

BOP500 Index

First Edition: Infrastructure Availability Index
(Released October 2023)



BOP
500

Overview & Summary

BOP500: a new city data and insight service on culture and the creative economy

In the 25 years of BOP Consulting's existence the world economy has been transformed by globalisation. The rise of developing economies, especially China and India, the relative economic decline of Europe, the surge in foreign direct investment, and the spread of the internet have already led to major changes in the world's economic structure, especially in manufacturing, finance and advanced producer services.

Where do culture and the creative economy fit into this changing story? They contribute to economic development, diversification and innovation, to place-branding, tourism, attractiveness and soft power, so must be affected by, and add to, these forces of change. Yet until now it has been hard to say much more than that, given a lack of comparative data and the relative neglect of culture-specific narratives at a global scale. It is an increasingly urgent question given the central role of cities in the consumption and production of culture. Urban growth is largely a developing world phenomenon in the 21st century, and new cultural forms such as the Korean Wave, Afrobeats and reggaeton have emerged from such cities. Is a new cultural geography, less centred on the West, taking shape?

As a specialist consultancy in these fields, with particular expertise in cultural statistics, creative economy mapping, and urban cultural policy, we have been frustrated by these



knowledge gaps. BOP500 is our attempt to address them. Our ambitious goal is to create a data and insight service rooted in a consistent, robust and comparable database that covers the world's largest cities across all global regions. This information base can then be explored in multiple ways to help examine trends and provide insights across cities. In so doing, we hope to tell the story of the cultural and creative geography of the contemporary world.

BOP500 Index

Benchmarking the cultural capability of cities

BOP's experience internationally has led us to the conclusion that achieving widely shared goals related to social and economic development – such as jobs, well-being, social inclusion – requires cities to realise their core 'cultural capability' (among many other factors). We define this as the ability to mobilise the *assets, participants* and *resources* which make up a city's unique cultural character to achieve positive outcomes.

We intend to measure elements of cultural capability in several ways, each of them grouped under one of three headings, or 'pillars': Infrastructure Availability (the subject of the First Edition), Attractiveness and Innovation. This report covers the first outputs of this work: a baseline assessment of *Infrastructure Availability* across an initial 250 cities. Like most Indexes, it is a composite which consists of three sub-indices that measure the *Prevalence of cultural assets*, their *Accessibility relative to city population size*, and their *Affordability*.

This opening phase was a huge undertaking in its own right,



involving almost two years of planning, research and web and GIS development. Through a lengthy process of verification, we identified over 28,000 individual museums, libraries, cinemas and concert halls in 110 countries across six continents. From this, we have been able to create the first edition of the BOP500 Index, the *Infrastructure Availability Index*.

The Global Coverage of BOP500

Globalisation and urbanisation mean that the geography of the 21st century already differs from that of the 20th century. For several decades, urban growth has been fastest in Asia, Africa and parts of Latin America. Reflecting these trends, we call it 'BOP500' as our ambition is ultimately to have coverage of 500 cities globally, though we are launching with 250.

In choosing the 250 cities for the platform, we used two criteria:

1. *City size by population*, focusing on the largest cities across the globe, and none with less than 100,000 people, balanced by the need for:
2. *Coverage across all global regions*, to capture and reflect the diversity of city contexts.*

Cities were not chosen based on existing preconceptions as to how 'cultural' or 'creative' they are.

Figure 1
Cities covered in BOP500, by population size, 2023

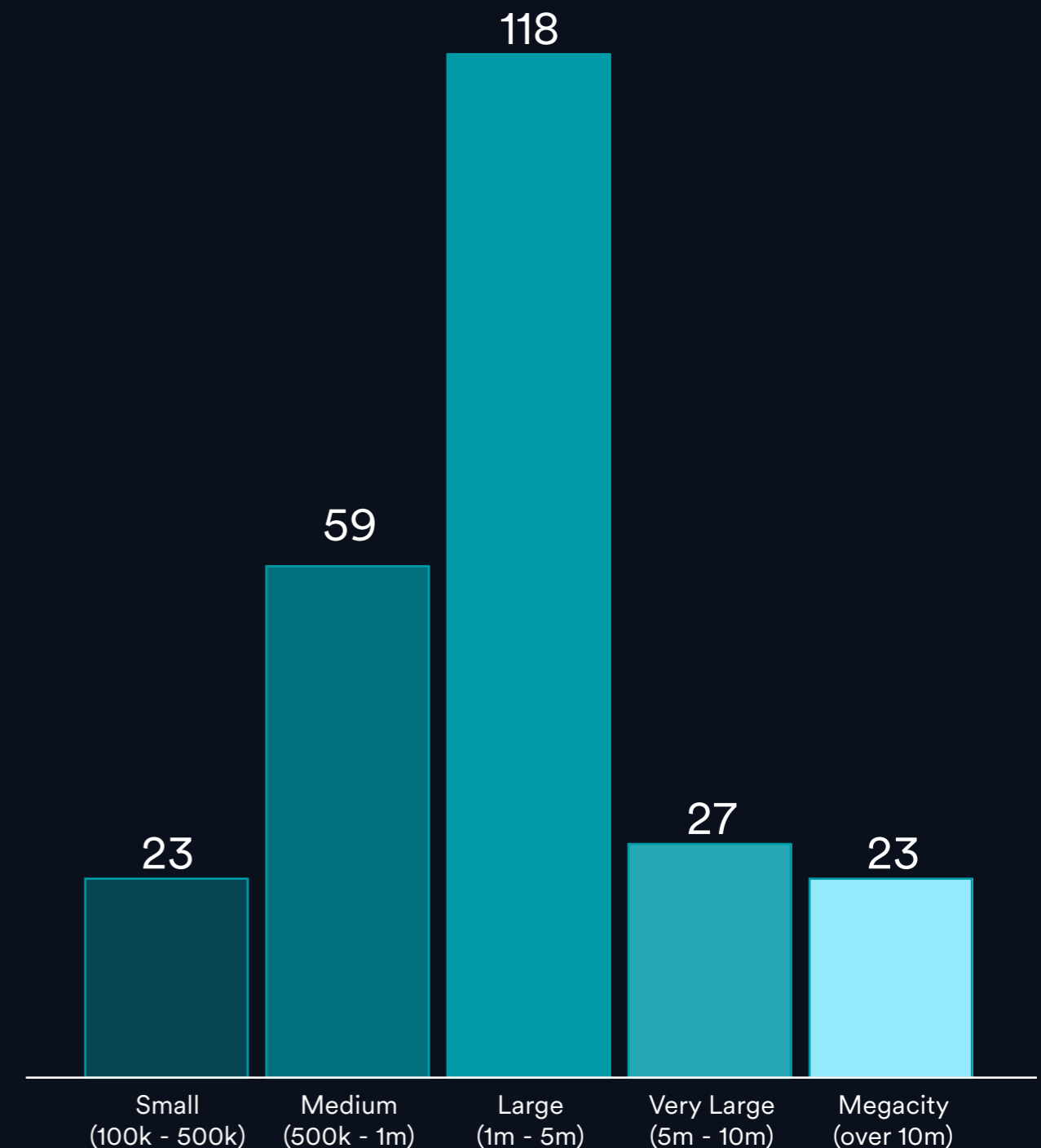
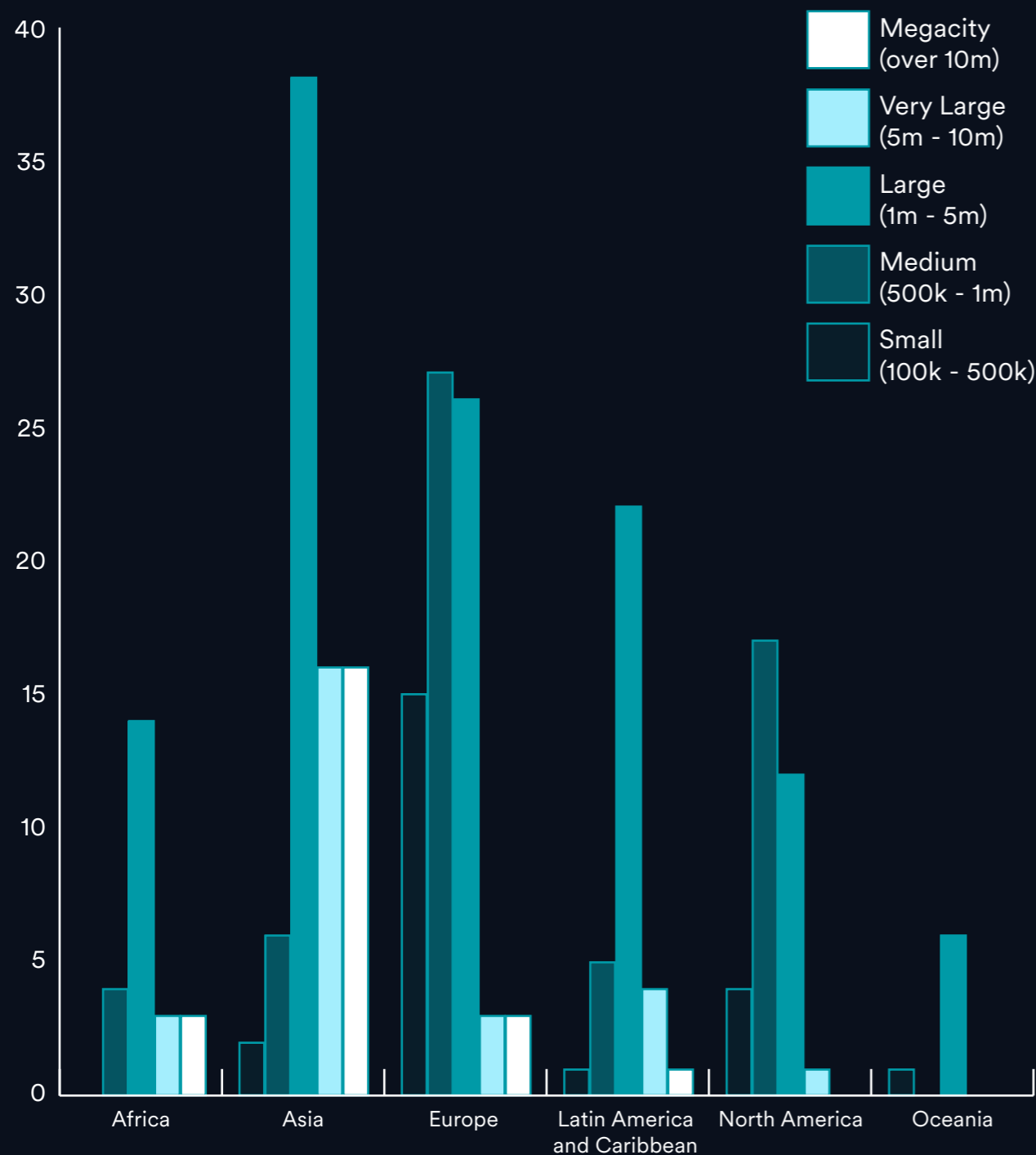


Figure 2
Cities covered in BOP250, by population size and region, 2023



Infrastructure Availability Index

Amsterdam takes the top place in our Index, followed by Zurich, London, San Francisco and Paris. Amsterdam hits something of a sweet spot in our rankings with its long history as a globally significant city, its present-day affluence, its counter-cultural past, and its wide range of cultural institutions serving a relatively modestly sized city.

The top 25 cities in our Index contains a mix of city types. There are the big Western cities that have traditionally been thought of as cultural powerhouses, from London, Paris and Berlin to Los Angeles and New York. There are a group of somewhat smaller, mostly European, cities which combine rich historical inheritances with strong current-day commitments to culture. Amsterdam leads the way, but others include Budapest, Prague, Vienna, Munich and Stockholm.

There are also a number of sizeable, dynamic North American cities: Seattle, Montreal, Toronto, Chicago. Finally, there is one Asian city, Seoul, along with two from Oceania, Auckland and Adelaide.

This variety gives some sense of the different types of ‘cultural city’ that exist already. The full list of 250 (see *main report*) suggests some other models are starting to emerge alongside them. In Asia, for example, the highest-ranking cities are

City	Region	Infrastructure Availability Ranking
Amsterdam	Europe	1
Zürich	Europe	2
London	Europe	3
San Francisco	North America	4
Paris	Europe	5
Berlin	Europe	6
Budapest	Europe	7
Stockholm	Europe	8
Montreal	North America	9
Los Angeles	North America	10
Auckland	Oceania	11
Prague	Europe	12
Warsaw	Europe	13
Seattle	North America	14
Vienna	Europe	15
Munich	Europe	16
Rome	Europe	17
Chicago	North America	18
New York	North America	19
Copenhagen	Europe	20
Adelaide	Oceania	21
Seoul	Asia	22
Milan	Europe	23
Edinburgh	Europe	24
Toronto	North America	25

typically large and economically powerful, and often capital cities. The top three in mainland China are Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen, while outside mainland China Seoul is followed by Taipei, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Singapore.

In Latin America, the biggest cities tend to lead the way. Mexico City is the highest-ranking in the region, with Buenos Aires, Santiago and São Paulo filling three of the next four slots. In Africa, meanwhile, it is the largest cities of the continent's traditional economic powerhouse, South Africa, that head the list: Johannesburg and Cape Town top the rankings, with Durban in fourth.

Our Index also allows us to make comparisons across 'cultural' regions as well as geographic ones. In the Middle East and North Africa, for instance, the wealthy, culturally ambitious cities of the Arabian Gulf are prominent, led by Doha, Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

Prevalence, Access, Affordability

The sub-indices of our overall index give further insight into the relative strengths of city types. Our *Prevalence Index* measures the number of assets held in a particular urban area. It is, as you might expect, led by the biggest cities. However, these are not just Western cities. While London and Paris top the list, Beijing,

City Ranking – Top 10

Composite Ranking

- 1 Amsterdam
- 2 Zürich
- 3 London
- 4 San Francisco
- 5 Paris
- 6 Berlin
- 7 Budapest
- 8 Stockholm
- 9 Montreal
- 10 Los Angeles

Prevalence

- 1 Paris
- 2 London
- 3 Shanghai
- 4 Beijing
- 5 Seoul
- 6 Tokyo
- 7 New York
- 8 Moscow
- 9 Berlin
- 10 Chengdu, Mexico City

Access

- 1 Reykjavik
- 2 Basel
- 3 Bratislava
- 4 Zürich
- 5 Ljubljana
- 6 Geneva
- 7 Tallinn
- 8 Wellington
- 9 Lisbon
- 10 Florence, Venice

Affordability

- 1 Tehran
- 2 Minneapolis
- 3 Seattle, Austin, Houston, Singapore, Washington, Phoenix
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9 San Diego, Denver, Dallas
- 10

the list, Beijing, Shanghai and Chengdu in China also make our top ten, as do Moscow and Mexico City.

The top ranks in the *Access Index*, on the other hand, a measure of the number of cultural assets per capita, are monopolised by smaller European cities that combine rich inheritances with strong contemporary commitments to culture.

Reykjavik leads this list, followed by several cities from Central Europe, as well as two of the world's most popular cultural tourist destinations, Florence and Venice.

Our *Affordability Index* provides a proxy measure for how much cultural experiences in cities cost relative to their residents' ability to pay. It is based on the most standardised cultural experience: the ticket price to see an international release at the cinema. This is then expressed as the percentage of net monthly income that cinema admission accounts for.

The top rankings are dominated by affluent cities in North America – no European city makes the top 30 on this ranking. This suggests that cinema ticket prices do not fully adjust to reflect the incomes of local residents, otherwise a more even spread might have been seen. However, the first ranked city is rather different: Tehran. The Iranian government has a policy of capping cinema ticket prices, set at a level for the whole country. Average wages in Iran's capital city are much higher than elsewhere, so these two factors combine to give Tehran the world's most affordable cinema prices among major cities.

Concluding Thoughts

BOP500 is in its early stages but these initial findings already suggest new ways of thinking about culture and the creative economy at the global level.

There are different dimensions of culture. Not every city can be a Paris or a New York, but that does not necessarily matter – smaller places can be just as successful in their own way, as our first Infrastructure Availability Index indicates. In the same vein, the Index gives cities a better set of comparators for assessing what their particular cultural offer is relative to others.

They will be able to identify 'near neighbours', cities which may not always be geographically close but might share similar income levels or city size or cultural history. This can be very helpful in exploring policy around tourism, place-making or economic development, to name just three areas of interest.

The world's cultural geography does appear to be changing. The dramatic rise in living standards in Asia in particular over recent decades has led to a significant culture and creative economy presence in those economies. Western cities cannot be complacent. That said, Europe and North America's greatest relative strength lies in their mid-sized cities, which often have a high density of assets. The challenge for Asia and Latin America is to develop a similar breadth across the cultural sector in their cities.

Finally, the importance of income levels in supporting a successful cultural and creative economy indicates that the sector does not stand apart from a city's wider economic fortunes. The interconnections between them matter, including for sustainable urban development. Building up a city's cultural capability is one part of developing the resilience cities will need to tackle the pressing issues they face this century: climate change, social cohesion, migration, rapid technological change and poverty.

Next Steps

This overview and summary gives a flavour of what BOP500 has to offer. The full report contains much more analysis and technical detail and is available to subscribers.

We are keen to work with cities and other interested parties to investigate this data further at the level of the individual city. We will also continue to fill out our 'pillars' of data, developing further indicators through innovative, sometimes experimental methods. Through the deepening and widening of BOP500, we aim to provide an even richer and more comprehensive analysis in the years to come.

To access the full report and to subscribe the BOP500 GIS platform and insights service please get in touch.

<https://www.bop.co.uk/bop500>
bop500@bop.co.uk
+44 (0) 20 7253 2041



