

King-Wey Hii 10 Bonington

Geography Coursework  
St Albans Field Trip  
Year 10 2003

~~'Do people travel further to buy comparison goods rather than convenience goods?'~~

Introduction:

My title asks, 'do people travel further to buy comparison goods rather than convenience goods?' My data collection was carried out in the central business district (CBD) of St Albans. My general aim is to investigate a range of interests of shoppers in the area and also a little on the land use in the CBD. Once sufficient data is collected I will be manipulating it to answer my hypothesis and to draw a conclusion from the relevant results.

St Albans was visited on a Market day, which is held in the main street of the city every Wednesday and Saturday. It was a suitable study area as it has many different aspects to it which would suit the needs for different types of data collection for many students with a large variety of hypotheses and questions.

St Albans is located in Hertfordshire, south-eastern England, on the River Ver, near its confluence with the Colne. St Albans is situated on the northern fringe of Greater London. The district includes the city and the parishes of Colney Heath, Harpenden Rural, Harpenden Town, London Colney, Redbourn, St. Michael, St. Stephen, Sandridge and Wheathampstead. (See ~~fig 3~~ 3). Nearby places outside the district include Hatfield to the east, Welwyn Garden City to the north-east, Luton and Dunstable to the north-west, Hemel Hempstead to the west, Watford to the south-west and Borehamwood to the south. (See ~~fig 1 and fig 2~~ 1 and 2). The population in mid-1998 was estimated at 131,400. (See ~~fig 6~~ 6).

In the CBD of St Albans, our study included the roads, Market place (where the market is held), Chequer Street, Victoria Street, Peters Street, London Road, Holywell Hill, High Street, Verulam Road, Dagnall Street, Spencer Street, Catherine Street and Hatfield Road. (See ~~fig 5~~ 5).

There are two main train stations. The city station is about 750m east of the city centre and is serviced by Thameslink. The abbey station is about 1km south of the city centre and is serviced by Silverlink. There is also a single train running between St Albans and Watford Junction, starting a new round trip every 45 minutes during most of the day.

Housing is expensive relative to England in general, possibly due to the fast commuting to London by train. Notable buildings include St Albans Cathedral.



The **sphere of influence** is the area served by a settlement, sometimes called a **catchment area** or **hinterland**. The larger the settlement, the greater the number and variety of shops and services and the wider the area from which people will travel to use the centre. London's sphere of influence is the whole country. Outside London towns such as Plymouth, Newcastle, Leeds and Norwich serve local regions. Market towns serve smaller villages and farms in the area. A village only serves itself and some surrounding farms.

Smaller settlements tend to have fewer shops and services than larger settlements. The shops, such as a general store, newsagent, small supermarket and chemist tend to provide low-order or **convenience goods** such as newspapers, bread and milk. In larger settlements there are more shops and services. They include shops selling convenience goods but there are also department stores and specialist shops selling jewellery, sports equipment and furniture. These are called high-order or **comparison goods**. The types of goods and services in a settlement are linked to the following:

- The **threshold population**: the minimum number of people required to support a service so that it remains profitable. In the UK this is about 300 for a village shop, 500 for a primary school, 25000 for a shoe shop, 50000 for a medium sized store and 100000 for a large one.
- The **range of a good**: the maximum distance people are prepared to travel to use a shop or service. Most people do not travel great distances to buy a newspaper or do their shopping but they are prepared to travel further to purchase clothes, jewellery or furniture, which are more costly and bought less often.

## Method:

On Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2003, geography students of Year 10 St. Helen's School visited St Albans on a market day in order to carry out some geography fieldwork for coursework. During the morning it was sunny and fairly warm, however, as the day went on, although it stayed sunny, it got colder.

The CBD land use map (see  7) and the shopper's questionnaire (see  8) were carried out during the afternoon, when we were in the CBD. We were split into 11 groups of 4-5 people and were sent to one of the 11 sections of the CBD. By being split into groups and then spread to different areas all around the CBD, made data collection easier and quicker. My group and I were appointed to work in area 4, which included Chequer Street, Market Place and a small part of High Street. This area is in the heart of the CBD and was in an area where the market was being held.

The CBD land use map was completed at about 14:30. My group and I walked around our area completing our land use map by filling in how each store along the streets was used. E.g. Fast food shop, shoe shop, newsagent etc. By doing this it showed us what proportion of stores were comparison and what proportion were convenience, were present in the CBD. This had to be pointed out as it could well effect whether people would travel further to buy either type of good. For example, if the CBD consisted almost completely of convenience stores, it may not be too likely that a lot of people would travel from very far to shop at the small range of comparison stores.



There were a few problems with this method of data collection however. First of all, it was quite difficult to fill in every shop on the map. Some of the stores were hard to find or couldn't be found at all. Also, the map was a little too small to fill in enough detail.

The shopper's questionnaire was carried out later on in the day. Each person in each group was advised to ask at least 5 different people who were seen in their particular area of the CBD. By asking the actual shoppers in St Albans, it allowed us to see their interests, whether they came to shop for comparison goods or convenience goods, how far they have travelled to buy what they wanted to buy, where bouts they have come from etc. Each question in the questionnaire had a different purpose, and some had some problems with them:


- **'Are you shopping in St Albans?'**: this was the first question asked. If the answer was 'no' to this question, most of the other questions that followed would be completely irrelevant.
- **'Were you held up in any traffic jam?'**: there was a problem with this question because, if the person being questioned travelled by foot it would not be a relevant.
- Some terms in the some of the questions were not understood by everybody. For example, **'Have you come to use specialist services?'**, the term 'specialist services' was not always understood and it had to be explained on many occasions. If the person being questioned was in a rush, they may not have had time to ask what the term meant, consequently giving an inaccurate answer which could effect the results.
- **'Where have you come from today to shop in St Albans?'**: this question may have caused problems as people were sometimes too vague with their answer because they may not have wanted us to know where they came from or maybe

where they lived. E.g. If the person said that they came from London, it would have been too vague as from that, we do not know if they came from the CBD of London or the suburbs etc.

## Analysis and Interpretation:

From studying the desire line maps (see  9 and  10) that I have drawn for both the distances people are prepared to travel for either comparison or convenience goods, it is fairly obvious that there are more people coming into St Albans from the south than from the north. This may be because of accessibility from these areas in the south and north to St Albans. I can see that there are better motorway links from the south than from the north. From the south there is the M1, A1, A41 etc. However from the north, although there are a few motorway links, it is more limited.

Again from looking at the desire line maps, I can see that the results for comparison goods and convenience goods do not differ greatly at all. They both are drawn slightly north from Harpenden, and attracted greatly south-west by people travelling from Greater London. There are not so many people however travelling from the north-east or the south-west. Both desire line maps are very similar to each other, though there is one anomaly on the comparison goods map. This anomaly is the person who had travelled from Enfield which drew the sphere of influence further east. This, again, seems to be due to motorway links.

A possible reason as to why the two desire line maps are so similar may be there is not a very large range of comparison goods in St Albans. From the CBD land use map, (see  12) even though it shows that there is a greater proportion of comparison stores than convenience stores, it may not mean that there is a large and wide variety of comparison stores. And at the same time, the market may have extended the distance people are willing to travel for convenience goods.

Even though the market is of mainly convenience goods, people may still be prepared to travel from fairly far to shop in the market. This may be because people see that St Albans has a different atmosphere to any other market. For example, despite the fact that there is Watford Market in Watford, we can still see that quite a few people have travelled from Watford to shop and to use the market in St Albans. This may be because Watford Market differs greatly from the market in St Albans. Firstly, Watford Market is indoors. On the day we visited St Albans, the weather was very good, so that could have attracted more people. Watford Market is also only open on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, so because of this, people in Watford may have needed to buy something from a market even though the market in their area was closed. So, as the market in St. Albans is open on Wednesdays, and the day we visited the market was on a Wednesday, there may have been more people from Watford on that day, who wanted to use the market in St Albans. St Albans is also a fairly historical area, for example there are prestigious monuments such as St Albans Cathedral and the Clock Tower. This again could be another reason as to why people are attracted to the market in St Albans rather than a market in their own area or one nearer than the one St Albans.

Conclusion:

My title asked 'do people travel further to buy comparison goods rather than convenience goods? From my results and interpretations I have been able to come to a conclusion to answer the question.

I was able to see from my interpretations of the two desire line maps that the spheres of influences are of roughly the same shapes. The only factor that makes them a little different is the anomaly of the single person who had travelled from Enfield on that particular day.

Also, all the reasons I have given as to why people may have travelled from particular places to buy either of the types of goods, even each other out. For example, the lack of variety of comparison stores lowers the distance people would be willing to travel for comparison goods, but at the same time the distance people would be willing to travel for convenience goods is being extended due to the unique market St Albans has.

The results and interpretations don't particularly match textbook predictions saying that people travel further to buy comparison goods than convenience goods. The ranges of the goods are very similar in this study and it shows that many factors can effect the distance people would be willing to travel to buy a particular good or to use a particular service. Therefore, one cannot always be grounded on the idea that comparison goods are always travelled further for than convenience goods are.

To conclude, people do not travel further to buy comparison goods rather than convenience goods, but they travel about the same distances for either.

\* Acknowledgements:

[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) (2020) for background information on S.Africa

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