

HISTORICAL URBAN STUDIES



Urban Societies in East-Central Europe, 1500–1700

Jaroslav Miller

URBAN SOCIETIES IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE,
1500–1700

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Urban Societies in East-Central Europe, 1500–1700

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First published 2008 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Miller, Jaroslav

Urban societies in East Central Europe, 1500–1700. –

(Historical urban studies)

1. Cities and towns – Europe, Eastern – History – 16th century 2. Cities and towns – Europe, Eastern – History – 17th century 3. Sociology, Urban – Europe, Eastern – History – 16th century 4. Sociology, Urban – Europe, Eastern – History – 17th century

I. Title

307.7'6'0947'09031

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Miller, Jaroslav.

Urban societies in East-Central Europe : 1500–1700 / by Jaroslav Miller.

p. cm. – (Historical urban studies series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7546-5739-2 (hardbk : alk. paper)

1. Urbanization–Europe, Central–History. 2. Sociology, Urban–Europe, Central–History.
3. Cities and towns, Medieval–Europe, Central. I. Title.

HT384.C465M55 2007

307.760943–dc22

2007023183

ISBN: 978-0-7546-5739-2 (hbk)

To István György Tóth and Pavlína Miller, as ever

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Historical Map of Early Modern East-Central Europe



Map of East-Central Europe by 1600



Gazetteer

Hungary

<i>Hungarian</i>	<i>Czech/Slovak</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>Other</i>
Bakabánya	Pukanec		
Bártfa	Bardejov	Bartfeld	
Bazin	Pezinok	Bösing	
Bélabánya	Banská Belá		
Besztercebánya	Banská Bystrica	Neusohl	
Eperjes	Prešov	Preschau	
Esztergom	Ostrihom	Gran	Strigonium
Galánta	Galanta	Galanta	
Galgóc	Hlohovec	Freistadt	
Kassa	Košice	Kaschau	Cassovia
Késmárk	Kežmarok	Käsmark	
Kismarton	Eisenstadt		
Körmöcbánya	Kremnica	Kremnitz	
Korpona	Krupina	Karpfen	
Lőcse	Levoča	Letschau	
Modor	Modrá	Modern	
Nagyszombat	Trnava	Tyrnau	Tyrnavia
Pozsony	Bratislava	Pressburg	Posonium
Selmecbánya	Banská Štiavnica	Schemnitz	
Sopron	Šoproň	Ödenburg	
Stompfa	Stupava		
Szakolca	Skalica	Skalitz	
Szeben	Sabinov	Zeben	
Szekesféhérvár	Stoličný Bělehrad		
Szentgyörgy	Svätý Jur	Sankt Georgen	
Szenc	Senec	Wartberg	
Szered	Sereď		
Trencsén	Trenčín		
Újbánya	Nová Baňa		

The Bohemian Lands

<i>Czech</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>Polish</i>	<i>Other</i>
Bělá	Zülz	Biała	
Bolesławiec	Bunzlau	Bolesławiec	
Brno	Brünn		
Broumov	Braunau		
Břeh	Brieg	Brzeg	
Česká Lípa	Böhmische Leipa		
České Budějovice	Budweis		
Hlohov	Glogau	Głogów	
Hradec Králové	Königsgratz		
Cheb	Eger		
Jelenia Góra	Hirschberg	Jelenia Góra	
Jihlava	Iglau		
Jáchymov	Joachimsthal		
Javor	Jauer	Jawor	
Kladsko	Glatz	Kłodzko	
Krnov	Jägerndorf		
Kutná Hora	Kuttenberg		
Lehnice	Liegnitz	Legnica	
Liberec	Reichenberg		
Litoměřice	Leitmeritz		
Lwówek	Löwenberg	Lwówek Śląski	
Mikulov	Nikolsburg		
Nysa	Neisse	Nysa	
Olomouc	Olmütz		
Opava	Troppau		
Opole	Oppeln	Opole	
Plzeň	Pilsen		
Prostějov	Proßnitz		
Rakovník	Rakonitz		
Śróda Śląska	Neumarkt	Śróda Śląska	
Svidnice	Schweidnitz	Świdnica	
Strzegom	Striegau	Strzegom	
Šprotava	Sprottau	Szprotawa	
Vodňany	Wodnan		
Vratislav	Breslau	Wrocław	
Zahán	Sagan	Żagań	
Zielona Góra	Grünberg	Zielona Góra	
Złotoryja	Goldberg	Złotoryja	
Znojmo	Znaim		
Žory	Sohrau	Żory	

Poland–Lithuania

<i>Polish</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>Other</i>
Braniewo	Braunsberg	
Bydgoszcz	Bromberg	
Chełmno	Kulm	Culm
Chojnice	Konitz	
Elbląg	Elbing	
Gdańsk	Danzig	Gedanium
Gniezno	Gnesen	
Grudziądz	Graudenz	
Królewiec	Königsberg	
Kraków	Krakau	Cracovia
Leszno	Lissa	
Lwów	Lemberg	Leopolis
Malbork	Marienburg	
Międzychód	Birnbaum	
Olsztyn	Allenstein	
Poznań	Posen	
Toruń	Thorn	
Tczew	Dirschau	
Wilno	Wilna	Vilnius
Wschowa	Fraustadt	

Historical Urban Studies

General Editors' Preface

Density and proximity are two of the defining characteristics of the urban dimension. It is these that identify a place as uniquely urban, though the threshold for such pressure points varies from place to place. What is considered an important cluster in one context – may not be considered as urban elsewhere. A third defining characteristic is functionality – the commercial or strategic position of a town or city which conveys an advantage over other places. Over time, these functional advantages may diminish, or the balance of advantage may change within a hierarchy of towns. To understand how the relative importance of towns shifts over time and space is to grasp a set of relationships which is fundamental to the study of urban history.

Towns and cities are products of history, yet have themselves helped to shape history. As the proportion of urban dwellers has increased, so the urban dimension has proved a legitimate unit of analysis through which to understand the spectrum of human experience and to explore the cumulative memory of past generations. Though obscured by layers of economic, social and political change, the study of the urban milieu provides insights into the functioning of human relationships and, if urban historians themselves are not directly concerned with current policy studies, few contemporary concerns can be understood without reference to the historical development of towns and cities.

This longer historical perspective is essential to an understanding of social processes. Crime, housing conditions and property values, health and education, discrimination and deviance, and the formulation of regulations and social policies to deal with them were, and remain, amongst the perennial preoccupations of towns and cities – no historical period has a monopoly of these concerns. They recur in successive generations, albeit in varying mixtures and strengths; the details may differ.

The central forces of class, power and authority in the city remain. If this was the case for different periods, so it was for different geographical entities and cultures. Both scientific knowledge and technical information were available across Europe and showed little respect for frontiers. Yet despite common concerns and access to broadly similar knowledge, different solutions to urban problems were proposed and adopted by towns and cities in different parts of Europe. This comparative dimension informs urban historians as to which were systematic factors and which were of a purely local nature: general and particular forces can be distinguished.

These analytical and comparative frameworks inform this book. Indeed, thematic, comparative and analytical approaches to the historical study of towns and cities is the hallmark of the Historical Urban Studies series which now extends to over 30 titles,

either already published or currently in production. European urban historiography has been extended and enriched as a result and this book makes another important addition to an intellectual mission to which we, as General Editors, remain firmly committed.

Richard Rodger
Jean-Luc Pinol

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Acknowledgements

I have studied, slept, eaten, and breathed the fascinating story of urban societies in early modern East-Central Europe for almost a decade. Over these years, I have consulted several dozen experts, non-experts and friends, from university professors to graduate students in Budapest, Oxford, Leipzig, Prague, Olomouc, Toronto, Wolfenbüttel, Munich and Marburg. I owe much to each and every one of them, perhaps more than they will ever realize. They raised critical, provocative and intellectually stimulating questions which helped me enormously to systematize my research and conceptualize my work.

As this study is the modest product of almost ten intellectually fertile years spent at the Central European University, my greatest debt goes to this institution which offered financial backing, a hospitable and motivating environment and which became, for several happy years, my home. In particular, I am grateful to late István György Tóth, my teacher and friend who supervised my PhD dissertation and who made me more familiar with the course and nature of Hungarian history in the early modern age. I have benefited greatly from our discussions over cups of coffee, as they have saved me from numerous obscurities and not a few errors. István György Tóth has done more than anybody else for the successful completion of this monograph without, alas, seeing it in print. This is why the book is dedicated to his memory with love and gratitude. He, László Kontler and Eva Kowalská, above all, have showed me how exciting and attractive a region for a historian East-Central Europe can be. This lesson will not be forgotten.

I am also grateful to the Lady Margaret Hall at the University of Oxford, the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in Toronto and Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum für Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas in Leipzig for providing me an excellent working environment which gave me support and encouragement. Special thanks go to Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and Hertie Foundation whose grants made possible for me to spend six months in the Herder Institute in Marburg and draw there a final version of the manuscript. I also greatly appreciate the financial support provided by the Czech Ministry of Education, MSM6198959225. In particular, I am grateful to Ashgate Publishing for accepting this book in its urban history series.

I am indebted to Professor Charles Ingrao who gave me the opportunity to present parts of my research in the *Austrian History Yearbook*, in 2005, honoured with R. John Rath Prize. Petr Černíkovský deserves special mention for going through the entire manuscript with his keen and critical eye. Finally, my greatest debt goes to my wife Pavlína who has lived this project for many years and our children Jan and Barbora who were, so to speak, born into it. Thereafter every hour spent on this book was an hour spent by Pavlína with them.

Milledgeville (Georgia), 24 March 2008

Introduction: The Closed Society and its Enemies

Recent changes in the political atmosphere of Eastern Europe will make it easier for English-speaking historians to undertake research in urban history there; in five or ten years it should be possible to list a substantial number of works in English on the urban history of Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and the Balkans in the early modern era.

(Christopher Friedrichs, *The Early Modern City, 1450–1750*, p. 346)

An overview of the major works on early modern urban history of Europe discloses their preoccupation with urban societies in the European West and their persistent ignorance of urban civilization in the European East. With the risk of simplification, the frontier between ‘the explored Europe’ and ‘the unknown Europe’ can be demarcated by the recently fallen iron curtain, that separated for several unhappy decades the communist bloc from the rest of the continent. This may easily be demonstrated when some modern syntheses of urban development in early modern Europe are considered. Most Anglo-American authors such as Paul M. Hohenberg, Lynn Hollen Lees, Christopher R. Friedrichs and Alexander Cowan draw largely on sources that refer to the urban experience in the area stretching from the British Isles to Germany and from the Low Countries to Southern Italy.¹ Conversely, references to urban life in the Eastern Europe are either sparing or completely absent. Their failure to fully integrate the vast territories of East of Saxony and Austria into their wide-ranging surveys of early modern cities is usually acknowledged by the authors themselves. For example, in the preface to his excellent book, Christopher Friedrichs elucidates that his synthesis ‘includes all of Western and Central Europe and some of Eastern Europe’, while Hohenberg and Lees clarify that ‘in the language of urban geography our Europe remains underbounded, meaning that we fail to give the peripheries their due’.² Similarly, the famous databases published by Paul Bairoch and Jan de Vries cover urban societies in the Eastern Europe only marginally and often their demographic estimates are not entirely correct. It is true, that German studies on early modern urban Europe pay slightly more attention to territories that

¹ P.M. Hohenberg and L.H. Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe 1000–1994*, (Cambridge/Massachusetts – London: Harvard University Press 1995); C.R. Friedrichs, *The Early Modern City 1450–1750* (London – New York: Longman 1995); A. Cowan, *Urban Europe 1500–1700* (London: Arnold 1998).

² Friedrichs, *The Early Modern City*, p. x; Hohenberg – Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe*, p. viii.

were largely German-speaking and were connected by countless economic, political and cultural ties with the Holy Roman Empire. By discussing basic parameters of urban life in Germany, Heinz Schilling briefly refers also to cities and towns in the Bohemian Lands.³ The most recent work on European early modern city by Herbert Knittler includes a number of illustrative examples from the Habsburg monarchy and Poland–Lithuania that aim to support the author's argumentation. Yet again, Knittler's book may offer hardly more than a highly selective and therefore simplistic view of urban life in Eastern Europe.⁴

Urban Eastern Europe, therefore, still largely remains *terra incognita* to most comparative historians. Several causes can be highlighted. First, the iron curtain, that in the post-war period so ruthlessly separated the continent, also discontinued a regular scholarly debate between historians from the European East and their colleagues from the West. It was this lack of mutual communication that caused the rather autonomous development of historical scholarship and course of research in the communist countries. This forty-year gap has not been overcome yet, despite undisputed rapprochement in the last decade. In addition, the marginal attention paid by Western European and American scholars to urban societies in Eastern Europe is largely the result of the region being traditionally seen as rather under-urbanized, at least when compared to the European economic core. From this viewpoint it seems quite natural that a prevailing interest of urban historians is attracted by the most urbanized areas of early modern Europe, such as the Low Countries or Italy.

Among other factors that complicate large-scale comparative research, the persistent language barrier is of significance as the crushing majority of relevant studies on early modern East European urban societies have been published in the vernacular and remain linguistically inaccessible to many historians. Lastly, in many areas of research East European historical scholarship has not yet surpassed the confining boundaries of national historiographies, which creates difficulties in identifying the general and specific features in the development of urban societies in the region under discussion.

The preceding paragraphs have implied the principal goal of this monograph, which is to investigate the basic parameters and contours of urban life in territories traditionally referred to by historians as peripheries. Some major aspects of urban civilization are explored in the Bohemian Lands, Royal Hungary and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth with some overlaps with Austria, Germany and Hungarian territories under Ottoman sovereignty. In order to distinguish the region from the Easternmost areas of the continent and from the Balkans, everywhere in the book the term East-Central Europe is used. It is one of the ambitions of this book to place this chronically underrated part of the continent on the map of early modern urban Europe.

The scope of the problem addressed as well as the geographical dimensions of the territory under review are intimidatingly broad. Yet I believe that only a study embracing a representative sample of urban societies may provide a substantial contribution to the debate about the major economic, social or demographic trends

³ H. Schilling, *Die Stadt in der frühen Neuzeit* (München 1993).

⁴ H. Knittler, *Die europäische Stadt in der frühen Neuzeit* (Wien – München 2000).

in early modern East-Central European cities and towns. The large-scale survey also allows one to answer the question, to what extent did urban civilizations in this part of the continent share a common fate and to what degree did variables support deviations from general models? The nature of this book is that it aims to surpass the limits of national scholarships as well as the limits of a bird's eye view of the East-Central Europe so often shared by Western scholars.

The argumentation revolves around the idea that East-Central European urban societies were confronted with five qualitatively new phenomena that are perceived by most historians as symptoms or agents of political, economic and social transformations on the way from the Middle Ages to Modernity. To be more precise, I have in mind:

- The early modern urbanization
- Socially, religiously and culturally diversified migration
- Reformation
- Early modern state building
- Large-scale structural shifts in the European economy

In my view, these processes affected medieval cities and towns basically in two ways. First, major trends in the European economy as well as the rise of the early modern state did much to uproot the medieval concept of the city as an autonomous economic and also political entity. While the traditional system of guild production and many urban economic monopolies were increasingly disturbed by in-depth changes in trade and by the entrepreneurial activities of nobility, in the case of urban political autonomy it was the rising pre-modern state that challenged the urban charters, rights and freedoms by striving to integrate the city into its administrative structures. Second, these processes challenged the integrity of late medieval urban societies by supporting their confessional, cultural and social fragmentation. In particular, it was the Reformation and increase in migration that destabilized a settled urban world by heavily undermining the fundamental principle inherently present in medieval urban societies, that is, the ingrained idea of a socially hierarchical but well-ordered and well-governed community. Potential readers, therefore, should be warned that this monograph has absolutely no ambition to present a general history of early modern urban societies in East-Central Europe. It rather aims to raise some new questions that emerge as natural outcomes of a macro-scale survey and analyse those trends that most contributed to the metamorphosis of *medieval urban community* to *pre-modern urban society*.

This obviously needs a more profound explanation. Aiming to enlighten the nature and chief organizational principles of medieval and early modern urban life I have relied upon the influential and prophetic concept introduced by Sir Karl Popper in his famous study *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945). In this in many ways paradigmatic text, Popper views closed societies as primarily collectivist organisms whose social coherence and internal stability rest upon semi-biological bonds such as kinship, communal life, sharing common efforts and values and facing common threats. It is the nature of closed societies, Popper tells us, that they are inclined to act as a body and the unified whole, while there remains little space for

personal initiatives, individual decisions and independent critical assessments. The superiority of collectivism over individualism implies that the closed society supports interventionism, assimilation, integration and obliteration of internal frontiers rather than cultural diversity and plurality of views and critical assessments. Though Popper's thought is nowadays mostly perceived as a warning against the intellectual seeds of modern totalitarianism, his concept has a universal validity and applies to many historical situations. Popper himself demonstrated his idea on political settlements of urban communities in ancient Greece.

This book sets out to defend a thesis that the medieval city was designed as the closed, interventionist society *sui generis* in which the communal interests and the ingrained sense of unity and collectivism occupied the uppermost place in the hierarchy of values. Most conspicuously, such a (self)reflection of city mirrored itself in literature. The ideals of concord, solidarity, harmony and order permeated practically all literary genres of urban provenance from elegies and panegyrics to chronicles. In order to defend these collectivist principles of urban life, cities developed an entire set of juridical, social and economic instruments with strong assimilative and integrative effects. In other words, all newcomers and minorities found themselves under a permanent pressure to acculturate and assimilate themselves by adopting local rules of the game as well as the norms, values and social modes of the host society. Of course, this is not to say that medieval urban societies were monolithic social entities as some groups, such as Jews, successfully resisted closer integration. In cases when integrative instruments failed, urban societies inclined either to push the alien identities out of the city or at least separate them.

In the Middle Ages, a defence of collectivist and communal principles still proved more or less successful as dissenting social organisms potentially producing frontiers within urban societies were usually weak and not numerous. According to Max Weber, in the medieval city 'outside the Jews, the priesthood was the only alien body'.⁵ In the early modern period, however, the idea of a closed and collectivist urban society began to be threatened with the rapidly changing reality. In general, the crisis of a city as community had much to do with demographic trends. Most medieval urban centres, particularly in East-Central Europe, were modestly populated and town dwellers, crowded in densely built-up areas, were personally acquainted. The existence of various mutual bonds and, therefore, emotionally conditioned relations formed a key pillar of a collectivist and communal nature of urban life. A demographic boom of the early modern city caused by the massive in-migration, however, weakened the social cohesion which rested upon personal acquaintance. Thus the growing impersonality was the first mark of a crisis of collective urban identity. The increased population mobility, as well as the Reformation and urbanization of nobility also took part in the process, by giving rise to many and previously nonexistent urban subcultures. The civic unity was challenged by the multiplication of alternative identities.

Though cities did not give up their assimilation policies and stubbornly defended the collectivist principles of urban life, the traditional integrative instruments gradually collapsed under the pressure of growing cultural, religious, ethnic and

⁵ M. Weber, *The City* (New York: Collier Books 1962), p. 207.

social diversities within urban population. In the 16th–18th centuries the medieval idea of a closed and socially coherent urban community still survived but it fought a losing battle with the reality of increasingly multicultural and fragmented urban population. Occasionally, however, the principle of a closed society might have prevailed. For example, the repeated expulsions of Jews and *Verbürgerlichung* and *Kommunalisierung* of protestant clergy might be interpreted in terms of a sustained communal and collectivist spirit favouring social, religious and cultural unity.

The structural shifts in the economy and the expansion of the bureaucratic state subverted the principle of a closed society in another way. Both rapidly changing market relations and consolidating state power deprived cities of outward symbols of social coherence, namely of their privileges and rights that for centuries formed an important part of the collective identity of medieval urban societies. As these freedoms, such as the autonomy in spheres of law, politics, administration and economy, were gradually suppressed, the class of burghers lost its distinctive features and, therefore, strong corporative awareness. The early modern age, therefore, launched the slow and lengthy process of pulling down the mental boundaries between the city and external world.

Considering the transformation of the medieval city, two explanatory notes must be made. The factors subverting the collective identity of urban inhabitants might not have worked collaterally. For example, because of forced re-catholicization, the disputed issue of confessional boundaries in Czech and Moravian cities largely disappeared by the mid-17th century. At the same time, the havoc of the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) and subsequent Polish–Swedish conflict halted the population growth of most cities in East-Central Europe. Some causes of changes within urban societies, therefore, might have been restrained while others might have appeared. The revival of confessional unity and the population decrease were overshadowed by new and possibly more serious threats, namely state interventions into urban affairs, market transformation, urbanization of nobility and revitalization of the Catholic Church autonomy within cities.

The other note refers to the obvious fact that this book covers only the initial phase of the complex and long-term transformation of the burgher world as the ultimate defeat of the idea of a closed urban community came as late as the 19th century with the rise of a civic society. This process was also responsible for a semantic change of the word *city*. In all most commonly spoken Central European languages (German, Czech, Polish, Hungarian) the term, among other connotations, originally referred to community (*Rat und Stadt*) and symbolical unity of the city inhabitants. The industrialization and the rise of the civic society, however, gave rise to a modern understanding of the word *city* in which the traditional connotation is missing. Nonetheless, in the period studied the perception of the city as a closed and unified social body still remained embedded in the burgher mentality though its medieval origins were in decline.

On a technical note, to avoid anachronisms, the present form of place names, which would turn Pozsony, for instance, into Bratislava, is not used. Instead, I place names commonly used in the early modern age. For large and internationally well known cities, such as Danzig, Prague, Warsaw, Pilsen, Breslau or Cracow, familiar German and English names are used. The names of regions are in English, if their

English name exists. For the greater comfort of a reader, the attached gazetteer lists the names of East-Central European cities in several languages. Latin, Czech, Polish, German and Hungarian quotations, though they faithfully follow the original, are translated into English.

Urbanization Trends and the Urban Landscape

Peter Mundy, an English traveller who visited the Royal Prussia in the 1640s, noted in his diary that Danzig, by far the largest city in East-Central Europe, ‘with its suburbs (...) may contain a population half as many as Amsterdam or a quarter of that of London’.¹ In general, such a sober estimate correlated with the size of cities and the density of the urban network in the area vis-à-vis the most urbanized parts of Europe, that is the Low Countries and Northern Italy. While leading European urban centres saw unprecedented demographic growth as their population multiplied during the 16th and the first half of the 17th century, the largest cities in the Bohemian Lands, Poland and Hungary, basically followed the same trend, if on a diminished scale. While Paris, Naples, Venice and later London, Amsterdam or Madrid fell into the first category of cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, the two most populous East-Central European centres, Prague and Danzig, fluctuated over the long term between the second (50,000–100,000 inhabitants) and the third (20,000–50,000 inhabitants) category of cities. The absence of a dominant urban settlement with more than 100,000 inhabitants, and consequently a more evenly distributed urban population, made East-Central Europe comparable to Germany, where Cologne (40,000 inhabitants by 1600), Nuremberg (40,000 by 1600) and Frankfurt (20,000 by 1600) ranked among the largest cities and it was only in the 17th century that they were eclipsed by the rapidly expanding Hamburg.²

This chapter is intended as a contribution to debates on the demographics of European urban life in the early modern period. Therefore, the results of the analysis serve as the basis for a large-scale comparison with inherent trends in other European regions as presented by major works on early modern urbanization. In postwar scholarship, various concepts of urbanization were introduced as sociologists, geographers and historians examined different aspects of the process. Yet there is no consensus about the definition, even among historians. Most commonly, urbanization is simply understood as the spatial concentration of people in urban settlements. Usually provoked by the economic potential of the city, incoming migration accelerated its population growth. Some historians, however, have associated urbanization with a whole set of qualitative changes within early

¹ J. Keast (ed.), *The Travels of Peter Mundy, 1597–1667* (Trewolsta: Dyllanson Truran 1984), p. 73.

² H. Schilling, *Die Stadt in der frühen Neuzeit* (München 1993), p. 11; R.E. Dickinson, *The West European City: A Geographical Interpretation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1961), p. 297.