

WORLD URBAN FORUM
THIRTEENTH SESSION

URBAN INDEX OF SHENZHEN

UIS City Observation Report: Livability



CONTENTS

01 UNDERSTANDING LIVABILITY: CONCEPT AND FRAMEWORK 04

02 OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF URBAN LIVABILITY 08

03 ASSESSING LIVABILITY BY OBJECTIVE 14

[1] SETTLEMENT 14

[2] QUALITY 17

[3] OPPORTUNITY 22

04 INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 26



PREFACE

Today, the world is rapidly entering the urban age, with cities becoming the core spaces for population concentration, economic activity, social innovation, and the evolution of civilization. In 2024, approximately 56% of the global population lived in urban areas, a share projected to rise to around 68% by 2050. At the same time, although cities occupy only about 2% of the world's land area, they generate more than 80% of global GDP. As urbanization continues to deepen, challenges such as population mobility, resource constraints, climate risks, and uneven development are becoming increasingly intertwined. How to promote more inclusive, intelligent, and sustainable urban development has therefore become a critical issue shared by cities around the world. It is against this backdrop that the Urban Index of Shenzhen (UIS) was created. Rooted in Shenzhen's own practices and oriented toward global urban governance, UIS seeks to translate the values, analytical framework, and practical experience of urban development into an international public good. It aims to provide cities worldwide with a framework for understanding cities, a roadmap for action, and a collection of transferable practices.

Centered on the development of a modern people-centered city, UIS has established an agenda framework structured around six dimensions: innovation, livability, aesthetics, resilience, humanism, and intelligence. Building on this framework, it has further developed a 6+20+50+X indicator system, comprising 6 dimensions, 20 objectives, 50 core indicators, and an open indicator pool that will continue to expand over time, with an emphasis on continuous iteration and dynamic updating. At the same time, UIS is expanding its global cooperation and application system by building an international network of experts and advancing initiatives in urban diagnostics, outstanding case selection, capacity building, scholarships, and forums. By linking index research, knowledge translation, and international exchange, UIS serves not only as a tool for observing cities, but also as an open platform for global exchange and collaboration.

This report is one of the outcomes under the six dimensions of UIS, with focus on Livability. It looks beyond the static assessment of living environments commonly found in typical livability indicators, and further asks whether a city can truly support people's daily lives, nurture their physical and mental well-being, and enable their long-term development.Based on this perspective, the report adopts "Settlement–quality-opportunity"as its basic structure. It develops a livability evaluation framework around three levels: stable settlement, quality of life, and sustained development. The report assesses 20 representative sample cities, seeking to reveal their structural characteristics, strengths and challenges in terms of livability. As the Livability chapter of UIS, this report is intended to support future research on other dimensions, the continuous iteration of the index, and broader global communication.

01 UNDERSTANDING LIVABILITY: CONCEPT AND FRAMEWORK

Livability has evolved with the changing course of urban development. It is not a fixed standard, but a concept that has been continually redefined as cities move through different stages of economic, social, and technological change. In this sense, the pursuit of livability reflects an ongoing effort to place people at the center of urban development. From the early focus on survival, sanitation, and order, cities gradually moved toward efficiency, convenience, and comfort, and later toward vitality, diversity, environmental quality, equity, resilience, and long-term adaptability. Today, livability is no longer a static description of the living environment. It is a key lens for assessing a city's overall quality, development performance, and ability to support people over time. At its core, livability asks whether a city can respond to human needs, enhance well-being, and remain stable and adaptive amid uncertainty.

	1800-1950	1950–1990	1990–2010	2010–present
Process	Industrialization: Order and Sanitation	Post-war Modernization and Early Globalization: Efficiency and Comfort	Globalization and the Internet Age: Vitality and Sustainability	Digitalization and Multiple Risks: Equity and Resilience
Background	The Industrial Revolution drove rapid urban expansion, leading to high population density, overcrowded housing, and growing challenges in public health and urban order.	Post-war reconstruction, welfare-state development, automobile use, and infrastructure expansion reshaped urban space, with suburbanization and increased mobility becoming key features.	Globalization, the knowledge economy, and internet industries shifted urban competition toward talent, innovation, and lifestyle appeal, while climate and sustainability issues gained prominence	The digital revolution has unfolded alongside financial, climate, and public health crises, bringing greater uncertainty and systemic risks to urban governance.
Global context	•Rise of public health systems •Garden City movement	•UN Habitat I •expansion of suburban middle-class lifestyles	•UN Habitat II •EIU, Mercer livability index tool •rise of the creative class theory	•UN SDGs framework •2015 Paris Agreement •Habitat III / New Urban Agenda
Understanding of livability	**Survival as the baseline, public health, infrastructure, and urban order**	**Better physical conditions, transport convenience, public safety, and everyday comfort**	**Quality of place, cultural vitality, ecological awareness, and lifestyle appeal**	**Equity, resilience, inclusion, well-being, and long-term adaptability**

Evolution of livability

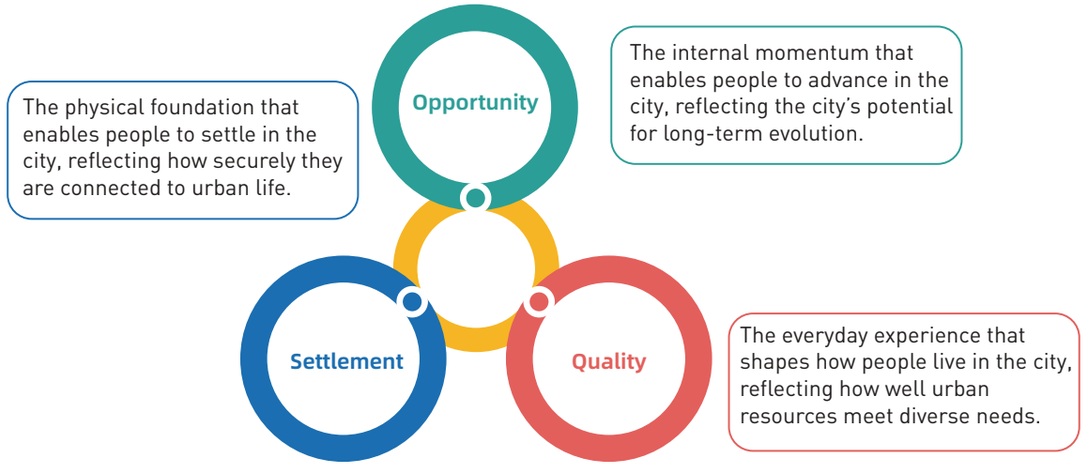
Existing international livability assessments, such as the EIU Global Liveability Index and Mercer Quality of Living Ranking, tend to measure a city's capacity to provide healthcare, education, infrastructure, safety, and other essential services. In essence, they ask what a city has. In recent years, other assessments have begun to pay more attention to whether residents can access and use public resources. However, they still largely focus on static outcomes and comparisons across individual indicators. Building on this, UIS places greater emphasis on a broader understanding of livability. It looks not only at whether urban services are sufficient and accessible, but also at whether a city can support people's long-term development and maintain a dynamic balance throughout the process of urban growth.



This understanding is closely rooted in Shenzhen's own development experience. As a high-density, fast-growing, and highly mobile city, Shenzhen has gone through a compressed process of modernization over just more than four decades, with population growth, industrial upgrading, spatial expansion, and improvements in quality of life unfolding almost simultaneously. The city has had to create conditions for large numbers of newcomers to enter, settle, and build a stable life. At the same time, it has had to continuously improve everyday living conditions and provide space for people's long-term development. It is through this process of balancing multiple goals at once that Shenzhen has developed a livability framework centered on "Settlement, Quality, and Opportunity".

Objectives	Indicators	Definition
Settlement	Housing support	Measured by a composite housing security index, including the rent burden ratio — the ratio of median urban rent to median household disposable income — and the supply rate of affordable housing, measured by the share of newly added policy-supported housing in total new housing supply.
	Basic service access	Measured by the coverage of basic public services. It reflects the share of urban areas where residents can conveniently access community services, healthcare, education, and other essential public facilities within a 15-minute living circle.
	Health and longevity	Measured by life expectancy, indicating the average number of years residents are expected to live under current social conditions. It reflects the overall level of healthcare, living environment, quality of life, and social development.
Quality	Mobility efficiency	Measured by the average one-way commuting time. It reflects the convenience of daily travel and the planning, construction, and operational efficiency of urban transport infrastructure.
	Advanced service access	Measured by the coverage of enhanced public services. It reflects the share of urban areas where residents can conveniently access commercial, cultural, sports, entertainment, and other quality-of-life facilities within a 15-minute living circle.
	Open space quality	Measured by a combination of per capita open space, accessibility to parks, green spaces, squares, and other open spaces, as well as Numbeo's Green and Open Spaces Quality Index. It reflects the comfort and quality of the living environment.
	Third-place vitality	Measured by the density of third-place facilities, including cafés, teahouses, bars, bookstores, community activity centers, and other spaces that support social interaction and leisure, per square kilometer.
Opportunity	Demographic structure	Measured by the median age of the resident population. A moderate and stable median age indicates a healthier and more dynamic population structure.
	Human capital level	Measured by the share of the population with higher education, reflecting the city's human capital and potential for innovation-driven development.
	Income level	Measured by per capita disposable income and price levels, reflecting the income residents can allocate after accounting for the cost of living.

Building on this framework, UIS further develops a livability assessment system composed of three development objectives and ten indicators. The system looks not only at the performance of individual indicators, but also at the structural relationships and overall coordination among them. It aims to provide a more comprehensive picture of how cities perform on settlement, quality, and opportunity.



UIS livability framework

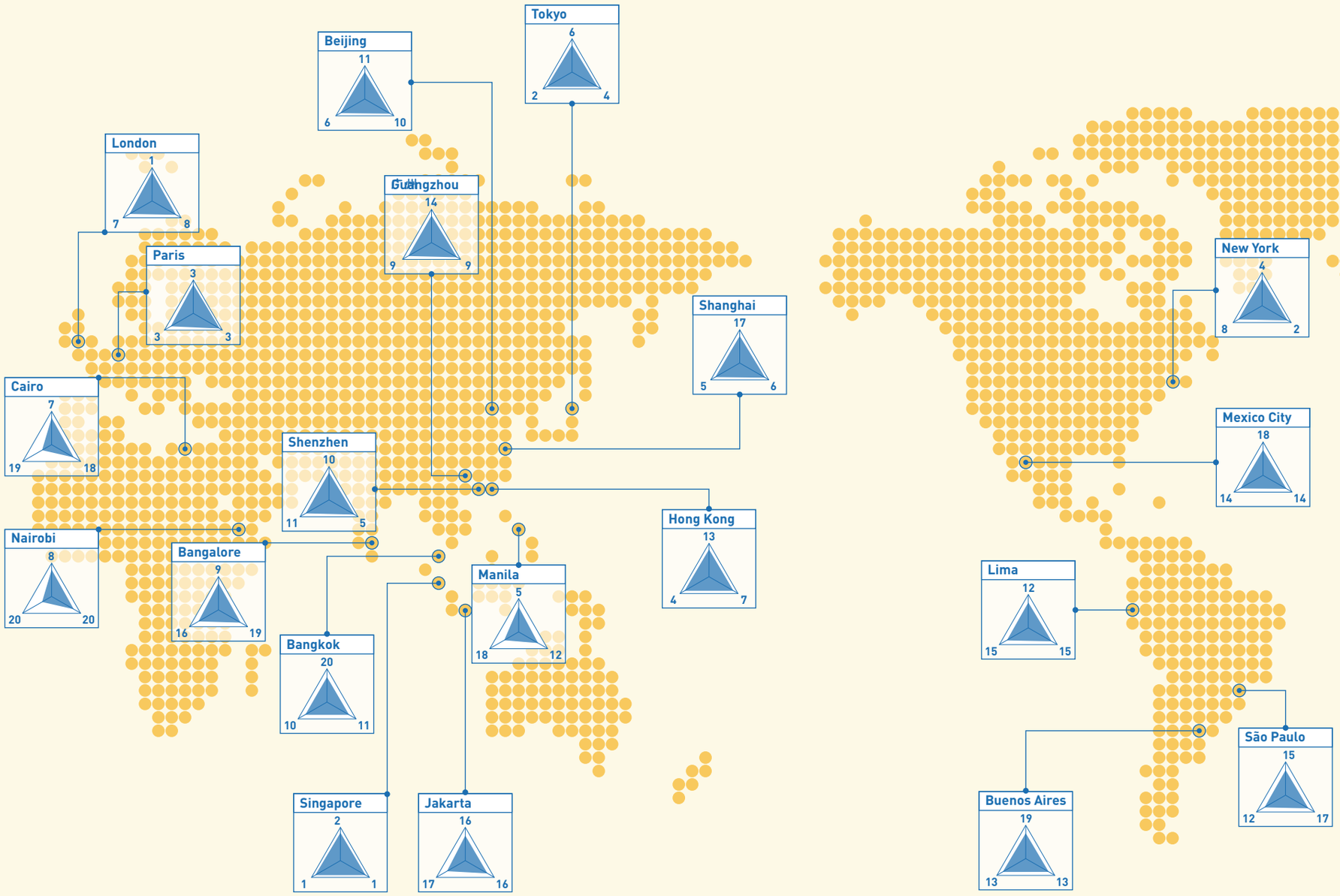
Settlement is about creating the basic conditions for people to establish themselves in the city. It forms the foundation for urban inclusion and long-term stability, allowing individuals to enter the city, stay, and develop a sense of belonging. It reflects whether a city can accommodate different groups in an inclusive and stable way, provide basic security, build confidence for the future, and lay a solid foundation for continued living and development.

Quality focuses on everyday experience. It shapes a high-quality, warm, and tangible urban living environment, and represents the most direct expression of livability. It ensures that the benefits of urban development are translated into daily life that residents can access, enjoy, and participate in. By embedding convenience, comfort, and vitality into the fabric of everyday life, the city becomes not only a place to stay, but a place worth living in.

Opportunity is driven by the possibilities for personal development. It supports the growth of individual capabilities and the realization of personal value, making it essential for a city's long-term vitality and future readiness. It reflects whether a city can continue to provide diverse pathways and upward mobility, enabling people not only to settle, but also to grow, expand their potential over time, and contribute lasting momentum to the city's evolution.

Overall, Shenzhen's development reflects the coordinated advancement of settlement, quality, and opportunity: a city must enable people to stay, support them in living well, and create room for their continued development. It translates Shenzhen's process of pursuing multiple goals and maintaining dynamic balance into a measurable indicator system, helping to assess the overall level of urban livability.

02 OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF URBAN LIVABILITY



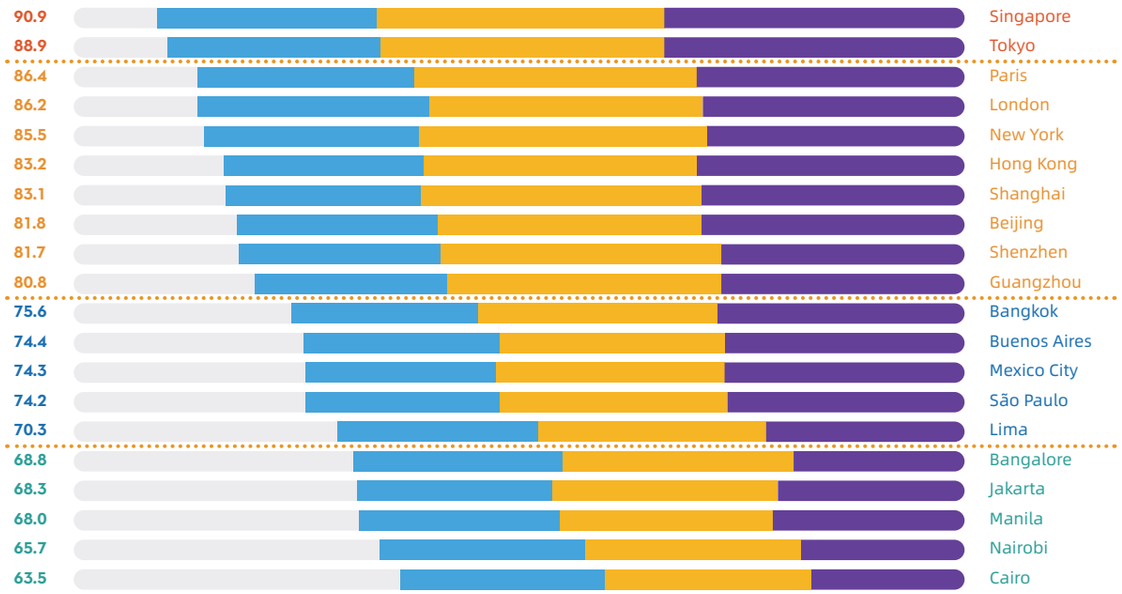
Based on the Settlement–Quality–Opportunity assessment framework, this report selects 20 representative global cities for comparative analysis. The sample takes into account different stages of development, geographic regions, and city types, with the aim of revealing structural differences and evolving patterns in urban livability across the world. The selected cities fall into three broad groups. The first includes mature global cities such as London, Tokyo, New York, Singapore, and Paris, which serve as benchmarks for livability under advanced stages of development. The second includes high-density cities in China and Asia, such as Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, allowing for a closer comparison of livability structures under similar development stages and intensive urban conditions. The third includes cities in the Global South and rapidly developing cities, such as Jakarta, Manila, Bangkok, Nairobi, and Lima, which highlight common challenges and emerging practices in basic urban capacity, quality of life, and development opportunities amid rapid urbanization.

This report combines international comparability with cross-validation from multiple sources. It prioritizes authoritative datasets that are globally applicable, methodologically consistent, and publicly available, and supplements them with city-level statistics and spatial data for verification and calibration.

The data are mainly drawn from sources such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the World Health Organization, OpenStreetMap, as well as statistical yearbooks, government bulletins, and thematic reports published by individual cities. Spatial measurement data on commuting, service accessibility, open space, and third-place facilities are also incorporated to support a more comprehensive assessment of each indicator.

The report standardizes the raw data and applies a weighting structure aligned with the Settlement–Quality–Opportunity framework to generate objective-level and overall livability scores for the 20 sample cities. Rather than producing a simple ranking, the assessment is intended to reveal the structural characteristics, relative strengths, constraints, and development patterns of different cities across the three objectives.

The results reveal a differentiated livability landscape across the sample cities. Mature global cities such as Tokyo and Singapore show more balanced and stable performance, while New York, Paris, Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen achieve relatively strong overall results but vary more clearly across specific objectives. By contrast, Global South cities such as Jakarta, Manila, and Nairobi still face significant pressure to strengthen basic urban capacity.



Ranking tiers

First tier

Score above 88: Singapore and Tokyo

Singapore and Tokyo represent the highest level of livability among the sample cities. They perform strongly across the assessment framework, making them the most balanced and stable group in this assessment. Their shared strength lies in mature institutions, well-developed public service systems, and strong governance capacity, which together support stable settlement, high-quality daily life, and sustained personal development.

Tier 2

Score above 80 and up to 88: Paris, London, New York, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou

Cities in this tier also demonstrate a high level of livability and form the main body of the assessment. They have solid overall foundations, supported by relatively complete public service systems, high-quality living environments, and a strong supply of development opportunities. Compared with Tier 1, however, their performance is less even, with variations in housing affordability, population structure, service balance, and cost of living. Their overall livability is strong, but not yet as stable or balanced as the leading cities.

Tier 3

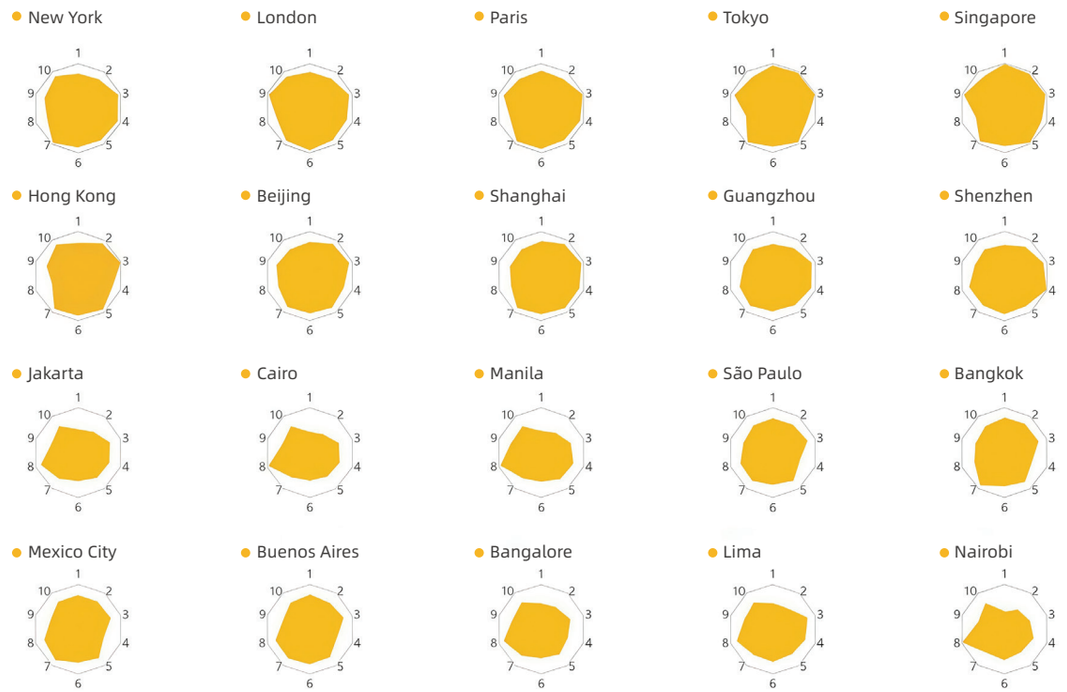
Score above 70 and up to 80: Bangkok, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, São Paulo, and Lima

Cities in this tier show a moderate level of livability. They have built certain foundations or distinctive strengths in specific areas, but their overall performance remains less stable than that of higher-tier cities. Many of them have strong urban vitality, demographic support, or regional service functions, while still facing constraints in basic urban capacity, service accessibility, environmental quality, and development opportunities. Their livability profile is therefore marked by localized strengths alongside broader structural limitations.

Tier 4

Score of 70 or below: Bangalore, Jakarta, Manila, Nairobi, and Cairo

Cities in this tier have relatively lower overall livability scores and face varying pressures across the framework. Many are still in a phase of rapid urbanization, population growth, and expanding development momentum, while basic infrastructure, public services, housing security, commuting efficiency, and everyday living conditions remain under strain. At the same time, these cities often have strong demographic vitality and considerable development potential, pointing to significant room for future improvement.



Ten-indicator radar chart

Unlike the previous comparison based on overall scores and tiers, the ten-indicator radar charts provide a closer look at the internal structure of livability across different cities. Overall, the 20 sample cities can be broadly grouped into five structural patterns:

	Cities	Character
Type 1: **Mature High-Performing Cities**	**Tokyo, Singapore, Hong Kong**	These cities show broadly expanded radar charts, indicating a high overall level of livability. However, demographic structure is generally weaker, reflecting aging-related pressures in mature urban systems. Tokyo and Singapore have more complete support structures, with demographic change as the main constraint. Hong Kong also maintains strong quality of life, but faces pressure in housing security and long-term settlement.
Type 2: **Balanced Global Cities**	**New York, London, Paris**	These cities show relatively complete and evenly expanded radar charts, with no obvious weak points. Their livability is supported not by a single outstanding indicator, but by a balanced relationship among settlement, quality of life, and development opportunities. This reflects the strong overall capacity of mature global cities.
Type 3: **High-Density, Advanced-Development Cities**	**Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen**	These cities perform strongly in quality-of-life indicators, while settlement-related indicators are more constrained. This suggests solid foundations in transport, services, and daily urban life, but continued pressure in housing security, residential stability, and long-term stay. Beijing stands out in talent, Shanghai is more balanced, Shenzhen in demographic structure and efficiency, and Guangzhou in overall steadiness.
Type 4: **Demographic-Dividend-Driven Cities**	**Jakarta, Cairo, Manila, Bangalore, Nairobi, Lima**	These cities show strong performance in demographic structure and growth potential, but weaker foundations in settlement and quality of life. Their livability is still largely supported by population momentum, while basic capacity, public services, and living conditions need further strengthening. Bangalore shows a stronger talent base, while the others are more defined by population vitality.。
Type 5: **Cities in Structural Transition**	**Bangkok, São Paulo, Mexico City, Buenos Aires**	These cities show a moderate spread across several indicators rather than a single strong peak. They have developed some everyday vitality and service capacity, especially in third places, urban atmosphere, and regional functions. However, their overall livability structure is still moving from localized strengths toward a more complete and coordinated system.

Through the overall assessment and structural analysis of the 20 sample cities, several key patterns in global livability development can be identified:

First, livability is not simply the result of excelling in individual indicators. What matters is the balance between the conditions that allow people to settle, the quality of everyday life, and the opportunities for long-term development. The assessment shows that even cities with strong economic capacity may have uneven livability profiles if housing stability or long-term urban capacity remains under pressure. At the same time, cities that do not lead in every indicator can still perform more steadily when their basic support systems, daily living conditions, and development opportunities are better aligned. Livability, therefore, should be understood less as a collection of individual strengths, and more as the result of a well-balanced urban system.

Second, in high-development cities, the focus of livability is shifting from expanding urban capacity to improving structural balance, with settlement becoming a key source of differentiation. High-performing cities have generally built strong foundations in quality of life. The differences between them are now increasingly shaped by housing security, residential stability, and the ability to support long-term stay for different groups. This suggests that, once cities reach a more advanced stage of development, livability depends not only on better services or more opportunities, but also on stronger long-term settlement support. The key is to move from strengths in selected areas toward a more balanced urban system.

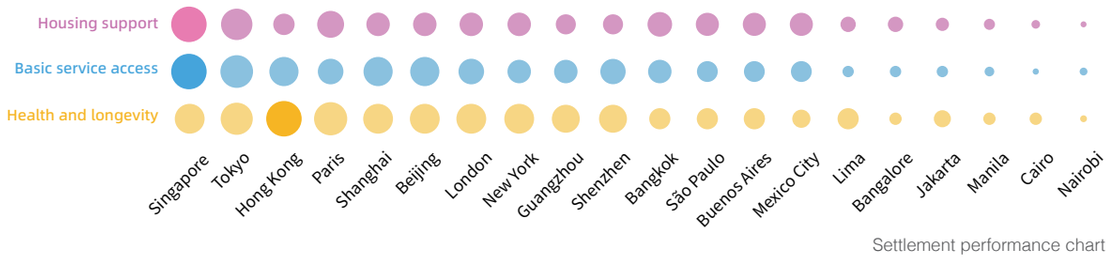
Third, for rapidly urbanizing cities, improving livability depends not only on sustaining growth momentum, but on translating growth into better settlement conditions and everyday life. Cities such as Bangalore, Jakarta, Manila, Nairobi, and Cairo continue to show strong vitality through population concentration, industrial development, and urban expansion. However, infrastructure, public services, and housing systems have not kept pace, making it difficult for settlement and quality of life to form an effective relationship with growth. For these cities, livability is not simply about pursuing faster growth. It is about turning the outcomes of growth into more inclusive basic support, more tangible improvements in daily life, and more sustainable development opportunities, gradually forming a more stable livability structure.

Fourth, similar opportunity scores do not necessarily mean similar quality of growth. Developed and developing cities draw on very different sources of growth. The assessment shows that cities such as Singapore, London, New York, and Tokyo draw more on human capital, mature industries, and stable development systems. By contrast, Bangalore, Manila, Nairobi, Jakarta, and Cairo benefit more from younger population structures, demographic vitality, and growth potential. For many rapidly urbanizing cities, the next step is to turn demographic vitality into stronger talent accumulation, broader development opportunities, and more sustainable growth capacity, creating a more stable foundation for long-term urban development.

03 ASSESSING LIVABILITY BY OBJECTIVE

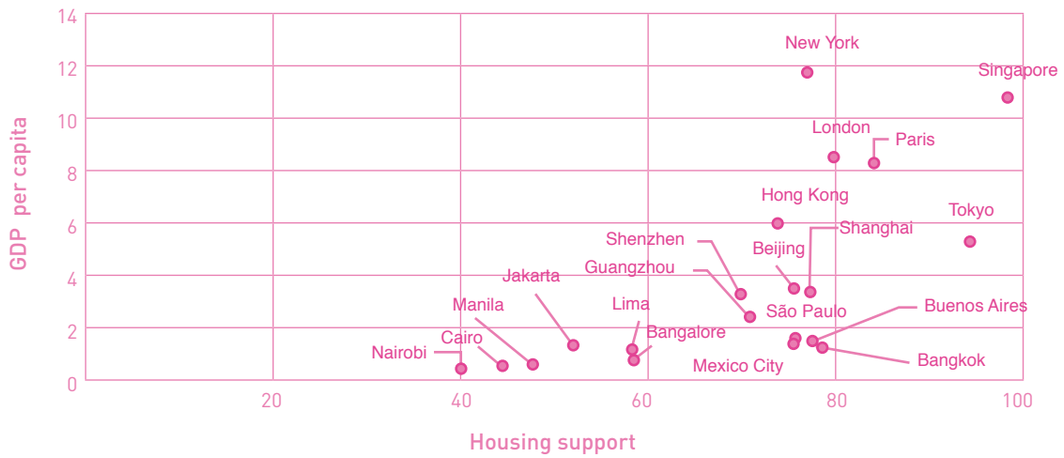
[1] SETTLEMENT

The settlement assesses a city's basic capacity to accommodate people and support long-term stability. It forms the foundation of livability and is essential to a city's ability to function steadily over time. Focusing on housing support, basic service access, and health and longevity, this dimension examines whether different groups can enter the city, stay, and gradually build a stable life. At its core, settlement asks whether a city can provide an inclusive, reliable, and sustainable support system that gives people a basic sense of security and confidence in the future.



Settlement performance chart

Among sample cities, settlement is shaped by two different types of support. Housing support most clearly reflects differences in institutional arrangements and governance approaches, and is a key factor that differentiates cities. By contrast, basic service access and health and longevity are more closely linked to the overall level of urban development, reflecting a city's development stage and its broader capacity to provide basic support.



Even among cities at similar levels of development, residential stability can vary significantly depending on public housing provision, rental market systems, land institutions, and housing regulation mechanisms.

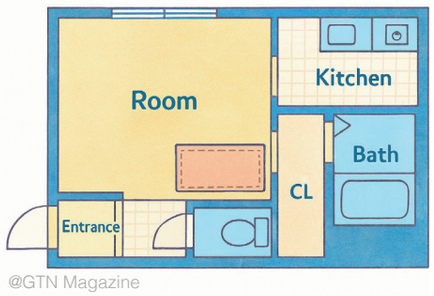
| Case 1 | Singapore — Public Housing as a Foundation for Stable Settlement

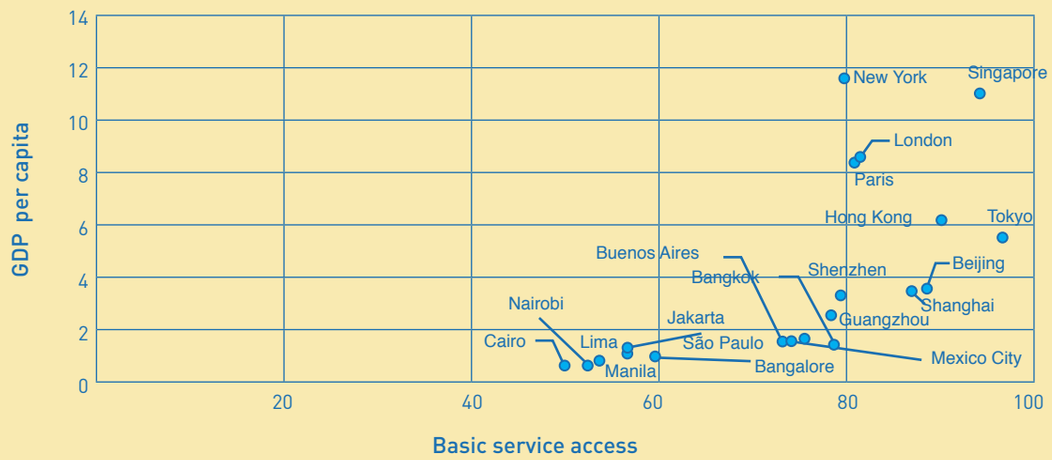
Singapore has built an institutionalized housing support system through long-term, sustained, and large-scale public housing development. Official data show that Singapore has built more than 1.25 million Housing & Development Board (HDB) flats, housing close to 80% of the resident population, with about 90% of HDB residents owning their homes. Public housing in Singapore is not treated simply as housing supply. It is planned together with neighborhood centers, schools, public transport, and community services, forming an integrated structure of housing, services, and daily life. The underlying logic is to reposition housing from a market commodity into an institutional public good that supports social integration, strengthens residential stability, and consolidates the foundation of livability. This provides a representative model for achieving large-scale and sustainable settlement in high-density cities.

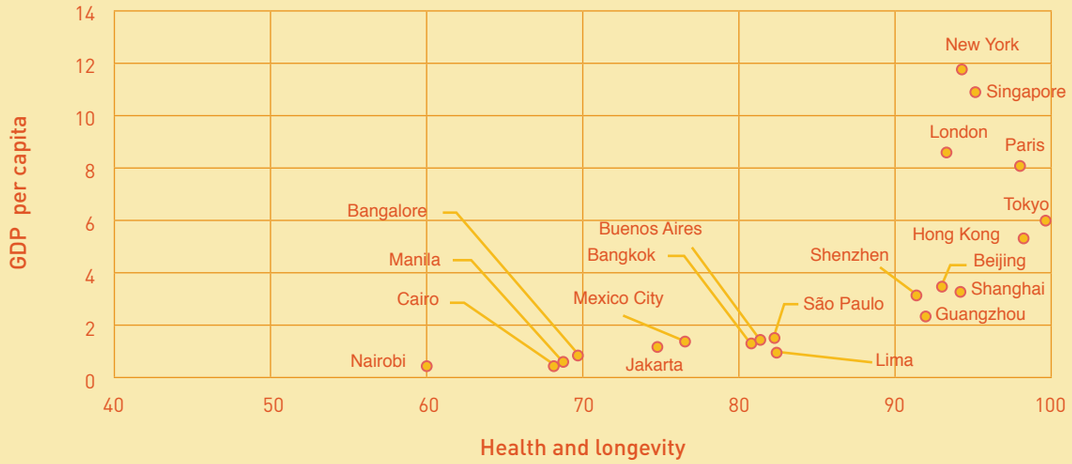


| Case 2 | Tokyo — Small-Unit Rentals and Transit-Oriented Housing for Residential Stability

Tokyo supports a relatively accessible residential pathway in a high-density context through small-unit rentals, a mature rental market, and rail-oriented metropolitan living. The common 1K layout — a living/sleeping room with a separate kitchen — offers a lower entry threshold than larger units, making it a practical option for young people, single-person households, and newcomers. Much of Tokyo's housing is located around railway stations, while its extensive rail network expands residential choices across the metropolitan area. Housing around Kiba Park and Kiba Station, for example, is typically within walking distance of subway access, showing the close link between housing location and commuting convenience. Together, small-unit supply, rental market stability, and rail-based accessibility help residents balance housing costs and commuting time in a high-density city.







By contrast, cities such as Jakarta, Manila, Nairobi, and Cairo face a different housing reality. Under rapid urbanization, continued population inflows, and limited formal housing supply, urban informal settlements have become a entry point for many low-income groups and newcomers to the city.

These settlements are less the result of deliberate policy design than a response to constraints in public finance, land governance, and implementation capacity. Without formal recognition and sustained public investment, they often lack adequate infrastructure, public services, and environmental improvement. As a result, residents face weaker living conditions, lower security, and limited residential stability.

When informal settlements expand in an unmanaged way, they can further intensify spatial sprawl, service shortages, and environmental pressure. In this context, entering the city does not necessarily lead to stable settlement.

| Case 3 | Shenzhen Shuiwei Ningmeng Apartments Provide Budget Housing for Newcomers

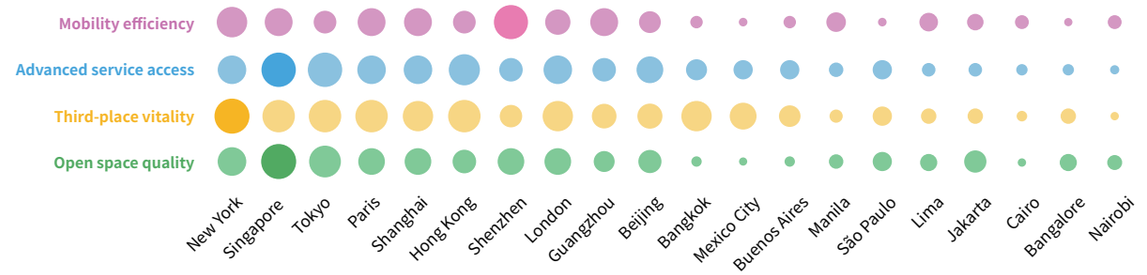
Shenzhen's urban villages have long served as a source of low-cost housing and a buffer for population inflows, providing an important entry point for many newcomers to the city. Around 60% of Shenzhen's population lives in urban villages. The Shuiwei Ningmeng Talent Apartments project adopts an incremental renewal approach that combines comprehensive renovation with apartment operation, helping transform existing rental spaces into a more stable, manageable, and livable form of housing. Jointly advanced by the government, enterprises, and the village collective, the project retains the original urban fabric and everyday atmosphere of handshake buildings and arcade streets, while introducing elevators, corridors, community service facilities, and modern commerce. In this way, fragmented and informal rental spaces are gradually reshaped into youth-friendly housing units with basic living support.



Shenzhen's urban villages also serve as low-cost housing and buffers for population inflows, but their development has followed a different path. Rather than remaining outside the formal urban system, many have been gradually incorporated into governance and renewal efforts. Through safety improvements, infrastructure upgrades, and better environmental management, these areas are being transformed from basic low-cost shelters into transitional housing with stronger everyday support.

[2] QUALITY

The quality objective focuses on residents' everyday experience and overall performance of living quality. It shows whether the outcomes of urban development can be felt, accessed, and used in daily life, making it the most tangible part of the livability framework. Through mobility efficiency, advanced service access, open space quality, and third-place vitality, this objective assesses whether a city can provide a convenient, comfortable, well-organized, and vibrant living environment. It looks beyond the number of facilities or the physical condition of spaces, and focuses on how transport, services, and everyday urban settings work together to make daily life more accessible, enjoyable, and attractive.



Quality performance chart

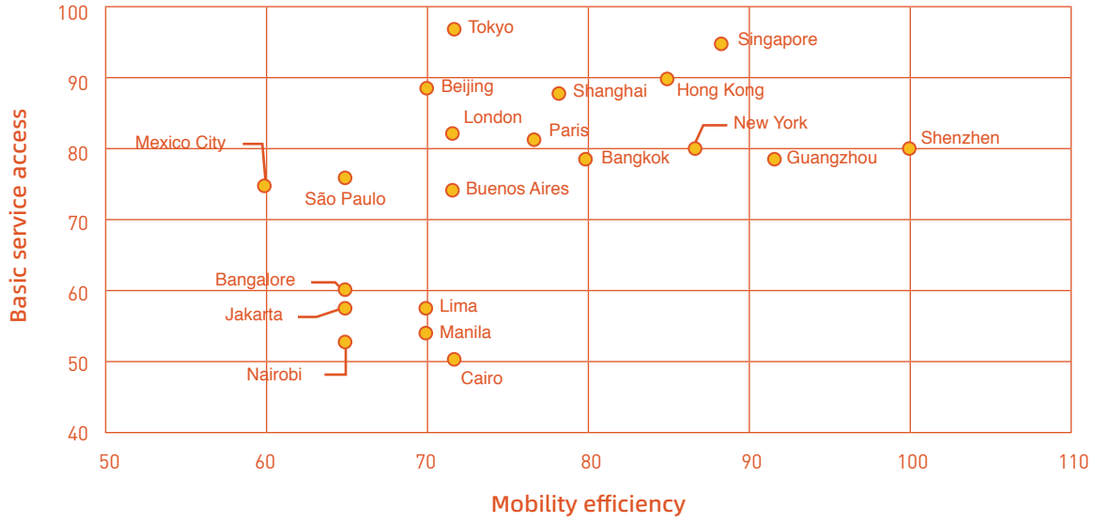
Mobility efficiency plays a bridging role in the indicator system. On one hand, it is closely linked to settlement issues, especially the relationship between housing location, housing cost, and access to jobs. On the other, it directly shapes the efficiency of everyday urban life and is an important measure of living quality. For high-density cities, the ability to connect housing, employment, and services with lower time costs is critical. It determines whether a city can turn basic residential accommodation into a genuinely better daily living experience.

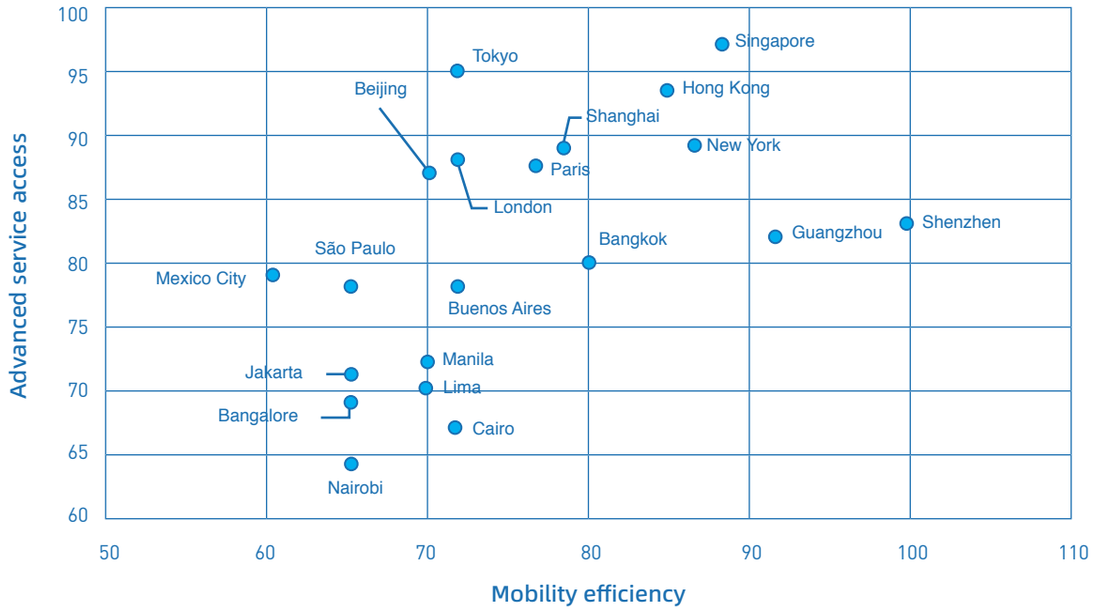
| Case 4 | Singapore Creating Accessible Life Circles through Transit and New Towns

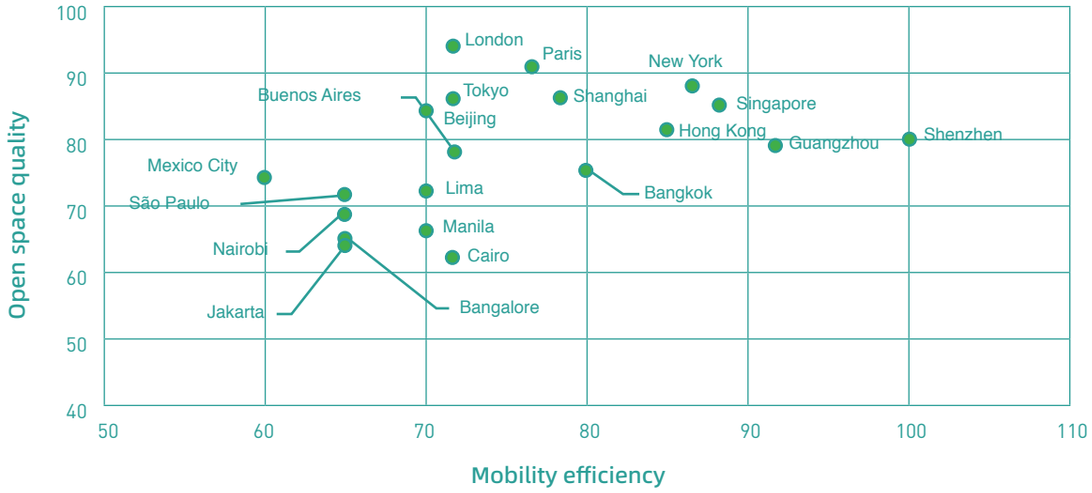
Singapore's strength in the quality objective is closely linked to its integrated approach to daily life circles, where housing, rail transit, services, and community facilities are planned together. The Land Transport Master Plan 2040 states that by the early 2030s, 80% of households will be within a 10-minute walk of a train station, with more homes located near stations, employment nodes, and daily amenities. In its new towns, Singapore typically coordinates housing with rail access, neighborhood centers, community facilities, schools, public spaces, and walking and cycling networks. This allows residents to commute, shop, study, relax, and participate in community life within a compact daily environment. Bidadari, for example, has been planned as a "Community in a Garden", integrating housing, greenery, communal spaces, and local amenities with pedestrian and cycling connections.



Examining the relationship between mobility efficiency, basic and advanced service access, and open space quality, a clear positive correlation can be observed. Cities with higher mobility efficiency tend to show stronger accessibility to services and open spaces. In the scatter plots, the sample cities broadly fall into two clusters. One consists mainly of cities in the first and second tiers, concentrated in the high-mobility and high-accessibility range. The other consists mainly of cities in the third and fourth tiers, clustered in the lower-mobility and lower-accessibility range. This suggests that mobility efficiency and access to living resources are not separate capabilities. Together, they reflect whether a city can effectively organize housing, employment, and high-quality daily amenities into a compact, frequent, and accessible everyday life system.







| Case 5 | Shenzhen Improving Efficiency through Planning and Transit

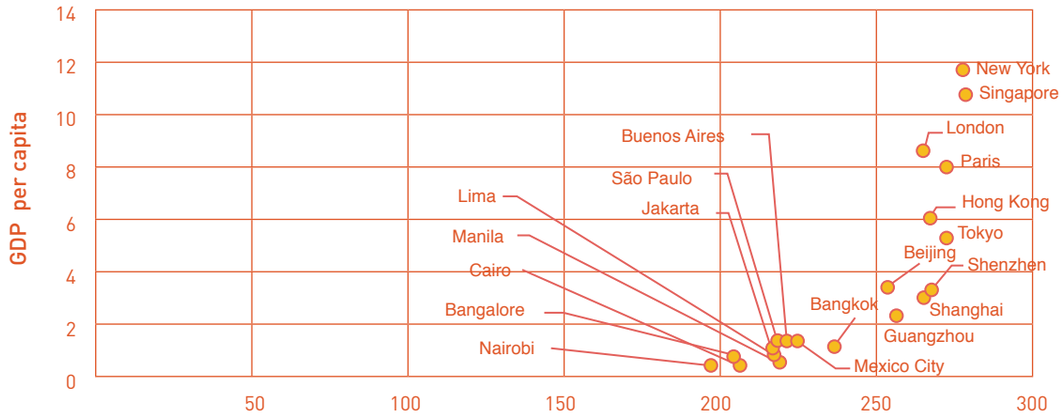


Shenzhen's strength in the quality objective is closely linked to its mobility efficiency within a polycentric urban structure. As multiple employment and service nodes continue to grow — including Futian, Nanshan, Qianhai, Bao'an Central District, Longgang, and Guangming — the city does not rely on a single core to accommodate all urban functions. Instead, its polycentric structure helps distribute jobs, services, and daily activities, while the rail network strengthens efficient connections between different districts. According to public information from the Shenzhen government, by 2024 the city's urban rail network had reached over 560 kilometers, with nearly 400 stations. This expanding network strengthens connections among major urban centers and improves access between housing, jobs, and daily services. By linking its polycentric structure with rail-based mobility, Shenzhen is turning high-density urban form into a more efficient everyday living experience, making mobility efficiency an important foundation of quality of life.

Shenzhen stands out in this comparison, suggesting that it has developed strong advantages in everyday efficiency under high-density conditions. Hong Kong and Singapore also fall within the high-performing range, supported by highly integrated transport and service networks. New York shows a strong ability to organize services and daily amenities, while Shanghai and Guangzhou have also built a solid foundation for efficient urban living. By contrast, Beijing, Tokyo, and London remain in the higher-performing group overall, but their mobility efficiency is not among the strongest. This suggests that their strengths in the quality objective rely more on service networks, spatial quality, and the broader living environment, rather than on shorter travel times alone.

Among the third- and fourth-tier cities, Bangkok stands out and is already approaching the range of the first- and second-tier cities. This suggests that Bangkok has built a strong foundation in service accessibility and everyday urban vitality, making it one of the most distinctive mid-tier cities in the quality objective.

By contrast, Mexico City, São Paulo, Jakarta, and Cairo remain in the lower range overall. This indicates that, where spatial expansion continues and infrastructure and service networks are still being improved, residents often need to spend more time accessing daily services. In this sense, the combination of mobility efficiency and advanced service access reflects how well a city connects housing, employment, and services into an efficient everyday life network.



Overall score of Quality objective

| Case 6 | New York Bryant Park as A Model for Public Space Management



A key feature of New York's public space governance is its mature public-private management model, supported by mechanisms such as Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). By involving surrounding property owners, local businesses, and professional operators, the city has been able to improve public spaces and strengthen street vitality over time. Bryant Park is one of the most representative examples of this approach. Bryant Park Corporation, a not-for-profit private management company, was founded in 1980 to restore and operate the park. In 1988, a 15-year agreement entrusted BPC with management and improvement responsibilities. Today, Bryant Park attracts more than 12 million visitors each year, making it one of New York's — and the world's — busiest public spaces. Its success lies not only in landscape design, but also in sustained programming and operation. Lawns, movable chairs, food and beverage services, reading areas, performances, winter ice skating, and free public events are integrated into one place, transforming the park from a simple urban green space into a multifunctional setting for leisure, social interaction, and public life.

Based on the sample results, high-income cities such as London, Tokyo, Paris, Singapore, Hong Kong, and New York are generally positioned in the higher range of the quality objective. This suggests that cities at more advanced stages of development are often better able to translate development outcomes into tangible improvements in everyday life. Although their specific pathways differ, these cities have developed relatively mature support systems across mobility efficiency, service access, open space quality, and third-place vitality. Paris is a notable example of the stable strengths seen in mature European cities, particularly in public space, service networks, and the organization of everyday urban life.

| Case 7 | Shenzhen Futian Five-Park Linkage — Connecting Parks, Retail, and Everyday Urban Life



The Futian Five-Park Linkage is an open-space connectivity project under Shenzhen's Mountain-Sea Vistas Plan. It brings together Meilin Mountain, Yinhu Mountain, Bijia Mountain, Lianhua Mountain, and Central Park, turning separate green and open spaces into a continuous urban network. Within this system, a roughly 450-meter elevated pedestrian bridge links Bijia Mountain Park, Lianhua Mountain Park, and UpperHills, making UpperHills an important slow-mobility node between the park system and the central urban district. The key value of this case lies in the role of UpperHills as an urban connector. It brings park recreation, retail, dining, walking routes, leisure, social interaction, and public events into one shared urban pathway. Through the Five-Park Linkage, ecological spaces, commercial activities, and public life are connected into a more continuous everyday experience, improving open space quality and urban vitality in a high-density central district.

Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen are particularly noteworthy. Their performance in the quality objective is already approaching that of leading global cities, suggesting that mobility efficiency, service provision, and everyday urban environments have reached a relatively high level under high-density conditions.

| Case 8 | Bangkok - Revitalizing Third-Place Vitality through Community Retail

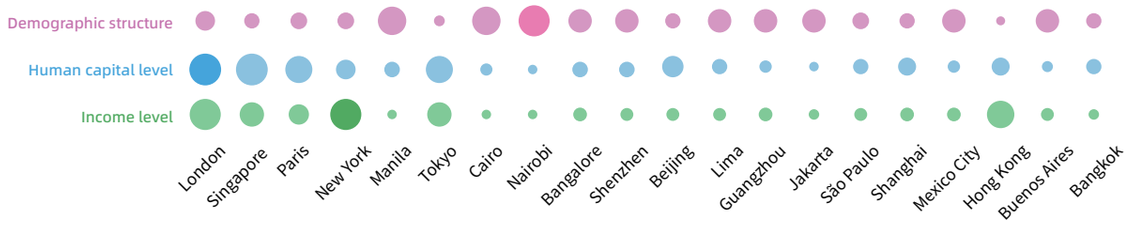


The Commons Thonglor represents a paradigm of commercial third-place in Bangkok. Diverging from traditional retail-dominated malls, it emphasizes openness, lingering, and social interaction. Through dining, marketing, shared seating, family activities, and small public events, it fosters a daily interaction space situated between home and work. Spatial design minimizes the boundary of enclosed commercial entities, utilizing semi-open courtyards, stepped seating, and multi-level public platforms to enhance accessibility and dwell time, allowing residents, tourists, youth, and families to gather naturally.

At the same time, their GDP per capita and household income levels have not yet fully reached those of mature global cities at the same level of quality performance. This points to a pattern in which quality of life has advanced ahead of income levels. In other words, their strengths in the quality objective are not simply the result of economic development, but are also supported by strong spatial organization, transport systems, and service provision under high-density conditions. Bangkok is another notable case. Although its overall development level is lower than that of first- and second-tier cities, its quality score is already close to the higher range. This suggests that some mid-tier cities can create strong urban appeal through third-place vitality, everyday urban atmosphere, and service settings, even before reaching the same economic level as mature global cities. By contrast, Jakarta, Cairo, and Nairobi remain in the lower range overall, indicating that improvements in the quality objective are often more constrained where the economic base, infrastructure, and service systems still need further development.

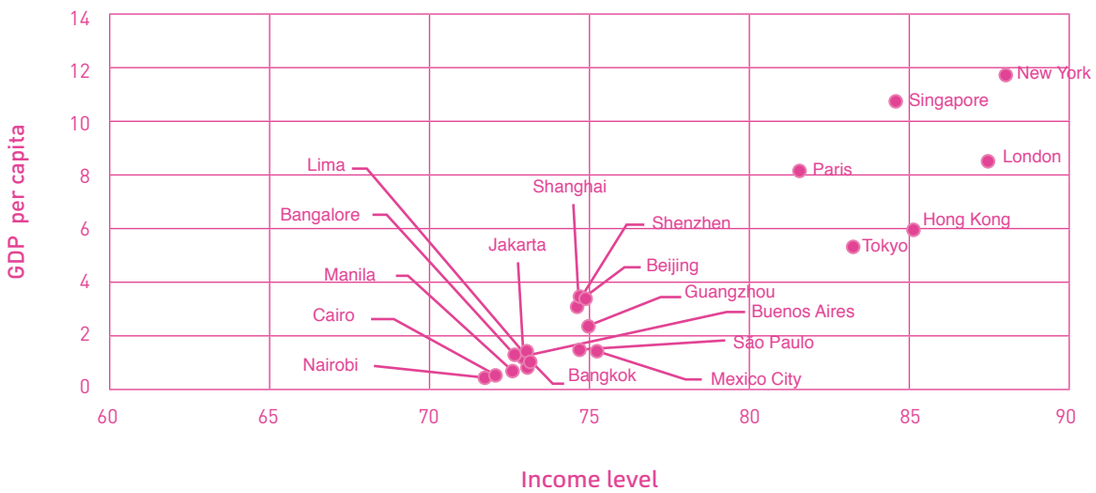
[3] OPPORTUNITY

The opportunity objective measures a city's ability to provide development opportunities and upward mobility for individuals. It concerns whether residents can build their capabilities and improve themselves within the city, while also supporting urban vitality and future development. Through demographic structure, human capital level, and income level, this objective assesses a city's capacity to generate development opportunities, support different forms of personal growth, and translate economic and social resources into broader possibilities for individual advancement. It focuses on whether a city can form a stable, open, and sustainable growth structure, enabling individuals not only to settle and live, but also to continue growing over time.



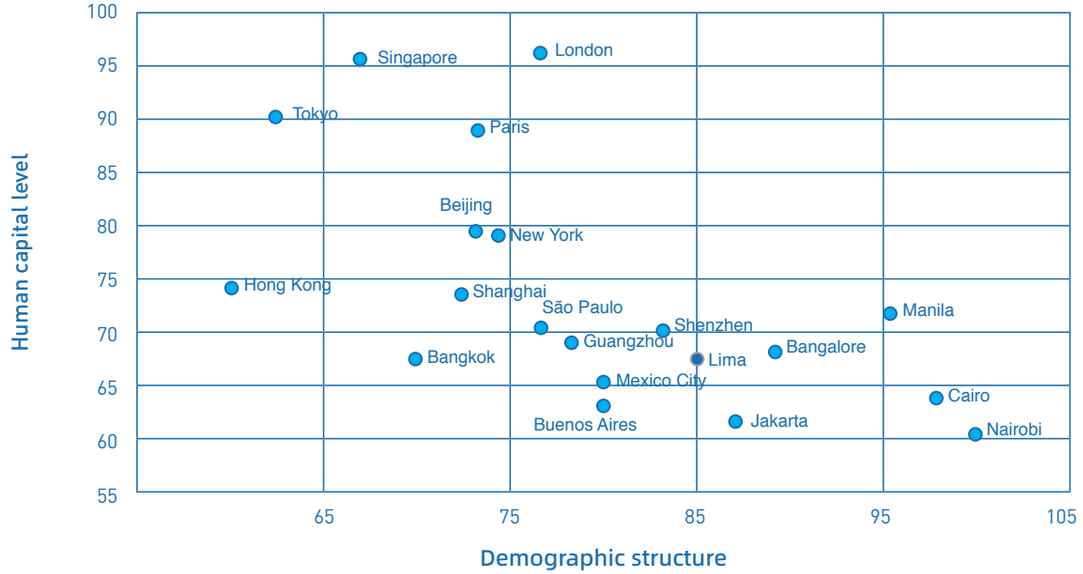
Opportunity performance chart

Overall, the most notable feature of the opportunity objective is that cities achieve high scores in different ways, while no city shows a fully balanced profile. Mature cities such as London, Singapore, Paris, New York, and Tokyo maintain strong performance mainly through high human capital level and income level. Although they are less advantaged in demographic structure, they still show relatively high-quality growth capacity. By contrast, some third- and fourth-tier cities, such as Manila, Cairo, Nairobi, and Bangalore, rank relatively high mainly because of their strong demographic structure, which reflects demographic dividends and development potential. This does not mean, however, that their growth support systems are already mature or stable. Meanwhile, some cities that perform well in settlement and quality may rank lower in opportunity because of more stable demographic structures or insufficient coordination within their support systems. This shows that the opportunity objective reveals not only current growth conditions, but also a city's future development momentum and capacity for sustained growth.



Examining the relationship between income level and GDP per capita, a generally positive correlation can be observed. Mature cities with higher incomes and stronger economic output are mostly positioned in the upper-right range, suggesting that a higher level of economic development usually provides stronger support for residents' income and consumption capacity.Notably, however, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen do not fall into a higher range that fully matches their overall urban economic strength. Instead, they are positioned closer to some third- and fourth-tier cities in the lower-left range. This suggests that a city's overall economic strength does not automatically translate into higher affluence at the resident level, and that there may still be a gap between economic growth and the everyday returns experienced by individuals.

This pattern is closely related to disposable income, cost of living, housing burden, and overall consumption pressure. In other words, GDP per capita mainly reflects a city's overall output capacity, while income level focuses more directly on whether development outcomes are translated into residents' disposable resources and everyday living conditions. For Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, the issue is not insufficient economic capacity. Rather, under conditions of high cost, high density, and intense competition, residents' everyday benefits have not yet reached the level seen in mature high-income cities. Within the opportunity objective, income level is therefore used as a more direct measure of whether urban development outcomes are being converted into better daily life and stronger conditions for long-term personal development.



Looking at the relationship between demographic structure and human capital level, the sample cities show a clear pattern of differentiation. Nairobi, Manila, Cairo, Bangalore, Lima, and Jakarta are mainly positioned in the lower-right range, indicating a shared profile of relatively young populations and strong growth potential, but comparatively lower human capital levels. This suggests that their opportunity advantage is driven more by demographic dividends and labor supply, and has not yet been fully translated into stronger human capital support.

| Case 9 | King's Cross in London Attracting Enterprise and Talent Agglomeration through Regeneration



King's Cross is one of London's most representative urban regeneration and knowledge-economy districts in recent years. Built on the renewal of former industrial and railway lands, the district brings together offices, research institutions, education, housing, retail, and public spaces, creating an urban setting that continues to attract businesses, talent, and innovation activity. The area is now home to institutions and companies such as Google, Meta, Universal Music, the Francis Crick Institute, and Central Saint Martins, forming a spatial structure where knowledge production, creative industries, and high-end services are closely connected.

| Case 10 | New York — Cornell Tech as a Platform for Talent, Innovation, and Global Collaboration

Cornell Tech is an integrated innovation platform on Roosevelt Island in New York City. Established through a partnership between Cornell University and the Technion–Israel Institute of Technology, it brings talent development, research translation, startup incubation, and international collaboration into one innovation ecosystem. Its campus brings together education, research and development, enterprises, and capital, creating intensive interaction among academic research, technology entrepreneurship, and industrial application. For New York, this platform builds on the city's mature base of global talent, capital, and international networks, and further organizes opportunities around future industries, innovation, and entrepreneurship.



In contrast, Tokyo, Paris, Singapore, and London are mostly positioned in the upper-left range, reflecting a different pathway. Although they show weaker demographic vitality, they have generally high human capital levels. This suggests that mature cities rely more on education, knowledge accumulation, and high-quality human capital than on the expansion of a young population. For these cities, the main constraint is not a lack of talent, but the long-term impact of aging, a shrinking working-age population, and more stable demographic structures.

| Case 11 | Bangalore — Electronic City as a Technology Cluster for Demographic and Talent Dividends

Electronic City is one of Bangalore's most representative technology clusters and an important spatial platform for the development of internet-related and technology industries. Established by KEONICS in 1978, the area has, over time, attracted information technology, software services, R&D support, and multinational corporate functions, with companies such as Infosys, Wipro, TCS, Tech Mahindra, and Biocon located there. Through this concentration of technology industries, Electronic City has created a large number of employment opportunities and attracted young technical workers and engineering talent to the city, strengthening Bangalore's advantages in demographic structure and human capital level.



| Case 12 | Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Youth Innovation Hub as a Platform for Youth Entrepreneurship



The Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Youth Innovation and Entrepreneur Hub is a youth entrepreneurship platform in Qianhai, Shenzhen. It provides startup teams from Hong Kong, Macao, and overseas with office space, incubation services, policy consultation, financing support, industry connections, and cross-border exchange opportunities. By combining startup space, service support, community building, and Shenzhen-Hong Kong cooperation, the Hub offers young teams a lower-threshold entry point into Shenzhen's innovation ecosystem. It connects entrepreneurial needs with industrial resources, capital networks, and policy services, turning innovation opportunities into practical pathways for young people to start, grow, and collaborate.

Within the higher human capital range, cities also show further differences. Hong Kong has a strong talent base, but weaker demographic vitality and more visible aging-related pressures. Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and New York are closer to the upper-middle range, showing a relatively balanced relationship between demographic vitality and human capital. Among them, Beijing and Shanghai have more stable talent foundations, Shenzhen and Guangzhou show stronger demographic vitality, and New York has a more mature overall support system. São Paulo is a relatively balanced mid-tier case: neither indicator is among the highest, but there is no obvious weakness between demographic vitality and human capital, suggesting a more balanced growth structure.

> **Overall, this comparison points to two different sources of urban growth capacity. Some cities rely more on young populations and growth potential, while others draw more on education, knowledge accumulation, and human capital. A stronger opportunity profile does not come from one outstanding indicator alone. It depends on whether demographic vitality can be translated into a stronger talent base, or whether cities facing aging pressures can sustain growth through high-quality human capital.**

04 Insights and Recommendations

Based on the assessment of 20 sample cities, this report does not seek to produce a simple city ranking. Instead, it uses the UIS livability framework to demonstrate a pathway from index assessment to urban diagnosis, case-based learning, and action-oriented application. As one of the six UIS dimensions, the value of the livability framework lies not only in measuring how cities perform today, but also in helping cities understand their internal structures, identify key constraints, and explore transferable practices through global comparison.

First, the framework shifts the understanding of livability from facility provision to people's long-term development.

Traditional livability assessments tend to focus on what a city provides in areas such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and safety. The UIS livability framework goes further by asking whether these provisions can support stable living and sustained personal development.

The settlement–quality–opportunity framework is not a simple division of livability into separate parts. It starts from people's urban experience: whether they can enter a city, stay there with stability, enjoy a high-quality everyday life, and access opportunities for long-term growth. In this sense, livability is no longer just a static description of the living environment, but a way to assess whether a city truly supports people over time.

Second, the framework serves as a diagnostic tool for identifying structural gaps in urban livability.

The UIS livability framework is not only about comparing overall scores. Its greater value lies in examining the relationships among different objectives and indicators. The sample assessment shows that some cities have strong economic capacity, yet still face pressure in housing support and long-term residential stability. Some perform well in quality of life, but are constrained by demographic structure or income level. Others, especially rapidly urbanizing cities, have strong demographic vitality but have not yet built stable basic services and everyday living support.

Through this structured diagnosis, cities can better understand the real gaps in their livability capacity, rather than relying only on individual strengths or overall rankings to judge their level of development.

Third, the framework supports differentiated action pathways for different types of cities.

Cities around the world face different livability challenges. Mature cities need to pay greater attention to aging, high costs, and the long-term maintenance of urban systems. High-density cities at advanced stages of development need to further improve housing stability, service balance, and affordability. Rapidly urbanizing cities need to translate population growth and industrial development more quickly into better infrastructure, public services, and quality of life.

UIS livability framework helps cities identify their development stage, structural characteristics, and action priorities within a shared framework.



Fourth, the framework can serve as an open platform connecting city comparison, case-based learning, and international cooperation.

As an index product, the value of UIS lies not only in indicator measurement, but also in the continuous collection, interpretation, and translation of global urban practices. The cases in this report show that livability can be advanced through different institutional, spatial, and operational pathways.

Looking ahead, UIS can continue to turn assessment results into shareable and actionable urban governance knowledge through indicator updates, case library development, urban diagnosis, capacity building, and international dialogue.

Looking Ahead: Toward an Integrated UIS Framework

This report is one of the research outputs under the six dimensions of the Urban Index of Shenzhen (UIS). Focusing on livability, it presents a comparative assessment and structural analysis of 20 sample cities around the world. Within the UIS framework, livability serves as an important lens for understanding the quality of urban development, while also connecting urban governance, spatial planning, and people's well-being.

Livability should also be understood as part of a broader, integrated framework. The six dimensions of UIS — innovation, livability, aesthetics, resilience, humanism, and intelligence — are closely connected and mutually reinforcing. The settlement–quality–opportunity framework emphasized in the livability chapter is linked to opportunity provision and talent attraction under innovation, spatial and environmental quality under aesthetics, safety and security under resilience, social inclusion and civic values under humanism, and governance efficiency and service access under intelligence. From this perspective, the livability chapter opens the way for the broader UIS framework. Future UIS research will continue to expand across other dimensions, supporting urban assessment, knowledge sharing, and international cooperation.