

Definition

Growth of the urban portion of a country's population; the diffusion of urban values and standards throughout a society; and the increase of concentrations of land covered by houses and roads.

Description

In 1800, less than 5 percent of the world's population lived in cities. That figure is now 50 percent of the world's six billion people and will rise to 65 percent by 2050. Urbanization is strongly associated with development and, like development, has not been evenly spread across the globe. The urban share now averages about 75 percent of total population in the most developed countries but only 25 percent in the least developed countries. As city economies expand, the promise of work and better living conditions attracts vast numbers of rural folk to urban centers. This rural-to-urban migration has been the main force behind urbanization everywhere. With the extremely rapid influx of population, however, many cities have not been able to keep up. Burdened with all the problems of growth, cities are increasingly subject to dramatic crises, especially in developing countries, which today have the highest rates of urbanization. In the cities of these countries, the main areas of concern are: not enough jobs for a growing workforce; environmental degradation; unclean water and improper waste disposal; deterioration of existing infrastructure; lack of access to land, finance, and shelter; disease; and crime. In the cities of developed countries, where rates of urbanization have slowed dramatically in recent decades, higher standards of living are, ironically, the cause of many problems.

The overuse of fossil fuels is often a direct result of wasteful urban practices and activity patterns. The extensive use of the private automobile for single purpose trips in cities, for example, unnecessarily degrades air quality and greatly increases national energy consumption that may contribute to global warming. As certain segments of their populations become more affluent, cities can become less diverse and welcoming. In some developed countries, people with means are moving to the suburbs and to gated communities, leaving the poor increasingly isolated in unhealthy and unsafe ghettos. In both developed and developing countries, cities and their economies can be made more sustainable by fostering cultural diversity, inclusive social structures, participatory systems of governance, affordable infrastructure and services, adequate shelter, conservative consumption habits, and efficient patterns of land use and transportation.

Bibliography

UNCHS. 1997. *The Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda*. Nairobi: United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

———. 2001. *Cities in a Globalizing World: Global Report on Human Settlements 2001*. Nairobi: United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

———. 2001. *The State of the World's Cities 2001*. Nairobi: United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

Web sites

www.unchs.org

Information, links, data, reports, and references on cities and human settlements (including those in the bibliography above).

www.citiesalliance.org

Information, links, and projects on urban slums and slum upgrading.

www.urban21.de

Essays, reports, and conference proceedings on urbanization issues in the twenty-first century.

www.who.dk/healthy-cities/hcstrat.htm

Health plans and profiles for specific cities, how-to manual for city health planning.

www.iclei.org

Information, links, and local Agenda 21 projects.

Further reading

Drewe, Robert, ed. 1997. *The Penguin Book of the City*. London: Penguin Books.

Girardet, Herbert. 1992. *The Gaia Atlas of Cities: New Directions for Sustainable Urban Living*. London: Gaia Books, Ltd.

Hill, Dilys M. 1994. *Citizens and Cities: Urban Policy in the 1990s*. Hemel Hempstead, England: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Jacobs, Jane. 1984. *Cities and Wealth of Nations: The Principles of Economic Life*. New York: Random House.

Mumford, Lewis. 1961. *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*. Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, Brace & Company.

Sudjic, Deyan. 1992. *The 100 Mile City*. London: Andre Deutsch.