# How liveable are our cities?

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An international study has devised a new measure for the "livability" of major cities across the world. The Global Liveable Cities Index (GLCI) takes into account the sensibilities of ordinary working people from 64 cities, balancing work and play, environmental awareness, localism, globalism and many other factors. Details are published in the *World Review of Science, Technology and Sustainable Development*.

According to Tan Khee Giap of the National University of Singapore and colleagues at University of California, Davis, and Curtin University, in Bentley, Australia, existing major city indices can be divided into two groups. The first includes those that put a higher value on cities based on economic-financial prowess, and strong global agenda-setting power in political and cultural matters. The second ranks cities based on their having a pleasant living environment, a mild climate and a scenic locale. However, such measures ignore the multidimensional nature of what makes a city liveable.

The team suggests that a combination of all those factors and several others should provide a much more balanced perspective on a city's "value" to its citizens from the economic, aesthetic, environmental and other perspectives. Moreover, the team asserts that, "The implicit ethical values of a balance between work and play, and of a balance between thinking globally and acting locally are values which we are comfortable in advocating to any city, and which we think most people could accept." The factors they take into account in their measure include (in no particular order of merit): economic vibrancy and competitiveness, domestic security and stability, socio-cultural conditions, public

governance, environmental friendliness and sustainability. These factors, each given equal weight, provide a conceptual framework for a concept of liveability in the team's index.

In the 1950s about one third of the world's population lived in cities, by the second decade of the new millennium this proportion had risen to about one half and it is projected that by 2050, almost three-quarters of us will live in urban, rather than rural or other, areas. It is important for the comfortable and sustainable development of cities and the quality of life of their citizens that we define and understand what makes a city liveable.

From the economic perspective, liveability is a key characteristic that attracts people with talent and money leading to putatively self-fulfilling economic growth and resilience and power on the global scale. But, city dwellers are not all rich and talented and their growing populations must have available to them opportunity for personal growth and a good quality of life too.

The team describes their index as a work in progress, but posits a liveability list of the 64 cities studied, which includes many of the most populace cities. The ranking of the top ten is as follows: Geneva, Zurich, Singapore, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Luxembourg, Stockholm, Berlin, Hong Kong, Auckland. New York City does not appear until number 17, despite being ranked number 1 by economic indicators and other ranking schemes. Tokyo is number 18. London is number 22. Moscow close to the bottom of the rankings at number 62 and Jakarta bottom of their list at number 64.

However, the team has simulated new rankings based on how environmental, political and economic change to improve liveability might alter the order and shown that Singapore could rise to joint #1 with Geneva while Chicago, Shanghai, Amman and Abu Dhabi could

jump from relatively low-ranking positions to much higher up the team's urban league table. "The rank of a city today is not necessarily a good indicator of its rank in the future," the team suggests. Environmental restoration and transport infrastructure improvements already underway in many Asian, and specifically Chinese cities, could see the higher liveability today of European cities outstripped as those developing cities develop further.

The team's ongoing work involves assessing 200 global cities including 100 from Greater China, 30 from South East Asia, 20 from the Middle East and 50 from Europe, Australia, New Zealand, North and South America.

**More information:** Giap, T.K., Thye, W.W. and Aw, G. (2014) 'A new approach to measuring the liveability of cities: the Global Liveable Cities Index', *World Review of Science, Technology and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp.176–196.

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