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GREEN CITIES: THE FUTURE

By Harry Jivenmukta

For the first time in history, more people now live in cities than outside of them. Only 200 years ago more than 80% of people lived in rural settings and smaller communities of towns or villages. There are a variety of reasons why people choose to live in cities today, but originally people were drawn to them mainly because of economic reasons. Traditionally, when harvests failed, or there was an economic downturn, people turned to the cities in hope. Often, families with only little farmland got to a point where the land would not support all the family. Some family members left to seek their fortunes in the nearby cities.

Today, many people choose to live in cities for a variety of reasons including:

- z   the diversity of life,

- z   a modern lifestyle,

- z   more amenities,

- z   increased possibilities to achieve more in career, social life, etc.

For most people who live in cities, they have no choice. Their families may have lived there for many years and city life is natural to them.

Many critics see cities as overcrowded, polluted, smelly places that are to be avoided at all costs. They see the diversity of life as presenting greater opportunities for immorality and crime. They resent the rushing, hustle bustle type of life that city people live. City people are seen as uncaring and unaware of the damage that they are causing the environment. It is true that cities do produce massive amounts of rubbish, pollution, and deviance, but then there is no way to compare a city to a rural setting to see if the same number of people in rural settings would cause the same amount of damage.

The largest growing cities are those in the developing nations, although the cities in the West do create more waste and consume more resources than them. As a whole, cities of the world consume about 75% of all the world's resources. It is estimated that by the year 2025 at least 60% of the world's population will be living in cities. The main problem for the future is how cities can cope with this increase. How can so many people living in close proximity to each other cope? How can the cities cope with supplies of food, sanitation, water supplies, transport systems?

Questions...

1. What is a city? Compare it to a town.
2. Why do people get drawn to cities?
3. Do you like cities? Give reasons why.

1. Tokyo, Japan 29,200,000

2 New York, N.Y. 18,087,251

3 Seoul, South Korea 17,588,000

4 Osaka, Japan 16,210,000

5 Sao Paulo, Brazil 15,416,416 1991

6 Mexico City, Mexico 14,991,281

7 Los Angeles, Calif. 14,531,529

8 Shanghai, China 13,341,896

9 Moscow, Russia 13,150,000

10 Bombay, India 12,596,243

11 Buenos Aires, Arg. 12,582,321

12 London, England 12,275,600

13 Calcutta, India 11,021,915

14 Beijing, China 10,819,407

15 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 9,796,498

16 Jakarta, Indonesia 9,709,411

17 Paris, France 9,319,000

18 Tianjin, China 8,785,402

19 Cairo, Egypt 8,761,927

20 Nagoya, Japan. 8,432,000

21 Delhi, India. 8,419,084

22 Chicago, Ill. 8,065,633

23 Manila, Philippines 7,832,000

24 Karachi, Pakistan 7,702,000

25 Tehran, Iran 6,773,000

NOTE: The table opposite does not show populations by city but by the urban area. This includes the city and the built up area around the city.

The purpose of using urban area figures rather than city population figures is that they show how many people live in and around that city area. The influence of cities is not only within a set boundary, and many people who live in the urban areas around see themselves as members of the same community. In the future it is these urban areas which will become part of the larger cities, in turn creating new urban areas as the population ripples outwards.

The world's five largest cities are:

z   Tokyo,

z   Mexico City,

z   Sao Paulo,

z   New York,

z   Shanghai.

Questions...

1. Does a point come when a city is simply too big?

2. What problems do very large cities face?

3. Is it inevitable that soon we will all be living in 'super' cities?

Cities come in all shapes and sizes. In the past cities were often very different from the cites of today. The types of cities include:

- z   **Ancient** cities followed two main patterns; the circular city or the square city. Many early cities had a circular wall around them, both for protection and because the circle represented life, the round Sun, the moon, etc.

- z   By **3500 BC** there were huge walled cities in the area now called Iraq. Cities were grand and gave the impression that they would last forever, an attempt by rulers to defy death.

- z   The **Greeks and Romans** had sophisticated cities, with amenities like theatres and public baths. Many people felt that cities should be more segregated between rich and poor but mainly in the early cities people lived close together.

- z   **Rome** in AD 100 had a million inhabitants and was the largest city on Earth. It relied on its huge empire for supplies.

- z   By **AD 1200** cities were widespread across Europe. Based mainly on the defensive military design, they had huge walls to protect them, and towers.

- z   In the **1400s** cities were becoming grander with great art and sculpture to adorn the city streets and galleries.

- z   The **age of empires** meant that the British created more than 50 cities across the world mainly to help trade. France developed many of the North African trade routes similarly.

- z   Cities mushroomed during the **Industrial Revolution** and were mainly very smelly, over populated places, with little sewage or hygiene provision. People lived in very crowded conditions, and with poor sanitation, diseases and illnesses were widespread.

- z   People dreamt of creating **garden cities** where people would live in green surroundings without smoky factories. In England, Letchworth and Welwyn were examples of the garden city, but today they are more of a commuter belt than cities.

- z   **Le Corbusier**, a French architect, was very mathematical and built houses and roads based on a geometric plan. His big success, (some say failure), was to design the new Indian city of Chandighar. This city is built in huge rectangular sectors with greenery in the middle of each rectangle and buildings around the circumference.   Today, the greenery is often a good dumping ground for rubbish, or for grazing the family cow.

- z   Some people started building their own cities in the 1960s, a period of rebellion against the status quo. They argued that the planned cities should not be encouraged, instead allowing **unplanned cities** to develop on their own.

- z   The **info-city** prediction for the future is that cities will become irrelevant when people can work from home and communicate by telephone, fax, e-mail, and the Internet.

Questions...

1. Trace the history of cities in more detail.

2. Choose a time in history and write a detailed report on the cities of that time.

CARS, CARS, CARS....

City streets were congested long before the car existed, but the problem has been compounded enormously by the masses of motor vehicles that enter or leave cities at peak traffic hours. The constantly growing number of cars throughout the world adds to the difficulty of finding remedies for congestion. The heart of the problem is that few city street systems have been designed for car traffic. Reliable estimates are that some two-thirds of the vehicles travelling in city centres could have been rerouted on roads which bypass the city because they are simply passing through. Rem- edying the situation of congestion is difficult and expensive. It calls for modern roads to provide both ready access into cities, and ways to avoid them. Suggestions for new roads encounter vigorous opposition, frequently justified, on the ground that building roads in cities disrupts neighbourhoods and destroys scenic or historic areas.

The widespread use of cars for business travel has also led in many cities to a decline in public-transport systems, and the need to develop and use mass transport has been much discussed. Given the trend toward dispersal of people and businesses in urban areas, it seems doubtful that mass transport will appreciably diminish motor vehicle traffic. Still, in most cities, bus systems can provide the needed capacity for public transportation and are the most economical way of doing so. Some criticisms of public transport are that the frequency of services is unreliable and the overall quality and cleanliness is poor.

The concentration of many thousands of motor vehicles in large cities has given the problem of pollution a new dimension. Car exhausts commonly contribute half or more of the atmospheric pollutants in large cities.

Road accidents create a distressing toll of fatalities and injuries wherever there is widespread use of cars. Each year there are hundreds of thousands of motor vehicle fatalities worldwide. The social and economic cost of such accidents is incalculable. Efforts to improve road safety have been successful in most countries, but a reduction in the ratio of fatalities and injuries per distance travelled is often offset by increases in numbers of accidents because of the ever-growing use of motor vehicles.

Questions...

1. How do cars contribute to city life in a positive way?
2. How do cars adversely affect cities?

The advantages of cities are that with so many people living in close proximity to each other, there is a tendency for different cultures and traditions to meet. Except for a small number of people who prefer to keep to their own culture, most people are happy to take advantage of the 'melting pot' effect of the city.

It is useful to look at the UK only 30 years ago, compared to today. The differences are huge:

- **Foodstuffs** are available from all over the world in supermarkets, and corner shops. Ingredients which people did not even know about are readily available, from spices to exotic fruits.

- Take away **shops and restaurants** cater for all tastes; Indian, Chinese, Thai, West Indian, Japanese, Middle Eastern, etc.

- **Music** has 'fused' to form new styles as well as world music; African drumming, Indian Bhangra, Buddhist chants, Rapping, etc.

- **Religions** of all the major beliefs have temples, churches and mosques spread out across cities. Previously, there was only one dominant religion with little knowledge of others. Today, anyone can find out about the belief systems of other religions, can attend services, etc.

- **Festivals** and traditions from across the world are celebrated and people can take part; Eid, Baisakhi, etc.

- **Fashion and clothing** are varied and international in flavour. People can wear traditional clothing or mix and match between styles.

Cities really are melting pots, where the world traditions meet and merge. The result is often incredible creativity and the development of new sub-cultures.

Questions...

1. Why do cities have a 'melting pot' affect?
2. Is multi-culturalism a good thing?
3. What happens to traditional ways of life in cities?
4. What are the disadvantages of new sub-cultures?

Alienation means when someone does not feel part of the events going on around, or feels separated from the values which are held by others. Alienation is common in cities, especially in the developing nations. The following case study is one example of alienation.

Karim lived in a small village on banks of a river. He had been born in the village, grew up there, and worked in the family owned fields nearby. He never went to school because the school was ten miles away and no-one from their village could afford the fare or the time. In any case there was no need for education; everything was learned by helping and watching others. He was very religious and went to the local temple every day.

The land which Karim farmed could not feed them because his two brothers also depended on it. With all three brothers married and 7 children between them someone had to leave to earn money elsewhere. Karim offered to go to the city.

When he arrived in the city, Karim's head was in a spin. He had never seen so many people, cars, noise, rushing around, ever before. He tried to stop someone for directions but no-one was interested in slowing down to listen. Eventually, he saw the spires of a temple, a familiar sight. The temple was a small oasis of calm in the noise of the city. The priest helped him to find the timber yard he had been told to go to.

After a month of living in the city, Karim was used to crying himself to sleep. There was no family, no communication. Everyone was busy, no-one stopped. When he was working at the timber yard, people only talked to him to tell him what to do. After work everyone went drinking or looking for women to drink and dance with. He had never drunk alcohol, and he was married with children. He never went with the others, but found himself sleeping in a tiny room, sharing with six others. They would come home in the early hours stinking of drink. There was no cleanliness, and the people he shared with were dirty. The food was not worth mentioning. He had to stay for the money or else his family would suffer. He wondered, 'will I become like these room mates...?'

Karim dreamed of the village, the fruit trees, the fresh air, the friendly smiles, the chit-chat, his family....

Questions...

1. What are the differences between village life and life in cities?

2. Why do people become alienated in cities?

3. Besides the reasons in the case study above, how else might someone from a village feel alienated in a city?

The facts about cities make grim reading, and I for one think we need to radically change the way we live if we are to have any type of quality life in the future. There are six areas of concern for me and they are:

z *Air quality,*

z *Food,*

z *Energy,*

z *Transport,*

z *Rubbish,*

z *Sewage.*

One fifth of the world population live in cities where the **air** *is not fit to breathe. This is mainly because of pollution caused by cars and industrial emissions. The worst cities as far as air pollution goes are; Milan, Tehran, Beijing, Calcutta, Delhi, and Jakarta.*

There is a massive operation involved in transporting enough **food** *and related materials into cities everyday. This causes pollution in itself, but the high demand for food also puts a great deal of stress on the farmlands which supply this food.*

80% of the world's fossil fuels are consumed in cities. Cities are classic examples of **energy** *wastage. City buildings are lit sometimes all night when there is no-one there, street lights, signs, and cars all contribute to energy wastage.*

Concerning **transport**, *in some cities as many as 90% of commuters drive to work. In many cars there is only on occupant. In Athens 80% of pollution is attributed to cars. Rush hour traffic is sometimes almost as slow as walking whilst engines idle away and continue to pollute the environment. In London, the average speed at rush hour can be as low as 16.6 kilometres per hour!*

Rubbish *accounts for about 1.6 Kg for every New Yorker every day! In London, every person creates nearly 1kg of waste every day! In developing countries where recycling is more widespread the amount is much less. The question is; can we afford to throw away so much rubbish, and where will we dump it?*

If the amount of waste is so much, just imagine how much **sewage** *there is! Cities try to remove sewage as quickly as possible. Sometimes mixed with more hazardous waste from industry, the sewage usually finds its way into the sea.*

Questions...

1. What do you think about the viewpoint expressed above?

2. Are all cities bad?

3. How can we deal with the problems listed above?
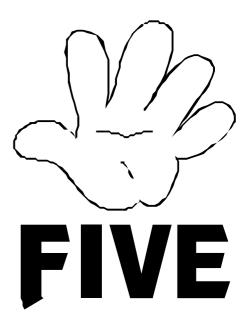
how we can live in a cleaner environment...

If cities of the future are anything like the cities we live in today, life will be very nasty. I think that we have to educate people how to live with a genuine concern about their neighbours. It is unnatural for people to live in so close a proximity to each other and that is why there are all sorts of problems. It is not only a question of air pollution or noise pollution, but also about stress, anxiety and worry caused by the pressure cooker life we live.

We need to develop a plan which lets us live our lives in harmony with our surroundings. Cleaner does not only mean physically cleaner but also mentally cleaner. We should be able to feel good about ourselves and the world we live in.

We need five good principles, good ways to lay the foundations for a better society. Green cities means more than the types of buildings we construct.

Make a list of five main principles which will lead to a better life for all in our cities.

FIVE

MY FIVE POINT PLAN

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

We do need to do something quite radical to overcome the problems that cities face. I love the city, the vibrant lifestyle, the variety, the heartbeat of modern life. So, I suggest six reforms:

- z *Solar energy,*

- z *Trees to improve air quality,*

- z *Locally grown foods,*

- z *Public transport,*

- z *Recycling,*

- z *Reusing sewage as fertiliser.*

Solar power *is getting cheaper and city rooftops even in cloudy conditions could produce some of the electricity required to power buildings. Otherwise, more energy efficient use of electricity will also save power.*

*By planting **trees** and having green areas in cities the air quality could be improved considerably in a natural way. An average tree can transpire about 380 litres of water a day and so cool down the surrounding area. The oxygen that trees give off would help neutralise some harmful pollutants.*

*In Shanghai, people are self sufficient in vegetables and grain. **Urban vegetable growing** is both possible and good for the environment. Many cities in developing nations grow their own produce whilst in the West it is rare.*

Public transport *is an obvious solution to motor vehicle pollution. Whereas cars are usually single occupant vehicles in the rush hour, a bus carrying 70 people will take up just three times the space of a car and pollute less. Some zero emission hydrogen powered vehicles are already operating in Switzerland and some US states.*

*Cities which have tried **recycling** find that they can effectively recycle about 75% of household waste. As a comparison with new products, it takes 35% less energy to make paper from recycled old paper than to make new paper from pulp.*

*Human wastes have been used as **composts** for centuries. Today there are vacuum trucks which can collect and deposit wastes onto agricultural land. This means less use of artificial chemical fertilisers, re-use of human wastes, and less pollution in our seas.*

Questions...

1. Are the proposals to improve cities, listed above, practical?

2. Which of these proposals are already being used today?

3. Are 'green' cities possible or are we just tinkering with the edges of what is a huge problem?

Throughout history people have had different ideas about what the perfect city would be like. Originally, more a protective wall type, through to the cities full of art and sculptures in Europe, the city is an opportunity for people to define the way they want to live. Cities are a fact. Whether you like them or not they will always be around. The real question is; what sort of future do we want?

If there are 50% of people living in cities today, that means that there are 50% who do not live in cities. These people also have a choice of how to live their lives. Many people think that eventually everything will be designed for the city and people living outside of them will have less choice. Already in many parts of the UK many village shops, post offices, and community centres have closed down. There are fewer bus services in rural areas. Contrast this with the continuous building and expansion that goes on in cities.

Questions...

1. What is your ideal city like? Write a summary of the main features of the city, and the advantages and disadvantages of your city compared to the life outside cities. Think about and include things like:

z	Social Life,	z	Bringing Up A Family
z	Transport,	z	Pollution
z	Work Opportunities,	z	Overcrowding
z	Entertainment	z	Choice