



Urbanization: a Global Process, a Local Reality

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Urbanization : a Global Process, a Local Reality

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www.population-demographie.org/revue03.htm; http://www.cairn.info/revue-population-et-avenir.htm)

The process of urbanization seems to have given clear markers for our understanding of the population shifts in various territories. These shifts would seem to be a simple duality : urban = high-density population and rural = low density population. This binary presentation, however, does not stand up well to analysis, as confirmed by the example below, which examines several European territories.

By Gérard-François Dumont



► The four factors of urbanization...

That the world has become highly urbanized in the last two centuries is undeniable. This urbanization is the result of four factors :

- ◆ the effects of the industrial revolution and its corollary, rural emigration ;
- ◆ the rise of the tertiary sector ;
- ◆ the need of many households for a broad employment market, taking into account the growing diversity of professions and the accompanying demand of professional mobility, both desired and constrained ;
- ◆ the rise of "world space", which often creates the necessity of sophisticated and highly functional international connections.

World-wide, the statistics generally cited have established that the proportion of the total population living in the cities, which amounted to less than 10% in 1800, has now reached 52%.¹ This figure, however, is only an indication of the size of this movement, due to the difficulty of a clear definition of "rural" and "urban", definitions which vary considerably from country to country.² France, for example, uses its own particular definitions, some of which engender heated discussion.³

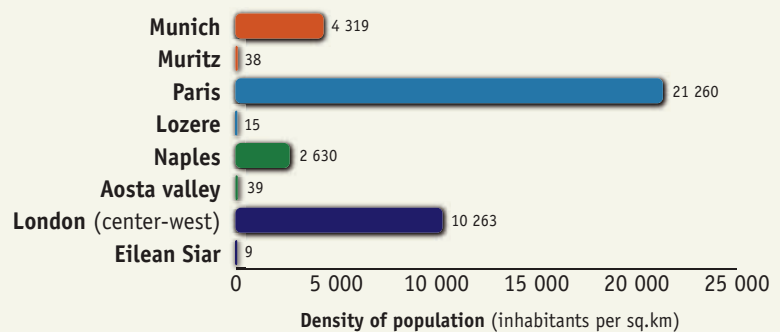
► ... with highly differentiated results...

If the intensity of urbanization developed in a similar fashion in all countries, the territories with the largest numbers of inhabitants should show density of populations of the same order. To verify this, we shall consider the four most highly-populated countries in the European Union – Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom – since they experienced, *grosso modo*, a similar development in their contemporary economic history, at least

compared with the diversity of the economic history of the southern countries. These countries also form a part of a regional organization, the European Union, which might imply similar processes of population movement. Consequently, their most urbanized territories might present similar patterns in the density of population, due quite simply to the effect of urbanization.

Such is not the case, however. To demonstrate this, refer to the breakdown of the Statistical Office of the European Union, called "Eurostat", in the section called "Nuts 3", that is, level 3 of the Nomenclature of the Territorial Statistical Units of the European Union. The differences among the most densely populated territories of each of these four countries are considerable. Paris, with 21,260 inhabitants/sq.km. is twice as densely populated as center-west London⁴, five times more densely populated than Munich, and eight times more densely populated than Naples. It should be noted that the definition by "Nuts 3" encompasses large differences of surface. Whereas the size of Paris is 105 sq.km., that of Munich is 310 sq.km., and that of Naples is 1171 sq.km., which makes comparison of population between Paris, Munich, and Naples highly complicated.

THE EXTREMES OF POPULATION DENSITY IN THE FOUR MOST POPULOUS COUNTRIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION



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► ... as a function of political territorial planning

The comparison between Paris and center-west London, however, is pertinent, since the latter is of a size comparable to the former, that is, precisely 112 sq.km. It becomes evident that the process of urbanization, albeit a general movement, does not necessarily express itself in a homothetic manner in various urban territories.

The urbanization pattern of any particular territory, therefore, is a result of the combination of the relative weight of the four factors of urbanization noted above plus the political strategy exercised in matters of implantation and structuring of the territory, the policy regarding fostering of migration, and specific urban government planning. 🍷

(translation: C. Knutson-Beveraggi)

1. PRB 2013, September 2013.

2. Dumont, Gérard-François (editor), *La France en villes, /French Cities/,* Paris, Sedes, 2010.

3. Guieysse, Jean-Albert, Rebours, Thierry, "Cities and Countryside : How to differentiate them?" / "Villes et campagnes : comment les différencier ?"/, *Population & Avenir*, No. 712, March/April 2013.

4. The second most densely populated territory of the United Kingdom is center-east London, which has less than 10,000 inhabitants/sq.km. with a size of 216 sq.km.