

**Lesson  
Eighteen****Urbanisation****Aims**

The aims of this lesson are to enable you to

- define ‘urbanisation’, and ‘de-urbanisation’
- identify the reasons for urbanisation and de-urbanisation
- understand the effect of urbanisation on social relations
- describe the differences between urban and rural social life

**Context**

This lesson follows on naturally from the last two which introduced you to the study of demography. You now know a little about how the population has changed in Britain in recent centuries but so far we have only really looked at the total population of the country. People do not stay in the same place. Families and even large groups of people are moving all the time. One of the most important kinds of movement over the years has been the movement into the cities and that is the main theme of this lesson. Afterwards, you should attempt the fifth tutor-marked assignment. Not far to go now!



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## Sociology's Great Dichotomy

Can you guess what the '**great dichotomy**' in sociology is? A **dichotomy** is a split between opposites. The title of the lesson should give you a hint!

Yes, of course, the **urban/rural** dichotomy.

A large part of sociological theory is concerned with these two distinct modes of social life — the urban, and the rural.

**Urban** refers to towns and cities; **Rural** to the village.

Cities have been there from very early times, but the increase in their number, and the enormous increase in the percentage of the population living in cities and towns is the process called **urbanisation**.

Industrialisation and the growth of urban centres, led to a movement away from the rural, agricultural life to life in the industrial city. This, in turn, led to massive problems of housing, pollution and disease, crime, poverty, etc. Thus, with increasing urbanisation, there was a further movement out of the cities into **suburbs** — outlying areas where people could escape from the noise and dirt and the crowds, and still have the facilities of cities lacking in villages.

This process is called **de-urbanisation** or **suburbanisation** or **urban dispersal**.

<b>Activity 1</b>	Define Urbanisation and De-urbanisation.
	

### Urban Life

In Britain today, most of us live in towns and cities.

The reason is very simple!

Most of the jobs are in these places, and people like to live near their place of work.

These metropolitan centres take in a growing proportion of the population. In Britain, for example, more than 40% of the people live in seven large metropolitan areas, or conurbations — London,

Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Newcastle, and Glasgow. This is one of the most important features of Britain's population!

This movement into the towns and cities began in Britain in medieval times. The population of London is said to have trebled during the reign of Queen Elizabeth the First. In the 18th century, peasants driven from the land were forced to move in search of work. The industrial revolution further speeded up this movement. The growth of large factories required in turn a large workforce. This attracted a large number of people. The needs of these people for houses, goods and services, brought in the traders, construction labourers, etc. This process of growth of urban centres is 'urbanisation' or 'urbanism'.

But, the increase and growth of these metropolitan areas, means not only an increase in urbanism, but also of 'suburbanism'.

The growth of metropolitan areas usually takes the form of 'rings' around the inner city areas. Outside the inner or central city, there are various kinds of communities — satellite cities; industrial towns; residential suburbs with housing estates within easy commuting distance of the larger city; etc. This 'suburbanization' began in Britain in the 1920's, with the affluent moving out of the inner city areas.

The expansion of these areas outside the central city, is in part simply the result of the tremendous increase in population. The new towns or suburbs are meant to accommodate the 'overspill' city populations and to relieve the pressures of over-population in the city.

In part this expansion is also the result of economic forces — high land values push industries out to the fringes where costs are less, and this brings in its wake the workers and the services they need.

In part the expansion must also be seen as a desire for a better way of life — for home-ownership, friendship and family, away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

The suburb then reflects an effort to combine the best of two worlds — the close community of the village with the amenities of the city, without the crowding and dirt and noise of the city.

Suburban growth, however, itself contributes to the problems of the city!

The heavy growth of commuting traffic increases congestion on roads. Crowded roads and shopping centres make urban living less desirable.

Further, as the affluent move away from the inner city, their place is taken by new migrants from the small towns and villages, as well as ethnic minorities. This changing class and ethnic composition of inner city areas causes its own problems — racial tension, violence, crime.

<b>Activity 2</b>	Give reasons for de-urbanisation.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>

## Rural and Urban Differences

How do patterns of social life differ in rural and urban areas?

What impact has urbanism had on styles of life?

An important sociologist, whose theoretical focus was the distinction between rural and urban life-styles was Ferdinand **Tonnies**. Tonnies distinguished between 'Gemeinschaft' and 'Gesellschaft', or **community** and **association**.

**Gemeinschaft** (or 'community') characterised rural life. Social relationships were based on close personal ties centred on the family, neighbourhood and church. People had a sense of belonging to their community. Therefore, there existed a sense of unity where there was mutual trust and a sense of shared obligation.

**Gesellschaft** (or 'association') characterised urban life. In this situation, relationships lacked depth and warmth. They were impersonal and calculating. People related to each other in terms of their roles - for example, policemen, teachers, shopkeepers or doctors - not as members of the same community who had grown up together.

A similar distinction between the rural and the urban ways of life is described by **Emile Durkheim**. He distinguishes between the mechanical solidarity found in traditional societies and the organic solidarity of modern industrial societies. In the traditional society, its solidarity or unity comes from a shared culture. It is based on

tradition and face-to-face relationships. The people are united because they are basically similar.

Conversely, in modern industrial societies Durkheim sees social unity or solidarity as based on the difference of its parts, Each performs a particular function for society and contributes for the well-being of the whole. He calls this **organic solidarity**. In industrial society there is a specialised division of labour, with each occupational group becoming more and more different with fewer and fewer aspects of culture in common. Life becomes centred on the individual rather than on the community.

In some respects Durkheim welcomed the change as it would provide more individual freedom. Nevertheless, he also felt that the rapid social change of the nineteenth century produced a situation of **anomie** or normlessness. Traditional norms and social control were being broken down and had yet to be replaced by new ones. Consequently, individuals were becoming increasingly isolated, dissatisfied and rootless. Durkheim saw anomie as responsible for increasing amounts of suicide, crime and social disorder in urban society.

The famous American sociologist Louis Wirth made similar contrasts between the urban and rural. He argued that city dwellers tend to be nervous and insecure. They feel 'lost in the crowd' and relationships lack the depth and meaning of those found in traditional rural societies. Relationships with other people tend to be practical, shallow and short-lived. As a result, he believed that in the city, tensions and conflicts arise and there is often an increased incidence of vices like gambling, drug addiction and crime.

Recently, these sweeping statements about loss of community have been questioned. For a start, there is considerable doubt about the rather rosy picture painted of rural life. **Raymond Williams** points out that in pre-industrial England, agricultural workers were poor and had little security. They may have stuck together because of what he calls 'the mutuality of oppression'.

Furthermore, there is evidence that there exist small close-knit communities within the urban environment. For example, Willmott and Young found this in Bethnal Green. People were born, raised and married in Bethnal Green - they 'knew everybody else'. An extended network of family and kin formed the basis of this close-knit community. Likewise, Herbert Gans in the USA has found village-like communities in Boston and New York. Often, these communities are working class and/or ethnic in origin.

**Activity 3**

What are the terms used by the following to distinguish between rural and urban social life?

1) Tonnies, 2) Durkheim, 3) Wirth



- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Rural Life**

Have you lived in a city or a village? How distinctive is the way of life? Most sociologists would agree that there are certain basic differences.

First of all, the sheer size! Cities are large and densely populated. Rural communities, being based largely on agriculture, are necessarily small and the population density is low.

Secondly, the main occupation in rural areas is agriculture. This is not so in cities, where you find a diversity of occupations.

Thirdly, of course, you have the rich and the poor in villages as well! But the differences in their way of life is not as marked as in cities, where the rich and the poor seem to live in different worlds!

Fourthly, some sociologists believe that in villages the poor seem to accept their status as natural and make no effort to change it.

The size and density of cities makes life impersonal — it is simply impossible to know large numbers of people! But in villages everybody knows everybody else.

The fact that everyone knows you acts as a powerful social control in villages. People are more free in cities to do as they please, especially in their private lives where state laws do not interfere.

The adverse effect of the anonymity of the city is that it leads to greater opportunities for crime. Deviant behaviour is more prevalent in cities.

Density of population leads to more diseases and health problems. Infant mortality and the death rate tend to be higher in cities. Fertility rates are usually higher in the rural areas.

Ninth and last, the average level of education is higher in cities than in rural areas.

A significant point is that changes in technology and the economy have fundamentally reduced the differences between the two life-styles.

The differences described by people such as Tonnies, Durkheim and Wirth represent the extremes. In reality, many communities lie somewhere between the two.

**Ray Pahl** has thrown light on some recent changes which have been taking place in rural communities. His research found that many villages near to London had been brought within the general orbit of the city. He refers to these as 'metropolitan villages'. These communities are no longer homogenous but contain a variety of groups who may have a variety of cultural and social backgrounds. These groups may therefore have conflicting interests and concerns. Links with the city may be strong. For example, some residents will be highly paid professionals who commute to the city and whose lives are centred round it. With the decline of rural industries like agriculture, some traditional villagers may be forced to commute to the city to find work. Social changes and improvements in transport have therefore meant that many villages are therefore within the orbit of cities.

In conclusion, we can say that many villages are no longer independent but economically tied to the city. Today's villagers have the benefits of mass communications and easy transport so they may be closely in touch with the social, commercial and cultural life of the city.

**Activity 4**

What according to you are the basic differences between the city and village?



## Project Work

Contact as many friends and relatives as you can from different parts of the city, preferably some who live in the middle of a city, some in the suburbs and some in the country.

Why do they choose to live where they do? Why the city and not the country, and vice versa? Where do they hope or expect to live in the future?

You could devise a questionnaire to ask these questions. Think about what it would contain and how you would organise the results. Remember that this is not a truly random sample.

## Recent Trends

Will the movement from the country to the city and from the middle of the city to the suburbs continue for ever? If it did, there would come a time when everyone lived in the suburbs! In fact, there are signs that there is a new trend in Britain towards extended de-urbanisation or '**countrification**'.

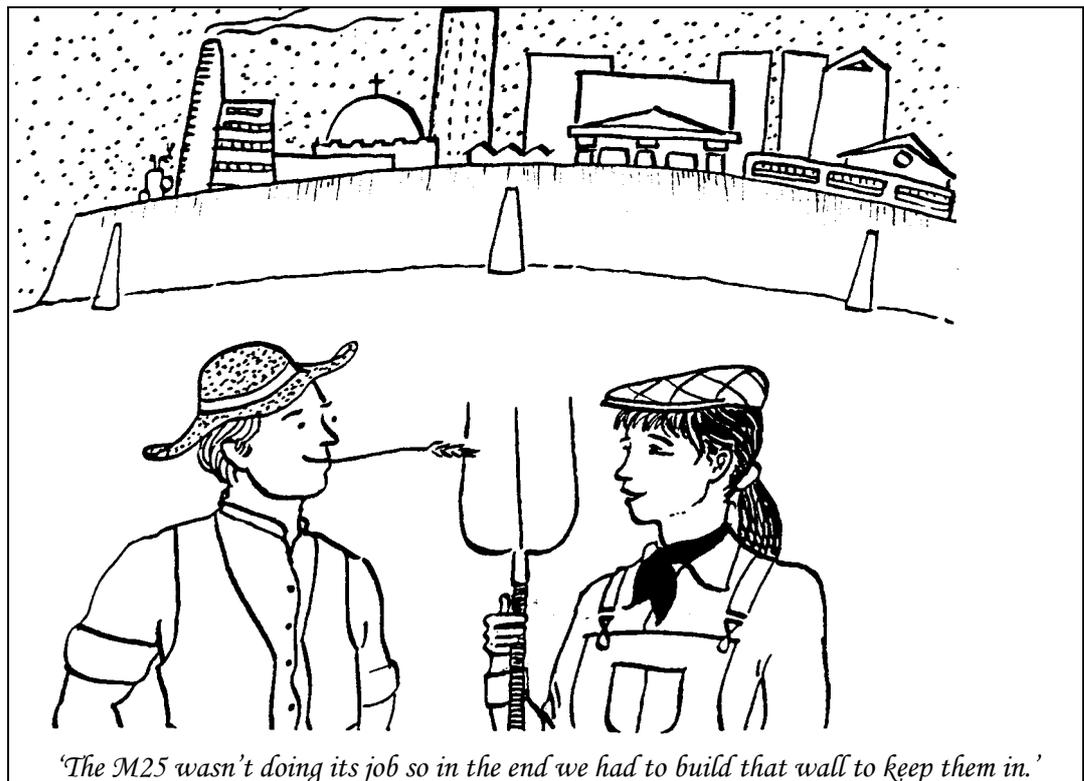
The population of Greater London dropped by 35,000 in a single year between mid-1987 and mid-1988. The population in London continued to drop in fits and starts during the following twenty years. Of course, many are moving to the surrounding counties but a significant proportion is going further afield.

Why should this be so?

One of the main reasons is the high cost of living and working in a city like London. Houses there are expensive. Business premises are also very expensive so businesses are shutting up shop and moving to other parts of the country, taking many of their old employees with them. Many businesses are finding that they do not **have** to be in the capital.

Also, the nature of work is changing for many people. Fewer and fewer are having to go to offices and factories located in cities. One reason for this is the rapid improvement in **telecommunications**. With instant contact by telephone or 'fax' or by e-mail and a network of computers, people are finding that they don't have to spend so much time at a single place of work. Instead of going in five days a week, they may now only have to travel in two days a week, with the result that they feel happy living in the country.

The greatest exodus has been from the inner cities. This is explained partly by the decline in traditional manufacturing industries which are often located in the oldest central parts of cities. These are frequently characterised by urban decay. High rates of unemployment result from the decline in industry, houses may be old and become neglected while the area suffers from high rates of crime and poor social amenities.



Paul Harrison describes Hackney in London as:

“a sump for the disadvantaged of every kind, a place where those with the fewest resources sink, and from which those who gain any freedom of choice escape. It is a place of deprivation, of toil and struggle and isolation, a knacker’s yard for society’s casualties, a breaker’s yard where the pressure of need grinds people against each other and wears them down.”

**Activity 5**

Read the above extract. Why do you think that life in the inner city is stressful? What sort of effects would you expect the environment to have on people?



The negative aspects of city life are sometimes described as ‘push’ factors which push people away from large cities, especially declining inner cities. There are also ‘pull’ factors which explain the attraction of smaller towns and villages. These areas have not experienced the industrial decline of inner cities and have actually grown. People are also attracted by the belief that they will experience a better life-style - less crime, a healthier and less polluted environment and better facilities.

Despite the trends described above, the situation is complex. In some inner city areas there are attempts at regeneration. For example, some parts of London have been ‘gentrified’, that is, taken over and improved by middle class residents. Also, new developments such as the Dockland developments on the Thames and the Riversway development on the former Preston Docks on the River Ribble in Lancashire go some way towards improving older urban areas. The tentative movement back into urban areas is known as **re-urbanisation**.

### The North/South Divide

For some years there has been a drift from the North to the South of the country. This migration usually involves younger people, who move for better employment opportunities. For example, unemployment levels are typically higher in the North East than in the South East. In the South, there has been a growth in the service industries and increasing trade with Europe while in the North there has been a decline in the traditional industries such as shipbuilding, coal mining, textiles and iron and steel. As a result, the South East of England has become the most prosperous part of the country with the highest levels of income.

## Tutor Test E

You should now attempt Tutor Test E, which follows. It will test your understanding of Lessons 16-18 on Population and Urbanisation.

### Summary

#### Lesson Eighteen: Urbanisation

You now understand the meaning of ‘urbanisation’ and ‘de-urbanisation’. You can identify the reasons for, and the consequences of, urbanisation and de-urbanisation. You can describe the impact of urbanisation on social relations, and the differences between urban and rural life-styles.

### Project Work

Here are some ideas that might make suitable titles for a sociological enquiry on urbanisation:

Study of specific trend, e.g. de-urbanisation and its consequences, using secondary sources (topic suggested by SEG/AQA);

Planning permission for a new superstore on the edge of town — arguments for and against.



In addition, you might read:

- *An Introduction to Sociology* (Ken Browne), pp. 388-92.

**Key Terms**

Urbanisation  
Dichotomy  
Urban Dispersal  
De-urbanisation  
Community  
Association  
Mechanical Solidarity  
Organic Solidarity  
Metropolitan Village  
Segmentation  
Homogeneity/Heterogeneity  
Countrification  
Push/pull factors  
Re-urbanisation

**Suggested Answers to Activities****One**

'Urbanisation' is the process of growth in the number of urban areas and in the percentage of the population living in these areas.

'De-urbanisation' is the movement out of the cities into the outlying areas or suburbs.

**Two**

1. Pressure of over-population in the cities
2. Economic reasons, e.g. lower land prices in outlying areas
3. Desire for friend- and family-centred life, away from the noise and dirt of the city, but within easy reach of city amenities

**Three**

1. Community / Association
2. Mechanical solidarity / Organic solidarity
3. Integrated / Segmented

**Four**

1. Size and density of population;
2. Occupation;
3. Heterogeneity of population.