Topic 6.1

The Origin and Influences of Urbanization

You will learn to:

- Explain how site and situation influence the origin, function, and growth of cities.
- Explain how urbanization is influenced by changes in communication and transportation, economic development, government policies, migration, and population growth.

Origins of cities

For thousands of years, humans were nomadic hunters and gatherers who searched for food by following animals and foraging for wild plants.

The first permanent human settlements, located in the Fertile Cresent region, were enabled by the introduction of subsistence farming and the domestication of animals. These events brought about the First Agricultural Revolution.
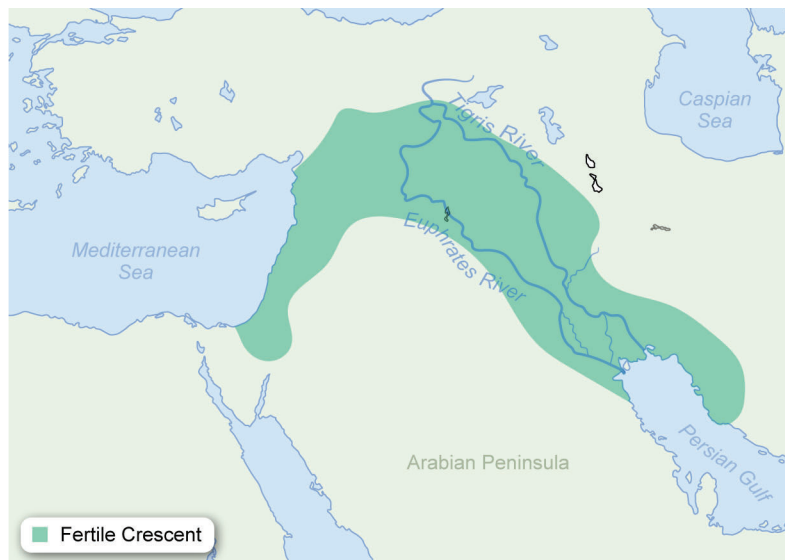
For centuries, many of these settlements were small and mainly used for subsistence agriculture, but over time, they evolved to become centers of innovation and trade. With these changes, the populations of cities increased, with smaller cities becoming rural and larger cities becoming urbanized. Early urban centers were characterized by:

- the existence of an agricultural surplus.
- the rise of a social hierarchy, including a leadership class.
- people specializing in jobs outside of agriculture, like tool and weapon production.

Over the centuries, cities slowly emerged throughout the world. Urbanization rapidly increased after the Second Agricultural Revolution in the 17th century and the resulting population boom.

In Topic 6.1, we will look at how the location, origin, function, and growth of cities are influenced by site and situation factors. We will also look at how modern urbanization is affected by social, political, economic, and technological changes.

The influence of site and situation on the origin, function, and growth of cities

Let's look at why people settled where they did. Cities' locations depend on factors related to site and situation.

Site

Site, the absolute location of a place, includes the internal physical characteristics of the location, including mountains, harbors, and rivers. Most settlements of early civilizations were located around waterways, coastal regions, or rivers. Coastal regions were typically used as shipping ports, while settlements often formed near freshwater areas due to the accessibility of water for drinking and agriculture.

For example, if we look at the time of the Ancient Egyptians, cities grew on the banks of the Nile River because northern Africa is part of the Sahara desert. The river's annual flooding created small strips of fertile land where ancient Egyptians could produce enough food to survive the year.

Ancient Egyptian Empire

Trade was also important in the creation of the sites where cities originated. Rivers, including the Nile, served as important trade routes. In Egypt, Cairo's merchants shipped goods north to Alexandria or south to nearby kingdoms.

Cities also form where smaller rivers, known as tributaries, meet to form larger rivers, or where large rivers flow into the ocean. New York City and New Orleans formed where two major rivers—the Hudson River and Mississippi River—flow into the ocean. Both cities became essential trade centers, and their locations allowed goods to be moved inland from the coast.

With the creation of the railroad during the Industrial Revolution, cities also grew around railway stations, which facilitated commerce as businesses opened for those arriving to these sites.

Situation

The situation of a city is just as important as its site. Situation factors are environmental assets that impact the shipping of goods to and from factories. The relative location of a place is shaped by surrounding areas. A place can be close to an agricultural town or sources of natural resources.

Cities were also established near trading routes, such as the Silk Road, which ran west from East Asia through the Middle East, ending in western Europe. These cities were important trading centers for centuries, but the importance of many as trading centers has decreased.


Cities on Trade routes

Influences on urbanization

Cities expand and evolve for various reasons. Some of these changes happen rapidly, while others occur gradually. Factors that influence urban development include changes in communication and transportation, economic development, government policies, migration, and population growth.

Communication and transportation

The movement of people and goods within and from one city to another has always been a concern for cities. Cities evolved to facilitate transportation systems such as the railroad, streetcars, buses, airplanes, and subways. City engineers constantly reshape cities to accommodate an increasing need for transportation services.
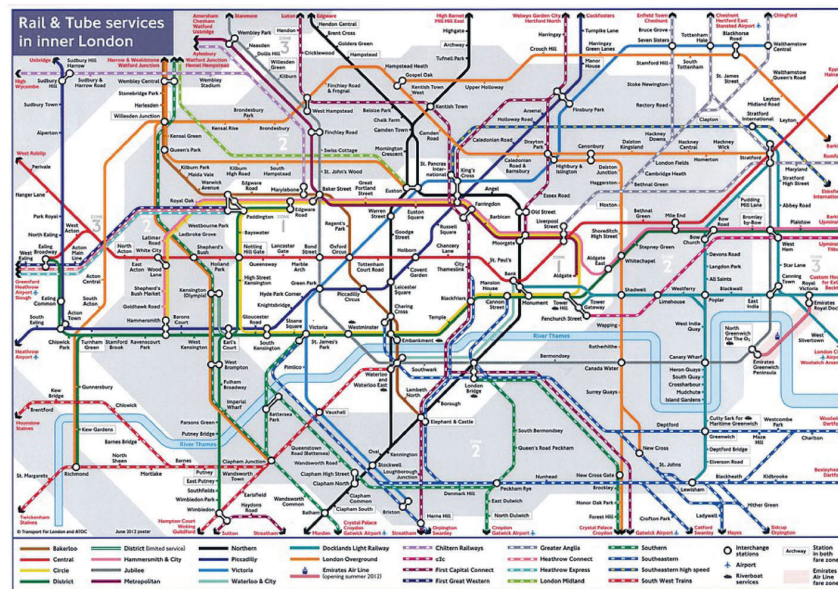
The invention of public transit, such as the railroad, streetcars, buses, and subways, made it easier for people to live outside of the city, in residential areas called suburbs, and be transported into the city for work or leisure activities. The mass production of automobiles in the early 20th century forever changed people's ability to travel from suburban to urban areas.

In addition to transportation, innovations in communication systems connected cities to other cities and rural areas. In the 19th century, the telegraph and telephone revolutionized long-distance communication, making it easier for people and businesses to connect.

These inventions were crucial to urbanization and suburbanization. Today, the Internet continues to influence urban and suburban growth, allowing instantaneous connections to people worldwide.

Economic development

When more people began to relocate into urban centers from rural areas to take advantage of higher living standards, the economic factors in cities changed.

For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, midwestern and northeastern US companies were offered financial incentives to relocate to Sunbelt cities. Such policies accelerated the economic growth and population of these cities, such as San José.
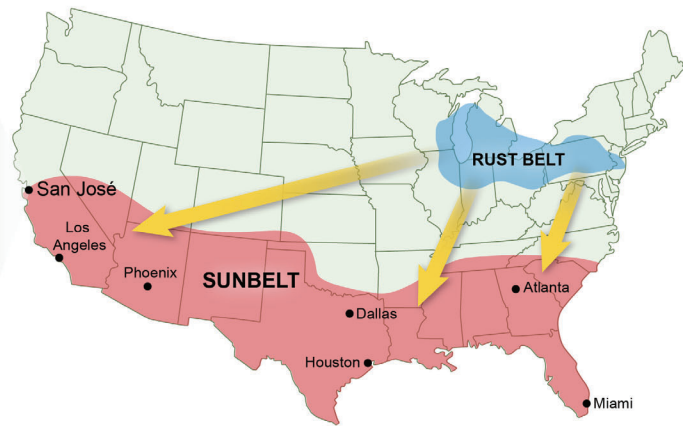
As a result, Sunbelt cities became centers for aerospace, defense, and technology companies, which increased job opportunities. This growth in job opportunities has attracted many people seeking employment in high-tech industries or the tertiary sector that supports them.

Government policies

Early city leaders were chiefly responsible for storing and distributing agricultural surplus. Over time, as cities expanded and became more complex, city leaders became responsible for infrastructure. By the time of the Industrial Revolution, governmental policies affected everything from housing to transportation and economic growth.

Today, a city's governmental policies ensure the growth and prosperity of the city. Redevelopment has become a major goal of city governments due to changes in economic opportunities, such as deindustrialization.

For example, when a company closes in one city, people move to other cities for employment. The decrease in tax revenue caused by the emigration of residents can cause a decline in the city's prosperity and a rise in homelessness. City leaders will attempt to bring in new companies to initiate regrowth.

Migration and population growth

Push and pull factors influence migration, the primary driver of the population growth of many cities worldwide. Rural-to-urban migration occurs in periphery and semiperiphery countries. For example, the steep rise in Mexico City's population over the last 70 years was primarily caused by increased domestic migration.

POPULATION OF MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

After 1950, the Mexican economy boomed because of increased industrialization and an improved transportation system. Mexico City saw the nation's highest economic growth rate, as the city attracted rural Mexicans looking for jobs.

In the 1980s, the country suffered an economic downturn, accelerating the internal migration of Mexicans from rural to urban areas, especially Mexico City. Again, millions of Mexicans sought better jobs, educational opportunities, and higher living standards in the nation's largest metropolis.

6.1 Vocabulary

Periphery	A national or global region outside of highly developed regions (the core). These regions possess disproportionately less wealth and cultural power.
Site	The internal physical characteristics of a place, including absolute location and spatial features.
Situation	The external locational attributes of a place, including its location relative to other, nonlocal places.
Semiperiphery	A national or global region that exists between developed regions (the core) and the least developed regions (the periphery); as such, the semi-periphery is exploited by the core but exploits the periphery.
Tertiary sector	The economic sector (sometimes called the service industry) that centers on providing goods and services to consumers. Businesses in this sector include restaurants, schools, and retail stores.

6.1 Check for Understanding

1. **Which of the following is the process by which an area becomes more densely populated as the number of people living there increases?**

    A. Globalization

    B. Suburbanization

    C. Urbanization

2. **Which of the following is a characteristic shared by most early settlements?**

    A. Favorable climate

    B. Transportation systems

    C. Water accessibility

3. **Which of the following was most responsible for the growth of the Sunbelt in the 1950s and 1960s?**

    A. Increased family planning

    B. Increased economic opportunities

    C. Increased international migration

4. **Which of the following had the greatest influence on the growth of the American Southwest during the late 19th century?**

    A. Advances in farming methods

    B. The Industrial Revolution

    C. Increased suburbanization