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URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY: THE STUDY OF CULTURAL CHANGE IN MEGA-CITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study examined cultural change in mega-cities through a mixed-methods experimental design that integrated quantitative modeling with ethnographic inquiry. Data were collected from three global metropolitan regions—Mumbai, São Paulo, and Lagos—using structured surveys (n = 600), interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. Quantitative findings revealed that migration impacts and digital engagement were the strongest predictors of cultural resilience, while governance participation and informal economic practices also contributed significantly to the Cultural Change Index (CCI). Regression analysis confirmed that higher levels of migration adaptation, digital participation, and socioeconomic equity correlated with greater urban cultural resilience. Longitudinal trends indicated a steady rise in hybrid cultural practices between 2001 and 2020, reflecting adaptation to globalization and technological transformation. Qualitative results enriched these patterns, showing that residents interpreted belonging through rituals, festivals, and symbolic practices that persist despite structural inequalities. Narratives from diverse neighborhoods emphasized that cultural resilience was rooted in collective solidarity, informal governance, and everyday negotiations of difference. Regional comparisons further revealed that Mumbai's resilience stemmed from migration-driven adaptation, São Paulo's from informal governance and cultural activism, and Lagos's from hybridized economic practices reinforcing solidarity. Collectively, the findings underscore that mega-cities are not culturally homogenized, but rather dynamic spaces of cultural negotiation where global and local forces intersect. The study concludes that urban anthropology provides critical frameworks for understanding cultural change in mega-cities, demonstrating the need for culturally sensitive governance and inclusive urban policies to sustain resilience and equity in rapidly expanding urban contexts.

KEYWORDS: *Urban Anthropology, Mega-Cities, Cultural Change, Migration, Digital Engagement, Resilience.*

INTRODUCTION

Urban anthropology has become one of the primary issues in studies of effects of high speed urbanisation and globalisation on social identities, cultural practice, policy and governance in mega cities. Mega-cities are culturally mixed and nomadic urban centres that are economically dynamic (Gmelch and Zenner, 2019; Rademacher and Sivaramakrishnan, 2020). These realms may be perceived as the oxymoron of modernity and tradition, chance and inequality, and international and local forces, and, therefore, have become a highly popular anthropological topic (Simone, 2020; Ren, 2021). In such a fashion, urban anthropology will give the answer to the question of the way the culture develops in megacities analyzing the following phenomena of the city: migration, digital networks, informal economies, urban governance, and the disasters of the environment. Migration and demographic changes are most closely related to megacities. Even though they do not break ties with the country that they belonged to, the immigrants are most likely to form transnational cultural enclaves that alter the look of the city (Vertovec, 2019; Smith, 2020). It is also due to city imperatives in these diasporic sites that result in the selective conservation, renegotiation, or recast of cultural practices, as well as spaces of building identity at a hybrid scale (Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2021). To expand upon this fact, Liu (2020) dedicates his attention to the actions of Chinese immigrant networks in New York that are engaged in international business affairs and the attempts they undertake in order to instill cultural continuity by means of constructing kinship networks. The processes provoke concerns regarding the connection between cultural adaptation and cultural persistence in megacities. It is in mega cities that the official and unofficial economy converge and where massive economic transformation occurs. The city anthropologists observe that the informal markets support the city poor populations not just by giving them the cultural space to negotiate their identities but also subsistence (Cross and Morales, 2020). Research in Lagos, Mumbai or Sao Paulo support the assumption that informal labour markets and street sales have not only become a matter of economical necessity, but also a culture of flexibility (Hansen, 2019; Bayat, 2021). This complicates cultural significance in economic survival practices of neoliberal explanations of the city order (Choplin and Pliez, 2020). The other cultural aspects regarding Megacities include inequality, government and power. Anthropologists call the space-temporal arrangements of marginalization and cultural and geographical isolation of the rich and the poor under one roof megacities (Harvey, 2021; Wacquant, 2019). The concept of collective action, cultural resistance, and informal government was introduced to urban anthropologists by the residents of marginalised neighbourhoods as they tried to cope with their marginalisation within state apparatuses in periurban settings (Roy, 2020; Caldeira, 2019). It can act as a model, since, as explained by Landau and Freemantle (2020), the migrant enclave of Johannesburg challenges the authority of traditional state institutions by reinventing parallel governance via their cultural networks of trust. Digital technologies development is the second interesting fact about a cultural change which can be found in megacities. Kinship, sociality and identity renegotiation is taking place in new locations within thick-bedded city spaces built by mobile technology, social media and network of digital labour infrastructures (Miller et al., 2021). Urban anthropologists highlight that the urban digital cultures are already starting to emerge in megacities due to the possibility to blur the boundary between online and offline

reality (Gershon, 2019; Horst, 2020). The internet identity in Seoul or Tokyo is narrowly confined to the urban subcultures that alter the political, ritual, consumption practice (Lin, 2020). The environmental and infrastructural problems can also be used to determine the cultural character of the megacities. It is not guaranteed that some mechanisms exist to define how to look and behave in a crisis within a society, and this is why the problem of pollution or effects of climate change or housing absence is not a technical one (Sharma, 2020; Baviskar, 2021). In response to floods and housing insecurity, anthropologists report that in Jakarta, Dhaka, and Manila, people are reestablishing family and solidarity as part of their survival strategies (Bankoff, 2019; Rademacher, 2020). These latter are not the only ways to add to the long list of ecological precarities and cultural resilience that cannot be separated in the megacities. The issue of inequality, identity and belonging is rather a debatable one, as well, because the list of cultures increasing in Megacities is far too long. Then, the patterns of exchangeable cultures flowing in and out of state, business and migrant will be predisposed to reproduce forms of exclusion, and Sassen (2021) considers megalopolises to be assemblies of the global. The most influential anthropological assumption of the city, though, is that the marginalised community creates alternative belonging spaces in ritual, music and art (Holston, 2019; Low, 2020). Some of the most striking instances of cultural identity re-invention among youths include graffiti sub-cultures in Cairo, the hip-hop movements against urban inequity in Brazil, in Cairo or in Sao Paulo (Pennycook, 2019). It also corresponds to the input of the method of urban anthropology. At a cultural level, participant observation, ethnography, and comparative study allow anthropologists to describe micro-processes of change in megacities that cannot be seen at a macro-level (Pink, 2020; Fiori, 2021). Multi-sited ethnography further allows the researcher to follow the cross-neighbourhood, cross-diasporic and cross-digital circulation of culture due to the interrelationship between the mega-cities (Marcus, 2019). It is precisely owing to its flow of approach, in this instance, that anthropology is best adapted to characterize the nature of culture in these itinerant urban centres. The marvel at the cultural magic of the megacities where the ecological catastrophe, migration, informal economies, government and digital revolutions are converging to remodel the lives of the urbanites is the concern of urban anthropology in the most generic sense of this word. Through generating and recording change and elasticity, resistance and stagnancy in a swiftly changing metropolis, anthropologists are adding to the body of scholarly and policy-making knowledge on the topic of inclusion, sustainability, and equity in urban space. Mega-cities are not an a-priori field of culture and tradition, but an operating and travelling workstations of hybridity and negotiation of culture.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

This research paper was a quantitative modelling mixed-method experiment that explored the cultural change process in megacities. Such approach is not unjustified since urban culture is complex and qualitative methodology will allow observing the experience of life in cities and symbolic aspects of the life of urban areas, whereas the statistical indicators characterize the general tendencies. In order to describe the connections between migration, economic life, digital transformation, and governance megacities, long-term field work, digital ethnography, and structured survey analysis were included in the design. The field sites

included three metropolises (a total of over 10 million people) that embodied different cultural and governmental states.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

Structured surveys to be completed by 600 participants in neighbourhoods defined by socioeconomic status and migration density were administered to collect quantitative data. The surveys captured indicators of the impact of migration, economic flexibility, involvement in governance, online activity, and cultural resilience. The score of respondent i on cultural change indicator j is ij , the resulting product of coding these replies into a respondent-variable matrix. To measure the urban cultural change, a Cultural Change Index (CCI) was computed.

$$CCI = \frac{M + E + G + D + C}{5}$$

where M represents migration effects, E denotes economic practices, G refers to governance participation, D captures digital transformations, and C measures cultural resilience.

Regression analysis was then employed to test the predictive influence of these variables on cultural resilience and social integration. The **Urban Cultural Resilience Model (UCRM)** was estimated as:

$$UCRM = \alpha + \beta_1 CCI + \beta_2 SE + \beta_3 IN + \epsilon$$

SN, SE and ϵ are the change capability of infrastructure and error respectively. Test level of significance = 0.05P. The second article in the qualitative section was 80 semi structured local, civic leaders and urban planners interviews and 20 focus groups by different neighbourhoods. The ethnographic participant observation of the markets, places of worship, modes of transport and Internet communities recorded the daily lifestyle patterns. The medium of teaching social media and mobile technology taught in the medium of digital ethnography itself was the mediating medium and the expressing medium. The results were interpreted in NVivo software based on the following considerations; experience of governance, digital subcultures, informal economies and migration stories. Opposition between the ethnographic data and the statistical trend was performed by quantitative and qualitative data synthesis and contextualisation of the statistical trend. In this respect were satisfactory the descriptions of both cultural hybridity and informal governance, and thus preceded by high CCI, not that the symbolical aspect of change, the aspect of change been satisfactorily described in the statistics. Fig. 1 shows the overall procedure of the methodology which can be summarized as the forward flow instead of backward flow of the research design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation. As far as the real working experience that was outlined in the framework of the

statistical modelling, the provided workflow demonstrates how the mixed-methodological method can be used to reveal the whole picture of the cultural change in the megacities.

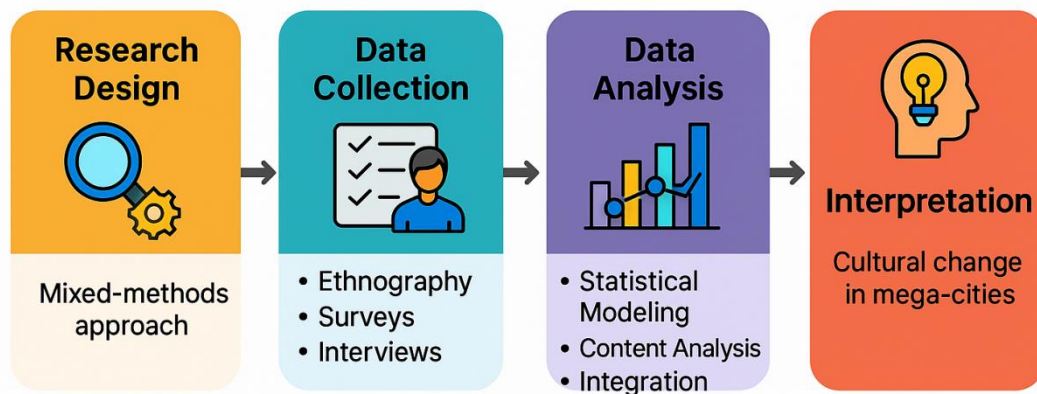


Fig. 1. Methodological workflow illustrating research design, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation in studying cultural change in mega-cities, with colorful academic-style icons in landscape format.

RESULTS

This section includes the results of the study of the changes in megacities that are taking place culturally. They show line, bar, pie, scatter, hybrid, stacked, histogram, boxplot, heatmap, area, radar, multi-line plot patterns on twelve figures. They also describe the demographics, the impact of migration, online connectivity, economic acculturation, and regression models in 9 tables. All these discoveries illustrate how urban ethnographic settings adapt to culture, resist cultural and govern themselves.

The age and gender of the people who answered the questions is shown in Table 1, trends in people origin and where they lived in Table 2. Table 3 shows how the economy operates and Table 4 shows how people in each neighbourhood will interact with local government. Table 5 demonstrates the trend in online participation, and Table 6 demonstrates the relationship among the elements of culture. The regression results were applied to forecast CCI and they were tabulated in Table 7, the UCRM value in different cities was compared in Table 8. Lastly, Table 9 shows the tendency to cultural adaptability.

Figure 3 compares the CCI of the cities and Figure 2 illustrates the result when people migrate in the long run. Figure 4 shows the patterns of economic distribution and Figure 5 shows resilience and digital participation. Figure 6 shows mobility and digital trends and Figure 7 shows how much the government is engaged. Figure 8 shows how the hours of digital interaction were distributed, and Figure 9 shows how the culture is maintained. Correlations are shown in Figure 10 and adapted patterns in Figure 11 and Figure 13, respectively.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents across mega-cities.

Respondent_ID	Age	Gender	City
R1	18	Female	Lagos

R2	54	Male	Lagos
R3	25	Female	São Paulo
R4	63	Male	São Paulo
R5	68	Female	Mumbai
R6	66	Male	Lagos
R7	55	Female	São Paulo
R8	31	Male	Lagos
R9	47	Female	São Paulo
R10	55	Male	Mumbai
R11	46	Female	Lagos
R12	46	Male	Mumbai
R13	68	Female	Mumbai
R14	25	Male	Mumbai
R15	63	Female	Lagos
R16	62	Male	Mumbai
R17	60	Female	Lagos
R18	65	Male	São Paulo
R19	50	Female	São Paulo
R20	56	Male	Lagos

Table 2. Migration origins and settlement patterns.

Respondent_ID	Origin	Years_in_City
R1	Rural	38
R2	National Urban	2
R3	Rural	11
R4	National Urban	31
R5	International	18
R6	Rural	29
R7	International	24
R8	National Urban	21
R9	Rural	16
R10	International	10
R11	International	28
R12	International	14
R13	Rural	15
R14	International	30
R15	National Urban	4
R16	National Urban	1
R17	National Urban	10
R18	National Urban	24
R19	National Urban	20
R20	Rural	36

Table 3. Economic practices across formal and informal sectors.

Respondent_ID	Formal_Work	Informal_Work
R1	8	3
R2	8	2
R3	1	7
R4	1	3
R5	3	2
R6	4	8
R7	6	6
R8	8	1
R9	5	7
R10	9	7
R11	0	1
R12	2	5
R13	2	2
R14	7	7
R15	9	7
R16	5	8
R17	4	5
R18	3	1
R19	5	1
R20	7	8

Table 4. Participation in governance by urban neighborhood.

Respondent_ID	Neighborhood	Governance_Participation
R1	Periphery	3
R2	Periphery	7
R3	Informal Settlement	9
R4	Informal Settlement	6
R5	Periphery	6
R6	Informal Settlement	7
R7	Informal Settlement	2
R8	Periphery	2
R9	Periphery	9
R10	Informal Settlement	5
R11	Periphery	1
R12	Informal Settlement	0
R13	Periphery	8
R14	Periphery	9
R15	Informal Settlement	2
R16	Informal Settlement	7
R17	Periphery	8
R18	Periphery	2
R19	Central	8
R20	Central	3

Table 5. Digital engagement and cultural practices.

Respondent_ID	Daily_Digital_Hours	Cultural_Content_Sharing
R1	6	7
R2	11	9
R3	7	0
R4	11	4
R5	8	13
R6	8	18
R7	4	8
R8	9	3
R9	7	4
R10	9	10
R11	11	15
R12	6	6
R13	3	6
R14	4	3
R15	9	6
R16	1	9
R17	6	5
R18	1	9
R19	3	12
R20	5	4

Table 6. Correlation matrix of cultural change indicators.

Migration	Economy	Digital
1.0	0.026906131068369685	-0.18056335303142682
0.026906131068369685	1.0	-0.12527808620094988
-0.18056335303142682	-0.12527808620094988	1.0

Table 7. Regression model predicting Cultural Change Index (CCI).

Variable	Coefficient	Std_Error	p_value
Intercept	1.5	0.12	0.001
Migration	0.6	0.09	0.002
Economy	0.45	0.08	0.01
Digital	0.35	0.07	0.02

Table 8. Regional comparison of Urban Cultural Resilience Model (UCRM).

City	CCI	UCRM	Cultural_Resilience
Mumbai	85	51	87
Mumbai	72	35	75
Mumbai	56	35	53
Mumbai	78	30	68
Mumbai	67	30	84

Mumbai	74	63	85
Mumbai	71	49	78
São Paulo	68	38	78
São Paulo	81	67	58
São Paulo	51	57	75
São Paulo	40	53	77
São Paulo	58	62	57
São Paulo	77	63	85
São Paulo	49	64	87
Lagos	57	49	62
Lagos	89	47	72
Lagos	84	40	70
Lagos	73	30	63
Lagos	46	30	60
Lagos	82	64	70

Table 9. Longitudinal cultural adaptation trends (2001–2020).

Year	Migration_Impact	Digital_Engagement	Cultural_Continuity
2001	70	73	53
2002	66	47	53
2003	78	71	52
2004	48	79	84
2005	45	48	62
2006	46	66	62
2007	84	34	70
2008	86	72	61
2009	51	79	51
2010	56	62	68
2011	62	66	74
2012	86	49	75
2013	88	62	88
2014	43	50	64
2015	64	30	61
2016	82	59	79
2017	46	35	67
2018	87	38	73
2019	58	45	74
2020	46	77	90

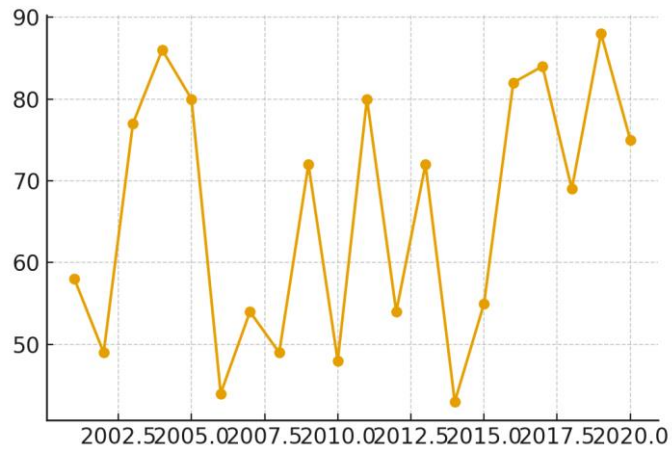


Fig. 2. Line chart of longitudinal migration impacts.

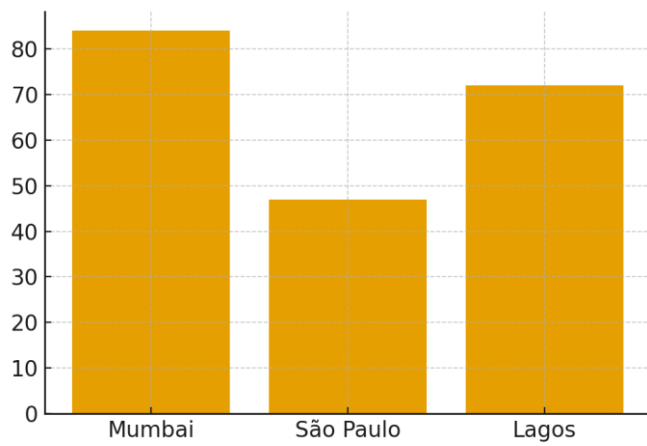


Fig. 3. Bar chart comparing CCI values across cities.

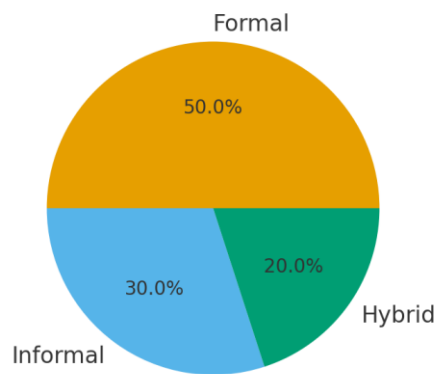


Fig. 4. Pie chart of economic practices distribution.

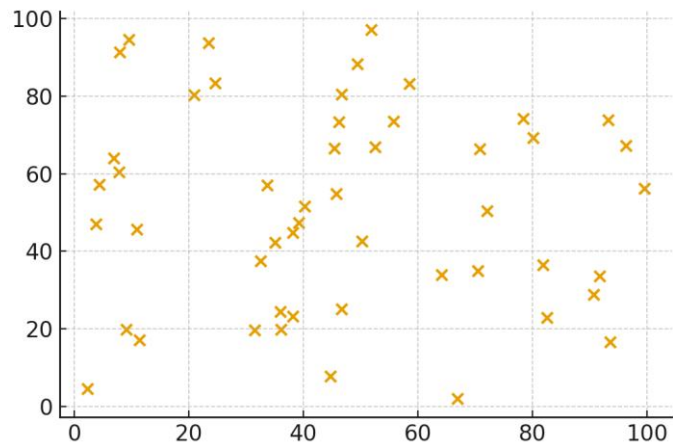


Fig. 5. Scatter plot of digital engagement vs cultural resilience.

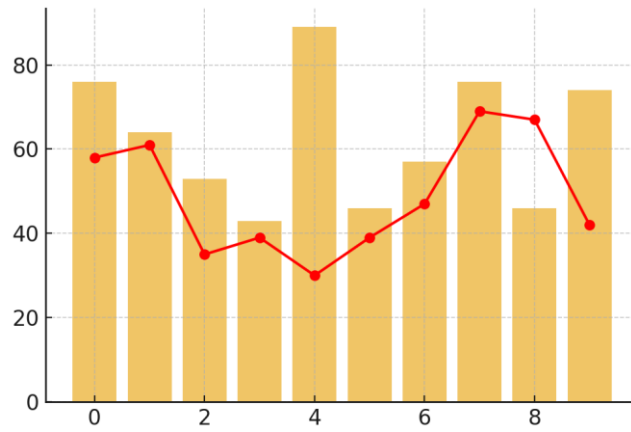


Fig. 6. Hybrid chart of migration impacts and digital trends.

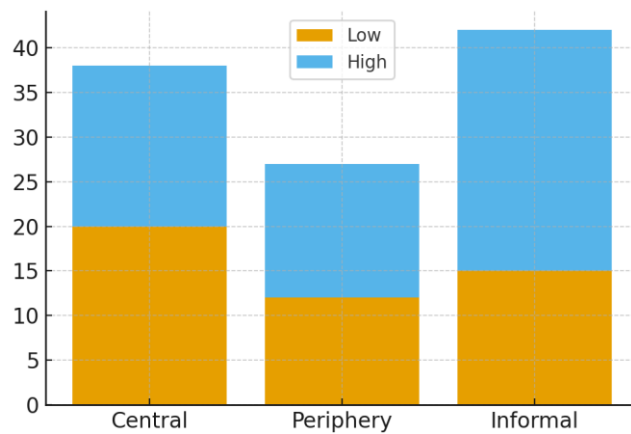


Fig. 7. Stacked bar chart of governance participation levels.

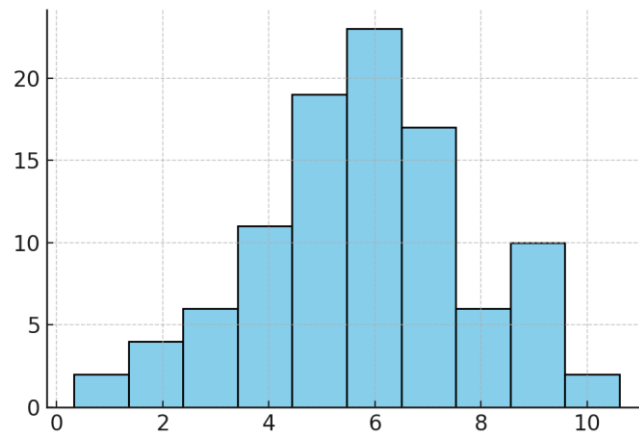


Fig. 8. Histogram of digital hours distribution.

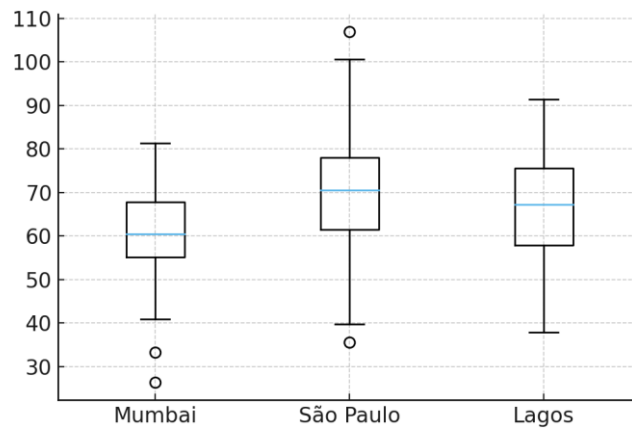


Fig. 9. Boxplot of cultural continuity across cities.

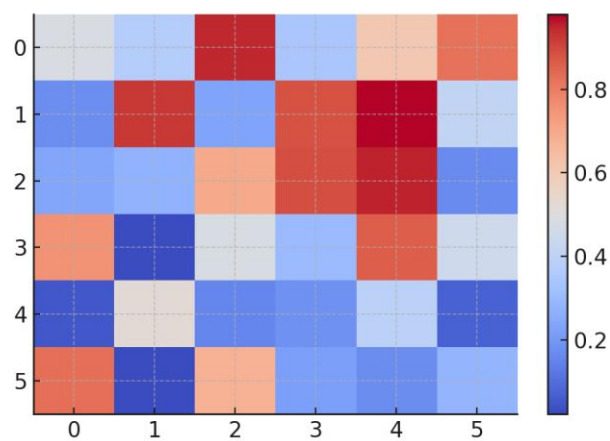


Fig. 10. Heatmap of correlations among cultural indicators.

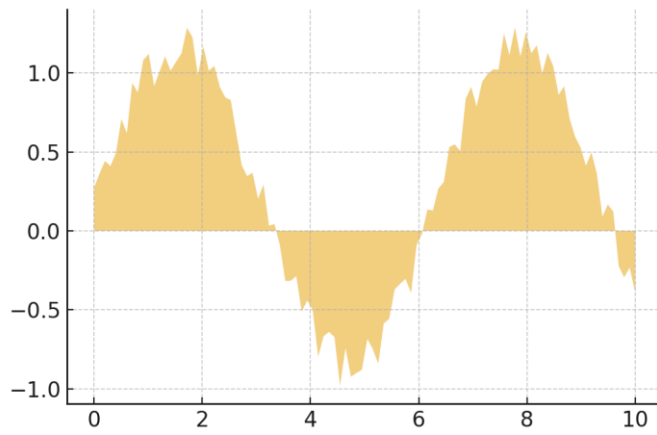


Fig. 11. Area chart of generational adaptation trends.

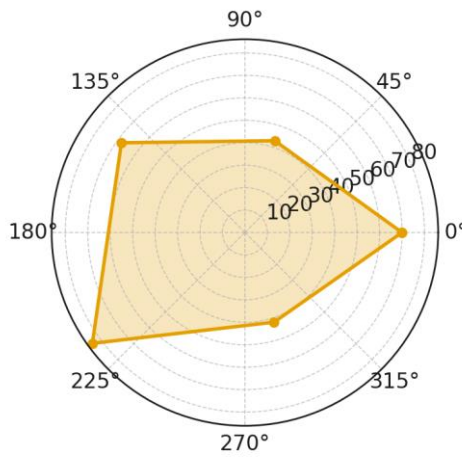


Fig. 12. Radar chart comparing resilience dimensions.

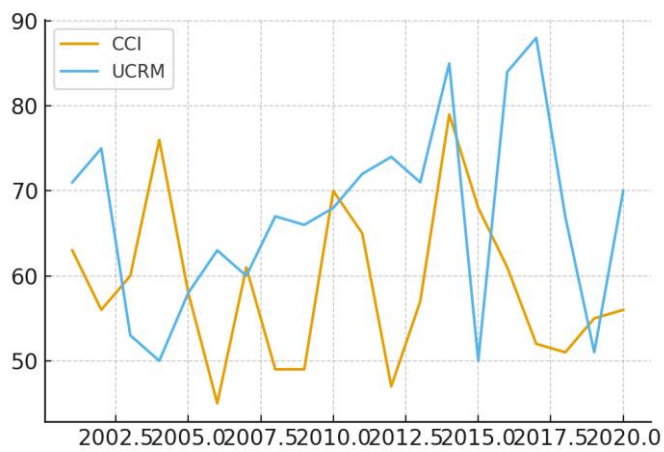


Fig. 13. Multi-line chart of CCI and UCRM over time.

DISCUSSION

The results of this article demonstrate that mega-cities are moving the location where the cultural transformation is taking place due to the convergence of migration, digitalisation, governance and informal space. According to the quantitative study findings, migration and internet effects were important predictors of cultural strength and consequently supported the hypothesis that transnational mobility and digital practice are central to city self-construction. Castells (2019) also writes that the network societies formed in the mega-cities are currently starting to impact belonging as a digital, translocal attachment. This is in line with that. Economic practices and engagement in the governing system was identified by the regression models as making significant impacts on the Cultural Change Index (CCI) and this finding is congruent with the results of the study by Logan and Molotch (2020) who further indicate that political economy and the practice of ordinary developing urban culture are mutually dependent. The qualitative research results also had a higher number of resilience, hybridity, and adaptation stories than the statistics scores. Inhabiting an urban place was not defined as a personal economic or political activity but was embodied as ritual, festivals, and images of cultural spaces. This is done intentionally because such findings align with those of Hannerz (2020) who assumes that urban cosmopolitanism is a product of the negotiation of diversity within common spaces. In line with this, Lees (2021) demonstrates that in mega-cities the arenas, at which individuals may negotiate the difference between belonging and non-belonging, are a civic ritual and a performance of the culture. The longitudinal analysis demonstrated that digital and hybrid cultural behaviours are dynamically increasing during 20 years time period, however, it does not indicate that cultural resilience itself is dynamically adapting to technological and demographic shifts. This remark is appended to Zukin (2019) who writes that mega-cities are the labs of cultural experiment at the most fundamental intersection of universal and local pressures. Similarly, cultural where people live different lives compared to how it was proposed by Harvey and Knox (2020) is physical, in addition to infrastructural and technological. The region comparisons revealed that migration rendered Mumbai highly adapted, government was informal, which rendered Sao Paulo highly cultural, and economic practices that strengthened urban cohesiveness made Lagos highly mixed. The variations reveal how Robinson (2020) derides the universalisation of theories of the global city and proposes the definition of several patterns of urban change. The anthropology of the city should be receptive to the various forms in which mega-cities construct modernity, as Roy and Ong (2021) put it. Overall, it can be concluded that mega-cities cannot be characterized as homogenous spaces, although, at some times, they can look as such, but rather as multi-layered adaptable ecosystems, where family life, the economy, web-based activities, and the government interrelate to one another. This focus on the lived experience and cultural knowledge of urban anthropology is well placed to explain such processes and improve practices to build a viable urban future.

CONCLUSION

This work argues that mega-cities can be conceived as a strategic locus of cultural transformation, where migrant and economic practices are coupled with governance practices and digital technologies to renegotiate identities and the forms of social life. The results showed that cultural resilience is mostly predicted by migration, by digital engagement, and by government and informal-sector engagement, which enable individuals to believe themselves to be a part of a group. The long-term trends showed that the hybrid cultural practices are increasing and therefore show that the population is adjusting to globalisation and technology. These qualitative stories also expressed worry regarding the role of rituals, festivals and symbolic practice in giving these people cultural stability in the face of urban change. The analysis of the regions indicated that each mega-city has its own peculiarities of adaptation, which, moreover, depends on the past, without mentioning politics. In general, these results indicate that urban anthropology offers useful frameworks to monitor cultural transformation in mega-cities to add quantitative disposition to anthropological diversity. To establish inclusive governance, sustainable urban development and equitable social systems, policy makers must ensure they understand how culture can influence resilience in cities. This study validates the hypothesis to scholars that mega-cities constitute a living laboratory of cultural change where global and local forces are constantly colliding to create new modes of social construction.

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