G.O.A.L.

The Five Pillar Index 2025 Urban Edition

A Global Benchmark of Urban Health Foundations

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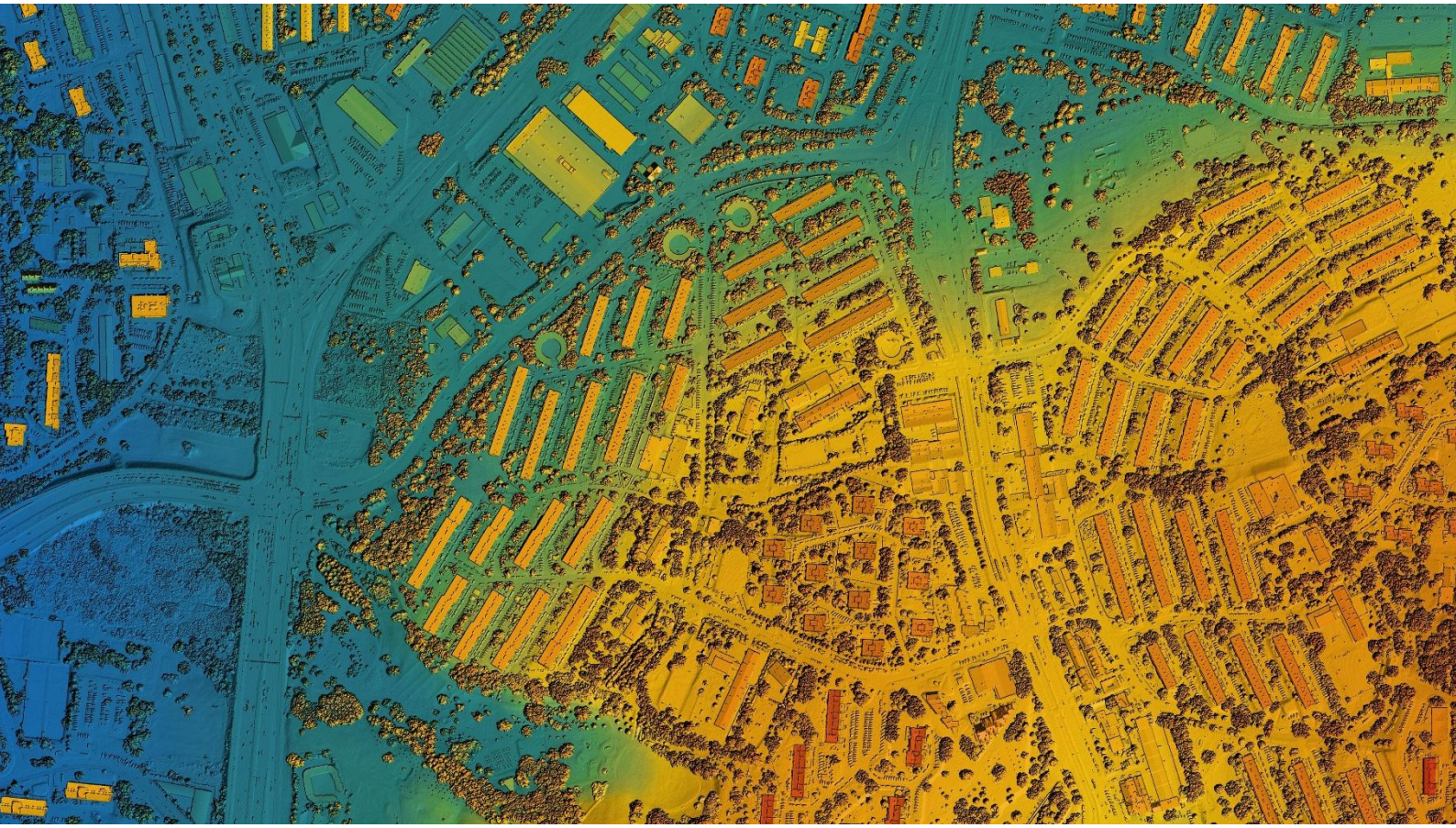

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Executive Summary
The Five Pillars Index: 2025 Urban Edition

Cities shape human health more than healthcare systems do. The Five Pillars Index: 2025 Urban Edition evaluates how well global cities enable health through the **structural conditions of daily life**—movement, nutrition, knowledge, mindset, and environment. The index benchmarks 30 global cities across five **non-substitutable pillars** that together determine long-term urban wellbeing.

Core finding:
Urban health outcomes are not accidental. They are the predictable result of system design.

High-performing cities do not excel because they maximize one domain. They succeed because **no pillar is allowed to fail**. Cities that underperform almost always have one or two structurally weak pillars that constrain progress everywhere else.

What the Index Reveals

- **Balance beats specialization.** Top cities outperform through system balance, not wealth or flagship infrastructure. One weak pillar is enough to drag the entire system down.
- **Mindset is the global blind spot.** Stress, loneliness, burnout, and limited mental-health access explain stagnation in many otherwise strong cities. GDP is a poor predictor of psychological wellbeing.
- **Environment sets the ceiling.** Clean air, safety, sanitation, and housing affordability are foundational. Cities cannot compensate for polluted, unsafe, or unaffordable environments.
- **Movement reflects values, not technology.** Human-scale, multimodal mobility systems consistently outperform car-dependent models by reducing stress and expanding daily freedom.
- **Knowledge multiplies everything.** Cities strong in education, digital access, media literacy, and transparency improve faster across all other pillars.
- **Fragmentation is the silent killer.** Uneven access across neighborhoods suppresses citywide performance, even where assets are strong.

What This Means for City Leaders

Health-first cities are built deliberately. Successful cities:

- strengthen their weakest pillar first,
- treat mental wellbeing as infrastructure,
- protect environmental foundations as non-negotiable,
- design mobility around people, not vehicles,
- invest in knowledge as long-term resilience,
- and reduce fragmentation across neighborhoods.

Copying individual cities does not work.
Understanding system logic does.

The New Mandate

The cities of the future will be judged not by size, wealth, or output, but by their ability to sustain human health at scale.

Health is no longer a sector.
It is the operating system of the city.

Contents

Introduction: The Urban Health Imperative

Why the future of global cities will be decided by health, not infrastructure.

Cities have become the defining environment of human life. More than half of the world's population now lives in urban areas, and nearly 70% will do so by 2050. Yet cities were not designed for the health challenges they now face: rising stress, chronic disease, loneliness, burnout, unaffordable housing, food insecurity, and environmental decline. Traditional urban success metrics—GDP growth, density, transit capacity, construction volume—no longer capture the lived reality of urban residents.

The Urban Health Imperative reframes the core mission of cities: not simply to host economic activity, but to create conditions in which people can *live well*. Urban health is not a sector; it is a systems-level outcome shaped by mobility, food environments, learning capacity, psychological wellbeing, and physical surroundings. When those systems function coherently, cities flourish. When they fracture, even economically strong cities struggle.

Across the world, a clear pattern is emerging: the most competitive and resilient cities are those that prioritize human health as their organizing principle. Cities with safe, walkable streets, strong education systems, high social trust, clean air, balanced work cultures, and accessible nutrition consistently outperform peers with similar economic conditions but weaker health foundations.

The Five Pillars Index: 2025 Urban Edition responds to this global shift. It provides a structured, comparative assessment of how cities enable human flourishing across five essential domains. It reveals where cities excel, where they falter, and what systemic characteristics separate leaders from cities at risk. In doing so, it lays the foundation for a new urban development paradigm—one where health is not an outcome, but the blueprint.

How to Use the Five Pillars Index

The Five Pillars Index: 2025 Urban Edition is designed as a strategic diagnostic tool, not a league table. Its primary purpose is to help city leaders identify structural strengths, binding constraints, and priority areas for action in building health-first urban systems.

Use pillar-level results, not headline rankings.
Overall scores provide context, but the greatest value lies in understanding which pillars are weakest. Across the index, underperformance is almost always driven by one or two constraining domains rather than system-wide failure.

Prioritize balance over excellence.
High-performing cities succeed because none of their pillars is critically weak. Over-investing in already strong areas delivers diminishing returns, while strengthening the weakest pillar often unlocks system-wide gains.

Use the index to guide sequencing, not imitation.
The index highlights *what works globally*, not how it must be implemented locally. Cities should use pillar results to inform policy sequencing, investment priorities, and cross-departmental coordination—rather than copying individual city models.

Interpret scores directionally.
Scores are designed for comparison, not precision. Small differences should be treated cautiously; larger gaps signal meaningful structural differences that warrant attention.

Treat the index as a starting point.
The Five Pillars Index is intended to catalyze deeper analysis, stakeholder dialogue, and locally grounded action—not to replace local data or judgment.

In short: the index helps cities move from isolated interventions to **coherent, health-first strategy**—placing human wellbeing at the center of urban decision-making.

Framework: The Five Pillars Applied to Urban Systems

The systems-based architecture for measuring health capacity in cities.

The Five Pillars Framework is a holistic model for understanding how cities shape human wellbeing. Rather than focusing on clinical health or economic indicators, the framework evaluates the structural and behavioral conditions that determine whether people can live healthy, meaningful, sustainable lives. Each pillar represents a non-substitutable foundation of urban health; weakness in any one domain limits the entire system.

1. Movement — Daily mobility as a health engine
Movement captures how easily, safely, and naturally people can move through the city. Walkability, transit accessibility, cycling safety, commute time, and road safety shape both physical health and psychological stress. Cities with multimodal, human-centered mobility consistently deliver higher quality of life.

2. Nutrition — The food environment that sustains wellbeing
Nutrition evaluates whether cities provide safe, accessible, affordable, and culturally aligned food systems. It includes food deserts, affordability, food safety standards, fast-food reliance, and public nutrition literacy. The nutrition environment directly influences energy, long-term disease risk, and equity.

3. Knowledge — The information and learning systems that enable adaptability
Knowledge reflects education quality, digital access, public learning resources, media resilience, and transparency. These systems determine whether residents can navigate complexity, make informed decisions, and participate fully in civic and economic life. Strong knowledge ecosystems amplify every other health determinant.

4. Mindset — Psychological and social wellbeing in urban life
Mindset captures stress, burnout, social trust, loneliness, and mental health access. It evaluates the emotional conditions of the city: whether people feel safe, supported, connected, and in control of their lives. This pillar is a decisive predictor of whether strong cities continue to rise—or plateau.

5. Environment — The physical and structural foundation for daily health
Environment includes air quality, safety, green space, housing affordability, waste management, and sanitation. These are the non-negotiable physical conditions that determine long-term sustainability. Environmental strength is the backbone of every other pillar.

Together, the Five Pillars form a systems model of urban health: a city cannot compensate for a failing pillar through excellence in others. Strength emerges from balance. Capacity emerges from coherence. This framework underpins the comparative assessment of 30 global cities in the 2025 Urban Edition and enables city leaders to identify precise leverage points for transformation.

Methodology & Index Construction

How the 2025 Urban Edition Measures the Health Foundations of Global Cities

The Five Pillars Index: 2025 Urban Edition benchmarks how well major cities enable human health and wellbeing through the structural conditions that shape daily life—how cities support people's ability to move, eat, learn, recover, and live in healthy environments. Rather than ranking cities by economic output or isolated sector performance, the index measures whole-of-life urban health capacity: the practical, lived foundations that make healthy behavior easier—or harder—at scale.

A systems framework: Five non-substitutable pillars

The index is built on the Five Pillars of Health—Movement, Nutrition, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment—each capturing a distinct, foundational determinant of urban flourishing. A core design principle is non-substitutability: strength in one domain cannot fully offset weakness in another. Cities with world-class transit but poor mental health conditions, unsafe streets, or unaffordable housing will not perform as highly as cities with more balanced systems.

Indicator architecture and scoring logic

Each pillar is scored using five indicators, yielding 25 indicators in total. Indicators are scored on a 0–2 ordinal scale using predefined thresholds:

- **0 (Insufficient):** weak, unreliable, inaccessible, or harmful conditions
- **1 (Partial):** mixed performance; moderate quality or inconsistent coverage
- **2 (Strong):** high quality, accessible, and broadly supportive conditions

This approach is intentionally designed to **avoid false precision** while enabling consistent global comparison across diverse data environments. Pillar scores range from **0 to 10** (sum of five indicators), and the overall city score is the **unweighted average** of the five pillar scores (0.0–10.0). The unweighted structure reflects the framework logic: all five pillars are essential foundations of health.

Evidence-led assessment and consistency controls

Scoring follows an evidence-first, judgment-second approach. Wherever possible, the index prioritizes internationally recognized datasets and official city-level sources. Where comparable city-level data is incomplete—particularly in indicators related to lived experience and wellbeing—scores are assigned using triangulated qualitative assessment grounded in multiple credible sources and peer-city benchmarking. To minimize bias and ensure repeatability, cities are evaluated using a standardized, pillar-by-pillar scoring procedure and the same definitions and thresholds across all cities.

Limitations and interpretation

As with any global index, results are shaped by variation in data availability, reporting standards, and cross-cultural comparability—especially for Mindset-related indicators and survey-based measures. These constraints are mitigated through source hierarchy, multi-source triangulation, conservative estimation when necessary, and transparent thresholds. The index is therefore best interpreted as a comparative benchmark of structural health conditions, not a clinical health outcome measure or a prediction of future performance.

Full indicator definitions, scoring thresholds, data-source notes, and the complete scoring matrix are provided in the Appendix.

Global Results: The 2025 Urban Edition Ranking

The 2025 Urban Edition of the Five Pillars Index evaluates 30 global cities across Movement, Nutrition, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment. Scores range from 3.0 to 9.4, revealing a widespread in how cities enable healthy, sustainable daily life.

The central finding is simple but powerful:

Cities do not succeed on health by accident. They succeed when mobility, food systems, learning, mindset, and environment are built as **one integrated system**, not as separate policy silos.

Across the sample, four clear performance tiers emerge:

- Tier 1 – Health-First Cities
- Tier 2 – Strong but Unbalanced Systems
- Tier 3 – Developing Urban Health Models
- Tier 4 – At-Risk Urban Systems

These tiers form the backbone of the global analysis.

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1. Tier 1 – Health-First Cities

- Copenhagen (9.4)
- Amsterdam (8.6)
- Stockholm (7.8)
- Singapore (7.6)

Tier 1 cities combine high performance across nearly all pillars with relatively few structural trade-offs. They are not perfect, but they are closest to a health-first urban ideal.

- **Copenhagen** stands out as the clear global leader with a score of **9.4**, supported by perfect or near-perfect performance in Movement (10), Knowledge (10), Mindset (9), and Environment (9). It is the clearest demonstration that a city can be dense, economically advanced, and still deeply human-centered.
- **Amsterdam (8.6)** similarly combines world-class Movement (8), Knowledge (10), and Mindset (9), with strong but slightly more pressured Environment (8) and Nutrition (8). Housing affordability and density pressures are the main frictions.
- **Stockholm (7.8)** and **Singapore (7.6)** complete the top tier with distinct models:
    - Stockholm follows the Nordic pattern of balanced performance: strong Movement (9), high Environment (9), and solid Mindset and Knowledge.
    - Singapore delivers extremely strong Movement (9), Knowledge (9), and Environment (8), but its Mindset score (5) highlights the psychological burden and intensity that often accompany hyper-efficient systems.

What defines Tier 1?

- No pillar scores below 5
- At least two pillars at 9 or 10 for the top two cities
- High social trust and safety, coupled with strong infrastructure and governance
- Trade-offs exist, but they don't fundamentally undermine daily health

These four cities provide the reference benchmark for the rest of the index.

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2. Tier 2 – Strong but Unbalanced Systems

- Barcelona (7.0)
- Tokyo (7.0)
- Vancouver (6.6)
- Berlin (6.4)
- Hong Kong (6.4)
- Seoul (6.4)
- Sydney (6.2)
- Toronto (6.2)
- London (6.0)
- Paris (6.0)

Tier 2 cities have strong health foundations, but their systems are visibly unbalanced: one or two pillars pull them down from Tier 1.

We can see three distinct archetypes inside this tier:

1. **Balanced-but-pressured European hubs**
    a. Barcelona (7.0), Berlin (6.4), London (6.0), Paris (6.0)
    These cities deliver good Movement and Knowledge, decent Nutrition, and strong cultural capital—but they are held back by:
    b. Housing affordability constraints
    c. Urban stress
    d. Uneven safety in some districts
2. **High-capacity but mindset-constrained East Asian systems**
    a. Tokyo (7.0), Seoul (6.4), Hong Kong (6.4)
    These cities perform very well in Movement, Knowledge, and Environment, but score far lower on Mindset:
    b. Tokyo: strong pillars but Mindset at 3
    c. Seoul: Knowledge at 9 but Mindset at 2
    d. Hong Kong: solid across pillars but limited by stress and social pressures

They are **structurally excellent, psychologically strained**.

High-quality Anglosphere and Pacific cities

- Vancouver (6.6), Sydney (6.2), Toronto (6.2**)**
  These cities combine strong Knowledge systems, good Movement and Environment, and relatively healthy Mindset scores.
  Their main friction:
    - Housing affordability
    - Increasing congestion and cost of living

What defines Tier 2?

- Overall scores between ~6.0 and ~7.0
- One or two pillars significantly below the others
- Systems that *could* become Tier 1 with targeted reforms (typically in housing, mental health, or movement equity)

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3. Tier 3 – Developing Urban Health Models

- Chicago (5.8)
- New York City (5.8)
- Shanghai (5.8)
- Beijing (5.6)
- Doha (5.6)
- Dubai (5.4)
- Los Angeles (5.4)
- Santiago (4.6)
- Buenos Aires (4.2)
- Bangkok (4.0)
- São Paulo (4.0)

Tier 3 cities are in transition. They have important strengths—often in infrastructure, culture, or education—but systemic weaknesses prevent them from functioning as true health-first environments.

Two broad clusters emerge:

1. **High-capacity but uneven global hubs**
    a. **NYC, LA, Chicago**:
        i. Strong Knowledge systems and cultural capital
        ii. Reasonable Movement for certain populations
        iii. But weakened by inequality, fragmented environments, and inconsistent safety
    b. **Shanghai, Beijing**:
        i. High Movement and Knowledge scores (especially for core populations)
        ii. Environmental and Mindset challenges, plus uneven affordability
    c. **Dubai, Doha**:
    d. Very strong Movement, safety, and sanitation
    e. Lower Mindset scores driven by stress, limited work–life balance, and social constraints
2. **Latin American and Asian megacities under structural pressure**
    a. Santiago, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Bangkok
    These cities combine:
        i. Strong social vibrancy and cultural capital
        ii. Partial or fragile infrastructure
        iii. Safety concerns, inequality, and volatility in food affordability or environment

Tier 3 is where incremental improvements could unlock major health gains—but only if cities address structural inequality, not just build more infrastructure.

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4. Tier 4 – At-Risk Urban Systems

- Riyadh (3.8)
- Cape Town (3.4)
- Jakarta (3.4)
- New Delhi (3.4)
- Mexico City (3.0)

Tier 4 cities are not "failed cities," but they operate under high systemic strain. They face multiple overlapping constraints in Movement, Mindset, Environment, and sometimes Nutrition.

Common characteristics include:

- Long, congested, and often unsafe commutes
- Uneven or fragile food environments
- High stress and low social trust in large segments of the population
- Safety risks and uncertain environmental conditions
- Housing affordability gaps relative to average incomes

Each of these cities has pockets of excellence—innovation districts, strong cultural cores, or improving infrastructure—but at the scale of the full urban system, health-supportive conditions remain partial and fragile.

Mexico City, with the lowest overall score (3.0), illustrates how congestion, safety, environmental strain, and inequality compound to erode daily health capacity, even in a culturally rich, economically vital city.

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5. Regional Patterns: A Global Health Landscape

While this is a city-level index, clear regional patterns emerge.

Europe

European cities, particularly in Northern and Western Europe, dominate the top tier. Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Stockholm,

Barcelona, Berlin, London, Paris all sit in Tier 1–2. They combine:

- Strong Movement
- High Knowledge
- Solid Nutrition and Environment with emerging pressure around:
- Housing affordability
- Mental health
- Urban density

East Asia

East Asian cities are structurally exceptional, psychologically strained. Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing consistently score high in Movement and Knowledge, with strong or improving Environment. But Mindset scores are low, reflecting high stress, long working hours, and limited mental health access. These cities show how far infrastructure can go—and where it stops.

North America

North American cities cluster in Tier 2–3, with:

- Strong Knowledge infrastructure
- Partial Movement systems (car dependency, inequitable access)
- Pressured Environment (air quality, safety, affordability)

Vancouver and Toronto are closest to the European pattern; NYC, LA, and Chicago are more fragmented, with strong cores and weakened peripheries.

Middle East

Dubai, Doha, Riyadh show a distinct development path:

- High Movement capability (for those with access to cars or formal transit)
- Strong sanitation and safety in core areas
- Lower scores in Mindset and Environment (especially affordability and psychological wellbeing)

They are infrastructure-forward, human-scale-constrained.

Latin America

Santiago, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Mexico City display:

- Social vibrancy
- Partial Knowledge and Nutrition strengths
- Major challenges around safety, inequality, environmental stability, and Movement equity

They often mix high human potential with structurally fragile urban systems.

Africa & South Asia

Cape Town, New Delhi, Jakarta sit in Tier 4, reflecting:

- Rapid urbanization
- Uneven access to safe mobility, sanitation, and food environments
- High stress and safety concerns

They are not outliers in potential, but they operate under constraints that are far more severe than their Tier 1–2 counterparts.

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6. Pillar-Level Signals: What Really Moves the Ranking

Across all 30 cities, three patterns stand out:

1. **Mindset is the hidden differentiator.**
   Many cities with excellent infrastructure—Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, Singapore—are held back by low Mindset scores. High stress, long working hours, and limited mental health access consistently stop strong systems from becoming truly health-first cities.
2. **Environment acts as a structural floor or ceiling.**
   a. Cities like Copenhagen and Stockholm benefit from clean air, safety, green space, and relatively strong affordability.
   b. Cities like Mexico City, New Delhi, and Jakarta show how environmental strain quickly drags down overall performance.
3. **Movement is necessary but not sufficient.**
   Leading cities all perform well on Movement. But some cities with solid mobility (e.g., several East Asian and Middle Eastern hubs) still fall short due to Mindset and Environment. The lesson: you cannot build your way into health while neglecting psychological and social infrastructure.

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7. The Big Picture

The 2025 Urban Edition of the Five Pillars Index shows a clear truth:

The cities that perform best are not simply rich or dense or technologically advanced.
They are the ones that balance infrastructure with human realities—where movement, food, learning, mindset, and environment reinforce each other instead of competing.

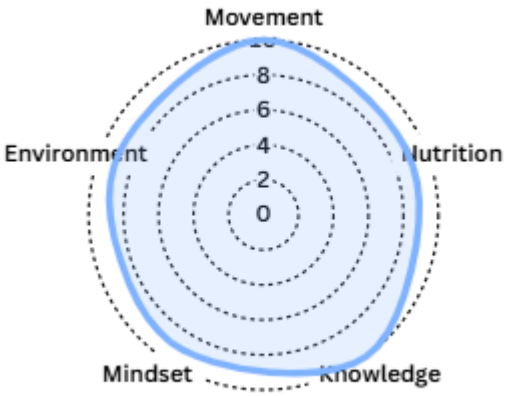
- **Tier 1 cities** prove that a health-first urban model is possible.
- **Tier 2 cities** show that many global hubs are one or two strategic decisions away from joining them.
- **Tier 3 and Tier 4 cities** reveal where global urbanization is still being built on fragile foundations.

The remainder of this report dives deeper into these dynamics: the regional archetypes, the pillar-level gaps, and the specific strategic implications for city leaders who want to move their city closer to a truly health-first future.

Copenhagen, Denmark – 9.4

Rank: 1

Copenhagen stands firmly in the top tier of global urban health performance, shaped by an exceptionally people-first design ethos. It is a high-trust, high-functioning, low-friction city where movement, knowledge access, and social infrastructure reinforce daily wellbeing. Its defining strength is the seamless integration of mobility and public trust, while its clearest vulnerability is housing affordability, the one pressure point in an otherwise exceptionally balanced system.



Movement (10/10)

Copenhagen delivers one of the world's most complete human-scale mobility ecosystems: hyper-walkable streets, universal transit access, and a cycling network that operates as a true mass-mobility backbone. Commutes are short, predictable, and largely congestion-free, while road safety ranks among the strongest globally due to slow streets and separated bike lanes. The city earns a perfect score because all four pillars of movement—walkability, transit, commute efficiency, and safety—are simultaneously world-class.

Nutrition (9/10)

Healthy food access is widespread across the city, reinforced by strong national nutrition guidelines, high food-safety standards, and a culture that values fresh, minimally processed eating. The main drag is affordability: while healthy food is available everywhere, Denmark's high living costs mean lower-income households face tighter nutritional budgets. Still, Copenhagen's overall nutrition environment is robust and systemically supportive.

Knowledge (10/10)

Copenhagen benefits from Denmark's consistently high-performing education system, near-universal digital access, and a broad public-learning infrastructure that supports lifelong development. Media and scientific literacy are strong, anchored in institutional trust and a transparent governance culture. The city reaches the maximum score because all five dimensions—education quality, digital connectivity, public learning, literacy, and open data—perform at global best-practice levels.

Mindset (9/10)

Work–life balance is deeply embedded in Danish culture, supported by short workweeks, high vacation uptake, and strong mental-health access. Social trust and low loneliness reinforce a psychologically safe environment. Stress exists but does not dominate population wellbeing, placing Copenhagen in the upper ranks for urban mental resilience.

Environment (9/10)

Air quality is clean, green space is abundant, and public safety and sanitation systems are among the most reliable globally. Waste and water infrastructure perform at consistently high standards. The sole structural weakness is housing affordability, where demand has outpaced supply, creating barriers for younger and lower-income residents.

Strengths:

- World-leading cycling, walking, and multimodal transit integration
- High social trust and exceptional institutional transparency
- Strong environmental management with clean air and abundant green space

Weaknesses:

- Housing affordability limits accessibility for younger and middle-income groups
- Nutrition affordability pressured by Denmark's high cost of living
- Stress levels moderate in some demographics despite strong work–life norms

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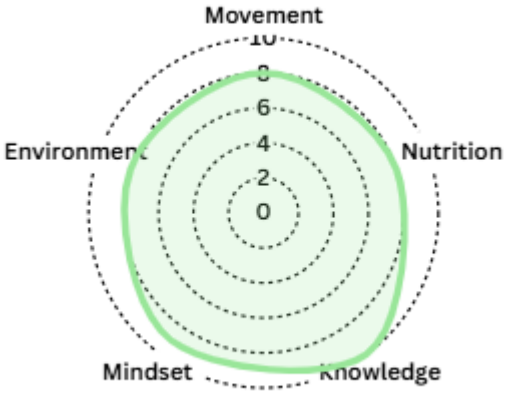
Final Take

Copenhagen represents one of the most complete expressions of a health-first urban model, where mobility, trust, education, and environmental quality reinforce each other in a self-sustaining loop. Its only real constraint is affordability—especially housing—which limits who can fully participate in this high-performing ecosystem. Compared globally, Copenhagen stands as a benchmark for human-centric design and wellbeing infrastructure. The city's story is clear: when you build everything around people, nearly every pillar of urban health rises with it.

Amsterdam, Netherlands – 8.6

Rank: 2

Amsterdam ranks in the upper tier of global urban health performance, defined by a uniquely fluid mobility culture and a deeply embedded knowledge ecosystem. It is a high-functioning, socially balanced, moderately stressed city where movement, learning, and civic infrastructure operate at strong, reliable levels. Amsterdam's standout strength is its active-mobility culture, while its most persistent weakness is structurally high housing costs that increasingly limit access for younger and middle-income residents.



Movement (8/10)

Amsterdam is a global reference point for active mobility, pairing dense walkability with one of the world's most extensive cycling networks and reliable multimodal transit. Commutes are short for most residents, especially those traveling by bike or tram, though road safety and transit coverage do not yet reach the universal benchmarks of cities like Copenhagen. The score reflects a mobility system that is excellent overall but with room to strengthen safety outcomes and network consistency.

Nutrition (8/10)

Healthy food is widely accessible across Amsterdam, supported by strong national food standards, reliable sanitation, and a culture that embraces fresh and minimally processed eating. The main constraints lie in affordability—with healthy food costs rising faster than wages—and a food environment where fast-food options remain visible, though not dominant. The city's nutrition ecosystem is robust and safe but not entirely equitable across income groups.

Knowledge (10/10)

Amsterdam benefits from the Netherlands' high-performing education system, near-universal digital access, and a rich network of public-learning institutions that support lifelong development. Media and scientific literacy remain strong, anchored in a society that values transparency, reasoned debate, and trust in public institutions. With excellence across all five knowledge indicators—education, connectivity, learning infrastructure, literacy, and open data—Amsterdam reaches the maximum score.

Mindset (9/10)

Work–life balance in Amsterdam is shaped by short workweeks, strong vacation uptake, and accessible mental-health services. Social trust remains high, though stress and loneliness appear in pockets due to rising living costs, dense urban rhythms, and demographic fragmentation. The score reflects a generally resilient mindset environment that is strong but not uniformly low-stress.

Environment (8/10)

Air quality is generally good, green space is well-integrated into the urban fabric, and public safety and sanitation systems perform reliably. However, housing affordability is a major structural weakness, with prices outpacing earnings and squeezing many residents into smaller units, shared living, or peripheral commutes. Amsterdam's environment score reflects strong fundamentals with one critical system-level constraint.

Strengths:

- Active-mobility culture that makes walking and cycling the fastest, healthiest modes
- High trust, transparency, and world-class knowledge infrastructure
- Clean, orderly environmental systems with strong sanitation and water quality

Weaknesses:

- Housing affordability severely restricts access and long-term resident stability
- Healthy food affordability pressured by rising costs

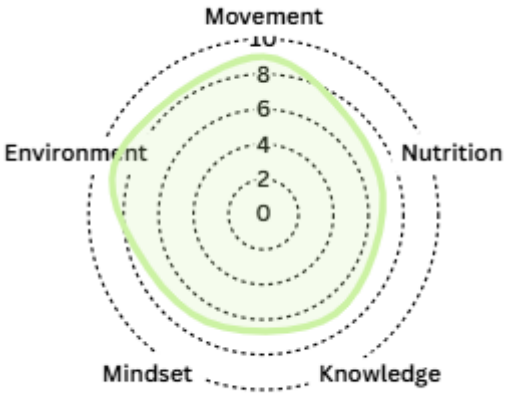
Final Take

Amsterdam's health-first identity is built around movement, knowledge, and trust—a city where active mobility and strong civic institutions form the backbone of daily wellbeing. What ultimately constrains its potential is housing affordability, the pressure point that shapes stress, accessibility, and long-term inclusion. Compared globally, Amsterdam sits comfortably among the top-performing cities, though just below the most balanced models like Copenhagen. The city's story is one of high-functioning urban life challenged by the escalating cost of belonging.

Stockholm, Sweden – 7.8

Rank: 3

Stockholm ranks firmly in the global top tier, defined by a clean, green, high-functioning urban model. It is an efficient, high-trust, mobility-first city where physical infrastructure consistently outperforms social indicators. Stockholm's dominant strength is its world-class environmental and mobility ecosystem, while its biggest weakness lies in rising stress, unequal wellbeing, and affordability pressures that soften its overall resilience.



Movement (9/10)

Stockholm offers exceptional mobility quality, with highly walkable districts, dense and reliable transit coverage, and one of Europe's safest traffic environments. Cycling infrastructure is extensive and well-designed, backed by long-term investment strategies, while commute times remain reasonable even at regional scale. The city scores high because walkability, safety, and transit access are simultaneously strong, with commute efficiency the only factor keeping it from a perfect score.

Nutrition (7/10)

Healthy food access is widespread across Stockholm, supported by a strong national food-safety regime and reliable supermarket distribution. While affordability is generally manageable, rising food prices and economic pressure reduce accessibility for some groups. Nutrition literacy and habits remain uneven—Sweden's dietary outcomes lag behind its policy intentions—resulting in a strong but not elite nutrition environment.

Knowledge (7/10)

Stockholm benefits from Sweden's solid education quality, near-universal digital access, and a broad public-learning infrastructure anchored by major universities and state-funded schooling. However, increasing socio-economic disparities, declining PISA performance in lower-achieving segments, and inconsistent media/scientific literacy temper the overall strength. The city performs well structurally but lacks the uniform excellence and equity characteristic of top-tier knowledge ecosystems.

Mindset (7/10)

Work–life balance norms are strong, supported by regulated work hours, high vacation uptake, and a robust social-welfare foundation. Sweden's high trust in institutions reinforces psychological safety, yet the population faces meaningful challenges: rising stress-related sick leave, moderate loneliness levels, and uneven access to mental-health services. Stockholm delivers a stable mindset environment, but one that shows clear signs of strain beneath its trusted surface.

Environment (9/10)

Stockholm is a global exemplar of environmental quality, with exceptionally clean air, abundant green space, safe public environments, and top-tier waste and water infrastructure. Urban planning emphasizes ecological protection and long-term sustainability, creating a highly livable baseline. Housing affordability remains the city's single major pressure point—limiting accessibility and preventing a perfect score.

Strengths:

- Clean-air, green, and safe urban ecosystem that reinforces daily wellbeing
- High-functioning mobility network where walking, cycling, and transit operate seamlessly
- Strong institutional trust and governance, supporting stable public services

Weaknesses:

- Rising stress and loneliness despite strong welfare and work–life structures
- Housing affordability pressures that undermine accessibility

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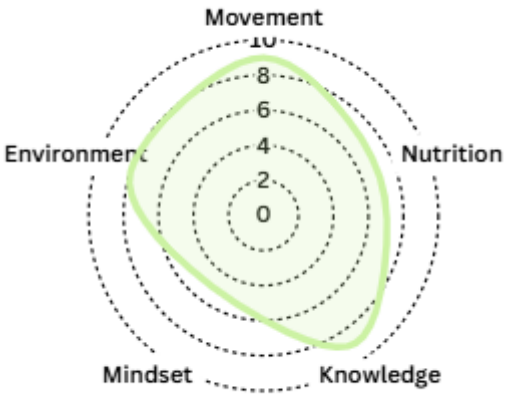
Final Take

Stockholm stands as one of the world's most balanced and clean urban environments, powered by exceptional mobility, green infrastructure, and strong public institutions. Its health-first identity emerges from physical systems that work exceptionally well—safe streets, clean air, and reliable services. What ultimately limits Stockholm is not its infrastructure but its social vulnerabilities: stress, inequality, and affordability pressures that prevent uniformly high wellbeing. Globally, Stockholm represents a near-best-practice model of environmental and mobility excellence, with a story defined by remarkable structural strength paired with growing pressure on the human side of urban health.

Singapore, Singapore – 7.6

Rank: 4

Singapore ranks firmly in the top tier of global urban health performance, defined by precision infrastructure, strong governance, and a deeply engineered sense of order. It is a hyper-efficient, high-safety, high-pressure city where world-class systems support daily life, yet psychological strain remains a defining tension. Singapore's most dominant strength is its seamless combination of mobility, safety, and knowledge capacity, while its greatest weakness is a chronic stress and burnout burden that its strong institutions have yet to fully offset.



Movement (9

Singapore offers one of the world's most integrated, reliable mobility ecosystems: walkable neighborhoods, dense MRT and bus coverage, and exceptionally safe streets. Commute times are moderate and predictable, while road fatalities remain among the lowest globally. Cycling infrastructure is expanding rapidly but is not yet at the level of leading European cities, keeping the score at an elite level but not perfect.

Nutrition (7/10)

Healthy food access is strong across the island, with widespread availability of fresh produce, supermarkets, and regulated hawker centers that maintain high food-safety standards. Nutrition literacy programs exist and food safety is robust, yet affordability remains an issue as Singapore's cost of living rises, especially for healthier options. Overall, Singapore scores well but does not achieve the universal nutritional ease of a true top-tier city.

Knowledge (9/10)

Singapore stands at the forefront of global knowledge performance: world-leading education outcomes, universal broadband penetration, and a powerful lifelong-learning engine through SkillsFuture. Scientific and media literacy are mixed, but the nation's governance model, open-data infrastructure, and digital ecosystem compensate strongly. The result is a city with one of the most advanced knowledge infrastructures anywhere in the world.

Mindset (5/10)

High stress, long working hours, and a rising loneliness burden make psychological wellbeing Singapore's most significant challenge. Social trust is moderate, and while mental-health services are expanding rapidly, stigma and demand pressures limit their impact. This creates a pronounced gap between the city's polished systems and the lived emotional resilience of its population.

Environment (8/10)

Singapore performs exceptionally well on safety, sanitation, water quality, and environmental management, reflecting decades of institution-led planning. Green spaces are widely distributed, though not abundant relative to density, and air quality fluctuates due to regional haze. Housing affordability pressures remain significant for younger and middle-income households, keeping the score at a strong but imperfect.

Strengths:

- World-class integration of transit, walkability, and public safety
- Exceptional education, digital infrastructure, and lifelong-learning capacity
- Highly reliable environmental and sanitation systems

Weaknesses:

- High stress and burnout undermine population wellbeing
- Housing affordability continues to pressure younger households
- Air-quality fluctuations from regional haze events

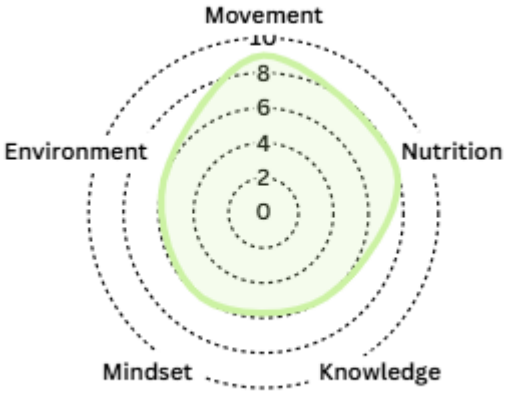
Final Take

Singapore represents one of the most technically accomplished expressions of a health-first urban system, where mobility, digital access, education, and environmental reliability function with near-frictionless precision. What limits the city is not infrastructure but human strain: stress, loneliness, and affordability pressures that sit beneath its polished surface. Compared globally, Singapore is a high-performance but high-pressure model, offering exceptional systems with uneven emotional sustainability. The city's story is clear: Singapore gets almost everything right—except the parts of urban life that depend on slowing down.

Barcelona, Spain – 7.0

Rank: 5

Barcelona sits in the upper-middle tier of global urban health performance, defined by a mobility- and food-access ecosystem that significantly outperforms its social and environmental resilience. It is an energetic, high-density, socially fragmented city where physical accessibility is strong but underlying wellbeing is uneven. Barcelona's defining contrast is clear: world-class walkability and food affordability on one side, and housing stress and socio-economic inequality on the other.



Movement (9/10)

Barcelona delivers a high-performing human-scale mobility system: highly walkable neighborhoods, extensive pedestrian zones, and the iconic Superblocks that reclaim streets for people. Transit access is near universal, cycling coverage is dense and expanding, and road safety is notably strong with a very low fatality rate. Commute times are moderate rather than exceptional, keeping the score at 9 instead of perfect.

Nutrition (8/10)

Healthy food access is widespread and affordability is strong, with healthy baskets costing well under 10% of household expenditure. Food safety standards are robust, and the retail environment is dense across the city. The main weakness is behavioral: low-to-moderate adherence to the Mediterranean diet and the high presence of unhealthy retail options, especially in lower-income districts.

Knowledge (6/10)

Barcelona benefits from near-universal digital access and a solid, publicly funded education system. However, academic outcomes sit around OECD averages, with persistent inequalities and skill gaps limiting overall performance. Media and scientific literacy are uneven, and transparency/open-data structures remain partial rather than systemically strong.

Mindset (6/10)

Work–life balance is a major cultural strength in Spain, reinforced by regulated working hours and high vacation usage. Yet mental-health signals are concerning: high loneliness rates, widespread workplace stress, and rising psychosocial risks across several sectors. Social trust is moderate and mental-health support exists but is inconsistent in reach and effectiveness.

Environment (6/10)

Air quality has improved significantly, reaching below 15 µg/m³ PM2.5, and waste/water systems are modern and reliable. However, green-space access is uneven, personal safety varies meaningfully across districts, and housing affordability has become one of the city's most acute structural challenges. These pressures pull down an otherwise competent environmental baseline.

Strengths:

- Mobility ecosystem that combines walkability, transit density, and safe cycling at scale
- Strong food accessibility and affordability within a mature Mediterranean food system
- Environmental infrastructure (air quality, sanitation) improving despite high density

Weaknesses:

- Housing affordability crisis that fundamentally shapes resident wellbeing
- Uneven green-space access and socio-economic disparities across districts
- Rising loneliness and mental-health strain in a city with high social fragmentation

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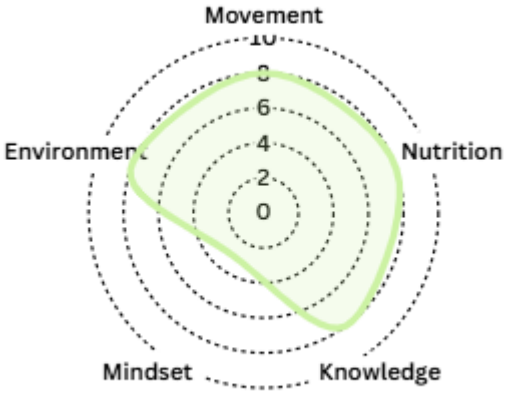
Final Take

Barcelona's health-first profile is built on exceptional mobility, strong food systems, and solid environmental infrastructure, making daily life highly accessible and navigable. Yet the city is ultimately constrained by housing pressures, social inequality, and a growing mental-health burden that dilute the benefits of its physical design. Compared globally, Barcelona stands out as a city that performs strongly on movement and nutrition but struggles to translate this into consistent psychological or social wellbeing. Its story is one of structural strengths overshadowed by social strain—a reminder that great streets and transport systems cannot fully compensate for affordability and inequality challenges.

Tokyo, Japan – 7.0

Rank: 5

Tokyo ranks in the upper tier of global urban health performance, defined by exceptional physical systems and deep structural efficiency. It is a high-functioning, high-intensity, low-friction megacity where mobility, safety, and daily infrastructure operate with extraordinary reliability. Tokyo's greatest strength is its world-class movement ecosystem, while its clearest vulnerability is the city's persistent stress culture and low psychological wellbeing.



Movement (8/10)

Tokyo delivers one of the most complete mobility ecosystems among global megacities: highly walkable districts, extremely dense rail coverage, and exceptional road safety. Most trips are supported by predictable, high-frequency transit, though commute times remain long due to scale and network load. Cycling infrastructure is improving but inconsistent across the city, keeping the score just short of perfection. This mix of excellence and friction results in a strong 8/10.

Nutrition (8/10)

Healthy food access is nearly universal, supported by dense supermarket networks, fresh markets, and strong national food-safety systems. Nutrition literacy is deeply embedded through Japan's Shokuiku framework, reinforcing balanced eating habits across generations. The main constraint is cost pressure and affordability in central districts, but overall Tokyo remains one of the world's most supportive nutrition environments.

Knowledge (8/10)

Tokyo benefits from Japan's globally strong education performance, near-universal broadband access, and a rich public-learning ecosystem spanning schools, libraries, and lifelong learning institutions. Scientific and media literacy are high, anchored in broad institutional trust and widespread digital infrastructure. A slightly more conservative transparency culture keeps it shy of top-tier scores, but Tokyo remains firmly in the global knowledge vanguard.

Mindset (3/10)

Tokyo's greatest systemic vulnerability lies in mental wellbeing. Long working hours, chronic stress, and burnout remain widespread, compounded by moderate social trust and elevated loneliness. Mental-health services exist but remain culturally underutilized, limiting population-level resilience. As a result, Tokyo performs poorly on this pillar despite strengths in other domains.

Environment (8/10)

Air quality is strong by megacity standards, green space is well-distributed (though not abundant), and public safety and sanitation systems are among the most reliable globally. Urban services—from water to waste to transit stations—are consistently well-maintained and trusted. Housing affordability, however, remains a structural challenge for younger residents, preventing a higher score.

Strengths:

- World-class movement system with unmatched rail coverage and walkability
- Extremely strong safety and sanitation infrastructure
- High educational quality and digital penetration supporting continuous learning

Weaknesses:

- Chronic stress and work culture undermine population wellbeing
- Housing affordability pressures, especially for younger generations
- Cycling infrastructure lags far behind global peers

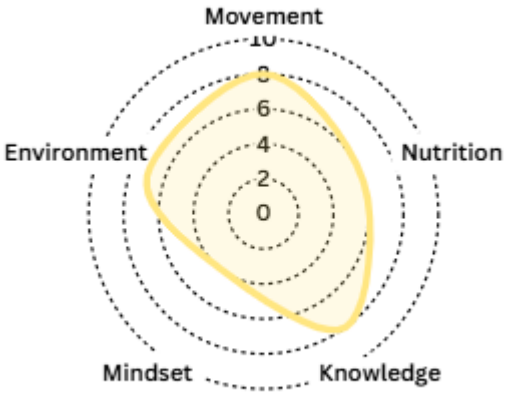
Final Take

Tokyo is a global megacity of extraordinary capability—an urban machine that delivers mobility, safety, knowledge access, and daily reliability at a scale matched by few cities anywhere. Its defining strength is the seamless, high-trust functioning of its physical and digital systems; its defining limitation is the human cost of this efficiency, expressed through high stress, moderate social trust, and persistent loneliness. Globally, Tokyo stands as a model of infrastructural excellence but also a warning on the psychological sustainability of high-performance urban life. The city's story is clear: Tokyo works beautifully—yet it asks a great deal from the people who live within it.

Vancouver, Canada – 6.6

Rank: 7

Vancouver ranks in the upper tier of global urban health performance, defined by excellent environmental quality, strong mobility access, and a high-performing knowledge ecosystem. It is a calm, well-designed, high-quality-of-life city whose biggest constraints come not from infrastructure, but from affordability pressures and rising psychological strain. Its standout asset is its environmental and educational foundation; its clearest weakness is the economic and mental toll of an increasingly inaccessible urban life.



Movement (8

Vancouver combines walkable central districts with strong transit accessibility across most neighbourhoods, and one of North America's most advanced cycling networks. Road safety levels outperform the continent's major urban centers, although commute times are only moderate and congestion remains a friction point. The city earns a high score because walkability, transit reach, and safety significantly outweigh its remaining mobility inefficiencies.

Nutrition (6

Access to healthy food is solid, supported by supermarkets, farmers' markets, and relatively strong safety standards, though affordability remains an issue for lower-income residents. Fast-food availability is widespread but not overpowering, and public nutrition programs exist but are not deeply embedded. Vancouver's nutrition environment is stable but constrained by cost barriers.

Knowledge (8

Vancouver benefits from excellent educational performance by provincial standards, near-universal digital access, and a rich learning ecosystem anchored by strong universities and a well-developed public library network. Public knowledge infrastructure is highly accessible, though media literacy and transparency fall just short of global best practice. The overall picture is one of a well-equipped, high-capability knowledge city.

Mindset (4

High living costs, long commutes for many workers, and job-market pressure contribute to elevated stress and burnout levels. Social trust is moderate, loneliness affects key demographics, and while mental health services exist, capacity and accessibility remain inconsistent. Vancouver's psychological landscape is defined by a tension between supportive cultural norms and significant economic and emotional pressure.

Environment (7

Air quality is generally clean, and Vancouver's extensive natural and urban green spaces create one of the most nature-integrated city environments in the world. Water, waste, and sanitation systems are reliable and well-managed, but affordability—especially housing—remains a dominant environmental constraint. Safety is comparatively strong, yet unevenness in certain districts tempers the overall score.

Strengths:

- Exceptional natural and urban environmental quality
- High-performing, well-connected mobility and knowledge systems
- Strong green-space integration supporting daily wellbeing

Weaknesses:

- Housing affordability severely limits inclusive access to the city
- Elevated stress and uneven mental-health access
- Commute friction and cost pressures erode lived experience

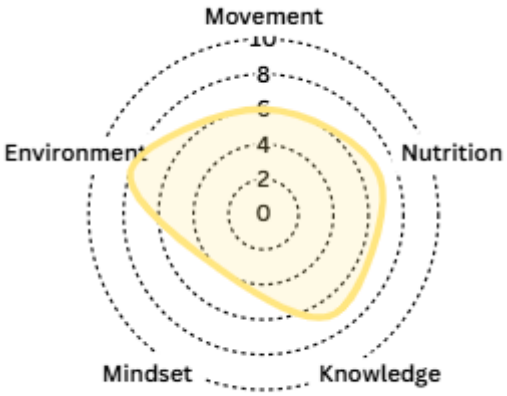
Final Take

Vancouver embodies a high-quality, environmentally anchored urban model, where movement, education, and access to nature combine to create a structurally resilient city. Yet its most significant vulnerabilities stem from affordability and psychological strain, which prevent residents from fully benefiting from the city's strengths. Compared globally, Vancouver stands out as a city with world-class environmental and educational fundamentals but a widening divide between its structural excellence and its lived reality. The city's story is one of beautiful systems under rising pressure—a place where the environment lifts wellbeing, but affordability and stress quietly hold it back.

Berlin, Germany – 6.4

Rank: 8

Berlin lands in the upper mid-tier of the index: a green, cognitively strong, yet psychologically strained city balancing high environmental quality with rising mental-health and affordability pressures. Its core identity is that of an open, creative, and spacious urban environment constrained by inconsistent mobility performance and growing social stress. Berlin's dominant strength—its exceptionally green, clean, and safe physical environment—stands in sharp contrast to its weakest pillar: population stress and mental wellbeing.



Movement (6/10)

Berlin combines walkable inner districts with a dense, comprehensive public-transport system that places most residents within minutes of a bus, tram, S-Bahn, or U-Bahn stop. Cycling infrastructure exists at scale but remains inconsistent and politically unstable, and commute times are surprisingly long, reflecting rail delays and city-wide friction. Road safety is a standout strength, but overall the city lands mid-range due to uneven infrastructure quality and low commute efficiency.

Nutrition (7/10)

Healthy food is broadly accessible across the city, and Germany's strong food-safety regime ensures uniformly high standards. Affordability is moderate—manageable for many households but strained for lower-income residents—while Berlin's food culture sits between convenience-driven fast food and a rapidly expanding organic/market ecosystem. Strong public nutrition programs and a growing sustainable-food movement elevate the city's nutritional environment above average.

Knowledge (7/10)

Berlin benefits from a solid national education baseline, vibrant universities, and near-universal digital access, creating a strong platform for human development and lifelong learning. Scientific and media literacy are present but uneven due to socioeconomic variation, while transparency and open-data infrastructure are notably robust. The city earns a high score because its institutional, digital, and informational systems are well-developed even if not fully equitable.

Mindset (4/10)

Stress and burnout are widespread, mirroring national trends but amplified by Berlin's urban complexity and employment structure. Social trust is moderate, and rising loneliness—especially among lower-income groups—indicates growing psychological fragmentation. Mental-health access exists but struggles to match demand, leaving Berlin with one of the weaker mindset profiles among major European capitals.

Environment (8/10)

Berlin's environmental profile is a major asset: excellent air quality, abundant and varied green spaces, and highly reliable water and sanitation systems. Safety is mixed, varying by district, and housing affordability—while more manageable than in other global capitals—has tightened significantly. Still, Berlin rises into the top tier environmentally due to its unique combination of clean air, space, and ecological stability.

Strengths:

- Exceptional environmental quality with abundant green space and clean air
- Strong digital and learning infrastructure enabling high knowledge access
- Reliable public services and strong food-safety standards

Weaknesses:

- Rising stress, burnout, and social-fragmentation indicators
- Inconsistent cycling infrastructure and long commutes reduce movement efficiency

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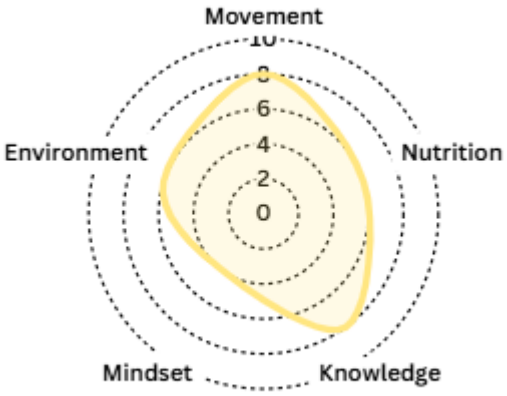
Final Take

Berlin presents a distinctive profile: a green, breathable, cognitively rich city where environmental and informational strengths stand in stark contrast to mounting psychological and social pressures. Its health-first potential is substantial, but hampered by rising stress, uneven mobility performance, and affordability pressures that erode daily wellbeing. Compared globally, Berlin ranks above average due to its environmental and digital assets, yet remains limited by its weakest pillar—mindset resilience. Berlin's story is ultimately one of high environmental opportunity constrained by human strain: a city where the external environment thrives, but the internal environment of its residents needs urgent reinforcement.

Hong Kong SAR, China – 6.4

Rank: 8

Hong Kong ranks in the upper tier of global urban health performance, shaped by density, efficiency, and a highly capable public sector. The city's identity is defined by high-intensity mobility and strong institutional systems, contrasted with mounting psychological pressure and extreme affordability challenges. Its dominant strength is world-class movement and knowledge infrastructure, while its clearest weakness is the human cost of stress, housing pressure, and limited personal space.



Movement (8/10)

Hong Kong operates one of the most efficient mobility ecosystems on earth: highly walkable urban corridors, a universally accessible MTR network, and short, predictable commutes across most districts. Transit coverage exceeds 85%, and road safety is strong by global standards, despite high density. Movement scores high because all core pillars—walkability, transit, commute efficiency, and safety—are simultaneously well above global norms, with only congestion pressure and limited cycling space moderating the score.

Nutrition (6/10)

Healthy food is widely accessible across the city through markets, supermarkets, and fresh-food stalls, though affordability is increasingly stressed by Hong Kong's high cost of living. Food safety standards are robust, yet everyday diets are shaped by convenience culture and high reliance on quick-service options. The city lands at a mid-to-high score because access and safety are strong, but affordability and dietary habits introduce structural constraints.

Knowledge (8/10)

Hong Kong benefits from exceptionally strong education quality, near-universal digital connectivity, and a broad public-learning ecosystem that includes libraries, museums, and community education centers. Media and scientific literacy are high, supported by institutional transparency and a culture of academic rigor. Knowledge scores strongly because all five dimensions—education, digital access, learning infrastructure, literacy, and data openness—are consistently high-performing, placing Hong Kong among top global urban knowledge hubs.

Mindset (4/10)

Stress and burnout are widespread, driven by long working hours, intense competition, and limited personal space. Social trust is moderate, loneliness is common among both youth and elderly populations, and mental-health access—while improving—remains uneven relative to population needs. Hong Kong scores low on Mindset because psychological pressure is high and support systems lag behind the intensity of daily life.

Environment (6/10)

Air quality fluctuates but is generally in the mid-range, green space is limited yet well-maintained, and public sanitation is reliable and high-quality. Safety is strong, but housing affordability remains one of the most severe in the world, significantly constraining environmental wellbeing. The score reflects strong sanitation and safety, counterbalanced by air-quality variability and profound housing stress.

Strengths:

- One of the world's most efficient mobility ecosystems
- High-performing education and digital infrastructure
- Strong public sanitation, safety, and institutional reliability

Weaknesses:

- Extreme housing unaffordability undermines wellbeing
- High stress, burnout, and loneliness across demographics

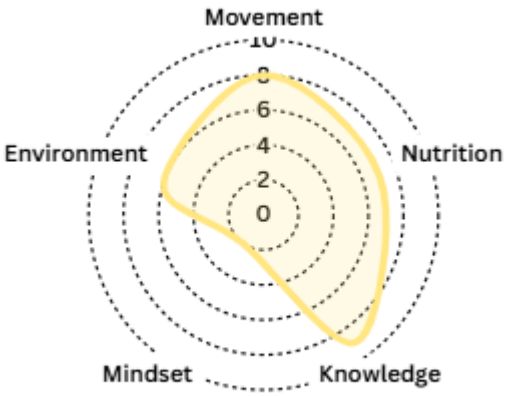
Final Take

Hong Kong stands as a high-capability, high-density city where movement, education, and public systems function at exceptional global standards. Yet the city's human experience is constrained by stress, limited space, and some of the highest housing pressures in the world. Compared globally, Hong Kong is a top-tier performer in structural capacity but a mid-tier performer in human wellbeing. Its story is one of efficiency at scale, where world-class systems enable urban life to function flawlessly—while the emotional and spatial costs of that efficiency remain the defining barrier to long-term, health-first sustainability.

Seoul, South Korea – 6.4

Rank: 8

Seoul sits in the upper-middle tier of the global index, defined by world-class infrastructure wrapped inside a high-pressure social environment. It is a hyper-efficient, hyper-dense, high-stress megacity where mobility, safety, and digital connectivity excel, but psychological wellbeing lags far behind. Seoul's greatest strength is its exceptional knowledge and transit systems, while its clearest weakness is a deep, structural mental-health burden driven by overwork, loneliness, and societal pressure.



Movement (8/10)

Seoul is a high-performing mobility city shaped by walkable districts, universally accessible transit, and excellent road safety. Rail and bus networks place the vast majority of residents within a short walk of public transport, though commute times remain long and cycling infrastructure is inconsistent. Overall, the city's mobility ecosystem is reliable and safe, but not yet seamlessly multimodal.

Nutrition (7/10)

Food access across Seoul is broad, with supermarkets, markets, and convenience stores deeply integrated into dense neighborhoods. National food-safety standards are strong and public nutrition programs are well-developed, but affordability pressures and spatial food inequality in peripheral districts pull the score down. The city performs well, yet the nutrition environment is not uniformly equitable.

Knowledge (9/10)

Seoul ranks among the global leaders in knowledge capacity: world-class education outcomes, near-universal broadband, and a robust public-learning ecosystem underpin lifelong development. Digital access is universal and open-data governance is advanced, though media literacy is mixed and misinformation resilience varies across demographic groups. These strengths place Seoul firmly in the top echelon of global knowledge cities.

Mindset (2/10)

This is Seoul's defining vulnerability. Stress and burnout are widespread, long working hours are normalized, and loneliness has become a major social issue across age groups. Interpersonal trust is moderate at best, and while mental-health services exist, capacity and stigma limit effective access. The result is a city where psychological strain undermines otherwise world-class physical systems.

Environment (6/10)

Seoul offers generally good air quality for its size, reliable sanitation, and some well-maintained green corridors — though green space remains limited relative to urban density. Public safety is among the strongest globally, yet housing affordability remains a major structural constraint for younger and lower-income groups. Overall, the environment is functional and safe, but not optimally supportive of wellbeing.

Strengths:

- Exceptional education, digital networks, and open-data infrastructure
- High public safety and a reliable, deeply integrated transit system
- Strong national food-safety and public-health foundations

Weaknesses:

- Severe stress, overwork, and rising loneliness across age groups
- Housing affordability and long commute patterns constrain quality of life
- Cycling and green-space infrastructure lag behind global leaders

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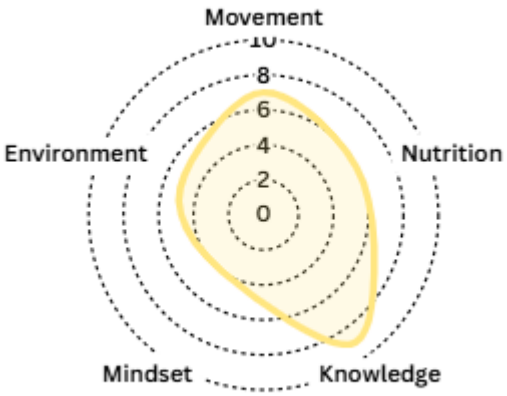
Final Take

Seoul is a city of remarkable capability — fast, dense, intelligent, and highly connected — but one whose human experience remains shaped by pressure rather than ease. Its infrastructure and knowledge systems rank among the best in the world, yet psychological wellbeing is low, and affordability challenges persist. Compared globally, Seoul stands as a high-performance but high-strain urban model, where the physical systems lead and the social systems struggle to keep pace. The city's story is clear: Seoul excels at everything except the human softness that makes urban life sustainable.

Sydney, Australia – 6.2

Rank: 11

Sydney sits in the upper-middle tier of global health-first performance, shaped by strong institutional capacity, high-quality services, and a rapidly improving movement ecosystem. It is a high-functioning yet high-pressure city where world-class knowledge infrastructure competes with rising affordability and wellbeing challenges. Its clearest strength—fast, safe, and increasingly integrated mobility—stands in sharp contrast to its defining weakness: severe housing pressure and lifestyle strain.



Movement (7/10)

Sydney's movement system is strong, multi-modal, and improving rapidly. Walkability is excellent in the inner city, and transit accessibility covers the vast majority of residents, delivering one of the most connected urban regions in Oceania. Cycling infrastructure exists and is expanding, commute times are acceptable relative to major global metros, and road safety sits in the high-performing band. The combination results in one of the most capable mobility ecosystems outside Europe and East Asia, even if suburban walkability and cycling continuity remain uneven.

Nutrition (6/10)

The city offers solid access to healthy food in central districts, supported by strong national nutritional guidance and robust food-safety regulation. However, affordability pressures increasingly constrain diet quality for low- and middle-income households, and fast-food penetration remains high across both inner and outer suburbs. The result is a structurally strong but behaviorally stressed nutrition environment, where the system is capable but cost and culture limit outcomes.

Knowledge (9/10)

Sydney excels on knowledge infrastructure: education outcomes sit above OECD norms, digital access is near-universal, and public-learning systems are comprehensive. Open-data governance and institutional transparency are mature, enabling both public accountability and innovation. Scientific and media literacy are strong for most residents, although inequality introduces variance. Overall, this pillar is Sydney's global-level competitive advantage.

Mindset (4/10)

The psychological climate is marked by high stress, burnout, and cost-of-living pressure, with long commutes and workload intensity fueling mental fatigue. Social trust is moderate and loneliness is widespread despite nominal community belonging. Mental-health services are present but stretched, reducing accessibility during periods of high demand. These pressures create a high-achievement, low-resilience mental environment that constrains overall wellbeing.

Environment (5/10)

Sydney benefits from consistently clean air, reliable sanitation, and stable water systems, forming a strong environmental foundation. Green space is accessible but unevenly distributed, and personal safety varies across districts. The dominant environmental constraint is housing affordability, which has deteriorated into a systemic barrier for many residents. In sum: a clean and stable but economically strained environmental context.

Strengths:

- High-performing mobility ecosystem with strong transit and safety fundamentals
- World-class education, digital connectivity, and public-learning infrastructure

Weaknesses:

- Severe housing unaffordability reducing access and upward mobility
- High stress and burnout driven by cost, workload, and urban pressure

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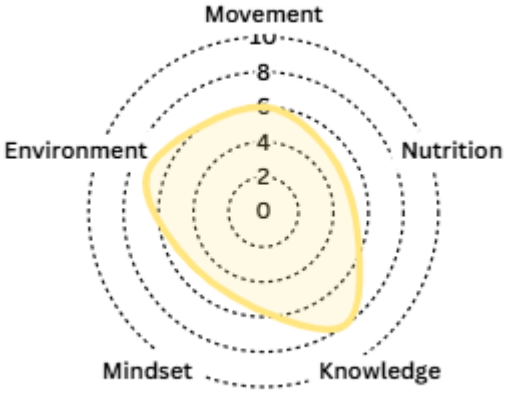
Final Take

Sydney is a capable, connected, and institutionally strong city that excels in mobility, knowledge infrastructure, and environmental stability. Yet its health-first performance is constrained by severe affordability issues and a mounting psychological burden that affects everyday life. Globally, Sydney compares well on systems and structure but underperforms on human experience, revealing a critical gap between capacity and wellbeing. The city's story is one of high performance under high pressure—a place where strong foundations lift potential, but cost and stress increasingly shape the lived reality.

Toronto, Canada – 6.2

Rank: 11

Toronto sits in the upper-mid tier of global urban health performance, shaped by strong institutional systems but restrained by affordability pressures and commuter stress. It is a high-functioning yet high-friction metropolis, where education, safety, and infrastructure outperform, but daily life is strained. Its clearest strength is institutional quality; its biggest vulnerability is the human cost of long commutes, burnout, and the rising cost of living.



Movement (6/10)

Toronto offers strong walkability in the central districts and broad transit accessibility across most neighbourhoods. Cycling infrastructure is expanding but remains inconsistent, and commute times are among the longest in Canada due to congestion and sprawl. Road safety performs well relative to other North American cities, yet mobility friction remains a defining limitation of daily life.

Nutrition (5/10)

Healthy food is widely available, but accessibility varies by income and neighbourhood, leaving pockets of food insecurity across the city. Affordability is the biggest barrier, with nutritious diets consuming a disproportionate share of household budgets. Food safety standards are strong and nutrition programs exist, but fast-food density and structural cost pressure weaken the nutritional environment.

Knowledge (8/10)

Toronto benefits from above-OECD education outcomes, near-universal digital access, and a comprehensive public-learning ecosystem. Its universities, libraries, and digital platforms provide broad opportunities for lifelong development. Scientific and media literacy are solid, and transparency practices are strong, though not at global best-practice levels.

Mindset (5/10)

Burnout and stress levels are elevated, driven by long commutes, affordability strain, and the pace of urban life. Social trust is moderate, loneliness affects key demographics, and mental-health services face demand pressures and uneven access. Work–life balance sits in the middle range, neither acutely poor nor strongly protective.

Environment (7/10)

Air quality is clean by global megacity standards, and Toronto's extensive parks and ravine systems provide rare access to nature within the urban fabric. Water, waste, and sanitation infrastructure operate at a high and reliable standard. Housing affordability, however, is a major structural weakness, and safety varies widely by district.

Strengths:

- High-performing education and digital infrastructure supporting population resilience
- Strong environmental fundamentals, including clean air and abundant green space
- Broad transit accessibility across the metropolitan region

Weaknesses:

- Long commute times and persistent mobility friction
- Housing and food affordability pressures undermining wellbeing
- Elevated stress and uneven access to mental-health care

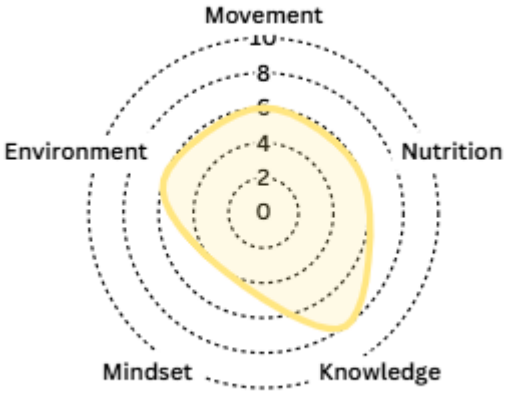
Final Take

Toronto is defined by institutional strength paired with human strain. Its systems—education, environment, infrastructure—perform at a consistently high standard, giving the city a strong structural backbone. Yet affordability, congestion, and chronic stress prevent these advantages from translating into everyday ease. In global comparison, Toronto stands as a capable but constrained metropolis: a city that works well on paper, but demands a lot from its residents. Its core story is the tension between high capability and high pressure—a city poised for health-first transformation if it confronts its structural stressors head-on.

London, United Kingdom – 6.0

Rank: 13

London sits firmly in the mid-tier of the index: a high-capacity, high-friction global city defined by world-class knowledge infrastructure wrapped inside a high-stress urban environment. Its greatest strength is the depth of its education and transit systems; its clearest weakness is the chronic strain on daily life—long commutes, high housing costs, and elevated stress levels.



Movement (6/10)

London offers good walkability in its urban core and exceptional transit accessibility, with over 96% of residents living within 400–500 meters of a public-transport stop. Yet these strengths are counterbalanced by long commutes, congestion, and uneven cycling infrastructure—strong in parts, patchy elsewhere. Road safety is a bright spot, among the strongest of major global cities, but overall performance lands mid-range due to structural inefficiencies and mobility friction.

Nutrition (6/10)

Healthy food is broadly accessible, supported by a strong food-safety regime and abundant retail options, but affordability challenges persist for lower- and middle-income households. London's food ecosystem is balanced rather than health-first, with fast food widely available alongside strong healthy alternatives. Public nutrition programs and policy direction exist, but their effects are uneven across income groups.

Knowledge (8/10)

London's strongest pillar: a globally competitive education system, near-universal digital access, and a powerful learning ecosystem anchored by universities, libraries, and public institutions. Scientific and media literacy are solid, though uneven across socioeconomic lines. The city benefits from one of the world's most robust open-data and transparency cultures, elevating London into the upper tier globally for knowledge infrastructure.

Mindset (4/10)

High stress and burnout are defining features of London's lived experience, fueled by intense workloads, long commutes, and high cost pressures. Social trust and mental-health access exist but are fragmented, creating uneven psychological safety across different communities. Loneliness and isolation remain moderate but persistent, keeping the city's mental-resilience score in the lower range.

Environment (6/10)

Air quality has improved meaningfully, and green space is relatively abundant—though unevenly distributed. Public sanitation and utilities operate at consistently high standards, reinforcing environmental stability. However, housing affordability remains a structural constraint, and safety varies significantly by neighborhood, resulting in a mixed overall environmental profile.

Strengths:

- Deep, world-class knowledge infrastructure with universal digital access
- High transit accessibility and strong road-safety performance
- Clean air relative to global megacities and robust sanitation systems

Weaknesses:

- Long, congested commutes that increase daily friction and stress
- Housing costs that erode affordability and overall wellbeing
- Elevated burnout and uneven mental-health resilience

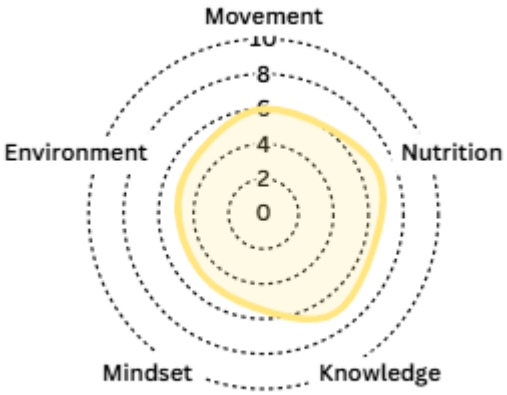
Final Take

London is a city of immense capability operating under immense strain. Its intellectual and infrastructural strengths—education, transit reach, digital systems—reflect a global powerhouse, yet its high daily friction, long commutes, and affordability pressures constrain its health-first potential. Compared globally, London performs strongest where institutional depth matters and weakest where day-to-day human experience is shaped by stress, time poverty, and cost burdens. The city's story is one of extraordinary capacity overshadowed by chronic urban pressure—a place where systems excel but people often struggle.

Paris, France – 6.0

Rank: 13

Paris ranks in the mid-range of global urban health performance, defined by strong public systems but constrained by structural pressure points. It is a high-density, high-stress, high-functioning metropolis where access to services is strong but daily lived experience is uneven. Paris' defining strength is its deep civic and learning infrastructure, while its biggest weakness is the persistent combination of stress, affordability burdens, and uneven safety that fractures overall wellbeing.



Movement (6/10)

Paris is highly walkable and offers near-universal access to transit, with dense metro coverage and short distances to daily services. Cycling infrastructure has expanded rapidly, but user experience still trails the safest global leaders, and commute times remain long and stressful for many residents, especially those traveling from the wider Île-de-France region. Safety and congestion challenges keep the score in the mid-range despite strong walkability and transit fundamentals.

Nutrition (7/10)

Healthy food access is strong across the city, reinforced by rigorous national food-safety standards and long-standing public nutrition programs. However, affordability is pressured—especially for lower-income residents—and Paris' food environment is shaped by a large fast-food and ultra-processed sector that competes directly with traditional healthy eating norms. The result is a nutrition system that is structurally sound but behaviorally challenged.

Knowledge (7/10)

Paris offers broad access to education and digital infrastructure, with strong public-learning institutions and near-universal connectivity enabling lifelong development. However, overall education quality sits close to the OECD average, scientific and media literacy are uneven across socioeconomic groups, and open-data transparency—while present—is not yet at the maturity or usability level seen in global leaders. The city's knowledge environment is solid and accessible, but fragmented performance across literacy and transparency brings the score into the upper-mid range rather than the top tier.

Mindset (5/10)

Work–life balance is structurally protected by France's short legal workweek and strong vacation culture, but this is offset by **high stress, lower social trust, and moderate levels of loneliness**, particularly among young adults. Mental-health services exist but face capacity constraints, long wait times, and unequal access. Paris' psychosocial environment is defined by tension: strong rights and protections, but daily lived experience marked by friction, pressure, and fragmentation.

Environment (5/10)

Air quality is moderate and periodically strained by pollution episodes, while green space is unevenly distributed across the dense urban core. Safety is mixed, with clear variation between central districts and certain high-risk zones, and housing affordability remains a major constraint on quality of life. Strong sanitation and water systems elevate the score, but structural pressures keep Paris in the mid-tier.

Strengths:

- Dense, multimodal mobility and learning ecosystems that anchor public access
- Strong national food-safety, health, and regulatory frameworks
- Rich cultural, educational, and civic infrastructure that supports lifelong learning

Weaknesses:

- High stress, uneven social trust, and strained mental-health capacity
- Housing affordability and cost of living reduce long-term wellbeing
- Uneven safety and patchy green-space availability across districts

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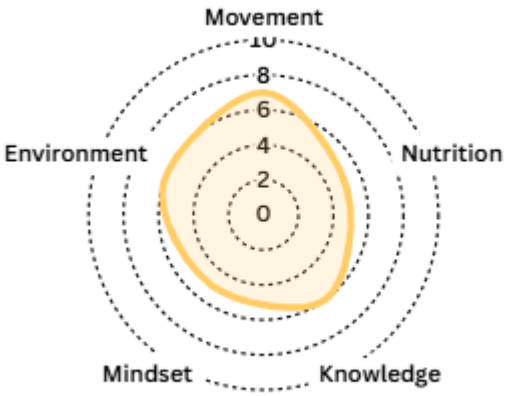
Final Take

Paris is a city of powerful systems but uneven lived experience: it offers world-class access to services, culture, mobility, and learning, yet struggles to convert these advantages into uniformly high wellbeing. The city's biggest limitations—stress, affordability, and safety asymmetries—dampen what could otherwise be a top-tier performance. Globally, Paris stands as a capable but strained metropolis, strong in structure but challenged in daily quality of life. The story of Paris is one of high potential held back by the friction of density, pressure, and inequality.

Chicago, United States – 5.8

Rank: 15

Chicago ranks in the upper-middle tier of the index, defined by strong infrastructure and mobility potential offset by deep socioeconomic and spatial inequality. It is a diverse, opportunity-rich, structurally uneven city where excellence and deprivation coexist within a few train stops. Chicago's greatest strength is its walkability–transit synergy, while its clearest weakness is persistent inequality across safety, food access, and affordability.



Movement (7/10)

Chicago offers one of the strongest mobility ecosystems in the United States: a highly walkable core, a comprehensive bus and rail network, and widespread transit proximity. Commute times are moderate and road safety sits in the mid-range, with risk concentrated in specific corridors rather than citywide. Cycling infrastructure exists at scale but remains inconsistently protected, resulting in a high—but not top-tier—movement score.

Nutrition (5/10)

Chicago's nutrition landscape is sharply bifurcated. The North Side and downtown enjoy ample supermarkets and fresh-food access, while large sections of the South and West Sides face entrenched food deserts and rapidly rising nutrition insecurity. Strong food-safety regulation and extensive SNAP-Ed and school food programs elevate the score, but fast-food saturation and affordability pressures prevent healthier diets from becoming the default.

Knowledge (6/10)

Chicago benefits from a broad education ecosystem, major universities, a large library network, and a mature open-data environment. Yet educational quality and digital access remain uneven, tracking longstanding neighborhood-level inequities. Media literacy and scientific literacy sit at moderate levels, producing a generally strong but highly uneven knowledge performance.

Mindset (5/10)

Chicago's psychological environment reflects the pressures of a large American metropolis: moderate stress, mixed work–life balance, and fragmented social trust shaped by segregation and uneven safety. Loneliness levels are typical for major urban centers, and while mental-health resources exist in abundance, access varies widely by income and neighborhood. The result is a stable but strained mindset profile.

Environment (6/10)

Air quality is generally healthy, and sanitation and water systems perform reliably citywide. Chicago's lakefront and large park system provide substantial green space, but access varies dramatically across neighborhoods. High crime in specific districts and persistent housing affordability challenges remain the core structural environmental constraints.

Strengths:

- High-quality multimodal movement supported by strong walkability and near-universal transit access
- Robust institutional infrastructure in sanitation, public learning, and open-data transparency
- Significant green and cultural assets that support lifestyle quality for residents with access

Weaknesses:

- Deep inequality across safety, food access, and educational outcomes
- Housing affordability challenges for large portions of the population
- Fast-food dominance and structural nutrition insecurity in underserved neighborhoods

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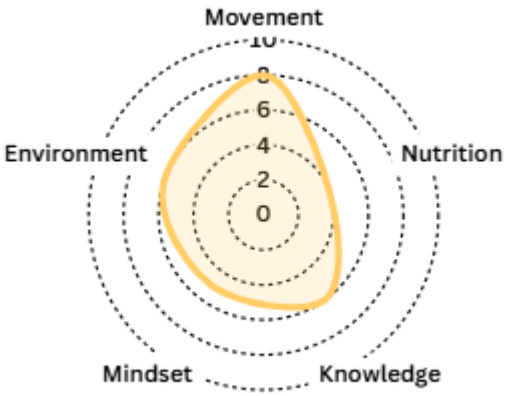
Final Take

Chicago's health-first profile is defined by strong infrastructure layered over deep structural divides. Its mobility ecosystem, environmental services, and learning institutions provide a solid foundation for wellbeing, but unequal access to safety, nutrition, and affordable housing limits who benefits. In global comparison, Chicago performs better than many U.S. peers but falls short of cities that offer more universal, equitable living conditions. The city's story in one stroke: a high-potential metropolis whose strengths are real but unevenly distributed, with inequality as the central barrier to healthier urban life.

New York City, United States – 5.8

Rank: 15

New York City sits in the upper-middle tier of the index, defined by density-driven efficiency in some pillars and deep inequality in others. It is a high-energy, high-stress, high-opportunity megacity where world-class infrastructure coexists with chronic affordability and access gaps. Its strongest asset is its unmatched mobility ecosystem, while its clearest vulnerability is structural inequality that undermines health outcomes across neighborhoods.



Movement (8/10)

New York is one of the most walkable cities in the world, with a dense street grid and large districts where daily life can unfold fully on foot. Transit accessibility is exceptional: over 90% of residents live within 500 m of a bus or subway stop, making car-free mobility genuinely viable. Commutes are long but predictable, and road safety is relatively strong for an American city, delivering a high movement score rooted in sheer accessibility and a continuous pedestrian–transit network.

Nutrition (4/10)

Healthy food access is sharply unequal: while Manhattan, parts of Brooklyn, and affluent neighborhoods offer abundant fresh food, large sections of the Bronx, Harlem, and outer boroughs remain entrenched food deserts. Food affordability is moderate at the citywide level, yet high fast-food density and cost burdens in low-income communities suppress nutritional quality. Strong regulation and public programs exist, but structural inequity drags the overall nutrition environment down.

Knowledge (6/10)

NYC benefits from a massive education system, broad public-learning infrastructure, and strong open-data transparency. Digital access sits in the mid-range: broadband penetration is well above 70%, but cost barriers and uneven connectivity reduce universal access. Education quality and media literacy are mixed—high-performing institutions coexist with underserved districts—yielding a stable but uneven knowledge environment.

Mindset (5/10)

New York is a high-pressure, moderate-resilience city: long work hours, financial strain, and dense urban living keep stress elevated. Social trust is mixed, varying significantly by demographics and neighborhood, and loneliness is common despite the city's scale and vibrancy. Mental-health access is extensive but uneven, leaving the psychological environment functional but far from optimal.

Environment (6/10)

Air quality is generally good for a global megacity, and green space—anchored by Central Park and a strong park system—is substantial. Public sanitation and water infrastructure are highly reliable, but affordability and neighborhood crime differences sharply constrain lived environmental quality. Housing costs remain the dominant drag, placing healthy living out of reach for many residents.

Strengths:

- A world-class movement ecosystem that enables true car-optional living.
- Robust institutional infrastructure—sanitation, open data, and transit—supporting systemic resilience.
- High-density learning and cultural ecosystems that create global knowledge spillovers.

Weaknesses:

- Severe inequality across food access, safety, education, and nutrition outcomes.
- Housing affordability crisis that undermines long-term stability and wellbeing.

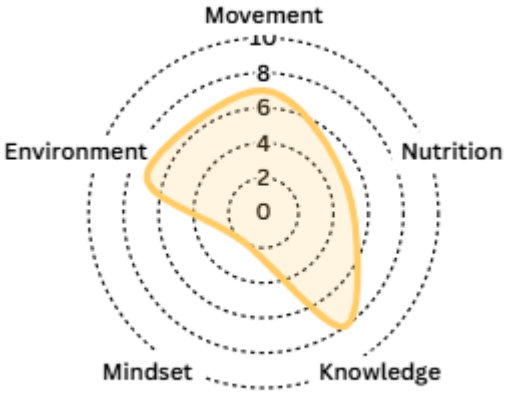
Final Take

New York City's health-first profile is defined by an extraordinary capacity for mobility, cultural learning, and institutional infrastructure—yet continually constrained by affordability and access gaps that shape daily wellbeing. Its strengths emerge from density: walkability, transit, and knowledge concentration; its weaknesses also emerge from density layered with inequality. Compared globally, NYC stands as a high-performing but high-friction megacity, excelling in movement and opportunity while struggling to translate scale into equitable health outcomes. The city's story in one stroke: a powerhouse of human potential held back by the unevenness of its own foundations.

Shanghai, China – 5.8

Rank: 15

Shanghai ranks in the mid-to-upper tier of global urban health performance, defined by strong infrastructure and high institutional capability. It is a high-intensity, high-capacity, high-pressure megacity where physical systems outperform human wellbeing. Shanghai's greatest strength is its world-class mobility and knowledge infrastructure, while its clearest weakness is chronic stress and affordability pressure that undermine overall wellbeing.



Movement (7/10)

Shanghai offers a dense, walkable core supported by one of the world's largest and most accessible metro networks, giving most residents convenient transit access. Commute times are long but manageable due to multimodal options, and road safety is strong relative to other megacities. The city earns a high score because transit accessibility, cycling availability, and safe movement infrastructure significantly outweigh congestion and commute pressure.

Nutrition (5/10)

Food access is broad across districts, supported by a mix of traditional markets and modern supermarkets, though affordability varies by income level. Fast-food and convenience-food consumption is common in dense commercial zones, counteracting otherwise robust food availability. The score reflects solid access and safety, moderated by affordability pressure and a rapidly convenience-oriented food culture.

Knowledge (8/10)

Shanghai benefits from exceptional education outcomes, near-universal broadband access, and a concentrated ecosystem of universities, research institutions, libraries, and cultural centers. Literacy and scientific competency are high, supported by a strong academic culture, though transparency in public data remains partial. The pillar scores high because education quality, digital penetration, and public-learning infrastructure operate at global best-practice levels.

Mindset (2/10)

Residents face intense stress, long working hours, and high burnout risks, a pattern deeply embedded in Shanghai's economic and cultural tempo. Social trust is moderate, loneliness affects both young professionals and older adults, and mental-health access remains insufficient relative to need. The city performs poorly here because psychological pressure and limited support systems dominate the lived experience, despite high institutional capability.

Environment (7/10)

Air quality has improved markedly in recent years, green-space investments have expanded access across districts, and public sanitation and safety are robust. Yet housing affordability remains a major structural limitation, creating inequities in access to healthy living environments. Shanghai earns a strong score because air quality, green space, and sanitation outperform most megacities, while affordability drags the pillar down.

Strengths:

- High-capacity systems that deliver reliable movement, education, and sanitation
- A deeply built knowledge ecosystem with strong academic performance
- Improved air quality and expanding green infrastructure

Weaknesses:

- High psychological pressure and burnout across demographics
- Housing affordability barriers that limit equitable wellbeing
- Nutritional habits skewing toward convenience over health

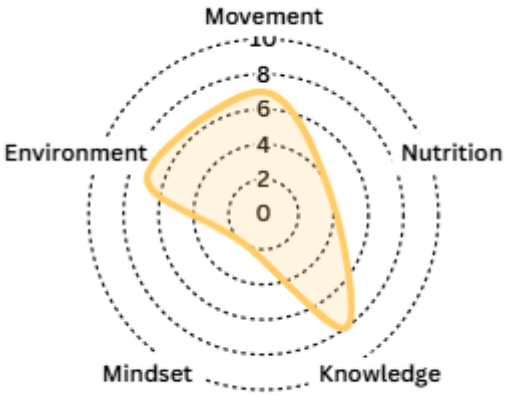
Final Take

Shanghai is one of the world's most capable megacities, where infrastructure, education, and environmental management operate at a consistently high level. Its defining edge is the strength and reliability of its physical systems, but its central vulnerability is the human cost of speed, pressure, and affordability. Compared globally, Shanghai sits just below the top tier: exceptional in capability, limited in wellbeing. The city's story is clear — a place where systems thrive, but people often struggle to keep pace.

Beijing, China – 5.6

Rank: 18

Beijing sits in the mid-range of global urban health performance, defined by strong state capacity, extensive infrastructure, and sustained environmental improvement. It is a high-pressure, high-capability megacity where systems perform well, but people absorb significant psychological and affordability strain. The city's clearest strength is its world-class education and mobility architecture, while its biggest weakness is the human impact of overwork, stress, and rising cost pressures.



Movement (/10)

Beijing combines walkable central districts with one of the most extensive and affordable mass-transit networks globally, providing strong mobility access to most residents. Cycling infrastructure is widespread and improving, commute times are long but manageable, and road safety is stronger than most megacities of comparable scale. The city scores high because transit breadth, multimodal access, and safety offset congestion and journey-time pressure.

Nutrition (7/10)

Food access is strong in core districts through markets and supermarkets, but affordability varies significantly across income groups. Fast-food and convenience options are widespread, shaping everyday dietary habits, while food safety standards are strong but unevenly enforced across small vendors. Beijing earns a mid-to-low score because access is reliable, but affordability and diet quality lag behind global best practice.

Knowledge (8/10)

Beijing hosts one of the world's most competitive education ecosystems, with exceptional academic performance and nearly universal digital connectivity. Public-learning infrastructure—from museums to libraries to research institutions—is dense and widely used. The pillar scores high because education quality, digital penetration, and knowledge institutions operate at global top-tier levels, with only transparency constraints moderating the score.

Mindset (2/10)

High stress, long work hours, and intense competition shape daily life for many residents, contributing to burnout across both young professionals and older workers. Social trust is moderate, loneliness is rising with demographic and lifestyle shifts, and mental-health access is insufficient relative to need. Beijing scores low because psychological strain and limited mental-health capacity significantly undermine population wellbeing.

Environment (7/10)

Air quality has improved dramatically, supported by targeted pollution controls, and green-space coverage has expanded through sustained ecological investment. Public sanitation and water systems are high-quality, and safety levels are strong citywide. However, housing affordability remains a major structural constraint, creating unequal access to healthy living conditions. The score reflects systemic environmental capability moderated by affordability stress.

Strengths:

- High-performing mobility, education, and sanitation systems
- Significant gains in air quality and urban green-space expansion
- Deep institutional capacity supporting large-scale urban management

Weaknesses:

- Chronic stress, burnout, and mental-health burden
- Housing affordability pressures that undermine wellbeing
- Dietary habits skewed toward convenience over nutrition

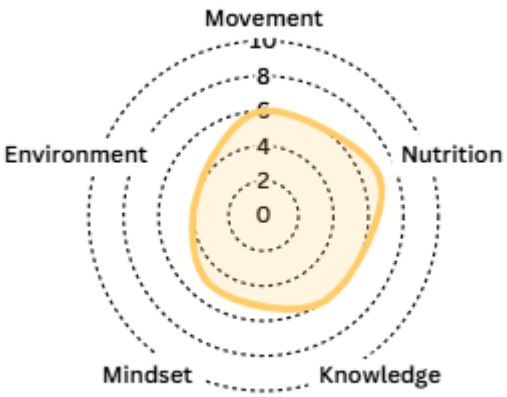
Final Take

Beijing is a city defined by capability at scale—its systems for movement, learning, and environmental management outperform most global megacities. Yet the human experience is constrained by psychological pressure, high living costs, and uneven nutritional outcomes. Compared globally, Beijing stands as a structurally strong but humanly strained city: impressive in what it can build, and challenged in how people live within it. Its story is clear—a megacity where infrastructure thrives, but personal wellbeing struggles to keep pace.

Doha, Qatar – 5.6

Rank: 18

Doha ranks in the mid-tier of global urban health performance, shaped by strong state capacity, high safety, and rapidly improving infrastructure. Its greatest strengths—exceptional food safety, universal digital access, and world-leading transit accessibility—stand in contrast to its biggest weaknesses: poor air quality, high housing costs, and a car-dominated urban form. Doha's profile is that of an ambitious, fast-modernizing city still working to align infrastructure excellence with everyday health realities.



Movement (6/10)

Doha combines outstanding transit accessibility—over 90% of residents live within convenient reach of public transport—with moderate commute times and improving cycling corridors. Yet walkability remains uneven, with most districts still built around car mobility despite pedestrian-oriented success stories like Msheireb. Road safety is improving but not yet world-class; overall, the city earns a solid but incomplete score rooted in strong transit, weak walkability, and moderate traffic safety.

Nutrition (7/10)

Food access and safety are among the strongest in the region, supported by a tightly regulated supply chain and high retail availability. Healthy food is accessible but not always affordable, and an entrenched fast-food culture contributes to some of the world's highest obesity rates. Robust national dietary guidelines and public-health programs are offset by lifestyle norms that favor convenience, placing Doha's nutrition environment in the upper tier with critical behavioral vulnerabilities.

Knowledge (6/10)

Doha benefits from near-universal digital access and a sophisticated education ecosystem, including global universities clustered in Education City. Public-learning opportunities and institutional capacity are strong, but national education outcomes remain below OECD averages, limiting the overall knowledge advantage. Transparency and data infrastructure are developing but not yet mature, resulting in a balanced but not breakthrough performance.

Mindset (5/10)

Stress and burnout sit at moderate levels, with a diverse expatriate population experiencing varied work–life conditions. Social trust and loneliness show a mixed picture—stronger for long-term residents, weaker for transient groups—while mental-health access is present but uneven across socioeconomic segments. The city's Mindset score reflects a functioning but fragmented wellbeing landscape that has not yet caught up with Doha's rapid economic ascent.

Environment (4/10)

Air quality remains the city's most significant environmental challenge, driven by dust, traffic, and climatic factors. Green space is expanding but remains moderate in availability, and housing affordability is a major pressure point for both local and expatriate residents. Safety and sanitation systems are strong, yet the overall environmental profile is constrained by natural conditions, urban form, and cost of living.

Strengths:

- Exceptional transit accessibility and reliable public infrastructure
- Universal digital connectivity enabling rapid learning and service adoption

Weaknesses:

- Poor air quality significantly limits long-term health outcomes
- Walkability and human-scale urban fabric lag behind infrastructure investments

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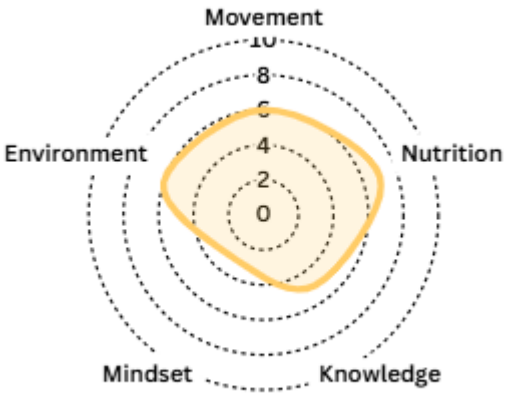
Final Take

Doha is a city of accelerated progress, where world-class infrastructure and safety coexist with environmental constraints and lifestyle risks. Its health-first potential is clear—transit access, food safety, and digital capacity already rival global leaders—but gaps in air quality, walkability, and affordability prevent that potential from translating into everyday wellbeing. Compared globally, Doha sits in the ambitious middle: outperforming peers on infrastructure but underperforming on human-scale health determinants. The city's story is one of modern systems in search of a more livable, health-aligned urban foundation.

Dubai, United Arab Emirates – 5.4

Rank: 20

Dubai sits in the mid-range of global urban health performance, defined by high efficiency, strong infrastructure, and a lifestyle shaped by ambition and pace. Its standout strengths lie in safety, food access, and digital connectivity, while its biggest structural weakness is a health environment dominated by car dependence, long commutes, and affordability pressures. The city's profile is one of high-functioning systems constrained by lifestyle risks and environmental stressors.



Movement (6/10)

Dubai delivers excellent public-transport availability thanks to a rapidly expanding metro system, but walkability remains fragmented and the urban form still orbits around cars. Cycling infrastructure is improving though not yet a city-wide mobility backbone. Commute times are moderate and road safety is strong relative to regional peers, resulting in a solid but uneven mobility score driven by exceptional transit access but weak pedestrian environments.

Nutrition (7/10)

Food access and safety standards are exceptionally high, supported by strong regulation and abundant retail availability. Healthy food is accessible, but affordability varies, and the city's intense fast-food and ultra-processed food culture contributes to elevated obesity risks. Nutrition literacy efforts exist but must compete with a lifestyle environment geared toward convenience and consumption.

Knowledge (5/10)

Dubai benefits from near-universal digital access and a robust schooling ecosystem, but education outcomes—benchmarked globally—remain below OECD levels. Public-learning infrastructure is strong, and the emirate operates within one of the region's more advanced data-governance systems. However, media and scientific literacy are mixed, keeping the pillar at a balanced midpoint.

Mindset (3/10)

Stress and burnout are significant across corporate and service sectors, shaped by long hours, high performance expectations, and a transient workforce. Social trust is moderate but fragmented across demographic lines, and loneliness risk is notably higher among migrant populations. Mental-health access is improving yet uneven, resulting in a low overall Mindset score dominated by work–life strain.

Environment (6/10)

Air quality remains a persistent challenge, driven by dust, emissions, and climatic conditions. Green space is improving but still inconsistent across districts, while housing affordability is a major pressure point for average earners. On the positive side, personal safety and sanitation systems are strong and reliable. The environmental picture is one of high safety but low ecological health.

Strengths:

- Exceptionally safe city with advanced infrastructure and high reliability
- Strong food system: abundant access, high standards, robust regulation
- Near-universal digital access enabling broad learning and service uptake

Weaknesses:

- Car-dependent urban form limits walkability and contributes to commute stress
- High cost of living, especially housing, strains wellbeing and accessibility
- Obesogenic food culture and weak work–life balance create long-term health risks

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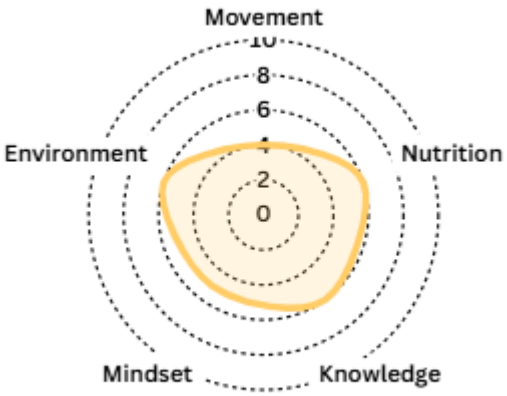
Final Take

Dubai is a high-capacity, high-velocity city whose systems operate with impressive efficiency, yet whose lifestyle and environmental pressures constrain its overall health performance. Its story is defined by world-class infrastructure colliding with human-scale gaps: walkability, affordability, and psychological wellbeing lag behind the city's ambitions. Globally, Dubai stands as a compelling case of a rapidly modernizing metropolis that excels in safety and access but still struggles to convert prosperity into holistic wellbeing. Its trajectory is clear—strengthen human-centered design and work–life balance, and Dubai moves decisively up the global urban health ladder.

Los Angeles, United States – 5.4

Rank: 20

Los Angeles sits in the mid-range of the index, shaped by a complex mix of world-class infrastructure, deep spatial inequality, and structural car dependence. It is a fragmented, opportunity-rich, high-friction megacity where lifestyle potential and institutional capacity coexist with major access gaps. Its dominant strength is strong public infrastructure (sanitation, air quality, food programs), while its defining weakness is weak mobility and affordability, which constrains everyday wellbeing.



Movement (4/10)

Los Angeles remains fundamentally car-dependent, with limited walkability and uneven pedestrian safety outside select neighborhoods. Transit accessibility is low by global standards, and commutes are long and congestion-heavy across most of the region. Cycling infrastructure exists but remains discontinuous and often unsafe, producing a low movement score driven by structural auto-reliance.

Nutrition (6/10)

LA's food environment is defined by sharp inequality: affluent areas enjoy abundant fresh food access, while large portions of South and East LA remain food deserts. Food is moderately affordable on average, but fast-food density is extremely high, shaping daily nutrition patterns. Strong food-safety regulation and extensive public nutrition programs raise the score, even as systemic access barriers persist.

Knowledge (6/10)

Education quality is broadly in line with national averages but varies significantly across districts. Digital access is solid but not universal, reflecting both strong urban connectivity and income-driven gaps. Public-learning infrastructure and open-data systems are robust, though media and scientific literacy remain uneven due to the city's socioeconomic disparities.

Mindset (5/10)

Los Angeles operates under consistently high psychological pressure: long hours, financial strain, and wide inequality elevate stress across demographics. Social trust is moderate but fragmented, and loneliness is common despite the city's cultural depth. Mental-health infrastructure exists at scale but is unevenly accessible, leaving the mindset environment functional but stressed.

Environment (6/10)

Air quality has improved significantly and now sits in a generally healthy range, while water and sanitation systems are well-managed and reliable. The region offers substantial green space overall, but access is deeply uneven across neighborhoods. Safety concerns and severe housing unaffordability remain foundational environmental constraints that limit the city's overall livability.

Strengths:

- Strong institutional capacity across sanitation, air quality, and public nutrition programs
- High cultural, educational, and creative density enabling robust learning ecosystems
- Improved environmental quality supported by large green and natural areas

Weaknesses:

- Structural car dependence limits walkability, transit viability, and safety
- Severe socioeconomic inequality across food access, education, and neighborhood safety
- Housing affordability crisis undermines long-term stability and wellbeing

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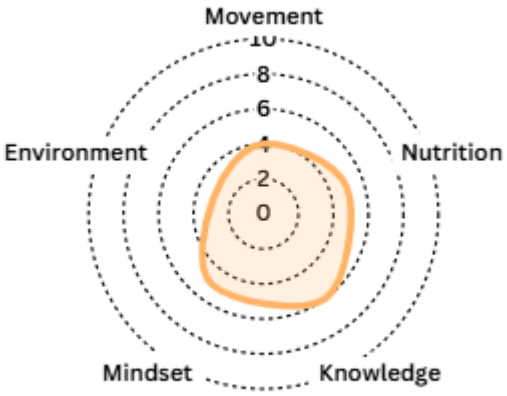
Final Take

Los Angeles is a city of extraordinary potential held back by systemic fragmentation. Its public infrastructure, environmental improvements, and learning ecosystems create a solid platform for human health—but the lived experience is uneven, shaped by car dependence, affordability pressures, and geographical inequality. Compared globally, LA resembles other sprawling megacities where opportunity is abundant but accessibility is constrained. The city's story in one stroke: a high-capacity metropolis where the foundations are strong, but the pathways to benefit from them are not evenly built.

Santiago, Chile – 4.6

Rank: 22

Santiago is a mid-tier performer, defined by strong institutions and stark socio-spatial inequality. It functions as an organized, capable, but pressured metropolis where knowledge systems outperform environmental and psychological wellbeing. Its greatest strength is institutional and data transparency, while its clearest weakness is the environmental burden—pollution, water stress, and housing strain—that shapes daily life.



Movement (4/10)

Santiago's core districts offer reasonable walkability and dense transit access, but this breaks down at the periphery, where car dependence and discontinuous pedestrian environments dominate. Commutes are long and congestion is chronic, while road safety remains far below global best practice. The city earns a mid-low score because its strong transit network is offset by long travel times, uneven cycling quality, and weak safety outcomes.

Nutrition (5/10)

Chile's national nutrition framework is one of the most advanced in Latin America, with robust food-safety systems and widely disseminated dietary guidelines. However, affordability is a defining constraint—a healthy diet is unattainable for a large share of households—and fast-food and ultra-processed consumption dominate daily eating patterns. Santiago lands mid-range because strong standards and public programs coexist with real-world barriers to healthy diets.

Knowledge (6/10)

Santiago benefits from near-OECD education performance, strong digital connectivity, and a dense ecosystem of universities and public-learning infrastructure. Scientific and media literacy are uneven but supported by Chile's culture of institutional transparency and one of the region's most mature open-data frameworks. These combined strengths elevate Santiago into the upper-middle tier globally for Knowledge.

Mindset (5/10)

Stress levels are moderate and work hours long, yet social cohesion and cultural connectedness help prevent loneliness from reaching severe levels. Trust is middling but higher than many regional peers, and mental-health access exists but varies sharply by socioeconomic zone. The city achieves a mid-range score because resilience and strain exist in equal proportion.

Environment (3/10)

Santiago faces chronic air pollution, particularly in winter, and deep green-space inequality between affluent northeast communes and lower-income southern ones. Housing affordability remains a major barrier, and while sanitation systems are technically strong, water stress is a growing, structural risk. These factors combine into one of the city's weakest pillars.

Strengths:

- Robust national nutrition, safety, and transparency systems
- Strong education and knowledge infrastructure relative to the region
- High-capacity transit network enabling metropolitan-scale mobility

Weaknesses:

- Chronic environmental stress: air pollution, water scarcity, and heat-island inequality
- Long commutes and uneven walkability reduce healthy mobility
- Affordability pressures undermine both housing and nutrition outcomes

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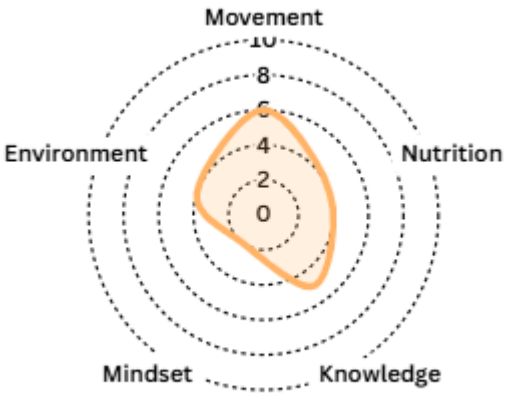
Final Take

Santiago is a city where institutional strength and human capital coexist with environmental and socioeconomic pressure, creating a dual reality that defines its health-first profile. It stands out globally for its transparency, data governance, and education quality, yet these assets are constrained by pollution, affordability challenges, and uneven access to daily wellbeing. Compared worldwide, Santiago is a capable but constrained metropolis—rich in systems, short on balance. Its story is one of a city that has built the foundations of a high-functioning urban model, but still needs to solve the environmental and social frictions that prevent those foundations from translating into equitable, everyday health.

Buenos Aires, Argentina – 4.2

Rank: 23

Buenos Aires ranks in the lower-middle, shaped by a blend of cultural vibrancy, institutional pockets of strength, and chronic economic stress. It is an energetic but uneven city, where walkability and governance coexist with affordability crises and rising psychological strain. Its clearest strength is everyday urban accessibility—on foot, by bus, or by bike—while its greatest weakness is the deep socioeconomic instability that undermines all pillars of wellbeing.



Movement (6/10)

Buenos Aires is one of Latin America's most walkable large cities, with a dense urban core, pedestrian-priority zones, and a sizeable cycling network that outperforms regional peers. Transit coverage is broad and used at massive scale, though commutes remain long and congestion heavy. Road safety is relatively strong for a megacity, helping lift the city to a solid mid-tier movement score.

Nutrition (4/10)

Food environments vary sharply: central neighborhoods have strong access to supermarkets and fresh markets, while poorer districts face limited availability of healthy foods and heavy exposure to ultra-processed products. Affordability is the main barrier—a healthy diet consumes well over 20% of income for many households—driving nutritional insecurity despite strong food-safety institutions and national dietary guidelines. This mix yields a below-average nutrition score.

Knowledge (5/10)

Buenos Aires benefits from robust digital access, major universities, and one of the most mature open-data ecosystems in the region. However, education quality remains below OECD standards, and media/scientific literacy is uneven due to structural inequality. These strengths and weaknesses balance into a mid-tier knowledge profile with notable institutional potential.

Mindset (2/10)

High economic stress, long working hours, low institutional trust, and rising burnout define the psychological landscape of Buenos Aires. Loneliness is moderate, but mental-health access—while culturally normalized—is uneven and difficult for low-income groups to sustain. The city scores low because systemic stress consistently outweighs resilience factors.

Environment (4/10)

Air quality is moderate, green-space assets exist but are unequally distributed, and sanitation systems function reliably for most residents. However, safety varies by district, and housing affordability has collapsed, placing heavy pressure on lower- and middle-income households. These structural constraints prevent environmental conditions from lifting beyond the mid-lower range.

Strengths:

- Strong walkability and a large cycling network by regional standards
- Mature open-data and institutional governance ecosystem
- High cultural cohesion that moderates loneliness and supports social life

Weaknesses:

- High economic stress and low trust erode daily wellbeing
- Healthy diets are unaffordable for a large share of households
- Safety, food access, and infrastructure quality vary sharply by neighborhood

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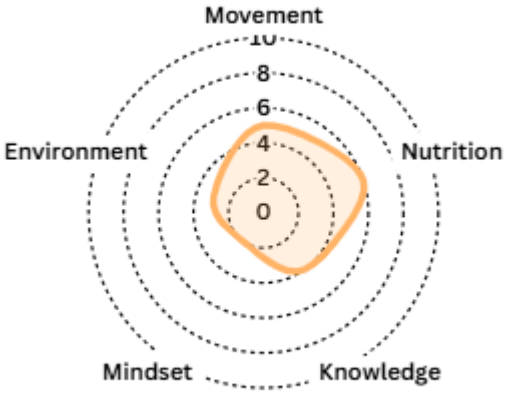
Final Take

Buenos Aires is a city of high cultural vitality set against deep structural strain, where mobility, digital access, and public life offer real strengths but cannot fully counterbalance the pressures of inflation, inequality, and institutional fragility. In global comparison, it is a mid-tier city with untapped potential—capable, connected, and vibrant, yet constrained by economic volatility and uneven living conditions. Its story is ultimately one of resilience under pressure, where strong urban form and civic spirit support daily life even as broader systemic forces hold the city back.

Bangkok, Thailand – 4.0

Rank: 24

Bangkok ranks in the lower-middle tier of global urban health performance, shaped by a dynamic but uneven urban system. It is an energetic, opportunity-rich, high-friction city where food accessibility and digital connectivity are strong, but mobility strain, environmental pressure, and psychological stress undermine everyday wellbeing. Bangkok's greatest strength is its exceptionally accessible and affordable nutrition ecosystem, while its biggest weakness is the combined burden of congestion, pollution, stress, and infrastructural strain.



Movement (5/10)

Bangkok offers walkable pockets and a growing transit network, but citywide walkability and transit coverage remain limited, forcing many residents into long, congested commutes. Cycling infrastructure exists but is fragmented and unsafe, while road safety remains a structural challenge. The city scores mid-range because multimodal improvements are real, yet overwhelmed by congestion, low transit coverage, and high accident rates.

Nutrition (6/10)

Bangkok's food environment offers broad physical access to fresh markets, supermarkets, and convenience outlets, but this access is uneven across income groups and outer districts. A healthy diet remains relatively affordable, yet fast-food density and convenience-driven eating patterns dilute the strength of the system. Food-safety standards exist but enforcement varies widely across formal and informal sectors. The city lands at a mid-range score because affordability and public programs are strong, but accessibility gaps, fast-food saturation, and inconsistent safety enforcement hold back overall nutritional quality.

Knowledge (4/10)

Digital access is near-universal, giving residents broad connectivity and access to online learning. However, education quality remains below OECD benchmarks, public-learning infrastructure is uneven, and media/scientific literacy is limited. Bangkok scores low because connectivity is strong, but foundational knowledge systems and transparency do not match global standards.

Mindset (2/10)

Bangkok faces widespread stress, long working hours, and high burnout risk across both office and service-sector workers. Loneliness is rising, social trust sits at moderate levels, and mental-health access is insufficient relative to need. The low score reflects a population under sustained psychological pressure, with inadequate systems to absorb or mitigate it.

Environment (3/10)

Air quality is persistently poor with frequent PM2.5 spikes, and green-space availability is among the lowest per capita in major global cities. Housing affordability pressures large segments of the population, and waste and water infrastructure—while present—are strained by rapid urbanization and flooding. Bangkok receives a low score because core environmental foundations remain fragile and unevenly distributed.

Strengths:

- High digital connectivity enabling broad access to information and services
- Large, affordable food ecosystem supported by both market and policy structures
- Transit infrastructure improving steadily despite systemic congestion

Weaknesses:

- Severe congestion, road-safety risks, and weak walkability outside core districts
- High stress, loneliness, and limited mental-health system capacity

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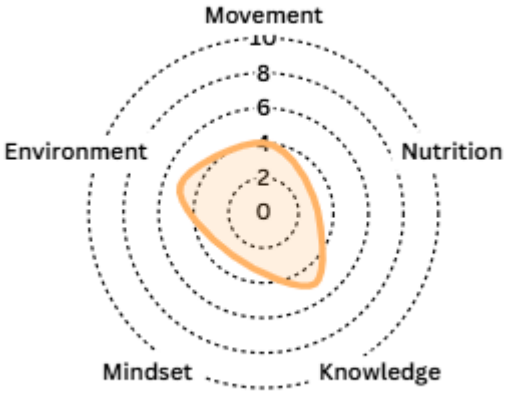
Final Take

Bangkok is a vibrant, opportunity-rich city whose strengths in food accessibility, digital connectivity, and cultural dynamism are counterbalanced by deep structural pressures on mobility, mental health, and environmental wellbeing. It performs below global averages because key systems—transport, environment, and psychological support—have not kept pace with the city's rapid growth and density. Compared globally, Bangkok stands as a city of high energy but low resilience, where the daily friction of movement, pollution, and stress shapes the lived experience. Its story is clear: a city where access is easy, but wellbeing is hard.

São Paulo, Brazil – 4.0

Rank: 24

São Paulo sits in the lower-middle tier, defined by scale, dynamism, and deep structural imbalance. It is a high-energy, high-stress, fragmented megacity where strong knowledge infrastructure contrasts sharply with environmental strain and uneven access to healthy living. The city's clearest strength is its economic and institutional capacity, while its biggest weakness is the infrastructure gap between formal and informal urban realities.



Movement (4

São Paulo offers strong transit coverage and a growing cycling network, but walkability remains uneven and peripheral districts are still shaped by car dependence. Commutes are long and congestion is chronic, while road safety outcomes remain far from best-practice standards. The mix of dense transit but weak overall travel experience places the city at a mid-range score.

Nutrition (3/10)

Healthy food access varies sharply by district, with central neighborhoods offering supermarkets and fresh markets while outer zones experience food deserts and heavy reliance on ultra-processed options. Affordability pressures are severe, making a healthy diet unattainable for many households, and fast-food culture is deeply embedded. Strong national food-safety systems do not fully offset the affordability and access barriers that keep São Paulo's score low.

Knowledge (5/10)

Education quality and digital access perform near regional bests, supported by large universities, strong innovation ecosystems, and a broad (though unequal) public-learning infrastructure. Scientific and media literacy are mixed but buoyed by Brazil's vibrant research and cultural sectors. Transparency and open data frameworks are robust, lifting São Paulo into the mid-tier.

Mindset (3/10)

High stress, long work hours, low trust, and rising loneliness define the psychological landscape of São Paulo. Strong cultural cohesion helps moderate social isolation, but mental-health access is uneven and strained by demand. The overall environment produces a city where resilience exists, but pressure dominates.

Environment (5/10)

Air quality fluctuates but is generally moderate for a megacity, and São Paulo benefits from extensive green assets—though distributed unevenly across socio-economic lines. Housing affordability remains a significant barrier for many, while safety levels and sanitation systems are functional but inconsistent across districts. The combination of green assets and infrastructure strain yields a balanced mid-range score.

Strengths:

- Strong innovation and knowledge ecosystem that drives cultural and economic influence.
- Large-scale green assets that provide environmental buffer despite urban density.
- Extensive transit network enabling mobility across a vast metropolitan footprint.

Weaknesses:

- High stress and low trust undermine psychological resilience.
- Severe inequality in access to healthy food and safe mobility conditions.
- Persistent affordability and safety pressures that fragment daily wellbeing.

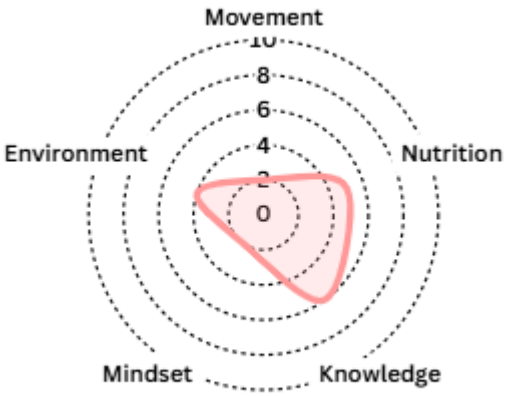
Final Take

São Paulo is a megacity defined by immense capacity and equally immense imbalance. Its knowledge infrastructure, universities, creative economy, and green spaces reflect real institutional strength, but these assets sit alongside deep inequality, heavy stress, and uneven access to healthy living. Globally, São Paulo represents the archetype of a "capable but constrained" metropolis: powerful, energetic, and culturally influential, yet limited by the scale and persistence of its structural gaps. The city's story is ultimately one of potential held back by fragmentation, where improving everyday urban health requires addressing the divides that shape nearly every pillar.

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – 3.8

Rank: 26

Riyadh sits in the lower band of global urban health performance, defined by rapid transformation, strong state capacity, and significant lifestyle and environmental pressures. The city's dominant strengths—safety, digital access, and food availability—contrast sharply with its biggest weaknesses: poor air quality, high stress, and a car-dependent urban form. Riyadh's story is one of a rising metropolis whose ambition outpaces its human-scale foundations.



Movement (2/10)

Riyadh remains one of the most car-dependent major cities globally, with weak walkability, fragmented pedestrian zones, and limited everyday cycling infrastructure. Commute times are moderate, but road safety challenges persist at levels far above global best practice. The score reflects a mobility ecosystem that is functional but far from human-centric, with insufficient alternatives to private vehicles.

Nutrition (5/10)

Food access and safety standards are strong, and healthy food is widely available across the city. However, affordability pressures remain real for average households, and fast-food culture is deeply entrenched, contributing to high obesity rates. Public nutrition programs exist but struggle to counteract a daily environment shaped more by convenience than health.

Knowledge (6/10)

Riyadh benefits from near-universal digital access and a maturing open-data ecosystem, alongside a large and expanding education infrastructure. Yet learning outcomes remain below OECD benchmarks, and scientific/media literacy is uneven, limiting the city's ability to fully leverage its knowledge systems. Overall, it is a pillar defined by strong infrastructure but middling human-capital results.

Mindset (2/10)

High stress and burnout, long working hours, and uneven work–life balance norms weigh heavily on daily wellbeing. Social trust and loneliness sit in a moderate zone—neither a strong community buffer nor a severe weakness—while mental-health access is improving but inconsistent. The low score reflects a population under pressure, with wellbeing systems not yet keeping pace with economic and urban growth.

Environment (4/10)

Air quality is the city's most significant environmental vulnerability, driven by dust, traffic, and regional climatic factors. Green space is expanding but still limited relative to population scale, and housing affordability remains a structural challenge. Public safety and core sanitation systems are strong, but overall environmental health remains imbalanced, with progress constrained by both climate and urban form.

Strengths:

- High safety and reliable core public infrastructure
- Universal digital access enabling future knowledge and service ecosystems
- Strong food availability and regulatory oversight across the supply chain

Weaknesses:

- Poor air quality and limited walkability undermine daily health
- High stress and weak work–life balance norms suppress wellbeing
- Housing affordability challenges constrain accessibility and equity

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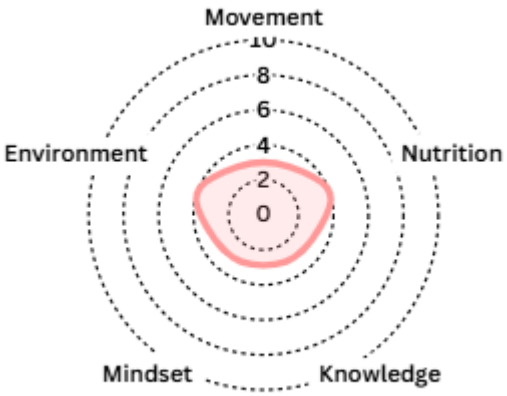
Final Take

Riyadh is a fast-advancing capital whose foundations—safety, digital systems, state capacity—give it the potential to evolve into a far more balanced health-first city. Yet its current reality is constrained by environmental pressures, a car-dominated urban form, and pervasive work–life strain, keeping overall health performance in the lower global tier. Compared internationally, Riyadh stands out for ambition and infrastructure, but falls short in human-scale design and wellbeing delivery. The city's story is clear: scale and speed are its strengths; human-centered balance is its missing piece.

Cape Town, South Africa – 3.4

Rank: 27

Cape Town lands in the low-to-mid tier of global health-first performance, shaped by stark spatial inequality and fragmented urban systems. It is a high-friction, uneven, structurally divided city where pockets of excellence coexist alongside chronic deprivation. Its biggest strengths—clean air and natural assets—stand in sharp contrast to its deepest weakness: safety, affordability, and access gaps that systematically limit wellbeing for much of the population.



Movement (3/10)

Cape Town offers walkable, human-scale mobility only in select pockets, primarily the CBD and certain central districts, while large peripheral zones remain car-dependent with weak pedestrian safety. Transit coverage is moderate on paper but unreliable in practice, leaving many residents far from efficient, safe mobility options. Commutes are long, congestion high, and road deaths significantly above global norms—resulting in a fundamentally uneven and unsafe movement ecosystem.

Nutrition (4/10)

Healthy food access varies sharply: affluent and central areas have strong supermarket coverage, while many townships face constrained access and rely heavily on informal markets. Healthy diets are expensive relative to income, making affordability a major barrier for lower-income groups. The public system provides solid food-safety enforcement and strong national nutritional guidelines, but the fast-food culture and structural inequality keep nutrition outcomes moderate.

Knowledge (3/10)

Education quality in Cape Town sits below OECD benchmarks, with strong performance in isolated schools overshadowed by systemic inequality and under-resourced public institutions. Digital access is widespread but uneven, and public-learning infrastructure does not consistently close capability gaps. Media and scientific literacy remain mixed, while transparency and open-data infrastructure are limited—producing a fragmented knowledge ecosystem with pockets of excellence.

Mindset (3/10)

Stress and burnout levels are high, driven by socioeconomic pressure, safety concerns, and limited access to mental-health services for many. Social trust is low, reflecting decades of spatial segregation and persistent inequality, and loneliness appears moderate across the population. While mental-health infrastructure exists, it is overstretched and unevenly distributed—leading to a psychological environment marked by strain and fragile resilience.

Environment (4/10)

Cape Town benefits from clean air and strong natural assets, with a coastline and mountains that offer high environmental potential. Yet personal safety is low, housing is broadly unaffordable for the average resident, and green-space and sanitation access vary substantially by neighborhood. Basic services operate reliably for many, but structural inequality keeps the overall environmental experience inconsistent and risk-laden.

Strengths:

- Strong natural environment and consistently clean air
- Robust food-safety regulation and public nutrition standards
- High digital uptake enabling broad (though uneven) information access

Weaknesses:

- Severe inequality driving systemic gaps in mobility, safety, and nutrition
- High violent crime and low perceived safety suppress daily wellbeing

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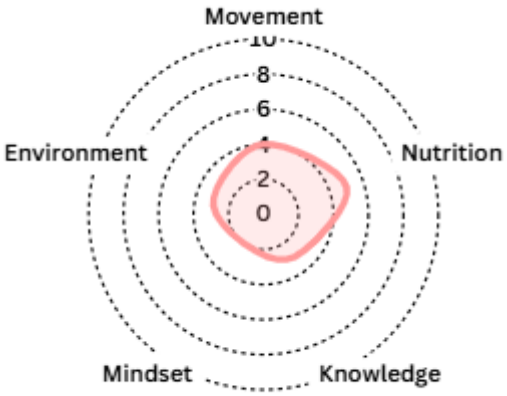
Final Take

Cape Town is a city defined by potential overshadowed by inequality—a place where world-class natural assets and pockets of high-quality infrastructure coexist with deep structural barriers. The city's health-first performance is constrained not by a lack of assets, but by safety, affordability, and access gaps that cut across every pillar. Compared globally, Cape Town resembles other highly unequal urban systems: strong in environment and digital connectivity, weak in cohesion, safety, and universal service delivery. The story of Cape Town is ultimately one of two cities—one thriving, one struggling—and the overall score reflects the weight of that divide.

Jakarta, Indonesia – 3.4

Rank: 27

Jakarta sits firmly in the lower tier of the global index, shaped by high-density pressure, infrastructural strain, and uneven public services. It is a fragmented, high-friction megacity where mobility constraints, pollution, and stress dominate daily life. Its clearest strength is affordable and accessible food, while its overwhelming vulnerability is environmental health, especially air quality and commute burden.



Movement (4/10)

Jakarta's mobility ecosystem is anchored by strong transit coverage—MRT, TransJakarta, and commuter rail collectively place a majority of residents within reasonable reach of public transport. Yet walkability remains deeply uneven, with sidewalks often discontinuous or unsafe, and cycling infrastructure largely symbolic rather than functional. Commutes are long and congested, and road safety remains weak; the score reflects limited human-scale design despite substantial investment in mass transit.

Nutrition (5/10)

Healthy food is widely available and relatively affordable, supported by dense traditional markets and street vendors. However, Jakarta's food environment is shaped by a strong fast-food and fried-food culture, inconsistent food-safety enforcement, and rising consumption of processed foods. Public nutrition programs exist but have limited reach, resulting in a mixed nutritional landscape—physically abundant, behaviorally strained.

Knowledge (3/10)

Jakarta combines broad digital access and extensive educational infrastructure with learning outcomes that remain well below global benchmarks. Public-learning ecosystems exist but are uneven in quality, and scientific/media literacy remains mixed across socioeconomic groups. Limited transparency and weak institutional data flow keep the city from translating access into high-quality, inclusive knowledge development.

Mindset (2/10)

High stress, long working hours, and widespread loneliness shape Jakarta's psychological environment. Social trust is fragile, especially in lower-income districts, and mental-health services remain underdeveloped relative to population needs. Burnout, isolation, and inconsistent access to support systems collectively anchor Jakarta in the lower global tier for urban mental resilience.

Environment (3/10)

Air quality is persistently poor, green space is scarce and unevenly distributed, and sanitation systems remain strained under rapid urban growth. Safety varies widely by neighborhood, and housing affordability is mixed but often precarious for low-income households. The city's environmental reality is defined by high pollution, limited green relief, and infrastructure under stress, making this the weakest structural pillar.

Strengths:

- High density of accessible and affordable food options
- Expanding multimodal transit network with broad geographic reach
- Rising policy recognition of walkability and urban redesign needs

Weaknesses:

- Extremely long, congested commutes with low road safety
- High stress, weak mental-health access, and low urban social cohesion

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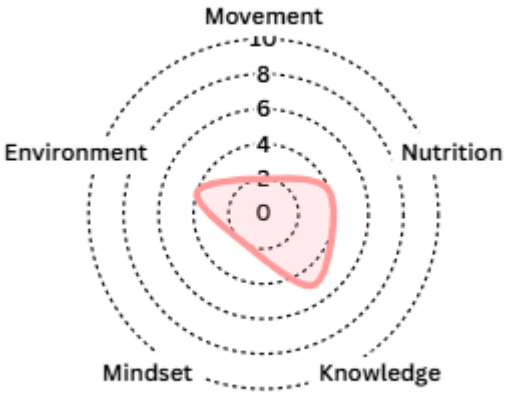
Final Take

Jakarta embodies the challenges of a rapidly growing megacity: abundant economic and cultural energy constrained by environmental stress, mobility bottlenecks, and psychological pressure. Its strengths—transit expansion and widespread food access—are outweighed by deep structural weaknesses in air quality, commute experience, and mental wellbeing. Globally, Jakarta ranks among the least health-supportive urban environments, not because of a single failure but due to a systemic overload across multiple pillars. The city's story is clear: without major shifts in environmental policy, public health, and human-scale design, Jakarta's population will continue to carry the burden of an urban system that struggles to support long-term wellbeing.

New Delhi, India – 3.4

Rank: 27

New Delhi sits firmly in the lower tier of the global index, shaped by high-intensity urban pressures and uneven service delivery. It is a high-stress, high-friction megacity where infrastructure struggles to keep pace with population needs. The city's strongest relative advantage is digital connectivity, while its most dominant weakness is environmental health, especially extreme air pollution.



Movement (2/10)

Walkability remains poor across most districts, with fragmented sidewalks, unsafe crossings, and car-first street design. Transit accessibility is moderate thanks to the expanding metro and bus network, yet long, unreliable commutes and severe congestion dominate daily mobility. Road safety remains a critical issue for pedestrians and two-wheeler users; the low score reflects deep structural mobility constraints.

Nutrition (4/10)

Food is widely accessible through markets, vendors, and retail, but affordability is a barrier for many households pursuing healthier diets. A strong fast-food and street-food culture drives high consumption of fried and processed foods, while food-safety enforcement remains uneven across formal and informal sectors. Public nutrition programs are growing but inconsistent in reach, creating a mixed and unequal nutritional environment.

Knowledge (5/10)

Delhi's knowledge strengths come from high digital penetration and broad schooling coverage, allowing most residents a baseline of educational access. However, learning outcomes remain below international standards, public-school capacity is strained, and scientific/media literacy is mixed. Transparency and open-data practices lag global benchmarks, limiting the ability of institutions and citizens to drive systemic improvement.

Mindset (2/10)

Stress and burnout are widespread, work–life balance is poor, and loneliness is rising across women, youth, and lower-income groups. Social trust is mixed and varies sharply by neighborhood and socioeconomic class, while mental-health services remain limited and unevenly accessed. These factors combine into a fragile mental-wellbeing landscape with significant structural barriers to resilience.

Environment (4/10)

Air quality is among the worst globally, with PM2.5 levels far above safe limits throughout the year. Green cover exists in aggregate but is unevenly distributed, leaving many districts underserved, while safety, sanitation, and housing affordability all vary widely by income and settlement type. Water, waste, and sewage systems are functional but strained, defining an environmental baseline that is high-risk and high-pressure.

Strengths:

- High digital access enabling broad information reach
- Extensive transit backbone with continued expansion
- Growing public-program momentum in nutrition and health awareness

Weaknesses:

- Severe air pollution and overstretched environmental systems
- Chronic overwork, poor mental-health access, and rising loneliness
- Fragmented mobility infrastructure that limits human-scale movement

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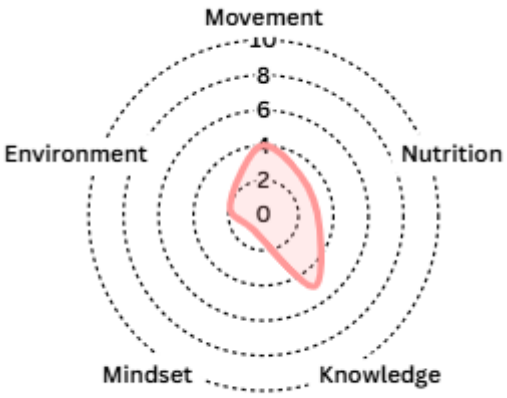
Final Take

New Delhi's health-first profile is defined by high connectivity but low liveability, where strong digital access contrasts sharply with environmental strain, mobility friction, and psychological pressure. The city's greatest limitation is its inability to translate scale and infrastructure into healthy daily experience—congestion, pollution, and stress consistently overwhelm systemic strengths. Globally, Delhi aligns with other megacities struggling under rapid growth and uneven service quality rather than cities that have achieved balance and resilience. The story of New Delhi is clear: a city with enormous potential held back by structural overload, where the fundamentals of health are challenged at every turn.

Mexico City, Mexico – 3.0

Rank: 30

Mexico City ranks in the lower tier of global urban health performance, shaped by intense scale, inequality, and chronic infrastructural strain. It is a high-pressure, fragmented megacity where strong cultural cohesion and open-data governance coexist with severe environmental stressors, long commutes, and affordability challenges. Its most distinctive strength is its dense social infrastructure and institutional openness; its defining weakness is the heavy burden placed on residents through pollution, congestion, crime, and limited mental-health resilience.



Movement (4/10)

Mexico City demonstrates pockets of walkability in its historic and central districts, yet most residents live far from human-scale streets and rely on fragmented urban form. Transit access is extensive—few megacities provide as many overlapping modes—but commutes are long, congested, and exhausting, driven by sprawl and traffic intensity. Cycling infrastructure has expanded but remains inconsistent, and road safety outcomes remain far below global standards.

Nutrition (3/10)

The city offers abundant fresh-food markets and an exceptionally dense food ecosystem, but accessibility drops sharply with income, and affordability barriers prevent many households from achieving balanced nutrition. Ultra-processed food and sugary drinks are deeply embedded in daily consumption patterns, reinforced by economic stress and cultural availability. Food-safety enforcement and nutrition programs exist but remain uneven relative to the scale of the challenge, limiting the city's nutritional resilience.

Knowledge (5/10)

Mexico City hosts some of Latin America's strongest educational and public-learning institutions, including UNAM, IPN, and a large public-library network. Digital access is high but not universal, and national school-performance levels remain below OECD benchmarks. While the city maintains one of the continent's most advanced open-data ecosystems, scientific and media literacy are fragile due to declining trust in institutions and widespread misinformation exposure.

Mindset (1/10)

Intense urban pressure produces high burnout, long work hours, and low institutional trust, while economic stress and security concerns weigh heavily on daily psychological wellbeing. Loneliness is moderated by strong family and cultural networks, yet mental-health access is limited, fragmented, and inadequate for a megacity of this scale. The combination of long commutes, insecurity, and affordability pressure leaves residents with some of the lowest mental-resilience conditions among global megacities evaluated.

Environment (2/10)

Air quality remains chronically poor due to topography, congestion, and industrial emissions, and housing affordability is out of reach for many residents. Green space exists in major parks and ecological reserves but is unevenly distributed, leaving large districts underserved. Water, waste, and sanitation infrastructure function for most but face severe stress, and safety concerns remain pervasive across many neighbourhoods.

Strengths:

- One of Latin America's most advanced open-data and digital-governance frameworks
- Dense social networks and community cohesion providing partial buffers to urban stress

Weaknesses:

- Severe environmental stressors: pollution, congestion, and uneven safety
- Extremely long commutes and weak mobility efficiency across most of the metro area

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Final Take

Mexico City is defined by immense vibrancy under immense pressure. Its cultural cohesion, institutional openness, and educational assets give it a strong foundation, yet the city's sheer scale and structural inequalities place heavy strain on daily wellbeing. Compared globally, it resembles other megacities where energy and density coexist with chronic overstretch: strong social fabric, weak systemic resilience. The story of Mexico City is one of human adaptability amid structural adversity, where residents carry far more of the city's burden than its infrastructure does.

Regional & Archetype Insights

The global ranking provides a clear picture of how cities perform across the Five Pillars of Health—but it does not explain why they perform the way they do. Urban health systems are shaped by deeper structural forces: policy traditions, governance models, cultural norms, infrastructure maturity, social fabric, and the pace of economic development. Cities that appear far apart on the ranking often share underlying characteristics, while others with similar scores operate on fundamentally different foundations.

This chapter moves beyond results and into system-level interpretation. Using the Five Pillars as a diagnostic lens, we identify the global urban archetypes that define how cities build, maintain, or struggle to sustain health-supportive environments. These archetypes cut across geography and income level; they reveal that cities do not simply succeed because they are wealthy, dense, or technologically advanced. They succeed when the structural and human dimensions of health—movement, nutrition, knowledge, mindset, and environment—reinforce one another instead of competing.

At the same time, regional context remains a powerful determinant of urban health. Cultural norms around work and social trust, the maturity of welfare institutions, historical planning decisions, and climate realities all shape how cities navigate their health challenges. To make sense of this, we overlay the archetypes with a regional lens that highlights how Europe, East Asia, North America, the Middle East, Latin America, and emerging regions follow distinct developmental pathways.

By combining archetype analysis with regional insight, this chapter provides a structural understanding of the global urban health landscape. It clarifies why Nordic cities dominate the top tier, why East Asia leads in capability but struggles with wellbeing, why North America remains fragmented, why Middle Eastern hubs excel in physical systems but lag in softer dimensions, and why rapidly growing cities face structural overload.

Ultimately, this chapter reframes the index:

Cities do not have health outcomes—they have health systems. And systems follow patterns.

The sections that follow map those patterns with precision and clarity.

Global Urban Archetypes

Cities do not simply scatter randomly along the ranking. When analyzed through the Five Pillars lens, they converge into five distinct system archetypes—patterns that reveal how cities structure mobility, food environments, knowledge systems, psychological wellbeing, and environmental foundations. These archetypes transcend geography and income level; they reflect the underlying logic of each city's health ecosystem.

Each archetype is defined by its pillar signature, structural strengths, and systemic constraints. Together, they form the backbone of the global urban health landscape.

Archetype 1 — Health-First Cities

Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Singapore

Health-First Cities are the global benchmark: systems where movement, environment, nutrition, mindset, and knowledge reinforce each other rather than compete. These cities deliver consistent performance across all pillars, with no major weaknesses and only minor pressure points.

Pillar Signature

- **Movement**: World-class multimodal systems; cycling as a core mobility mode
- **Nutrition**: Strong food safety, culture of balanced dietary habits
- **Knowledge**: High education quality, wide digital access, institutional transparency
- **Mindset**: High social trust, moderate stress, strong work–life balance
- **Environment**: Clean air, safe streets, abundant green space, strong sanitation

Structural Strengths

- Clear long-term governance
- Human-scale planning embedded in public policy
- Strong social safety nets and universal access to core services
- Culture of "everyday wellbeing" rather than tactical interventions

Systemic Constraints

- Rising affordability pressures that could weaken long-term balance
- Increasing mental health strain in some cities (notably Singapore)

Why They Lead
Everything in these cities is designed around quality of life as a policy goal, not an afterthought.

Archetype 2 — High-Performance / High-Strain Cities

Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong

These cities achieve exceptional scores in Movement, Knowledge, and Environment, often outperforming even Tier 1 cities in efficiency and infrastructure. But they are consistently held back by the Mindset pillar—high stress, long working hours, and limited mental health access.

Pillar Signature

- Movement: Hyper-efficient, extensive public transit systems
- Knowledge: High educational attainment, strong digital infrastructure
- Nutrition: High food safety and quality
- Environment: Strong sanitation and safety
- **Mindset: Weakest pillar—work strain, low social trust, limited mental health support**

Structural Strengths

- Elite-level infrastructure and planning discipline
- High safety and predictability
- Strong governance and compliance

Systemic Constraints

- Cultural norms around work and competition
- Limited public discourse around mental health
- Small living spaces + dense environments → chronic stress

Why They Stall in Tier 2
Infrastructure alone cannot create health; psychosocial systems define the ceiling.

Archetype 3 — Fragmented High-Capacity Cities

New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, London

These cities combine world-class assets—innovation ecosystems, education, transit nodes, cultural capital—with deep internal fragmentation. Their strengths benefit some groups disproportionately, while other populations face severe constraints.

Pillar Signature

- **Knowledge**: Consistently strong
- **Nutrition**: Good access and food diversity
- **Movement**: Mixed (high-quality transit + car dependence + inequity)
- **Environment**: Mixed safety, pollution, affordability challenges
- **Mindset**: Moderate stress, mixed social trust

Structural Strengths

- Economic dynamism and global talent hubs
- Strong institutions (universities, research, healthcare)
- Cultural and intellectual density

Systemic Constraints

- Inequality that shapes access to mobility, safety, housing, and environment
- Inconsistent governance across districts
- High cost of living → stress + exclusion

Why They Remain Mid-Tier
Their systems are not broken—they are uneven, preventing citywide health outcomes.

Archetype 4 — Infrastructure-First Gulf Cities

Dubai, Doha, Riyadh

These cities deliver strong sanitation, safety, and large-scale infrastructure, yet lag in human-scale determinants of health such as walkability, mindset, and affordability. They have the physical foundations of high-functioning cities but not the full ecosystem that supports everyday wellbeing.

Pillar Signature

- Movement: Car-centric but efficient for those with access
- Nutrition: Moderate; mixed healthy food culture
- Knowledge: Improving education systems, high digital penetration
- Mindset: Lower wellbeing; moderate social trust; work intensity
- Environment: Strong sanitation, improving safety, mixed affordability

Structural Strengths

- Fast implementation of urban projects
- High investment capacity
- Strong safety and sanitation standards

Systemic Constraints

- Car dependency
- Limited public space culture
- High work demands and low work–life balance
- Affordability tied to income stratification

Why They Sit in the Mid-Tier
They have built the infrastructure of modernity, but not yet the infrastructure of human wellbeing.

Archetype 5 — Dynamic but Strained Emerging Cities

Santiago, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Mexico City, Cape Town, Jakarta, New Delhi

These cities demonstrate extraordinary cultural vibrancy, community strength, and economic gravity. Yet they operate under structural overload—infrastructure, environment, and governance systems struggle to keep pace with population needs.

Pillar Signature

- Movement: Often congested, unsafe, or inconsistent
- Nutrition: Partial strengths through local markets
- Knowledge: Mixed quality, uneven access
- Mindset: Moderate to low trust; stress tied to inequality
- Environment: Chronic pressure from safety, air quality, or sanitation

Structural Strengths

- Strong social ties and resilience
- Growing innovation districts
- Cultural richness that supports psychological wellbeing informally

Systemic Constraints

- Inequality shapes every pillar
- High pollution, low safety, and affordability pressures
- Rapid population growth → system overload
- Underinvestment in soft infrastructure

Why They Remain in Tier 3–4

They have momentum and potential, but structural strain consistently outpaces progress.

Regional Insights

Urban health systems do not emerge in isolation. They are shaped by geography, culture, governance, and economic development—factors that create distinct regional pathways. While the global archetypes describe structural "models" of cities, the regional analysis reveals why certain models emerge where they do, and why the same archetype behaves differently across continents.

Together, the regional and archetype lenses provide a complete understanding of the global urban health landscape.

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1. Europe: The Global Benchmark for Balanced Urban Health

Cities: Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Barcelona, Berlin, London, Paris
Typical Archetypes: Health-First Cities; Fragmented High-Capacity Cities (London)

Europe is the strongest-performing region overall, driven by long-standing commitments to human-scale planning, welfare systems, multimodal mobility, and environmental stewardship. European cities generally perform well across all Five Pillars, with no severe weaknesses—only pressure points.

Structural Strengths

- **Movement:** High walkability, extensive cycling networks, integrated public transit
- **Nutrition:** Strong food safety and cultural norms supporting balanced diets
- **Knowledge:** Well-funded education systems, universal digital access
- **Mindset:** High social trust and strong work–life balance
- **Environment:** Clean air, safe streets, abundant green spaces

Common Constraints

- Housing affordability is the region's main friction
- Increasing mental health strain in dense capitals
- Tourist pressure (Barcelona, Paris) affects environment and stress levels

Why Europe Leads

European cities align policy, culture, and physical infrastructure around long-term wellbeing. They reflect decades of integrated planning and strong institutions—advantages that compound over time.

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2. East Asia: Exceptional Infrastructure, High Human Strain

Cities: Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing
Typical Archetypes: High-Performance / High-Strain Cities

East Asian cities are defined by a striking duality: some of the world's most advanced infrastructure systems coexist with some of the lowest Mindset scores. This region embodies the limits of infrastructure-centric development when psychosocial systems lag behind.

Structural Strengths

- **Movement:** Among the most efficient public transit systems globally
- **Knowledge:** Elite education performance and near-universal digital penetration
- **Nutrition:** Strong cultural norms of fresh cooking and food safety
- **Environment:** High sanitation and safety in core districts

Systemic Constraints

- **Chronic overwork, high stress, limited mental health access**
- Small living spaces drive density-related strain
- Lower social trust compared to Europe or North America
- Significant urban-rural inequality reflected in broader systems

Why They Don't Breach Tier 1

Despite extraordinary physical systems, **Mindset is the structural ceiling** for East Asian urban health.

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3. North America: High Potential, High Fragmentation

Cities: Vancouver, Toronto, Chicago, New York City, Los Angeles
Typical Archetypes: Fragmented High-Capacity Cities; Health-First (near for Vancouver)

North American cities combine world-leading assets with equally significant structural weaknesses. Their systems are powerful but uneven, producing mid-tier aggregate scores.

Structural Strengths

- **Knowledge:** Top-tier universities, research institutions, and digital access
- **Nutrition:** High availability of healthy options (though affordability varies)
- **Movement:** Extensive transit in core areas (NYC, Chicago)

Systemic Constraints

- **Inequality**, shaping access to safety, mobility, housing, education
- **Affordability crisis** in major metros
- **Car dependency**, especially in LA and parts of Toronto
- **Environmental inconsistency** across districts

Why They Cluster in Tier 2–3

They do not lack capability—they lack cohesiveness. Their systems work for some but not for all, pulling down population-level scores.

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4. Middle East: Infrastructure-Forward, Human-Scale-Limited

Cities: Dubai, Doha, Riyadh
Typical Archetypes: Infrastructure-First Gulf Cities

Middle Eastern cities present a distinct model: rapid development, high-quality infrastructure, and strong sanitation, yet limited performance on human-scale dimensions of health.

Structural Strengths

- High safety and low violent crime
- Strong water, waste, and sanitation systems
- Ambitious mobility and green initiatives
- High digital access and efficient government services

Systemic Constraints

- **Car-centric mobility**, low walkability
- Lower work–life balance and rising burnout
- Mixed nutrition environments
- Affordability tied to income segmentation

Why They Remain Mid-Tier

They excel in physical systems but underperform in Mindset, Nutrition, and Movement quality, preventing a rise to Tier 1.

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5. Latin America: Vibrancy and Potential Amid Structural Pressure

Cities: Santiago, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Mexico City
Typical Archetypes: Dynamic but Strained Emerging Cities

Latin American cities bring strong community resilience and cultural richness, but systemic pressures—inequality, infrastructure fragility, safety concerns—hold them back.

Structural Strengths

- Vibrant food cultures, strong informal community networks
- Improving transit systems in select cities (Santiago, São Paulo)
- High cultural vitality → soft wellbeing support

Systemic Constraints

- Congestion and car dependence
- Pollution and environmental instability
- Uneven safety and persistent inequality
- Mixed-quality sanitation and infrastructure

Why They Cluster in the Lower Tiers

Their social strengths are real, but structural constraints consistently outweigh them.

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6. South Asia & Africa: Emerging Systems Under Structural Strain

Cities: New Delhi, Jakarta, Cape Town
Typical Archetypes: Dynamic but Strained Emerging Cities

These cities represent the frontier of global urbanization, where population growth outpaces the capacity of infrastructure, environment, and governance systems.

Structural Strengths

- Strong informal economies and community networks
- Rapid improvements in digital access
- Significant cultural and economic engines within their regions

Systemic Constraints

- Severe congestion and mobility barriers
- Pollution and environmental stress
- Safety concerns and uneven sanitation
- Mixed education quality
- Growing mental health burden but limited support systems

Why They Score Lowest

They face **multi-layered systemic pressures** that accumulate across all five pillars, producing the lowest scores in the index.

Cross-Archetype Contrasts

The five global archetypes reveal that urban health is not determined by geography, wealth, or population size alone. Instead, cities cluster around a small number of structural patterns—each defined by how the Five Pillars interact. Several contrasts emerge across archetypes, offering a diagnostic lens through which global city performance can be understood.

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1. Infrastructure Alone Does Not Create Urban Health

East Asian cities prove that cities can excel in Movement, Knowledge, and Environment yet still face deep health barriers when psychological wellbeing lags. Even the world's most efficient systems cannot compensate for chronic stress, low social trust, and limited mental health access.

Contrast:

- *Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong*: Efficient but strained
- *Copenhagen, Amsterdam*: Balanced systems with strong wellbeing

Lesson: Hard systems create efficiency; soft systems create sustainability.

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2. Fragmentation Is More Damaging Than Weakness

Cities that perform well in some pillars but poorly in others—especially those where capability varies sharply across neighborhoods—struggle to improve overall health outcomes.

Contrast:

- *New York City, London, Los Angeles*: High capacity + high inequality
- *Barcelona, Stockholm, Singapore*: Equitable distribution of services and mobility

Lesson: Uneven systems weaken population-level health regardless of peak performance.

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3. Environment Sets the Floor, Mindset Sets the Ceiling

Environmental foundations (air quality, safety, sanitation, affordability) limit how high a city can rise. Mindset determines whether a structurally strong city can reach its full potential.

Contrast:

- *New Delhi, Mexico City, Jakarta*: Environmental strain anchors them in lower tiers
- *Tokyo, Seoul*: Strong environment—but Mindset caps their score
- *Nordics*: Strong environment + strong mindset → top global scores

Lesson: Cities must secure a stable environmental base before mindset investments pay off.

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4. Affordability Shapes Every Pillar

Even cities with excellent infrastructure and strong cultural foundations see performance erode when housing becomes inaccessible or cost of living rises faster than wages.

Contrast:

- *London, Paris, Amsterdam*: High-performing but increasingly affordability-constrained
- *Stockholm, Copenhagen*: Still relatively balanced — but beginning to feel pressure
- *North American cities*: Affordability defines mobility, safety, stress, and nutrition

Lesson: Housing affordability is not an "economic issue"—it is a health determinant.

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5. Culture and Governance Explain More Than Wealth

Some middle-income cities outperform richer global peers on individual pillars due to cultural strengths (nutrition traditions, strong community bonds), while some wealthy cities underperform due to governance gaps or lifestyle strain.

Contrast:

- *Buenos Aires, Santiago*: Strong informal support networks despite system strain
- *Dubai, Doha*: Wealthy cities with lower wellbeing indicators
- *Hong Kong*: High GDP, low Mindset score

Lesson: Urban health is not a function of resources alone—it is a function of how systems are designed and lived.

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6. The Best Cities Are Not the Fastest-Growing — They Are the Most Coherent

Cities that align their pillars—transport, environment, social systems, food culture, and education—perform better than those that excel in isolated domains.

Contrast:

- *Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Stockholm*: Alignment
- *Shanghai, Los Angeles, São Paulo*: Excelling in pockets, lagging elsewhere

Lesson: Coherence, not scale or speed, defines success in the urban health era.

Implications of the Global Archetypes

The global archetypes reveal a decisive truth: health-first cities are built—not inherited. Every city, regardless of income level or geography, has strategic levers it can pull to strengthen its Five Pillars performance. The implications below outline where cities should focus, depending on their structural profile. These insights are not prescriptive formulas, but strategic pathways grounded in comparative evidence.

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1. Balance Beats Excellence: Cities Must Strengthen Their Weakest Pillar First

Across all archetypes, the cities with the highest performance are those with no major weaknesses.
The data shows that improving a city's lowest-scoring pillar yields a far greater impact on population wellbeing than marginally improving an already-strong pillar.

Implication for leaders:

- Identify the *pillar gap*—the lowest-scoring domain—and invest there first.
- Resist the political pressure to overinvest in familiar strengths.
- Build multi-year strategies that explicitly integrate all five pillars.

Strategic truth: Cities rise when their systems stop competing and start reinforcing each other.

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2. Mindset Is the Hidden Differentiator — and the Most Neglected Urban System

Mindset (stress, social trust, mental health access) is the least-developed pillar globally, even in top-performing cities.
Cities that ignore psychosocial wellbeing hit a performance ceiling regardless of their infrastructure quality.

Implication for leaders:

- Treat mental health as core urban infrastructure, not healthcare policy.
- Reduce structural stressors (commuting, overwork, safety anxiety).
- Expand public mental health services and normalize early intervention.
- Invest in community spaces that foster belonging and reduce isolation.

Strategic truth: If a city wants to improve fast, improve Mindset.

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3. Environment Sets the Floor: Safety, Air, and Affordability Decide the Bottom Tier

Emerging cities demonstrate that without stable environmental foundations—clean air, safe mobility, reliable sanitation, and affordable housing—progress in Movement, Knowledge, or Nutrition has limited effect.

Implication for leaders:

- Prioritize environmental governance and enforcement.
- Improve safety through urban design, not just policing.
- Expand green space to buffer pollution and strengthen resilience.
- Address housing affordability as a health policy, not an economic side issue.

Strategic truth: A city cannot climb the tiers if its environment is failing.

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4. Fragmentation Undermines High-Capacity Cities

The North American and some European cases show that fragmented cities—where access to transport, safety, green space, and nutrition varies dramatically by district—produce lower population-level wellbeing even when world-class assets exist.

Implication for leaders:

- Shift from *"project delivery"* to *"system equity."*
- Prioritize the weakest districts in mobility, safety, and environment upgrades.
- Tie funding to improvements in accessibility and inclusion metrics.
- Measure wellbeing across neighborhoods, not citywide averages.

Strategic truth: Fragmented cities perform well on paper—but not for people.

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5. Infrastructure-First Growth Has Limits Without Human-Scale Policy

Gulf cities and East Asian megacities show that physical infrastructure alone cannot produce top-tier health outcomes. Without strong Mindset and Nutrition systems, cities plateau.

Implication for leaders:

- Rebalance policy portfolios to include human-scale initiatives.
- Develop walkability, public spaces, and active mobility networks.
- Strengthen food environments through regulation, education, and incentives.
- Embed wellbeing into corporate and public-sector norms.

Strategic truth: You cannot engineer wellbeing—you must design for it.

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6. Cultural Strengths Are Assets — But Not Substitutes for Infrastructure

Latin American and African/South Asian cities display remarkable social cohesion and cultural resilience, but these strengths cannot outweigh systemic deficits in mobility, safety, sanitation, or environmental quality.

Implication for leaders:

- Identify and amplify cultural assets (community networks, food culture).
- Pair them with targeted upgrades in sanitation, mobility, and safety.
- Build governance mechanisms that increase reliability and reduce volatility.

Strategic truth: Social vibrancy helps—but systems sustain.

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7. The Path to Tier 1 Requires a Systems Approach, Not Incremental Fixes

Every city that reached Tier 1 did so not by improving one domain, but by aligning all five pillars simultaneously. This multi-dimensional coherence is the hallmark of globally leading cities.

Implication for leaders:

- Adopt **Five-Pillar strategic planning** as a governing framework.
- Break down departmental silos: transport, housing, health, education, environment.
- Use integrated dashboards and cross-agency KPIs.
- Evaluate new projects for their impact across all pillars—not just one.

Strategic truth: Tier 1 is not a score—it is a system.

Pillar Deep Dives: What Separates Leaders from Laggards

While the global ranking and archetype analysis reveal how cities perform overall, they do not fully explain what drives excellence or weakness within each of the Five Pillars. Urban health is multidimensional, and success in one pillar does not guarantee success in another. Some cities excel in movement but struggle with mindset; others have strong food systems but suffer from weak environmental foundations.

This chapter isolates each pillar to identify the conditions that consistently differentiate leaders from laggards, drawing on the full dataset of 30 cities. By focusing on cross-city patterns rather than individual cases, the deep dives highlight the structural levers that matter most—regardless of geography, size, or income level.

The findings are clear: every pillar has its own “signature” of what works and what fails. Cities rise when they build systems that reinforce those signatures, and fall when they allow gaps to persist. The following sections outline these dynamics pillar by pillar, providing targeted, evidence-based insights for policymakers and urban leaders.

Movement

Movement shapes how people experience daily life through mobility, safety, and physical activity.

Movement is the most visible expression of a city's health system—and the strongest predictor of overall performance. Across the index, nearly every top-performing city achieves a Movement score of 8 or higher, underscoring that daily mobility is not merely a transport issue, but a core determinant of stress, safety, and physical activity.

What Leaders Do Differently

High-performing cities design mobility systems around human-scale, multimodal access, not speed or vehicle throughput. Rather than relying on single megaprojects, leaders invest in integrated networks that combine walkability, cycling, and reliable public transport. The result is not modal dominance, but freedom of choice.

Safety is embedded directly into street design. Top cities consistently maintain road fatality rates below 3 per 100,000 through traffic calming, protected cycling infrastructure, Vision Zero frameworks, and predictable enforcement. In these cities, safety is treated as a design problem, not a behavioral one.

Leaders also reduce commute stress through proximity, not velocity. Compact urban form enables most daily needs to be reached within 15–30 minutes, lowering time poverty, congestion, and chronic stress. This pattern consistently distinguishes cities such as Copenhagen, Stockholm, Barcelona, and Singapore.

Finally, cycling infrastructure is treated as core urban infrastructure, not a lifestyle add-on. Cities with continuous, protected cycling networks outperform peers even when public transit quality is comparable, making cycling one of the most powerful leverage points in the Movement pillar.

Why Laggards Fall Behind

Low-performing cities are constrained by structural car dependency, driven by sprawl, fragmented transit networks, and unsafe conditions for walking and cycling. Car use in these contexts is not a preference but a necessity, reinforcing congestion, emissions, and stress.

Commutes in lagging cities tend to be long, unreliable, and psychologically taxing, compounding strain on the Mindset pillar. Inconsistent transit reliability and daily congestion normalize time loss and unpredictability.

The absence of safe cycling infrastructure further entrenches car reliance. In many lower-scoring cities, cycling is either unsafe or effectively impossible, not due to culture but due to street hierarchy and risk exposure. This removes one of the most accessible forms of daily physical activity from urban life.

Finally, elevated road danger directly constrains mobility freedom. In cities with traffic fatality rates above 8 per 100,000, commuting becomes not just inefficient but hazardous—reducing participation, autonomy, and wellbeing.

The Core Structural Divide

The decisive difference across all cities is simple and consistent:
Leaders design mobility around the human body; laggards design mobility around vehicles.

Cities that prioritize density, safety, and multimodal access reliably outperform those optimized for speed, sprawl, and private car dominance—regardless of income or region.

Strategic implication:
Cities seeking rapid gains in urban health should treat safe, multimodal mobility as foundational infrastructure, not a secondary transport policy.

Nutrition

Nutrition is the quiet determinant of urban health.

It shapes daily energy, long-term disease risk, productivity, and quality of life, yet remains largely invisible in the built environment. Across the index, Nutrition shows the widest performance gap between cities and is the pillar where culture, affordability, and regulation matter as much as income level.

What Leaders Do Differently

High-performing cities treat food systems as public health infrastructure, not a matter of individual choice. Strong, consistently enforced food-safety regimes keep risk low and trust high, creating a stable foundation for daily consumption. Cities such as Tokyo, Singapore, Copenhagen, and Barcelona demonstrate that reliable enforcement matters more than regulatory complexity.

Affordability is the clearest structural differentiator. Leaders operate in environments where nutritious diets remain accessible across income groups, even amid rising living costs. In these cities, fruits, vegetables, and balanced staples are not premium goods but baseline consumption, making nutrition a health-equity outcome rather than a market luxury.

Cultural norms reinforce policy. Fresh-food traditions, market-based retail, and low reliance on ultra-processed products shape everyday behavior in cities like Tokyo and Barcelona. Where healthy eating is culturally embedded, policy works with habits rather than against them.

Finally, leaders prevent fast food from becoming the default option. This occurs either through lower outlet density or through strong, attractive alternatives that compete on convenience and price. Cities that combine balanced fast-food presence with abundant fresh options consistently outperform peers.

Why Laggards Fall Behind

Lower-scoring cities face structural access gaps. Fresh, safe, and affordable food is often geographically uneven and income-dependent, turning nutrition into a constraint rather than a choice. In these contexts, food deserts and supply instability disproportionately affect low-income households.

Affordability pressures further erode nutrition quality. Where healthy food absorbs a large share of household income, diets become price-driven rather than health-driven, reinforcing long-term risk. Volatile supply chains and reliance on imported goods exacerbate this dynamic.

Fast food dominance is another defining trap. In many lagging cities, fast food is not merely present but the most predictable, affordable, and accessible option, crowding out healthier alternatives. This dominance, rather than fast-food presence itself, explains much of the performance gap.

Weak or uneven food-safety enforcement compounds these issues. Irregular inspections, informal supply chains, and inconsistent standards undermine trust and raise risk, particularly in parts of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

The Core Structural Divide

The decisive difference across cities is consistent:
Leaders make healthy eating the default; laggards make it the exception.

High-performing nutrition environments emerge when affordability, cultural norms, regulatory strength, access, and public education align. No single metric drives success—system coherence does.

Strategic implication:
Cities seeking to improve nutrition outcomes should focus less on expanding food choice and more on ensuring that the healthiest options are also the easiest, safest, and most affordable.

Knowledge

Knowledge is the backbone of a city's long-term health capacity.

It shapes whether residents can access truth, navigate complexity, adapt to change, and make informed decisions about their wellbeing. Across the index, Knowledge is the strongest predictor of upward mobility between tiers: cities that perform well here tend to improve over time, even when lagging elsewhere.

What Leaders Do Differently

High-performing cities treat knowledge systems as foundational infrastructure, not auxiliary services. They maintain high-quality, equitable education systems that deliver strong outcomes across socioeconomic groups, building population-level cognitive resilience rather than elite advantage.

Digital access is near-universal. In top cities, broadband penetration above 90% ensures that health information, public services, and learning opportunities are broadly accessible. Leaders treat connectivity as essential infrastructure, recognizing that modern knowledge ecosystems are digital by default.

Leaders also invest in lifelong public learning environments. Beyond formal schooling, libraries, community centers, museums, and adult education programs create continuous learning pathways. This distinguishes top-tier cities from otherwise well-resourced global hubs that underinvest outside the school system.

Media literacy and scientific understanding are actively cultivated. Education models emphasizing critical thinking, combined with strong scientific institutions and relatively high institutional trust, reduce vulnerability to misinformation and support healthier individual and collective decision-making.

Finally, leaders maintain transparent and accessible public-data ecosystems. Open data portals enable civic participation, improve policy design, and reinforce trust between institutions and residents.

Why Laggards Fall Behind

Lower-scoring cities are typically constrained by uneven access, not absolute absence. Education quality often varies sharply by district or income group, creating fragmented outcomes and limiting social mobility despite pockets of excellence.

Digital access gaps further widen information inequality. Where connectivity is limited or costly, residents face reduced access to services, skills development, and health information, weakening the foundation for informed choice.

Public learning infrastructure is frequently underdeveloped. Underfunded libraries, scarce community learning hubs, and limited free educational resources restrict lifelong learning and adaptability.

Low media literacy and polarized information environments exacerbate these challenges. In cities with inconsistent education quality and weak institutional trust, misinformation spreads more easily, undermining public health behaviors and governance.

Limited data transparency compounds the problem. Without open datasets and civic dashboards, accountability weakens, innovation slows, and trust erodes.

The Core Structural Divide

The difference across cities is consistent:
Leaders democratize knowledge; laggards allow it to fragment or concentrate.

Cities that ensure broad access to education, digital infrastructure, and trustworthy information strengthen every other pillar. Where knowledge systems are uneven, inaccessible, or unreliable, progress elsewhere proves fragile.

Strategic implication:
Investments in knowledge systems deliver the highest long-term returns because they multiply the effectiveness of all other urban health interventions.

Mindset

Mindset captures the psychological and social foundations of urban life.

It reflects how people experience stress, connection, trust, and mental safety within their city. Across the index, Mindset has the lowest global average score and the weakest correlation with GDP, underscoring a critical insight: prosperity alone does not produce wellbeing.

What Leaders Do Differently

High-performing cities treat wellbeing as a structural outcome, not an individual responsibility. They protect work–life balance through policy, labor norms, and culture—shorter working hours, high vacation uptake, flexible arrangements, and strong worker protections normalize rest rather than framing it as a personal reward.

Leaders cultivate high social trust, which consistently correlates with lower stress and higher life satisfaction. Stable governance, reliable public systems, and safe public environments reinforce trust in institutions and in one another, strengthening collective resilience.

Loneliness is actively mitigated through social and civic infrastructure. Investment in accessible public spaces, community centers, cultural programming, and inclusive urban design creates everyday opportunities for belonging. In these cities, density supports connection rather than isolation.

Mental health systems are accessible and preventive. Leaders provide subsidized counseling, integrated community-based services, stigma reduction efforts, and early-intervention pathways—reducing crisis dependence and long-term burden.

Finally, leaders diffuse stress through the physical environment itself. Short, predictable commutes, safe streets, and access to green space reduce cognitive load and allow daily life to feel manageable rather than exhausting.

Why Laggards Fall Behind

Lower-performing cities tend to externalize wellbeing to the individual. Long working hours, intense competition, and weak rest norms drive chronic stress—most visibly in high-income, high-pressure urban models where productivity is prioritized over recovery.

Social trust is often fragile or fragmented. Historical inequities, safety concerns, and political polarization erode confidence in institutions and communities, undermining collective wellbeing.

Loneliness manifests differently but consistently. In some dense global cities, isolation persists despite proximity; in others, inequality and spatial segregation fracture social networks. In both cases, the absence of shared spaces and social infrastructure amplifies disconnection.

Mental health systems are frequently inadequate or inaccessible. Limited workforce capacity, high costs, low insurance coverage, stigma, and weak prevention constrain early support and escalate crisis-level demand.

Environmental and mobility stressors further compound psychological strain. Long commutes, unsafe streets, pollution, and affordability pressures convert background stress into a constant mental load.

The Core Structural Divide

The decisive difference is clear:
Leaders design cities that absorb stress; laggards design cities that generate it.

In top-performing cities, policy, urban form, and social infrastructure reduce the cognitive burden of daily life. Where systems are misaligned, stress accumulates and wellbeing deteriorates—regardless of income or efficiency.

Strategic implication:
Cities that treat mental wellbeing as a systems design challenge—not a cultural trait—are best positioned to improve long-term health, resilience, and upward mobility.

Environment

Environment captures the physical conditions people are exposed to every day.

It shapes health continuously—through air quality, safety, green space, housing affordability, and sanitation reliability. Across the index, Environment exerts the strongest downward drag on lower-tier cities and one of the strongest upward lifts for top-tier cities, acting as both a floor and a ceiling for urban health performance.

What Leaders Do Differently

High-performing cities treat environmental quality as long-term infrastructure, not a reactive policy domain. Clean air outcomes are achieved through sustained discipline—traffic regulation, emissions enforcement, renewable energy adoption, industrial zoning, and dense transit networks—rather than short-term interventions. Cities that maintain low pollution levels also tend to score highly on Movement and Mindset, reinforcing cross-pillar gains.

Safety is treated as a core environmental condition. Leaders maintain low levels of violent crime and predictable public spaces, enabling freedom of movement, social trust, and daily participation. In these cities, safety supports wellbeing not only by reducing harm, but by expanding the range of safe, low-stress behaviors available to residents.

Green space is embedded into the urban fabric. Rather than being residual or ornamental, parks and natural areas are accessible, well-distributed, and multifunctional—supporting air quality, stress reduction, physical activity, social interaction, and heat regulation. Leaders integrate green space early in urban form, rather than retrofitting it later.

Sanitation systems are reliable and largely invisible. Clean water, effective waste collection, and well-maintained public spaces form a quiet foundation that enables Nutrition, Movement, and Mindset to function effectively.

Finally, leaders preserve relative housing affordability, even under demand pressure. While not inexpensive, housing costs remain broadly aligned with incomes through predictable planning frameworks, supply-side policies, and mixed-income neighborhoods—buffering stress and limiting spillover effects such as overcrowding and long commutes.

Why Laggards Fall Behind

Lower-performing cities face chronic environmental stressors. Persistent air pollution—rather than episodic spikes—erodes cardiovascular health, cognitive performance, productivity, and psychological wellbeing, becoming a structural barrier to upward mobility.

Safety concerns further restrict daily life. Where violence or perceived risk is high, mobility contracts, stress increases, and social trust deteriorates—weakening multiple pillars simultaneously.

Green space is often scarce, unevenly distributed, or poorly maintained. When access is limited to wealthier districts, environmental quality becomes a driver of inequality rather than a shared public asset.

Housing affordability is a major pressure point. In cities where housing costs vastly outpace incomes, stress, financial strain, overcrowding, and long commutes amplify burdens across Mindset, Movement, and Nutrition.

Inconsistent sanitation systems compound these challenges. Water, waste, and sewage failures undermine food safety, increase disease exposure, and destabilize the broader urban environment.

The Core Structural Divide

The defining difference is clear:
Leaders build environmental resilience; laggards manage environmental crises.

High-performing cities invest early and consistently in air quality, safety, green space, sanitation, and housing affordability. Where these foundations erode, progress in all other pillars becomes fragile or reversible.

Strategic implication:
Cities seeking durable health gains should treat environmental quality as non-negotiable infrastructure—because when environmental foundations fracture, the entire urban health system fractures with them.

Strategic Implications for City Leaders

What It Takes to Build Health-First Urban Systems

The Five Pillars Index reveals a consistent truth: urban health outcomes are not accidental. They are the predictable result of how cities design mobility systems, food environments, knowledge ecosystems, social structures, and physical foundations. For city leaders, progress does not come from copying individual cities, but from understanding the system logic that separates resilient models from fragile ones.

Across all cities assessed, six strategic implications emerge.

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1. Strengthen the Weakest Pillar First to Restore System Balance

High-performing cities succeed because none of their pillars is weak. In contrast, mid- and lower-tier cities almost always have one or two domains that constrain the entire system.

Implication for leaders:
Diagnose the lowest-performing pillar and prioritize it—even when it is politically invisible. Over-investing in already-strong domains yields diminishing returns; closing the weakest gap unlocks system-wide gains.

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2. Treat Mindset as Core Urban Infrastructure

Stress, loneliness, social trust, and mental health access are the most underdeveloped—and most decisive—determinants of long-term performance. Cities with strong physical systems but weak Mindset consistently plateau.

Implication for leaders:
Embed mental wellbeing into labor policy, community infrastructure, public space design, and official performance metrics. Mental health is not a social add-on; it is a structural prerequisite for resilience.

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3. Make Environmental Foundations Non-Negotiable

Clean air, personal safety, reliable sanitation, and housing affordability form the floor of urban health. Cities cannot compensate for weak environmental conditions through education, technology, or economic growth.

Implication for leaders:
Prioritize air quality, safety-by-design, sanitation reliability, and income-aligned housing as foundational infrastructure. Cities with unsafe streets, polluted air, or unaffordable housing cannot sustain high performance.

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4. Design Mobility Around Humans, Not Vehicles

The most successful cities do not optimize for speed or capacity, but for freedom of movement. Multimodal, safe, and proximity-based mobility systems consistently outperform car-centric models.

Implication for leaders:
Shift planning paradigms from vehicle throughput to human-scale access—expanding safe walking and cycling, improving transit reliability, and reducing commute times through compact urban form.

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5. Invest in Knowledge as the Multiplier Pillar

Knowledge systems—education quality, digital access, media literacy, and transparency—determine whether cities can adapt and improve over time. Cities strong in Knowledge tend to rise across all other pillars.

Implication for leaders:
Treat education, broadband, public learning, and open data as long-term resilience infrastructure. Knowledge is the only pillar that systematically amplifies progress elsewhere.

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6. Reduce Fragmentation to Unlock Equity and Performance

Many cities underperform not due to lack of assets, but due to **uneven distribution**. Fragmentation across neighborhoods undermines health outcomes and suppresses overall performance.

Implication for leaders:
Target investments where deficits are greatest, align agencies around shared wellbeing metrics, and prioritize integrated, mixed-income urban development. Equity is a structural condition, not a social aspiration.

A New Mandate for Global Cities

The Five Pillars Index makes one conclusion unavoidable: the cities of the future will be judged not by size, wealth, or output, but by their ability to sustain human health at scale.

The strategic pathway is clear. Cities that:

- balance all five pillars,
- invest early in Mindset and Environment,
- design coherent systems rather than isolated projects, and
- make wellbeing the default outcome of daily life
- will define the next era of urban leadership.

Health is no longer a sector. It is the operating system of the city.

The Way Forward: Building Health-First Cities

The Five Pillars Index: 2025 Urban Edition points to one unmistakable conclusion: the cities that thrive in the coming decades will be those that treat human health as the foundation of all urban systems—not as a secondary outcome of growth. Regardless of size, geography, or income level, cities that align around health-first design build stronger, more resilient futures.

Wellbeing is no longer a social aspiration. It is a competitive advantage. Health-first cities attract talent, reduce long-term healthcare costs, strengthen social cohesion, and improve economic productivity. The Five Pillars framework shows how this advantage can be deliberately and systematically built.

Across the index, three strategic shifts define the path forward.

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1. Redefine Urban Success Around Human Flourishing

Most cities still measure success through economic output, construction volume, or infrastructure delivery. These metrics matter—but they fail to capture whether people are actually living well.

Health-first cities reframe their core mandate around lived outcomes: access to healthy food, safe and efficient movement, equitable knowledge systems, psychological wellbeing, and environments that support long-term health.

What this means in practice:
Adopt health-based performance scorecards, integrate wellbeing metrics into budgeting and planning cycles, and tie major investment decisions to Five Pillar impact rather than political visibility.

The shift: from growth-first planning to health-first governance.

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2. Build Cities Through Integrated Systems, Not Isolated Projects

The index shows that fragmented interventions consistently underperform. Transit without walkability, green space without safety, or mental health programs without work-life reform fail to deliver durable outcomes.

Health-first cities succeed because their systems reinforce one another.

What this means in practice:
Align departments around shared Five Pillar objectives, apply pillar-based impact assessments to major projects, and prioritize interventions that deliver benefits across multiple domains—such as walkability upgrades that reduce stress, or green corridors that improve air quality and movement simultaneously.

The shift: from department-driven decisions to system-driven strategy.

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3. Optimize Cities for Human Experience, Not Just Efficiency

Cities can be highly efficient yet psychologically exhausting. The next era of urban leadership requires designing for how daily life feels—not only how systems perform.

Health-first cities embed wellbeing into design, governance, and culture.

What this means in practice:
Create walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods; invest in public spaces that foster connection; normalize rest and balance through workplace and civic norms; elevate mental health as a preventive public service; and use behavioral insights to make healthy choices the default.

The shift: from efficiency-centered cities to human-centered cities.

A Global Blueprint for the Health-First City

Across all pillars—Movement, Nutrition, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment—the message is consistent: every city can become a health-first city if it commits to balance, coherence, and human-centered systems.

This transformation does not depend on wealth alone. It depends on governance alignment, design principles, cultural norms, infrastructure investment, and long-term vision. When one pillar strengthens, others rise; when one is neglected, the entire system strains.

Appendix — Indicators, Definitions, Data Tables

Technical documentation for the Five Pillars Index: 2025 Urban Edition

This appendix provides the full operational detail underpinning the Five Pillars Index: 2025 Urban Edition. It includes complete indicator definitions, scoring thresholds, methodological decision rules, data-source classifications, and the full indicator-level scoring matrix for all cities assessed. The appendix is designed to ensure analytical transparency, replicability, and external auditability for researchers, policymakers, and urban practitioners.

A. Indicator Framework and Scoring Scale

The Five Pillars Index evaluates cities across 25 indicators, grouped into five pillars (five indicators per pillar). Each indicator is scored on a 0–2 ordinal scale, defined as follows:

- **0 — Insufficient**
  Weak, unreliable, inaccessible, or harmful conditions
- **1 — Partial**
  Moderate quality, mixed performance, or inconsistent coverage
- **2 — Strong**
  High quality, accessible, well-enforced, and broadly supportive conditions

The ordinal structure is intentionally designed to:

- Reduce false precision in cross-city comparisons
- Improve robustness across heterogeneous data environments
- Emphasize structural conditions rather than marginal performance differences

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B. Indicator Definitions and Scoring Thresholds

B1. Movement Indicators

Assesses how effectively a city enables safe, efficient, and accessible daily mobility.

Indicators	0	1	2
Walkability / Pedestrian Quality	Unsafe, discontinuous, or car-dependent pedestrian environment	Mixed walkability; partial coverage or safety gaps	Highly walkable; continuous, safe pedestrian network
Transit Accessibility *(% of population within 500m of transit)*	<60%	60–85%	>85%
Cycling Infrastructure	Essentially absent or unsafe	Exists but uneven, fragmented, or limited	Extensive, protected, and citywide
Commute Time *(typical median)*	Long, congested, unreliable	Reasonable by global standards	Fast, predictable, and efficient
Road Safety *(traffic deaths per 100,000 residents)*	>8	3–8	<3

B2. Nutrition Indicators

Evaluates the healthfulness, accessibility, affordability, and safety of food environments.

Indicators	0	1	2
Healthy Food Accessibility	Food deserts common	Mixed access; strong core but weak periphery	Widespread, equitable access
Food Affordability *(% of income for healthy basket)*	>20%	10–20%	<10%
Fast Food Culture	High reliance or density	Balanced presence	Low reliance; strong alternatives
Food Safety / Sanitation	Weak enforcement; frequent violations	Moderate standards; uneven compliance	Strong standards and consistent enforcement
Nutrition Literacy / Public Programs	Weak or absent programs	Moderate, inconsistent programming	Strong curriculum and widespread public campaigns

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B3. Knowledge Indicators

Measures access to education, information, public learning, and institutional transparency.

Indicators	0	1	2
Education Quality	Below OECD average	At OECD average	Above OECD average
Digital Access *(household broadband penetration)*	<70%	70–90%	>90%
Public Learning Infrastructure	Very limited or inaccessible	Moderate availability	Strong, inclusive ecosystem
Scientific / Media Literacy	High vulnerability to misinformation	Mixed resilience	High critical reasoning and institutional trust
Open Data & Transparency	Limited public data availability	Partial transparency	Mature open-data ecosystem

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B4. Mindset Indicators

Evaluates psychological wellbeing, social cohesion, and access to mental health support.

Indicators	0	1	2
Stress & Burnout Burden	High (top global prevalence)	Moderate	Low (bottom global prevalence)

Work–Life Balance *(hours and time-off norms)*	>45 hours/week	40–45 hours/week	<40 hours/week with high vacation uptake
Social Trust	Low	Moderate	High
Loneliness / Social Isolation	High prevalence	Moderate	Low prevalence
Mental Health Access	Poor availability or coverage	Moderate capacity	Strong, accessible support networks

B5. Environment Indicators

Captures the physical and structural foundations of healthy urban living.

Indicators	0	1	2
Air Quality *(PM2.5 annual mean)*	>35 µg/m³	15–35 µg/m³	<15 µg/m³
Green Spaces	Low supply or uneven distribution	Balanced provision	High, accessible provision
Personal Safety / Crime Levels	High crime; significant safety concerns	Mixed safety	Generally safe; low violent crime
Housing Affordability *(relative to median income)*	Unaffordable	Doable	Affordable
Waste, Water & Sanitation	Weak or inconsistent systems	Moderate but reliable services	High-quality, well-managed infrastructure

C. Score Construction and Aggregation

- **Indicator Score:** 0–2
- **Pillar Score:** Sum of five indicators (0–10)
- **Final City Score:** Unweighted average of five pillar scores (0.0–10.0)

No weighting is applied, reflecting the Five Pillars principle that all dimensions of health are **essential and non-substitutable**.

D. Data Sources and Evidence Hierarchy

D1. Primary Data Sources

The index draws on high-quality, internationally recognized datasets, including:

- **Multilateral & Global Sources**
  - OECD Metropolitan Database
  - WHO Global Health Observatory
  - World Bank Open Data
  - UN-Habitat Urban Indicators
  - UNESCO Institute for Statistics
- **Environmental & Air Quality Sources**
  - IQAir Global Dataset
  - NASA / ESA satellite-derived PM2.5 data
  - National environmental agencies
- **National & Municipal Sources**
  - City open-data portals
  - Metropolitan planning authorities
  - Public transport agencies
  - Housing authorities
  - Police and public safety dashboards
- **Academic & Research-Based Sources**
  - Peer-reviewed urban mobility studies
  - Food environment research
  - Mental health accessibility analyses
  - Green-space distribution studies

D2. Indicator-Level Data Extraction Rules

For each indicator, data was selected using the following priority order:

1. Official city-level data
2. National datasets with city specificity
3. Multilateral datasets
4. Peer-reviewed academic studies
5. Triangulated qualitative assessment when quantitative data was unavailable

D3. Qualitative Scoring and Triangulation

For indicators lacking standardized city-level data—particularly within Mindset and Food Culture—scores were derived using:

- Multiple independent sources
- City and regional surveys
- Comparative peer-city benchmarking
- Cross-metric validation (e.g., safety data combined with wellbeing metrics)

No indicator was scored based on single-source inference or unsubstantiated judgment.

E. Consistency, Validation, and Quality Assurance

To ensure consistency and reliability:

- Each city was evaluated one pillar at a time using the same procedures
- All scoring used identical definitions and thresholds
- Outlier values were rechecked against alternative sources
- Conflicting data points were resolved using source hierarchy or triangulation
- Contextual anomalies were assessed using multi-year trends where available

F. Methodological Notes and Limitations

- Municipal reporting standards vary across regions
- Mental health and loneliness metrics lack full global standardization
- Some indicators rely on proxy measures due to data gaps

- Scores reflect structural capacity, not individual clinical outcomes
- Results are intended for comparative benchmarking, not precision forecasting

These limitations are mitigated through transparent thresholds, conservative estimation, and consistent application across all cities.

G. Indicator-Level Scoring Tables

								Movement					Nutrition					Knowledge					Mindset					Environment				
		Average of Pillar Scores	Sum Movement	Sum Nutrition	Sum Knowledge	Sum Mindset	Sum Environment	Walkability / Pedestrian Quality	Transit Accessibility	Cycling Infrastructure	Commute Time	Road Safety	Healthy Food Accessibility	Food Affordability	Fast Food Density	Food Safety / Sanitation	Nutrition Literacy / Public Programs	Education Quality	Digital Access	Public Learning Infrastructure	Scientific / Media Literacy	Open Data & Transparency	Stress & Burnout Burden	Work-Life Balance	Social Trust	Loneliness / Social Isolation	Mental Health Access	Air Quality	Green Spaces	Personal Safety / Crime Levels	Housing Affordability	Waste, Water & Sanitation
1	Copenhagen	9.4	10	9	10	9	9	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2
2	Amsterdam	8.6	8	8	10	9	8	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2
3	Stockholm	7.8	9	7	7	7	9	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	2
4	Singapore	7.6	9	7	9	5	8	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	0	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	2
5	Barcelona	7.0	9	8	6	6	6	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	2
5	Tokyo	7.0	8	8	8	3	8	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2
7	Vancouver	6.6	8	6	8	4	7	2	1	2	1	2	1	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	0	2
8	Berlin	6.4	6	7	7	4	8	1	2	1	0	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	2
8	Hong Kong	6.4	8	6	8	4	6	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	0	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1
8	Seoul	6.4	8	7	9	2	6	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	2	0	2
11	Sydney	6.2	7	6	9	4	5	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	0	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	1
11	Toronto	6.2	6	5	8	5	7	1	2	1	0	2	1	0	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	0	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	0	2
13	London	6.0	6	6	8	4	6	1	2	1	0	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	2
13	Paris	6.0	6	7	7	5	5	2	2	1	0	1	2	1	0	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	2
15	Chicago	5.8	7	5	6	5	6	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	2
15	New York City	5.8	8	4	6	5	6	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	0	1
15	Shanghai	5.8	7	5	8	2	7	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	0	2
18	Beijing	5.6	7	4	8	2	7	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	0	2
18	Doha	5.6	6	7	6	5	4	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	0	2	2	0	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	2	0	1
20	Dubai	5.4	6	7	5	3	6	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	0	2	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	2
20	Los Angeles	5.4	4	6	6	5	6	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	2
22	Santiago	4.6	4	5	6	5	3	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
23	Buenos Aires	4.2	6	4	5	2	4	1	1	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
24	Bangkok	4.0	5	6	4	2	3	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1
24	São Paulo	4.0	4	3	5	3	5	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
26	Riyadh	3.8	2	5	6	2	4	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	2	1	0	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	1
27	Cape Town	3.4	3	4	3	3	4	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	1
27	Jakarta	3.4	4	5	3	2	3	1	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
27	New Delhi	3.4	2	4	5	2	4	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	2	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
30	Mexico City	3.0	4	3	5	1	2	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1

About G.O.A.L.

G.O.A.L. – Global Organization for Athletics & Life is an independent strategy studio and think tank focused on designing health-first futures through the Five Pillars of Human Health. Our work spans urban intelligence, demographic sustainability, system-level strategy, and health-centered governance. We help institutions, cities, and organizations navigate global megatrends by aligning intelligence, design, and policy toward human wellbeing.

Learn more at www.global-goal.org or contact us at info@global-goal.org.

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