**Characteristics of Urban Decline**

* **Poor quality housing - with outside toilets, overcrowding, no hot water or central heating**
* **Poor building maintenance - many buildings would have leaking roofs, draughty windows and crumbling stonework**
* **Many empty buildings, and these have the potential to be vandalised; gap sites where buildings have been knocked down turn into derelict land**
* **Empty factories**
* **High levels of air, noise, land and water pollution**
* **Social characteristics of urban decay include high unemployment rates, high crime rates, depopulation, and split families.**

Causes of Urban decline.

1. Political decisions – governments can favour some cities over others, and encourage the development of some areas over others. London is a city that attracts lots of investment, but the UK government has tried to decentralise some of its functions.
2. Another cause is the outmigration of wealthier and more skilled people leaves a lesser qualified population. Often tied in with Suburbanisation, this removes people who are better off economically, leaving the area to those who are usually poorer, which contributes to higher unemployment rates, a characteristic of urban decay. In the USA this has become known as “White flight”, as the white middle class gradually left the cities for suburban areas because of the perceived higher crime rates and danger caused by African-American migration north toward cities after World War I
3. Decline in Quality of housing stock - The old pre-war buildings get worse because of poor maintenance because the owners are unwilling to spend money on maintenance or because the tenants cannot afford to spend money on maintenance. The stock can also decline in quality if population densities become too high. Detroit may be well-known for its so-called ruins, but much of the city is relentlessly covered with small, Cape Cod-style, 3-bedroom and one-bath single family homes on slabs that are not in keeping with contemporary standards for size and quality.
4. There was lack of urban planning in the past. Things such as narrow streets cause traffic congestion and can force people and investment away. This happened in the London Docklands where traffic into and out of the Docklands was initially limited for security reasons, and later became a reason for lack of investment because of poor communications. In Detroit major corridors have long stretches of anonymous single-story commercial buildings, with few trees or other landscaping. Signs, banners, awnings and decorative lighting are noticeably lacking. Overhead electrical wires extend for miles, and streets have been rigidly engineered with road signs and markings. The city’s corridors are hardly pedestrian friendly.
5. The loss of an industry through changing market conditions or a lack of/withdrawal of government support. This has happened in the UK, such as Scotswood in Newcastle or large parts of Middlesbrough. In the USA many of the heavy manufacturing industries were located in the North of the country in cities such as Chicago and Detroit. This has become known as the “Rust Belt” as globalisation and out sourcing of many industries to low wage Asian countries has decimated those industries. In cities like Detroit, entire neighbourhoods have been abandoned as high paying manufacturing jobs vanished and the workers along with them. Rust belt to sun-belt migration has also occurred, with people moving to warmer climates in the South of the USA.
6. The concentration of low income groups in one area of a city can lead to urban decay because of poverty. The residents in the inner city are often low-income group (or new immigrants) for easy access to work. This carries with it social issues. Indeed, high levels of poverty can result in higher drug use and increase the level of crime, which contributes to urban decay. When crime levels go up, property prices decrease, leading to higher levels of building disrepair and eventual abandonment. With a crime rate of 59 per one thousand residents, Detroit has one of the highest crime rates in America compared to all communities of all sizes - from the smallest towns to the very largest cities. One's chance of becoming a victim of either violent or property crime here is one in 17. The per capita income in Detroit in 2010 was $14,984, which is low income relative to Michigan and the nation. This equates to an annual income of $59,936 for a family of four. Detroit also has one of the higher rates of people living in poverty in the nation, with 39.81% of its population below the federal poverty line.
7. Racism and a lack of ethnic integration. In the past in some countries people were discriminated against because of their race. In the USA African-Americans were most likely to be declined jobs and loans, both of which would help their economic status as well as the health of their neighborhoods. Discrimination can therefore promote unemployment, which in turn promotes poverty, street gangs and illegal drug-trafficking activities and other crimes.