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AN URBAN THEORY OF THE 'GLOBAL SOUTH'

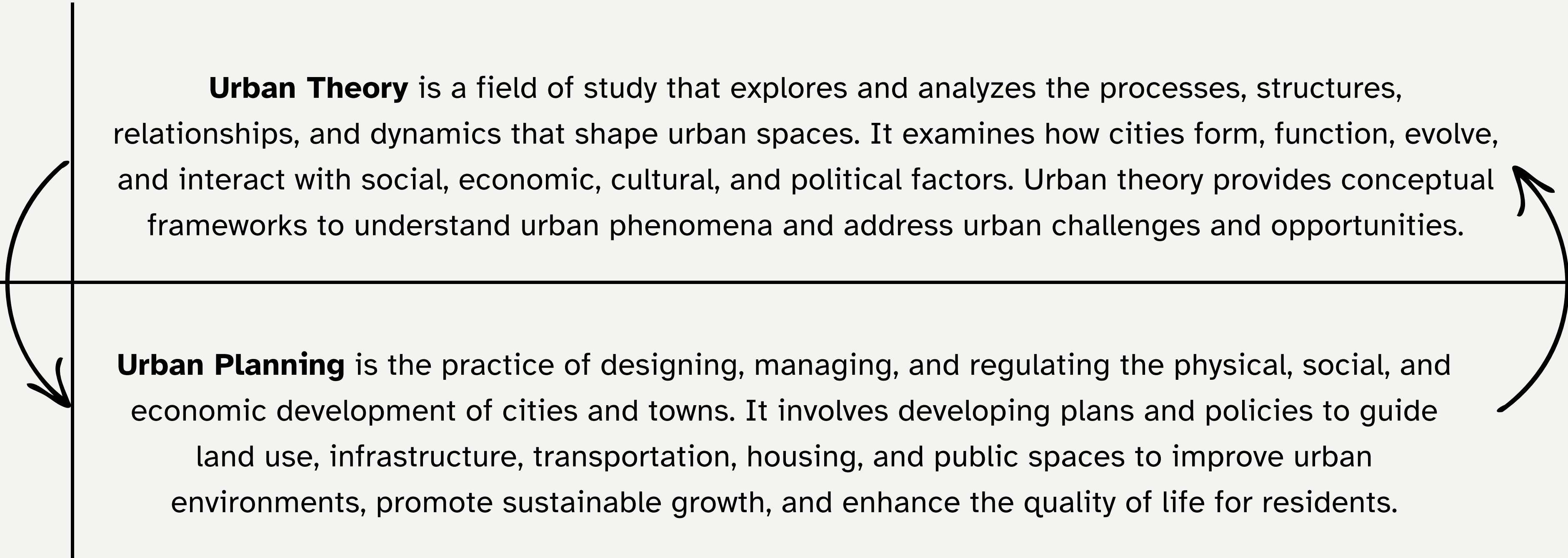




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INTRODUCTION



Urban Theory is a field of study that explores and analyzes the processes, structures, relationships, and dynamics that shape urban spaces. It examines how cities form, function, evolve, and interact with social, economic, cultural, and political factors. Urban theory provides conceptual frameworks to understand urban phenomena and address urban challenges and opportunities.

Urban Planning is the practice of designing, managing, and regulating the physical, social, and economic development of cities and towns. It involves developing plans and policies to guide land use, infrastructure, transportation, housing, and public spaces to improve urban environments, promote sustainable growth, and enhance the quality of life for residents.

WHAT IS AN URBAN THEORY OF THE GS?

*An urban theory of the 'global south' refers to theoretical frameworks specifically developed or adapted to address and interpret the unique urban experiences and challenges found in cities outside of the 'global north' including but not limited to **rapid urbanization, informality, colonial legacies, diverse socio-economic conditions, and environmental vulnerabilities typical of cities in the south.***

WHY IS IT NECESSARY?

- As it stands, urban theory emphasises economic growth indicators and northern models of development as the benchmark of efficient urbanisation and overlooks the agency of local actors in the historically determinate urbanisation in other parts of the world (Malaquais, 2011; Pieterse, 2010).
- The corpus of urban theory is overwhelmingly focused on an exclusive group of northern cities framed as 'successful locales of high finance and corporate city life' while 'poor' cities are purveyors of a failed modernisation - 'economically stagnant yet (perversely?) expanding in size' (Robinson, 2002).
- This is not a new debate, but it is one that has 'struggled to gain traction' (Pieterse, 2010), as southern cities are continually measured against a 'global/world cities' model based on 'northern' urbanisation (Shatkin, 2007)



6.7 BILLION

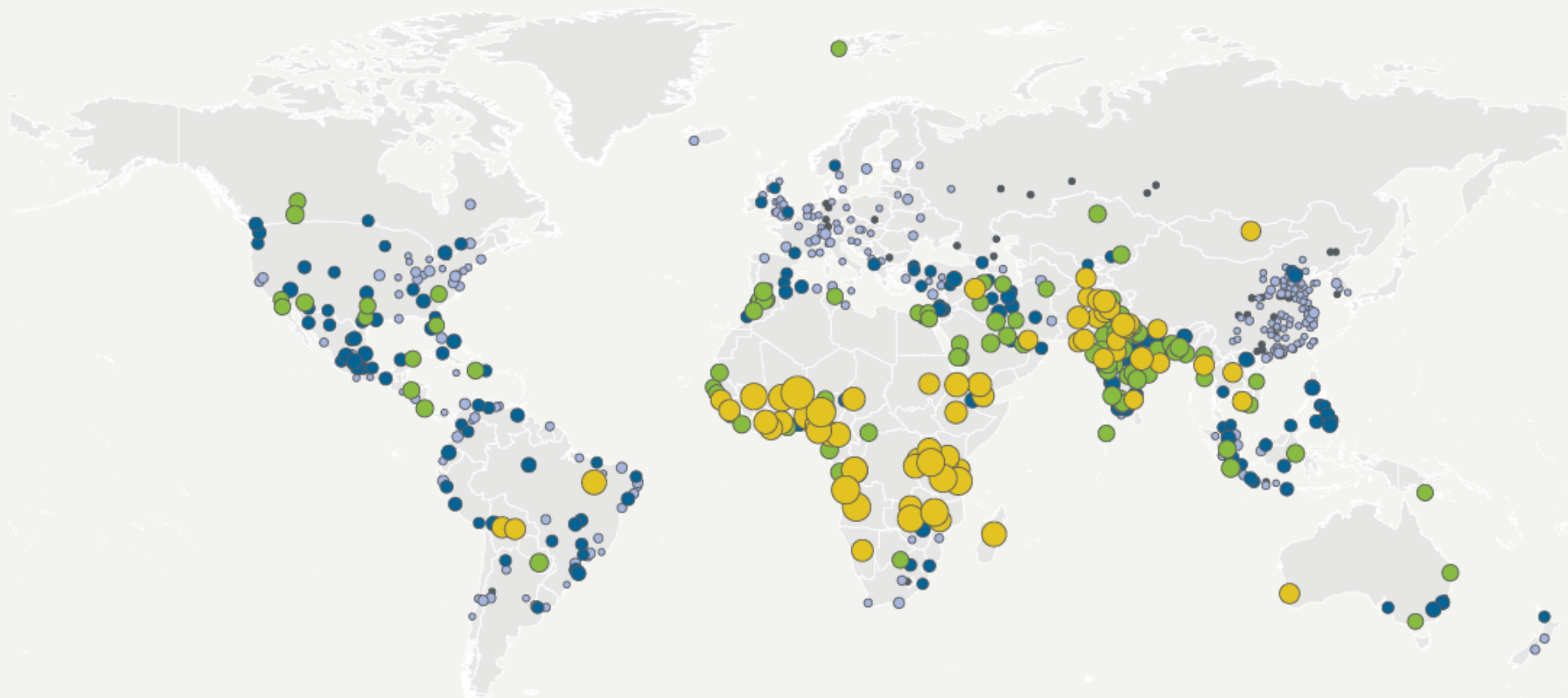
WORLD'S URBAN POPULATION IN 2050

90%

OF THIS GROWTH IS PROJECTED IN AFRICA
AND ASIA

Source: World Resources Institute, 2024

Projected Change in Urban Population, 2015-2030 • <1% 1-15% 15.01-30% 30.01-45% >45%



Source: World Resources Institute, 2024

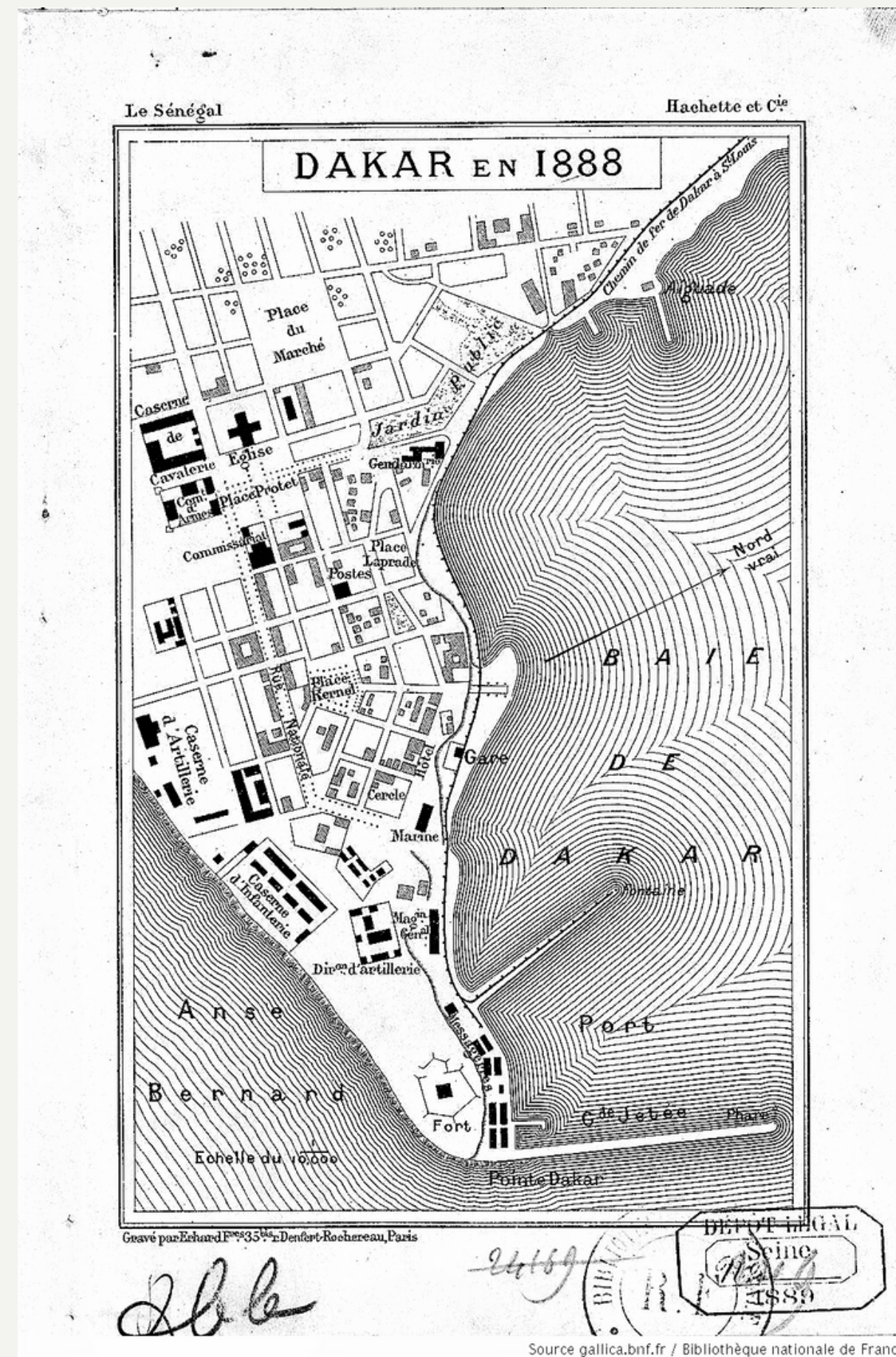
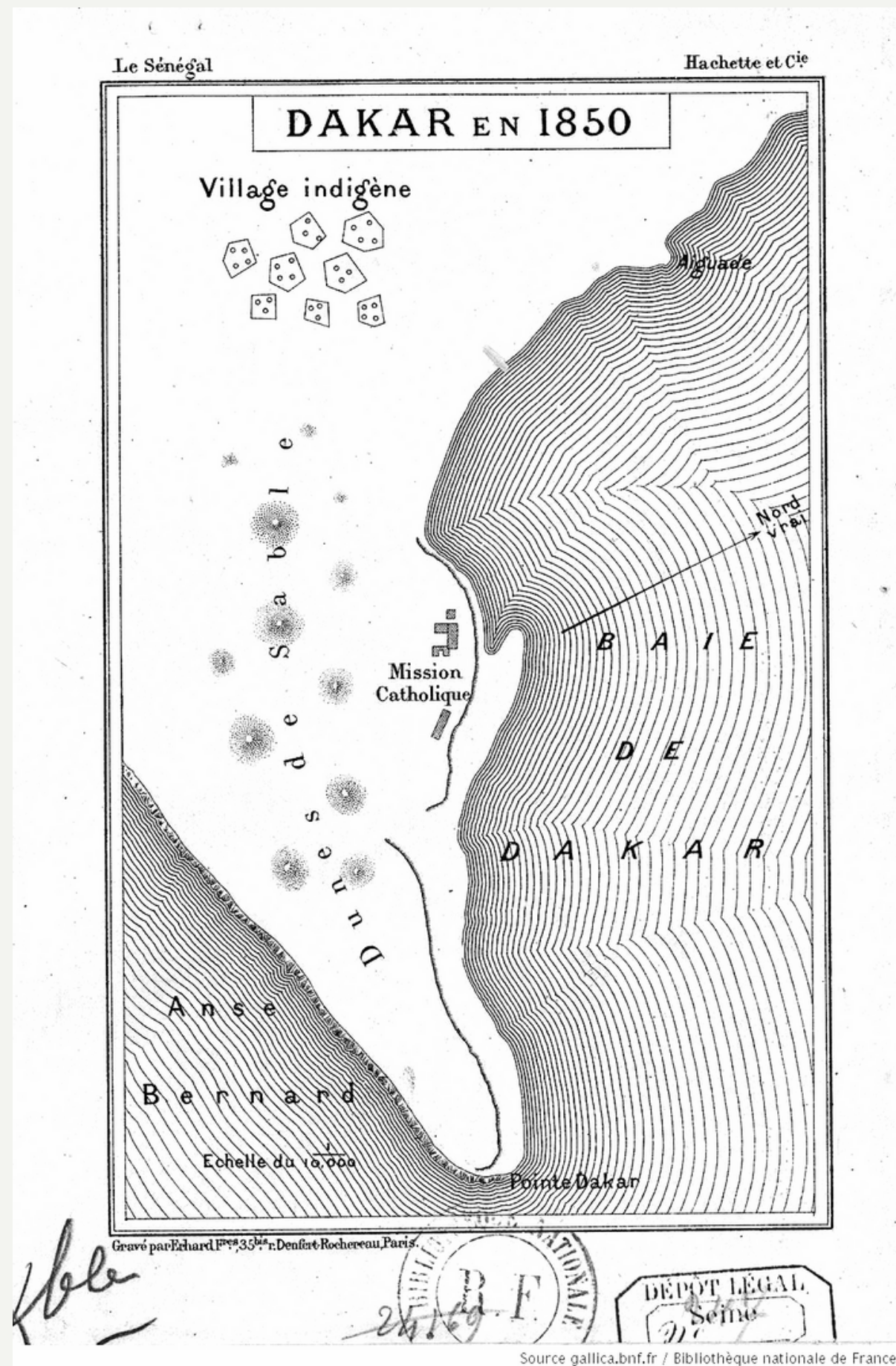
Almost all urbanization is expected to take place in low- and middle-income countries, where the urban population will rise by about 75 percent.

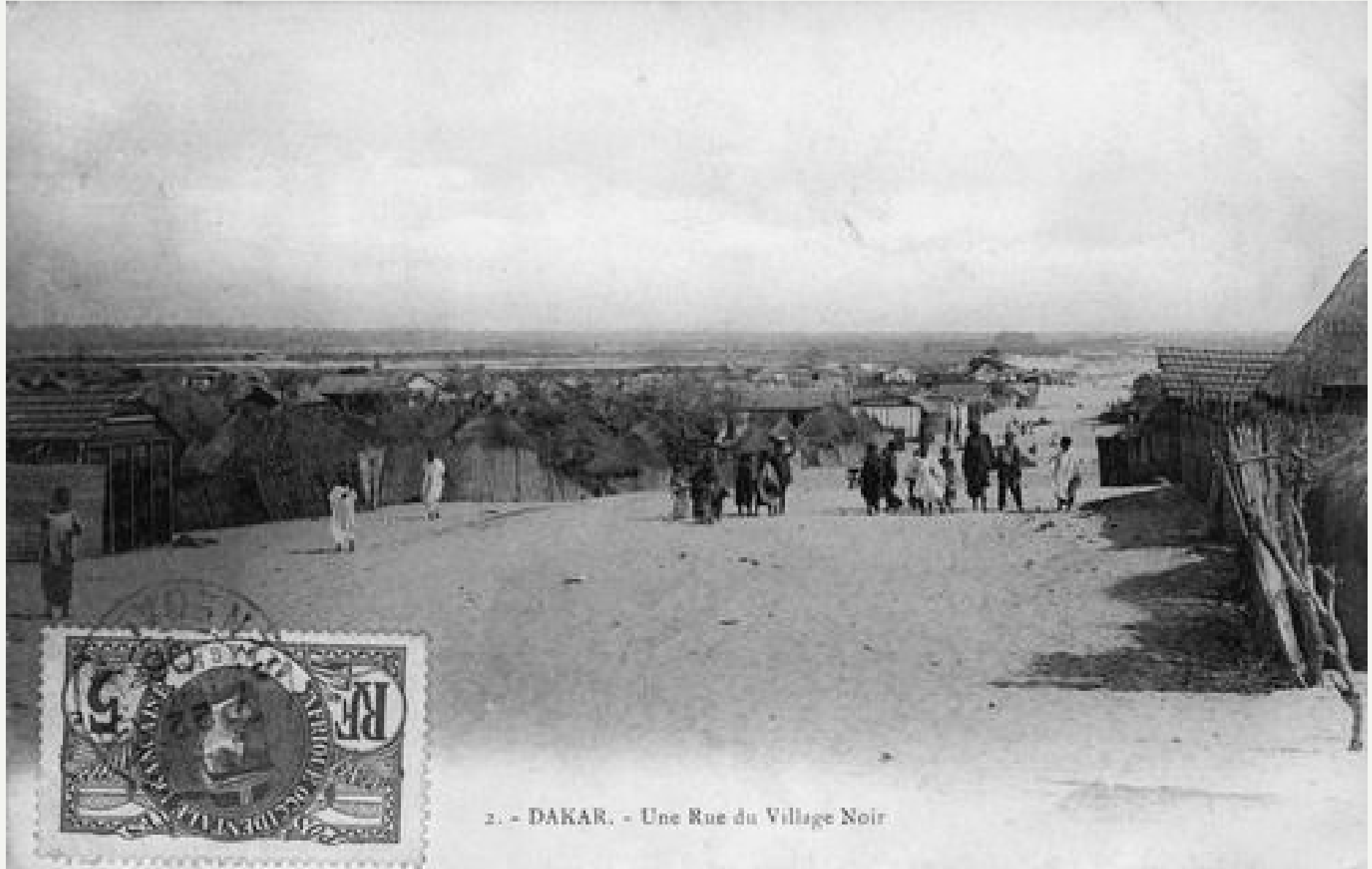
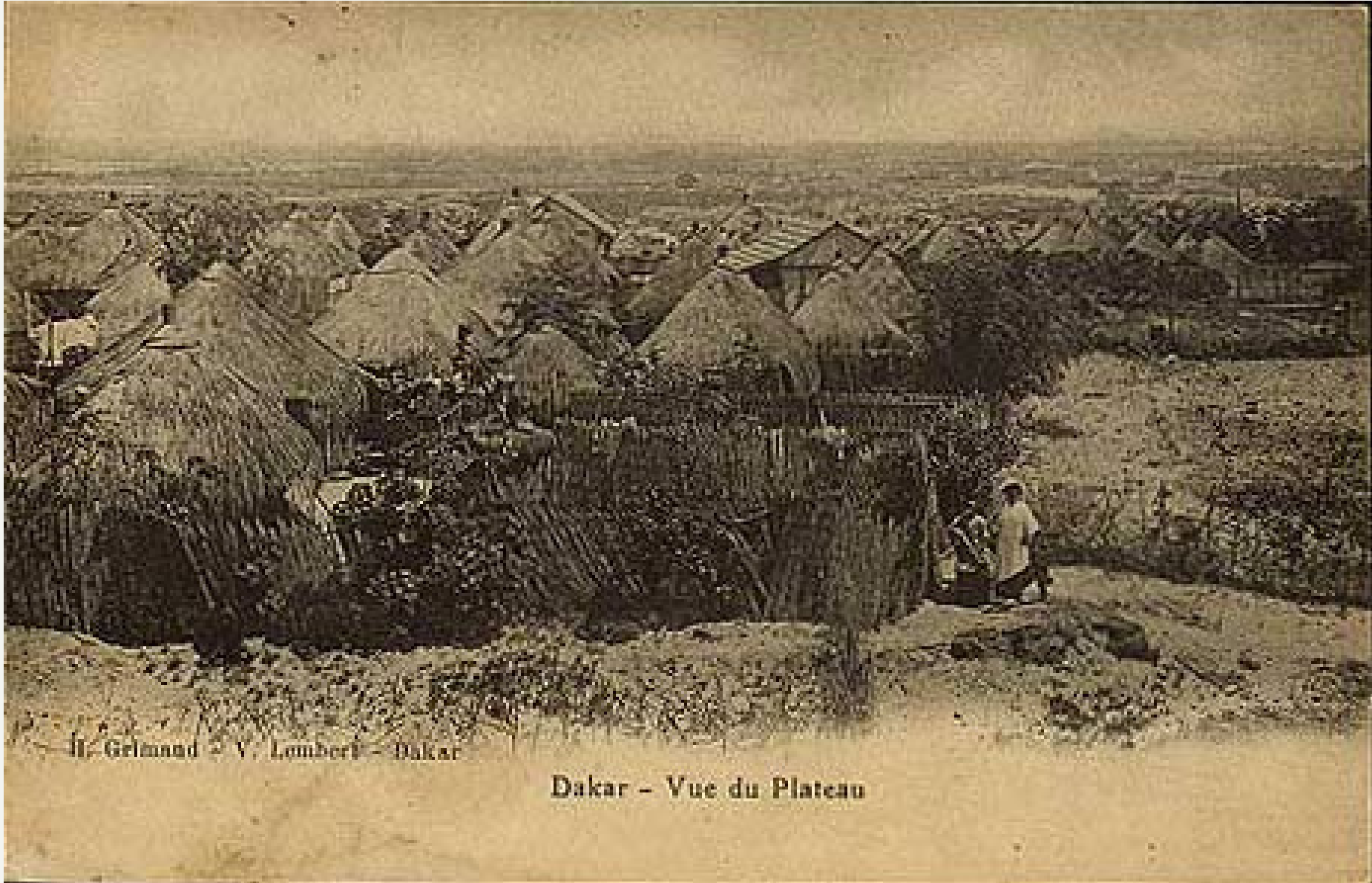
DECOLONIZING URBAN THEORY

*As a result, the study of African urbanism has been defined by a perception of the ‘**colonial terrain**’ as a ‘**passive receptor**’ of **imported ideas without precolonial forms of urbanisation** (Bigon, 2016).*

TABULA RASA?

- The continent was not 'devoid of urban development' before colonialism and was home to several cities, such as Zanzibar and Ibadan, as well as major hubs along trade routes, including Timbuktu and Djenne which had similar characteristics to pre-industrial cities elsewhere in the world (Stewart, 1996).
 - Gao (Mali), Thaba Bosiu (Lesotho), Umgungundlovu (South Africa), Kumasi (Ghana), Ife (Nigeria) and Kilwa (Tanzania) are other notable examples of pre-colonial African cities.
 - The populations of Gao, Timbuktu and Djenne, in Mali, amounted to 15,000-80,000 inhabitants, while Ibadan, in Nigeria, was home to about 70,000 people prior to colonialism (Hopkins, 1973; Stewart, 1996).
 - The history of empire is a history of dispossession, the effect of which has affected both the cities of the coloniser and the colonised and allows for a better understanding of the state of African and southern cities in the 21st century.
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→ **GLOBAL POLITICAL ECONOMY**

→ **POLICY FIX**

→ **SOCIOSPATIAL INFRASTRUCTURES**

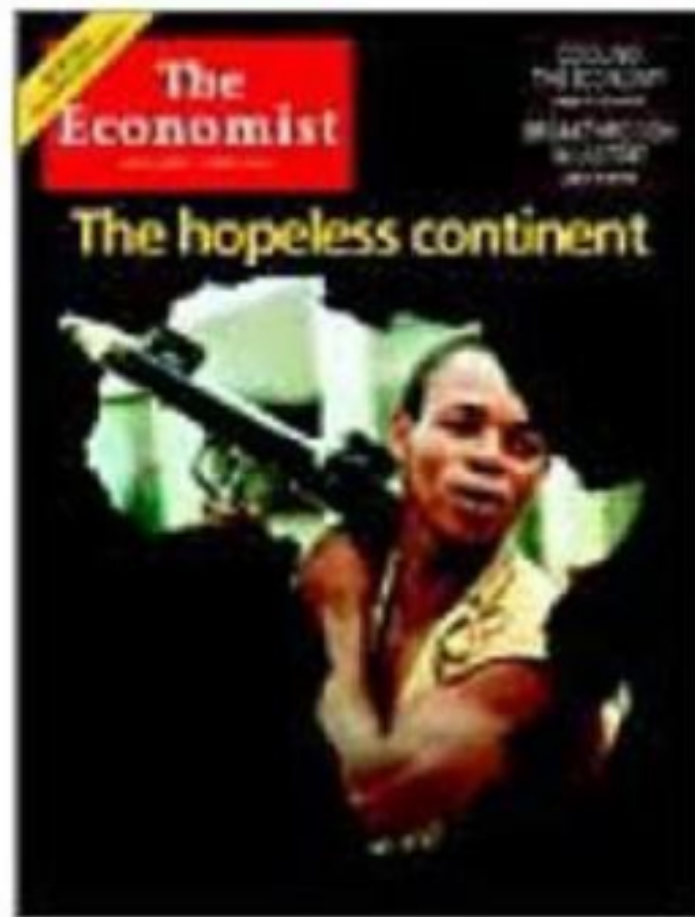


GLOBAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

- The global political economy approach consists of perspectives based on the spatial workings of capitalism and state regulation.
- The bulk of this literature is focused on ‘big structural factors’ that drive Africa’s economic marginalisation in the world order and considers how these processes are ‘captured’ by political elites (Pieterse, 2017).
- This literature characterises cities across the continent as ‘incomplete or deteriorated examples of modernity’ in the global economy (Harrison, 2006).
- An important criticism levied against the global political economy approach is its failure to acknowledge longue-durée processes that explain the current state of affairs in African cities. Specifically, this approach does not adequately address the historical impacts of ‘colonial plunder’ and the intentional underdevelopment of countries and cities kept ‘economically subservient’ in a supplier relationship with former empires (Simone & Pieterse, 2017, pg. 50; Arrighi, 2010).

Davis, 2008; Kaplan, 1994; Cheru, 2005; Fay and Opal 1999

2000



2011



2013



2019



The Economist captures the 'changing narrative' surrounding the African continent; while the May 2000 front cover was cynically titled 'Hopeless Africa'; by February 2001, this had shifted to 'Africa's elusive dawn'; in July 2005, 'Helping Africa to help itself'; in December 2011, 'Africa rising' and by March 2013, the headline read 'Aspiring Africa'.

POLICY FIX

- The 'policy fix' approach looks at development 'deficits' and identifies sites and sectors for policy intervention.
- This type of literature evolves as development paradigms emerge in the international development sector.
- The primary focus of this approach is the institutional efficiency of the state and the requisite policy for managing complex urbanisation processes.
- The policy fix approach utilises terms that are implicitly biased towards a western model of development in the emphasis on economic growth, normative planning policies, and the integration and normalisation of urban governance structures (e.g. informality and grey spacing)

AfDB, 2010; World Bank, 2014; UN HABITAT, 2008; ILO, 2002; Beall et al., 2010

SOCIOSPATIAL INFRASTRUCTURES

- The socio-spatial approach aims at a 'fine-grained' understanding of urban life by looking at the influence of colonialism, ethnicity, culture, planning, economic development, etc. to generate deeper insight into how the urban poor negotiate livelihoods in the city despite considerable impediments.
- This approach is based on ethnographic research and in-depth case studies that 'illuminate the nature of social life' and give voice to the subaltern (Pieterse, 2009).
- The socio-spatial infrastructures approach tries to understand how urbanites of the 'global south' cope with difficult living conditions and survive in circumstances of marginality. The focus on survival strategies and agency generates an understanding of cities as 'centres of generative, imaginative, or creative energies' in contrast to the 'wounded urbicides' of global political economy and policy fix (Myers, 2011)
- African cities are framed as precursors to a 'new kind of urbanism' previously ignored by the discourses of western modernity but 'perfectly adapted' to the challenges of the 21st century (Gandy, 2005).

Bigon, 2010; Beeckmans, 2014; Myers, 2011; Robinson, 2006; Mcfarlane & Rutherford, 2008;

INTRODUCING 'CITYNESS'

'Cityness' can seem to be a nebulous concept but can broadly be explained as a theoretical concept capturing the essence of urban life and dynamics that exist uniquely within 'global south' cities, beyond 'global north' frameworks.

- The term highlights the importance of local knowledge, everyday practices, and community resilience.
- It recognizes informal solutions and adaptations as legitimate and insightful and relevant to the realities of the urban environment
- It encourages contextually relevant urban policy and development approaches in contrast to current urban theories often fail to accurately reflect realities in the 'global south'
- It calls on urban theorists, planners, and policymakers to actively engage with and support the development of contextually relevant theories and solutions.

CASE STUDY: BRICOLEURS

Borrowing from Levi-Strauss (1962), we can argue that the urbanites of African cities are the 'bricoleurs' of a 'new urban sociality' (Simone, 2010);

'...the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions.'



Stefan Gladieu, Dakar Arty



Stefan Gladieu, Dakar Arty



Stefan Gladieu, Dakar Arty



Stefan Gladieu, Dakar Arty

Bayat (2013) observes; 'strolling through streets of Cairo, Tehran, Dakar or Jakarta in the midst of a working day, one is astonished by the presence of so many people operating in the streets – working, running around, standing, sitting, negotiating, driving or riding on buses or trams. These individuals represent the relatively new subaltern of the neoliberal city.'

CASE STUDIES OF CITYNESS

Lagos, Nigeria:

Informal markets as critical economic hubs, demonstrating resilience and innovation in challenging circumstances.

São Paulo, Brazil:

Creative housing strategies, including participatory and informal land-use practices that respond dynamically to local needs.

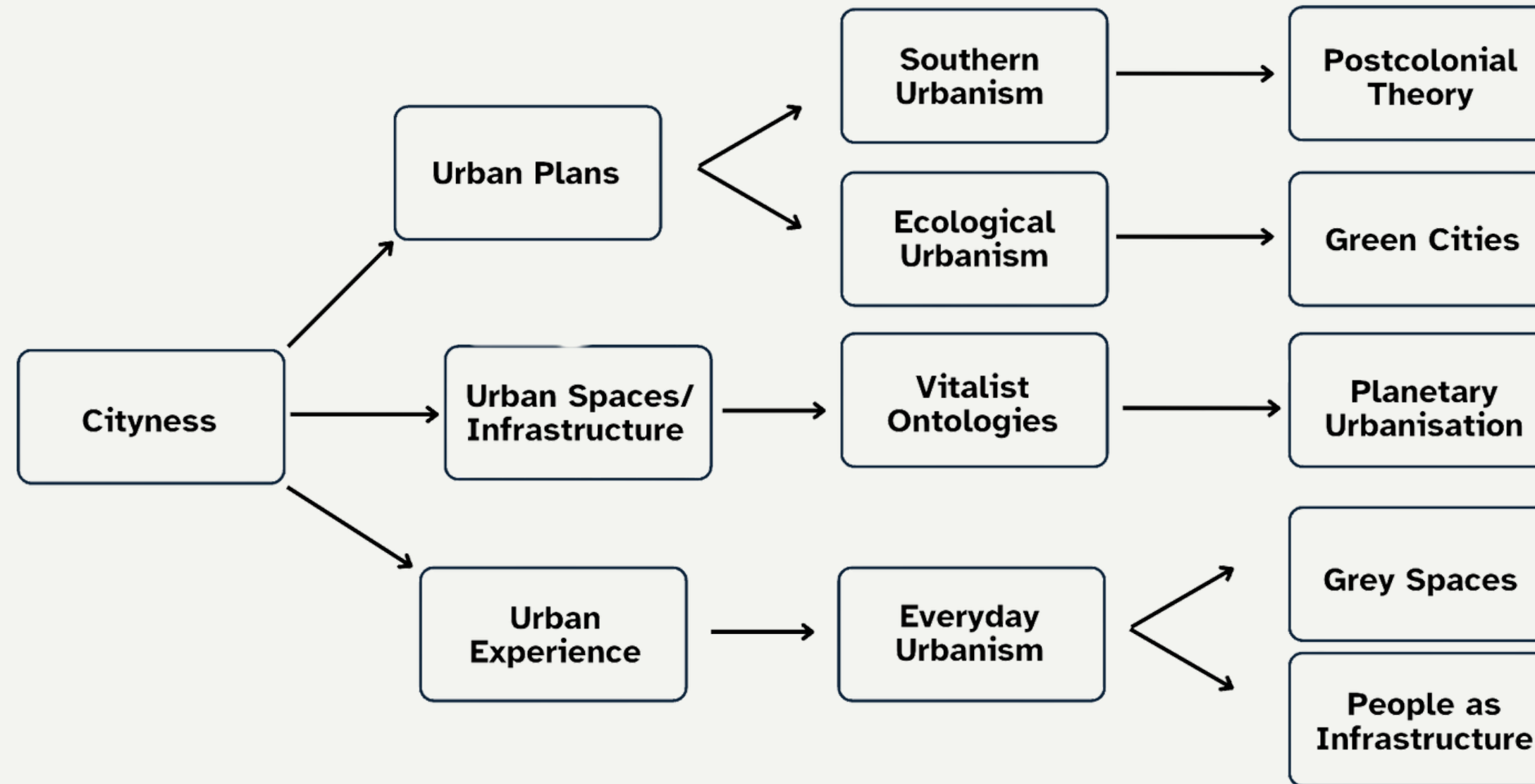
Mumbai, India:

Community-driven infrastructure and sanitation initiatives, reflecting grassroots innovation in managing rapid urban growth.

Johannesburg, South Africa:

Policy experimentation in tackling apartheid-era spatial segregation, emphasizing community-based adaptation and local solutions.

SITUATING 'CITYNESS'



CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- Institutional biases favoring ‘global north’ knowledge
- Data scarcity and challenges in quantifying informal sectors
- Limited research funding for ‘global south’-specific urban studies
- Cross-regional collaboration and knowledge-sharing
- The emergence of new theories and practices rooted in local contexts
- Potential for equitable and inclusive urban futures through informed policymaking

*Urban processes and practices in the 'global south' are **not 'inadequate copies, or distortions' of northern developments but instead have 'their own logics' and represent unique and 'creative adaptations of the modern'** (Harrison, 2006).*

THANK YOU

QUESTIONS?

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