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Building Better Cities

Danny Dorling

7th annual Human City Institute lecture, The Malmaison Hotel, Birmingham, March 9th 2017
Geography is the subject that shows you how everything is connected to everything else.

Cities are very recent in our evolution. So recent that most of us in the world have only lived in one in the current generation.

It would be a mistake to believe that we have a huge amount of useful history to learn from on how to build large cities.

We are transforming into an urban species.
# The growth of urban Oxford

**1750**  
Population: unknown

In 1750 Oxford consisted largely of the medieval city; outlying villages such as Headington were still separate entities.

**1830**  
Population: 24,000

In 1830 there were 24,000 people living inside the modern Oxford boundary. The period saw housing built to the north of the city.

**1900**  
Population: 57,000

Between 1830 and 1900 there were major urban extensions into St Clement’s and North Oxford.

**1939**  
Population: 94,000

The interwar years saw large numbers of houses built in what are now the suburbs of Cowley, Headington and Marston.

**1970**  
Population: 125,000

Council housing estates including Blackbird Leys were built in the postwar period. The green belt was introduced from the 1950s.

**2001**  
Population: 134,000

The urban footprint of Oxford has changed little since the 1970s. The most recent urban extension at Greater Leys was built in the 1990s.

**2011**  
Population: 152,000

The rapidly growing population since 2001 has been accommodated by increased housing density within the existing urban footprint.

**2021**  
Projection: 165,000

With the city still growing but confined by the green belt, developments are planned at Northern Gateway and Barton.
Two ladders
Reasons families find themselves to be homeless in England, 1998-2015

![Graph showing triggers of homelessness from 1998/99 to 2014/15.]

Proportion of acceptances

- Loss of an AST
- Relative/friend ceased accommodating
- Mortgage/rent arrears
- Relationship breakdown
- Other

Our problem is not too few homes – although we do need to build more due to immigration.

From Figure 6 of:

Relative housing inequality: The decline and return of housing space inequality in England and Wales, 1911-2011

Rebecca Tunstall
Director, Centre for Housing Policy, University of York (now published)

Inequality in distribution of rooms per person for people in private households in England and Wales, percentile ratios, 1911-2011
Better cities have better laws and so cope better in crisis.

Tenants in Germany often furnish their home and also decorate it, fit kitchens and cupboards and live very much like people with a mortgage live in the UK. Rent caps are enforced so that landlords cannot set whatever rent they wish for new tenants. Rents are also not permitted to rise at all quickly. Tenants’ groups organize to complain when landlords are not penalized for breaking the law.

Health and the city

Our health is currently deteriorating and this is as yet not due to ageing having had an effect. It is our mental health, but also our physical health.

Figure 9.2: Trends in self-reported health used by ONS in annual well-being reporting 2009-2013

Source: ONS, derived from Understanding Society Survey

Multiple government targets are now being missed
Source: Gemma Tetlow, Financial Times, 28th February 2017 (Institute for government)
NHS health spending and provision, choices over taxation, education, housing and wealth.

France is no Utopia, but compared with the UK, it has six more doctors to treat every 10 000 patients (21% more per person), 35 more hospital beds per 10 000 people (130% more per person), and people stay in hospital for less time on average (5.6 days instead of 6.9 days).\textsuperscript{14} The productivity of those in work is higher partly because health is better and people are not forced into low paid employment.\textsuperscript{15} There is a clear and present danger that leading French politicians will seek to portray their country as a failing state in the race for votes this year. But if that can be avoided then we should not assume that the inequality and poor health that helped get Brexit over the line and Trump into power will necessarily play out that way in France. Facts, and how they are presented, will matter more than ever before.

\textsuperscript{[14]} NHS Confederation (2016) Key statistics on the NHS, last updated 15\textsuperscript{th} November 2016, http://www.nhsconfed.org/resources/key-statistics-on-the-nhs
Schools, the city & segregation

Yet at the same time our schools are becoming less segregated by ethnicity and we saw huge improvements until 2010. The culprit is a stupid emphasis on competition and the unequal society parents see their children facing.

We are not ‘swamped’

The regional geography of ‘foreigner-born’ in Europe in 2014 (% population):
Our problems are often ‘inequality’ but on January 10th 2017 ONS announced that inequality had fallen

How much the richest and poorest households earn

UK annual average household income after paying taxes, receiving benefits and equalised for household size.

£13,586

Below this and your household is in the bottom 10% ...

£53,448

... and above this in the top 10%

But the measure they used ignored households in the 1%...
Household income inequality, quintile ratio 1977-2016, 1% take 1977-2012, UK

The take of the 1% is shown as a separate line, derived from the World Wealth and Income Database – we do not know if the drop after 2009 is “real” or not...
On November 19th the Economist Magazine published the best correlates to “explain” why increase for the Republicans rose in some areas and not in others – poor health: “even after controlling for race, education, age, sex, income, marital status, immigration and employment, these figures remain highly statistically significant.”

Sources: Atlas of US Presidential Elections; Census Bureau; IPUMS; Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation; The Economist

*Weighted index of obesity, diabetes, heavy drinking, physical exercise and life expectancy, 2010-12

After the Brexit result in the UK, no-one can doubt that inequality matters. It was the economically most unequal EU state which has voted to leave the union (and most of Wales).
American political scientist Benjamin Radcliff recently used statistics to show that: ‘The differences in your feeling of well-being living in a Scandinavian country (where welfare programs are large) versus the US are going to be larger than the individual factors in your life. The political differences trump all the individual things you’re supposed to do to make yourself happier – to have fulfilling personal relationships, to have a job, to have more income. The political factors swamp all those individual factors. Countries with high levels of gross domestic product consumed by government have higher levels of personal satisfaction.’
What does inequality mean in the UK and other countries, what are the implications for the whole of society (including the rich), and what can be done to make societies in the world more equal?

There are a growing number of studies findings many “≠” connections from health & happiness to cars and exams.

**Figure 26:** Healthy behaviour and income inequality, walking and cycling 2006-2010, affluent countries.

*Note: The figures for Japan are only for workers, not students, and are low because the train is the main means of transport for so many in Japan. Area proportional to population.*

*Source: Paris Top income dataset figures as accessed in January 2015, cycling and walking for Japan http://www.tokyobybike.com/2013/10/how-many-japanese-cycle-to-work.html*
Trends in education and many others also tend not to look good but there are many factors at play: ONE FACTOR MAY BE THAT WE ‘TEACH TO THE TEST’ IN THE UK.
Figure 2: State spending as a proportion of GDP, twelve rich countries 2002–2020 (%)
More equal countries have a gentler slope
To build a better city you need an enabling state and you need

- Taxing at the normal European level
- Spending on education & health normally
- Having housing laws that are fair to tenants
- Working towards a basic income for all
- No sanctions and student loans for the young
- Introducing a fair system of voting (PR)
- Not allowing the 1% who take a 7\textsuperscript{th} of everything every year in the UK – to also run political parties, newspapers, companies, even university building programmes unchallenged. This is best done by reducing their income/wealth – and that can be done in many ways – which they are aware of.
We should predict trouble ahead
But we can also predict better long term

Cycle routes out to the countryside could also protect wedges of the green belt – otherwise people can rightly ask who are we actually protecting it for and what are we really protecting – the house prices of the affluent and their ability to separate their children from others?
Change 2001-2011 (% point)
A plan for 10 years or 40?
It isn’t too late – but some want you to think it is – that there is no alternative
Amanda Tomlinson, Chief Executive
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