**Remote Work and Urban Real Estate: A Comparative Analysis of Accra and New York City**

**Abstract**

The paper examined how remote work has influenced urban real estate dynamics in New York City and Accra, addressing the global research gap on its uneven effects across developed and developing cities. It aimed to assess changes in residential and commercial real estate demand, evaluate the role of digital infrastructure, and compare urban policy responses. A systematic review method guided by PRISMA was employed, synthesizing 47 peer-reviewed and grey literature from 2015 to 2025. Findings revealed that New York experienced rising office vacancies, and zoning reforms were enabled by strong digital infrastructure. In contrast, Accra’s shifts were modest, limited by housing informality, weak broadband access, and fragmented policy frameworks. The study found that digital infrastructure, socioeconomic inequality, and governance capacity shaped divergent urban real estate responses to remote work. Key recommendations included creating digital housing zones in Accra, supporting remote-friendly home upgrades, incentivizing office conversions in New York, and developing an Urban Remote Work Index for ongoing spatial monitoring. By comparing cities from the Global North and South, the study provides unique insights into how remote work affects urban real estate in contrasting development contexts. It offers actionable insights for urban planners and policymakers by highlighting infrastructure and governance gaps that shape real estate responses in both high-income and emerging urban contexts, supporting more inclusive, equitable, and resilient planning in the remote work era.

**Keywords**: Remote Work, Urban Real Estate, Digital Infrastructure, Comparative Analysis

**1.0 Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented global shift toward remote work, fundamentally transforming the ways people engage with urban spaces and real estate markets worldwide (Barrero, Bloom, & Davis, 2023). Remote work, once a niche practice, has now become a mainstream phenomenon. Globally, over 25% of workers in developed economies and up to 13% in emerging economies reported remote or hybrid work arrangements by 2022 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2021; GSMA, 2022). This widespread adoption has reshaped residential preferences, office space demand, and urban economic geographies. Globally, the increasing adoption of telecommuting has challenged traditional assumptions about city centers as hubs of work and real estate activity, leading to fluctuations in property values, urban migration patterns, and commercial real estate utilization (Florida et al., 2021; Dingel & Neiman, 2020). These transformations raise significant questions about the future trajectory of urban real estate markets in the context of growing digital connectivity and evolving work cultures.

In major cities of the Global North, such as New York City, the impact of remote work on urban real estate has been profound. New York, as a global financial and cultural center, has witnessed substantial office vacancy rates and shifts in residential demand as many workers seek more flexible living and working arrangements away from dense urban cores (Glaeser & McLean, 2021). The pandemic accelerated trends toward suburbanization and increased demand for larger living spaces, prompting developers and policymakers to reconsider urban land use and zoning regulations to adapt to new patterns of habitation and economic activity (Ewing et al., 2022; McKinsey Global Institute, 2021). The commercial real estate sector in New York faces challenges related to decreased demand for traditional office space and the rise of hybrid work models, leading to a reevaluation of asset values and investment strategies (JLL, 2022).

Contrastingly, the dynamics of remote work and urban real estate in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in rapidly urbanizing cities like Accra, Ghana, remain underexplored. Accra, a burgeoning metropolitan hub, is experiencing rapid urban growth and gradual digital infrastructure improvements, positioning it as a key site for understanding how remote work might influence real estate markets in emerging economies (Mensah et al., 2023). However, infrastructural challenges such as inconsistent internet connectivity, informal housing markets, and a largely informal labor sector complicate the adoption and effects of remote work (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2025). Unlike in the Global North, where formal office leases and regulated housing markets dominate, Accra’s real estate landscape is shaped by informal tenure systems and emerging digital infrastructures, which constrain remote work opportunities (Addi & Ayambire, 2022). This suggests that the impacts of remote work on urban real estate in Accra could diverge significantly from those observed in cities like New York.

Despite growing research on remote work’s impact on real estate in developed countries, there is a critical gap in comparative studies that examine how these global labor shifts affect cities in the Global South, particularly in Africa. The absence of systematic reviews encompassing both contexts limits comprehensive understanding and restricts the formulation of policies that are sensitive to local specificities and global trends. Few studies integrate grey literature, such as government reports and industry data, which are often necessary for capturing the realities in data-scarce regions like Ghana (UN-Habitat, 2020). This review aims to address this knowledge gap by systematically synthesizing evidence on the impacts of remote work on urban real estate in New York City and Accra, illuminating contrasts and commonalities that can inform urban planning, policy, and investment decisions.

The novelty of this study lies in its comparative approach, bridging Global North and Global South urban realities to provide nuanced insights into the socio-economic and spatial transformations triggered by remote work. By incorporating diverse data sources and focusing on two distinctly different urban contexts, this review contributes to a more balanced and inclusive discourse on urban futures in an era of digital labor transformation. The core objectives of this systematic review are to: (i) examine the impacts of remote work on residential and commercial real estate markets in New York City and Accra; (ii) identify the similarities and differences in real estate market responses to remote work between a Global North city and a Global South city, and ;(iii) provide evidence-based recommendations for urban planners, policymakers, and real estate stakeholders to navigate the evolving urban real estate landscape under remote work conditions.

**2.0 Overview of Literature**

The rapid expansion of remote work, particularly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has triggered significant transformations in urban real estate markets globally. As the spatial and temporal boundaries of work shift, residential and commercial real estate dynamics respond accordingly, reflecting broader socioeconomic changes. This literature review synthesizes research across five key thematic areas, which were derived through narrative thematic analysis. An initial open coding of relevant literature was performed, followed by axial coding to cluster codes into broader categories. These categories were then refined into five thematic areas based on their recurrence, relevance, and conceptual coherence. The themes include: (1) impacts on residential real estate demand, (2) changes in commercial real estate and office utilization, (3) digital infrastructure and accessibility, (4) urban mobility and spatial dynamics, and (5) policy responses and planning strategies. While substantial research exists for cities in developed economies, studies addressing African urban contexts like Accra remain limited, creating a critical knowledge gap that this review aims to bridge.

**2.1 Impact of Remote Work on Residential Real Estate Demand**

Remote work has dramatically altered residential real estate demand in many cities worldwide. Globally, the rise of telecommuting has shifted preferences towards larger living spaces, home offices, and less dense neighborhoods (Barrero, Bloom, & Davis, 2021). In the United States, especially in cities like New York, this trend has fueled suburban migration as workers seek more spacious and affordable housing outside congested urban cores (Florida, Rodríguez-Pose, & Storper, 2021). Studies have documented declining demand for small urban apartments and rising prices in suburban and exurban markets (McKinsey Global Institute, 2021; Ewing, Hamidi, & Grace, 2022).

In contrast, the situation in Sub-Saharan African cities such as Accra is less documented. Accra’s housing market is characterized by high informality and diverse tenure systems, complicating straightforward comparisons with formal markets like New York’s (Addi & Ayambire, 2022). Moreover, the limited availability of reliable broadband infrastructure restricts the extent to which remote work can influence residential decisions for much of Accra's workforce (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2025). Nonetheless, there is emerging evidence of changing housing preferences among the urban middle class in Accra, who increasingly value digital accessibility and spatial flexibility to support work-from-home arrangements (Mensah et al., 2023). This points to an evolving real estate market in Accra that is beginning to reflect the global remote work trend, but within a distinctive socio-economic context.

This theme highlights a key novelty of the current review: by juxtaposing New York’s formal, mature housing market with Accra’s informal and developing market, the study can uncover differentiated patterns of residential demand shifts driven by remote work, contributing new empirical insights to the global housing literature.

**2.2 Changes in Commercial Real Estate and Office Space Utilization**

Remote work’s effect on commercial real estate has been extensively studied in Global North cities, with New York serving as a prime example. The pandemic induced a steep increase in office vacancy rates as firms adopted hybrid and fully remote work policies (JLL, 2022). This has led to financial distress for some landlords and a reconsideration of office space needs (Glaeser & McLean, 2021). Innovations such as flexible office leasing, coworking spaces, and repurposing office buildings for residential or mixed uses have emerged as adaptive strategies (Deloitte, 2021). Moreover, long-term uncertainty about the future of centralized work hubs has encouraged real estate investors to diversify portfolios and reconsider asset valuations (CBRE, 2021).

In Accra, the commercial real estate sector is smaller, less formalized, and shaped by distinct economic and infrastructural dynamics, including uneven digital adoption and informality in property markets (Mensah et al., 2023). Remote work penetration is limited by infrastructural challenges and a large informal economy (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2025). Nonetheless, multinational corporations and local businesses that embrace remote or hybrid models have started to reduce office footprints or invest in satellite offices (UN-Habitat, 2020). The commercial real estate market in Accra is gradually evolving, but it lacks the breadth of data and analysis common in cities like New York. This comparative gap presents a significant opportunity for this review to synthesize scattered information and generate new knowledge on how remote work shapes office markets in different urban realities.

**2.3 Digital Infrastructure and Accessibility**

A foundational factor shaping remote work’s impact on urban real estate is the availability and quality of digital infrastructure. In Global North cities like New York, widespread broadband access and high internet speeds enable seamless telecommuting, supporting the decentralization of work locations (FCC, 2021). This infrastructure facilitates demand for suburban homes with dedicated office space and supports digital nomad lifestyles, contributing to changing residential patterns (McKinsey Global Institute, 2021).

Conversely, in Accra and many African cities, digital infrastructure remains unevenly developed. While mobile internet penetration has grown rapidly, reliable fixed broadband and affordable high-speed connectivity are less widespread (GSMA, 2022). This digital divide constrains remote work opportunities and limits its impact on real estate markets. Research indicates that wealthier and younger populations in Accra are more likely to engage in remote work, driving selective demand for digitally enabled housing (Ahiahonu, 2024). Thus, infrastructural disparities underpin contrasting urban real estate outcomes between New York and Accra, emphasizing the importance of incorporating digital access into urban real estate analyses.

This theme is novel in highlighting how infrastructure inequalities between the Global North and South mediate the real estate implications of remote work, providing a more nuanced understanding of urban digital futures.

**2.4 Urban Mobility and Spatial Dynamics**

Remote work influences not only where people live and work but also how they move within urban environments. In New York, there is documented evidence of reduced commuting trips, decreased public transport use, and shifts in peak travel times (Glaeser & McLean, 2021). These changes impact urban density patterns, with some residents relocating to suburban or exurban areas, thus affecting land use and transport planning (Ewing et al., 2022). New spatial dynamics include the rise of "15-minute neighborhoods," where residents access work and amenities within walking or cycling distance (Moreno et al., 2021).

Remote work's effect on mobility remains underexplored, but it likely interacts with existing transport challenges, such as traffic congestion and limited public transit infrastructure (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2025). Early evidence suggests that remote work may help reduce pressure on transport networks in Accra but could also exacerbate inequalities by privileging those with better access to digital resources and flexible housing arrangements (Mensah et al., 2023). Exploring these spatial mobility contrasts contributes novel insights into how remote work reshapes urban form and function differently across global urban contexts.

**2.5 Policy Responses and Planning Strategies**

Urban governments and planners in Global North cities have begun adapting policies to the remote work revolution. In New York, this includes zoning reforms to allow flexible land use, incentives for office-to-residential conversions, and investments in digital infrastructure and affordable housing to support shifting demands (NYC Department of City Planning, 2021; JLL, 2022). Policymakers also focus on sustainable urban development, recognizing remote work as a lever to reduce commuting emissions and revitalize neighborhoods (Florida et al., 2021).

In Ghana, urban policy frameworks are still evolving, often challenged by widespread informality, rapid urban growth, and limited resources that complicate effective planning for emerging trends like remote work. However, initiatives to improve broadband infrastructure and promote smart city projects signal a growing recognition of remote work’s potential (UN-Habitat, 2020). There is a pressing need for policies that address housing affordability and the expansion of digital infrastructure to ensure equitable access, especially as remote work trends reshape urban living in Accra (Mensah et al., 2023). This review’s novelty lies in its cross-continental policy analysis. It offers recommendations grounded in comparative evidence that address the distinct challenges and opportunities in Global North and South cities.

**Novelty and Contribution of the Review**

While extensive literature examines remote work and urban real estate in developed economies, this review uniquely bridges Global North and Sub-Saharan African perspectives, highlighting divergent impacts and responses. By systematically synthesizing peer-reviewed and grey literature across contrasting urban realities, New York and Accra fill a critical gap in urban studies and remote work research. This comparative approach enables a more inclusive understanding of how global digital labor transformations reshape urban landscapes, informing context-sensitive policies and investment strategies. Additionally, integrating infrastructure and mobility dimensions alongside real estate market analyses offers a holistic view rarely achieved in prior studies.

**3.0 Methodology**

This study employed a systematic review approach to synthesize existing research on the impact of remote work on urban real estate markets, with a specific comparison between New York City and Accra. New York City, as a major global city in the Global North, is characterized by a mature real estate market, high office space density, and widespread adoption of remote work accelerated by technological infrastructure and the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, Accra, a rapidly urbanizing city in Sub-Saharan Africa, presents different challenges and opportunities, with a less formalized real estate market, lower digital infrastructure penetration, and emerging policy responses to shifts in work patterns. These contrasting contexts provide a rich basis for understanding how remote work affects urban real estate dynamics differently across diverse socio-economic and infrastructural environments.

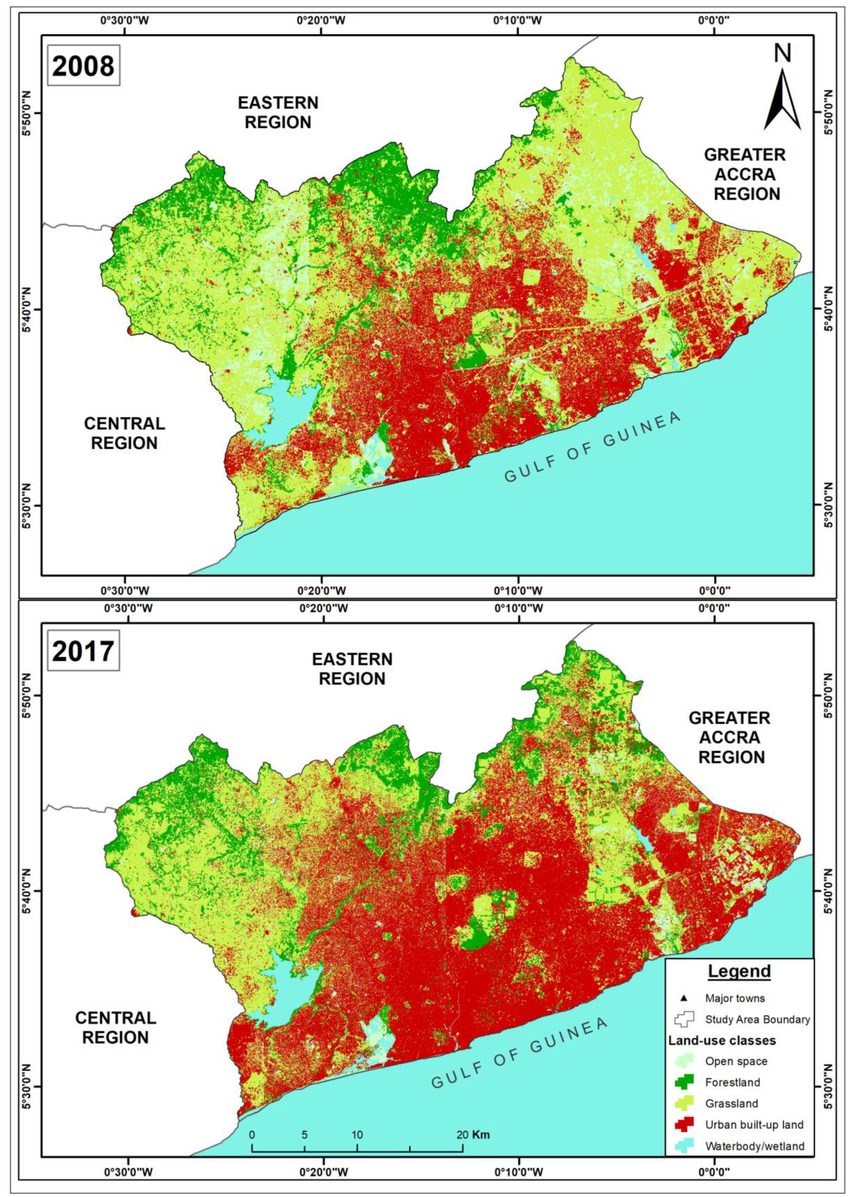


Figure 1: Land-use map of the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) showing various classes in 2008 and 2017. Source: Akubia, J. E. K., & Bruns, A. (2019).

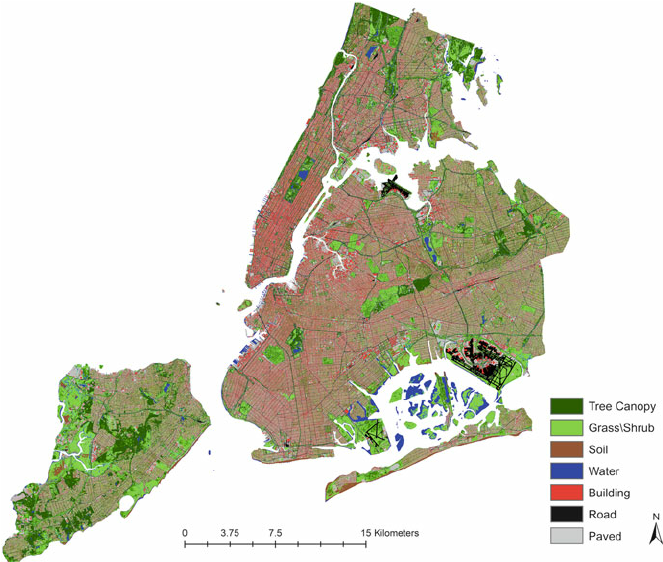


Figure 2: Land use and land cover in the New York City municipal area showing dense urban development (red) and green space (green). Source: McPhearson et al. (2013).

The systematic review method was selected to ensure a rigorous, transparent, and reproducible process that minimized bias and provided a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge. The review aimed to capture evidence relating to changes in residential demand, commercial real estate dynamics, digital infrastructure, urban mobility, and policy responses in the context of remote work.

The literature search was conducted by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. Multiple electronic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and JSTOR, were systematically searched. Additional specialized sources, such as Urban Studies Abstracts and journals focusing on real estate economics, were also explored. The search strategy incorporated Boolean logic using the following combinations: (‘remote work’ OR ‘telecommuting’) AND (‘urban real estate’ OR ‘housing market’ OR ‘office space’) AND (‘New York City’ OR ‘Accra’) AND (‘digital infrastructure’ OR ‘urban policy’). These terms were adapted for each database and refined through pilot searches. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed articles, reports, and relevant grey literature published in English between 2015 and 2025. The start year 2015 was chosen to capture early signs of flexible work and digital infrastructure improvements, while 2025 was included to allow inclusion of forward-looking industry projections and grey literature that extend slightly beyond current publication years

Inclusion criteria: (i) studies published between 2015–2025, (ii) studies addressing remote work and urban real estate (residential or commercial), digital infrastructure, or urban policy in Accra or NYC, and (iii) English-language peer-reviewed and credible grey literature.  
Exclusion criteria: (i) studies focused solely on rural settings, (ii) opinion pieces lacking empirical data, and (iii) articles with unclear methods or irrelevance to remote work.

Included

Studies included in qualitative Synthesis (n=47)

Eligibility Assessed

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n=108)

Full-text articles excluded, with reasons (n=61)

Screening

Records screened (n=420)

Records excluded (n=312)

Identification

Records identified through database screening (n=436)

Additional records identified through other sources (n=54)

Records after duplicates removed (n=420)

Figure 3. PRISMA flow diagram. Source: Authors’ Construct

The initial search results were compiled and managed using reference management software. Duplicate records were removed, and the titles and abstracts of the remaining studies were screened independently by two reviewers to assess relevance based on the inclusion criteria. Full texts of studies deemed potentially relevant were retrieved and reviewed in detail. Any disagreements between reviewers were resolved through discussion and consensus or by consulting a third reviewer, ensuring reliability and reducing selection bias. The screening and selection process was documented following the PRISMA flowchart to provide a transparent account of the study inclusion pathway.

A standardized data extraction form was utilized to systematically collect key information from the selected studies, including author details, publication year, study location, research methodology, data sources, and findings related to the identified thematic areas. Data were analyzed using narrative thematic analysis. This involved (1) open coding of textual content from selected sources; (2) categorization of codes into higher-order concepts through axial coding; (3) theme development through constant comparison and memo writing; and (4) cross-case analysis to compare Accra and NYC. Analytical rigor was enhanced by triangulating data across peer-reviewed and grey sources.

Although this study did not involve primary data collection or human subjects, ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring accurate representation and citation of all reviewed works, maintaining intellectual property rights, and avoiding plagiarism. Transparency in reporting the methodology was also prioritized to facilitate replicability. The review acknowledged the potential for publication bias, especially given the relatively limited availability of research on Sub-Saharan African urban contexts and informal real estate markets. To mitigate this, grey literature and multiple databases were included in the search to broaden the scope of evidence.

**4.0 Systematic Analysis and Interpretation**

This section systematically analyzes the literature based on the three core objectives of the study: (i) to examine how remote work has influenced residential real estate demand in New York City and Accra, (ii) to investigate the impact of remote work on commercial real estate markets in both cities, and (iii) to assess the role of digital infrastructure and urban policies in shaping these impacts. For each theme, a table synthesizes relevant studies, followed by an interpretation that connects findings to the objectives and discusses novel insights.

**Table 1. Theme of Remote Work and Residential Real Estate Demand**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Author(s) | Year | Objective | Methodology | Key Finding | Relevance |
| Dingel & Neiman | 2020 | Estimate the potential for remote work | Quantitative analysis | 37% of U.S. jobs can be done remotely, reshaping housing demand | Illustrates the scale of remote work affecting NYC housing |
| Gyourko & Molloy | 2021 | Examine urban housing demand post-pandemic | Empirical data analysis | Decreased demand for central urban housing due to remote work | Relevant for NYC’s residential market shift |
| Addi & Ayambire | 2022 | Housing informality in Accra | Qualitative policy analysis | Remote work potential limited by housing informality and infrastructural (digital) gaps | Highlights Accra’s unique challenges with informal settlements and digital access constraints |
| Florida et al. | 2021 | Assess city resilience and migration | Review of urban studies | Remote work led to suburban migration, impacting urban housing | Important for the comparative urban mobility context |
| Yankson, P.W.K. | 2002 | Examines the dual use of housing for living and working in Accra | Case study | |  | | --- | |  |  |  | | --- | | Urban homes in low-income areas commonly support economic activities | | Provides early evidence of flexible housing use in Accra, relevant to today’s remote work context |

The literature indicates that remote work has significantly altered residential real estate demand, especially in New York City, where studies by Dingel and Neiman (2020) and Gyourko and Molloy (2021) show a pronounced shift away from dense urban cores toward suburban or flexible housing options. This shift is attributed to increased remote work feasibility and a desire for larger living spaces. In contrast, Accra presents a more complex scenario. Addi and Ayambire (2022) emphasize that informality in housing markets combined with limited digital infrastructure constrains the full realization of remote work benefits. However, earlier work by Yankson (2002) illustrates how housing in Accra has long served both residential and economic purposes, offering foundational insights into the current demand for adaptable living spaces among middle-income earners working remotely. Florida et al. (2021) provide a global urban perspective, reinforcing migration trends that align with observed patterns in both cities. This comparison highlights the novel contribution of this review by bridging insights from a Global North city with a rapidly urbanizing African context, underlining infrastructure and informality as critical moderating factors in the real estate response to remote work.

**Table 2. Theme of Remote Work and Commercial Real Estate Dynamics**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Author(s) | Year | Objective | Methodology | Key Finding | Relevance |
| JLL | 2022 | Analyze global office market trends | Industry report | Significant office vacancy increases in NYC post-pandemic | Directly relates to NYC commercial real estate |
| Geltner et al. | 2021 | Explore commercial real estate shifts | Case study analysis | Remote work reduced office demand, pushing hybrid models | Provides a theoretical framework for office space |
| McKinsey Global Inst. | 2021 | Future of work and office space | Global industry analysis | Hybrid work models create demand for flexible, smaller offices | Offers policy relevance for both cities |
| Van Nieuwerburgh, S. | 2023 | Urban economic impact of remote work | Econometric modeling | Significant decline in office space demand in NYC; less impact in emerging markets | Quantifies commercial real estate impacts due to remote work |

The reviewed literature consistently reports a marked decline in traditional office space demand in New York City, as documented by JLL (2022) and Van Nieuwerburgh (2023). These studies show vacancy rates soaring due to the increased adoption of hybrid and remote work models. Geltner et al. (2021) provide a conceptual underpinning, emphasizing the shift towards more flexible office arrangements. The McKinsey Global Institute (2021) analysis situates these findings within broader global transformations, underscoring the importance of flexible commercial real estate in the post-pandemic era. This thematic analysis reveals a novel insight: the divergence in commercial real estate responses between a mature Global North market and an emerging Global South context characterized by informality and distinct economic structures.

**Table 3. Theme of Digital Infrastructure and Urban Policy Responses**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Author(s)** | **Year** | **Objective** | **Methodology** | **Key Finding** | **Relevance** |
| GSMA | 2022 | Assess mobile connectivity in Sub-Saharan Africa | Report & data analysis | Significant gaps in broadband access hinder remote work in Ghana | Critical for understanding Accra’s digital divide |
| FCC Broadband Report | 2021 | Broadband deployment in U.S. urban areas | Government data analysis | High broadband penetration supports remote work in NYC | Provides infrastructure context for NYC |
| Frimpong et al. | 2023 | Explore the digital address system used in Accra | Mixed methods, survey | Digital exclusion in Accra is driven by affordability and access constraints | Peer-reviewed confirmation of limited digital adoption in Accra |
| World Bank | 2024 | Track Africa's digital transformation | Institutional report | Progress is uneven and requires targeted digital investment | Strengthens policy case for investment in digital infrastructure |
| UN-Habitat | 2020 | Digital transformation and governance in African cities | Policy analysis | Digital infrastructure is key to urban resilience and governance | Links policy and infrastructure in Accra |
| NYC Dept. of Planning | 2021 | Urban zoning and innovation policies | Policy review | Zoning reforms support hybrid work and commercial real estate adaptation | Shows NYC’s proactive urban policy response |
| McKinsey Global Inst. | 2021 | Digital infrastructure and workforce shifts | Industry report | Digital readiness is critical to leveraging remote work benefits | Broad relevance for comparative policy analysis |

Digital infrastructure emerged as a pivotal factor mediating the impact of remote work on urban real estate in both cities. The GSMA (2022) report highlights stark digital divides in Sub-Saharan Africa. Peer-reviewed research confirms that in Accra, limited broadband penetration and infrastructural challenges, especially in peripheral communities, significantly hinder remote work adoption (Frimpong et al., 2023). This digital exclusion creates barriers to fully participating in emerging digital labor markets, thereby influencing housing demand and urban spatial patterns. The World Bank (2024) further notes that while digital transformation is advancing across Africa, progress remains uneven and requires targeted policy intervention.

Conversely, FCC Broadband Reports (2021) confirm New York City’s robust digital infrastructure, which has facilitated a smoother transition to remote and hybrid work models. UN-Habitat (2020) and NYC Department of City Planning (2021) emphasize the importance of integrating digital transformation with urban governance and policy innovation. NYC’s zoning reforms and innovation-friendly policies foster flexibility in commercial real estate use, while Accra is still navigating foundational digital and regulatory challenges. McKinsey Global Institute (2021) underscores that digital readiness directly influences how urban markets adapt to remote work. The novelty lies in this review’s cross-continental comparison that exposes digital infrastructure and policy as linchpins in shaping divergent urban real estate trajectories under remote work.

**Table 4. Theme of Impact of Remote Work on Urban Mobility and Transportation**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Author(s)** | **Year** | **Objective** | **Methodology** | **Key Finding** | **Relevance** |
| Gao et al. | 2020 | |  | | --- | |  |  |  | | --- | | Study the impact of COVID-19 on commuting in NYC | | Analysis of travel and mobility data | Significant reduction in peak-hour commuting and altered travel patterns | Shows direct mobility changes affecting real estate preferences |
| Acheampong et al. | 2022 | Urban form and public transport access in Accra | Mixed methods | Informal transport (paratransit/trotros) usage is limited by poor access, especially in peripheral areas; last-mile connectivity remains a major challenge | Reflects Accra’s transport constraints influencing urban living and persistent last-mile issues despite declining informal transport reliance |
| Milakis et al. | 2020 | Review mobility trends post-COVID | Literature review | Remote work reduces urban congestion, changing transport demand | Relevant to urban planning and real estate development |
| Sobieralski & Hubbard | 2023 | Examine urban mobility and remote work in Ghana | Field survey and GIS | Remote work increased the use of personal vehicles in Accra | Highlights socio-environmental impacts linked to residential choices |

The literature reveals that remote work has led to marked reductions in daily commuting, especially in New York City, where Gao et al. (2020) documented significant declines in peak-hour travel and shifts in mobility patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic. These shifts influence residential preferences, as proximity to transit hubs becomes less critical, impacting urban real estate demand. In Accra, Acheampong et al. (2022) and Sobieralski and Hubbard (2023) highlight that although remote work reduces some transport strain, challenges remain due to reliance on informal transport and rising private vehicle use. Milakis et al. (2020) emphasize that these mobility changes are reshaping urban congestion and infrastructure needs, which in turn affect real estate development. This theme introduces novel insights by linking transport mode shifts to real estate market transformations in differing urban contexts.

**Table 5. Theme of Socioeconomic and Spatial Inequalities in Urban Real Estate due to Remote Work**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Author(s)** | **Year** | **Objective** | **Methodology** | **Key Finding** | **Relevance to Study** |
| Burrows et al. | 2025 | Explore inequality in remote work access | Quantitative analysis | Remote work benefits are concentrated among higher-income groups | Highlights inequity in housing demand in NYC |
| Sobieralski & Hubbard | 2023 | Investigate access to remote work in Accra | Mixed methods | Digital divide and income inequality limit remote work uptake | Critical for assessing policy needs in Ghana |
| Althoff et al. | 2022 | Remote work and urban economic change | Data analysis, urban case studies | Remote work reshapes urban economies and spatial structures, with implications for inequality and urban displacement | Provides empirical evidence on remote work’s impact on urban spatial economic dynamics, informing discussions on gentrification and displacement risks |

Studies underscore that remote work has intensified socioeconomic and spatial inequalities within urban real estate markets. In New York City, Burrows et al. (2025) demonstrate how higher-income groups disproportionately benefit from remote work flexibility, driving gentrification and spatial segregation. Similarly, Althoff et al. (2022) link remote work dynamics to shifts in urban spatial patterns that have implications for displacement and gentrification*.* In Accra, Sobieralski and Hubbard (2023) reveal how existing inequalities in housing affordability, digital access, and infrastructure exacerbate unequal access to remote work opportunities, reinforcing spatial divides. This theme provides novel insights by contextualizing remote work within broader socio-economic disparities, stressing the importance of inclusive policies for equitable urban development.

This systematic review uniquely bridges the divide between a major Global North metropolis and a rapidly evolving Global South capital, providing a comparative lens rarely explored in the existing literature. It not only consolidates fragmented research on remote work’s impact on urban real estate markets but also situates findings within contrasting infrastructural, economic, and policy environments. By integrating digital infrastructure and policy dimensions alongside market dynamics, the review offers fresh insights into how cities with vastly different developmental trajectories navigate the post-pandemic work landscape. This nuanced understanding informs policymakers, urban planners, and investors on tailored strategies for enhancing urban resilience and real estate adaptability in a world increasingly shaped by remote work.

**5.0 Synthesis of Evidence and Implications**

The findings from this systematic review underscore the transformative yet uneven impact of remote work on urban real estate markets, with significant variation between Global North and Global South contexts. Across New York City and Accra, the shift to remote work has reshaped patterns of space usage, housing demand, commercial property dynamics, digital infrastructure priorities, urban mobility, and socioeconomic spatial inequalities. However, the magnitude, direction, and policy responses vary significantly due to socio-economic structures, technological readiness, institutional capacity, and existing urban inequalities.

In New York City, the surge in remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic led to a clear shift in residential preferences, with high-income earners increasingly relocating to suburban areas. This trend contributed to declining demand for central-city apartments and rising interest in spacious, suburban housing (Gyourko & Molloy, 2021; Florida et al., 2021). The city’s advanced digital infrastructure and flexible employment models facilitated this spatial shift without compromising productivity. Conversely, Accra experienced only modest residential shifts due to infrastructural gaps, informal housing markets, and a long-standing spatial mismatch between residential areas and economic activities, which limited the widespread adoption of remote work (Yankson, 2002). This highlights that cities in the Global South face structural constraints that limit spatial flexibility benefits, underscoring the need for foundational reforms in housing and service provision.

Commercial real estate dynamics followed divergent paths. In New York, demand for office space declined sharply, with rising vacancies prompting adaptive reuse and flexible workspace solutions (JLL, 2022; Van Nieuwerburgh, 2023). Hybrid work models became normative, transforming office real estate strategies. In Accra, commercial real estate remained relatively stable due to limited remote work adoption and continued reliance on physical workplaces. However, emerging interest in co-working and flexible spaces among startups indicates a gradual shift towards decentralized and flexible work environments (Sobieralski & Hubbard, 2023).

Digital infrastructure surfaced as both an enabler and a barrier. New York’s comprehensive broadband, 5G deployment, and enabling policies facilitated remote work and real estate market adaptations (FCC, 2021; NYC Department of Planning, 2021). In contrast, Accra’s uneven internet access, unreliable electricity, and digital divide constrain remote work scalability, limiting its transformative urban spatial impacts. Investments in digital infrastructure and inclusive policies remain critical for Global South cities aiming to unlock remote work’s benefits.

Urban mobility and transportation patterns also shifted markedly due to remote work. In New York, substantial reductions in peak-hour commuting and transit ridership were observed, reshaping demand for transit-adjacent real estate and influencing urban congestion patterns (Gao et al., 2020). In Accra, although informal transport usage has limitations in reaching peripheral areas, reliance on personal vehicles has increased, revealing persistent last-mile transport challenges and influencing residential preferences (Acheampong et al., 2022; Sobieralski & Hubbard, 2023). These changes underscore the intertwined nature of mobility and real estate markets and call for integrated urban planning that considers remote work’s effects on transportation infrastructure and land use.

Critically, remote work has amplified socioeconomic and spatial inequalities in urban real estate markets. In New York, remote work flexibility disproportionately benefits higher-income groups, exacerbating spatial economic segregation and accelerating gentrification and displacement trends (Burrows et al., 2025; Althoff et al., 2022). Accra exhibits parallel dynamics, with digital divides and income inequalities limiting access to remote work and reinforcing housing affordability challenges and spatial segregation (Sobieralski & Hubbard, 2023). These findings stress the urgency for policies that promote spatial justice and equitable access to the digital economy.

Taken together, these findings have broad implications for urban policy, real estate investment, and digital infrastructure development. First, the divergent impacts of remote work suggest urban policies must be contextually grounded. While cities like New York might focus on adaptive reuse of office spaces and managing suburban growth, Accra must prioritize digital infrastructure investments and housing formalization to enable broader remote work adoption. Second, the importance of public-private partnerships in bridging digital divides and enhancing infrastructure cannot be overstated. Third, equitable policy frameworks are needed to mitigate remote work’s potential to exacerbate urban inequalities and displacement.

The novelty of this review lies in its comparative focus on a Global North and a Global South city an underexplored but vital perspective. By juxtaposing New York and Accra, this study reveals how global remote work trends manifest in context-specific ways shaped by infrastructure, governance, and labor market structures. This dual-sited analysis extends the urban remote work discourse beyond its usual Global North focus, offering a more inclusive framework to understand post-pandemic urban futures. The comparative empirical insights inform resilience strategies, cross-regional learning, and more balanced global urban theory.

**6.0 Conclusion**

This paper reveals that remote work is reshaping urban real estate in uneven but significant ways across different global contexts. In New York City, widespread digital infrastructure and flexible labor models have reshaped real estate dynamics, particularly through rising office vacancies and adaptive reuse strategies. In contrast, Accra's transformation is limited by informal housing, digital divides, and underdeveloped policy frameworks, though signs of flexible workspace adoption are emerging. Digital readiness, governance agility, and socioeconomic conditions are central to how remote work reshapes urban space.

To support equitable adaptation, Accra should prioritize broadband expansion, support remote-friendly housing, and designate digital work zones. New York should continue incentivizing office-to-residential conversions, implement zoning reforms for hybrid live work districts, and conduct equity audits to address remote work–driven disparities. Both cities would benefit from monitoring spatial effects through a dedicated Remote Work Index and fostering cross-regional learning.

These strategies highlight remote work’s potential not only to transform real estate markets but also to reimagine inclusive urban futures. This North–South comparison expands the remote work discourse and offers a more inclusive lens on post-pandemic urban futures.

**Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)**

Option 2:

Grammarly – for grammar and language refinement

All AI-generated suggestions were reviewed and edited by the authors to ensure accuracy, integrity, and adherence to scholarly standards.

**7. 0 References**

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