

Chapter 11 – Urban Trends and Problems

- Differences in urban growth processes between the world's core regions and the underdeveloped periphery mirrored in patterns and processes of urban change
- Urban change is dominated by the consequences of an economic transformation to a postindustrial economy
- Traditional manufacturing and related activities have been moved out of inner-city areas, leaving deteriorating neighbourhoods
- New commercial activities have meanwhile begun to cluster in redeveloped CBDs and in edge cities around metropolitan fringes
- Logic of agglomeration economies has created 100 mile cities – metropolitan areas that are literally 100 miles (160 km) or so across
- **Dualism** – The juxtaposition in geographical space of the formal and informal sectors of the economy

Problems of Postindustrial Cities

- **Fiscal Problems**
 - Economic restructuring and metropolitan decentralization have meant that central cities have been left since the mid-1970s with a chronic problem that geographers call “fiscal squeeze”
 - Squeeze comes from increasing limitations on revenues and increasing demands for expenditure
 - Revenue-generating potential of central cities has steadily fallen as metropolitan areas have decentralized
 - Central city governments are still responsible for services and amenities used by the entire metropolitan population
 - Canadian central cities have lost far less revenues, our cities are more compact, and our municipal governments cover much wider areas than do cities in the US
- **Infrastructure Problems**
 - Continued growth of cities in the core countries has often ignored the need to renew original infrastructure built many years ago
 - Many cities still use water-cleaning technology from WWI
 - About one-third of all towns and cities has its own examples where provincial cutbacks have been blamed for jeopardizing the health of many urban dwellers
 - Coastal cities still discharge untreated sewage into the sea and therefore need to have expensive treatment systems built
 - Estimated that 50% of all waste-water treatment systems in North America are operating at 80% or more of their capacity
- **Poverty and Neighbourhood Decay**
 - Relative lack of urban decay in Canadian cities differentiates it from US cities
 - Inner city poverty and neighbourhood decay have become increasingly pronounced since the 1960s, as manufacturing, warehousing, and retailing jobs have moved out to suburban and edge-city locations
 - Spiral of neighbourhood decay begins with substandard housing occupied by low-income

households that can afford to rent only a minimal amount of space

- Consequent overcrowding not only causes greater wear and tear on the housing itself but also puts pressure on the neighbourhood infrastructure of streets, parks, schools, and playgrounds
- Need for maintenance and repair increases quickly but it rarely met
- Individual households cannot afford it, and landlords have no incentive to do so because they have a captive market
- **Cycle of poverty** – Transmission of poverty and deprivation from one generation to another through a combination of domestic circumstances and local neighbourhood conditions
- Cycle begins with a localized absence of employment opportunities and in turn, a concentration of low incomes, poor housing and overcrowded conditions
- Overcrowding makes people vulnerable to poor health, which is compounded by poor diets
- This contributes to absenteeism from work, resulting in decreased income
- Crowding also produces psychological stress, which contributes to social disorganization and a variety of pathological behaviours, including crime and vandalism
- Increased divorce rates and a high incidence of teen pregnancy have led to far greater numbers of single-parent families and a feminization of poverty
- **Underclass** – A subset of the poor, isolated from mainstream values and the formal labour market
- Isolated from the formal labour force and the social values and behavioural patterns of the rest of society, the underclass has been perceived as being subject to an increase in social disorganization and deviant behaviour
- Localized inner-city poverty is now characterized by senseless and unprovoked violence, premeditated and predatory violence, domestic violence, organized violence of street gangs, and epidemic levels of infectious diseases – all closely associated with drug use and dealing
- **Homelessness**
 - Chronic, long-term homelessness means not having customary and regular access to a conventional dwelling
 - Includes people who have to sleep in shelters, flophouse cubicles, and emergency dormitories and missions, as well as those sleeping on the streets
 - Number of homeless rose sharply in the mid-1970s
 - Mainly a consequence of the poverty and the economic and social dislocation caused by economic restructuring and the transition to a globalized, postindustrial economy
 - Intensified by the fiscal squeeze confronting central cities and by the trend for governments to cut back on welfare programs of all kinds
 - Intensified by the adoption of revolving-door policies of mental-health hospitals, which released large numbers of patients who had formerly been institutionalized
 - Canadian Council for Social Development estimated in 1987 that there were between 130000 and 250000 homeless people in Canada
 - Estimates of the number of homeless people in US cities in the 1990s varied a good deal
 - Estimates ranged between 1.5 million to 3 million
 - The former Soviet Union saw the “shock therapy” of free markets bringing homelessness to

cities that had not experienced it for decades

- Homelessness had previously involved white, adult males, relatively few of whom actually had to sleep outdoors, the new homeless are of all ethnic groups and include significant numbers of women, children and the elderly
- In Europe, estimates suggest that up to 70 percent of the homeless are under 20 years old, and official statistics show that more than 40 percent of the people receiving services for the homeless were women

The Urban Environment

- Most Canadian cities devote large sums to snow clearance, and our cities must accommodate the rigours of winter in plans for street layout and building design.
- Canadian cities have created their own environment, and these are not always as healthy or comfortable as those found outside the city
- Examples of urban climate and urban health well illustrate this contention
- **Urban Heat Island** – an effect resulting from the absorption and radiation of thermal energy by buildings and roads, together with the heat generated by urban living, which causes the average city to be warmer than its surrounding countryside
- Bricks and concrete absorb and radiate solar radiation but also because the range of activities that take place in a city create heat
- A city may be up to 3 degrees Celsius warmer than its surroundings
- Configuration of buildings, especially tower blocks, also can modify weather conditions as vortices are created and wind is funnelled along urban canyons
- A combination of urban heat island, wind and local topographic effects, cities act to concentrate the pollution that results from much of their own industrial and transportation activities,
- Smog has become an increasing problem of larger Canadian centres and is a phenomenon that poses considerable health risks to some people, including the elderly and asthmatics

Problems of Unintended Metropolises

- **Unemployment and Underemployment**
 - Urban unemployment rates in underdeveloped countries tend to be significantly higher than rural unemployment rates
 - Result of cities' inability to absorb the rapid population influx from the countryside
 - Greatest urban problem is underemployment which reflects the low productivity of the formal economic sector in underdeveloped countries
 - **Underemployment** – The state of working less than full time, even though the people concerned would prefer to work more hours
 - Peripheral cities have developed their characteristic informal sector of employment
 - Occupations such as street vending, scavenging at dumps, driving pedicabs, making home-brewed beer, writing letters for others, and dressmaking use these as occupations to feed their families
 - Pedicabs provide an affordable, nonpolluting means of transportation in crowded metropolitan settings

- Garbage picking provides an important means of recycling and can provide a considerable, indirect subsidy to production which is passed onto consumers in the core regions in the form of lower prices for goods
- **Slums of Hope, Slums of Despair**
 - Unemployment, underemployment, and poverty mean overcrowding
 - In situations where urban growth has swamped the available stock of cheap housing and outstripped the capacity of builders to create affordable new housing, the inevitable outcome is makeshift, shanty housing
 - Such housing has to be constructed on the cheapest and least desirable sites
 - Sometimes, it means adapting to the most extreme ecological niches
 - The UN estimated in 1999 that more than 1 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing
 - Shanty and squatter neighbourhoods provide affordable shelter and function as important reception areas for migrants to the city, with supportive communal organizations and informal employment opportunities that help them to adjust to city life
 - City authorities, recognizing the positive functions of informal housing and self-help improvements, are now increasingly disposed to be tolerant and even helpful toward squatters, rather than sending in police and municipal workers with bulldozers
 - Many shanty and squatter neighbourhoods where self-help and community organization do not emerge
 - Grim and desperately miserable conditions make them slums of despair
- **Transport and Infrastructure Problems**
 - In many of the world's peripheral and semiperipheral metropolises, sharp increases have occurred in the availability and use of automobiles
 - Water supplies and sewage also present acute problems for many cities
 - The World Bank estimates that worldwide, only about 70 percent of urban residents in less-developed countries have access to a satisfactory water source, and only about 40 percent are connected to sewers
 - Hundreds of millions of urban dwellers have no alternative but to use contaminated water – or at least water whose quality is not guaranteed
 - In many cities (such as Bangkok, Bogota, Jakarta, Karachi and Sao Paulo) only one-quarter or one-third of all garbage and solid waste is collected and removed
 - Rest is partially recycled informally, tipped into gullies, canals or rivers
- **Environmental Degradation**
 - Pressing problems of poverty, slim housing, and inadequate infrastructure, it is not surprising that peripheral cities are unable to devote many resources to environmental problems
 - Industrial and human wastes pile up in lakes and lagoons, polluting long stretches of rivers, estuaries and coastal zones
 - Groundwater is polluted through the leaching of chemicals from uncontrolled dumping sites, and the forests around many cities are being denuded by the demand of cities for timber and domestic fuels
 - Environmental degradation is directly linked to human health

- People living in such environments have much higher rates of respiratory infections, tuberculosis and diarrhea and much shorter life expectancies than people living in surrounding rural communities
- Air pollution has escalated to very harmful levels in many cities
- The development of a modern industrial sector and the growth of automobile ownership, but without enforceable regulations on pollution and vehicle emissions, tonnes of lead, sulphur oxides, fluorides, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, petrochemical oxidants and other toxic chemicals
- Burning of charcoal, wood and kerosene for fuel and cooking in low-income neighbourhoods also contributes significantly to dirty air
- Sao Paulo, for example, has housing in very poor quality with toxic industrial wastes being dumped into the surrounding forests and contaminating the city's water supplies
- Vegetation in and around the city has suffered substantially from air pollution
- **Governance and Management**
 - Governments of towns and cities in the world's periphery are faced with tremendous problems
 - Typical growth rates mean that cities' physical infrastructure of roads, bridges and utilities need to be tripled every 10 years
 - Most city governments find it nearly impossible to take care of the daily upkeep of their existing infrastructure because of the wear and tear that is caused by overurbanization
 - Basic services have to be provided to populations that cannot afford to pay more than a fraction of their costs
 - Governance of most peripheral countries tends to be highly centralized, with relatively little political power allocated to city or metropolitan governments
 - City and metropolitan governments are typically fragmented as well as being understaffed and underfinanced
 - Metropolitan governance and management seem doomed to be ineffective and inefficient until some way can be devised to improve the institutional framework and reduce the financial constraints faced by municipal governments