



Image credit: NASA

[Download Image Here](#)

## Barcelona, Spain at Night

By the middle of the 19th century, this city on the northeastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea had grown into an overcrowded and unsanitary death trap. The entirety of its 187,000 inhabitants were packed into a 2-sq-km area enclosed by fortified medieval walls, which were now more effective at preventing air from circulating and incubating cholera bacteria than discouraging invaders. Life expectancy for a working class resident of Barcelona in 1843 was 23 years. Help.

Enter Ildefons Cerdà, an unknown engineer with a powerful imagination. Not only did the walls come tumbling down, but an entirely new expansion to the city called Eixample (expansion) was constructed that increased the city's livable area by a factor of 4. Eixample featured wide streets laid out in practical grids, octagonal intersections for better visibility (all pre-automobile, don't forget), and carefully-considered placement of essential services like schools, hospitals, and marketplaces.

Eixample can be seen in this image just above center, where several wide boulevards radiate outward from the Plaça de les Glòries Catalanes, with orderly grids of streets expanding in all directions. Cerdà went on to establish the science of Urbanization, and published the first book on the subject in 1867.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of urban life? How about rural life? Which would you prefer, and why?



PERSPECTIVES  
OF EARTH  
images of a shared world

