

The Implications of Urbanization Processes in Developed Countries for Africa

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Urbanization is the inevitable path of national economic development, and the level of urbanization development in most African countries is still low. By analyzing five typical developed countries in the United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Japan, this paper discusses the promoting factors and problems of the rapid urbanization development in their specific years, as well as the experiences and lessons that Africa can learn, so as to prevent Africa from taking the detour in the urbanization process of Western developed countries and promote the balanced regional development of various African countries.

Keywords: developed countries, Africa, urbanization

Urbanization contributes to the economic development of a country. Many countries in Europe, West Asia, and South America have achieved high urbanization rates. Among them, Singapore, Monaco, and Nauru have achieved 100% urbanization. In 2023, the urbanization rates of the United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Japan respectively reached 82.9%, 85.5%, 83.9%, 77.1%, 93.5%, China 65%. The international urbanization rate reached 57.4%. The urbanization rate in Africa was only 44.7%.

Africa is a continent with rich resources and diverse cultures. Except for a few rich countries such as Seychelles, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritius, Gabon, and South Africa, the rest of African countries are basically weak in national power. Residents in some areas are still facing the threat of hunger. The African economy is in urgent need of accelerated development (Liu et al., 2023; Huang & Wang, 2023), so the development experience of developed countries is worth learning from.

The United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Japan are not only economically developed, but also among the best in the world in terms of culture, education, and welfare benefits. By analyzing five typical developed countries in the United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Japan, this paper discusses the promoting factors and problems of the rapid urbanization development in their specific years, as well as the experiences and lessons that Africa can learn, so as to prevent Africa from taking the detour in the urbanization process of Western developed countries and promote the balanced regional development of various African countries.

The experience of urbanization construction in developed countries is mainly summarized as *laissez-faire* (market-oriented model) and government-regulated model, and in the same country, different model

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combinations may be adopted; in addition, even if it is the same government-regulated model, different countries have different measures and experience.

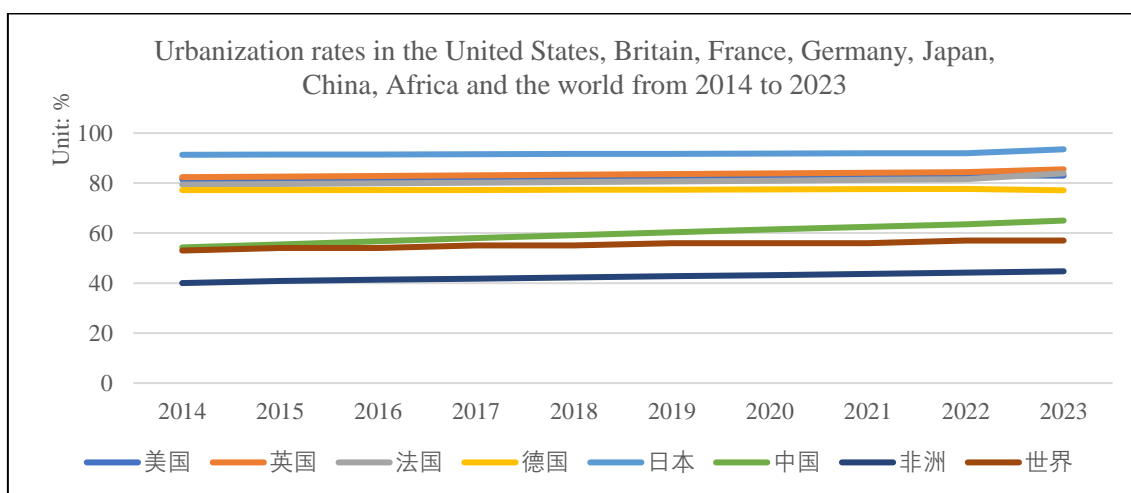


Figure 1. Urbanization rates in the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, China, Africa and the world from 2014 to 2023. Data source: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>, <https://data.worldbank.org.cn/indicator>.

The Process and Characteristics of Urbanization Development in the UK

In history, there are 21 colonial countries of Britain in Africa, which have a great influence on these countries: South Africa, Nigeria, Cameroon, Lesotho, Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Eswatini, Zambia, Uganda, Tonga, Seychelles, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Gambia, so the British experience of urbanization has certain significance.

Britain's urban population exceeded 50% in 1850, and the experience of urbanization in Britain can be summarized as a "trinity" model of market operation, government guidance, and public participation. The whole process of urbanization in Britain went through four stages: The first stage was from the 16th century to the 18th century, which was called the agricultural development period. The second period was from the 1760s to the 1830s, which can be called the Industrial Revolution. The third stage is from the 1830s to the middle of the 20th century, which belongs to the development period of emerging cities. The fourth stage is from the 1970s to the present, which is known as the period of counter-urbanization (Lu, 2023).

Characteristics of British urbanization:

(1) The urbanization of Britain is developed on the basis of the development of agriculture. The labor force engaged in agriculture was transferred to non-agricultural industries. The Industrial Revolution adjusted the industrial structure in Britain. With the end of the Industrial Revolution in the UK, the huge productivity brought about by the Industrial Revolution boosted manufacturing, mining, and construction.

(2) The agricultural, commercial, and transport revolutions created the necessary conditions for the development of urbanization in Britain. The agricultural revolution, which provided raw materials, markets, and industrial workers for the Industrial Revolution, promoted urbanization. The commercial revolution accumulated capital through overseas trade, which led to the outbreak of the Industrial Revolution and the large-scale rise of new cities in Britain. The transportation revolution has facilitated the movement of goods and people, shortened commuting distances, promoted suburban urbanization, and promoted the transformation of large urban agglomerations into small and medium-sized towns.

(3) The construction of legal system has provided support and guarantee for the development of urbanization in Britain. Through legislation, the government can solve social problems such as urban diseases in the process of urbanization development, which is conducive to building a perfect social security system, strengthening people's environmental awareness, optimizing the order of urbanization, and improving the quality of urbanization.

(4) Rural industry and small towns develop in harmony. The development of rural industry transfers part of the rural labor force from agriculture to industry, realizes the local transformation of farmers, promotes the transformation of British countryside into small towns, and speeds up the pace of rural urbanization (Cai, 2023).

Characteristics of Urbanization Development in France

Today, France still has enormous influence and interests in Africa. Of the 54 countries in Africa, 29 are French-speaking, and French is the second most commonly spoken language in Africa and one of the official languages of the African Union. France's trade with Africa accounts for 5% of France's total trade, and Africa is France's third largest export market and fourth largest source of imports. France's investment in Africa accounts for 10% of France's total investment, and Africa is France's second largest investment destination. France has seven military bases in Africa, with more than 10,000 troops, participating in a number of peacekeeping operations and counter-terrorism operations in Africa.

The following African countries or regions were once French colonies: Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central Africa, Chad, Chagos Islands, Comoros, Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Gabon, Al Gambia Albreda and Kunta Kinteh Island, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Togo. The urbanization development experience of Tunisia and France is relatively easy to promote in these countries.

The Central African Economic and Monetary Community can be used for pilot projects. Because of their close business ties with France, France's total imports from the Central African Economic and Monetary Community will reach 1.9 billion euros in 2022, a year-on-year increase of 155%. France's trade deficit with the Central African Economic and Monetary Community will reach 300 million euros in 2022. By country, France imports the most from Cameroon, reaching 641 million euros, followed by Gabon (537 million euros), Congo (329 million euros), Chad (80 million euros), the Central African Republic (31 million euros), and Equatorial Guinea (23 million euros).

The start of urbanization in France (1830) was more than half a century later than that in Britain (1755). Characteristics of French urbanization:

(1) The pace of urbanization in France is relatively slow. Its urbanization development speed is relatively uniform, does not pursue speed, and pays attention to quality. It took 81 years for the level of urbanization in France to rise from 10% to 44.2% in 1911, and 101 years for it to exceed 50%. The characteristics of French smallholder economy are prominent and the land is scattered, which makes the farm develop slowly. The impact of the industrial revolution on the traditional industrial structure of France is not obvious, light industry such as handicraft industry still occupies an important position, and industrial development is slow. These factors restrict the transfer of the rural population to the city.

(2) Agricultural modernization also plays an important role in France's urbanization process. After World War II, the government provided subsidies and assistance to farmers by borrowing foreign debt, such as providing long-term low-interest loans, etc., to encourage farmers to purchase modern farm tools and equipment and

gradually improve agricultural modernization. In addition, through planning, special crop areas are formed to specialize agriculture. These measures have saved rural labor and provided sufficient labor for cities.

(3) France's urbanization construction focuses on infrastructure construction. In the process of urbanization, the government, based on long-term interests, adopts reasonable urban structure, convenient transportation, and ecological development concepts, rationally plans old cities, and protects ancient buildings and cultural relics; the government attaches great importance to the development of transportation, which gives the development of urbanization an inherent driving force (Liu, Zhou, & Tan, 2022); in recent years, the French government has implemented a series of measures to solve urban pollution and encourage people to travel green, with remarkable results.

(4) The market leads, and the government assists. From the 1790s to the 1840s, the government and farmers freely allocated and traded agricultural and non-agricultural land through the market, promoting a higher degree of marketization in cities. In the mid-1950s, in order to enhance the economic ability of small farmers to carry out technological transformation, the French government promoted land centralization, promoted large-scale operations (Zhao & Rong, 2022), and introduced a series of measures to transfer rural surplus labor and encourage young people to work in urban enterprises.

The Process and Experience of Urbanization Development in the United States

The United States is a big country with rich resources. It not only has strong economic strength, but also has many developed big cities. These cities are often economic, cultural, and political centers and have an important influence on the entire country. New York City is the largest economic center in the United States, with a GDP of more than 1.6 trillion US dollars, exceeding the total economic output of 40 states in the United States. San Francisco is the most prosperous technology city in the United States, home to many world-renowned technology companies. Washington, D.C. is the largest government center in the United States, home to a large number of federal agencies and think tanks.

In 2023, the urbanization rate in the United States was approximately 82.9%, of which California, New Jersey, and Massachusetts rank the top three. The Top 5 most densely populated cities are: Los Angeles, San Francisco, SAN Jose, Delano, New York. The United States urbanization development is not balanced; the urbanization rate of the region ranking is: West—89.8%, Northeast—85%, Midwest—75.9%, South—75.8%. And the densest cities do not necessarily coincide with the most urbanized.

The development of urbanization in the United States can be roughly divided into three stages: first, the agricultural modernization stage before 1860; second, the industrialization period from 1860 to 1920; the third is the informationization stage from 1920 to the present.

The urbanization development of the United States has the characteristics of typical urbanization development of Western developed countries. Before 1800, when the majority of U.S. residents lived in rural areas, the urbanization level was only 6.1%. Beginning in 1830, the advanced technology of the Industrial Revolution was transmitted to the United States, and the continuous improvement of agricultural labor productivity led to the continuous transfer of agricultural labor force to non-agricultural industries. In the late 1840s, when the urbanization level was about 16%, it entered the second stage of urbanization development. It entered the third stage when the urbanization level was about 60% after the end of World War II, which coincided with the rapid development of urbanization caused by the transportation upheaval and the widespread use of

steam engine and factory system in the United States from the 1840s, and the accelerated spread of suburbanization after World War II. The urbanization development experience of the United States:

(1) The improvement of agricultural modernization level is the prerequisite for the development of urbanization in the United States. There are just over two million farmers in the United States. This accounts for less than 2% in a country with a population of more than 300 million. However, they produce about 20% of the world's food. The output and export volume of major crop products such as wheat, corn, soybeans, and cotton are among the best in the world. Among them, corn exports account for 70% of the world's exports, and soybeans account for 85%, almost in a monopoly position.

(2) The role of government in promoting urbanization. In the early and middle stage of urbanization development in the United States, mainly relying on the leading role of the market, the urbanization level of 50% is the best entry point for government policy makers. The government accelerates the formulation of laws and regulations on urban planning and industrial planning by implementing effective regional coordination and management, merging cities and counties (Chen, Wang, Ma, & Wang, 2023). At the same time, the government pays attention to the protection of the environment, and emphasizes the intensive use of land and forest resources, and the development concept is people-oriented.

(3) The urban layout and urbanization development in the United States go hand in hand. The major cities in the United States are located in different regions of the country and are widely distributed. Each city has unique characteristics and economic development advantages, and brings more opportunities and challenges to the entire country. Driven by globalization and technological advancement, these cities continue to attract talent and investment.

(4) Many large cities in the United States have satellite suburbs (Shen & Gu, 2023). The highly developed level of urbanization in the United States is not reflected in the super cities, but in the flowering of small towns. In the United States, there are 30 cities with a population of more than 500,000, of which 10 cities have a population of more than one million, distributed in different parts of the country¹. Small towns with less than 100,000 people account for approximately 99.3% of the total number of cities, or nearly 35,000. These small towns around the layout of big cities form a dense urban agglomeration (belt), through the emphasis on urban suburban infrastructure construction, the characteristics of urban and rural integration in the United States is becoming more and more obvious, the difference between rural and town is becoming smaller and smaller, people living in the countryside, than those in big cities, and the "happiness index" is probably much higher.

Germany's Urbanization Development Experience

Germany has a population of more than 83 million and a land area of 357,376 square kilometers. Germany's urbanization development has taken a relatively rare path. The population does not really gather in cities, and the industrialized industry is not concentrated in cities, but a large number of small towns with distinct themes are the main carriers of urbanization. As one of the world's major developed economies, Germany reached an urban rate of 62% as early as 1910. However, with such a high urban rate, Germany did not have a single super-large city. Germany implements a decentralized and agglomeration urban development model (Li, 2022). The population does not gather in large cities and does not form megacities. Germany's average population density

¹ Distribution map of major cities in the United States, overview of the distribution of major cities in the United States, 2023-05-11, <https://www.jyxxzz.cn/lxgh/wyjy/430543.html>.

is not low, but Germany's topography, population distribution, and urban layout give people the feeling of a vast land and sparsely populated areas.

(1) The population is evenly distributed. Most Germans live in small and medium-sized cities with a population of less than one million, evenly distributed in small and medium-sized cities across the country. These cities are evenly scattered throughout Germany. There are only four cities in Germany with a population of more than one million, Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, and Cologne. The capital Berlin has a population of about 3.6 million. There are also 11 cities with a population of more than 500,000 but less than one million. The remaining cities have a population of less than 500,000.

(2) Each city has a complete municipal system and infrastructure, and there are convenient and fast transportation systems between neighboring cities (Li, 2023).

(3) Germany's political centers, financial centers, industrial centers, and transportation centers are often scattered in various cities. For example, Berlin is Germany's political, cultural, transportation, and economic center, Frankfurt is Europe's financial center and transportation hub, and Hamburg is Germany's most important seaport and largest foreign trade center. Germany has never formed a super-large city that integrates politics, economy, science and technology, culture, and transportation centers like Beijing in China, London in the United Kingdom, Paris in France, and Tokyo in Japan.

(4) Germany's rural development also has its own unique features. Germany's agricultural management system mainly includes two parts: family farms and agricultural socialized service systems. Family farms in Germany are the main body of agricultural production and operation, and the government is able to provide a series of agricultural support and subsidies to stabilize their main position. The agricultural socialization service system is the subject of the agricultural management system. There are many types of agricultural organizations in Germany, including industry and regional agricultural organizations, as well as cross-regional and national agricultural organizations, which basically cover all business processes such as agricultural product production, processing, sales, and services.

(5) Vigorously develop agricultural modernization. German agriculture is highly mechanized. Currently, agricultural employees account for about 2% of the total population who manage and maintain half of the country's total agricultural land. On average, each farmer feeds 120 people or more, and more than 80% of agricultural products can be self-sufficient². A family farm in Germany can be regarded as an agricultural enterprise. The high degree of individual modernization and specialization promotes the overall mechanization and scale of German agriculture.

(6) Fiscal policy tilt. The three largest expenditures of the German government finance are: One is the subsidy to agriculture, which is conducive to the improvement of agricultural mechanization and continuous upgrading; second, subsidies for housing, rental industry, and housing construction industry are conducive to balanced population distribution; the third is the subsidy for the transportation industry, which is conducive to the support of logistics for economic development. Germany's fiscal leaning policy is very beneficial to the balanced development of economy, especially the balanced development of urbanization.

Japan's Urbanization Development Experience

As a developed country in Asia, Japan's urbanization rate in 2023 has reached 93.5%. Due to its small land

² Yang Peichang, The secret of Germany's rich people and strong country, work of Shandong People's Congress, 2012-08-15.

area and limited development space, Japan has taken a highly intensive urbanization mode with the spatial agglomeration of metropolitan areas. In a limited space, it quickly focuses on unlimited resources, production, and living factors (Xu, 2022), and many experiences are worth learning.

In 1945, Japan's urbanization rate was only 28%. In 1955, the urbanization rate quickly rose to 56%. In 2011, this figure exceeded 90%, which was a leading level in Asia.

Japan's urbanization has taken four steps: industrialization, metropolitan areas, transportation systems, and satellite cities. Industrialization is the first driving force for Japan's urbanization, the metropolitan area is the core platform for Japan's high-speed urbanization, and the three-dimensional and convenient transportation system and a large number of satellite cities are important supports for Japan's urbanization.

In order to effectively avoid problems such as subjective deviations from human factors and laissez-faire disorderly growth in the process of urbanization, Japan attaches great importance to legal protection and planning first. The government has successively promulgated Comprehensive Land Development Law, Three Major Metropolitan Area Development Plans, and other series of laws and regulations (Luan & Kang, 2023); through scientific planning and effective guidance, the market mechanism can play the role of allocating resources in the urbanization process.

Through airports, highways, high-speed Shinkansen lines, subways, trams, and water transportation, Japan has formed a convenient three-dimensional transportation network system of sea, land, air, and underground, which has become another important guarantee for Japan's urbanization development. It not only strengthens the driving and radiating effects of the metropolis, but also promotes the creation of a large number of functional satellite cities around the metropolis that play an important role in relieving various pressures on the metropolis.

Conclusion

Urbanization is an inevitable process for the economic development of nations. Although the level of urbanization development in most African countries is relatively low, the urbanization process in Africa is accelerating, making it the fastest-growing region in urbanization globally. However, it also faces numerous challenges, with some African countries experiencing significant imbalance between urbanization and socio-economic development.

African countries exhibit significant differences in economic foundations and development levels, leading to varying degrees of urbanization. With urbanization rates ranging from over 89% to less than 20%, the requirements for urbanization development vary greatly among African nations. Therefore, African countries should take into account their own geographical, cultural, political, and economic backgrounds and judiciously absorb the urbanization development experiences of developed countries.

This paper analyzes five typical developed countries—the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Japan—to explore the factors that have accelerated urbanization development in specific periods and the problems that have arisen. It also discusses the lessons and experiences that Africa can draw from these countries to help avoid pitfalls in urbanization development.

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