

## *Adapting to an Urban Future*

### **Challenge Overview Sheet**

#### **What is the challenge?**

Humans are rapidly becoming an urban species. The global proportion of urban population rose dramatically in the twentieth century.

1900	13%	220million people
1950	29%	732million people
2005	49%	3.2billion people

In 2009 the 50/50 point was passed and, for the first time in history, more people live in urban than rural areas. This trend is predicted to continue during the twenty first century and it is the rapid pace of this trend which presents challenges for the world's cities.

- What are the causes and consequences of this mass migration?
- How will the cities adapt to meet this challenge?
- What do the cities of the future look like?

With a third of humanity on the move there are inevitably impacts on cities and the rural areas which are left behind. This 21CC considers the causes and consequences of this global urbanisation and looks to the future.

#### **What are the causes and consequences of this mass migration?**

**Doug Saunders, Author of Arrival Cities** is an expert on the process and outcomes of rural to urban migration having visited and studied numerous cities undergoing this change. Post world war two 70-75% of the world's population lived by subsistence farming, today that figure is approximately 30%. Agriculture has become drastically more productive and it is the push factor from the change in agricultural practices which account for the urban to rural migration patterns far more than the pull factor from bright light syndrome. Urban to rural migration has occurred in the past, initially during the industrial revolution, but it is the magnitude of this shift, which causes concern today.

When migrants arrive in an urban area in the developing world they move into transitional urban neighbourhoods or 'arrival cities', often what we know as squatter settlements. They are viewed as temporary by migrants on their way to becoming middle class urban dwellers. These are largely self-built areas where migrants seek employment and earn more than their rural counterparts. These transitional urban neighbourhoods are increasingly places where social mobility occurs through entrepreneurial activity and also places of tension as political issues

arise. The uprising in Cairo, Egypt during the spring of 2011 stemmed from one of these locations.

Saunders argues that urbanisation is beneficial as demonstrated in development indicators: infant mortality rates fall, education rates increase, life expectancy increases, HIV transmission rates fall and family sizes decrease in the city. These changes all occur regardless of culture and religion. The rural to urban shift in Iran has seen average family sizes fall from 8 to 1.9 which is less than the UK. This will potentially solve the problem of population growth rates. If India can overcome their barriers to urbanisation, population growth rates will slow and, with a population of over a billion this will significantly affect the global figures. It is not only population growth that becomes more stable but political stability increases too. As demonstrated in South America which is now largely 'urbanised' and politically stable.

For many migrants it is not only the rural to urban shift that they must adapt to but the cultural one too as many are both rural to urban and international migrants. This presents a challenge for cities in more developed countries as enclaves of these migrants develop. Over 90% of migrants from Eastern Europe, Northern Africa and Turkey to Western Europe are poor rural migrants. Tower Hamlets is one example of such an enclave. It has a large, relatively poor migrant population and consequently the associated economic, social and political issues. That said, these migrant workers are funding the development of their home regions. Remittances now account for more finance than foreign aid.

Saunders suggests there are many challenges that cities face in coping with these changes but there are also potential longer term benefits in terms of global population growth and levels of development.

### **How will cities adapt to meet the challenge of urbanisation?**

**Peter Bishop is the former Director of Design for London and Group Director at the London Development Agency.** Peter Bishop describes cities as at best; creative and exhilarating and at worst; cruel and inhuman. He states that cities can no longer be planned and designed but if we understand them we can shape them. Cities have changed dramatically as a result of population change and growth within them, changes in the way we work as a society, the emergence of the 'transumer', economic and environmental uncertainty and the increasing divide between rich and poor. These all present challenges for design within cities.

Bishop considers some factors that will influence 'shaping the city' for tomorrow. *Climate change* will influence and in some cases limit city growth as planners have to cope with the potential consequences.

*Intense competition* will mean that cities will specialise to distinguish themselves such as through types of economic activity (creative industries or manufacturing) or an environmental focus.

*Quality of life* will have to be considered by planners rather than just function of a city.

*Know problems, know solutions* – Curitiba in Brazil is an outstanding example of a city which has focused on becoming a sustainable city. It has achieved success in an extensive recycling industry, and has reduced pollution by concentrating on the public transport infrastructure.

4 levels for shaping a city:

- **Powerful concepts:** these can be used to drive competitive nature. Barcelona is an example of success for regeneration; it focused on regenerating the waterfront area and investing in public spaces. In Copenhagen pedestrianisation was the key idea and now 50% of journeys are made on bicycle and it is a city centre for individuals.
- **Interweaving of agendas:** design must link together the ideas/needs across a broad spectrum including transport, health, education, housing and climate change is a theme through these agendas.
- **Getting detail right:** simple techniques can be used to redesign neighbourhoods. Local workshops, citizen involvement and participation are all critical for developing an area in an appropriate way for the people who live there. This means techniques vary between neighbourhoods.
- **Choreography of the city:** spaces can have temporary uses and therefore adapt to change. Pop-ups and events allow people to use space in different ways and we need to allow people to re-imagine cities and their activities.

Bishop suggests that cities should adapt to the needs of the citizens in a range of creative ways which encourage competition. They are temporary, dynamic places rather than permanent structures.

**Robert Neuwirth is a journalist and author of *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, A New Urban World*.** He lived in shanty town settlements for two years to research his book and he has recently published a new book; *The Stealth of Nations*. He suggests that we should learn from squatter settlement communities and encourage the self-made dwellings so that cities can cope with their rapidly rising populations in the future.

Currently 1 in 6 of the world's population live in squatter settlements and this number is set to rise to 1 in 3 by 2050, even with a reduction in overall population growth. No government has the ability to handle this scale of growth. In order to accommodate this population a house every second would have to be built and no government or private firm can ever hope to achieve this... so people do it themselves and squatter settlements are the result.

How do they do it? In Turkey, one strategy is to use the law to their advantage. A law states that if a house is built overnight and is substantially habitable, eviction can only be through the due process and residence becomes an eviction battle. If two thousand people succeed in doing this and become a community they can apply to be officially recognised and subsequently can elect their own local government. This has been achieved in Sultanbeyli, Istanbul where the elected squatter government has now installed some infrastructure and the area no longer looks like a squatter settlement but an extension of the city. Another strategy to develop infrastructure is to steal or 'tap' electricity from the cables across the city. This can be used to drive a pump to steal water and small scale infrastructure is in place. Neuwirth argues that these kinds of strategies demonstrate resourcefulness and the desire to improve living standards from within the squatter settlement.

Economic activity in squatter settlements is a critical component in the future of these cities. Business activity in the informal economy is unregistered and unlicensed though the product is legal. It is estimated that half of the world's workers are off the books and that the value of the informal economy is approximately 10 trillion dollars. Neuwirth argues that the informal economy is only going to grow and we must 'get used to it!'

Neuwirth suggests four principles which can be used to understand the issues facing these rapidly growing cities:

- *"In the great work of money the shilling of the laziest man is more lucrative than that of the poor and industrious."* Frederick Nietzsche. Meaning that money is unequal depending on whose hands it is in, the poor need money more.
- *"The outstanding faults of the economic society in which we live are its failure to provide for full employment and its arbitrary and inequitable distribution of wealth and income."* John Maynard Keynes. This is still true today that the biggest problems are economic disparity and lack of jobs.
- *"Facts come from negotiations between different parties."* Paul Feyerabend. We need to discuss the way we define people. Squatters could also be homesteaders?
- *"When will I be able to go into the supermarket and buy what I need with my good looks?"* Allen Ginsberg. There needs to be some engagement with the alternative economic market because 'the market', as we've defined it, is having problems in working for the people of these emerging cities.

For Neuwirth it is important to engage the informal sector and entrepreneurial activities from below. It represents such a significant proportion of the world's population; it will determine the activity and the future of world cities.