The world’s cities and megacities

A city is a large and permanent settlement, and is usually quite complex in terms of transport, land use and utilities such as water, power and sanitation.

Where are cities located?

This image of the Earth at night (figure 1) shows where lights are shining. The brightest areas on the map are the most urbanised, but might not be the most populated. If you compare this image with figure 2, you can make some comparisons. For example, there are very bright lights in western Europe (Belgium, The Netherlands, France, Spain and Portugal, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Austria) and yet more people living in China and India.

utilities: services provided to a population, such as water, natural gas, electricity and communication facilities
sanitation: facilities provided to remove waste such as sewage and household or business rubbish

Figure 1 | Satellite image of the Earth at night

Figure 2 | Map showing the populations of cities around the world
**What is a megacity?**

A *megacity* is a city with more than 10 million inhabitants. When you consider that Australia’s population is around 23 million — with around 4.5 million of those living in our largest city, Sydney — it is hard to imagine what it would be like to live in a megacity.

The number of megacities has grown over time. In 1950, only two cities in the world — Tokyo and New York — had a population above 10 million. By 1975 there were four; by 2000 there were 17, and in 2010 there were 20 megacities. In another 15 years it is predicted that there will be 26 megacities. Many of these cities exceed the megacity definition and have a population greater than 15 million.

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**The never-ending city**

In some parts of the world, megacities are merging to create *megaregions*. These regions are home to huge populations. Examples of megaregions include:

- Hong Kong–Shenzhen–Guangzhou in China, already home to around 120 million people
- Nagoya–Osaka–Kyoto–Kobe in Japan, expected to be home to around 60 million people by 2015
- Rio de Janeiro–São Paulo in Brazil, with a population of 43 million people.

**Megacity facts**

- Over half the future growth in megacities will be within Asia.
- The 20 largest cities consume 80 per cent of the world’s energy and produce 80 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.
- Slums in megacities are especially vulnerable to climate change, as they are often built on hazardous sites in high-risk locations.

**megacity**: city with more than 10 million inhabitants  
**megaregion**: area where two or more megacities become connected as increasing numbers of towns and ghettos develop between them
COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES IN YOUR BOOK

REMEMBER...
1. What do the bright lights in figure 1 show?
2. What is a megacity?
3. How many megacities were there in 2010?
4. Name the first two megacities and the countries they are located.
5. What is a megaregion?

EXPLAIN...
6. Refer to figure 3. Describe how the number and distribution of megacities has changed over time.

DISCOVER...
7. Use an atlas to locate the three megaregions mentioned. Why have these regions developed?

PREDICT...
8. ‘As the world’s population continues to increase, cities will spread into the darker regions shown in figure 1.’ State whether you agree or disagree with this statement, providing reasons for your decision.

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