



The Structure Of European Cities: East Versus West

Any large metropolitan city will contain a core of residential, industrial and service functions. The spatial location of these functions - the structure of the city - will be determined by the decisions both of those who perform and those who use these functions. These decisions will be based on two key mechanisms, the market and the plan, which will operate, in different proportions, in every city's development. This Factsheet will address to what extent the relative dominance of the plan in Eastern Europe and the market in Western Europe has affected the structure of urban areas in these two regions.

The West European City

Attempts to delineate the structure of the West European city usually involve applying and extending the classic zonal and sectoral patterns of Burgess and Hoyt to the particular European setting. Mann produced a model based on work in three northern English cities where the relative location of industry and middle-class housing was determined by the prevailing wind direction. Middle-class housing and commuting 'villages' are generally located such that industrial fumes do not blow over these properties: in Britain this means that they are to be found in the south and west of the city. Robson studied several British cities and concluded that both sectoral and concentric zonal patterns could be detected, with house age concentrically organised and socio-economic groups structured sectorally. If these concepts of cities having a concentric and/or sectoral structure do in part survive being transplanted from the American models of Burgess and Hoyt, there are perhaps two important differences between the typical American and West European city:

- 1). the city core in European cities retains the function of a high status residential area to a greater degree than in American cities, particularly in cities with a rich history where prestige is gained from living in historic areas.
- 2). the inner city areas of European cities are more mixed than in America with a combination of economic and residential functions and a more concentrated industrial zone between the inner city and the suburbs. Burgess' gradation of CBD - zone in transition - lower class housing - middle class housing, a simplification in any city, is even less applicable where economic and industrial functions are thoroughly intermingled with housing.

Exam Hint - This is definitely *not* an essay which should be attempted by candidates who cannot back up their analysis with accurate sketch maps of named cities.

A Model of the West European City

These points of departure from the principles of Burgess and Hoyt do allow the formulation of an alternative model of the West European city in the late twentieth century. Burtenshaw, Bateman and Ashworth outline five components to this model (See Fig 1):

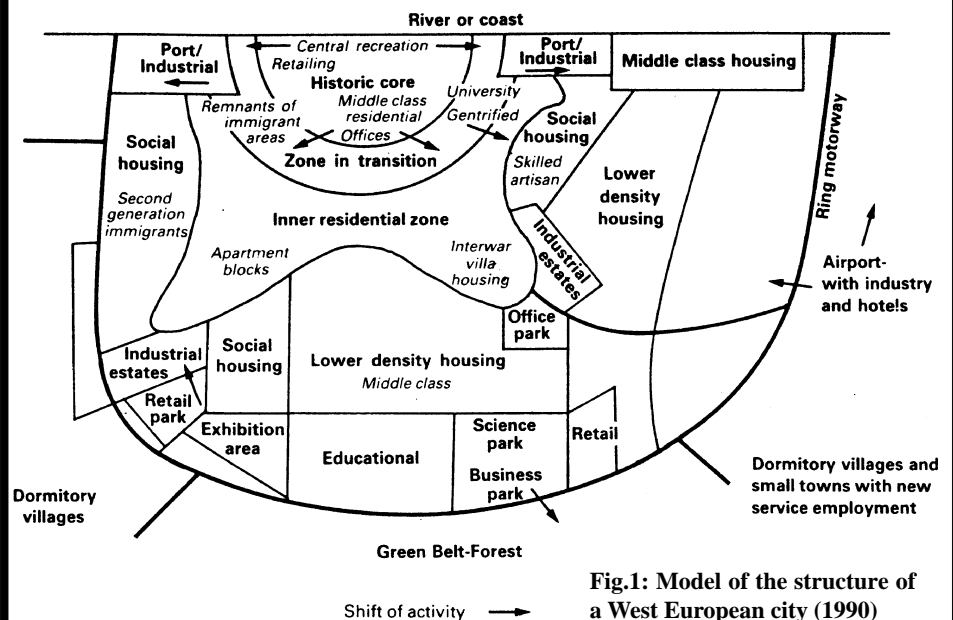


Fig.1: Model of the structure of a West European city (1990)

- 1) a historic core combining retail and commercial functions and gentrified middle class housing.
- 2) an old zone in transition, now undergoing gentrification, with immigrant housing being edged out.
- 3) an inner residential zone of inter-war housing
- 4) lower density middle class housing near to new educational and employment nodes; social housing near to industry
- 5) the limit to the contiguous city marked by a ring motorway (e.g. M25, M42) beyond which a green belt is maintained with dormitory villages and small research and business parks.

Eastern and Western Cities

Cities in Western Europe are planned and developed within the framework of the **capitalist money market**. This means that all public and private developments are funded by capitalist finance - loans must be repaid and generate a return. The underlying motive to make a profit ultimately distinguishes the West and East European city. However, as will be shown, this distinction exists only between the two poles of a spectrum of city types. In between are cities in the West like Vienna, where banks are nationalised and the state owns a large proportion of the land, and Budapest in the East where the private sector has long been involved in housing investment and construction in a supposedly socialist society.

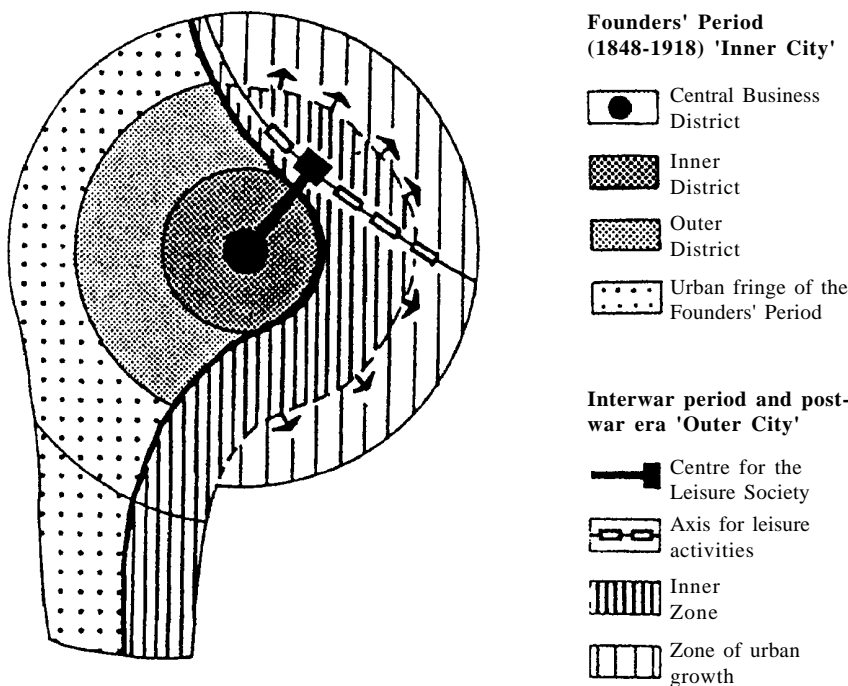
Exam hint -

It is unwise to think of European cities in two distinct categories of 'Western' and 'Eastern'. Rather, the balance of plan and market in each city will determine its position on a spectrum from the most strongly planned to the least planned cities. Equally, each city will contain elements from different historical eras - Czech and Polish cities, for example, experienced a phase of capitalist growth in the inter-war period before coming under Soviet influence after World War II. The mill towns of Lancashire and the Ruhr (Manchester, Blackburn, Essen, Dortmund) are essentially the product of an eighteenth and nineteenth century liberal industrial phase of city growth, but these now form the cores of late-twentieth century welfare state cities.

CASE STUDY: Vienna

Vienna is typical of a West European city where urban development since 1918 has been tightly controlled by the public sector and the plan, to the extent that it can be labelled a 'city of municipal socialism'. Approximately half the city area is owned by the state and its development is subject to the principle of 'social urban design' whereby the state directs what can and cannot be built and organises the total mix of land uses. The effect of these policies of municipal socialism is to make Vienna a bipolar city. An inner city dating from the old monarchist capitalist system prior to 1918 is separate, both spatially and conceptually, from the outer city of planned inter- and post-war growth. In the 1960s in particular massive housing production in the south and east of the city marked a reversal of the traditional western focus of the city. (See Fig 2).

Fig 2. The city of municipal socialism



**The East European City
Socialist thinking on the city**

The essential principle behind socialist ideas on the structure of cities was that the organisation of functions and land uses be tightly planned with the aim of maximising the **quality of life** of the urban population. Developments and indeed the whole layout of the city would be justified not on their profitability through rents and loan repayments, but in terms of whether people were provided with a fuller set of public services - housing, public transport, hospitals - and so enjoyed a higher standard of living. In addition to upgrading and equalising the provision of public services, socialist planners also sought to limit excess urban sprawl and reduce commuting. The extent of land given over to open space and amenities such as children's playgrounds was also to be expanded. The effect of these policies was to make cities polynuclear with a network of self-contained and well-serviced urban centres. Each residential district would consist of a series of multi-storey blocks, in theory supposed to foster a sense of community, and with most basic services easily accessible.

The East European housing estate

An example of a typical housing estate from the socialist period in East Europe can be illustrated with a case from Warsaw, Poland. Earlier patterns of residential development are quite different with housing built before World War II forming continuous footages to the road. In contrast, new estates from the 1960s are taller, separated from each other by open space and play areas, and insulated from major roads by belts of trees and neighbourhood service roads. Much of this housing was depressingly uniform, with standardised buildings built of prefabricated materials and with an onus on quantity and not quality. By the 1970s, estates were built with a more varied layout and design, at a cost of having to accommodate a greater density of occupants.

The building of these residential neighbourhoods was by far the most significant impact of the socialist period on the landscape of East European cities. Typically, housing densities do not decline from city centre to periphery, as assumed by Burgess, but will often increase with the transition from the older inner city to the 'high rise' periphery. Though the overall population density may appear to decline, this reflects the decreasing frequency of the new residential estates with distance from the centre. In marked contrast to Western cities, the East European city have no suburbs, only high rise tower blocks stretching out to the edge of the urban area.

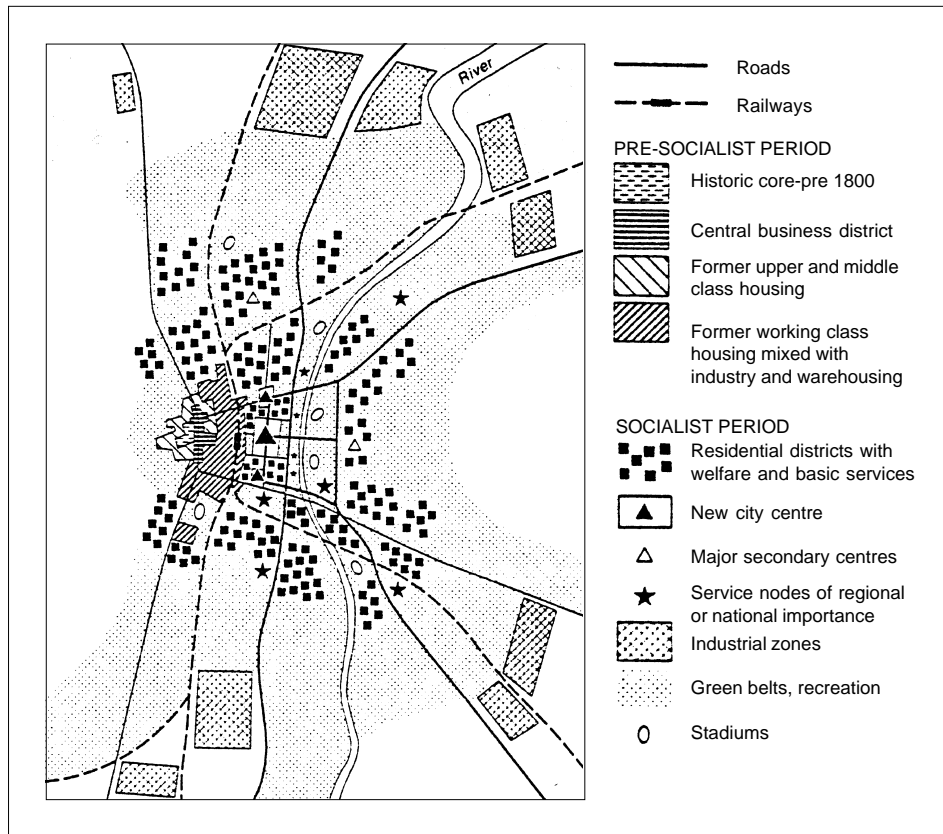


Fig 3. The development of new city centres in East European cities was used to portray the socialist perspective in history

New Centres

Another important dimension to the East European city was the development of a new city centre. Where the old city had been destroyed in World War II - for example Berlin and Warsaw - it could be rebuilt on planned lines; alternatively an entirely new site would be used as the new focus of political and administrative control, as was the case in Katowice, Poland. These new or rebuilt city centres would include large squares and thoroughfares to cater for large processions and symbolic gatherings of loyal citizens. New monuments, museums and memorials remind citizens of significant revolutionary events. These cultural and political functions occupy the central sites which in the West would be taken by retail and commercial functions - shopping and other services are provided on the housing estates. Overseas visitors would usually only see these grand city centres and never the more drab residential districts. Such city centres were geared more to putting across the socialist version of history to both local and overseas peoples than to serving the local population.

A Model East European City

Together the new centre and the uniform, self-contained housing district form part of a model East European city containing: (See Fig 3).

- 1) a historic core with market square, castle and, added more recently, a Palace of Culture and statues to socialist heroes.
- 2) a relict capitalist city with a mix of residential and industrial uses. This area has been largely ignored by socialist planners with the symbolic importance of the city centre and the pressing need to house the growing urban population.
- 3) a zone of socialist transition - with widespread war damage, this zone will include the old centre, now the modernised site of hotels and government offices. If the historic centre was relatively unscathed the focus for socialist planners would be a new centre.
- 4) residential neighbourhoods with basic services provided at the same site.

Conclusions: the convergence of planning ideas

The East European city is characterised by the style and number of residential estates and by the use of a new or rebuilt centre for purposes of social control. These features owe more to political expediency than a coherent fulfilment of socialist theories. The demise of socialism has inevitably prompted a lessening of the grip of the planners and the renewed role of private investment in structuring East European cities. In effect, East European planning is resembling ever more West European planning and the East European city is becoming closer in its geography to the West European city. East European cities are already experiencing a differentiation of (private) rents rather than the essentially equal pricing of state housing. Along the same lines, suburbanisation is occurring, as those that can afford it, prefer to live in more spacious surroundings out of town. Planning in East European cities is becoming more specifically urban again as power is decentralised from the central government to the relevant local authorities. The spectrum of European cities is narrowing.

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This Geo Factsheet was researched and written by Jeremy Smith.

Geo Press
 10 St Pauls Square
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