

Introduction to human settlements

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**ASSIGN
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UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN SETTLEMENTS Why people build environments? In order to understand built environments, one should know how the human mind works. The human mind imposes an order on the world. The world is chaotic and disorderly which; the human mind classifies, orders and onto it, imposes cognitive schemata. Settlements, buildings and landscapes are results of this activity. Hence, built environments including settlements are one way of ordering the world. INTRODUCTION

Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements (1976) defined human settlements as “ the totality of the human community - whether city, town or village - with all the social, material, organizational, spiritual and cultural elements that sustain it. The fabric of human settlements consists of physical elements and services to which these elements provide the material support”. The physical components comprise, Shelter, i. e. the superstructures of different shapes, size, type and materials erected by mankind for security, privacy and protection from the elements and for his singularity within a community; Infrastructure, i. . the complex networks designed to deliver to or remove from the shelter people, goods, energy or information; Services cover those required by a community for the fulfilment of its functions as a social body, such as education, health, culture, welfare, recreation and nutrition. All settlements essentially involve the making of places. Each place is a differentiated portion of the earth’s surface of previously undifferentiated space, a portion that is distinguishable from other such portions and has a specific meaning. What makes a place is always some schema, some ordering principle, which varies in different cultures.

In most traditional cultures these schemata are related to the sacred. The purpose of place is to create a space that is habitable and usable in terms acceptable to the culture. All settlements are ordered and organized. Settlements not only impose an order on the larger domain but also are themselves organized. There is an ordering system both in the settlement, ceremonial centre or whatever and at the larger scale; there are systems within systems. All settlements are designed. Settlements are designed in the sense that they embody human decisions, choices and specific ways of doing things.

Designed environments include places that are cleared and planted, areas where rivers have been diverted and fields that have been fenced in certain patterns. In fact many apparently commonplace activities have a greater impact on the earth than design in the traditional sense. The way cities, regions and countries look depends in the final analysis on the design activity of many individuals and groups at different times. ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS Origin of settlements can be traced back to the caves where people gathered for protection against the natural forces or for defence against rival tribes.

These places of communal living gave way to the village. The village was a by-product of the development of agriculture in areas where there was an adequate water supply and fertile soil. Many of these earliest villages arose adjacent to what are now the Mediterranean Sea and the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers. In addition to the role of providing shelter to its people, the village was also an appropriate sanctuary for the altar of their Deity, a

meeting place for assembly, and a centre for trade. As this environment became increasingly populated, urbanization resulted.

Communities larger than the village came as a result of the growth of crops and the breeding of stock on a more permanent basis than before. The production of hard grains that could be stored for a longer period of time offered stability, since it assured insurance against starvation. The ability of these urban areas to preserve food made it possible to diversify into other activities. With a development of diversified economy not totally dependent on food production, it became possible to attract people into a labour pool, thus providing employment in a variety of forms.

This brought about the enlargement of villages or hamlets into towns and cities, which operated on different political and economic bases than had not been possible in the simpler forms.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

The Influence of Geography Natural factors played an important part in the development and growth of settlements. The danger of fire and flood, extreme climatic conditions, the possibility of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, lack of natural resources or fertile soils - all influenced decisions either to settle in a given area or to move to a more favourable site.

Moderate climates were always preferred to settle. Most of the settlements are located between the latitudes 60-degree North and 45-degree South. Although extreme temperatures are found within these boundaries, as the climate is favourable for habitation for major parts of the year. Geographic studies indicate that settlements seldom form where the topography is steep. Some cities are located at high altitudes, but the slope of the land is

relatively level. For example, Denver, Colorado and Mexico City are around 5000 feet above sea level but the terrain at these sites is relatively flat.

Accessibility to other settlements also plays a role in the location and development of settlements. Political and Social Organization The village brought something new to the lives of primitive people: the need for mutual responsibility and cooperation. Various social and political organizations emerged as a direct result. People did not adjust easily to the self-discipline that community life required. Personal rivalry flared within the village and the most powerful individual assumed the role of tribal leader. Rivalry between villages often resulted in armed conflict.

Several villages might come under the domination of the victorious tribe with that tribe's leader rising to the position of ruler. In time empires were created and rulers took the titles of king and emperor. What distinguishes the early city from the primitive village is its higher degree of political and social organization. The more sophisticated social structure allows people to live together in relative peace. Social, economic and political organization is essential to the growth and development of a city. As a result of the more advanced social structure, bold aesthetic changes took place.

Temples and other structures of the ruling group became permanent. Tremendous amounts of energy were expended to produce great edifices, such as palaces and cathedrals, which became a source of pride to the public and the seat of power for its rulers. In the mean time, most of the people lived as slave labour in mud huts or worse where none of the basic amenities existed. Such situations still exist in many parts of the world today, where

great numbers of people live in slums. Evolution of Physical Form Two basic forms of settlements are noticeable: the walled town and the open city.

Within these basic forms a wide variety of patterns are woven. Each form and design is shaped by the character of the society at the time. Few cities that thrived with great cultures began with a plan. They developed by a process of accretion; the growth was irregular, responsive to the changes in the habits of people and dynamic in character. They began as free cities settled voluntarily. Their external form and the physical pattern were introduced according to the structure of the land itself or the manner in which the land was apportioned among the inhabitants.

Cities have been subjected to the process of continuous remodelling through the ages and the variety of their forms is the result of the particular force or forces that were dominant during the successive periods of their history. In order to discern the characteristics of a civilization, attention cannot be confined only to the rulers but also to the affairs of the people. More than the great and the impressive structures, common dwellings of the people mark the culture of the cities.