

Defining Cities and Urban Centres: A Review**Sunil Kumar**

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Abstract

Most of us are “city people,” whether we like it or not. Many people say they do not like the city, with its noise, pollution, crowds, and crime, but living outside the city has its challenges as well. Living outside a city is inconvenient because rural areas lack access to the numerous amenities found in cities. The clustering of activities within a small area is called agglomeration, and it reduces the friction of distance for thousands of daily activities. Cities are convenient places for people to live, work, and play. Convenience has economic consequences, as well. Reduced costs associated with transportation, and the ability to share expenses for infrastructure creates what is known as economies of agglomeration, which is the fundamental reason for cities. The convenience and economic benefits of city life have led nearly 8 in 10 Americans to live in urban areas. In California, America’s most urban state, almost 95% of its people live in a city.

Key words: people, city, urban etc.

Introduction

Though it seems simple enough, distinguishing cities from rural areas is not always that easy. Countries around the world have generated a plethora of definitions based on a variety of urban characteristics. Part of the reason stems from the fact that defining what constitutes urban is somewhat arbitrary. Cities are also hard to identify because they look and function quite differently in different parts of the world. Complicating matters are the great variety of terms we use to label a group of people living together. Hamlets are tiny, rural communities. Villages are slightly larger. Towns are larger than villages. Cities are larger than towns. Then there are words like metropolis and even megalopolis to denote huge cities. Some states in the United States have legal definitions for these terms, but most do not. The United States Census Bureau creates

the only consistent definition of “city,” and it uses the terms “rural” and “urban” to distinguish cities from non-city regions. This definition has been updated several times since the 1800s, most radically in recent years as the power of GIS has allowed the geographers are working for the US Census Bureau to consider multiple factors simultaneously. It can get complex.

City Push and Pull Factors

Cities began to form many thousands of years ago, but there is little agreement regarding why cities form. The chances are that many different factors are responsible for the rise of cities, with some cities owing to their existence to multiple factors and cities that arose as a result of more specific conditions.

Two underlying causal forces contribute to the rise of cities. Site location factors are those elements that favor the growth of a city that is found at that location. Site factors include things like the availability of water, food, good soils, a quality harbour, and characteristics that make a location easy to defend from attack. Situation factors are external elements that favor the growth of a city, such as distance to other cities, or a central location. For example, the exceptional distance invading armies have had to travel to reach Moscow, Russia has helped the city survive many wars. Most large cities have good site and situation factors.

Understanding Distribution and City Size

Under very unusual circumstances, one might find that among a group of cities, no single city has unique site location advantages over others. This might happen out on a vast plain, like in Kansas, where there are no navigable rivers, waterfalls, or ports. In instances like this, situation advantages come to the fore, and a regular, geometric pattern of cities may emerge. This process was more pronounced when transportation was primitive, and the friction of distance was considerable, but it can still be witnessed by picking up a map of almost any flat region of the earth. Geographer Walter Christaller noticed the pattern and developed the Central Place Theory to explain the pattern and the logic driving it forward.

Examples of Countries that Lack Primate Cities

- India's most populous city is Mumbai (formerly Bombay) with 16 million; second is Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) with more than 13 million, and third is less than 13 million.
- China, Canada, Australia, and Brazil are additional examples of non-primate-city countries.
- Utilizing the metropolitan area population of urban areas in the United States, we find that the U.S. lacks an actual primate city. With the New York City metropolitan area population at approximately 21 million, second-ranked Los Angeles at 16 million, and even third-ranked Chicago at 9 million, America lacks a primate city.

Understanding Internal City Structure and Urban Development

Most urban centers begin in the downtown region called the central business district (CBD). The CBD tends to be the node or of transportation networks along with commercial property, banking, journalism, and judicial departments like City Hall, courts, and libraries. Because of high competition and limited space, property values for commercial and private ownership tend to be at a premium. CBDs also tend to use land above and below ground in the form of subways, underground malls, and high-rises. Sports facilities and convention centers also tend to be dominating forces in CBDs.

Urban planning is a sub-field of geography and until recently was part of geography departments in academia. An urban planner is someone trained in multiple theories of urban development along with developing ways to minimize traffic, decrease environmental pollution, and build sustainable cities. Urban planners, sociologists, along with geographers, have come up with three models to demonstrate and explain how cities grow.

The first model is called the concentric zone model, which states that cities can develop in five concentric rings. The inner zone of the cities tends to be the CBD, followed by a second ring that tends to be the zone of transition between the first and third rings. In this transition zone, the land tends to be used by industry or low-quality housing. The third ring is called the zone of independent workers and tends to be occupied by working-

class households. The fourth ring is called the zone of better residences and is dominated by middle-class families. Finally, ring five is called the commuter's zone, where most people living there have to commute to work every day.

The second model for city development and growth is called the sector model. This model states that cities tend to grow in sectors rather than concentric rings. The idea behind this model is that "like groups" tend to grow in clusters and expand as a cluster. The center of this model is still the CBD. The next sector is called the transportation and industry sector. The third sector is called the low-class residential sector, where lower-income households tend to group. The fourth sector is called the middle-class sector, and the fifth is the high-class sector.

The third and final urban design is called the multiple nuclei model. In this model, the city is more complex and has more than one CBD. A node could exist for the downtown region, another where a university is situated, and maybe another where an international airport is located. Some clustering does exist in this model because some sectors tend to stay away from other sectors. For example, the industry does not tend to develop next to high-income housing.

Conclusion

Sociologists, geographers, and urban planners know that no city exactly follows one of the urban models of growth. However, the models help us understand the broader reason why people live where they do. Higher-income households tend to live away from lower-income households. Renters and house owners also tend to segregate from each other. Renters tend to live closer to the CBD, whereas homeowners tend to live in the outer regions of the city. It should be noted that the three models were developed shortly after World War II and based on U.S. cities; many critics now state that they do not truly represent modern cities.

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