

Water connects places

Because people rely on water to survive, easy access to water influences where people choose to live. Cities, towns and villages are often located near fresh water sources such as rivers, lakes and underground water reserves. Water sources also directly influence the way people live; for example, the crops they grow or the transport they use. As human settlements tend to cluster around the same types of water sources, these water sources need to be shared by the communities. Because of this, many places around the world are connected with each other through these water sources. Generally, three main factors relating to water influence where people settle. These factors are discussed below and shown in Source 1.

Historical and environmental factors

Historically, towns and cities have developed along rivers and near lakes and other fresh water sources. People will settle anywhere there is water, adapting their way of life to the local environmental features. Communities in the Hindu Kush region of the Himalayas in Pakistan and Afghanistan depend on the seasonal melting of the snow and glaciers to provide them with fresh water. This melt also feeds the great rivers in the region, the Indus River and the Ganges River, that supply water to the many cities and communities that have been established along their banks – around 1.5 billion people.

Agriculture

Communities also rely on fresh water to grow crops and farm animals. The availability of fresh water will determine the sorts of crops grown. In places where water is limited, crops that need little irrigation, such as corn, will be grown. Crops that rely heavily on water, such as rice, are grown on floodplains where water is plentiful. These floodplains and deltas, located on land where rivers meet the sea, have particularly rich soil due to the deposits of silt that has travelled down the river from the mountains.

Trade and transport

Rivers move water across the Earth's surface, carrying water great distances to the sea. Rivers, lakes and oceans also act as transport networks, allowing products and people to move easily from one place to another, connecting the communities established on their banks.