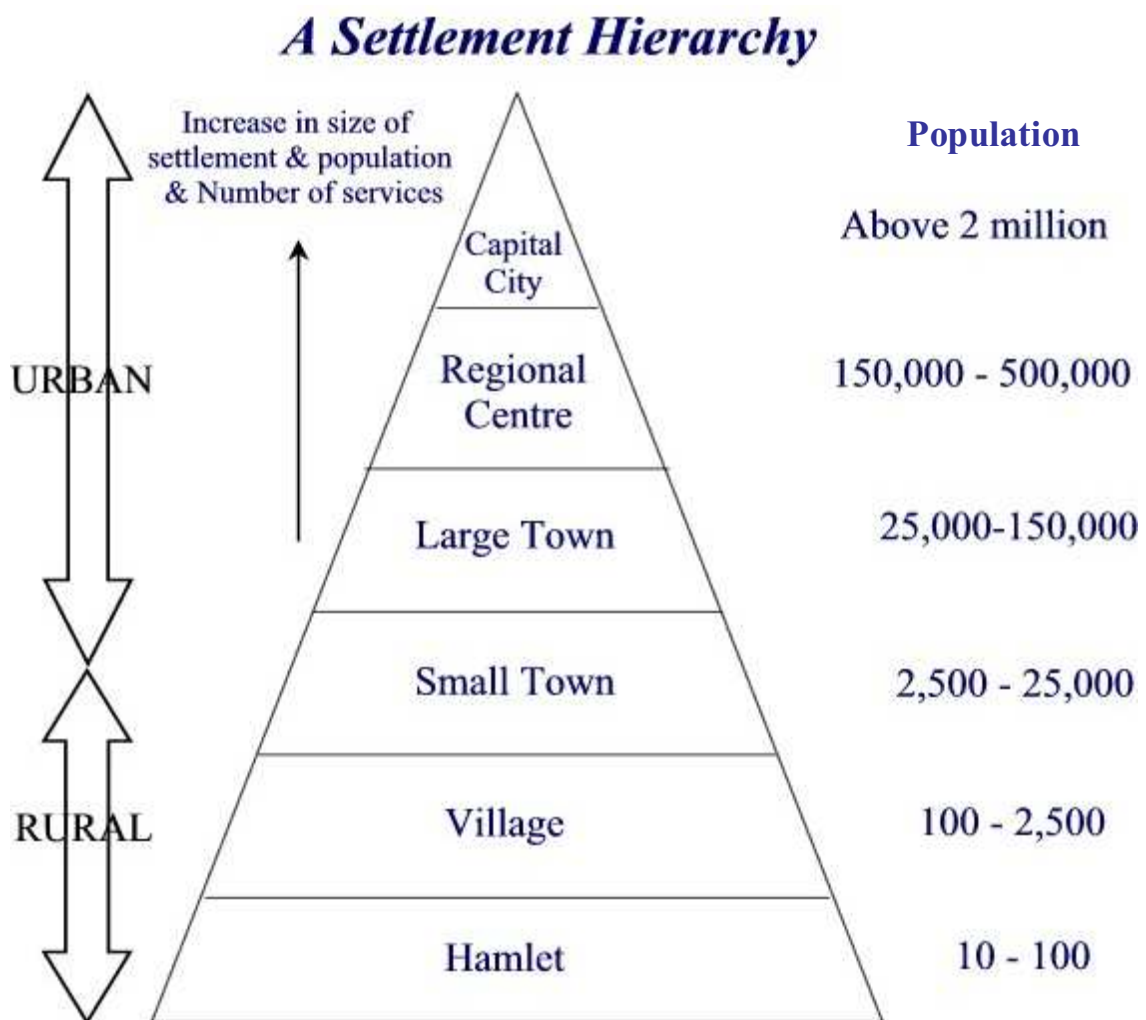


Settlement Hierarchy

A settlement hierarchy arranges settlements in order of importance, with individual farms and hamlets at the bottom and the single largest city, which is usually the capital, at the top. Three different measures are often used:

- The size of settlement in terms of its population
- The range and numbers of services
- The sphere of influence or the size of the area served by the settlement



This diagram shows a hierarchy of settlements according to population size. As you go up the hierarchy there is an increase in the size of the settlement, population and number of services.

Services

The shops and services in a settlement provide the local population with its needs. The larger a settlement, the more services are needed to provide for the population. The diagram opposite suggests a hierarchy based upon the services in settlements of different sizes.



- Convenience (low order) – goods shops which sell the necessities, basic foodstuffs for example bread, meat and vegetables which must be purchased frequently. These goods have a low range as customers are not prepared to travel far to obtain them. Convenience goods shops have a low threshold population; this is the minimum number of customers needed for a shop for it to be successful. They are most likely to be situated in small local centres.
- Comparative (high order) – goods shops and specialist stores (department stores) on the other hand, sell both consumer durable goods which are bought less frequently such as furniture and electrical goods. Comparative shops tend to group together in large centres. Both categories of shops, however, offer high order goods and services which have a wider range and higher threshold population than convenience goods stores. So therefore comparative stores compete for the more beneficial sites in the larger shopping centres in a town.

The following types of services can be identified:

- Local centre – this is the lowest order centre and consists of a small group of low order shops selling convenience goods.
- Neighbourhood centre – there are likely to be a few specialist stores but convenience goods shops will predominate.
- Community or district centres - there is a higher proportion of specialist stores selling goods and services with a wider range because people are prepared to travel farther to obtain them.

- Regional centre – Comparative goods and specialist stores predominate and convenience goods are confined to cheap and inferior sites on the edge of the shopping centre.

Sphere of influence

The sphere of influence is the area served by a settlement. The larger the settlement, the greater the number and variety of shops and services and the wider the area from which people have to travel to use the centre. London's sphere of influence is the whole country, Newcastle and Leeds serve local regions, market towns serve smaller villages and farms in the area and a village only serves itself.

Smaller settlements tend to have fewer shops and services than larger settlements. As they just might have convenience goods stores, which provide low-order such as small supermarkets. But in larger settlement there are more shops and services for example as well as convenience goods stores they also have, department stores and specialist shops which provide a whole variety of goods and services and this is called high-order. The types of goods and services are linked to the following:

1. The threshold population – the minimum number of people required to support a service so that it remains profitable.
2. The range of goods – the maximum distance people are prepared to travel to use a shop or service.

Functions of a settlement

The function of a settlement is its purpose, why it is there and the “work” that it does. It can be assessed by looking at the occupational structure of the settlement.

- Towns with a balance occupational structure – no single employment group dominates e.g. Manchester
- Fishing towns – fishing employs over 5% of the workers in the town e.g. Peterhead
- Engineering town – engineering employs 15% of workers in the town e.g. Birmingham

- Resort towns – personal service and entertainment employ over 20% of workers in the town e.g. Blackpool
- Commercial towns – Commerce and finance form the largest single group, employing over 10% of workers e.g. London

Many settlements in Britain have changed their function over time. Most settlements began with farming as their main function. Over time mechanization has reduced the need for farm workers and therefore many villages, especially those close up to large urban areas, now house workers in all types of employment who travel elsewhere to work. These settlements are called commuter or dormitory villages, for example County Durham. They have often expanded with the addition of a new housing estate, and the resident commute to work in the cities nearby.