

Chapter Nine: Urban Geography

The **urban morphology** of a city is the layout of the city, its physical form and structure. Urban geographers study how states build and rebuild cities, and work to understand the linkages between political geography and urban geography. A **city** is a conglomeration of people and buildings clustered together to serve as a center of politics, culture, and economics. Globally, more people live in towns and cities than in rural areas, making the global population predominantly **urban**—the city and the surrounding environs connected to the city. In Western Europe and the US, 4 out of 5 people live in cities or towns. In India and China, the figure is more like 3 out of 10. Human communities have existed for over 100,000 years, but more than 90,000 years passed before people began to cluster in towns. It has been only in the last 200 years that cities began to resemble their modern size and structure.

The rise in cities is rooted in the switch from hunting/gathering to agriculture, where **agricultural villages** arose. Two components that enabled the rise of cities were:

1. **Agricultural surplus:** Advances in technology such as irrigation allowed other people to enter new areas of industry and production.
2. **Social stratification:** a **leadership class** was able to arise due to the surplus of agriculture; this class was then able to organize and create the structures that enabled the growth of cities.

There were five hearths of urbanization:

1. **Mesopotamia:** located in the heart of the Fertile Crescent between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in modern Iraq around 3500 BC. Social classes were apparent, and a walled city was created. Unsanitary conditions helped keep the population low.
2. **Nile River Valley:** located in present day Egypt around 3200 BC. There were no walls built, but obviously enough food was grown to feed people who could devote themselves to pyramid construction.
3. **Indus River Valley:** located in India around 2200 BC. Evidence of coins from far away Mediterranean region suggests trade.
4. **Huang He (Yellow) and Wei (Yangtzi) River Valleys:** located in China around 1500 BC. Huge structures built to honor the ruling class shows social stratification of this area.
5. **Mesoamerica:** centered in Mexico and Central America around 200 BC.

Cities became the chief marketplace for the trading of goods and services made possible through enough food being grown to feed the new artisan and merchant class. The cities listed above had populations of between 10,000 and 15,000. By 500 BC, Greece had grown to become an urban center. From Greece, urbanization diffused to the Roman Empire, which in turn diffused through Western Europe, which in turn diffused throughout the world through colonialism. Roman planners displayed a remarkable ability for choosing the **site**, or absolute location, for the cities to be built. Considerations included trade possibilities and defensive ability. Greeks inspired Romans to build their cities in grid patterns, with a **forum**, or social and governmental center. Even Roman and Greek cities had pockets of poverty amidst wealthier people.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, Europe entered the Middle Ages (aka the Dark Ages) from 500 to 1300 AD. Little urban growth occurred, but in Asia, Africa, and the Americas it did occur; Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, had as many as 100,000 inhabitants. Many cities grew on trade routes such as the Silk Road; however, over time due to the advent of shipping and ocean trade around 1400, cities such as Bombay and Tokyo began to arise on coastal zones. The **situation**, or relative location to the region and world around it, changed to the detriment of cities such as Paris. The trade networks enabled wealth to flow into European cities, creating zones of commerce and extravagant construction.

In the late 18th century and early 19th century, the industrial revolution began in Europe, and a second urban revolution began with that. With the continued improvement in agriculture, more food was able to be grown to feed industrial workers, while at the same time requiring fewer agricultural workers, which also meant more workers for industry. Cities arose around factories and workers thronged into the cities. The rapid rise of cities without corresponding rises in sanitation and the dirty nature of early industry led to terrible working and living conditions for city dwellers. Slums and ghettos arose. By the late 20th century, many of the factories have left American and European cities, but the cities remain.

Where are Cities Located and Why?

All cities and towns have a **trade area**, which is an adjacent region within which its influence is dominant. Customers visit to shop, and the media from the city influence the surrounding area. The trade areas and population combine to give us a hierarchy of urban places, following a pattern commonly called the rank-size rule. The **rank-size rule** holds that in a model urban hierarchy, the population of a city or town will be inversely proportional to its rank in the hierarchy. For example, Los Angeles, the second largest city in the US, according to this rule should have a population one-half the size of New York, the largest city. The third largest city would have 1/3 the population of the largest city. This tends to happen in developed countries; in developing countries, there tends to be one supremely dominant city, often called a **primate** city because it is much larger than all other cities within the country. Mexico City would be an example of a primate city.

Walter Christaller wrote the classic urban geography study to explain where cities and towns would be located, and he laid the groundwork for the **central place theory**. He attempted to develop a model to predict how and where central places in the urban hierarchy (hamlets, villages, towns, and cities) would be functionally and spatially distributed. Centers provide a set of goods to their **hinterland**, which is the market area surrounding the urban center. Bigger centers serve a large market area, providing more specialty, or high-order goods, than smaller centers with smaller market areas. You can see this in the midstate area of Tennessee; if you live in Springfield or Murfreesboro and you want a mink coat, you would have to go to Nashville to get it. One might expect the shape of each central place's trade area to be circular like a bullseye. But circles either have to overlap or leave certain areas unserved. So Christaller chose perfectly fitted hexagonal regions as the shape of each trade area. (page 275) Although there are exceptions, his studies confirm that the distribution and spacing of cities, towns, and villages in a region is not an accident but is tied to trade areas, population size, and distance. This was later confirmed in the **Sunbelt phenomenon** of the past four decades, in which millions of Americans moved from the North and Northeastern states to the South and Southwest. Central place theory would predict that some existing cities would respond by increasing their offerings of higher-order goods and services, increasing their economic reach and bypassing others. This is what happened; Atlanta, Dallas, and Phoenix became headquarters cities for large regions, moving up in the urban hierarchy. Charlotte, Tampa, San Antonio also rose, but took secondary status. Other centers participated less in the new spatial economy and remained where they were in the urban hierarchy, such as Asheville, Birmingham, and El Paso.

How are Cities Organized, and How do they Function?

All cities display a **functional zonation**, or the division of the city into certain regions (zones) for certain purposes (functions). The term **zone** is typically preceded by a descriptor that conveys the purpose of that area of the city, such as industrial zone or residential zone. Most models define the key economic zone of the city as the **central business district (CBD)**; this is where business and commerce is concentrated. The term **central city** describes the urban area that is not suburban; in essence, it is the older city as opposed to newer suburbs. A **suburb** is an outlying, functionally uniform part of an urban area and is often adjacent to the central city; they frequently have residential subdivisions, schools, malls, and office parks. Brentwood would be a suburb of Nashville. **Suburbanization** is the process by which the lands that were previously outside the urban environment become urbanized as people move to those spaces from the city. In many cases, suburbia has evolved into self-sufficient urban entities, containing their own major economic and cultural activities, and is often able to compete with the central city for commerce. An example would be Nissan's corporate headquarters moving from California to Franklin instead of Nashville. 62% of the population living in metropolitan areas lives in the suburbs.

Urban geographers have attempted to construct models that allow for change and growth in the geographic layout of North American cities. (see models on page 277) As all these are from the 1930's and 40's, they are somewhat outmoded:

1. **Concentric zone model:** As the city grows, land is converted in zones around the outside of the city. At the center is the CBD; then zone two is sketchy residential and light industrial; then zone three is blue collar housing; zone four is middle class residences; then zone five is suburban ring. As the city grows, the inner ring will encroach on the outer ring; what was once higher end housing might become lower end over time.
2. **Sector model:** Says city grows outward from CBD/center, but that sectors can extend all the way to the edge of the city, as in a pie-shaped fashion.
3. **Multiple –Nuclei Model:** looks kind of like a Picasso; has CBD losing influence as single nucleus over time by the development of suburban business centers/nuclei as well.

Thanks to the development of the interstate highway, suburbia exploded from the late 1950's on. Today, located near key interstate intersections, are **edge cities**. Hendersonville would be an example; it has heavy residential, shopping centers, and industrial parks. It is technically possible to live in Hendersonville without ever needing to go to Nashville. In many metropolitan areas there is more employment in the suburban areas than in the CBD. Perhaps the most up to date model of American cities is the **urban realm**, which is the idea that many urban areas consist of several urbanized realms or areas, each of which has its own central area/downtown servicing the surrounding realm. (see page 279 for graph)

Today there are hundreds of world cities with inhabitants numbering over a million. Many of these cities grew with the influence of European colonizers on top of existing native cities, completely overtaking their infrastructure; these cities are known as **colonial cities**.

Latin American cities reflect this colonial influence, but are unique enough to have their own distinction: the **Griffin-Ford model**. This model states that Latin American cities blend traditional elements of Latin American culture with the forces of globalization that are reshaping the urban scene, combining radial sectors (pie slices) with concentric zones (bullseye). There is a CBD, but it emanates outward via a wealthy spine-like boulevard that serves as an extension of the CBD, with shopping, etc, ending in a high-priced edge city of residential and shopping as well. The remaining concentric zones are home to less well-off residents, including **squatter settlements**/slums which are known broadly as **disamenity sectors**, but locally as **barrios** in Spanish and **favelas** in Brazil. These favelas are made up of shacks built on property that is not their own and are very densely populated, often in squalid conditions. There is, however, an optimistic spirit and haphazard, informal economy that operates through it. The Griffin-Ford model accurately portrays the disparity of wealth present in Latin American cities.

Cities in Sub-Saharan Africa are among the fastest growing in the world. Some cities are European in nature, such as the cities in South Africa. However, many are unique in that they have not one but three CBD's: a remnant of the colonial CBD with tall buildings; an informal and sometimes periodic market zone that tends to be open air markets; and a traditional CBD where commerce is conducted from curbside, stalls, or one story store fronts. As in Latin America, there are squatter settlements on the outskirts of the town.

How Do People Make Cities?

Often in the fastest growing cities, an influx of poor from the countryside looking for opportunity leads to the rise of **shantytowns**, or unplanned developments of crude dwellings and shelters made of scrap wood, cardboard, etc. These shantytowns arise due to a lack of enforceable **zoning laws**, which define what kinds of dwellings are acceptable in particular areas of a city. Without zoning laws, you might find a factory right next to an elementary school. Even though one sees disparity of wealth in American cities, this disparity is more pronounced in the poorer cities of the world.

One disadvantage that the poor would face in the US before the civil rights movement of the 1960's was **redlining**, which was the practice of financial institutions identifying poor/risky neighborhoods in cities, usually African American, and refuse to offer loans to people living in those areas. This caused the neighborhoods to spiral downward and become more rundown. Also before the civil rights movement, realtors could purposefully sell a house in a white neighborhood at a very low price to a member of the African American community. Then, in a practice called **blockbusting**, the realtors would solicit other white residents of the neighborhood to sell their homes under the guise that the neighborhood was going downhill because an African American family had moved in. This produced what geographers call **white flight**; the movement of whites to the suburbs. This enabled realtors to make a lot of money in commissions, then sell the houses for low prices to real estate speculators, allowing them to subdivide lots and turn the houses into tenements. Conversely, some whites would create what were called **restrictive covenants**, where whites would agree not to sell their houses to a minority family. All of these acts are now illegal, and all of these led to the impoverishment of the inner city areas of American cities in the 1960's and 1970's.

In an effort to combat this trend, cities have taken over slum-like areas and created **commercialization** programs that encourage turning these blighted inner city areas into businesses and new residents. As a result, in many areas these formerly poor neighborhoods are experiencing **gentrification**, where new residents move in and rehab old homes near the city. The Germantown and Edgefield neighborhoods near downtown Nashville are examples of this. Over time, housing values increase, and in some cases drive the poorer residents out due to higher rents. Many of the people moving into these neighborhoods are young professionals.

Suburbs are not immune to gentrification. Rampant in many American suburbs (especially those close to the city) are **tear-downs**, houses that new owners bought with the intention of tearing them down and building much larger homes. These new homes are often referred to as **McMansions** because of their supersize that is out of context of the rest of the homes on the street. This is a common phenomenon in Green Hills, West Meade, and now East Nashville. Proponents say it keeps people from moving out to larger homes outside of Davidson County. Opponents say the houses ruin the character of the neighborhood because they are out of scale.

Keeping people living in the urban center helps fight **urban sprawl**, which is unrestricted growth of housing, commercial developments, and roads over large expanses of land with little concern for urban planning. Sprawl is a by-product of the car era. In some areas, even the suburbs have suburbs; these way out suburbs are called **exurbs**. To combat urban sprawl, there is a movement to implement **new urbanization**, which is the creation of communities that create walkable neighborhoods with schools and stores embedded within. A nearby example is the West Haven neighborhood in Franklin; houses are close to each other, and there are enough houses to sustain a school and grocery store so that residents don't have to be constantly driving. There is often a park or green space within as well. One criticism of new urbanism is that it favors those wealthy enough to buy into a neighborhood like this.

Due to immigration, many European cities, and indeed cities around the world, have developed ethnic enclaves in particular parts of the city where outside ethnic groups live. For example, Paris has an Algerian section of town; London has a Jamaican part of town; Berlin has a Turkish part of town. These parts of town containing a particular ethnic group are called **ghettos**, and despite the American connotation, this term does not necessarily denote an area of poverty. As European cities are older and more compact than American cities, they typically have historic city centers where housing and commercial areas are very compact. The skyscrapers, which are often in the middle of American cities, lie outside the old city center. Housing and commercial areas are combined, with people living above the commercial spaces. Large zones of housing in Europe typically begin in a ring around the outside of the city center in what is known as the **zone of transition**. Interestingly, immigrants from cities tended to spread out among the housing areas of Europe, whereas those from the countryside tended to stay clustered in ethnic neighborhoods.

In the slums of many cities, the slum dwellers all work. They fix things, sort through waste for recycling and trade/sell things through makeshift stands; this is part of the **informal economy**—the economy that is not taxed or counted toward a country's gross domestic product.

What Role do Cities Play in Globalization?

World cities are cities that function at the global scale, beyond the reach of the state borders, functioning as the service centers of the world. Examples would include New York, London, and Tokyo; these are all important centers of banking, law, advertising, and accounting, having an impact not only in the countries in which they are located but also in countries throughout the world.