

Future cities

Cities are apparently the future. All the predictions I've seen for the next few decades show the world's population concentrating in cities, but our development indicators and policies are still listed by nation state. Perhaps they should be wider, for instance by including developing cities on the lists.

I said "developing" there - which begs the question "*how* are these cities developing?". This isn't just a Las Vegas-style spreading of suburbia across the desert: many of the cities I've visited in the past year have [shanty towns](#), and these appear, at least from outside, to be where a lot of the city development is happening (btw, I wanted to use a less emotive word than 'slum' here: although it's what [Slum Dwellers International](#) uses, there's still a lot of [negative feeling](#) about it). From Lagos to Guatemala to Haiti, I've seen dozens of homes and businesses under tin roofs looking across at smaller numbers of tower blocks, and wondered "how do these economies fit together", and "where does it go from here".

[Good old BBC](#) gave me a few more answers... and a few more questions (like how does the nation-based world fit with people this adaptable and informal), and case studies, [Medellin](#) and London, of both positive and negative ways that the shanty and non-shanty worlds can start to fit together.

Perhaps it's the way you look at it. If you look at the Wikipedia links above, you'll see shanty towns and slums described in very negative terms... impoverished, illegal, lack of services. If you hang out with people who live or work in shanty towns, they're communities and neighbours and businesses and services - and quite possibly the adaptable, informal, majority economic future of the cities they're part of. Whichever way you look at it, there are a lot of people in shanty towns, and how (and [what](#)) they develop is important.