

DETROIT –

A large city of the developed world

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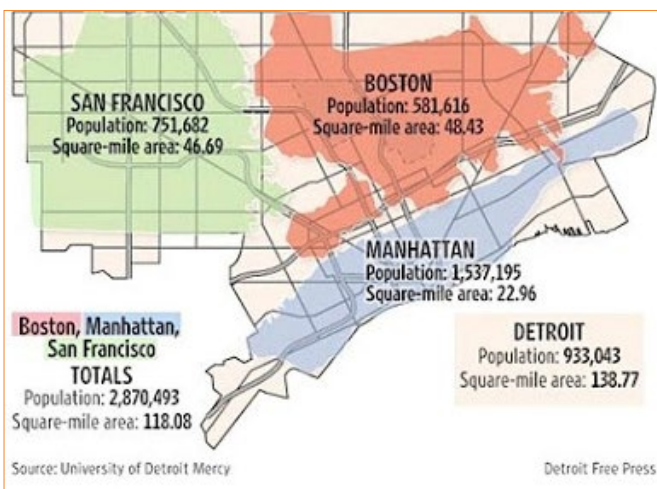
Image Source: Wikimedia Commons

Teachers are constantly looking for new and engaging case studies for senior students. These studies need to be contemporary, easy to research and directly related to the syllabus content. Living out of a large city, my HSC students felt that Sydney was just as foreign to them as any international city. This led to the decision in 2013 to teach Detroit as the case study for this section of the course.

Detroit is an excellent alternative to the Australian cities many teachers choose for their students to study for the HSC. The Urban Places topic calls for *'a case study of the results of the urban dynamics in a large city selected from the developed world'*. Detroit illustrates the dynamics of suburbanisation, urban decline, urban renewal and consolidation. Located at 42° 33' N and 83° 04' W, in the state of Michigan, USA, Detroit was a famous motor car manufacturing city that declared bankruptcy in 2013 after 40 years of urban decline. After the city's bankruptcy a extraordinary amount of media reports, statistics, infographics, documentaries and government released information about the rise, fall and rebuilding of Detroit became available. Students have shown increased levels of engagement with this section of the course and in 2013 candidates who chose the urban option in the extended response section of the HSC paper scored highly.

The following map puts the scale of Detroit as a large city in perspective.

Comparing Detroit to three other major US cities



Source: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_H6XW_a4TYus/SjNV85UAgvI/AAAAAAAAA44/T98M-yLkJPA/s400/detroit+comparison+map.jpg

Derelict Packard Automobile Works

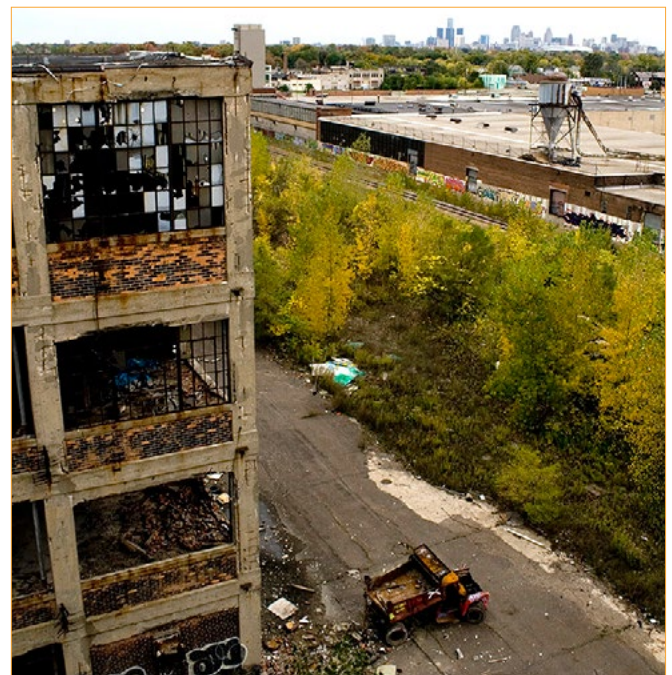


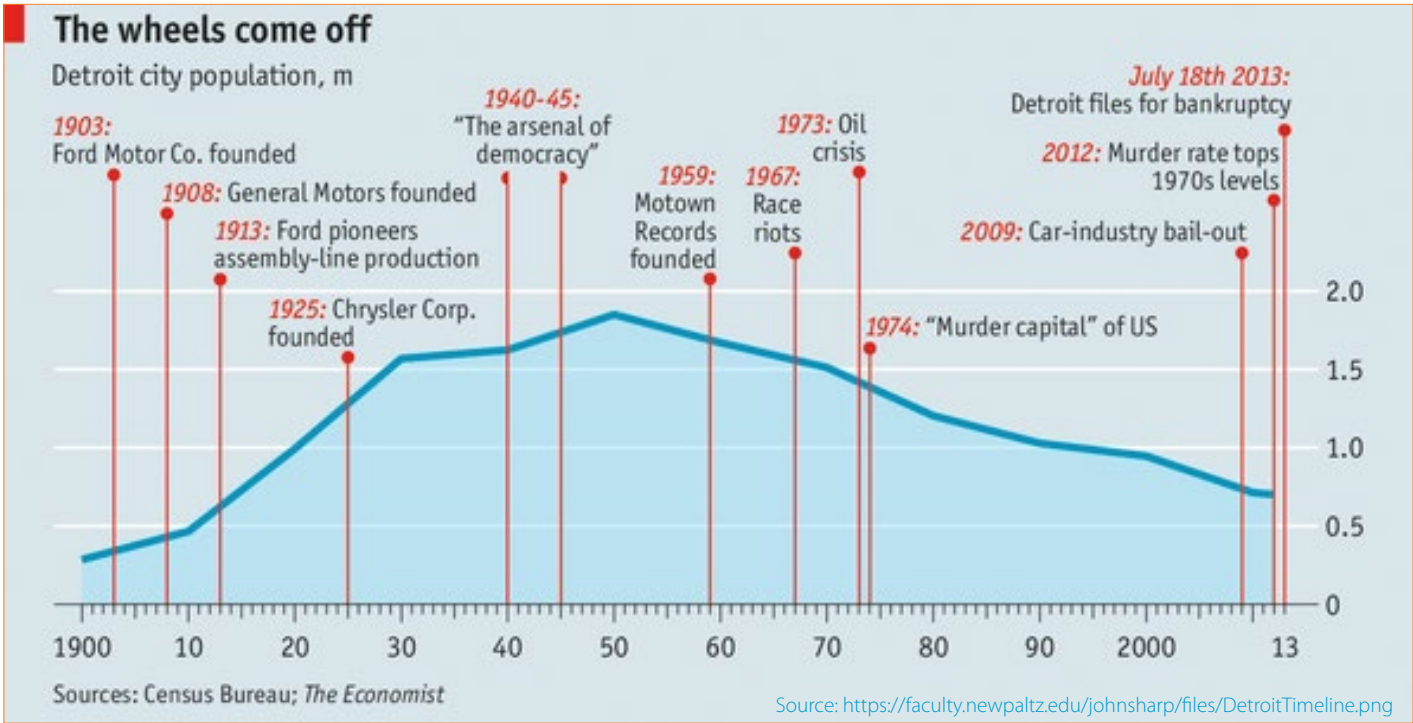
Image Source: Wikimedia Commons

Background

When teaching Urban Places I start with the Urban Dynamics section. This is mostly due to the requirements of our internal assessment schedule and my desire to use the dot point concerning the suburb/country town as a fieldwork assessment item. I found this worked well as a lead up to studying Detroit as the local study involved discussing the concept of urbanisation and the push/pull factors associated with it. From here, I then develop the students' knowledge on the factors that cause change in cities (eg economic restructuring) and how this brings about different urban dynamics. After examining all of the urban dynamics and illustrating them using one example of each from around the world, students were ready to explore the urban dynamics operating in Detroit and the consequences for the city.

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The infographic below provides an overview of the rise and fall of Detroit.



A quick google search for 'Detroit infographics' will not disappoint when developing resources for this case study.

How to structure the case study

From the introductory work my teaching approach for this case study involved using a timeline for a study of each urban dynamic and exploring each within the specified time period.

Students were given an outline of each dynamic operating in Detroit and an explanation on how to examine the effects on the city. A large amount of time was spent exploring the syllabus 'dash points' to ensure students understood the meaning of each point or concept eg *culture of place*. When students demonstrated an understanding of these syllabus points they were provided with a media file of articles, You Tube videos, images, infographic weblinks,

An example of a summary scaffold when examining the media file

1970s-present – Urban Decay			
Definition and drivers			
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>			
Social Structure and Spatial patterns of advantage and disadvantage, wealth and poverty, ethnicity	Changing economic character, nature and location of residential land, commercial and industrial development	Culture of place as expressed in the architecture, streetscape, heritage architecture, noise, colour, street life, energy, vitality and lifestyles	Growth, development, future trends and ecological sustainability.

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newspaper articles and the documentary *Detropia*. Students worked independently to compile notes into summaries, interspersed with class discussions on their findings. The change of pace was good for the students, who were given ownership over their work, in an environment where information sources had already been edited to ensure usefulness and relevance to the syllabus. This approach has been shown to aid student's memory of content for exams because they are involved in processing information for themselves. The approach relies on students having a thorough understanding of the syllabus language to enable them to match the statistics found in articles to the correct dash point. After students have completed compiling the information the focus turns to the HSC, explaining how the information might be examined with students completing practice questions and essay scaffolds.

A brief overview of the urban dynamics of change operating in Detroit

Suburbanisation 1940 – 1970

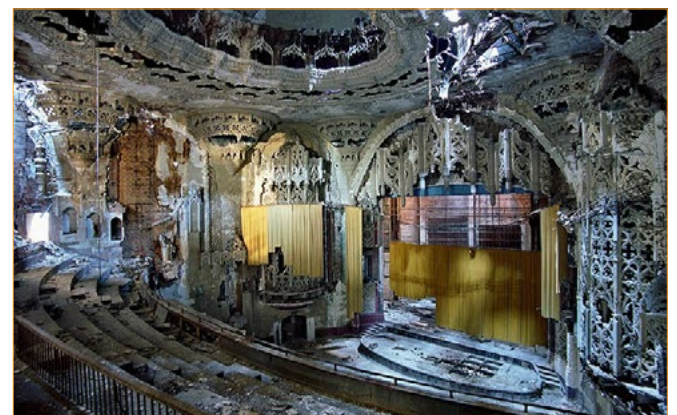
Due to a lack of natural boundaries, suburbanisation in Detroit happened with ease. Detroit is famous for being the motor city and as such, it's highly paid manufacturing workers had the opportunity to purchase motor vehicles at reduced prices. During WWII further expansion of freeway services led to greater ease of accessing the city via road. After the war, many auto industry companies decentralised, moving further out of the city into newer facilities that had been constructed for war manufacturing operations. Slowly people began to move toward the suburbs for all the things suburbanisation is associated with such as large

spaces and cheap land. Unique to pushing Detroit's suburbanisation was a forced integration policy that caused race riots, the two most notable ones occurring in 1943 and 1967. After the race riot in 1967 the process of suburbanisation was coined the "white flight". The most mobile people of Detroit, the wealthy, made up predominately of white Americans, moved to the outskirts of the city, forming a doughnut shaped circle of wealth and distinct pattern of ethnicity around the city. The process of suburbanisation and the economic restructuring of the automobile industry is what led to the decline of Detroit.

Abandoned housing



... and the interior of a derelict theatre in Detroit.

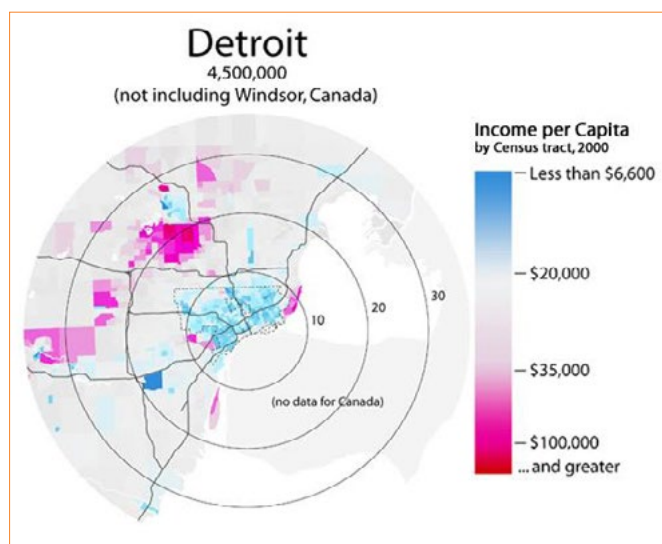


Source: http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_L52qel-j4jM/TSNY7OmJubl/AAAAAAAAA8k/8F8BpEoghHc/s1600/detroit-01.jpg

Urban Decline 1970 – present

The urban decline of Detroit is well documented and a quick Google search will reveal hundreds of articles, blogs, images and infographics for this section. The documentary *Detropia* highlights Detroit's urban decline brilliantly. As the wealth moved to the suburbs with residents, so did their tax payments, leaving the city of Detroit with a lack of money to run city services. This was compounded by the declining motor industry and subsequent loss of jobs. The population started to decline and during this time Detroit became known as the murder capital of the US. A lack of funds forced the city to turn off street lights, close schools in

Map of Detroit showing Income per Capita



Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Detroit,_Michigan

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Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/22/detroit-bankruptcy-infographic-chart-debt_n_3625421.html

neighbourhoods with low numbers, reduce emergency services and limit bus routes. The patterns of spatial advantage and disadvantage become clear, areas of low population density and high home abandonment had very limited services available and the city directed its limited funds to small areas of concentrated population. The city of Detroit filed for bankruptcy in 2013 and at this point its population was 83% black African American with an unemployment rate of 15.8% and the highest per capita crime rate of the United States' 25 largest cities.

Urban farming by Hantz group



Source: <http://www.hantzfarmsdetroit.com/>

... and a local community group



Source: <https://foodlabdetroit.com/media/detroits-newest-urban-farming-trend-pretty-fishy>

Encouraging urban renewal



Source: <http://america.aljazeera.com/content/dam/ajam/images/shows/Stream/DetroitTreplnographicThumb2.png>

Urban Renewal and Consolidation

2010 – present

A shortage of information on this urban dynamic requires a more targeted approach to Googling. The links included at the end of this article show that urban renewal is occurring in Detroit and some new concepts have developed to describe associated changes including "ruin porn" and 'urban exploring' – a form of tourism that is now boosting the Detroit economy. Consolidation is part of the city's urban renewal projects. Detropia covers this urban dynamic very well, especially in how it affects *culture of place*. The city's government has forcibly moved people out of less densely populated areas in order to concentrate on restoring services to smaller, more manageable parts of the city. One-third of Detroit's land mass has been abandoned and is now vacant, yet there are some very exciting renewal projects which link into the **sustainability, the future and growth** sections of the syllabus. Urban farming is one form of renewal with 700 urban farms currently yielding more than 120 tons of produce each year. Detroit is ambitious and intends to become the first food self-sufficient city as a result of

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the success of urban farming initiatives. The rise of the arts scene and the changing demographics of the city as a result of the number of artists and creatives moving into downtown Detroit (due to living affordability) is a major driver of urban renewal. The clashes occurring between traditional Detroiters and the new 'hipsters' and consequent gentrification of downtown Detroit also makes an interesting study.

Resources

Use the following resources as a start to using Detroit as a study of the operation of urban dynamics in a large city in the developed world.

- Detropia – <http://www.detropiathefilm.com/> a documentary showing the results of urban decline, urban renewal and consolidation. Stream on Netflix or purchase on iTunes. The documentary provides a great virtual fieldtrip for students as it takes you into community meetings, interviews with locals and provides excellent footage of the current state of Detroit.
- Thematic map exercises can be created from the following weblinks when examining the results of urban decline and urban renewal, especially *social structure, patterns of advantage and disadvantage, wealth and poverty, ethnicity*.
<http://www.neighborhoodscout.com/mi/detroit/grand-lawton/#schools>
<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/113946/detroit-bankruptcy-2013-maps-numbers>
- National Geographic have published a number of articles on Detroit, all with excellent visuals, maps, interviews and articles. A few are listed below for Urban decline, renewal and sustainability
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/taking-back-detroit/index.html>
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/09/1409010-detroit-mounds-debris-dumping-vacant-lots/>
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/special-features/2014/08/140822-detroit-michigan-water-shutoffs-great-lakes/>
- For urban renewal and sustainability the following links are valuable
<http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2014/mar/02/detroit-michigan-first-steps-urban-renewal>
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/26/detroit-in-20-years-2033_n_4269422.html
<http://detroitfuturecity.com/about/>
- New Republic article with thematic maps
<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/113946/detroit-bankruptcy-2013-maps-numbers>
- National Post – a comparison of Detroit over time
https://nationalpostcom.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/fo0202_detroit1200c.jpg - this has a great comparison of Detroit over time.

New vehicles awaiting shipment by rail, Detroit 1973

