



## Space and amenities

**There are more people in the world than ever before, and we are living closer together, with over half the world's population now in towns and cities.<sup>1</sup>**

Much of the population growth is in areas that already suffer the greatest pressure of numbers. This overcrowding and loss of amenity is causing economic loss. Studies have also suggested that overcrowding and a lack of access to green spaces can contribute to stress and mental health issues.

### *Space*

The amount of space per person is diminishing relentlessly. This is happening both in developing countries with high birth rates and in developed countries where populations are growing more slowly but an increasing proportion live in large conurbations. This means that people live further from their places of employment, and further from the countryside.

At the same time, countryside and urban green spaces are shrinking, and so are more difficult to access. In towns and cities, in recent years many playing fields have been lost to residential or commercial development, while larger gardens are used for infill housing. In London, for example, an area of vegetated garden land equivalent to 21 times the size of Hyde Park was lost between 1998–99 and 2006–08, representing 3,000ha or a 12 per cent reduction. This constitutes an annual loss of an area two and a half times the size of Hyde Park.<sup>2</sup>

Public parks are becoming more crowded, and are being encroached upon. Noise and light pollution mean that the peace and quiet which used to be common over much of the country is now increasingly rare, adversely affecting both wildlife and people.

In the UK, there is increasing pressure to provide additional housing by building in designated Green Belt areas, which risks turning large parts of the country into unbroken stretches of urban regions. Many people already object to new housing or business developments close to where they live, often referred to as Not in My Back Yard or NIMBYism. Although many people value undeveloped land and green space as individuals, such space is rarely given sufficient official recognition. All too often they are inadequately protected, except in designated national parks.

### *Transport*

Increases in population size and density often take place without sufficient investment in transport infrastructure. When this happens, people are subjected to unnecessary stress as a result of more time spent travelling, delays and overcrowded public transport systems. Overloaded transport systems result in a number of negative effects:

- Longer journey times, either as the direct result of delays or the need to allow extra time to cater for unpredictability. Often the extra time is wasted because it cannot be used productively.

- Increasingly uncomfortable and unsafe travelling conditions for those using public transport systems.
- Arriving late for work, meetings, etc., thereby wasting time both for the traveller and for others.
- Consequent loss of economic productivity.
- Wasted fuel, because vehicles are unable to operate at optimum speeds and are required to make higher numbers of acceleration/deceleration cycles.
- Consequent additional wear and tear on vehicles, and higher levels of air pollution.
- Stressed and frustrated travellers, which may lead to road rage and reduced mental and physical health.
- Traffic congestion delays to emergency vehicles.

- “Rat runs” through residential and recreational areas, due to spillover of traffic from congested routes, with consequent loss of amenity, increased local noise, rising air pollution and greater risk of accidents.

In many developing countries there are insufficient resources to invest in adequate transport systems for a growing population. But wealthier countries such as the United Kingdom also experience unacceptable levels of congestion. This may in part be the result of investing in inappropriate forms of transport infrastructure. However, it is also the result of a “predict and provide” approach intended to satisfy such ever-increasing demand for travel as may arise, rather than any attempt to manage the demand itself. The underlying transport problem in densely populated countries is often that there are “simply too many people”.

## References

Internet references accessed 22/04/2016

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unfpa.org/pds/urbanization.htm>

<sup>2</sup> *London: garden city?* Research project by Chloë Smith on behalf of London Wildlife Trust, 2010

## General reference

<http://www.railnews.co.uk/news/metro/2009/12/01-tube-overcrowding-causing-increasing-stress.html>