Urban Foundations

City Origins and Influences on Cities Today

Historical Context for Cities

- This week: looking at some of the historical context for cities today
- We will take virtually the entire class today to view a video case study that does an excellent job of helping us to expand our thinking on cities and human development
  - What were early cultures like?
  - What challenges did they face?
  - Why did some cultures succeed and prosper, while others failed?

Historical Context for Cities

- In particular, this video helps us to begin to answer where and how people began to come up with the “city” idea
  - What was the context, both historical and geographical?
- I will hand out a question sheet to help guide your viewing as we watch this video (brief discussion at the end)

Fundamental Issues

- It’s tempting to think of our city problems as unique, and our plans as highly developed
- However, we’re dealing with the same issues people have grappled with for thousands of years
  - Technologies are different, but problems are the same

Fundamental Issues

- Issues faced by early city-builders
  - 1. Site Selection: most suitable location for new cities and communities
    - Is defense a high priority, or should we give more weight to amenity (liveability) or transport potential (good links to outside)?
    - Site selection was a key issue in the development of Dallas (trading routes, rail lines)

The San Francisco Bay Area offers obvious site advantages for city development

San Francisco Bay Area
Fundamental Issues

2. Community Purpose: what is the function of the city?

- Center of commerce, political capital, recreation destination, resource extraction center, other functions
- Q: How might “function” have an impact on plans for a community?

St. John’s, Canada

St. John’s (est. 1583) is North America’s easternmost city. Q: Why do you think the city was founded?

Washington, DC

Q: How has Washington as a city been impacted by its function as national capital?

Fundamental Issues

3. Land Use Allocation: how do we lay out the various activities of the city for proper/efficient function?

- Reduce/eliminate conflicts between uses
- Residential, business, politics, trade/transport
- Q: Why is “layout” important? How do we decide on this in Denton and other cities?

Land Use Map for Atlanta, GA: note the different color codes for different kinds of land uses

Fundamental Issues

4. Accommodating Growth: where do we put new people and businesses as the city grows?

- How do we value our urban and rural land?
- Compact city (Europe, Asia) vs. Spread city (North America)
Chartres, France

Note a well defined "urban envelope": farm land outside the city will not be developed

Dallas-Fort Worth

Metro Population: Approximately 6.5 million

Jinan, China

Metro Population: Approximately 8 million

How do they put so many people in so little room?

Jinan, China

Same scale as D-FW map

Urbanized Area

Metro Population: Approximately 8 million

How do they put so many people in so little room?
Issues faced by early city-builders

- 5. Circulation of Goods and People: how do we move around the city?
  - Challenges are different with evolving transport technology, but the problem is the same as it was thousands of years ago
  - Promote easy transport around city, or develop city for life based in local communities
  - Q: What choices are we making in D-FW?

Q: how would you describe Boston’s highway network?

- 6. Community Form: how are society’s values reflected in the layout of the city?
  - Utilitarian view: promote jobs and trade
  - Aesthetic perspective: value in parks, public facilities
  - Q: How do you think we see society’s values in Denton’s city form today? (or any other city you are familiar with)

The establishment of Central Park reflects something about what the people of New York want for their city

- It has been tempting to think that it was the brightest people groups that came up with cities and other advanced ideas first, with others following later (or not at all)
  - Geographer Jared Diamond, in the Guns, Germs, and Steel video case study we saw, does a good job of refuting this kind of thinking
  - Diamond’s Basic Idea: innovation (including city building) occurred in regions that allowed for innovation (a test of regional environments, not the intelligence of people)
City Origins

- Your text outlines the **basic environmental conditions** necessary for organized agriculture and city growth (p. 23)
  - Climate, water supply, topography, natural resources, soil conditions
  - Regions with these favorable conditions are the regions that hosted the earliest cities
  - Even with these conditions in place, people needed further breakthroughs (technology, farming practices, and social organization) before cities began to grow

City Origins

- The production of an agricultural surplus is one factor fundamental to the existence of cities, in the past as well as today
  - Some debate as to whether an agricultural surplus on its own directly caused city growth
  - Organization of society into divisions of labor, the existence of population pressures, and the needs of trade, defense, and religion are all reasons that theorists cite for city origins
  - Most realistic to think that a combination of all of the above resulted in the growth of cities

City Origins

- Great example of a region where this all came together: China
  - Today, the world’s most populous country (over 1.4 billion people)
  - Historically, the site of urban development for over 4,000 years
  - The east China plain is one of the most agriculturally productive regions on the planet

City Origins

- Historic center of agriculture and urbanization
  - Bejing (first urbanization on site: 1100 BC)
  - Baotu Springs, Jinan (park organized: 1500 BC)
The Chinese built cities because their environment allowed them to do it.

Other cultures with long histories of urbanization:
- Mesopotamian culture: modern-day Iraq
- The Inca culture: South America
- The Greek culture: Europe
- The Roman culture: Europe

City Origins
- A common point with all of the cultures where cities were invented is the emergence of not just individual cities, but **city systems**.
- We see groups of cities beginning to function together through **trade**, the exchange of **ideas**, and the development of **regional governments**.
- Evidence for this early development can be seen today through the diffusion of technologies and ideas (the wheel, architectural designs) throughout regions.

City Origins
- Out of all of the early city-based societies, the **Greek** and **Roman** empires have special significance to cities in North America.
- City planning and architectural principles from these empires are still part of our cities today.

Early Greek Cities
- Early Greek Cities:
  - Grew in an unplanned, "organic" manner around a central **defensive/religious structure** (the Acropolis).
  - Residential areas were placed in **curving, narrow streets** around the Acropolis.

Early Greek Cities
- The **Acropolis in Athens** as it looked in ancient times.
- The **Acropolis in Athens** as it looks today.
Early Greek Cities
- As the Greek empire spread, cities were developed and redeveloped
  - Regular (grid) street networks were planned to simplify planning and administration of rapidly-growing cities
  - Some of the earliest grid street networks were adopted in Miletus and other cities across the spreading empire

Roman Cities
- Greek city form became a model for the Romans
- The Romans used city form to emphasize social class in their cities
  - Placement of administrative and religious facilities in special places to act as a focus for the city's activities
  - City design facilitated the continuation of control over the city by the elite of society

Roman Cities
- Typical Roman City
  - Square or rectangular layout
  - Bisected by two perpendicular roads (north-south, east-west)
  - City center contained an open square (forum)
    - Marketplace
    - Space for public assemblies, such as sporting events, political functions, shows, and funerals

Roman Cities
- The walled core of Florence, Italy: note the four main streets radiating out from the square Roman city at the centre

Roman Cities
- The Roman city center in Pompeii: present-day view of the Forum from the air
Roman Cities

The Roman city center in Pompeii: note the collection of important temples etc. around the central Forum.

Cities in the Middle Ages

- Medieval times saw a continuation of the importance of class and the development of large public buildings symbolizing the power of the upper classes.

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The walled city of Carcassonne from the air.

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Public Square and Cathedral in Delft, Netherlands.

Renaissance and Baroque Cities

- The period AD 1400 – 1800 was particularly important in shaping European cities as we know them today (and by extension, the modern cities of North America).
- Three key factors account for changes in European city development through this period:
  - 1. The emergence of new technologies.
  - 2. A revival of interest in Greek and Roman city design principles.

Renaissance and Baroque Cities

- European city development of this period is known for its dominant characteristics:
  - Wide, straight avenues for main city routes.
  - Gridiron pattern for local streets.
  - Monuments/squares as focal points for cities.
Renaissance and Baroque Cities

Example of Paris: development of wide processional routes and monumental focal points

Renaissance and Baroque Cities

More Paris: Champs Elysees, Arc de Triomphe

Renaissance and Baroque Cities

More Paris: Champs Elysees, Arc de Triomphe

Renaissance and Baroque Cities

Q:

- Have you ever been in Paris, or a city with these grand kinds of features? Are there cities in America like this?

Renaissance and Baroque Cities

Washington, DC: note the parallels with Paris
Renaissance and Baroque Cities

Q:
– What do you think might be the advantages of this kind of city that previous cities did not have? Do any particular group(s) in society benefit from having such cities?

The cities of this period differed fundamentally from earlier cities (think of our original “six city-building issues”)
– More focus on commerce and transportation, less on defense
– More accommodating of growth and change
– More circulation of people and goods around the city

This orientation toward transportation, growth, and circulation led to further expansion and the growth of European empires
– Spain and Portugal were the first to connect the world’s periphery to the European urban system
– European city growth was spurred on in the 1500-1900 period by trade with the colonies

Key concept in the functioning of this core-periphery system: gateway cities
– In a colonial setting, these cities were also important as on-the-site administrative centers for resource extraction in the colonies (fur trade, forestry, mining)
– Rio de Janeiro and gold mining; Accra and cocoa
– These centers fulfilled command and control functions, usually in both an economic and a military sense
– The site of major fortifications and naval bases

Key concept in the functioning of this core-periphery system: gateway cities
– At the other end of the system, gateway cities in Europe were also greatly changed by this imperial development
– Cities like London, Paris, and Lisbon displayed wealth and power that would have been unattainable without their empires
– Legacy of this growth is still visible in the architecture and city form of these European capitals (think of the Paris example)
Renaissance and Baroque Cities

Trafalgar Square, London

- Such city development and growth provided a foundation for the modern, industrial city.