

# Urban Patterns

Suppose as a geography class assignment you were dropped off on a street corner in a very large city and told to meet your instructor and classmates in 1 hour at city hall. How would you find it? In a small town you could simply ask for directions, but in an unfamiliar neighborhood of a large city would you hesitate to ask strangers?

Your destination is probably downtown, because that's where public services such as city hall cluster. Which direction is downtown? The skyscrapers far in the distance are probably a clue, and house numbers on major streets get lower as you head toward downtown.

## KEY ISSUES

- 1 Why Do Services Cluster Downtown?
- 2 Where Are People Distributed Within Urban Areas?
- 3 Why Do Inner Cities Face Distinctive Challenges?
- 4 Why Do Suburbs Face Distinctive Challenges?



In a small town everything is within easy walking distance, but in a large city your destination is too far to walk. How would you get there without a car? Hitchhiking is dangerous, and you don't have enough money to hire a taxi. What about the bus? Where does the bus stop? What route does it follow? How much is the fare? Do you have the exact change or a prepaid fare card, as required on most big-city buses?

Once on the bus, you sit down next to another passenger. Is your neighbor of the same ethnicity as you? In fact,

are you the only person on the bus of your ethnicity? Have you been in other large groups where you were the only person of your ethnicity? Do the other passengers smile at you and chat, or do they mind their own business?

A large city is stimulating and agitating, entertaining and frightening, welcoming and cold. A city has something for everyone, but a lot of those things are for people who are different from you. Urban geography helps to sort out the complexities of familiar and unfamiliar patterns in urban areas.

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Waiting for the Paris Métro



## CASE STUDY / Two Families in New Jersey

Ruth Merritt lives in the city of Camden, New Jersey. She is a 24-year-old single parent with three children (ages 7, 2, and 1). Her income, derived from the community's program of child support, is \$250 per month. That works out to \$3,000 a year.

The Merritt family lives in a four-room apartment in a row house that was divided some years ago into six dwelling units. The apartment has generally adequate plumbing and kitchen facilities, but the residents sometimes see rats in the building. The rent is \$75 per month, plus an average of \$50 per month for electricity and other utilities.

Ruth Merritt receives food stamps, but her monthly expenses for food, clothing, and shelter exceed her income. In cold weather she must sometimes reduce the food budget to pay for heat.

Just 10 kilometers away, east of Camden, the Johnson family lives in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. William Johnson is a lawyer. He commutes to downtown Philadelphia, across the Delaware River from Camden. Diane Johnson works for a nonprofit organization with offices in the suburban community where they live. Their two children attend a recently built school in the community.

The Johnson family's dwelling is a detached house with three bedrooms, a living room, dining room, family room, and kitchen. The attached garage contains two cars, one for each parent to get to work. The half-acre lawn surrounding the house provides ample space for the children to play. The Johnsons bought their house 10 years ago for \$250,000. The monthly payments for mortgage and utilities are \$3,000, but the family's combined annual income of \$200,000 is more than adequate to pay the housing costs. The house is now worth a half-million dollars.

The Merritt and Johnson households illustrate the contrasts that exist today in U.S. urban areas. As you have seen throughout this book, dramatic differences in material standards exist around the world. However, the picture drawn here is based on families living in the same urban area, only a few kilometers apart.

Were these examples taken from an urban area elsewhere in the world, the spatial patterns might be reversed. In most of the world the higher-status Johnsons would live near the center of the city, whereas the lower-status Merritts would live in the suburbs. ■

When you stand at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 34th Street in New York City, staring up at the Empire State Building, you know that you are in a city. When you are standing in an Iowa cornfield, you have no doubt that you are in the country. Geographers help explain what makes city and countryside different *places*.

Chapter 12 and this chapter are both concerned with urban geography, but at different *scales*. The previous chapter examined the distribution of urban settlements at national and global scales. This chapter looks at *where* people and activities are distributed within urban *spaces*. Models have been developed to explain *why* differences occur within urban areas.

We all experience the interplay between *globalization* and *local diversity* of urban settlements. If you were transported to the downtown of another city, you might be able to recognize the city from its skyline. Many downtowns have a collection of high-rise buildings, towers, and landmarks that are identifiable even to people who have never visited them.

On the other hand, if you were transported to a suburban residential neighborhood, you would have difficulty identifying the urban area. Suburban houses, streets, schools, and shopping centers look very much alike from one American city to another.

In *regions* of MDCs, people are increasingly likely to live in suburbs. This changing structure of cities is a response to conflicting desires. People wish to spread across the landscape to avoid urban problems, but at the same time, they want convenient *connections* to the city's jobs, shops, culture, and recreation.

In this chapter, the causes and consequences of today's evolving urban patterns are examined. Although different

internal structures characterize urban areas in the United States and elsewhere, the problems arising from current spatial trends are similar. Geographers describe where different types of people live and try to explain the reasons for the observed patterns.

### KEY ISSUE 1

## Why Do Services Cluster Downtown?

- CBD Land Uses
- Competition for Land in the CBD
- CBDs Outside North America

Downtown is the best-known and the most visually distinctive area of most cities. It is usually one of the oldest districts in a city, often the site of the original settlement. The downtowns of most North American cities have different features than those in the rest of the world. ■

### CBD Land Uses

Downtown is known to geographers by the more precise term **central business district (CBD)**. The CBD is compact—less than 1 percent of the urban land area—but contains a large percentage