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Part Two

Further Issues

Urbanisation
Aid and Development
Resources and Energy
Pollution and Toxicity
Agriculture and Food
Culture and Religion
War and Peace

Urbanisation

Things that may interest you

- Cities consume 75% of global resources and produce 70% of greenhouse gas emissions.
- The population of cities worldwide grows by 1.5m people *every week*. The most urbanised continent is Latin America. One in four of the world's urban population lives in slums.
- New Yorkers use 24 times more energy than inhabitants of Kolkata in India, consuming the energy-equivalent of an oil supertanker every 1.5 days.
- Of the roughly billion poor people worldwide, three-quarters live in urban areas.

Historically, humanity passed a significant tipping point around 2008 when the number of people living in cities over half a million population topped 50% of world population – it will be around two-thirds (66%) by 2050. That's an enormous increase – the biggest migration ever. At the same time, Earth's rural population has already peaked and will decline, sinking by 600m by 2050. A majority of us is thus now shaped and psychologically conditioned by man-made environments.



Tel Aviv, a modern Israeli city that has engulfed the old Arab city of Jaffa. Most Palestinians may not visit.

The world's largest city region is Tokyo, with 37m people (same as Poland or Canada). The second, Jakarta, has 28m (same as Ghana or Australia). *City-regions* are the most important thing here, irrespective of jurisdictional and boundary issues that can make for smaller official municipalities.

The most urbanised continents are North and South America, and the least, Africa and Asia, are urbanising fastest. Globally, 28 megacities currently have populations above ten million – there will be 41 by 2030, and in 1990 there were just ten. Delhi, Seoul, Manila, Mumbai, Karachi, Shanghai, New York, Sao Paulo, Beijing and Mexico City all have more than twenty million people.

There are 43 large cities with 5-10m people, such as Singapore, Madrid and Santiago (Chile), and there will be 63 by 2030. Globally, 417 medium cities with 1-5m people will become 558 by 2030. China alone has six megacities and ten large cities. Developing countries will build the equivalent of a city of a million people every five days from now to 2050.

Most of the world's economic and population growth takes place in cities. They house most of the world's middle classes, and burgeoning middle class growth in developing economies is causing significant growth in resource-consumption, water depletion, pollution, waste output and land loss. Meanwhile in developed world cities the middle classes are challenged, even shrinking, partially as a result of computerisation and a decline in well-paid office jobs.

The total GDP output of Chinese cities outstrips or equals Western cities, but their per-capita GDP growth will take longer to grow. GDP growth in developing world cities is high due to catch-up growth, while mature, affluent world cities have lower rates of inward migration, higher growth costs and fewer investment and job-growth opportunities. So the story is quite different in cities in the developing and developed worlds.

The urban birth rate is generally lower than in country areas, but cities have a higher population growth rate due to inward migration and higher birth rates amongst new incomers. But generally, the lower birth rate is because cities' populations are largely younger, and younger people now have smaller families, or they are increasingly single or childless, while some of them support families back where they came from, thus lacking time or money to have families of their own. But the sheer numbers of people in cities make for higher overall population growth than in rural areas.

In China new research has found that, despite the migration of 200m people to cities in the last 35 years, and despite city-dwellers having three times the income of rural dwellers, rural people report significantly higher happiness and life-satisfaction levels than city-dwellers. This said, Chinese city-dwellers generally do not report a wish to return to the countryside. This might be true globally. It suggests a preference for delayed gratification through saving and capital accumulation, of people rating wealth aspiration higher than current satisfaction, and of the attractions of modernity being valued more than traditional lifestyles and securities, especially amongst younger people.

Cities host crowds, characterised by a multiplicity of relationship networks and short-term encounters with a wide variety of people, yet they can be lonely places too. Though crowded, in cities you're on your own and the modern process of psycho-emotional individualisation operates strongly. Cities are incubators of a new kind of experience and awareness, and of separateness in a dense mass of people that we don't usually know personally or even recognise. For people from rural backgrounds, this is a profound, life-changing and also an alienating process.

Where is all this going longterm? The clue lies in the psychological, cultural and material change experienced by city-dwellers. Rural flight makes traditional farm, community and village life weaken and decline. Urbanisation is not just a matter of relocation but also

of profound, irreversible social-cultural change, rather like migrating to another planet. It means the slow death of all that is traditional and rooted in the past – languages, cultures, knowledge, beliefs and lifestyles. For better or worse, humanity is becoming a very different animal living in a different universe.

As cities evolve and mature, a counter-urbanising tendency, common in Europe and America, takes root – people leaving cities for outer suburbs or the country. Mostly they do not revert to simple country lives – they take city ways, values, supermarkets, traffic, money and culture with them – not least since the internet allows townies to conduct business and gain cultural stimuli more or less anywhere, and retired and richer people have location-independent incomes too. Rural areas thus become ex-urban areas with a dispersed cosmopolitanism and economic de-concentration.

By osmosis urbanisation shifts the centre of gravity of power away from nation states toward city regions and their hinterlands. Some states will therefore weaken and others might collapse as city regions grow. Singapore, an independent city-state, has spread into Malaysia and Indonesia, creating its own centre of gravity, while Guangdong, Shenzhen and Kong Kong act as a cross-border city-region. Meanwhile, in Britain, London has evolved into a world city with closer links to faraway cities than to provinces in its own country, dominating the nation without giving it priority attention or necessarily understanding its needs. People in giant cities such as Lagos, Kinshasa, Nairobi and Cairo live in a very separate reality to most of their provincial neighbours.

People's experiences of big cities differ wildly. For some they are a place of freedom, opportunity, upward mobility and stimulus, and for others they are places of hard work, dirt, poverty, crime and insecurity. Over 70% of developing-world city growth takes place without formal planning processes and 30% of city populations live in informal settlements (slums), making inner cities vulnerable to crime, disease, flooding, pollution and other problems. Many cities

have only limited capacity to control inward migration and urban growth because they cannot control the push-factors driving people their way, or even fully control their own affairs because of fragmented municipal governance, national policy overrides and lack of full jurisdiction over issues that affect them.

Governability is thus a big issue. The speed of city growth often means that urban governance is reactive, with tax-collection, investment, infrastructure and service development lagging behind growth. Some inner city areas become ungovernable, even though they are close to centres of political power. Emphasised inequality, social exclusion and poor service provision increase crime and unrest, making city government vulnerable to protest and violence – in cities it's frequently not a very long walk from favelas and slums to business and government districts, and the contrasts between these different urban environments are stark.

Developing world cities have become havens for the poorest of rural people and for refugees from climate change, conflict and land-appropriation, drawn there because of provincial insecurity and lack of rural support by central government. Resource-consumption, pollution, overcrowding, congestion, crime, social stress and lack of infrastructure pose big problems in urban areas, especially for the underprivileged – and many issues are then exported to outlying areas through population overspill, pollution, property price growth and the many other influences cities exert.

Yet, on the upside, and for the winners, the economic, technological, cultural, architectural and social openings in cities are significant. Metropolises have become sources of progressive social change, technology, education, healthcare and governmental development, ahead of national governments and even acting as hatching grounds for rural sustainability and regeneration projects.

But in the developed world this magnetic urban pull leads to spiralling urban property prices and living costs, gentrification and

deteriorating public service provision as the interests of richer people override those of ordinary people – the nurses, teachers, drivers and cleaners who service cities and keep them going. Cities can thus lose their heart and social vibrancy. In New York City, the post-2008 recovery almost entirely benefited its richest: the top 5% of households earned 88 times that of the bottom 20%, and one in five of the population still required food assistance. Meanwhile, in the developing world the big money goes into airports, motorways, business districts and shopping malls, while housing, sewage systems, health and educational provision lag behind.

So an urban crisis is looming. Cities, insulated in realities of their own, tend to counteract other, wider global priorities such as climate, pollution, bio-sustainability, food security and reducing social inequality, and they tend to determine much of what happens in rural and provincial areas. Humanity has to get wise to the enormous cultural change it has made by creating enormous urban worlds, dissociated as they are from the natural environment.

We need to cater properly for the effects that cities have on the environment, their hinterlands and inhabitants. Many cities, as centres of economic and population growth, impact heavily on provincial areas, contributing to the dominance of economic and business priorities over environmental, farming, community and natural resource concerns. In the longterm, this weakens cities' own sustainability by weakening hinterlands' conditions.

Useful links

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