The different sides of urban life

Both small and large urban areas can provide people with positive and negative experiences.

The wealth of cities

Cities attract people to them with the opportunity of work and the possibility of better housing, education and health services. There is a strong interconnection between the wealth of a country and how urbanised it is. Generally, countries with a high per capita income tend to be more urbanised, while low-income countries are the least urbanised. This happens because people grouped together create many chances to move out of poverty, generally because of increased work opportunities. There are often better support networks from governments and local councils. It is also cheaper to provide facilities such as housing, roads, public transport, hospitals and schools to a population concentrated into a smaller area.

Urban challenges

Rapid population growth in urban areas can result in problems such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate shelter, poor sanitation, dirty or depleted water supplies, air pollution, road congestion and overcrowded public transport.

Slums

In many developing countries, urban growth has resulted in unplanned settlements called slums (other terms used around the world include ghettos, favelas, shantytowns, bidonvilles and bustees). Almost 1 billion people live in slums worldwide.
Water and sanitation

Many cities cannot keep up with more and more people living in urban areas, which means it is difficult to provide water and toilets for everyone (see table 1). Without these services, more people suffer from diseases and poor health and are unable to go to work or school.

| Table 1: Availability of water and sanitation in selected regional cities around the world |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Water on premises (%)                       |                |                |                |                |
|                                            | Urban poor     | Urban non-poor | Urban poor     | Urban non-poor |
| Latin America                               | 59             | 74             | 44             | 67             |
| Sub-Saharan Africa                          | 31             | 46             | 20             | 32             |
| South, Central & West Asia                  | 59             | 74             | 48             | 60             |
| South-east Asia                             | 36             | 50             | 67             | 88             |

Transport and pollution

In cities that can't keep up with rapid population growth, traffic congestion and overcrowded public transport mean that many people must travel for hours to get to and from work (see figure 1).

Pollution is also a problem that affects the health of people living in cities. Most cities have high levels of air pollution and some — including Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Beijing and Los Angeles — are famous for being so polluted.

According to the World Bank, 16 of the world's 20 cities with the worst air are in China. The burning of coal is the main source of air pollution in China.

Figure 2 | Traffic congestion in Los Angeles, United States

COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES IN YOUR BOOK

REMEMBER...
1. Explain what a slum is, in your own words.
2. Why are transport and pollution often problematic in large urban areas?

EXPLAIN...
3. Look at figure 2:
   a. In which continent are the most urban slums found?
   b. Name three countries in this continent with very high numbers of slums.
   c. Describe the general pattern shown in the map.

4. Draw a graph to illustrate the water and sanitation data for urban areas given in table 1.

DISCOVER...
5. Conduct some research to find out which Australian city has the worst:
   a. transport problems
   b. pollution