

Growth in major urban areas

This map and accompanying table show the estimated and projected population change in 590 major urban centres across the planet, between 1950 and 2050. It is based on UN commissioned research published in 2007: 10 years old now, but still relevant for showing overall trends. Data were collected from national census surveys where available, so the picture is not quite complete. An urban area is not necessarily the same as a 'city' or 'town'. These latter terms are based on formal and well-recognised administrative boundaries. An urban area is a human settlement with high population density and built infrastructure, and which does not necessarily follow administrative boundaries. Official definitions vary somewhat between nations.

Some urban areas are likely to continue to suffer a reduction in population- especially in the post-industrial 'western world'. The experiences for many cities in Europe and North America, are concealed by data used for this map. For example, Detroit in Michigan (US) (1) has suffered well documented de-population resulting from de-industrialisation, and people moving out to the suburbs. Detroit is only part of a larger urban area. Patterns of global population growth and urbanisation are completely different compared with the 19th and early to mid-20th Century. Europe's once great centres of industry are no longer among the world's largest cities. Most of the future growth in urban areas globally will be in low and middle income countries. The major focus of change is now emphatically in parts of Asia, Africa and South America. The (increasing) scale of sub-Saharan urban areas such as Lagos (Nigeria) and Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (2), may surprise some people. The rate of urban growth in India and China is more common knowledge. Tokyo will continue to be the world's largest urban area for the foreseeable future, but its growth has now largely stabilised, and other urban areas will begin to make up ground, such as Mumbai (India) and Dhaka (Bangladesh) (3).

People and Societies cohere into urban areas for many reasons, and there are huge social, cultural, educational, and technological advantages in so-doing. Focusing human population in one place can also be effective in conserving natural resources, and in efficient use of energy. There are also major disadvantages. The rapid inflows of rural population to urban places give rise to immense housing crises and slum creation (4). The decrease in rural population effects the agricultural production due to shortage of workers in rural areas. Urban populations are more vulnerable to food insecurity, as they rely on external sources for their food needs and are thus exposed to greater supply risks. Expanded urban areas pressurize water and sanitation facilities. They can generate acute environmental pollution and health hazards. An influx of new urban dwellers can lead to social alienation, and 'rootlessness'. For example, the Chinese 'Hukou' system (5) (a household registration system used in determining where people are allowed to live and work) does not allow migrant workers from the rural areas to enjoy the same rights as people currently registered as city dwellers.

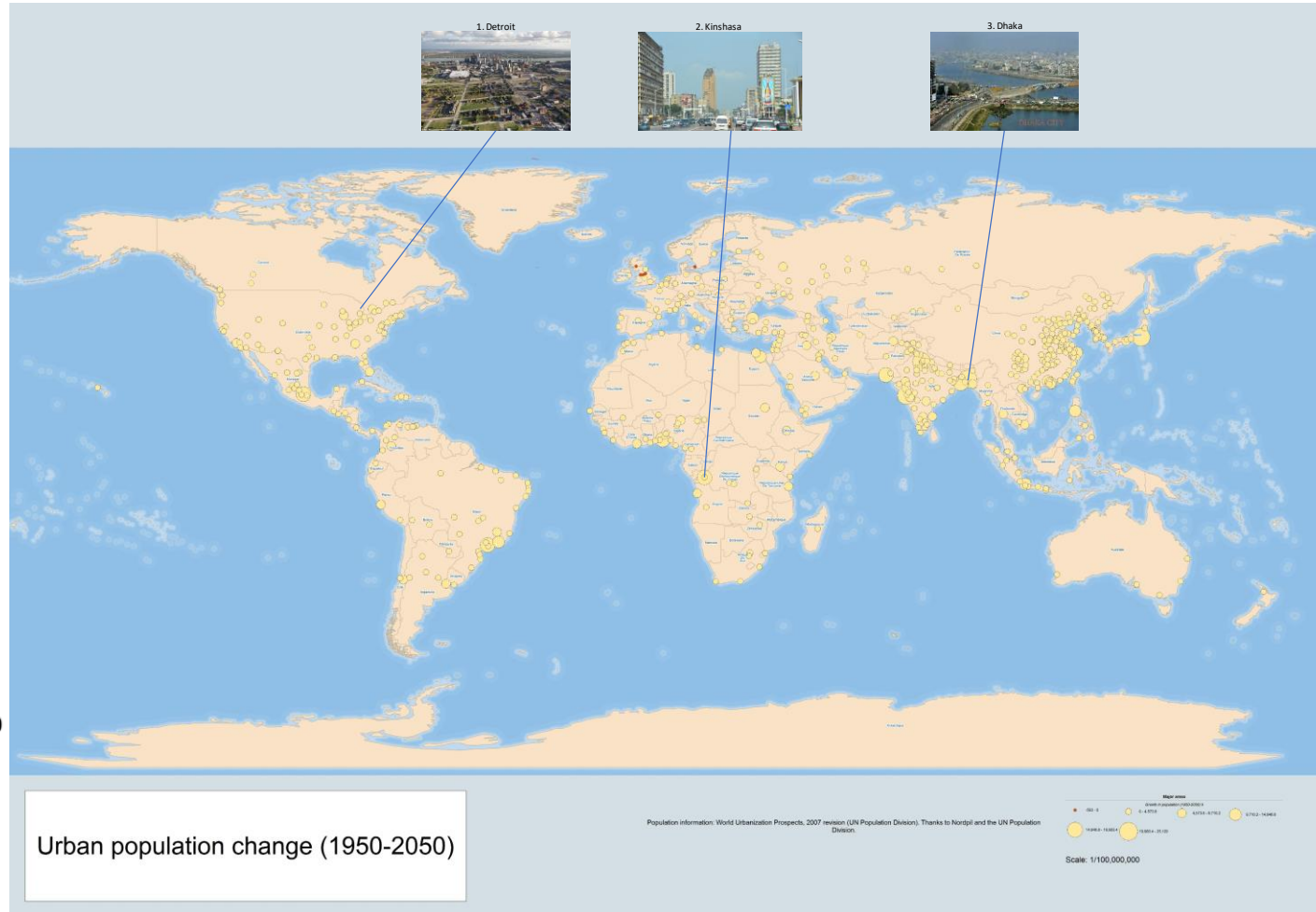
But problems are also challenges seeking positive and innovative thinking. The Chinese Government may soon look at changing the Hukou system as it works in its provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities. Urban agriculture already produces an estimated 15 to 20 per cent of the world's food supply and could play a major role in achieving global food security. In cities in developed countries, urban agriculture is limited by a lack of space and the absence of economic incentives; however, in the developing world, urban agriculture has considerable potential to improve food security (6). The terrible living conditions that are a bi-product of rapid and unplanned urban growth can hopefully in the longer-term be reduced through innovative low-cost housing solutions (7).

Throughout history, the most successful urban areas have proven to be those subject to clear and accepted political, administrative and legal structures, as these provide a stable and rational basis for planned and managed growth.

		Population expressed in 000s (K)			
City	Country	1950 population	2015 population	2050 population	Population change (1950-2050)
Tokyo	Japan	11,280	36,090	36,400	25,120
Mumbai	India	2,860	20,070	26,385	23,525
Dhaka	Bangladesh	340	14,800	22,015	21,675
Delhi	India	1,370	17,020	22,498	21,128
São Paulo	Brazil	2,330	19,580	21,428	19,098
Ciudad de México	Mexico	2,880	19,480	21,009	18,129
Karachi	Pakistan	1,060	13,050	19,095	18,035
Kinshasa	Democratic Republic of the Congo	200	9,050	16,762	16,562
Kolkata	India	4,510	15,580	20,560	16,050
Lagos	Nigeria	300	10,570	15,796	15,496
Shanghai	China	6,070	15,790	19,412	13,342
Manila	Philippines	1,540	11,660	14,808	13,268
Al-Qahirah	Egypt	2,490	12,500	15,561	13,071
Istanbul	Turkey	970	10,530	12,102	11,132
Jakarta	Indonesia	1,450	9,700	12,363	10,913
Rio de Janeiro	Brazil	2,950	12,170	13,413	10,463
Guangzhou, Guangdong	China	1,490	9,450	11,835	10,345
Beijing	China	4,330	11,740	14,545	10,215
Shenzhen	China	170	8,110	10,196	10,026
Lahore	Pakistan	840	7,090	10,512	9,672
Bruxelles-Brussel	Belgium	1,420	1,740	1,744	324
Montevideo	Uruguay	1,210	1,500	1,520	310
Rotterdam	Netherlands	760	1,010	1,057	297
Palermo	Italy	590	860	871	281
Buffalo	United States of America	900	1,050	1,180	280
London	United Kingdom	8,360	8,610	8,618	258
Amsterdam	Netherlands	850	1,040	1,089	239
Praha	Czech Republic	940	1,160	1,159	219
Hamburg	Germany	1,610	1,780	1,792	182
Antwerpen	Belgium	760	920	920	160
Łódź	Poland	610	740	735	125
Birmingham	United Kingdom	2,230	2,290	2,323	93
Berlin	Germany	3,350	3,420	3,436	86
Budapest	Hungary	1,620	1,660	1,655	35
Newcastle upon Tyne	United Kingdom	910	890	918	8
West Yorkshire	United Kingdom	1,690	1,540	1,575	-115
København	Denmark	1,220	1,090	1,096	-124
Manchester	United Kingdom	2,420	2,240	2,267	-153
Liverpool	United Kingdom	1,380	820	845	-535
Glasgow	United Kingdom	1,760	1,160	1,197	-563

Top 20

Bottom 20



4. Slum development is a bi-product of rapid un-planned urban growth



5. Chinese 'Hukou' internal passport system



6. Innovative food production is required to feed huge urban populations



7. Low-cost housing (like these 'inflatable' concrete structures) may help solve appalling living conditions.