

# The pre-industrial urban system: France, 1740–1840

---

**Bernard Lepetit**

*Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris*

*Translated by*

**Godfrey Rogers**



EDITIONS DE LA MAISON DES  
SCIENCES DE L'HOMME

# Contents

---

<i>List of figures</i>	page xi
<i>List of tables</i>	xii
<i>Foreword</i>	xv
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xix
Introduction	1
1 The urbanization of France	7
Analysis of degrees of urbanization	8
The urbanization of France during the First Empire	11
Urbanization before industrialization	27
Urbanization in the past	34
2 Urban images	43
<i>Ancien régime</i> : change and continuity	44
The image of the town: three sources for analysis	46
The closed town	53
The open town	63
Conclusion: the town in time and space	76
3 The town, the economy, the territory	78
Eighteenth-century essays in urban economics	79
Towns, flows and infrastructures	102
4 An essay in urban typology	124
Urban classifications	126
<i>Ancien régime</i> towns: functions and infrastructures	136
Profiles of <i>ancien régime</i> towns	152
Plural hierarchies	162
Conclusion: Back to the balance sheet	174
5 Hierarchical gradations	176
The standard distributions	178
From one structure to the other	187
Regional variations	198
An outline archaeology of thresholds	203

6	The new geography of power	209
	Becoming a departmental <i>chef-lieu</i> in 1790	210
	The redistribution of administrative roles	218
	Harmonization of the urban hierarchies	234
7	The France of the <i>chefs-lieux</i>	251
	A page of social history	253
	The town as infrastructure	271
	Urban budgets	283
8	Towns and roads	299
	Regional variations in the transport surface	302
	Road network and urban framework	309
	Roads, towns and traffics	327
	Conclusion: road network and urban growth	345
9	Urban systems: from frameworks to networks	349
	The administrative and marketing principles	350
	The evolution of regional price structures	367
	Diffusion of innovation in the urban tissue	375
	Conclusion: urban systems and regional development	395
10	Back to representations	397
	Rupture: classical political economy	398
	The paradigm of mobility	407
	From capitals to central places	417
	Conclusion	435
	Appendix A. Statistical methods	444
	Appendix B. The population of French towns with 10,000 inhabitants or more, 1700–1836	449
	Appendix C. Urban and rural population of France in 1806, by department	453
	Appendix D. Urban and rural population of France in 1836, by department	458
	<i>Bibliography</i>	463
	<i>Index</i>	478

## Figures

---

1	Departmental indices of urbanization, 1806	page 14
2	Indices of urbanization and town size, 1806	15
3	Settlement systems	20
4	Departmental indices of urbanization, 1836	30
5	The rate of urbanization in France, 1806–36	31
6	The upper reaches of the urban framework, <i>c.</i> 1780, the combination of variables	154
7	The ‘ <i>ancien régime</i> town’, <i>c.</i> 1780, the combination of variables	158
8	The urban framework, <i>c.</i> 1780	164
9	Town types at the end of the eighteenth century	173
10	The central place system of Christaller	179
11	Urban hierarchies: standard distributions	184
12	Hierarchical distributions of towns in France, <i>c.</i> 1700–1836	190
13	Urban hierarchies: schemata of evolution	196
14	Becoming a departmental <i>chef-lieu</i> in 1790	216–17
15	Administrative change and geography of towns	233
16	Departmental distribution of projects examined by the Conseil des Bâtiments Civils (Year IV–1851)	276
17	Towns with budgets exceeding 10,000 francs in 1812	289
18	France’s road infrastructure <i>c.</i> 1820: departmental typology	307
19	Royal highways, <i>c.</i> 1820	310
20	Levels of road provision to towns <i>c.</i> 1820	315
21	Geography of postal receipts (1745–1842)	341
22	The regional forms of organization of commercial circuits, <i>c.</i> 1850	363
23	The diffusion of savings in 1847	382
24	Regional variations in the diffusion of savings banks (1818–48)	386
25	The establishment of savings banks in the main towns (1817–48)	388

# Tables

---

1	The number of printings of guidebooks to Paris, 1601–1800	page 49
2	Publication dates of 228 maps of Paris, 1600–1769	52
3	Urban improvement projects examined by the King's Council in the eighteenth century	110
4	The towns studied, by department	139
5	Territorial capitals and trading centres, c. 1780	156
6	The ' <i>ancien régime</i> towns', c. 1780	163
7	The parameters of the rank-size curve, France, 1700–1836	191
8	The hierarchical positions of towns with departmental <i>chef-lieu</i> status	215
9	The <i>ancien régime</i> positions of departmental seats	215
10	The transformations in the administrative framework from the <i>ancien régime</i> to the Empire	228
11	The principles of functional mobility between <i>ancien régime</i> and Empire	229
12	The administrative fortunes of towns in relation to their previous positions	231
13	Demographic growth and administrative reform (c. 1780–1806)	237
14	Demographic growth and town size (c. 1780–1806)	239
15	Demographic growth and town size (1806–36)	247
16	Number of projects submitted to the Conseil des Bâtiments Civils (Year IV-1851)	278
17	Number of projects submitted to the Conseil des Bâtiments Civils and urban administrative status	279
18	Per capita expenditure and urban budget size in western Europe in 1812	293
19	Articulation between the road and urban networks	317
20	Road network and administrative network (completed roads)	320
21	Road network and Imperial administrative network (classed roads)	326

22	The regional forms of organization of commercial circuits <i>c.</i> 1850, by department	361
23	The commercial facilities of towns in three regions during the first half of the nineteenth century	365
24	Chronology of the diffusion of savings banks, 1818—48	380
25	The 'loi de l'équilatérie' applied to the administrative framework of France, 1863	425