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Growth, innovation, scaling, and the pace of life in cities

Luís M. A. Bettencourt[*,†], José Lobo[‡], Dirk Helbing[§], Christian Kühnert[§], and Geoffrey B. West[*,¶]

– Author Affiliations

*Theoretical Division, MS B284, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Los Alamos, NM 87545;
‡Global Institute of Sustainability, Arizona State University, P.O. Box 873211, Tempe, AZ 85287–3211;
§Institute for Transport and Economics, Dresden University of Technology, Andreas-Schubert-Strasse 23, D-01062 Dresden, Germany; and
¶Santa Fe Institute, 1399 Hyde Park Road, Santa Fe, NM 87501

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Abstract

Humanity has just crossed a major landmark in its history with the majority of people now living in cities. Cities have long been known to be society's predominant engine of innovation and wealth creation, yet they are also its main source of crime, pollution, and disease. The inexorable trend toward urbanization

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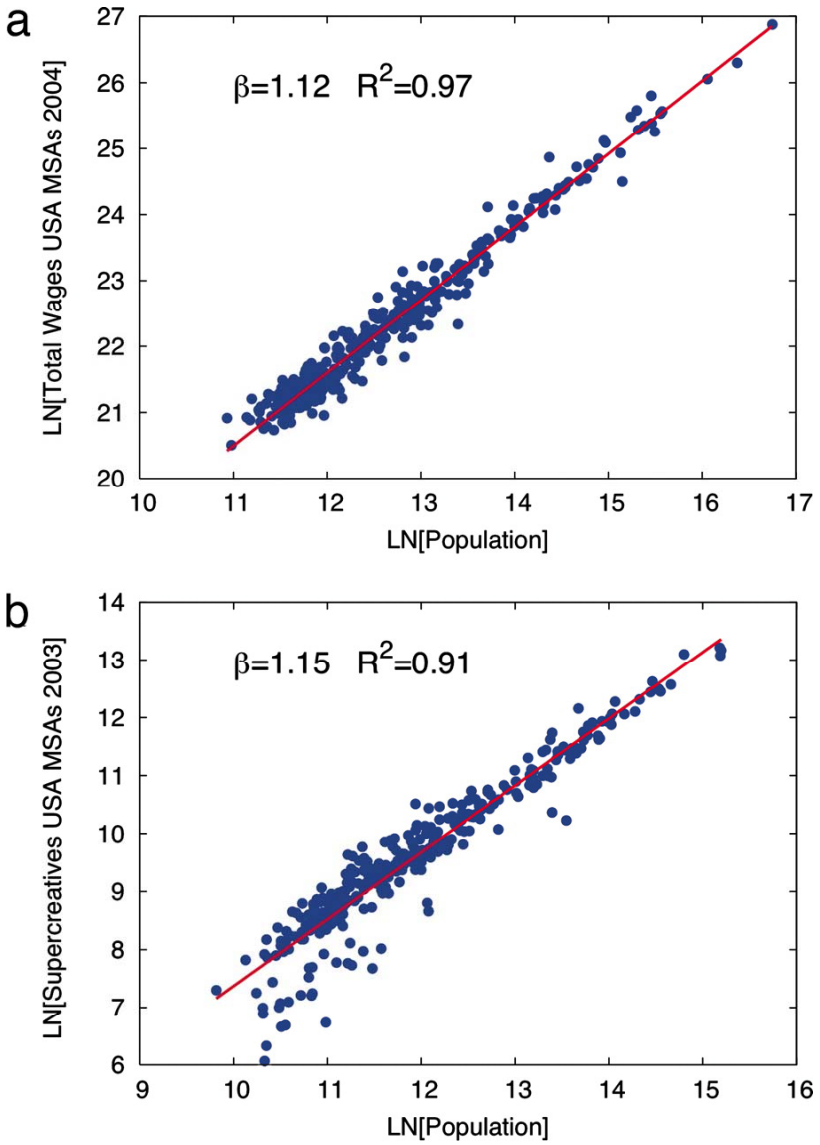
Table 1.

Scaling exponents for urban indicators vs. city size

Y	β	95% CI	Adj–R^2	Observations	Country–year
New patents	1.27	[1.25,1.29]	0.72	331	U.S. 2001
Inventors	1.25	[1.22,1.27]	0.76	331	U.S. 2001
Private R&D employment	1.34	[1.29,1.39]	0.92	266	U.S. 2002
"Supercreative" employment	1.15	[1.11,1.18]	0.89	287	U.S. 2003
R&D establishments	1.19	[1.14,1.22]	0.77	287	U.S. 1997
R&D employment	1.26	[1.18,1.43]	0.93	295	China 2002
Total wages	1.12	[1.09,1.13]	0.96	361	U.S. 2002
Total bank deposits	1.08	[1.03,1.11]	0.91	267	U.S. 1996
GDP	1.15	[1.06,1.23]	0.96	295	China 2002
GDP	1.26	[1.09,1.46]	0.64	196	EU 1999–2003
GDP	1.13	[1.03,1.23]	0.94	37	Germany 2003
Total electrical consumption	1.07	[1.03,1.11]	0.88	392	Germany 2002
New AIDS cases	1.23	[1.18,1.29]	0.76	93	U.S. 2002–2003
Serious crimes	1.16	[1.11, 1.18]	0.89	287	U.S. 2003
Total housing	1.00	[0.99,1.01]	0.99	316	U.S. 1990
Total employment	1.01	[0.99,1.02]	0.98	331	U.S. 2001
Household electrical consumption	1.00	[0.94,1.06]	0.88	377	Germany 2002
Household electrical consumption	1.05	[0.89,1.22]	0.91	295	China 2002
Household water consumption	1.01	[0.89,1.11]	0.96	295	China 2002
Gasoline stations	0.77	[0.74,0.81]	0.93	318	U.S. 2001
Gasoline sales	0.79	[0.73,0.80]	0.94	318	U.S. 2001
Length of electrical cables	0.87	[0.82,0.92]	0.75	380	Germany 2002
Road surface	0.83	[0.74,0.92]	0.87	29	Germany 2002

Examples of scaling relationships



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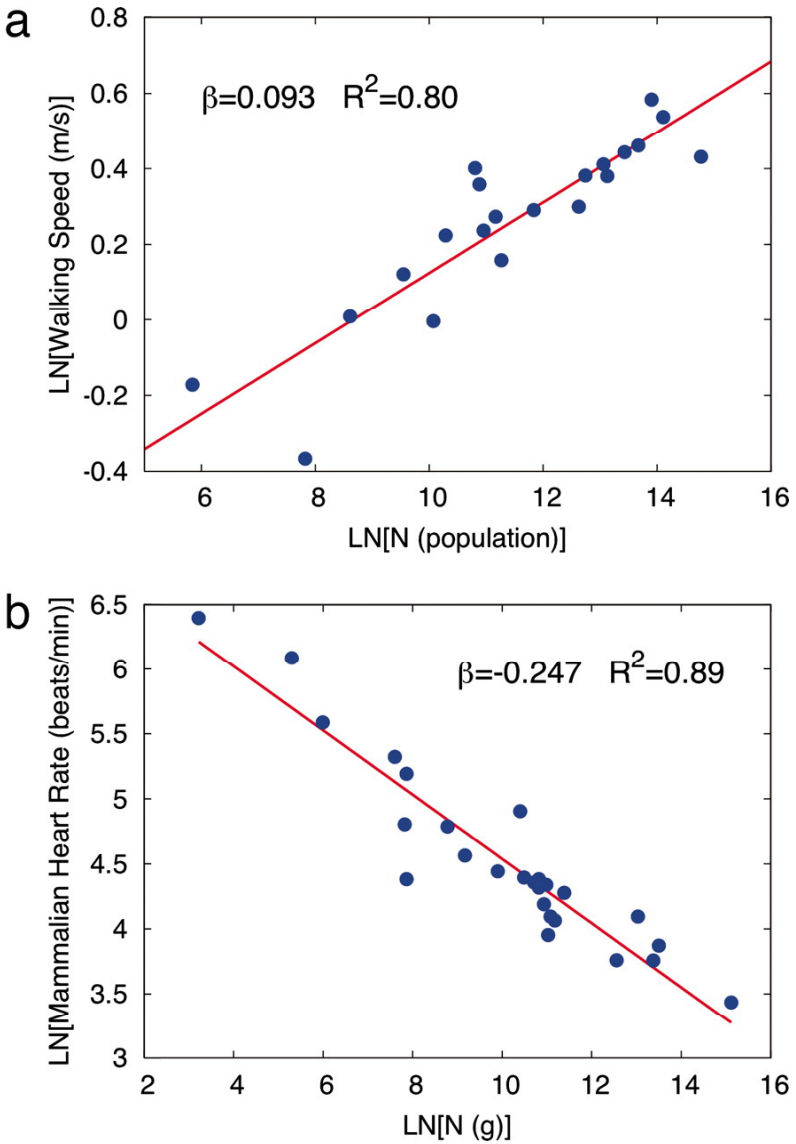
The pace of urban life increases with city size in contrast to the pace of biological life, which decreases with organism size



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Regimes of urban growth

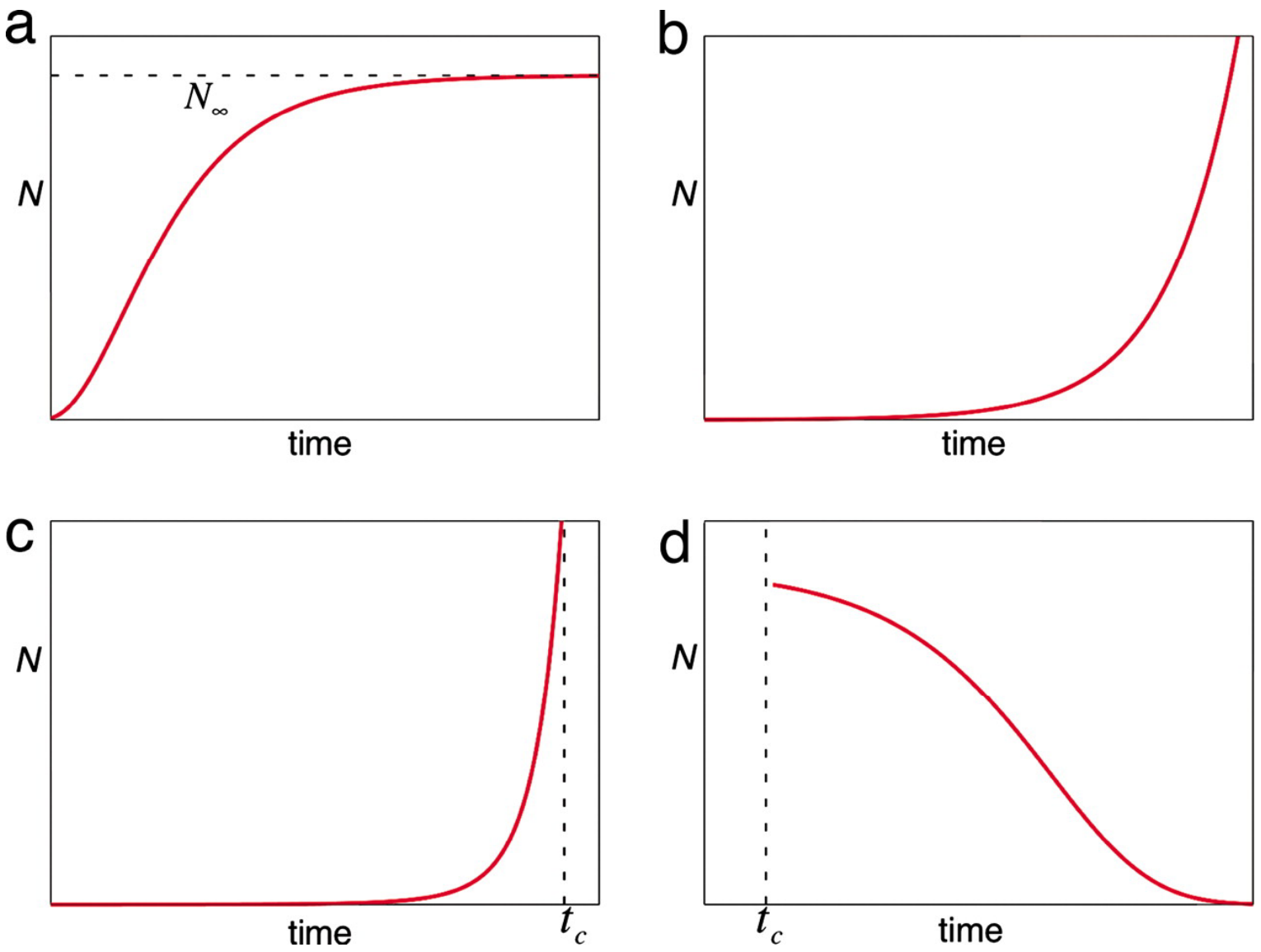

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Table 2.

Classification of scaling exponents for urban properties and their implications for growth

Scaling exponent	Driving force	Organization	Growth
$\beta < 1$	Optimization, efficiency	Biological	Sigmoidal: long-term population limit
$\beta > 1$	Creation of information, wealth and resources	Sociological	Boom/collapse: finite-time singularity/unbounded growth; accelerating growth rates/discontinuities
$\beta = 1$	Individual maintenance	Individual	Exponential