



## The Urban Explosion



### *Introduction*

Explore a major dilemma of the 21st Century: how to sustain the world's exploding urban population without destroying the delicate balance of our environment. Locations: Mexico City, Istanbul, Shanghai and New York City.

For the first time in history, more than half the population of the world now lives in cities. The need to shelter and sustain this population without destroying the delicate balance of the environment is a major dilemma for the coming century.

Bustling Mexico City has become a symbol of all that could go wrong with urban development. The city's air is so thick with smog that eight out of ten days are declared hazardous to human health. The city's center has sunk 30 feet in the last 100 years as the city depletes its once abundant underground water supply, squeezing the ground like a sponge. Raw sewage flows through open canals, carrying disease to surrounding farmlands. Journey to Planet Earth looks at what went wrong and at some of the community-based efforts to find solutions.

*Mexico City pulses with energy but thanks to its geography, population and the internal combustion engine, it is on the verge of environmental disaster.*

Lying astride Europe and Asia, Istanbul, capital of three great empires, has long been a cosmopolitan city. Economic and political refugees from Turkey's outlying regions pour into this ancient city at the rate of 500,000 newcomers a year. Bisecting the city is one of the busiest waterways in the world, the Bosphorous. As shipping traffic increases, ferries and fishing boats share the narrow strait with tankers loaded with flammable cargo, with occasionally disastrous results. Renowned photographer Ara Guler takes Journey to Planet Earth on a tour of the changing face of his beloved city which now sprawls into the green countryside that once surrounded it. We visit the municipality of Esenyurt, which is facing these challenges head on.



*Built on the edge of two continents — Asia and Europe — Istanbul has always served as a bridge between the Orient and the trading centers of Europe and the Middle East. But this sophisticated waterfront city is near collapse as a rapid increase in population taxes its water, waste and housing resources.*

Shanghai is poised to recapture its role as the commercial capital of Asia. Already housing a population of 16 million, the city is attempting to rebuild its infrastructure as it faces increasing problems with pollution, water supply and waste treatment. Journey to Planet Earth looks at Shanghai's efforts to deal with the environmental issues facing a city that has chosen industrial growth over agricultural production.

*Home to thousands of multi-national corporations who see Shanghai as the financial capital of China, if not all Asia, this city has become a beacon to people looking for a better life. But the influx of millions of peasants from the countryside is pushing the city to its limit.*

Surrounded by water and built of steel, New York City is an example of a matured megalopolis whose explosive growth came long enough ago to allow it to establish the necessary infrastructure to provide clean air and safe drinking water for nearly all of its inhabitants. Journey to Planet Earth visits the neighborhoods of the South Bronx, Harlem and Brooklyn's Carroll Gardens to explore ways to improve and preserve the quality of urban life.

*New York has many advantages over Mexico City, Istanbul and Shanghai. When its first wave of immigrants arrived over 100 years ago, the city was forced to create an infrastructure to deal with the needs of its burgeoning population. That infrastructure still works today.*

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