



Urban Form and the Social Geography of the City

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- The spatial organization within a city, and a city's governance, are both of interest to contemporary human geographers.
- How a city is spatially organized and used varies widely.
- Cities are also found to vary within different continents and geographic regions.
- In more developed countries housing is viewed either as a commodity or as a universal right, while it is actually somewhere in between.
- Similar to migration, there are push and pull factors that influence residential mobility.
- Being homeless does not necessarily mean that someone is sleeping out on the street or in the open; it can also mean living in insecure housing or inadequate accommodations.
- Governance of cities arose primarily out of the development of social problems related to housing and disease.
- Initial urban planning activities involved implementing infrastructure to manage public health issues.
- Many contemporary cities are spreading outwards as the processes of suburbanization and urban sprawl are increasing the size of cities.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- explain the variety of ways in which cities are spatially organized and how this differs by region or history;
- understand the various uses of cities and the participants involved in making decisions about these uses;
- understand how neighbourhoods can be places of assimilation, acculturation or multiculturalism;
- explain the processes of suburbanization and gentrification;
- describe why official planning processes came about and the factors involved in planning processes;

- discuss how cities are governed, including the political bodies involved, constraints on city governance, and the participants of governance;
- understand how housing and neighbourhood characteristics are spatially variable; and
- understand how cities in more developed countries differ from those in less developed countries.

KEY TERMS

Back-office activities Repetitive office operations, usually clerical in nature and performed using telecommunications, that can be located anywhere in or out of the city, including relatively low-rent areas. (p. 313)

Central business district (CBD) The social, cultural, commercial, and political centre of the city; usually characterized by high-rise office and residential towers, key municipal government buildings, and civic amenities. (p. 286)

Charter population The dominant or majority cultural group in an urban area; the host community. (p. 300)

Class A large group of people of similar social status and income (and often culture); commonly used forms include *upper class*, *middle class*, and *working class*. (p. 286)

Congregation The residential clustering of specific populations (minority groups), usually as a matter of choice or preference; a form of segregation. (p. 300)

Conurbation A continuously built-up area formed by the coalescing of several expanding cities that were originally separate. (p. 204)

Cultural minority A member of a minority group whose minority status is based on factors other than skin colour, such as language, religion, lifestyle, ethnic origin, etc. (p. 301)

Cycle of poverty The idea that poverty and deprivation are transmitted intergenerationally, reflecting home background and spatial variations in opportunities. (p. 306)

Edge city A centre of office and retail activities located on the edge of a large urban centre. (p. 304)

Filtering A process whereby housing units transition from being occupied by members of one income group to members of a different income group over time; downward filtering is more usual than upward filtering. (p. 297)

Front-office activities Skilled occupations requiring an educated, well-paid workforce; because image and face-to-face contact with others is important, these activities favour prestige locations in major office buildings in city centres. (p. 313)

Garden city A planned settlement designed to combine the advantages of urban and rural living; an urban centre emphasizing spaciousness and quality of life. (p. 316)

Gated community A high-status residential subdivision or community with access limited to residents and other authorized people such as domestic workers, tradespeople, and visitors; often surrounded by a perimeter wall, fence, or buffer zone such as a golf course. (p. 306)

Gentrification A process of inner-city urban neighbourhood social change resulting from the movement of higher-income groups; originates from *gentry*, a term referring to people of high social standing and immediately below those of noble birth. (p. 298)

Green belt A planned area of open, partially rural, land surrounding an urban area; an area where urban development is restricted. (p. 316)

Homelessness The circumstances of being without a permanent dwelling, such as a house or apartment. (p. 310)

Informal sector A part of a national economy involved in productive paid labour but without any formal recognition, governmental control, or remuneration. (p. 322)

Informal settlement A concentration of temporary dwellings, neither owned or rented, at the city's periphery; related to rural-to-urban migration, especially in less developed countries, sometimes referred to as a squatter settlement or shanty town. (p. 321)

Involuntary segregation The residential clustering of specific populations (minority groups), usually as a result of discrimination; a form of segregation. (p. 300)

Minority population (or groups) A population subgroup that is seen, or that views itself, as somehow different from the general (charter) population; this difference is normally expressed by ethnicity, language, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, lifestyle, or even income (as in the case of the homeless or the extremely wealthy). (p. 300)

Mobility The ability to move from one location to another. (p. 312)

Neighbourhood A part of the city that displays some internal homogeneity regarding type of housing, may be characterized by a relatively uniform income level and/or ethnic identity, and usually reflects certain shared social values. (p. 294)

Producer services Activities that offer a wide range of services to multinational and other companies that need to respond quickly to changing circumstances, including banking, insurance, marketing, accountancy, advertising, legal matters, consultancy, and innovation services; in recent years, the fastest-growing sector of national economies in most of the more developed countries. (p. 304)

Redlining A spatially discriminatory practice, favoured by financial institutions, that identified parts of the city regarded as high risk in terms of loans for property purchase and home improvement; affected areas were typically outlined in red on maps. (p. 296)

Segregation The spatial separation of population subgroups within the wider urban population. (p. 298)

Slum A heavily populated informal settlement, usually located within the urban core, and characterized by poverty, substandard housing, crime, and a lack of sanitation, water, electricity, or other basic services; common in less developed world cities today and in more developed world cities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (p. 321)

Suburbanization A process through which land on the periphery of an urban area (the rural-urban fringe) becomes urbanized over time, as people and businesses move there; the process of suburban development. (p. 303)

Urban structure The arrangement of land uses in cities; related to urban morphology. (p. 286)

Visible minority A member of a minority group whose minority status is based wholly on the colour of his or her skin; the Canadian government recognizes anyone that is neither white nor Indigenous as a visible minority. (p. 301)

Zoning Legal restrictions on land use that determine what types of urban activity (residential, commercial, industrial, and so on), and building form are allowed to take place on particular parcels of land. (p. 318)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Using a North American city as an example, explain how suburbanization affected it post–World War II.
2. Planning is one of the ways that particular values are imposed on landscapes. Describe the planning processes where you live—identify how your area is designed spatially, its land uses, and how this reflects which values are most important in the city.
3. Describe the rise of the New Urbanism model of planning. What was this model a reaction to? Has it been implemented successfully and should it become a dominant form of planning?
4. What was Le Corbusier’s vision of a city? Describe where it has been implemented, whether or not it achieved its original goals, and its degree of success in other factors.
5. What kinds of issues are related to reliance on automobiles as the main method of transportation through cities?

LINKS OF INTEREST

- The Canadian Institute of Planners
<http://cip-icu.ca/?lang=en-US&r=1>
- Spacing Magazine
<http://spacing.ca/>
- New Urbanism
<http://www.newurbanism.org/>
- Fondation Le Corbusier
<http://www.fondationlecorbusier.fr/>
- Plan Canada
<http://plancanada.ca/>
- Council for Canadian Urbanism
<http://www.canadianurbanism.ca/>

SUGGESTED READINGS

Badcock, B. 2002. *Making Sense of Cities: A Geographical Survey*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Good urban geography textbook covering all the key conceptual and empirical topics and with an informed international focus.

Harris, R. 2004. *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900–1960*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

An informed and readable account of how the built suburban landscape and the suburban way of life became such important parts of the Canadian urban experience.

Levy, J. M. 1997. *Contemporary Urban Planning*, 4th edn. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Standard text on urban planning; includes a good overview of the history of planning along with discussions of current planning objectives and strategies. Focuses on US examples.

Speck, J. 2018. *Walkable City Rules: 101 Steps to Making Better Places*. Washington DC: Island Press

Explains the steps we need to take to make healthier, more cost-effective and environmentally sustainable decisions in order to develop more walkable cities.

YOUTUBE VIDEOS

S.Nevada Strong. 2014. “A Sneak Peek at the Benefits of Transit Oriented Development (TOD).” YouTube video, 4:28. Posted December 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2gwy6bKKVg>

1. What are some of the benefits of TOD mentioned in the video?
 - It creates opportunities for a very walkable neighbourhood—a place where people can walk to their children, their work, increase exercise. The increase in physical ability helps improve long-term health.
2. Why is TOD considered a holistic approach to development?
 - It looks at the community having access to parks, walkability, and improves the lives of low to moderate income people by providing them access to jobs and amenities that many people take for granted.

hexagonal.org. 2014. “Walkable Cities by Kent Larson (New Urbanism).” YouTube video, 16:41. Posted May 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKCJ2qzYEtl>

1. Why should we care about cities?

- Cities account for a tremendous amount of human development. For example, cities will account for 80 per cent of all global CO₂, 90 per cent of population growth, and 75 per cent of energy use. It is also where people want to live—over 50 per cent of the world's population now live in cities. Cities are where most of the world's wealth is created and where women find the most opportunities.
2. What is a compact urban cell?
- This is the idea that within a one-mile radius (or about 20 minute walk) almost everything is provided for people. This can increase resiliency and liveability.