

What is a Global City?

The term “global city” was first introduced by Saskia Sassen in her book “The Global City”, published in 1991. In reference to London, New York, and Tokyo, Sassen described the global city as one that tangibly influences global affairs in terms of politics, culture, and various socio-economic means. Furthermore, the author described the global city as “strategic sites for the management of the global economy and the production of the most advanced services and financial operations”. Following is a discussion of some general characteristics of the global city.

- A global city is generally home to, or participates in various forms of international affairs. For example, New York City is home to the United Nations and various supporting agencies.
- Large Populations
- Global cities characteristically have vast and advanced mass transportation systems. Systems commonly include



London, England

- light rail, rapid transit, regional rail, bus services, and ferry services. Transport for London (TFL) is an integrated body responsible for London’s transport systems (http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/abt_tfl.asp).
- These types of cities typically have several international cities within the urban boundaries. For example, many global cities in North America have areas designated as “Chinatown” and “Little Italy”.
- Global cities are home to, or have subsidiaries of large international financial institutions and global headquarters. These cities also commonly have things such as stock exchanges (London, New York, Tokyo) with influence on the world economy.
- These cities tend to have world-renowned cultural and academic institutions that draw patrons from around the globe.
- Global cities have a very lively cultural scene with attractions including international film festivals, theatre, art galleries, and opera companies.
- Global cities have media outlets that tend to reach the rest of the world. For example, the *BBC* in the United Kingdom and *The New York Times* in New York City.

While London is among the “original” three global cities as previously mentioned, there are many new emerging global cities around the world that are helping to accommodate the present and future globalization of the planet.

While global cities continue to form and grow around the world, there are some who see the significance or need for global cities as a dwindling phenomenon. In an article entitled *The City: Between Topographic Representation and Spatialized Power Projects*, the author states,



New York, New York

...“the particular dynamics and capacities captured by the terms globalization and digitalization signal the possibility of a major transformation in this dynamic of spatialization. The dominant interpretation posits that digitalization entrails an absolute disembedding from the material world. Key concepts in the dominant account about the global economy- globalization, information economy, and telematics- all suggest that place no longer matters”¹.

As the author clearly notes, there are some critics today who feel that there is no longer the need for concentrated urban populations. In today’s digital world, one argument is that since improved technology allows work do be done from any location, this diminishes the need for people to concentrate in the same area. This argument is an obvious oversimplification, because despite technological advances in this era, cities have not decreased in size or importance. This may be due to the effects of localization or agglomeration economies, in which the proximity of other firms and industries, and the benefits that this proximity provides, increases the appeal of that location itself. Therefore, despite the digitalization and globalization referred to in the aforementioned article, it is felt that the importance of urban areas has not diminished to the extent that this author argues.

Global cities have become more important in recent times for three reasons: 1) the greater size and velocity of world capital flows; 2) the increased need for centralized command-and-control posts in a decentralized world economy 3) the extensive technical infrastructure needed by the FBS (financial and business services) industries. “These arguments were based on observations of growth driven by FBS in the 80’s. Later, renewed expansion of these cities was dependent also on the surprising rapid growth of media-related, informational, and cultural enterprises”².

As previously stated, advanced mass transportation systems are one of the general characteristics of a global city.

¹ *The City: Between Topographic Representation and Spatialized Power Projects*, Pg. 13

² *The City Builders: The development industry and urban redevelopment*, Pg. 30-31

“Passenger numbers using the UK’s rail network have risen sharply, especially in and around the capital city of London, but the drive to increase capacity and reduce overcrowding has largely stalled, as investment earmarked for expansion has had to be diverted into maintenance”³.

Mass transportation systems are important in all cities but are crucial for a global city such as London. TFL (Transport for London) must continue to improve mass transit or London’s role in the global economy may be diminished.

London’s Place Within the Global Economy

As can be seen in the figure below, London is not expected to grow, in terms of population, by nearly the same extent as other mature or emerging global cities. There are over 20 cities around the world that are larger than London. A substantial number of these cities have exploded into “megacities” during the past 30 years.

“The megacity is a relatively new form of urban development. In 1950, there were only two cities with populations of over 10 million: New York and Tokyo. By 1975, two more locations, Shanghai and Mexico City, joined the club. But by 2004, the number of megacities had rocketed to 22 and, together, these cities now account for 9% of the world’s urban population”⁴.

The fastest growth of megacities will take place in developing countries that are in areas such as Asia and Africa. These Emerging cities will continue to have rapid population growth that will demand huge improvements to existing infrastructure. Mature and transitional cities will have aging populations in the future. London will differ from most emerging and mature megacities because London has “strategic sites for the management of the global economy and the production of the most advanced services and financial operations.” London is and will continue to be the main center for financial and business services in the European Union.

³ *The Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Report, United Kingdom, January 2007, Pg. 20*

⁴ *Megacity Challenges, A stakeholder perspective, Pg. 13*

City	Country	2003 Population (Millions)	2015 Population		Area (km ²)	Population Growth
			Forecast (Millions)			
London	Great Britain	7.6	7.6		1,600	0.00%
Tokyo	Japan	35.0	36.2		13,100	3.43%
New York	USA	21.2	22.8		10,768	7.55%
Seoul-Inchon	South Korea	20.3	24.7		4,400	21.67%
Mexico-City	Mexico	18.7	20.6		4,600	10.16%
Sao Paulo	Brazil	17.9	20.0		4,800	11.73%
Mumbai	India	17.4	22.6		4,350	29.89%
Los Angeles	USA	16.4	17.6		14,000	7.32%
Delhi	India	14.1	20.9		1,500	48.23%
Manila-Quezon	Philippines	13.9	16.8		2,200	20.86%
Calcutta	India	13.8	16.8		1,400	21.74%
Buenos Aires	Argentina	13.0	14.6		3,900	12.31%
Shanghai	China	12.8	12.7		1,600	-0.78%
Jakarta	Indonesia	12.3	17.5		1,600	42.28%
Dhaka	Bangladesh	11.6	17.9		1,500	54.31%
Rio de Janeiro	Brazil	11.2	12.4		2,400	10.71%
Ruhr Area	Germany	11.1	11.1		9,800	0.00%
Cairo	Egypt	10.8	13.1		1,400	21.30%
Beijing	China	10.8	11.1		1,400	2.78%
Lagos	Nigeria	10.7	17.0		1,100	58.88%
Moscow	Russian Fed.	10.5	10.9		1,100	3.81%
Paris	France	9.8	10.0		2,600	2.04%
Istanbul	Turkey	9.4	11.3		2,650	20.21%
Chicago	USA	9.2	10.0		8,000	8.70%

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit

London's Population

1951	8,196,000
1961	7,992,000
1971	7,568,000
1981	6,679,000
1991	7,120,000
2001	7,654,000
2010	8,250,000

Source: CRP-649 Presentation

As can be seen in the above two figures, London's population has remained relatively stagnant in the city's past and is expected to remain at current levels into the foreseeable future. This particular prediction has very significant spatial implications for the City of London. With the new Thames Gateway Initiative, those designing and redeveloping the huge mass of land must bear in mind that they are not building to accommodate an inflow of new residents, but rather are accommodating the need of current inhabitants for rejuvenated neighborhoods and for housing that might be priced at different levels.

On another front, the spatial implications that stem from the industries of the 21st century have significant impact on London's spatial needs. While much of the Gateway region seems to have been of industrial/manufacturing nature to begin with, designers and developers must now rebuild for the service industries of today. The necessary nature of what this tweaked design and spatial organization consists of specifically is beyond the scope of the authors. However, it is hoped that the Thames Gateway Initiative

Conference, for which this paper is written, will provide insights and take the information in this paper to delve into the various possibilities of spatial design of the Gateway.