The Urbanization Boom and City Design

A

In recent decades, the world has witnessed an unprecedented surge in urbanization. According to United Nations data, more than 55% of the global population now resides in cities, a figure expected to rise to 68% by 2050. This rapid urban growth has created both immense opportunities and pressing challenges. On one hand, urban areas can foster economic development, innovation, and access to services. On the other, poorly planned expansion can lead to overcrowding, pollution, traffic congestion, and inadequate housing. As cities swell in size, the way they are designed becomes crucial not only for livability but also for sustainability.

B

The roots of urban design stretch back thousands of years. From the grid layout of ancient Roman towns to the symmetrical avenues of Renaissance cities, the structure of urban space has long reflected the values and needs of its time. In the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution prompted a dramatic expansion of urban areas, and with it, new concerns about sanitation, housing, and public health. Influential figures like Ebenezer Howard in Britain envisioned "garden cities" that combined the best elements of rural and urban life. Meanwhile, cities like Paris were redesigned under Baron Haussmann to introduce wide boulevards and improved infrastructure.

C

Today, however, the speed and scale of urbanization—particularly in the Global South—pose a different set of challenges. Megacities like Lagos, Dhaka, and São Paulo are growing faster than planners can keep up with. Informal settlements often spring up to accommodate migrants in search

of better opportunities, but these areas frequently lack basic services such as clean water, sewage systems, and reliable electricity. The mismatch between population growth and infrastructure development can lead to inequality and strain urban resources.

D

To address these concerns, modern urban design increasingly prioritizes sustainability and inclusivity. The concept of the "smart city" has emerged, emphasizing the integration of technology and data analytics to optimize services such as traffic flow, waste collection, and energy usage. In cities like Singapore and Barcelona, real-time monitoring systems help manage transportation networks and environmental conditions. These innovations aim not only to enhance efficiency but also to make urban living more responsive to citizens' needs.

E

Another influential trend in contemporary city planning is the emphasis on walkability and public space. Inspired in part by the "New Urbanism" movement, many urban designers advocate for mixed-use neighborhoods where residents can live, work, and play without relying heavily on cars. Parks, pedestrian zones, and bike lanes are central to these plans. For instance, Copenhagen has become a global model for bicycle-friendly infrastructure, with nearly half of its population commuting by bike. Urban green spaces, meanwhile, have been linked to improved mental health, reduced urban heat, and enhanced biodiversity.

F

Yet, despite these positive developments, the implementation of progressive urban planning principles is often uneven. In many rapidly expanding cities, short-term economic considerations can overshadow

long-term planning. Real estate speculation and private interests may lead to gentrification, pushing low-income residents out of central areas. Moreover, climate change introduces additional pressures, requiring cities to adapt to rising sea levels, extreme weather, and resource scarcity. This has prompted some planners to adopt the idea of "resilient cities," designed to absorb shocks and stresses while continuing to function effectively.

G

In conclusion, the global urbanization boom is reshaping not just the physical layout of cities, but also how societies think about the future. City design must balance a multitude of goals: efficiency, equity, environmental sustainability, and cultural vibrancy. As urban populations continue to grow, thoughtful planning and inclusive design will be key to ensuring that cities remain not just places to live—but places where people can thrive.

Questions

Questions 1–5: Paragraph Matching

Match the following statements with the correct paragraphs (A–G).
You may use any letter more than once.

1. A city that has successfully integrated bike travel into daily life.
2. A historical figure who influenced how modern cities were planned.
3. A concept that refers to cities that use digital tools to improve services.
4. The importance of public outdoor spaces for community well-being.
5. The impact of climate change on city planning efforts.

Questions 6–9: Yes / No / Not Given

Do the following statements agree with the information in the passage?
Write:

- YES if the statement agrees with the views of the writer.
- NO if the statement contradicts the views of the writer.
- NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this.

6. More than half of the world's population currently lives in cities.
7. The population of rural areas is predicted to increase by 2050.
8. Informal settlements often arise in response to poor city planning.

9. Haussmann's redesign of Paris emphasized public transportation systems.

Questions 10–13: Summary Completion

Complete the summary below using words from the passage.
Choose NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS for each answer.

Urban design has evolved over centuries, reflecting the needs of the times. While ancient Roman towns favored a 10. _____ layout, 19th-century cities began to address issues such as sanitation and housing. The Industrial Revolution spurred urban growth, leading thinkers like 11. _____ to propose ideal communities that combined urban and rural elements.

In the modern era, some cities are turning into "smart cities," using technology to improve services like 12. _____ and energy use. Others are emphasizing walkability and 13. _____ as part of efforts to enhance quality of life.

Answer Key

Paragraph Matching (1–5):

1. E
2. B
3. D
4. E
5. F

Yes / No / Not Given (6–9):

6. YES
7. NO
8. YES
9. NOT GIVEN

Summary Completion (10–13):

10. grid
11. Ebenezer Howard
12. traffic flow
13. public space