

Liverpool / Great Britain

Context

Liverpool grew rapidly in the 19th Century to become the second port in the United Kingdom, after London. It reached the peak of its importance in the early years of the 20th Century with a population of over 800,000 people, but structural changes in the economy, competition from elsewhere and increases in productivity caused a decline in economic activity, employment and population from the 1950s onwards.

Population

The population of the city reached a peak of 867,000 in 1937, within a conurbation (Merseyside) of about 1.8 million people. Since that time the population of the city has fallen to around 440,000 and the conurbation to about 1.4 million, although there are signs that decline has slowed and the population is stabilising.

Year	Population
1961	745,000
1971	610,000
1981	510,000
1991	452,000
2001	441,800
2004	444,500

Source: Liverpool City Council (http://www.liverpool.gov.uk/News/newsdetail_1352.asp, accessed 17.9.07)

Thus two phenomena can be observed: an absolute decline in the population of the conurbation and a decentralisation or sprawling of the remaining population from the core city to the suburbs. The principal reasons for these changes were:

- (1) A sharp reduction in local employment creating employment-led net out-migration.
- (2) A gradual aging of the remaining population and consequent decline in birth rates.
- (3) A decentralisation or suburbanisation of some remaining employment.
- (4) Slum clearance and building suburban social housing (especially in the 50/60s).
- (5) Building suburban private owner-occupied housing (especially 60s - 80s)
- (6) Recently a new phenomenon, city-centre living, historically unknown in England, has emerged as demand from the expanding numbers of 1 and 2 person households is met by developers building on sites released from city-centre employment use.

Economy

Decline in employment in the port of Liverpool was a consequence of increased productivity (larger ships; faster turnaround; more containerisation etc.); falling demand for imports and exports from the declining manufacturing sector in its hinterland; and a poor location to exploit the expanding trade with Europe. At the same time there was a decline in port-related industries such as ship repair and food processing. As a port Liverpool was at one time the second most important financial centre in the country, but a combination of declining trade, centralisation and globalisation in the financial and insurance sectors have seen much of this work disappear or move to London or elsewhere. Local manufacturing industry also declined, especially in the 1970s and 1980s when local manufacturers, either moved production to developing countries (e.g. Dunlop) or were unable to compete in the increasingly global economy (e.g. Triumph motors).

But there has been economic growth as well. Government regional policy in the 1960s and 1970s saw the development of automobile manufacturing at Halewood (Ford/Jaguar) and Ellesmere Port (General Motors). The 1990s saw the beginnings of a major recovery in the city's fortunes. The port is today booming (although the use of robotics etc. means employment is low); the chemical and pharmaceutical industries remain strong and there has been recent growth in the health and education sectors as well as the tourism and leisure industries. Although unemployment is now low by historic standards (5.3%), it remains about double the national average.

Consequences

One of the main consequences for the population is declining urban density. On a positive note this gives more housing space and living space to each household. On the other hand these falling densities make service provision more difficult, with the closure of schools and other local amenities, and longer journeys to school, for shopping needs and so forth. Falling densities also lead to a reduction in the numbers of elected politicians representing the area.

As the population has shrunk so the city becomes more dependent upon external funding: a) from central government - increasing the centralisation of power; b) the city finds itself in an increasing competition with other cities for private sector funding (especially as these firms themselves are increasingly national or international in structure), therefore the city has reducing power over decision making vis à vis the demands of the private sector.

Political and planning responses

The main policy response can be summed up as 'urban regeneration'. Initially developed by the then Merseyside County Council in the late 1970s, the aims of this policy have been to encourage economic development and the re-use of urban land (brownfield sites) whilst placing strong restrictions on peripheral growth (greenfield sites). As policy developed through the 1980s, central government came to play an increasing part in the regeneration process, with local government increasingly marginalised. Although the present Government has adopted a different approach, emphasising the importance of local decision making, there remains a high degree of central control and the role of local

authorities has shifted from providers to enablers. Restrictions on peripheral housing have proved to be somewhat stronger and more strictly enforced than those over industrial and commercial developments (such as retail parks) that provided 'much needed jobs'. Whereas in the inner city areas the booming housing market has led to a transformation of much former industrial and commercial land into housing and related uses.