**Chapter I**

**General Aspects**

Lying near the geographic center of England, at the crossing points of the national railway and motorway systems, is Birmingham city, the second largest city in the United Kingdom (with a population of 1.028.701) and a borough in the West Midlands metropolitan area.Although Birmingham is tagged now as one of the important industrial cities worldwide, during its history, things weren’t as bright as they are at this moment.Throughout the medieval period for example, Birmingham was nothing but a medium-sized market town, gaining international importance only in the 18th century.

**1.1 History**

The earliest evidences of settlement in Birmingham are some artifacts discovered in the center of the city and dating from 10.400 years ago.In the 7th century it was only an Anglo Saxon hamlet at the edge of the Forest of Arden, at the fringe of the Mercia kingdom.The first written mention of this settlement was recorded in the 11th century, being presented as a small village, worth only 20 shillings.The first market charter was granted in 1166, but the settlement remained unimportant up until the 16th century when it began exploiting its supplies of coal and iron.In the 17th century, during the Civil War, Birmingham was an important manufacturer town, gaining the reputation of a small arms producer.

In the 18Th century it became the core of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, a canal system being constructed in the 1820s, providing greater access to the natural resources needed to supply the industries.The population of Birmingham grew rapidly to over a half a million during the Victorian era, receiving the status of “city” in 1889 from Queen Victoria.

During the World War II, Birmingham suffered massive bomb damage and was done up in the 1950s and 1960s.After the World War II Birmingham remained the most prosperous provincial city, but because of the measures taken, its economy suffered and during the recession of the early 1980s, the unemployment and outbreaks of social unrest in inner-city districts reached unprecedented levels.

In the decades following the World War II, the ethnicity of Birmingham changed significantly receiving waves of immigration from the Commonwealth of Nations and other countries.The city’s population peaked in 1951, at 1.113.000 residents.In recent years Birmingham has been transformed (new squares have been constructed, canals, buildings and old streets have been restored, the pedestrian subway have been removed), this being known as the “*Big City Plan*”*.*

**1.2 Demography and Government**

According to 2009 estimates, Birmingham is the second most populous city in England with 1.028.700 inhabitants.Also, Birmingham’s metropolitan area is the second in the United Kingdom with a population of 3.683.000.The population density is 3.649/km², females representing 51.6% and men 48.4%.Compared to England as a whole, Birmingham has a younger population, the average being 36, while in England 38.6.As of 2005, the highest proportion of population was under the age of 34, the 20-24 year group being 2% above the national figure.

Birmingham has the smallest indigenous population by percentage of the major British cities.At the time of the 2001 census, 70.4% of the population was white , 19.5% British Asian, 6.1% black, 0.52% Chinese and the rest was of other ethnic heritage.

## In terms of religion, 59.1% of the population is Christian, the second largest religion being Islam (14.3% of the population being Muslims).12.4% of the population is Atheist.The Catholicism represents the largest congregation, being followed by Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Anglicanism etc.

## Birmingham City council is the largest local authority in the United Kingdom and the largest council in Europe, having 120 councilors representing 40 wards.The headquarters are at the Council House in Victoria Square, no single party being in overall control, but a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition.The city is also the seat of regional government for the West Midlands region of England.Law enforcement is carried out by West Midlands Police, having the headquarters at Lloyd House in Birmingham City Centre.Birmingham’s criminal rate is lower than England’s other major cities, but above the national average.

## 1.3 Economy

## Although the city gained the repute of a manufacturing and engineering centre, the economy today is dominated by the service sector, which in 2008 accounted for 86% of its employment.

## Birmingham has the second largest urban economy in the United Kingdom and ranks at 72 in the world.The city is the largest centre for employment in public administration, education and health in Great Britain and the third largest center for employment in banking, finance and insurance outside London.

## Two of the largest banks in Britain were founded in Birmingham (Lloyds Banking Group in 1765 and HSBC Bank in 1836), as well as the world’s first building society, Ketley’s Building Society.In 2010, the Cushman&Wakefield (a private held commercial real estate services firm) stated that Birmingham was the third best place in the United Kingdom to locate a business and the 18th in Europe.

## The fact that this city has three universities (Aston University, University of Birmingham and Birmingham City University) and two University colleges makes a significant contribution to the city’s economy, having over 65.000 students and around 15.000 staff members, as well as its research and innovation base.

## Birmingham city centre is the United Kingdom’s third largest retail centre, with an annual turnover of 2.43 billion pounds, the busiest shopping centre in the country and the largest department store outside London.In 2004 it was ranked the third best place to shop in The United Kingdom, being described as a “world-class shopping centre”.

## Manufacturing accounts for 10% of employment in Birmingham, a figure below the average of Great Britain.Despite the decline of manufacturing, several industrial famous brands remained, including Jaguar Cars and Cadbury Trebor Bassett.