

Cultural and Political Shifts

Individual empowerment, enhanced by internet access and social media, together with global economic, cultural and social tensions, migration and extremism are fuelling activism and challenging traditional politics and governance.

Economic challenges, demographic changes and the dramatic growth in and access to information are driving major cultural and political shifts. Social and political activism is on the rise, facilitated by the sharing of information online and the growing power of social media. Demands for accountability and transparency are growing, as are concerns over personal data and privacy.

Many people are defining themselves less by geography and more by communities of shared interest, as migration, multiculturalism and generational shifts call into question traditional ideas of national boundaries and social structures. However, political and religious extremism are also on the rise, as perceived threats to belief systems and national identities become apparent. These trends, along with a gradual shift of global power to the East, mean that national security and the future role of traditionally preeminent countries in the world have major implications.

Globally, the spread of democracy is slowing as its legitimacy is increasingly questioned, with voter engagement falling in many countries. Political polarisation, a lack of faith in party politics and short-termism in decision-making is increasingly apparent and undermining societal responses to long-term threats like climate change. In spite of notable successes, such as the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the adequacy of vital governing bodies like the European Union (EU) and United Nations are under scrutiny. This has come to the fore with the UK's referendum decision to leave the EU.

Challenges

- ★ How can we respond to shifting global economic and political power, given its implications for traditional political and economic models?
- ★ Can we ensure that growing access to information will be a positive force for change, or will personal privacy concerns and misuse limit its potential?
- ★ How can we tackle growing religious and political extremism?
- ★ How are technology, devolution and community empowerment challenging traditional governance structures? Can they tackle the big issues facing society and deliver positive change?



Key Facts:

1. Currently some 50 countries sit in the middle ground between autocratic and democratic systems of government, concentrated in Africa, the Middle East and Asia¹.

2. Just over 60% of all countries were democratic in 2012, but the trend of democratisation has arguably slowed since 2000².

3. Over the period 1945-2001 global voter turnout in democratic nations declined, however regional variations are significant³.

4. By 2022 more people worldwide will be middle class than poor⁴.

5. 80% of the global middle class by 2030 will reside in developing regions⁴.

6. In 2010, Christians and Muslims were the largest religious groups globally, with 31.5% and 23.2% of total population respectively⁵. By 2050, Islam is likely to be nearly equal to Christianity⁶.

Devolution Deals:

Greater Manchester, Sheffield, Liverpool, North East, West Yorkshire, West Midlands and Cornwall

Combined Authorities:

Tees Valley, East Anglia, Greater Lincolnshire, West of England, North Midlands and Heart of the South West.¹⁰



LDA Design Insights:

Devolution of power and community decision-making is growing in popularity, especially in planning and development. The potential opportunities and risks are considerable and structures to manage them uncertain. With near-ubiquitous internet access, growing citizen awareness is driving a surge in social activism.

★ In the UK, there has long been a trend away from public towards private sector provision of services and infrastructure, accompanied by recent significant cuts to public sector budgets. However, short-termism and policy uncertainty are putting investment at risk. Devolution of powers to combined authorities and communities offers alternative options for infrastructure investment and delivery, and for people and environment-centric strategic planning.

★ Engagement in and trust of mainstream UK party politics has fallen, while membership of alternative parties has surged. The UK's vote to leave the EU may focus minds on governance. Devolution of additional powers to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and English city regions is on the cards, which will lead to increasing divergence in plan-making and infrastructure priorities. Further afield, anti-establishment candidates are finding electoral success across Europe and North America, while the politically and economically unstable EU is set for further reform.

★ Rapid growth in access to information means citizens are more aware of society around them and the structures governing it. Governments, corporations and development proposals are under growing scrutiny from well-informed individuals. Activism is surging, as are the voices of extreme political and religious groups. Development and regeneration, public realm, and energy and infrastructure projects risk obstruction and delay without effective and inclusive engagement.

★ Strategic planning and coordination of development and infrastructure are hugely important, but need to find new ways of pro-actively engaging with citizens so that their activism can be harnessed as a positive force for change. Public and private sectors need to understand the shift to a more engaged citizenry and empower them to play a central role in decision-making and long-term stewardship. For example, infrastructure and services can now be planned, designed and financed by communities, with benefits to developers and investors from enhanced local support. Taking advantage of the wealth of user-generated 'big data' to design places, infrastructure and services to meet local needs will be enormously beneficial as technology evolves.

What is LDA Futures?

The world is changing in response to a set of environmental, economic, social and technological drivers, and these are shaping the types of infrastructure and development we need and the way we use land.

LDA Futures explores these drivers and their implications to enable us to make appropriate responses through our projects and the advice we give to clients.



References

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