

Vienna and Paris, 1850-1930: The Development of the Modern City¹

Broad Context: 19th-c. Urbanization

The 19th c. was a period of great change in Europe. Just as the Industrial Revolution transformed the Continent's mode of production and its patterns of work, it also greatly accelerated the urbanization of the West. Individual cities grew rapidly as large numbers of immigrants from rural areas came in search of industrial jobs, and society was transformed as urban rather than rural life became the lifestyle of the majority.

Unfortunately for the residents of Europe's growing 19th-c. cities, living conditions were often very difficult. This is how one French author described Paris in 1848:

If you contemplate from the summit of the Montmartre or any other hill in the neighborhood, the congestion of houses piled up at every point of a vast horizon, what do you observe? Above, a sky that is always overcast, even on the finest day. Clouds of smoke, like a vast floating curtain, hide it from view. A forest of chimneys with black or yellowish chimneypots renders the sight singularly monotonous.... Looking at it one is tempted to wonder whether this is Paris; and, sized with sudden fear, one is reluctant to venture into this vast maze, in which a million beings jostle each other, where the air, vitiated by unhealthy effluvia, rising in a poisonous cloud, almost obscures the sun. Most of the streets in this wonderful Paris are nothing but filthy alleys forever damp from a reeking flood. Hemmed in between two rows of tall houses, they never get the sun; it reaches only the tops of the chimneys dominating them. To catch a glimpse of the sky you have to look straight up above your head. A haggard and sickly crowd perpetually throngs these streets, their feet in the gutter, their noses in infection, their eyes outraged by the most repulsive garbage at every street corner. The best-paid workmen live in these streets. There are alleys, too, in which two cannot walk abreast, sewers of ordure and mud, in which the stunted dwellers daily inhale death. These are the streets of old Paris, still intact.²

Rapid population growth overwhelmed the capacity of early 19th century municipal governments to provide for the needs of their new citizens. The problems described in the quotation were almost universal. Many cities in Continental Europe remained hemmed in by medieval fortifications designed to protect much smaller populations from military attack. Even without this obstacle to expansion, however, urban spread was limited by the almost complete absence of cheap, public transportation. People had to live close to their jobs because they walked to them, and essentially medieval residential patterns persisted in which craftsmen and merchants dwelled behind or above their places of business and poorer persons occupied the upper floors of the same buildings.

The growth in the urban population within the old walls led to an increasingly dense pattern of residence. Landlords added additional floors to existing buildings, cut up once spacious apartments into many smaller living units, erected inferior dwellings in courtyards and other open spaces, and rented basement and attic rooms. Sunlight and fresh air disappeared as building heights increased along narrow, medieval streets. Basements were particularly unhealthy dwellings; they often leaked and seldom received sunlight or ventilation. With little but musty, stale air available to them, it was a custom of basement residents to get an occasional "airing" out of doors.

¹ This lesson is from Wiesner, Ruff, and Wheeler, *Discovering the Western Past: A Look at the Evidence*, Volume II, 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), Ch. 8 (pp. 210-246).

² H. Lecouturier, *Paris incompatible avec la République, plan d'un nouveau Paris où les révolutions seront impossibles* (Paris: 1848), quoted in Louis Chevalier, *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Frank Jellinek (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 155. Montmartre is the highest point in Paris.

Simple movement of people was a problem in the streets of such cities. Lacking sidewalks, pedestrians competed with horse-drawn vehicles for the opportunity to move through cramped streets wet with household waste water and soiled by horse droppings. A trip across a major city, which today would require a matter of minutes by subway, consumed considerably more time in the early 19th century.

Rapid population growth in the limited spaces of many cities produced serious health and social problems. Extremely primitive methods for disposal of human wastes often led to pollution of water supplies, and in the first decades of the 19th century, sewers in Paris and other cities emptied into the very rivers that were the main sources of municipal water. Under such conditions, disease spread rapidly, and life could be short. Epidemics of cholera, a disease transmitted by polluted drinking water, struck many cities in the 19th century; 20,000 persons died in one outbreak of the disease in Paris in 1832. Indeed, well into the 19th century, most cities retained an age-old urban demographic pattern in which death rates among their citizens exceeded birth rates. The limited urban population growth that occurred prior to about 1850 was almost entirely the result of immigration to the cities from rural areas.

A rapidly rising crime rate was probably the most vexing social consequence of urban growth. Urban life often plunged unskilled immigrants of rural origin into deep poverty. Though crime sometimes stemmed from poverty, certain features of urban life encouraged it. The social controls of rural village life largely were absent in the cities, where the anonymity of the individual in the urban mass facilitated law-breaking. Police resources for controlling such behavior were limited or nonexistent during the first half of the 19th century, too. The pioneering effort at urban crime control, the London Metropolitan Police Force, was created only in 1829, and was imitated widely only after 1850.

In fact, only after about 1850 can we find Western society systematically attempted to solve the real problems of urban living. Collectively, these responses transformed city life and produced our modern pattern of urban living. Several 19th-century developments made possible this important transformation. We should note first that the power of central governments grew everywhere. The state's ability to command resources in the form of taxes financed many improvements. Its growing bureaucracy also provided the personnel to undertake the first modern urban planning. And its need to maintain order in growing cities led to improved police services and better street lighting to inhibit crime, wider streets to allow for troop movements in case of urban rebellion, and better sanitation to protect the health of its citizens and taxpayers.

The Industrial Revolution played a major role in the urban transformation, too. It created new technologies whose application to city life would improve conditions, and it produced wealth, increasingly shared by more and more persons, which could finance private projects of urban building and improvement. Industrialization also sustained a new consumer-oriented economy characterized by the mass distribution of the products of the new factories to large urban markets. Modern science played a part in urban improvements, too. The work of Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) and other scientists made possible purer water and food to protect public health.

The combination of these 19th-century developments would transform the Western city by 1930.

Paris and Vienna

In the 1870s, Paris and Vienna, respectively, were Europe's second- and third-largest cities; only the population of Greater London was larger. As the political capitals of their nations and as major cultural, commercial, and industrial centers, they experienced rapid growth during much of the period from 1850 to 1930. The population of Paris grew from 547,000 persons in 1800 to 2,714,000 persons a century later, a growth rate of 496 percent. For the same period, Vienna's population grew even more rapidly: from 247,000 persons to 1,675,000 persons, for a growth rate of 678 percent.³ With such rapid growth, Paris and Vienna experienced the full range of urban problems described above. The two cities' responses to these problems are typical of those of most Continental European cities in that time period.

Unlike English cities, which early abandoned their defensive walls because of the protection from attack afforded all of England by its surrounding seas, most Continental European cities retained their walls into the 19th century because of the probability of military assault. Thus, Paris traditionally had been confined by fortifications against attackers and by barriers erected to enforce the collection of taxes on goods entering the city. Only in the 1850s did major improvements of the central city begin. But these improvements in Paris were centrally planned because the national government administered the French capital through its prefect of the Seine Department.⁴ As a result, change in Paris could come about rapidly, since the financial resources of the national government could be brought to the process, and the prestige of that government aided private investment schemes for civic improvements like new housing.

From 1852 to 1870, Emperor Napoleon III governed France. He personally drafted detailed plans for the improvement of Paris and entrusted these to his energetic prefect of the Seine, Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann (1809-1891). Haussmann's projects combined government initiative and money with private capital, and his results were sweeping and rapid. He cut new boulevards through the warren of narrow, medieval streets in the city's center and began the construction of peripheral boulevards along the line of the tax wall of 1784 that once enclosed the city. The new boulevards were wide, some almost 400 feet in width. Such street-building efforts eased movement of goods and persons through the city and improved health standards by opening the center of Paris to more light and fresh air. At the same time, the city's physical appearance changed dramatically as private investors erected new apartment buildings along Haussmann's broad boulevards.

Matters of public health also occupied Haussmann. The government greatly expanded the Paris sewer system and built aqueducts to bring clean drinking water into the city. Haussmann's work also added to the cityscape of Paris parks where residents could enjoy recreational opportunities and unrestricted sunlight and fresh air. Former royal hunting preserves at the western and eastern borders of the city, the Bois de Boulogne (the Boulogne Wood) and the Bois de Vincennes (the Vincennes Wood), became great new public parks, and Haussmann added major new inner-city parks: the Buttes-Chaumont, Monceau, and Montsouris parks.

³ B.R. Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics 1750-1970*, abridged edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 12-15.

⁴ In 1791 the Legislative Assembly divided France into 83 departments for administrative purposes. Paris was the Department of the Seine until 20th century reforms subdivided the metropolitan area into a number of new departments in the interest of efficiency. Napoleon I instituted the office of the prefect as the central government's administrator in each department.

Urban improvements continued in Paris after Haussmann. More major new thoroughfares opened, including the Avenue de l'Opéra in 1877, and public transportation soon flowed on the new boulevards. Paris had had slow-moving and rather expensive horse-drawn buses called omnibuses since 1828. But the new boulevards permitted the city to lead Europe in the introduction of horse-drawn tramcars running much more quickly on steel tracks. By the end of the 19th century, electrification of trams provided increasingly efficient and inexpensive public transportation. And in 1900 the city opened a subway system, the Métropolitain, which many urban transportation specialists regard as the world's most comprehensive public transportation system.

The 20th century also witnessed greater attention to solving housing problems of working people in Paris. The apartment buildings constructed along Haussmann's boulevards, built at private expense, were intended to provide real estate investors a good return on their capital. These new buildings housed the middle- and upper-class Parisians, who, like their counterparts throughout Continental Europe, preferred the city to the suburbs, which were already drawing affluent English and Americans out of their cities. These new buildings and Haussmann's boulevards, however, destroyed much old working-class housing, and Paris's near suburbs, like those of many European cities, became zones of cheap worker housing as well as home to industries too large for the city itself.

Much of this housing for workers was of poor quality, however, because building expenses had to be kept low to keep rents affordable. Also to keep prices low, such housing was densely built; in Paris, working-class suburbs often had greater population densities than the central city. Worse still, there was an increasing shortage of low-cost housing in the early 20th century in Paris. Rent controls, made necessary by World War I (1914-1918), continued until after World War II (1939-1945) and made private construction of low-cost housing called HBM (Habitation de Bon Marché, that is, inexpensive housing). Built as multistoried apartment buildings, some of this new housing arose in the zone that had been occupied by Paris's most recent city wall, which was built in 1841-1845 and which the government razed after World War I.

Vienna, like Paris, sustained a rapid and planned transformation from a congested, walled city to a modern metropolis in the 19th century. As in Paris, the initiative came from the central government. In December 1857, Emperor Francis Joseph ordered the destruction of Vienna's fortifications and the implementation of a plan for his capital's expansion into the area of the old walls and the open spaces, called the *glacis*, surrounding them.⁵ Just as Haussmann had promoted the construction of peripheral boulevards along the old tax wall of Paris, Viennese planners mapped out a broad system of boulevards, along the old defense lines. As in Paris, this new boulevard system was grand: the Ringstrasse's builders made it 2.5 miles long and 185 feet wide. Along it rose new public buildings and privately financed apartment buildings.

Just as in Paris, such construction affected the human geography of Vienna. The old city within the walls had been densely populated before 1857, but it had never been squalid. The Imperial Court resided within the walls, and many of Austria's great nobles maintained residences nearby. Most of Vienna's suburbs, on the other hand, had long contained the residences of the economically

⁵ Early modern fortifications customarily were surrounded by a *glacis*, an unbuilt area intended to provide free-fire zones for the fortifications' defenders. By the 19th century, as artillery ranges increased, these zones often had become quite broad indeed. In Vienna's case, the *glacis* was 1,485 feet wide. Destruction of constraining fortifications was a common feature of urban development in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The following cities tore down their defensive walls in the years indicated: Brussels (1830s), Geneva (1851), Barcelona (1854), Basel (1860-1867), Madrid (1868), and Bologna (1902).

disadvantaged: densely built tenements of two- and three-room apartments, structures that Viennese called “rent barracks” and “bedbug castles.” The construction of the Ringstrasse reinforced this segregation, as its new apartment buildings became the residences of affluent families whose wealth was derived from new industries or service in the expanding governmental institutions of 19th-century Austria-Hungary. Even though the city of Vienna annexed numerous suburbs in 1867 and again in 1890, many neighborhoods just beyond the Ringstrasse retained their working-class character.

A new street system encouraged the development of public transportation in Vienna as it did in Paris. Horse-drawn trams began to run in 1868, and these were electrified at the turn of the century. Also at the century’s end, in 1894, the city began construction of a peripheral railroad, the Stadtbahn (or S-Bahn), that ran in tunnels for about a quarter of its 16.5-mile route. A true subway system was planned, too, but World War I prevented its construction, and Vienna opened its subway system only in 1980.

Late 19th-century Viennese planners effected many other improvements in their city. They initiated a system providing pure water to the city in 1860 and rechanneled the Danube in 1870-1875 to prevent dangerous flooding. Most importantly, they, like Haussmann, opened parks to provide healthful recreation opportunities for citizens. The Ringstrasse itself included a great deal of green space, but the most important park opened to citizens in the 1880s when Emperor Francis Joseph turned a former hunting preserve on the Danube River over to the city. This new park, the Prater, had some 3,200 acres and by the end of the 19th century offered something for almost everyone. It had paths for walking, riding, or bicycling; lakes for boating; soccer fields; an amusement park with a large Ferris wheel; and Europe’s largest outdoor theater.

Such development made Vienna a much more attractive city by the outbreak of World War I in 1914. But that war drastically changed the city. Austria-Hungary broke up at the war’s end, and Vienna found itself not the political and cultural center of a cosmopolitan empire of 54 million, but the capital of a republic of 6 million, with one-third of those living in Vienna. The capital of the small Republic of Austria faced great problems. Population growth outstripped the construction of new, privately owned housing even before World War I, and wartime rent controls, as in Paris, ended most private construction during and after the war. Thus the city found itself with a major housing shortage at the war’s end, when soldiers returned from the army to marry and establish families, and refugees from the former empire’s territories crowded the city.

In Vienna, as in Paris and many other cities, the government sought to address this and other problems. The postwar constitution of Austria gave Vienna the status of a province, with authority to raise and spend substantial revenues. The government of this city was in the hands of the Socialist party until 1934, and that party used public funds for the construction of 63,924 low-cost housing units to meet the housing shortage and to provide better residences for those dwelling in Vienna’s tenements. Other projects improved recreational opportunities; these included public swimming pools and a 60,000-seat stadium in the Prater.

The Sources

Guiding questions for evaluating the sources:

- How were these cities physically reshaped in response to early 19th-century problems?
- How did this physical transformation affect the lifestyle of urban dwellers?

Sources 1-3: *The Pre-Industrial City*

Source 1: Vienna in 1850



Vienna before the Ringstrasse development, showing the city walls and glacis.

- What is your impression of the city within those walls?
- In which direction have buildings grown because of the city's confinement within these walls?
- What sort of opportunities did the *glacis* offer urban planners?

Source 2: A Paris Street in the 1850s



- What kind of housing did such a street seem to offer?
- What do you think the population density in such a neighborhood would have been?
- Consider health conditions. How much sunlight reached the residences on this street? Given the city's lack of sewers in the early 19th c., what function do you think the central gutter performed? Why do you think such a street would offend your senses and prove unhealthy?

Source 3: Leather Workshops on the Bièvre River in Paris in the mid-19th c.



This district was in a densely populated area of the city on a river flowing into the Seine River, from which Parisians drew much of their drinking water in the early 19th c. Leather processing produces strong chemical odors and much toxic waste.

- Why do you think the workshops were built along the Bièvre?
- What sort of health impact do you suppose these workshops had?

Source 4: Schematic Drawing of the Viennese Ringstrasse and Its Major Buildings



Key

Pre-1857 Buildings

- A St. Stephen's Cathedral
- B Hofburg (Imperial Palace)

Post-1857 Buildings

- 1 Votivkirche (the Votive Church of the Divine Savior)
- 2 Opera House
- 3 New Hofburg
- 4 Courthouse
- 5 Art History Museum
- 6 Natural History Museum
- 7 Parliament

- 8 City Hall
- 9 University
- 10 Burgtheater
- 11 Banking Union
- 12 Stock Exchange
- 13 Army Barracks
- 14 School of Arts and Crafts

This map shows central Vienna, with the Danube Canal curving across the lower right of the map near building Number 13.

- What evidence of deliberate planning efforts do you see in the development?
- Does the Ringstrasse, which intermingled new apartment buildings with both public and commercial buildings, seem to have certain functional zones (ex. commercial district, government zone, etc.)? Identify them.

Source 5: Paris, 1850-1870

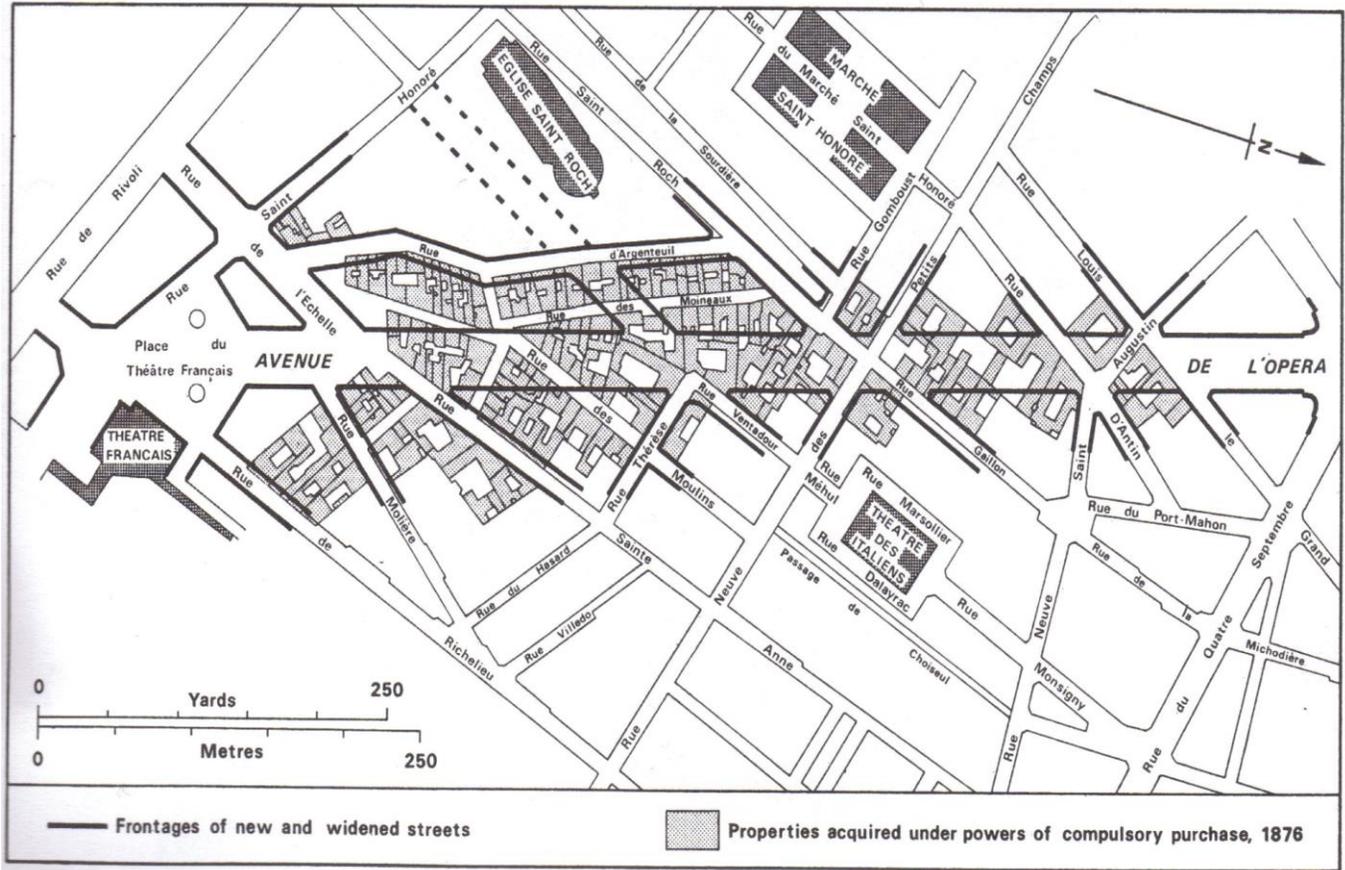


- How has Haussmann improved Paris and the quality of life for Parisians? (ex. consider streets, transportation, parks)
- What problems dictated the aqueducts in the lower center of the map and its upper right?
- What do you notice about the city's growth? What suburbs did it annex to provide for growth?

Sources 6-8: Case Study of Change in Paris: The Avenue de l'Opéra

Hausmann began this broad avenue in the 1850s to provide better communication in western Paris, but it was completed only in 1878, after he left office. The complexities of property acquisition for the new street played a major role in its delayed completion.

Source 6: The Completion of the Avenue de l'Opéra, 1876-1877



- What was the street pattern in this area of the city before the avenue's construction?
- What effects do you think the avenue had on its district?

Source 7: Clearing Old Neighborhoods for the Avenue de l'Opéra, Paris, 1876



- How does this photograph affect your opinion of the complexity of this project?
- How would knowing that street builders had to level a large hill, the Butte Saint-Roch, to provide a level path for the avenue change your assessment of the project's difficulty?
- What sort of housing do you think was removed to make way for the avenue?

Source 8: The Completed Avenue de l'Opéra, Paris, Late 19th c.



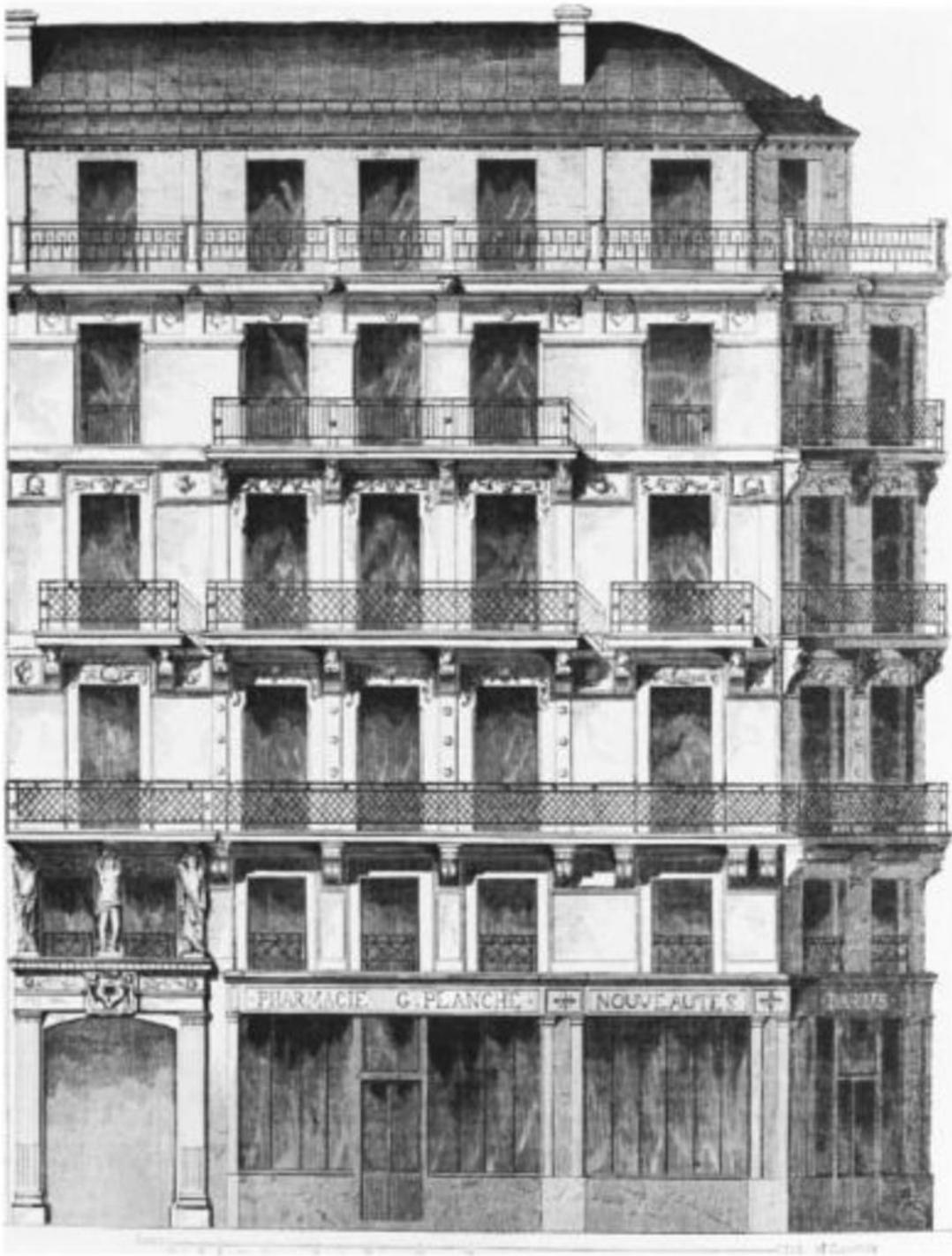
The newly completed opera house is, opened in 1875, is at the end of the avenue.

- How did the avenue improve communications in the city?
- What health benefits probably resulted from its construction?
- What sort of housing seems to surround the avenue?

Sources 9-10: New Housing

Examples of the housing built along the Ringstrasse and Haussmann's new streets.

Source 9: A Paris Apartment Building, Late 19th c.



Engraving of a building typical of those built along Haussmann's new boulevards. There were usually shops on the ground floor with apartments on upper floors. Access to the buildings' residential sections often was through a large double door (at lower left in the picture) leading past the lodging of a *concierge*, who controlled access to the building and kept it clean, to an inner courtyard.

Source 10: Ringstrasse Apartment Building, Schottenring 25



- What about the building's façade suggests to you that the building's upper floors might contain less prestigious, cheaper, and smaller apartments than the lower floors?
- Why might you conclude that, in the absence of elevators (1st office building passenger elevator was 1870 in NYC), some former patterns of social segregation by floor persisted?

Sources 11-12: New Recreational Areas

Source 11: The Prater, Vienna



- What sort of diversions did this park offer?
- What developments in 19th-century urban life would have made such a place more accessible to citizens of all classes?

**My grandmother's father owned the Riesenrad (the ferris wheel in the photo) – there is a reference to Eduard Steiner in this link: <http://www.riesenrad.co.at/vienna-ferries-wheel.html>

Source 12: The Buttes-Chaumont Park, Paris



The park was constructed in 1864-1867 near Belleville, one of the 19th-century worker suburbs annexed by Paris. On an area formerly occupied by quarries and dumps, Haussmann's engineers created a lake surrounded by a dramatically landscaped park with a view of the entire Paris area. Note that a multitrack railroad line traverses a corner of the park (lower left) and that the smokestacks of industrial enterprises cluster around its periphery. What does the presence of these activities suggest to you about the suburbs of cities like Paris and Vienna?

Source 13: Working-Class Suburb, Paris (Belleville), 19th c.



- Consider the population density of a street such as this one.

Source 14: Working-Class Housing, Vienna, Early 20th c.



- Compare these conditions with those in Paris. Why are the conditions so similar?

Sources 15-16: New Modes of Transportation

The Stadtbahn, or S-Bahn (a metropolitan railway), encircled Vienna, and buses and electric trolleys like those of Paris appeared on the streets of all European cities. The fares were low at all times and were often discounted for workers at rush hours.

- What impact might the availability of such transportation have had on worker living patterns?
- Since public transportation ran 7 days/week, why do you think recreational opportunities for workers increase?

Source 15: Vienna S-Bahn, Built 1894-1897, Operated 1898-1989



Source 16: Gare de l'Est Bus and Tramway Stop in 1936



Sources 17-18: Post-WWI Developments

These sources illustrate post-WWI answers to the problems of city life, whose growing complexity dictated state rather than private action. Almost all major European cities built public, low-cost housing for workers after WWI. Source 17 illustrates the largest such Viennese housing project, the Karl Marx Hof, which provided homes for 5,000 people in 1,382 apartments. Such projects really were small cities, equipped with common laundries, child-care facilities, and parklike courtyards.

Source 17: Karl Marx Hof, Vienna, Erected 1927-1929



- Contrast this block of apartments with the tenements in Source 14. Why would you think that such large complexes would have been more healthful for workers than the old tenements?

Source 18: Kongressbad, Vienna, One of Europe's Largest Pools, About 1930



Kongressbad measured 66' x 330'. Built at public expense, such a pool represented the culmination of many trends.

- Why would such projects as this pool, which attracted 450,000 bathers in 1930, have been virtually impossible without developments in public transportation in the 19th-20th c.?
- How do the pool and public housing developments reflect a government attitude toward the solution of urban problems different from that of the earlier 19th c.?