

Evolution and Spread of Settlements in the Esan Area of Edo State

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ABSTRACT The study focused on the pattern of settlements evolution and spread in the Esan area of Edo State. The catastrophic theory and the infilling concept are very useful in explaining the evolution and spread of settlements in the study area. The settlements in the study area were founded by migrants from Benin Kingdom in 14th century during the reign of OBA EWARE. The Oba's only two sons died mysteriously on the same day and to mourn them the Oba enacted some laws forbidding; cooking, dancing, sexual intercourse etc., Those who could not abide by these laws have to flee or migrate into the jungle. Those who migrated and settled in the jungle – North east of Benin kingdom are the ancestral fathers of the Esan people. However, the hardship encountered in the jungle — high mortality rate due to the malaria, fever, wild animals and slave riaders forced the settlers to re-migrate to the EGWALES (villages with traditional ruler) for security. In 1807, slave trade was abolished. The consequent freedom and safety encouraged some farm-families to move to their farm sites to settle. With time these farmsteads developed into out-post settlements. This is how the entire region was balkanized by the different communities and humanized through agricultural activities. The current phase is that of competition and in-filling of the available spaces. In the course of history, some “Egwales” — Ekpoma, Uromi, Ubiaja, Irrua and Igueben — have emerged as the leading settlements. These urbanizing centers are currently the headquarters of their respective local government areas. It is suggested that further investments in these urbanizing centre will empower them to function adequately as rural service centers.