

What are the  
problems associated  
with rapid urban  
growth? essay



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The urbanization process refers to much more than simple population growth; it involves changes in the economic, social and political structures of a region.

Rapid urban growth is responsible for many environmental and social changes in the urban environment and its effects are strongly related to global change issues. The rapid growth of cities strains their capacity to provide services such as energy, education, health care, transportation, sanitation and physical security. Because governments have less revenue to spend on the basic upkeep of cities and the provision of services, cities have become areas of massive sprawl, serious environmental problems, and widespread poverty. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, urbanization resulted from and contributed to industrialization. New job opportunities in the cities motivated the mass movement of surplus population away from the countryside. At the same time, migrants provided cheap, plentiful labor for the emerging factories.

Today, due to movements such as globalization, the circumstances are similar in developing countries. Here the concentration of investments in cities attracts large numbers of migrants looking for employment, thereby creating a large surplus labor force, which keeps wages low. This situation is attractive to foreign investment companies from developed countries who can produce goods for far less than if the goods were produced where wages are higher. Thus, one might wonder if urban poverty serves a distinct function for the benefit of global capital.

One of the major effects of rapid urban growth is “urban sprawl”- scattered development that increases traffic, saps local resources and destroys open space. Urban sprawl is responsible for changes in the physical environment, and in the form and spatial organization of cities. Developed and less developed countries of the world differ not only in the percent living in cities, but also in the way in which urbanization is occurring. In Mexico City (950 square miles), as in many other megacities in the developing world, urban sprawl exists as nearly 40% of city dwellers live in the urban periphery in poverty and environmental degradation.

These high density settlements are often highly polluted owing to the lack of urban services, including running water, trash pickup, electricity or paved roads. Nevertheless, cities provide poor people with more opportunities and greater access to resources to transform their situation than rural areas. In the United States, poorly planned urban development is threatening our environment, our health, and our quality of life. In communities across the United States, sprawl is taking a serious toll.