Course Learning Outcomes for Unit VII

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Discuss key concepts in human geography including place, region, movement, and landscape.
   1.1 Discuss the impact of massive population movements on the urban environment.

4. Investigate past and current economic relationships, patterns, and issues within the three tiers of the world system.
   4.1 Discuss economic patterns in cities.
   4.2 Discuss economic issues faced in cities.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 11: Urbanization and the Global Urban System

Chapter 12: City Spaces: Urban Structure

Unit Lesson

In this unit, we are studying the urban environment. In the readings in this unit, you will learn about spatial and growth patterns in cities, issues being faced by cities in the core and periphery, and the importance of urban planning. This lecture will focus on megacities. Megacities are centrally located urban centers containing 10 million residents or more. In 1990 the world had only 10 megacities. “As of 2014, the Earth has 28 megacities worldwide—16 in Asia, four in Latin America, three each in Africa and Europe, and two in North America” (Rowe, 2014, para. 4). The two in the United States are Los Angeles and New York City. Most of these megacities are located in the periphery or semi-periphery in the Southern Hemisphere. "Essentially megacities in developing countries should be seen for what they are: a tragic replaying of the worst aspects of the mass urbanization that occurred previously in the West" (Kotkin, 2011, para. 3). Knox and Marston (2016) discuss the growth of these megacities. "In the most massive population movement the world has ever seen, millions of people continue to pour out of rural villages each year, hoping for fresh economic opportunity in the world’s cities” (p. 415). Dobbs (2010) states China and India will be the leaders in the forthcoming urban age. It is estimated that half of Asia will become urbanized with about a billion people transitioning from country to urban life. It is projected that in the next 20 years, 30% of all urban dwellers will live in India and China (Dobbs, 2010). In the first lecture for this course, global trends were discussed. One of those top 10 predicted global trends was the growing importance of the megacity (Poushter, 2013). Why are megacities so important? The concentration of human capital in these mammoth cities has both positive and negative impacts on global environmental, health, and economic patterns.
Mega-benefits

Megacities are economic powerhouses. “Today the world’s megacities account for 15% of global GDP, and that figure is projected to rise to 20% by the end of the decade” (Geiling & Esri, 2014, para. 4). “The megacity will be home to China’s and India’s growing middle classes—creating consumer markets larger than today’s Japan and Spain, respectively” (Dobbs, 2010, para. 7). Kalan (2014) argues that the process of agglomeration economies is a big benefit to the megacities. Knox and Marston (2016) state these economic linkages and interdependencies create lower costs and spur further economic growth. With a greater number of people comes greater innovation and creativity, which leads to more jobs. There is also the benefit of social mobility created by the economic growth in the megacities (Rowe, 2014). As citizens make more money, they are able to afford better housing, health care, and education for their children.

Mega-problems

Despite the numerous advantages of megacities, there are serious social, economic, and environmental issues.

The way in which megacities grow—often without an overarching controlling vision—only adds to the issues that they bring with them. This is largely due, says DESA, “to the challenges of providing urban jobs, housing, energy and infrastructure to mitigate urban poverty, expansion of slums and a deterioration of the urban environment.” (Rowe, 2014, para. 15)

This is often called overurbanization, which is when the population outpaces jobs, housing, and resources like water. Massive overcrowding in megacities leads to an increase in crime, health epidemics, traffic congestion, and strain on water and sanitation resources (Kotkin, 2011). For example, the waste treatment in Jakarta has failed to keep up with the population. Now, when it rains, sewage and garbage flood the low-lying areas, which leads to dengue fever and other illnesses (Marshall, 2005).

Megacities, because of their large population and size, have a significant impact on the environment. Both air and water pollution are serious issues in many of these megacities. In these cities, air-pollution related illnesses are much more common. “Cities are responsible for 70% of the world’s carbon emissions, especially those that sprawled out as they grew” (Geiling & Esri, 2014, para. 5). The rapid economic growth and population influx in megacities leads to increased deforestation and destruction of natural habitats. Deforestation decreases biodiversity, endangers animals, and removes trees that help counter carbon emissions. In the conflict between environmental preservation and economic growth, the economy typically takes precedence.
Solutions

Innovative urban planning, more investment, and proper governance are critical to addressing the issues faced by megacities. In super-dense areas, it is impossible for every person to have their own car. Forward-thinking urban planning is required for mass transit and other transportation management that will cope with the growing populations. Sustainable solutions like clean energy are essential in curtailing pollution and carbon emissions. While in the Northern hemisphere, there are a lot of resources available to handle challenges faced in megacities, it is not the case in the global south.

‘There’s talk of US$350 trillion of investment in infrastructure in the next decade [in cities in the global south], so it’s important to get it right and make sure the development is sustainable’ says Evaeus (Manager of Climate Control Communications at WWF). (Rowe, 2014, para. 42)

Ashok Detar, chairman of the Mumbai Environmental Social Network states that periphery countries need to work to create jobs and infrastructure in more manageable midsize urban areas to relieve some of the influx into the current megacities (Kotkin, 2011). Besides improving resources and creating sustainable solutions, it is important to create other economic centers to reduce the migration to the megacities.

The growth of megacities promises to be a continuing trend. These large cities provide economic, cultural, and social benefits that remain a draw. However, cities that suffer from overurbanization struggle with providing the critical infrastructure and resources that their dwellers require. If they fail to meet these challenges, the environmental, health, and economic fallout will be devastating.

The good news, at least for optimists, is that the developed world already has come through the urbanization wringer and survived to tell the tale…. America’s two current megacities, New York and Los Angeles, face their share of challenges, but few of these could reasonably be described as apocalyptic. (Lewis, 2007, para. 7)

Do you think the megacities in the developing world will be able to keep up with the growing demand for housing and jobs? How can these megacities successfully address the issues resulting from overcrowding? What will the future hold for megacities in the periphery and semi-periphery? What role should sustainability play?

Here is a great source that shows the growth of some of the world’s megacities. Visit the website below and see for yourself the geographical growth of some of the world’s biggest cities over time:


References


**Learning Activities (Non-Graded)**

Visit the UN Habitat (unhabitat.org) website to discover more about cities in peripheral regions. Review some of the urban themes (energy, mobility, climate change, etc.) and urban initiatives presented at the UN Habitat website. Pick an urban theme from the website and at least one urban initiative presented on the UN Habitat website to address that theme. UN initiatives are listed as part of each theme. Evaluate the initiative. Does the initiative seem effective? Is the initiative sustainable? What stakeholders are involved in the initiative? What positive or negative impact could this particular initiative have?

This is an alternative assignment to get you thinking more critically. This is not a written assignment that you turn in. You can write a one page essay discussing your responses to the above questions.

Non-graded Learning Activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. You do not have to submit them. If you have questions, contact your instructor for further guidance and information.