

URBANIZATION – IMPACTS

1. THE CONCEPT OF URBANIZATION

Urbanization refers to general increase in population and the amount of industrialization of a settlement. It includes increase in the number and extent of cities. It symbolizes the movement of people from rural to urban areas.

Urbanization happens because of the increase in the extent and density of urban areas. The density of population in urban areas increases because of the migration of people from less industrialized regions to more industrialized areas.

Urban sprawl

The concept “Urban Sprawl” means increase in spatial scale or increase in the peripheral area of cities. “Urban Sprawl” has its own drawbacks.

- The city and its infrastructure may not be adequately planned.
- Traffic is high with increased time needed for commuting.
- Essential services are not reachable within time.
- City administration becomes extremely difficult.

An excellent example of urban sprawl within our country is that of the city of Bangalore. After the establishment of IT industry in Bangalore, the population exploded from 24,76,355 in 1980 to 42,92,223 in 2001 with influx of 18 lakh immigrants within two decades. The growing population has increased pressure on several resources including civic amenities, residential availability, cost of living, local infrastructure, transport, traffic and administration. Bangalore has lost many of its water bodies (lakes) and consequently the fragile ecosystem has been disturbed due to the ever-increasing need for space, to cater to residences and business establishments.

2. HISTORY OF URBANIZATION

The beginning of urbanization can be traced back to Renaissance times in 16th century. Turkish assaults resulted in movement of Christians from the east to western European countries. As a result, trade grew and European cities along the coasts developed greatly. A further boost for urbanization was created with the arrival of the “Industrial Revolution”. Populations of cities in Europe and USA started to increase significantly in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, urbanization started in Asia only in the first half of the 20th century and in the second half of the 20th century in Africa, when the countries obtained independence from colonial rule.

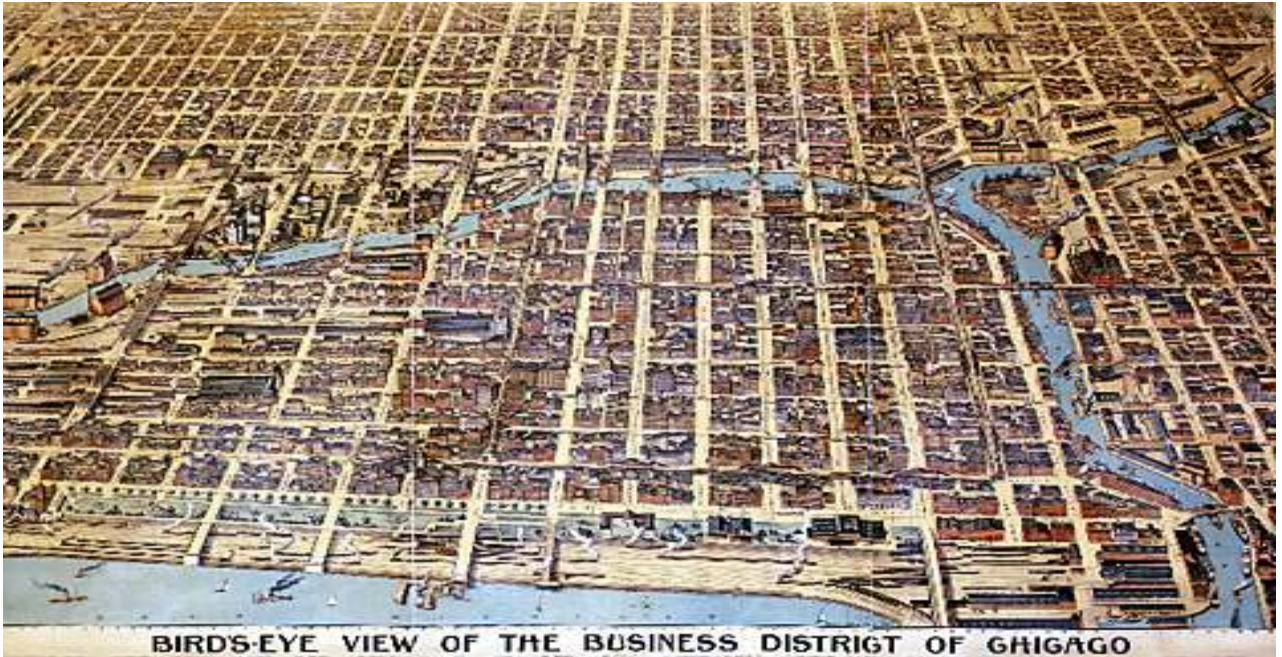
An example for a dramatic increase in extent and population of cities is Chicago in USA. The population increased from 15 people to about 20 million, within a span of 78 years.



This photograph shows the 15 European settlers settling in Chicago in 1820



This photograph is a birds-eye-view of urbanized Chicago in 1854



This is a view of the business district in 1898.

3. URBANIZATION IN THE WORLD TODAY

	1950	1990
World	30%	51%
MEDCs	53%	74%
LEDCs	17%	34%

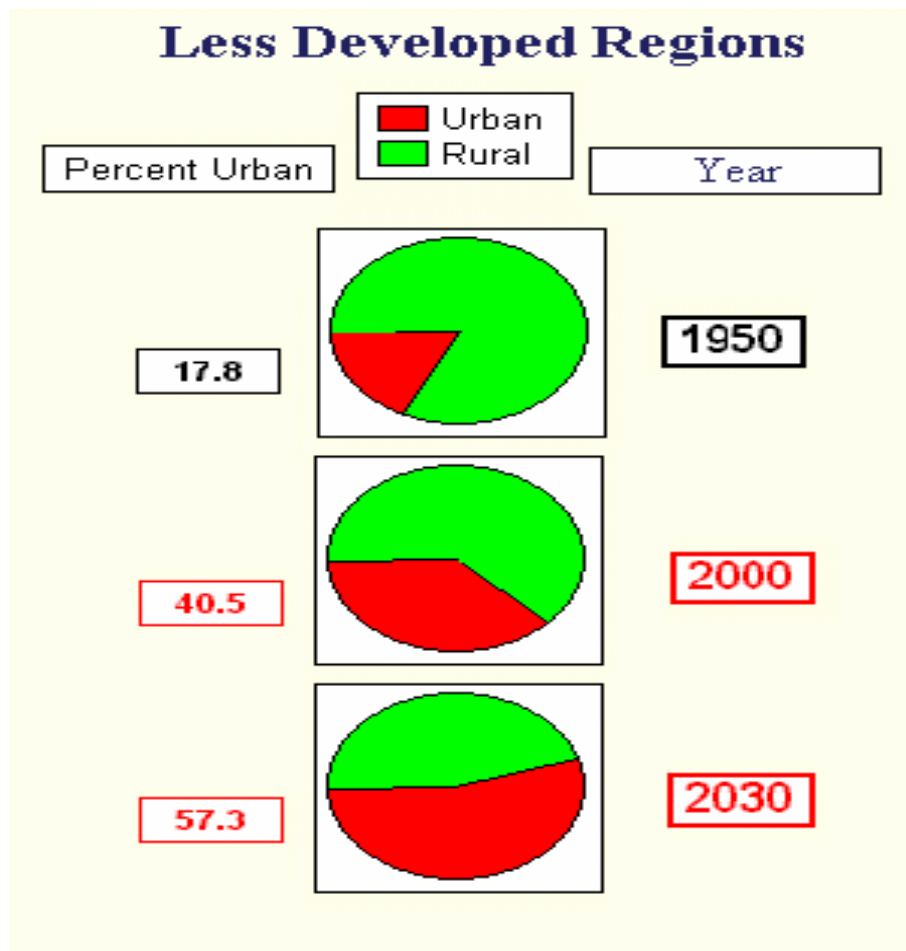
This table presents the increase in urbanization in the World. MEDC refers to Most Economically Developed Countries and LEDC to Least Economically Developed Countries.

Today as compared to Asian and African countries, countries such as USA and UK have a higher urbanization level. Economic forces helped to locate factories and workers in cities. In USA 5% of the population lived in cities in 1800. By 1920 50% of the population lived in cities. In comparison only 17.8% of population of Third world societies lived in cities in 1950. But by 2000, the percentage had increased to 40%. By 2030, the percentage is predicted to increase to 60%.

Australia is the most urbanized country in the world. Both the rate and level of urbanization in Australia are high.

2. CAUSES OF URBANIZATION

Urbanization usually occurs when people move from villages to cities to settle, in hope of a higher standard of living. This usually takes place in developing countries. In rural areas, people become victims of unpredictable weather conditions such as drought and floods, which can adversely affect their livelihood. Consequently many farmers move to cities in search of a better life. This can be seen in Karnataka as well where farmers from Raichur, Gulbarga districts which are drought-stricken areas, migrate to Bangalore to escape poverty. Cities in contrast, offer opportunities of high living and are known to be places where wealth and money are centralized. Most industries and educational institutions are located in cities whereas there are limited opportunities within rural areas. This further contributes to migration to cities.



This graph indicates the shift of population from rural areas to urban areas.

3. EFFECTS OF URBANIZATION

Urbanization brings with it several consequences – both adverse and beneficial. They impact on social and environmental areas.

Adverse effects of Urbanization

There is increasing competition for facilities due to the high standard of living in urban areas, which has triggered several negative effects. Many people including farmers who move to cities in search of a better life end up as casual laborers as they lack adequate education. This leads to one of the worst problems of urbanization - the growth of slums.

Slums

They are urban areas that are heavily populated with substandard housing and very poor living conditions. As a result several problems arise.

- **Land insecurity** - Slums are usually located on land, which are not owned by the slum dwellers. They can be evicted at any time by the landowners.
- **Poor living conditions** - Crowding and lack of sanitation are main problems. This contributes to outbreak of diseases. Utilities such as water, electricity and sewage disposal are also scarce.
- **Unemployment** - Since the number of people competing for jobs is more than jobs available, unemployment is an inevitable problem.
- **Crime** - Slum conditions make maintenance of law and order difficult. Patrolling of slums is not a priority of law enforcing officers. Unemployment and poverty force people into anti-social activities. Slums become a breeding ground for criminal activities.

Environmental impacts of urbanization

- **Temperature** - Due to factors such as paving over formerly vegetated land, increasing number of residences and high-rise apartments and industries, temperature increases drastically.
- **Air pollution** - Factories and automobiles are symbols of urbanization. Due to harmful emissions of gases and smoke from factories and vehicles, air pollution occurs. Current research shows high amount of suspended particulate matter in air, particularly in cities, which contributes to allergies and respiratory problems thereby becoming a huge health hazard.
- **Water issues** - When urbanization takes place, water cycle changes as cities have more precipitation than surrounding areas. Due to dumping of sewage from factories in water bodies, water pollution occurs which can lead to outbreaks of epidemics.

- **Destruction of Habitats** - To make an area urbanized, a lot of forested areas are destroyed. Usually these areas would have been habitats to many birds and animals.

Benefits of urbanization

Though urbanization has drawbacks, it has its benefits.

- **Efficiency** - Cities are extremely efficient. Less effort is needed to supply basic amenities such as fresh water and electricity. Research and recycling programs are possible only in cities. In most cities flats are in vogue today. Many people can be accommodated within a small land area.
- **Convenience** - Access to education, health, social services and cultural activities is readily available to people in cities than in villages. Life in cities is much more advanced, sophisticated and comfortable, compared to life in villages. Cities have advanced communication and transport networks.
- **Concentration of resources** - Since major human settlements were established near natural resources from ancient times, a lot of resources are available in and around cities. A lot of facilities to exploit these resources also exist only in cities.
- **Educational facilities** - Schools, colleges and universities are established in cities to develop human resources. A variety of educational courses and fields are available offering students a wide choice for their future careers.
- **Social integration** - People of many castes and religions live and work together in cities, which creates better understanding and harmony and helps breakdown social and cultural barriers.
- **Improvements in economy** - High-tech industries earn valuable foreign exchange and lot of money for a country in the stock markets.

4. FUTURE OF URBANIZATION

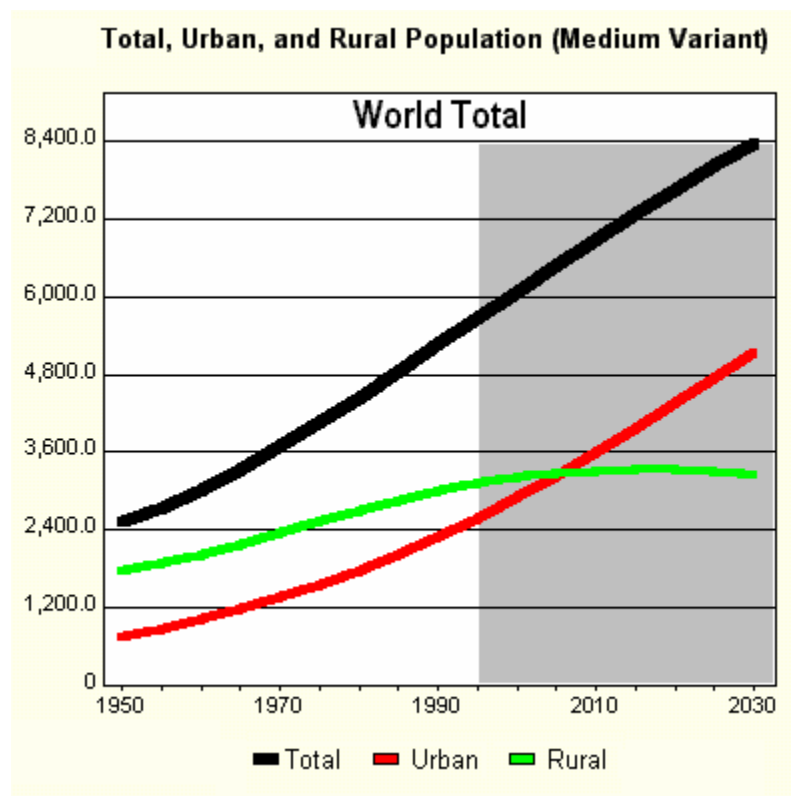
Urbanization is set to stay for a long time. It may slow but surely does not show any signs of stopping. In 1985, 45% of the world population stayed in cities. Scientists estimate that 60% of the world population will be city-dwellers by 2025.

The main goal of urban planning is to make all amenities and comforts available to the public without imposing many negative effects on society and environment, aptly referred to as “Sustainable growth”. The cardinal rule is to plan cities beforehand, rather than let them grow spontaneously and haphazardly. During city planning it should be ensured that adequate infrastructure is available to support the population. Residences should be conveniently located near the civic bodies. This could improve effective provision of the necessary services.

Opportunities can be created within rural areas to reduce stress on cities. This also results in a higher standard of living for the people of the country as a whole. Some of the villages in South Kanara district of Karnataka set a good example for this.

They have efficient transport and communication system and electricity. Co-operatives have been set up to provide financial aid to peasants. The rural people have been encouraged to engage in cottage industries and commercial activities such as making pickles, handicrafts, sweets and savories. Through cooperative agencies, marketing of these goods also has become easy. This is an efficient method of curbing urbanization, by creating opportunities for people in villages. This reduces the rate of migration.

Currently, planning cities for sustainable growth, mainly in the third-world societies, is a major challenge for humanity. Restricting the population boom is another major issue of the third millennium. All these vital factors would decide what the future would look like for humankind and our planet.



This graph indicates the total increase in population of urban vs. rural areas

Although it is impossible to restrict urbanization it can be ensured that the path of the development can move in the right path.

