

Welcome To Contemporary Urban Environments!

1.0 An Introduction:

Key Term:

Urbanisation is the increasing proportion (%) of our population living in urban areas, such as cities, towns, edge settlements, urban conurbations etc...

This can be observed on a number of scales, locally, nationally and globally, and it is propelled by many reasons, the main ones being:

- *Rural to urban migration (push-pull factors)*

You might remember this from GCSE. It essentially means that there are more 'pull' factors for people to move to urban areas, such as better careers, education or healthcare. Often they are wrong and end up being marginalised in informal 'slum' settlements.

In some areas, these migratory trends are then exemplified by strong 'push' factors away from rural life, such as lack of resources, conflict, and in the future, potentially [climate change](#) (read more by clicking the link!)

- *Natural increase*

I.E. Population growth caused by decreasing death rates, whilst birth rates remain high. This is particularly visible in LICs and NEEs which are less far along the demographic transition model (DTM.)



Helpful exam tip!

One of the most common mistakes at geography a-level is with this definition. Way too often, students fail to mention the key term 'proportion' when defining urbanisation, saying instead the growing population, which usually won't gain them any marks. Make sure you don't do the same thing – its such an easy thing to do!



A* Extra Learning

2.1 Why is this important?

In truth, although it may seem obvious there are many different reasons why we should care about urbanisation. Many sprawled cities are larger than countries (Tokyo, the largest, has around 37,000,000 residents and a GDP of approximately \$1.8 Trillion!) They are global, multicultural hubs, with huge importance, culturally, economically and politically, whilst at the same time are often very unequal. Many environmental issues you've heard of we'll study in more detail have been exacerbated by urban forms and landscapes and are highly reliant on rural areas with dwindling populations to support their growth, causing conflict.



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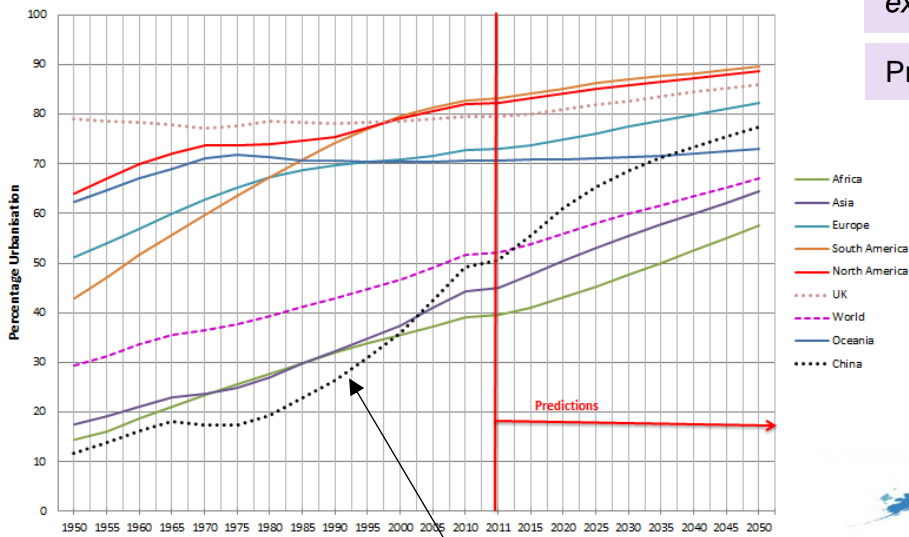
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2.0 Patterns & Trends Of Urbanisation Since 1945:

A graph to show World Urbanisation for different world areas from 1950 to 2050



Look at China skyrocketing! They are projected to increase almost 8 times in 100 years. Why do you think this is so evident? Wink wink 😊 – see [this](#) document for more info...

Urbanisation first occurred in the late 19th century during the industrial revolution in wealthier Western countries. In fact, the United Kingdom was not only one of the first to urbanise, but also now is one of the most urban nations, at over 80%. People were attracted to urban areas from rural areas to work in factories and warehouses (remember those pull factors from before?!) where incomes and job prospects were better than in an agrarian (farming) lifestyle.

Today, the rate of urbanisation is increasing in almost all areas on a larger scale, but the rate in low-income countries is greater than in HICs, typically in Asia. As LICs are developing more people are migrating to urban areas for similar reasons. The choropleth maps to the right (from our friends at [internetgeography.net](#) (and [esa.un.org](#))) clearly show these patterns.



Please note!

Our urban populations may be growing proportionally on a global scale, but there are a few instances where this isn't the case:

Suburbanisation: usually occurs in fairly urbanised countries, wealthier individuals and families often move away from the CBD (city centre), looking for a better quality of life; thus leading to the emergence of 'suburban settlements' and 'urban sprawl' – usually characterized by larger, spaced semi or detached houses.

Counter-urbanisation: less common than suburbanisation, but in some very overcrowded cities people have been moving back into rural areas to escape city life. Some people think post-coronavirus pandemic this process will increase.

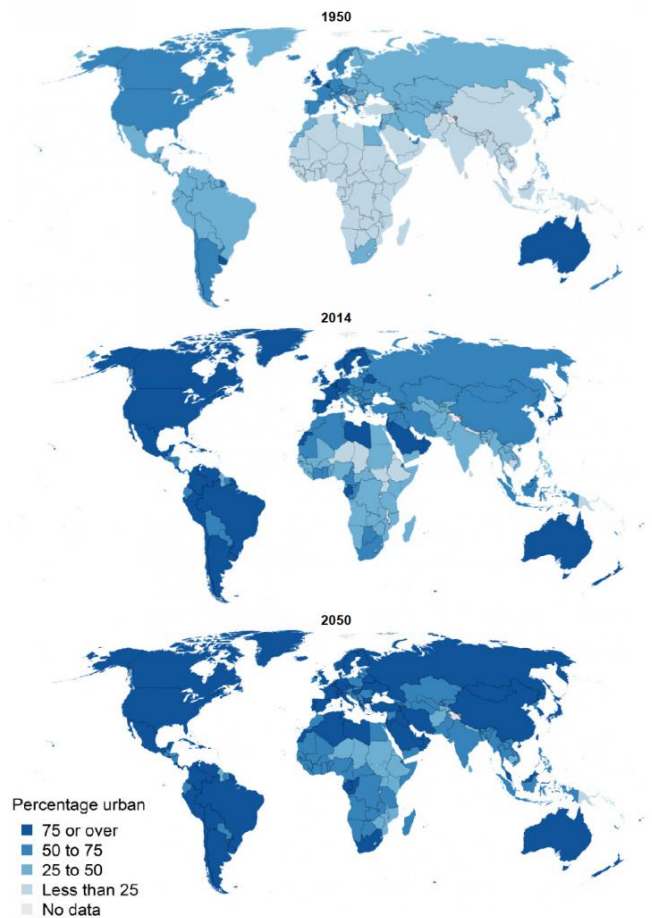


Want to see what it was like before 1945? We recommend [this](#) video, a 3-minute time-lapse from 3700 BC showing the exponential growth of urban areas.

Printed? Scan me instead!



The figure on the left shows rates of urbanisation across different regions (and select countries) of the world from the mid-20th century until today, with predicted increases shown up to 2050.



Urban Resurgence: simply describes where declined or decaying urban areas (see page 4) have been successfully regrown and are experience a 'renaissance' once more. This is the most niche process here.

3.0 Cities In The 21st Century:

3.1 The Emergence & Importance Of Megacities:

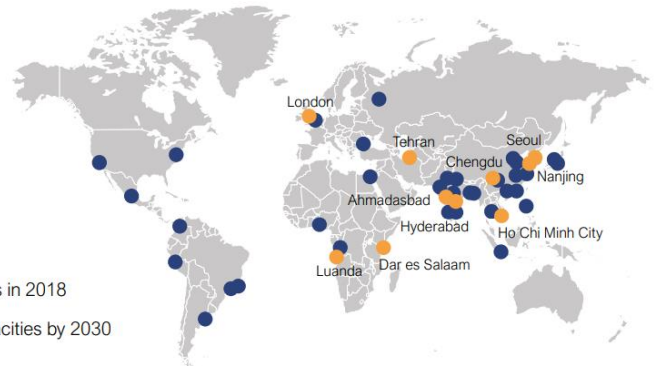
What? Megacities can easily be defined as urban areas with over 10 million residents. Back in 1950, there were only a few – today as you can see this number is far higher!

Where? Megacities are typically concentrated in rapidly urbanising areas, notably Asia (and in the future, Africa)

Why? There are many physical and human factors in the development of megacities. Some of the most important ones include location for trade (note that almost all megacities in the figure are found along the coast – this is no coincidence!), economic reasons such as large manufacturing or financial centres which highly skilled immigrants from around the world (like New York), as well as increasingly changes to rural-urban migration and natural increase. Whilst most of the first megacities were driven by migration, nowadays the growth in Africa and India, particularly, is primarily a result of very high birth rates.

● Megacities in 2018
● New megacities by 2030

Megacities of the world in 2018 and 2030



Megacities are important simply because they are the hubs of our globalised world. The huge amount of people means that these areas will become educational, technological and industrial hubs, but will also face some of the most acute challenges, such as overcrowding and pollution, urban planning, waste, dereliction, inequality and more that you'll learn about in contemporary urban environments.

3.2 The Emergence & Importance Of World Cities:

What? World cities are more difficult to define. Essentially, they are urban conurbations of wider social, cultural, economic, or political relevance. The highest-ranked examples are Alpha ++ cities, as shown in the table on the right. Many world cities are also megacities, but this isn't a necessity.

Where? They are located on a global scale, much more evenly distributed than megacities (particularly how they will be in the future) and there are many more of them. There are also many more western alpha cities despite often being physically smaller, often because of their relative historic or cultural importance.

Why? As with megacities, there are loads of physical and human factors affecting where and why urban areas become world cities. The most important is historical location. Take London for example, as the centre of the British empire (who commanded around 25% of the world and drew the worst borders ever), it easily rose to become the most influential world city to this day, although slowly American and increasingly Asian cities are beginning to 'rise up the ranks' as they become bigger and more geopolitically powerful in the 21st century.

City ranking	Description	Examples from 2012 ranking
Alpha ++ cities	More integrated than all other cities and constitute their own high level of integration	London and New York
Alpha + cities	Other highly integrated cities that complement London and New York, largely filling in advanced service needs for the Pacific Asia	Tokyo, Hong Kong, Paris, Shanghai, Singapore, Beijing, Sydney, Dubai
Alpha and alpha – cities	Very important world cities that link major economic regions and states into the world economy	Chicago, Milan, Mumbai, Moscow, Sao Paulo, Frankfurt, Toronto, LA, Madrid and more
Beta level cities	These are important world cities that are instrumental in linking their region or state into the world economy	Bangalore, Lisbon, Copenhagen, Santiago, Guangzhou, Rome, Cairo and more
Gamma level cities	These can be world cities linking smaller regions or states into the world economy, or important world cities whose major global capacity is not in advanced producer services	Zagreb, Lahore, St Petersburg, Durban, Islamabad, Bristol and more

4.0 Changes To Urban Areas:

4.1 Deindustrialisation:

Deindustrialisation is just the terminal (i.e., permanent) decline in manufacturing activity (in an urban area), thus leading to closures of secondary industries, which used to form a large amount of the local economy. This is often quite visible because of the large amounts of empty buildings that usually accompany it – and is primarily occurring in highly developed western economies. If a country is wealthier and more developed, by definition the cost of operating there is higher – in terms of hiring and paying employees, finding increasingly scarce and expensive manufacturing plants, and dealing with more strict regulations. Many companies therefore relocated abroad or used outsourcing to places where they could maximise their profit margins, leading to:



4.2 The Rise Of The Service-Oriented Economy:

In recent years, to counter this ‘exodus’ of companies, government policy in these countries has promoted tertiary (services) and quaternary (research and development) industries, such as finance, banking, legal services, tourism and education, which are higher skilled. This has led to a fundamental shift in the organisation of economies.

In the UK, for example, manufacturing has gone from being around 26% of our economy in the 1950s to just over 15% nowadays, whilst services have increased to over 75%. This is part of a wider trend as countries progress along the development curve:



4.3 Decentralisation:

This is different from the two terms above. Decentralisation describes the breaking up of larger cities in a social, cultural, economic, and political sense – usually into smaller fragments, each with their own unique identity and atmosphere. A good example of this is New York City, which is actually quite a few famous neighbourhoods separated by rivers – Brooklyn, Manhattan, The Bronx, Staten Island etc...



Many thanks for reading and using this resource – good luck!

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