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Beyond, City Dwellers Express Likes, Dislikes, Changes and
Concerns in Ground-Breaking Survey*



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Chicago, Ill – Chicago enjoys the highest proportion of residents who are “very satisfied” with their city (49 percent), according to a poll conducted by Ipsos for Veolia Environnement in 14 of the world’s largest cities.

New York ranks third with 41 percent of very satisfied residents (behind Sydney, 44 percent) and Los Angeles ranks fifth with 35 percent (in a tie with Paris and Lyon and behind Berlin, 38 percent). Satisfaction is lowest in Mexico City (19 percent “very satisfied”), Beijing (18 percent) and Tokyo (14 percent).

The study was conducted by interviewing 8,600 residents in 14 top world cities about the conditions, aspirations and elements of their city. In addition to the three largest U.S. cities, New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, the study was conducted in Alexandria, Beijing, Berlin, Lyon, London, Mexico City, Paris, Prague, Shanghai, Sydney and Tokyo.

With regard to housing, neighborhoods and living conditions, Sydney residents are the most satisfied with their city (44 percent “very satisfied” on average), followed closely by Chicago (40 percent), Los Angeles (35 percent), New York (31 percent), Berlin (28 percent) and London (25 percent).

Overall, the global findings show that 83 percent of city dwellers are very or somewhat satisfied with their city and 75 percent have chosen to live in their city. However, these positive attitudes are tempered by contradictory feelings about city life: while city residents tend to feel a great sense of freedom (84 percent), most feel constrained by high cost-of-living and economic pressures (80 percent). The city is viewed as a setting where it is relatively easy to meet people (72 percent), but one that triggers feelings of isolation, anonymity and anxiety among a majority (53 percent) of people. Convenience, attachment and stress were the top three feelings respondents used to describe their relationship with their city. Mixed emotions seem to be a permanent fixture of city life around the globe.

In addition to convenience, a sense of freedom and an ease in meeting people, city dwellers appreciate cities for their sports and cultural activities, public transportation and the diversity of people. Chief among their dislikes and concerns are the costs of living, traffic jams, safety, pollution, noise, dirt and poor management of public services. What city dwellers say would improve their quality of life includes reduced cost of living (49 percent globally versus 59 percent for U.S. cities), improved safety (27 percent), less pollution (25 percent), reducing unemployment (25 percent), fewer traffic jams (23 percent) and development of public transportation (18 percent).

More Key Findings

What urbanites like about the cities where they live - Worldwide, respondents cited the following when asked what they like most about the city where they live: Public transportation systems (36 percent), sports and cultural activities (35 percent), cultural and economic dynamism (30 and 24 percent, respectively), entertainment possibilities (26 percent), and diversity (23 percent).

What urbanites dislike about the cities where they live - Respondents cited the following when asked what they hate about the city where they live: Traffic jams (48 percent), pollution (38 percent), noise (28 percent), dirt (26 percent), poor management of public services and crowds (both at 25 percent).

Improving public transportation and mobility is important to city dwellers - Sixty-six percent of respondents across the 14 cities use public transportation as their primary means of transportation versus a much lower 41 percent in the three U.S. cities. Residents of Los Angeles and Chicago are more likely to use cars as their primary means of transportation (88 percent and 76 percent, respectively) versus the global average (53 percent). However, New York is slightly below the global average with 48% relying primarily on cars. Overall, Americans are more likely to see traffic congestion as a strong dislike and are more passionate about reducing traffic congestion as a key way to improve quality of life.

Residents of Shanghai, Beijing, Chicago, Prague, Lyon and Paris are most confident about the future of their city. Around the world, however, the proportion of city-dwellers who are “very confident” about the future is relatively low (16 percent) versus 49 percent who are “somewhat confident”. **Chief worries for the future include:** the cost of living (72 percent), air quality (67 percent), the number of parking spaces (66 percent), noise (65 percent), quality of the environment (56 percent) and housing (55 percent).

What is the ideal city? Focus group participants around the globe described the ideal city as a combination that includes:

- Sydney, Chicago and Los Angeles, best described as “easy to live” cities because of a closeness to nature (ocean and Great Lakes settings) and optimism
- Tokyo’s mass transit system and convenience
- Shanghai and Beijing’s economic vitality
- Paris, London and New York’s cosmopolitan setting and cultural activities
- New York, Chicago and Los Angeles’ population diversity
- Alexandria, Berlin and Prague’s fun-loving social atmosphere and ease in meeting people
- Prague and Chicago’s friendliness
- Prague’s architecture

From a negative perspective, Tokyo was generally considered a “cold” city for its lack of warmth and friendliness, while the survey underscored Mexico City residents’ concern for safety and negative feelings arising from urbanization.

How city dwellers spend their time is universal around the world - During the week, the typical city dweller sleeps 7 hours on average and devotes 7 hours to work, 2 hours to transportation, 2 hours each to administrative tasks and chores, and enjoys approximately 4 hours for personal leisure time. Similarly, residents from all cities desire more sleep (1 hour, ideally), less time in transport (1 hour), less time at work (1 hour) and 2 more hours per day for family, friends and personal leisure.

These are some of the findings of the Veolia Observatory of Urban Lifestyles survey conducted by Ipsos among 8,608 males and females aged 15 to 70 in Alexandria, Beijing, Berlin, Chicago, London, Los Angeles, Lyon, Mexico City, New York, Paris, Prague, Shanghai, Sydney and Tokyo in December 2007. Surveys were conducted online, using Ipsos’ Online Access Panel, in all cities except in Alexandria and Prague where interviews were conducted in-person. Sample sizes range from 600 to 633 for each city.

The results are based on a sample where quotas and weighting are employed to balance demographics and ensure that the sample’s composition reflects that of the cities’ populations. Quota samples with weighting provide results that are intended to approximate a probability sample. An unweighted probability sample of 600 individuals, with a 100% response rate, would have an estimated margin of error of +/- 4.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

To supplement the quantitative online survey, focus groups were also conducted in 11 of the 14 cities.



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