

UN HABITAT

FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



GLOBAL REPORT ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS 2009

BACKGROUND

PLANNED ANCIENT CITIES

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

- The ancient cities of the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) attained the peak of their development about 2800 BC. One of the best known of these, Uruk, covered an area of about 445ha and contained up to 50,000 inhabitants.
- Another ancient city, Catal Hüyük, in present-day Turkey, was already well developed by 6000 BC in terms of its urbanity. Istanbul has ancient origins, and served as the capital of three historic empires: the Eastern Roman (324–395 AD), the Byzantine (395–1453 AD) and the Ottoman (1453–1923 AD). It was a leading socio-economic and cultural centre in the Middle East and has been classified as a 'world city' as a result of its historical heritage.
- The ancient cities of Egypt emerged not long after urbanization had begun in the Mesopotamian region. Memphis and Hierakonopolis were established by 3100 BC during the reign of Menes, the first paramount pharaoh of a united Egypt.

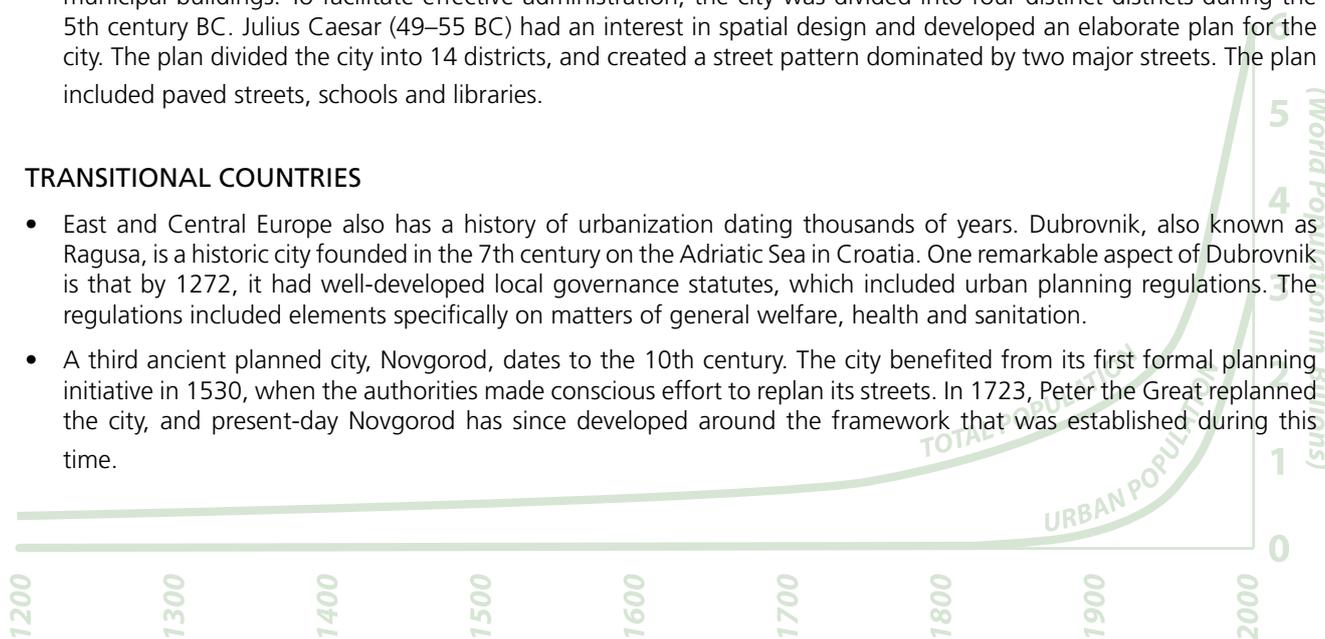
DEVELOPED & TRANSITIONAL COUNTRIES

WESTERN EUROPE

- In Western Europe, cities in Greece and Italy show the earliest evidence of urban planning. The location and physical structure of towns in these two civilizations were largely influenced by military concerns. For instance, Athens, which evolved from a small farming village from about the end of the fourth and beginning of the third millennium BC, was on an isolated fortified hilltop. In addition to the encircling wall, there was the Acropolis, which was a large citadel, and the Agora, which served as the centre of socio-political and economic life, a central meeting place, and a market.
- Rome initially developed as a village of shepherds in the 8th century BC. The Etruscans inhabited the city during the early days of the Roman Empire and laid out its earliest system of public infrastructure, including streets, sewers and municipal buildings. To facilitate effective administration, the city was divided into four distinct districts during the 5th century BC. Julius Caesar (49–55 BC) had an interest in spatial design and developed an elaborate plan for the city. The plan divided the city into 14 districts, and created a street pattern dominated by two major streets. The plan included paved streets, schools and libraries.

TRANSITIONAL COUNTRIES

- East and Central Europe also has a history of urbanization dating thousands of years. Dubrovnik, also known as Ragusa, is a historic city founded in the 7th century on the Adriatic Sea in Croatia. One remarkable aspect of Dubrovnik is that by 1272, it had well-developed local governance statutes, which included urban planning regulations. The regulations included elements specifically on matters of general welfare, health and sanitation.
- A third ancient planned city, Novgorod, dates to the 10th century. The city benefited from its first formal planning initiative in 1530, when the authorities made conscious effort to replan its streets. In 1723, Peter the Great replanned the city, and present-day Novgorod has since developed around the framework that was established during this time.



PLANNING SUSTAINABLE CITIES

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

LATIN AMERICA

- Latin America had urban civilizations of great antiquity, such as the Maya, Aztec and Inca. Located in the Yucatan, the Mayans became prominent around 250 AD in present-day southern Mexico, Guatemala, western Honduras, El Salvador and northern Belize. The Mayans were already living in urban settlements by 2600 BC. Some of these settlements had populations in excess of 300,000 by the late 1400s when Christopher Columbus arrived in the region.
- The Inca Empire stretched for about 4,020km from Quito in present-day Ecuador to the Maule River in Chile. Archaeological research has uncovered evidence of an elaborate ancient architecture, including temple-pyramids, palaces and observatories. The urban infrastructure of the Incas includes 22,530km of well-planned and maintained footpaths.

ASIA

- Cities dating to about 3500 BC existed in Mohenjo-Daro in the Indus Valley and at Harappa in the Punjab. These cities had sophisticated spatial design structures, public bathrooms, well-designed systems of covered drainage laid at depths of up to 0.6m below the street level, and broad paved streets. There is a striking similarity between these historic urban settlements and what was later introduced in the region under the banner of modernity. The ancient towns of the Indus Valley in the north-western region of present-day Pakistan assumed a compartmentalized spatial structure with distinct areas for different land-use activities.
- In ancient China, cities were typically constructed around a gridiron street pattern, criss-crossing at right angles and often punctuated by six avenues. Cities were often enclosed within walls, in the same manner as ancient Greek cities. The street pattern in these cities bore a striking resemblance to what was to be introduced by European colonial authorities. Until the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), urban planning in ancient China was rigid and highly centralized. A more decentralized form of planning emerged following the demise of the Tang Dynasty and with the rise of the Song Dynasty (960–1279 AD).

AFRICA

- Many towns and cities flourished in Africa prior to the colonial era. These include Meroë, Axum, Kumbi-Saleh, Timbuktu, Djenné, Ife and Gao in North and West Africa; and Great Zimbabwe, Kilwa, Sofala, Mombasa and Zanzibar in Southern and East Africa. Meroë was established in about 560 BC and served as the capital of the Black Kingdom of Kush. Some of these cities were surrounded by walls of stone or earth. Walls surrounding these ancient cities had three main purposes: defining the settlements, controlling growth and protecting the inhabitants from external threats. Often, the towns were intersected by avenues and alleyways, which opened onto broad thoroughfares. In the more politically centralized polities such as Asante, Yoruba, Hausa and Ganda, the towns were configured in radial concentric formations with roads that originated at the ruler's compound or a central marketplace, and radiated to various provincial centres. In south-western Nigeria, the planning process adopted was one that enhanced the realization of aspirations and protected socio-economic and political interests.

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