

Livable Communities: Abandoned Cities

In Ontario

Significance of this lesson:

- Explore and discover sustainable approaches to city planning
- What makes a city resilient? What does this mean?
- Culturally informed design practices when planning communities
- What are abandoned cities and how do they become abandoned?

Cobalt

- Founded in 1903, Cobalt was “The Silver Capital of Canada”, one of the world’s leading producers of silver
- Fires over the years that left more of the population homeless and needing to move, yet another fire in 1977 burnt most homes and structures to the ground
- When the price of silver declined in the 80s, the mines officially closed





Burwash

- Burwash Correctional Center opened in 1914, this sprung a community to form around it
- In 1974 the Ontario Minister of Correctional Services (Robert T Potter) announced the close of Burwash Correctional Center
- The facility was deemed too expensive to maintain
- Prisoners would be relocated.
- Following the close of the prison, around 1000 residents of the town were displaced as their livelihoods depended on the facility running
- Since the closure, the land has been sold off by the government a number of times, there has been chunks used for a variety of things including Goat Farming and Military Training facilities.



BalACLava

- The town received its name from the battle of Balaklava, a skirmish during the Crimean war in 1850s
- It is situated in Renfrew County in Eastern Ontario
- It was the farming and industrial center in the late 19th century
- The Sawmill was constructed in 1855
- Site of the first ever environmental lawsuit in Ontario for depositing too much sawdust in the river
- Decrease in availability of lumber and failure of local farms caused the town's population to decline
- After the sawmill shut down in 1967, the town became a ghost town



Aultsville

- Aultsville, Ontario, was originally founded in 1787 as Charlesville by disbanded soldiers of the King's Royal Regiment of New York
- In the 1950s, the Canadian government initiated the St.Lawrence Seaway project to improve navigation, Aultsville was one of the several villages displaced by the creation of the St.Lawrence Seaway
- The government flooded the area in 1958, submerging it under the Lake St.Lawrence. Residents were relocated, and many buildings demolished, moved, and submerged
- Today it lies underwater, near Long Sault, and traces can still be explored
- Aultsville is located near the united counties of Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry
- It is now part of the Lost Villages of the St.Lawrence Seaway



Flooded Aultsville



Street before flooding



Street after demolition

What events lead to the abandonment of towns and cities?

- Natural disasters
 - Fires
 - Floods
 - Pollution
- Economic downfall
 - For example, recessions or labour strikes
- Depletion of natural resources
- Human conflict



THINK-PAIR-SHARE: What are some potential hazards regarding abandoned cities?

- Take 1 minute to brainstorm, then 1 minute to discuss with a peer beside you

Why are they hazardous?

Why can abandoned cities be hazardous?

1

(1) Physical Hazards :

- **Structural Instability** - Crumbling buildings, unsafe roads, bridges, and infrastructure pose risks of injury or death.
- **Uncontrolled Fires** - Abandoned cities can have unmaintained electrical systems, dry vegetation, or other flammable materials that make them at a higher risk of fires.
- **Exposed Electricity** - older electrical systems can lead to electrocution risks, fires, or explosions if not properly contained.

Why are they hazardous?

Why can abandoned cities be hazardous?

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(2) Environmental Hazards and Contamination :

- **Environmental Hazards and/or contamination** - Hazardous chemicals, industrial waste, and pollutants left behind can runoff into the environment, affecting air, soil, agriculture, and water quality.
- **Water Contamination** - Without maintenance, sewage and water systems can break down, leading to contaminated water supplies from runoff and posing significant health risks.
- **Air Quality Degradation** - Mold, dust, and toxic fumes from decaying infrastructure can degrade air quality, leading to respiratory problems and other health concerns.

Why are they hazardous?

Why can abandoned cities be hazardous?

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(3) Ecosystem and Wildlife Contamination :

- **Ecosystem Disruption** - Abandoned areas can lead to the spread of invasive species, disturbing the local ecosystem.
- **Dangerous Flora and Fauna, Vegetation Overgrowth** - Rapid vegetation growth can block access to areas, damage infrastructure and even create tripping hazards.

Why are they hazardous?

Why can abandoned cities be hazardous?

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(4) Public Health and Safety Risks :

- **Pests and Disease** - Rodents, insects, and stagnant water create environments that attract insects/animals such as mosquitoes and rats that pose health risks.
- **Unexpected Ordinance, Hazardous Materials** - In former war zones or industrial sites, abandoned cities may still contain unexploded bombs, landmines, or leftover chemicals that can cause health concerns or death.

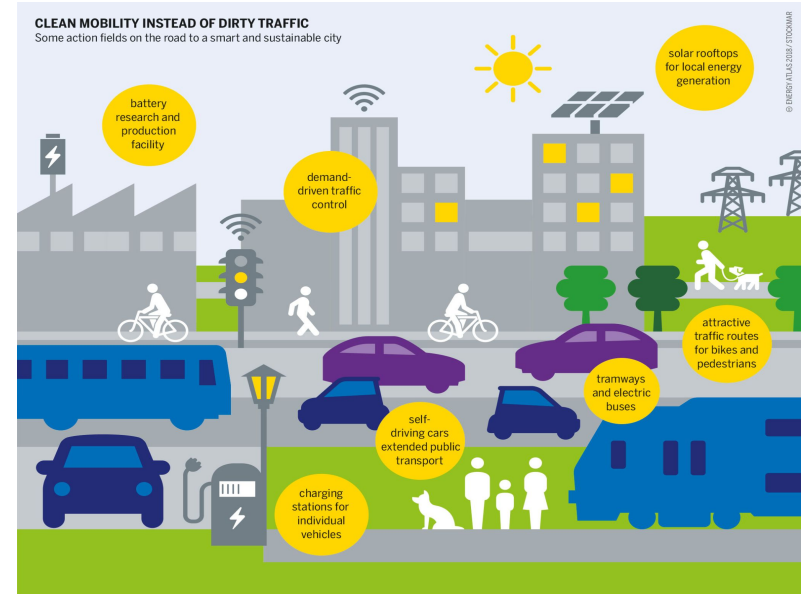
THINK-PAIR-SHARE: What are some sustainable practices for planning a city?

- Take 1 minute to brainstorm, then 1 minute to discuss with a peer beside you
 - Have you noticed anything around the city you live in currently?
 - Have you noticed different sustainable technologies or planning strategies in other cities you have visited?
- Regroup and discuss as a class

Sustainable Practices

- Turning bridge poles to generate power
- Green roofs
- Electric bike and scooter rentals
- Accessible transportation
- Walkable cities
- Green spaces
- Solar Farms

<https://youtu.be/ViJIJh-BNq8>



More Ontario Ghost Towns

Newfoundout

Cooper Falls

Blairton

Indiana

Burchell Lake

Allan Mills

Eldorado

Aultsville

Crooks Hollow

Balacava

Swords

Burwash

Falkenburg

Instructions

In groups, you will select an abandoned community in Ontario and create either a physical or digital re-imagination of how this city could become a revived and sustainable environment. You will overlay your sustainable designs onto an image of the ghost town you select with your group.

This re-imagination should be creative and realistic, introduce sustainable strategies, and consider tying in human element.

For example, what are the people living here doing? What does their lifestyle look like? Consider natural elements beyond human-made solutions, such as wildlife inhabiting the city. Do not worry about the way your art looks, what's more important is finding a way to communicate the possibility for these communities to be revived in a climate-friendly way.

Success Criteria

- ❑ I can apply my knowledge of environmental sustainability to propose solutions for abandoned towns
- ❑ I can understand what factors contribute to towns being abandoned and why that is an environmental issue
- ❑ I can reflect on sustainable practices that I can envision for the future and start implementing now
- ❑ I can demonstrate active participation and collaboration within my group, contributing ideas, insights, and skills to create a comprehensive re-imagining of the community
- ❑ I can showcase creativity in proposing innovative, realistic, and human-centered solutions that belong with the natural environment and promote long-term sustainability
- ❑ I can assess the feasibility of the proposed designs in real-world applications, considering the social, economic, and environmental implications