

Living In The City

Living in the city has evolved dramatically over the centuries. Jericho, one of the world's first permanent settlements, was established around 9,000 BCE and is considered the earliest known defended settlement. It's fascinating to think about how early urbanization was already focused on protection, laying the foundation for future urban planning. Over time, urban settlements have grown significantly, with rural populations outnumbering urban dwellers until 2007. By today's standards, approximately 55% of the world's population now resides in cities. This shift underscores the increasing importance of urban centers and the challenges they face in terms of infrastructure, housing, and resources. Urban planning, while dating back 5,000 years to the rise of the first true cities, has become more sophisticated as planners now focus on various factors such as zoning, sanitation, transportation, and environmental sustainability.

Urbanization has shaped many of the world's largest cities, with Tokyo, Japan, currently holding the title of the largest metropolitan area, home to about 37.5 million people. However, projections by the World Economic Forum suggest that Jakarta, Indonesia, could surpass Tokyo by 2035, further emphasizing the rapid growth of urban populations. In addition to these megacities, many ancient settlements such as Çatalhöyük in Turkey, which had an estimated population of 6,000 between 6,700 and 5,700 BCE, provide insight into early urban life. However, definitions of what constitutes urban or rural areas can vary across nations. For example, the United States classifies towns with over 2,500 people as urban, while in Japan, the threshold is set at 30,000. This discrepancy highlights the diversity in urbanization metrics around the world.

The term "megalopolis" refers to a sprawling urban region formed by the overlapping of major metropolitan areas. The Bosnywash region in the United States, which

includes Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C., serves as a prime example. This interconnected urban space is a testament to the growing interconnectedness of cities across regions. Another fascinating aspect of urban living is the large cities that exist in extreme environments. Murmansk, Russia, located north of the Arctic Circle, is one of the largest cities in the world to lie within the Arctic zone. With a population of over 300,000, the city benefits from the moderating effects of the North Atlantic Current, which helps maintain its temperatures despite its northern location.

Suburbs, while often seen as residential areas on the outskirts of cities, have become essential parts of the urban landscape. Suburbs are technically considered urban areas but differ from city centers in that they are less densely populated. In many European and North American metro areas, suburbs have actually surpassed the main cities in population. This phenomenon, fueled by factors such as the creation of freeways, “white flight,” and the expansion of public transportation, reflects broader social and economic trends. For instance, Vatican City, a sovereign city-state, remains one of the smallest urban areas in Europe, with a population of only 453 people across just 0.19 square miles. Despite its size, Vatican City plays a significant role as the center of the Roman Catholic Church.

The early history of urbanization is also marked by impressive milestones such as the ancient city of Uruk in Mesopotamia, which was the first urban center to reach a population of 50,000 people around 2,900 BCE. Uruk's population growth set the stage for the future development of cities around the world. In addition to ancient settlements, the study of urban environments, known as “ekistics,” continues to overlap with disciplines like geography, anthropology, and cartography. Ekistics scholars classify settlements based on their size and functionality, helping us understand the evolution of human habitation. This field not only looks at population but also examines the social, economic, and environmental factors that shape urban spaces.

Finally, urban names often carry significant historical or geographical meaning. Rio de Janeiro, for instance, translates from Portuguese as “River of January,” a name given

by European explorers when they first encountered Guanabara Bay. The study of urban areas continues to evolve, especially as modern census data helps define urbanized areas. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, any urbanized area with a population of over 50,000 people is considered a major urban area, while those with fewer than 50,000 are categorized as urban clusters. Over time, as cities grow and expand, the boundaries of what constitutes an urban area become increasingly complex, leading to a broader understanding of how urbanization shapes our world. Ancient Rome, for instance, was the first city to reach a population of one million people during the early Imperial Period, a milestone in urban history that set a precedent for future growth in cities around the globe.

