coupled with the **pull factor** of **industrial employment** presented by the Industrial Revolution, encouraged migration to **factory and mill towns**. At coal-field locations, factory owners built **terraced 'back-to-back' housing** for miners' families. As towns grew up around coalfields and

TRENDS IN EUROPEAN URBANISATION

textile factories, built to meet the rising demand for the accommodation of a growing population, the **first slums** developed.

Urban growth in the 19th century witnessed a new trend, namely government regulation in the form of **local authorities**. In England, the outbreak of Indian Cholera in 1831 was eventually sourced to the intersection between sewerage channels and the Thames River water table from which people drew their supply of drinking water. This forced the **planning of proper sewerage and water conduits**, the construction of which lasted until the end of the Victorian era. Also at this time, regulations were put in place concerning the keeping of farm domesticated animals in borough towns and the lime washing of house walls.

In some towns and cities during the industrial era, **enlightened industrialists** such as Robert Owens built towns for their employees which included schools for workers' children and social amenities to improve the lot of their workers. **charitable trusts** also attempted similar measures, such as the Iveagh Trusts' buildings in St. Patrick Street, Dublin.

Full local authority involvement in urban planning did not arise until after World War II. **Forced migration** caused by the war, **greater farm mechanisation** and the **destruction of cities** by air raids created a huge upward pressure on the demand for urban housing. Many cities such as Coventry in England were rebuilt from scratch and provided a *tableau-rasa* upon which to experiment with urban design. **Commercial** interests were secured in inner cities. Where people were housed in inner cities, it was usually in **multi-storey apartment style buildings**. In the newly created **suburbs**, two-storey houses became the norm with housing density much lower than in the city centre. There was one exception. The post-war baby boom led to huge increases in **European population**. This encouraged local authorities and private developers to build high-rise, high-density accommodation on the outskirts of cities. These structures could be built much more quickly and cheaply than traditional two-storey housing and the perception that they were modern and a thing of the future underlined their popularity. Only later was it realised that inadequate services in these suburbs, and the unsuitability of these tower blocks for families, had created another set of slums.

As commercial interests continued to compete for space in the city centre, a dual trend of **urban sprawl** and **inner city decline** took hold. These trends were accentuated by **push factors** in the inner city such as **congestion, pollution and rising crime** as the 1960's youth generation rebelled against established attitudes towards young adults. The trend was also underlined by the pull factors of suburbia, namely more **space, cleaner environments, less apparent crime, newer modern housing with gardens**, and in private housing developments, **houses with garages for the increasing number of car owners**.

It was in the 1960's also that **manufacturing** concerns moved from **high bid-rent city centre locations** to suburban **industrial estates**. These industrial estates offered lower rents, purpose built factories, less congestion and a local labour supply. However financial and commercial employment remained fixed in the city centre along with office employment and government departments. This created **traffic congestion**, particularly during morning and evening '**rush hours**' as workers travelled into the city to work, and travelled outwards on their way home in the evening. Congestion and pollution increased as a result of this pattern of daily movement. **Light manufacturing** tended to remain in the city centre, just beyond the **Central Business District**. Therefore by the 1970's, cities tended to exhibit clear **functional zones** for commercial, manufacturing, low, medium and high income residential uses.

The clearing of inner city slums further encouraged urban sprawl and planners were faced with another trend, this time more problematic, namely the tendency for the city to engulf adjacent rural land. Wealthier individuals reacted against this trend with **counter-urbanisation** by building their own residences in rural areas. This however threatened the countryside with unplanned development and pollution through the inadequate provision of services, especially sewerage and waste disposal.

Planners combated sprawl beyond the metropolitan boundaries with a number of new trends. **Greenbelts** were established in an attempt to break-up the continuous built environment and preserve **recreational space** for suburban residents. The establishment of **New Towns** especially in Britain, represented a new development in urban design. These were designed to provide residences,

TRENDS IN EUROPEAN URBANISATION

employment and services for people while remaining independent of major cities. Often however these plans failed. In Tallaght, Dublin, the town was too close to the city so people could travel easily to Dublin. Worse, they were encouraged to do so by the lack of services and employment in the New Town. In Britain, Milton Keynes was accused of being sterile and 'boring' but was still successful as a New Town, as was Cymbran. In France, La Defense and Velizy were designed successfully as suburban centres, and Cergy-Pontoise and St. Quentin-en-Yveline as New Towns.

The trend towards New Towns brought about a realisation that the inner cities were dying. By the 1980's, governments had begun to entice people back to cities with tax incentives and grants which reduced the cost of purchasing expensive city accommodation. While this trend continues, many cities continue to sprawl outwardly. More recently, the concept of **estate management** had been used to maintain existing housing environments, both by private developers and local authorities. In local authority areas in Ireland this has been successful in combating the activities of drug dealers and users, yet another problem created by inadequate residential environments in urban areas (although it should be noted, by no means confined to urban areas).

This essay has outlined the importance of urbanism and urbanisation as a geographical phenomenon with socio-economic significance. With 75% of Western Europe's population currently defined as urban, cities present important problems for governments and their planning authorities, as well as providing benefits. As food production in the Western World and especially the EU continues at its phenomenal rate, producing large surpluses, together with rural-decline, and cities continue to offer attractive benefits such as superior services (education, hospitals) and entertainment facilities, the trend towards greater urbanisation will continue. Government **decentralisation** policy as a solution to this trend fails as it merely shifts urbanisation to a different location. The task of geographers and governments in the future will deal less with where to house people and more with finding solutions to the environmental and socio-economic problems created by increasing urbanisation.

Answer the following questions.

1. Identify three functions associated with early Greek cities.
2. Identify three functions of Roman towns.
3. What functions were at the root of medieval towns. How would these towns be identified today?
4. Identify two reasons for the growth of medieval towns.
5. What is meant by residential segregation?
6. How did Renaissance cities differ from their predecessors?
7. Identify two urban functions which grew rapidly during the Renaissance.
8. What role did government intervention play in the development of cities?
9. Identify one push factor and one pull factor leading to urban growth in the 19th century.
10. Identify three characteristics of industrial towns.
11. Identify three push factors which encouraged urban growth after World War II.
12. Identify three characteristics of post-World War II cities.
13. Identify three push factors contributing to inner city decline.
14. identify four pull factors which encouraged urban sprawl.
15. What is meant by 'rush hour'? What causes it?
16. What is counter-urbanisation?
17. What is a Greenbelt?
18. What is a New Town? Identify two British and two French examples.
19. how have local authorities changed the administration of public housing?
20. Identify one possible method of managing urban growth.
21. Draw a sketch map to show Europe's major cities.