

Date: 20 October 2007

Subject: H2 Geography (Human)

Topic: Urbanization

Question Source: Post Prelims Revision Lectures

*Explain why rapid urbanization cannot continue indefinitely in ELDCs.*

Rapid urbanization cannot continue indefinitely in the ELDCs as a result of natural constraints and limits that the process of urbanization is subjected to, and the inherent problems that emerge from rapid urbanization that may possibly put an end to the process.

To begin, a fast pace of urbanization cannot be sustained indefinitely because of the capacity of the city that is defined by the resources it has, the infrastructure capacity, the land space. The city would not be able to meet ever increasing demand for essential supplies such as food and energy indefinitely. The authorities would hardly be able to cope with a consistently high rate of urbanization especially when urbanization process in ELDCs is often restricted to a single primate city.

Shortages and bottlenecks caused by overcrowding in the city will eventually impede the functions and the daily operations of the city, rendering it less attractive to rural migrants. Housing problems left unsolved by the local authorities, leading to more and more pavement dwellers would naturally make it difficult for new migrants to settle in the city. Transport congestion can make it unfavourable for additional economic activities.

Once these economic activities are being adversely affected by the bottlenecks and problems arising for the overly rapid urbanization, they might move out of the city, reducing employment opportunities and thus making the city less of a land of opportunities - urbanization would slow or cease since migration is the main driver of urbanization.

The other driver of urbanization, natural increase, can also slow as urbanism leads city dwellers to realize the burden of big families and social advancement takes place. Fertility rates will fall as the former migrants finds jobs and obtains a stable income, hoping to maintain higher standards of living. If migrants flood the cities so much that already a high proportion of people are in the cities, then urbanization will slow down.

Problems associated with overly rapid urbanization, such as poor utility provision, housing provision would prompt government to implement policies to slow down urbanization if it does not slow down by itself. Birth controls to curb population growth would reduce natural increase assuming they are effective. Internal migration policies can be applied to discourage rural-urban migration like that in China. Government may try transmigration programmes such as in Jakarta, in order to try reducing the overcrowding problems in ELDCs cities.

Hence, rapid urbanization is not sustainable and would not continue indefinitely in the ELDCs.

*With reference to specific examples, assess the extent to which rapid urbanization can be beneficial to ELDCs.*

Rapid urbanization, coupled with effective management of the cities and the urbanization phenomenon by the government, can be beneficial to ELDCs, both in terms of potential economic development and social advancement

Rapid urbanization is often the key factor driving the rapid growth and physical expansion of cities in ELDCs. Urban sprawl in Karachi in Pakistan and Sao Paulo in Brazil were responsible for

the rapid spatial expansion; the labour from the influx of migrants also helped build up the city and provided the consumer base for the cities' economic activities.

Since most ELDCs adopts export-oriented approach to economic growth, the rapid urbanization fills up any gaps in the job market and thus lowers labour cost and ensure attractiveness of the city to foreign investors. This lays the foundation for further economic growth. Small trades and businesses are also started by the enterprising migrants, providing support services for the big foreign firms that have relocated to the ELDC. This would pave the way for the growth of domestic firms and industries. The cities are usually growth centers for the ELDCs economies and are responsible for majority of the rapid growth that these countries enjoy.

Cities have become land of employment for the rural migrants in ELDCs and there's a chance rapid urbanization can provide an avenue for poverty alleviation since the cities definitely provides more opportunities than the stagnating rural regions that are starve of government investment and development. Those lucky enough to gain employment in the cities can also benefit the rural regions and possibly spur rural development by remitting money back to their hometowns where they are used to strengthen the rural economies, thus reducing poverty. Rapid urbanization provides the chance for informal activities in the economies to be formalized since authorities do not have the capacity to cope with the changes and introduce new systems. In Karachi and Sao Paulo, minibuses which were previously the paratransit system were formalized into forms of public transport, thus providing the bus drivers with a steadier source of income.

Of course, there are problems associated with rapid urbanization in ELDCs and these would be adverse to the ELDC economies, possibly stultifying their growth. Housing, transport and waste disposal problems can impede day-to-day functioning of the city and threaten the sustainability of the urbanization process as the city becomes overcrowded. Large numbers of pavement dwellers, long traffic congestion times and serious pollution are problems that can reduce the attractiveness of the cities as a destination for investments and thus stun the growth of the country if the cities are the main drivers of economic development. The authorities must be able to cope with the rapidity of the urbanization process to ensure that urban population growth is translated to actual economic growth.

The high rates of urbanization also encourages primacy as it causes the development of a single growth pole in the expense of the others, distorting income distribution and worsening the inequality in ELDCs. The rapid urbanization encourages more and more funds to be allocated to the urban centers and ths would mean that urban growth is in the expense of rural development. If growth is not well distributed, the ELDC economies may become dualistic and hard to bridge. There's a huge divide in income levels between the east coastal cities and the inland rural regions in China. This uneven development can be a potential source of social unrest.

The extent to which rapid urbanization can benefit the ELDCs largely depends on the authorities' ability to cope with the fast-paced nature of the phenomenon and whether they can catch the opportunity to direct these urban populations to help grow the economy. Cities have been important drivers of growth for ELDCs, which usually have a monocentric urban system. As such, it is important to ensure that the city functions smoothly and the rapid urbanization process do not end up crippling the city. Government will also have to be able to distribute the benefits evenly for rapid urbanization to benefit the ELDC in a sustainable way as growing disparity between the incomes of urban and rural and spark unrest. Even within the primate cities, inequalities are serious problems and authorities must try to bridge the 2 circuits in their dualistic economies.