

Social and economic issues associated with urbanisation

3.2.3.3 Urban environments

What you need to know
How economic inequality creates issues in urban areas
How social segregation creates issues in urban areas
How cultural diversity creates issues in urban areas
New urban landscapes with cultural quarters, fortress developments, gentrification, edge cities and post-modern western urban trends

Introduction:

Growth in urban areas, with increased numbers of migrants both from within a country and in some cases internationally, leads to a diverse spatial distribution of wealth, culture and ethnicity. Whilst a multi-cultural urban area brings many benefits, such as varied perspectives, richness in diversity, wider choice of food and cultural experiences, e.g. music, it can create issues that require careful management.

Economic inequality

Economic inequality refers to the extreme differences between poverty and wealth, as well as people's well-being and their access to services like jobs, education and housing.

Within an urban area some areas are more affluent than others. Generally, the trend in most developed world cities has been that within the central CBD the land is at its most expensive. However, this generalised pattern then reverses as we move out from the CBD, through the inner city where land values are much lower, as is the income of residents, and out to the suburbs where the level of affluence rises once more. However, the distribution of economic inequality is less uniform when considering cities in the developing world.

Developed world cities

Within the developed world, urban areas have been in existence for more than a century and as such, the areas within a city have developed distinct characteristics. The Central Business District (CBD) is the centre of the city where land prices are at their highest. Competition over the land means that mainly commercial and retail properties can afford to locate here. In recent times (past 20 years) where CBDs have seen a decline in retail properties, urban development corporations have **regenerated** the areas and attempted to attract people back into the CBD to live, with developments such as the distinctive Beetham Tower in Manchester (and Liverpool). These properties, however, tend to be luxury apartments so this has increased inequality in the zone around the central city as only young professionals can afford to buy or rent them.

The inner city, just out from the CBD is where low-income families are frequently situated. The reason for this is that this area is where, during the industrial revolution, factory owners constructed rows of basic housing for their workers. The housing tends to be terraced housing, with limited garden space and 2 bedrooms. They are old and

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tend to not have been refurbished. Many will have damp problems, inefficient heating and the result is that ill-health is more likely and life expectancy is significantly lower for people than for those living in the suburbs. Levels of unemployment are high in the inner city and wages low for those in work. Significant social and economic deprivation is a concern for those living in this area of the city. The growth of food banks over the last few years shows that poverty is persistent, with many families having to resort to using them to secure food for their families.

Where **slum-redevelopment** has taken place in the inner city, reconstructed areas of **local authority housing** dating from the 1950s, 60s and 70s may have improved the amenities and facilities in new residential blocks and estates, but the causes of deprivation have not been addressed and many of the issues for those living in the inner city have simply been transferred to concrete estates of the post-war decades.

In contrast, the suburbs of the city provide homes for more affluent families. The houses are usually more modern, dating from the 1960s in the form of semi-detached and detached properties, with large gardens, driveways. The families here are wealthier than the inner city population and levels of poverty are low. Life expectancy is subsequently higher here.

The one area of the suburbs where affluence is not encountered is in outer-city local authority housing estates. As inner-city areas were redeveloped with lower-density housing in the large-scale urban redevelopment schemes of the 1970s-90s, the issue of where to house the surplus or **overspill** population arose. The answer for many major cities in Britain was to build new estates on greenfield land at the edge of the urban area. The Bransholme Estate on the northern edge of Hull is one of the largest areas of local authority housing in Europe. The residents, moved by the city council from the run-down inner city zones associated with the city's declining fishing industry, were relocated in new housing estates and blocks of flats on the edge of the city. While the quality of housing improved, people were far from places of employment and the estate developed a reputation for low incomes, high crime, graffiti and drug-related issues. This suburban pocket of deprivation and low affluence contrasts with the high-affluence suburbs to the west and east of Hull which are typical of the outer suburban image.

Whilst services will be provided throughout the city, there is a tendency for resource decisions to favour services in the more affluent areas. Often school and health provision is underfunded in the poorer areas, which exacerbates the social problems that people living there already face.

Urban **redevelopment**, with the bulldozing of whole neighbourhoods and new house construction, as well as urban **regeneration** through renewal schemes whereby existing properties are updated and improved, have been successful in many cities, to make the living environment more attractive and healthier for families. Sustainable transport systems have been implemented to improve air quality too.

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Developing world cities:

Many developing world cities have grown rapidly over a short period of time. Much of the growth has been within the last 45 years on average. The growth has occurred as a result of rural-urban migration. Due to the rapid changes these cities have faced they have a less formal structure, in comparison to developed world cities. There is still a CBD which has many commercial and retail businesses, but the sectors of housing follow a less uniform pattern, often grouped into distinctive areas unique to each city.

Similar to developed world cities, there are areas of both wealthy and poor housing. The wealthy housing makes up only a small percentage of the total and these areas are often **gated communities** for the security of the residents. In contrast, many of the poorer people live in **squatter settlements**. These settlements are frequently illegal homes, with limited sanitation, water, basic amenities - and are overcrowded. As a result, diseases are common and life expectancy is low. The people living here often work in the **informal tertiary economy**, in businesses which also may be illegal. As these squatter settlements continue to grow due to rapid numbers of people moving in from the rural areas, further issues expand. Due to these settlements being illegal, governments will rarely provide services so waste and polluted ground becomes a problem. This further increases the risk of disease and vermin thrive within the area. Due to the rapid growth of developing world cities, factories are established with few health and safety regulations attached. This also leads to poor air quality as well as unsafe working conditions, which contributes to reduced life expectancy.

Services within the city are restricted and are usually privatised, meaning only the wealthy can access them. This further extends the gap between rich and poor as squatter settlement dwellers can't afford healthcare, waste collection or to send their children to school.

Urban renewal strategies may be put into place in the squatter settlements, with many NGOs and city authorities helping to improve the infrastructure and the quality of housing. **Site and service schemes** whereby locals are allowed to purchase the land and rebuild their houses to a better standard and authorities lay on basic water and sanitation provision are a common strategy. Equally, **self-help schemes** where people are provided with building materials to reconstruct their housing are common. NGO provision of education and health care facilities is also helping to reduce poverty.

Social segregation & cultural diversity

Developed world cities:

As well as people being segregated according to their wealth, people also segregate according to their faith and culture. Within any city there may be segregation by self-choice, or enforced segregation by unequal access to key resources.

Where faith, language, culture and tradition are distinctive from others in the city self-segregation may take place as new arrivals choose to locate themselves close to centres

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of religion or amongst people with whom they feel a cultural affinity and shared customs. In London there are thriving and culturally rich areas of predominantly Bangladeshi, West Indian, Polish, Jewish, East African and Chinese (amongst many other) communities. Self-segregation may be an economic response too, as finding work amongst one's own community is often easier, as well as assistance with housing.

Enforced segregation, however, results in certain areas of a city becoming trapped in a **cycle of deprivation**. In the UK, areas where there is a high proportion of immigrant population they may find access to education, higher education and apprenticeship training proves difficult to access due to language difficulties, low qualification achievements, or the two reinforcing each other. Migrants arriving in a city from lower income origins find it difficult to access social housing and cannot afford mortgages to buy their own home so frequently reside in rented accommodation in the inner city where houses are cramped and services are limited or overstretched. Employment and housing discrimination, despite being illegal, may still be faced. Schools may have less successful achievement rates and well-paid and regular employment is hard to find. Moving out from the area may be beyond the capacity of many arrivals even years after they have initially located there.

Social enclaves of culture may develop within a city where there is limited assimilation between immigrant communities with each other and/or the rest of the urban population. They have sometimes led to increases in social tension as a "them and us" feeling develops where it is easy to target blame at another group for one's own difficult circumstances. Protests and attacks have arisen in some cities and some areas of inner cities have become "no go" areas for some cultures due to the perceived and actual risks against people recognised as members of other communities. The benefits of cultural diversity are hidden by segregation.

The solutions to this include the following:

- increasing children's achievement by improving educational provision and opportunities in deprived areas and seeking to improve literacy in areas where English can be a second language
- increasing employment through initiatives to ensure basic skills and access to information and training for all; plus, enforcement of anti-discrimination laws
- increasing community involvement by ensuring that the needs of minority groups are understood and met
- providing facilities that encourage meetings of all sections of a community rather than separate ethnic and religious groups in order to encourage integration.

New urban landscapes

Many of the traditional models of urban form and structure are being added to by new developments. Urban planning has learnt from past mistakes and there is greater collaboration between cities in exchanging successful planning initiatives.

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These contemporary developments in the urban areas of developed countries are sometimes a response to counter-urbanisation and central area decline that many cities have experienced in the last two decades. Reviving the attraction of city-living has underpinned a number of developments:

Cultural and heritage quarters

The attractiveness of central cities for living, working and spending leisure time has been stimulated by building upon their historic attractions. The canal area of Birmingham and Manchester have both been the focus for developments sympathetic to the original architecture, converting warehouses into modern apartments, bars, restaurants and art centres. The canals have been cleaned up and are used by tourist barges, floating bars and waterside urban walkways. Manchester's Northern Quarter has become synonymous with creative and artistic workshops amid converted factory premises intermixed with real-ale pubs, wine bars, small-scale music venues and craft shops.

Town centre mixed development

Bringing cities into **24-hour City** -use has been the plan of policy-makers concerned that many traditional city centres go quiet after the evening rush hour and being seen as areas of potential insecurity and threat. Pedestrianisation of city-centre thoroughfares, such as the area around St Paul's in London, mixing retail and commerce with entertainments and leisure uses, holding city-centre events such as with Hull's City of Culture year in 2017 with street and open-air festivities, street entertainment around Covent Garden in London and creating open-space plazas with fountains, seating areas and attractive sculpture such as in the centre of Nottingham in front of the city hall – all attempt to make residents feel they 'own' the city centre and it's a vibrant, safe place for them to enjoy throughout the day and night, and at all times of the year.

Fortress developments

The concept of '**defensible space**' has been developed to cope with perceived and actual threat in areas of the city where social tension may arise. It applies to gated communities, often in renovated warehouses where plush apartments are occupied by highly affluent professionals close to deprived areas of the city. Electronic gates on their car park, CCTV and motion-activated spotlights, together with security wardens help give residents a sense of security, but can be intimidating and combative to nearby innocent local residents. In public spaces of central city areas, the concept is applied to both anti-terrorism activities, with bollards outside public buildings such as the BBC, to widespread use of CCTV, visible community support police officers and anti-graffiti surfaces.

Gentrified areas

The process of **gentrification** can be planned or ad hoc changes to a former run-down, usually residential, neighbourhood in the inner city. The conversion of warehouses to apartment-use may be part of planned gentrification as the planning approval of city authorities is often required for private developers to initiate change of use. Equally, unplanned gentrification can change an area environmentally, economically and socially. Middle-class buyers moving in to buy run-down inner city housing, doing it up with renovation and refurbishment, can make others see the potential for a property

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investment. Buying cheap, improving, and watching property values rise rapidly as the area gains in status and prestige draws others to follow. While superficially a boon to a neighbourhood, with café-culture, delis, wine bars and artisan bread shops opening in the area as it gentrifies, the rapidly rising property values can drive out local people who either cannot afford to purchase property in the area they grew up in, or find landlords putting up rents beyond what they can afford as they seek to get the property ready for sale at the new higher value.

Edge cities

As with edge-of-city retail parks and Business Parks, done on a grander scale – as many North American cities seem to do – edge cities are complete communities located just beyond the outer periphery of existing cities. They often attract relocating retail, commerce, office and administration from the CBD by offering landscaped and purpose-built facilities at lower density (cheaper land); closer to suburban housing (so easier commute); and close to major highway/interstate roads. The most well-known is likely to be Silicon Valley on the southern edge of San Francisco in California where hi-tech companies and cutting-edge IT research have founded an edge city of global significance.

Postmodern western city

The form and functions of urban areas are changing as economies switch from industrial to post-industrial service economies. Urban areas are reflecting the change as they evolve:

- from uni-central cores (one CBD) to multiple cores (many separate CBDs of distinctive functions)
- from being based on manufacturing industry to being based on a sophisticated service economy of high expertise in IT, finance, law, technology, commerce etc.
- from functional architecture to psycho-social architecture (creating welcoming and safe places to encourage activity and use and facilitate mixing and integration)
- from separate and segregated ethnic communities to self-selecting but integrating communities that retain some distinctiveness but add to communal urban richness.

Developing world cities:

Social segregation is not as apparent in developing world cities. Economic segregation occurs more as a result of wealth disparities. Most migrants into these cities are internal migrants and the differences in economic opportunities is the major discriminating factor. In some cities where there is a pull for companies to locate there, many foreign migrants may be attracted to the city and they may establish their own area to settle in, often known as “expat” (expatriate) communities.

Where racial segregation has been a national issue – as in South Africa - some areas of cities such as Cape Town still show signs of segregation as many residents have either chosen to stay living in areas where their families may have lived for decades, or economic changes are only slowly removing obstacles to the least affluent black-South African residents giving them options for choice of residential area over a wider area of the city.