

# Thinking about Cities.

David Gilbert

Professor of Urban and Historical Geography, Royal Holloway



## Cities

**Urbanisation** (the processes of making and the growth of cities)

**Urbanism** (forms of economy, society, culture and ways of life associated with cities)

These have all been central issues in the ways that Geographers have thought about the human world – an inspiration and challenge for what we might call our ‘geographical imaginations’. Thinking about cities runs through many of the modules in Human Geography at Royal Holloway. Ahead of your arrival in the Department, I’ve picked out three themes that you might want to explore, by doing more reading (including that suggested here), and by thinking through these issues in cities that are known to you, either in your experience or your previous studies.

### 1. An urban world

How do we understand a world in which the majority of people are urban dwellers?

The talk points you towards ideas such as ‘global suburbanisation’ and ‘planetary urbanisation’ as two of the ways that Geographers are thinking through these ideas.

Have a look at these two links:

<https://theconversation.com/suburban-change-is-transforming-city-life-around-the-world-125598>

<https://wsimag.com/architecture-and-design/32403-planetary-urbanization>

The source for the images of Shenzhen and the Pearl River Delta is this:

<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/may/10/china-pearl-river-delta-then-and-now-photographs>

More generally the Guardian Cities section has a really wide-ranging and stimulating set of things to read about the changing nature of cities across the globe.

<https://www.theguardian.com/cities>

### 2. Cities of Connection.

The second part of the talk thinks about how cities can only be understood in terms of their relationships with other places – how they are positioned in networks of power, flows of goods, money and people, and their environment impact on distant places. Doreen Massey’s classic essay on ‘London Inside-Out’ can be found here:

[https://www.lwbooks.co.uk/sites/default/files/s32\\_06massey.pdf](https://www.lwbooks.co.uk/sites/default/files/s32_06massey.pdf)

Doreen Massey (2005) ‘London Inside-Out’ *Soundings* 32 pp.62-71.

You can also read a pdf of a paper I wrote with Felix Driver, another of the academics at Royal Holloway, that thinks about how London needs to be understood as fundamentally shaped by its role as capital of Empire, and how there are lasting effects on the city today.

David Gilbert and Felix Driver (2000) 'Capital and Empire: Geographies of Imperial London' *GeoJournal* 51, No. 1/2, Special edition on European Capital Cities (pp. 23-32).

### 3. 2020: A crisis for the city?

Finally, the talk raised the possibility that the current virus crisis might mark a fundamental turning point in our relationship with big cities.

Have a look at this:

<https://theconversation.com/after-coronavirus-how-seasonal-migration-and-empty-centres-might-change-our-cities-139439>

The *Economist* for 11<sup>th</sup> June 2020 had a leader and detailed briefing on the issue:

<https://www.economist.com/leaders/2020/06/11/great-cities-after-the-pandemic>

<https://www.economist.com/briefing/2020/06/11/covid-19-challenges-new-yorks-future>

(You may need to sign-up to get access to these articles – the *Economist* gives free access to 5 articles a month. Once you are registered at Royal Holloway you'll be able to access as much as you need through the Library portal.)

This short article is available on open access:

Mike Batty (2020) 'The Coronavirus crisis: What will the post-pandemic city look like?

*Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science*

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2399808320926912>

It's more technical than the other articles (and I have a very different approach to cities than that adopted here) but there some interesting ideas.

**Finally, a couple of tasks if you'd like to organise your thoughts.** Have a think about these questions, and perhaps put some notes together or a short powerpoint if you are feeling enthusiastic. The teaching for the Human Geography module next term is supported by small group tutorials, and I'll ask the academics running your tutorials to look at these issues with you.

1. Take a city known to you – through your experience or your studies – and think about it 'inside-out'.  
What connections to other places make it what it is?  
How does it impact on other places?
2. What characteristics of cities, urbanization and urbanism are likely to be changed in the long-term by the current CV-19 crisis?