

# New town planning and imbalanced development: The case of Stevenage

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*Abstract:* The major differences between British new towns and other towns is they have been designated with specific objectives and characteristics. There are some major characteristics for British new towns, which are defined by British government.

One of the most important them is that they should be established and developed as balanced communities for work and living (*Ogilvy [5]*). It means hat the structure of employment should not be dominated by a single firm or type of industry.

The pattern of employment change in Stevenage shows that the this new town during the 1960s benefited substantially from the new town programme policy, but from 1971 as a Mark I new town, it actually experienced slower growth than other towns of similar size. This new town for the first time during the 1980s experienced considerable out-migration of labour from the town. There are many reasons for this out-migration. Of particular importance is the fact that the development of Stevenage new town was mainly dependent upon a limited number of big companies. Stevenage has failed to become a balanced community. The recession of the early 1980's caused the loses of a considerable number of manufacturing jobs.

*Keywords:* new town, balance, labour market, manufacturing

## 1 Introduction:

The new town originates with formal recognition, and then the population and industry increases until it reaches the required size. Because of the order of development in new towns it is possible to exercise more control over the town's structure, the type of economic activity and the kind of residents, than the traditional town (Robinson, [7]). The major differences between British new towns and other towns is they have been designated with specific objectives and characteristics. There are some major characteristics for British new towns, which are defined by British government.

The general characteristics of these new towns were defined by the new towns Committee chaired by Lord Reith. The

Reith Committee set up in 1945, suggested guide-lines according to which such towns should be established and developed as self- contained and balanced communities for work and living (*Ogilvy, [5]*).

Cresswell and Thomas [1] identified three criteria relating to the balanced community concept:

- a) that there should be a balance between population and employment ;
- b) that the structure of employment should not be dominated by a single firm or type of industry;
- c) that the new towns are not to be one-class communities.

The second meaning of balance was that the structure of employment should not be dominated by a single firm or type of industry. The reason for this is to prevent a catastrophe if the dominant industry

suffered a drop in employment, bringing about large-scale unemployment in the town.

In relation to the industrial base in new towns, Cresswell and Thomas [1] and Luttrell [4] argued that the new towns have attracted mostly light industries. Cresswell and Thomas mentioned some exceptions, such as Corby with a dependence on steel, Welwyn Garden City on chemicals, Stevenage on vehicle production, (in the form of aerospace), Basildon, Cwmbran, and East Kilbride all on vehicle production. Gratton [3] who studied the industrial diversification in new towns, explains that increasing size leads to increasing diversification.

The object of this paper is present an analysis of the imbalanced development of Stevenage in the post war development.

## **2 Migration and population change**

The rate of population change in Stevenage is directly influenced by migration over the different stages of its development. The rate of growth of population in Stevenage new town clearly shows the process of development of this town. Data from censuses of population show that, in general, the rate of growth of Stevenage's population declined over this period. As we can see in Table 2, Stevenage's population grew significantly during the first stage (1950s) after designation by an average growth rate of 19.38%; by contrast it increased by 0.08% over the period 1981-1991, the fourth stage.

If we compare Stevenage New Town and Hertfordshire County over each of the four decades, we can see that Hertfordshire's rate of population growth was similar to that of Stevenage New Town, decreasing over time; of course at a different rate. Stevenage's population increased at an average rate of 19.38% during 1951-1961, about 6.6 times faster than in Hertfordshire County, while it increased by just 0.08%

over 1981-1991, less than Hertfordshire County.

Stevenage New Town, because of redistribution of population in the region and the development of the New Town, grew at a considerable rate, over the period 1951-1961. By contrast over the fourth stage (1981-1991), because of considerable out-migration, the rate of population change was just 0.08% per year.

As we can see in Table 3, Stevenage's first decade of development as a small town involved a large amount of in-migration into the area (about 418% of the Stevenage's population in 1951).

Out-migration, with the effect of reducing Hertfordshire's population, began in the 1970s. For the first time since its designation in 1948, during the 1980s Stevenage New Town had a high level of out-migration and as a result its population growth rate was less than that of Hertfordshire.

## **3 Migration and the stages of development of Stevenage**

The results of the labour market accounts for Stevenage, indicate that this town experienced a huge amount of in-migration over the first and second stages of its development. This town experienced 393% and 32% in-migration respectively over the first and second stages. This was because of substantial growth of job opportunities in Stevenage during these stages.

But, like other new towns, in the maturity and stagnation stages this town experienced a decline and even a negative change in in-migration. Stevenage for the first time in the stagnation stage experienced out-migration.

As we know, there is a close relationship between change in employment structure and change in migration in Stevenage. As we can see in Table 1, there are important differences between the results for males and females. This is because of the pattern

of employment change in Stevenage new town. During the last four decades there was a growth in the service sector and a decline in the number of in manufacturing jobs in Stevenage. The pattern of change in employment structure of Stevenage has been reflected on the pattern of in-migration to the Stevenage. There was a growth in level of female in-migration and a decline in rate of male in-migration over the last four decades.

It must be mentioned that the huge volume of in-migration to Stevenage during the first and second stages had an important effect on the level of population in these stages and on the growth of local labour force in third and fourth stages.

#### **4 The importance of manufacturing in Stevenage**

Stevenage New Town was the first post-war New Town designated to attract population and industry from the London area. Because of this we can see a considerable change in employment in Stevenage New Town during the 1950s and 1960s. But, in common with many of the first generation New Towns, there was a considerable decline in the rate of employment change during the maturity stage, (1971-81).

The important component of growth of employment in Stevenage was in the manufacturing sector. Until 1966, as much as 65% of employment in the town was in manufacturing. Consequently Stevenage, compared with most other towns in Hertfordshire, had a high proportion of its employment in manufacturing. As we can see in Table3, in 1971 just 24.7% of employment in the County was in manufacturing. However, after 1966 the proportion of manufacturing sector began to decrease as employment growth in the service sector increased (By 1971 about 57% of Stevenage's employment was in manufacturing compared with 24% in

Hertfordshire). By 1981 only 40.7% of employment in Stevenage was in manufacturing compared to 35% in Hertfordshire. The Stevenage proportion decreased to 16.4% in 1991.

Generally speaking, the change in employment structure was an important factor in the general trend of employment change in Stevenage. The relative importance of manufacturing employment has declined in Stevenage as service sector employment has grown. This is a reflection of national and regional trends.

Stevenage New Town developed very rapidly during the 1950's and 1960's. During these decades a large number of manufacturing companies moved into the Stevenage new town. (Stevenage County Borough Council [8]). The number of jobs in Stevenage had grown rapidly between 1946 and 1981. At designation in 1946 there were about 2500 jobs in the town, this number grew rapidly to 19209 fourteen years later and to nearly 35000 jobs by 1981. During this period, as Fothergill and Gudgin [2] found, Stevenage New Town like other small towns and rural areas was successful in expanding its manufacturing base. Furthermore, this New Town during this period benefited substantially from New Towns policy.

As we saw in Table 2, during the 1980s for the first time in its history as a new town, Stevenage experienced out-migration, equivalent to 8.6% of its economically active population in 1981.

There are many reasons for out-migration of labour force from Stevenage during the 1980s. One of the most important is the fact that the development of Stevenage New Town was mainly dependent upon a number of limited big companies.<sup>1</sup> (Stevenage Borough Council, [9]).

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<sup>1</sup>These companies included English Electric Ltd (British Aerospace), de Havilland Propellers Ltd (Hawker Siddeley), Mentmore

As we know, one of the major original objectives of British New Towns was for them to be balanced communities. Cresswell and Thomas [1] defined the balanced communities as a community that the structure of employment should not be dominated by a single firm or type of industry. The reason for this was to prevent a catastrophe if the dominant industry suffered a drop in employment.

It is clear that Stevenage New Town has failed to achieve this objective. Stevenage had been dominated by aerospace since the mid-1950s when the English Electric Company relocated a large part of its production to the Stevenage. By 1961, 26% of the total employment in Stevenage was in aerospace. (Philpott and Kraithman, [6]).

During the early 1980s the national economy experienced a severe recession; consequently Stevenage, because of its dependence on these manufacturing companies was badly affected. Many of the companies, such as Kodak, ICI and Platignum, were closed completely; whilst others reduced their workforces (e.g British Aerospace).

## 5 Conclusions

The results indicate that Stevenage, like other New Towns, experienced substantial growth in the level of employment and in-migration over the first stage of its development. It is clear that the migration of heads of families to the New Towns led to the growth in the level of unemployment in the town.

In the maturity (third) stage, the Stevenage new town experienced a lower rate of employment change. As a result of the mismatch between labour supply and labour demand, they experienced a growth

in the level of job-shortfall and unemployment.

Furthermore, Stevenage during the fourth stage experienced out-migration. This was because of a weakness in the economic position of New Towns in this stage. Of course, out-migration and out-commuting reduced the level of unemployment and job-shortfall during this stage.

The important component of growth of employment in Stevenage was in the manufacturing sector. Until 1966, as much as 65% of employment in the town was in manufacturing. Consequently Stevenage, compared with most other towns in Hertfordshire, had a high proportion of its employment in manufacturing.

Furthermore, the Stevenage has always been dominated by a small number of large firms. This might therefore explain a relative lack of success in Stevenage's manufacturing industry.

During 1980s, there was no growth in the demand side of the Stevenage labour market. As a result, this town, experienced an out-migration of its labour force. The decrease in demand for labour in Stevenage, was because of a considerable decline in manufacturing jobs in this town. The recession conditions of early 1980s, led to a general decline in manufacturing jobs throughout the country. Over this period, Stevenage New Town lost a considerable number of manufacturing jobs.

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Table 1: Population change in Stevenage New Town and Hertfordshire County

	1951-1961	1961-1971	1971-1981	1981-1991
Stevenage	19.38	4.55	1.05	0.08
Hertfordshire	3.44	1.61	0.33	0.20

Note : The rate of growth of population per year.

Table 2: In-migration in Stevenage New Town and Hertfordshire County

	1951-1961		1961-1971		1971-1981		1981-1991	
	M	P/M	M	P/M	M	P/M	M	P/M
New Town	30597	418	7753	18	1552	2.3	-6317	-8.4
County	177811	31	20964	2.6	-4036	-0.4	-4459	-0.5

Note : M : Net in-migration, P/M : Ratio between population and migration

Table 3: Change in employment structure in Stevenage New Town and Hertfordshire County (10%, sample)

		1971	1981	1991	1971-1981	1981-1991*
Services	New Town	1173	1823	2384	650	557
	%	37.3	51.6	66.0	20.7	14.3
	County	2968	13654	33072	10686	19418
	%	52.2	50.3	70.0	23.8	142.0
Manufacturing	New Town	1789	1436	922	-353	-515
	%	56.9	40.7	16.4	-19.7	-13.2
	County	1407	9694	9460	8287	-234
	%	24.7	35.7	20.0	18.5	-16.0

\* : These data are for Stevenage District, %:Percentage of economically active population in base year