Regional Landscapes of the United States and Canada

MEGALOPOLIS: The Urbanized Northeast
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MEGALOPOLIS

MEGALO = very large          POLIS = city

Term created in the 1930s and used to describe any large urban area created by the growth toward each other and eventual merging of two or more cities. (Lower-case “m”)


Landscapes within Megalopolis
Includes large cities, small towns and rural areas where most of the people reside in an urban place.

When you think about this region, what images come into your mind?
Tall buildings
Congestion
Many, many people
Shopping
Ethnic neighborhoods
“Unnatural” areas
Urban problems
Road traffic
Activity 24/7
Manufacturing
Cultural institutions

Megalopolis: The Urbanized Northeast

U.S. region stretching from Southern New England to the Middle Atlantic states made up of counties exhibiting urban characteristics.
- From the Maine-NH border north of Boston to the Virginia counties south of Washington, DC.
- Referred to as the “Northeast Corridor” because it is linked by Interstate 95 and Amtrak.

See Textbook Chapters 5 and 14

Megalopolis at Night

Stretches 500+ miles along the coast.
Some people have it extending from Portland, Maine to Richmond and Norfolk in Virginia or nearly 700 miles.
Rural gaps are quickly being filled by suburbanization and exurbanization.

**Creation of Megalopolis**

- **CONURBATION**: Urban areas grow toward each other, filling the non-urban gaps between them yet remaining independent of each other politically.
- Urbanization spreads along lines of transportation.
- The faster and more reliable the transportation, the greater the distance can be covered in the same period of time.
- This allows for expansion and the creation of a mega-city as conurbations merge.

**Megalopolis as a Region**

Does the region called Megalopolis have the characteristics of an urbanized area?

- Has unique site characteristics that support its creation.
- Pull factors ("functions" and reasons to concentrate people).
- Site/situation advantages (reasons for location).
- Spatial organization (intense and complex)
- Economic advantages associated with concentration, accessibility, and movement (as both a collection and distribution point).
- Has evolved over time.

**Megalopolis the Region: Today**

- Urban landscape is the dominant with urbanization expanding into surrounding farmland.
- Rural areas persist but are getting smaller.
- 10 major metropolitan areas of over 1 million people exist plus many smaller cities with large populations.
- Has 17% of the total U.S. population but only 1.5% of the total land area
- A fifth of all U.S. export trade moves through its six major ports.
- It is a region of international significance and influence.
- Employment has shifted away from the factory to the office, service and technology fields.

**Landscape Development within Megalopolis**

Today's area is the northern portion of the 13 Original Colonies.

- All began with settlement of New England colonies.
- American landscape took on a new appearance: English land-settlement scheme
  - Consisted of a town inhabited by farmers and artisans.
  - Common pasture and forest land administrated by local governing board.
  - Cultivated land surrounding the village
- Growth of coastal towns necessitated movement inland for new farmland to supply food: they were connected to coastal towns by road
- New England towns were the first manufacturing areas of America: Yankee ingenuity/inventions
- Mill towns grew where there was waterpower.

**New England Town Plans**

- [Plumstead village reproduction]
Landscape Pattern within Megalopolis resulting from the Metes and Bounds Land Survey System

This demarcation method can be seen in the shape of plots of land throughout Megalopolis including the shape of lots and the alignment of streets.

Landscape Development within Megalopolis

- The location and associated landscapes of its colonial cities are evident: place names, system of land division and road networks.
- Cities grew as people focused on areas that were economically sound, had links to the outside and were culturally inviting (pull factors).

Landscape Development within Megalopolis

- East coast cities took on a European flavor and appearance (culture).
- Technological developments changed their appearance (modernization), including inventions, public health measures, building construction methods, landscaped parks, paved streets, sewers, forms of mass transit, etc.

Landscape Development within Megalopolis

- Manufacturing grew in cities: sources of labor, money and ancillary services.
- Cities’ need for workers lured people: local farmers, laborers from other regions, and immigrants from abroad.
- Early transportation routes focused on the cities: need to move people, raw materials and finished products to market (ship/road/rail).
- Urban subdivision occurred: manufacturing and warehousing districts; workers’ housing areas; ethnic neighborhoods; upscale sections for the wealthy and powerful; amusement parks; later zoning.
- Mountain and seaside resorts grew near cities: catered to both the wealthy and the worker; leisure time.
- Estates were established in areas around the cities.

Landscape Development within Megalopolis

- Abandonment takes away jobs; tax base suffers.
- Housing areas (neighborhoods) begin to decay as workers move away and poverty levels rise.
- Gentrification: land is bought by outsiders; takes on different usage (the character of the landscape changes).

RECAP: Urban Landscape Development Sequence

The development of an urbanized area takes on a life cycle.

1. Creation
2. Growth
3. Stagnation
4. Demise
5. Resurgence

Resurgence leads to the creation of a new identity.
Northeast Coast: Beneficial Site Characteristics

- Coastal location: allowed for regional trade and interaction with the world, esp. Europe.
- Numerous estuaries and bays: good harbors.
- Moderate climate: cold winters, yet ice free harbors, and ample precipitation for a fresh water supply.
- Variable soils: provided enough food for residents but tended to be less productive than agricultural regions. (Better soils in the area south of Philadelphia).
- Mixed forest: Variety of tree species provided wood for many uses.
- Flat to gently rolling terrain: easy to use.
- Straddles two physiographic regions: includes the Fall Line.

The Fall Line

- Marks the border between the Piedmont and the Atlantic Coastal Plain.
  - Rapids and waterfalls are present. Rivers flow from the Piedmont’s (hard rock) higher elevation onto the soft rock coastal plain.
  - These were the sites for the first water mills that were the catalyst for urban development.

Boston

Original site on a peninsula on a sheltered bay.

New York City

Original site at the narrow tip of an island on twin sheltered bays.
Philadelphia

Original site on high ground on a peninsula between two rivers.

Baltimore

Original site at the mouth of a river at the head of a sheltered bay.

Washington, DC

Original site on donated marshland near the head of navigation on a river.

Plan of Washington, DC

The street plan of Washington was created to mimic the design of the monumental capitals of Europe.
### SITUATION of Megalopolis

- **Good location** for trade and immigration relative to Europe.
- **Accessible.**
  - Along the natural trade routes to Europe, Caribbean, S. America (wind/ocean currents).
  - Good harbors: deep, protected and ice free
  - Routes to the interior: natural and man-made, especially Hudson-Mohawk corridor and the Erie Canal
  - Convenient service point for ships sailing the North Atlantic routes.

### Access to the Interior (Hinterland)

Of all east coast cities, only New York City had direct access to the interior of North America. By coincidence it also had the largest and best harbor.

The Hudson-Mohawk Corridor provided an easy and fast route from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes.

### Urban Landscape: Industrialization

- Industrialization had a very important role in the development of Megalopolis.
  - American Industrial Revolution began in the 1870s.
  - Waves of skilled immigrant labor arriving from Europe supported this growth.
- Manufacturing needed to be near water for power, processing and transportation.
- Enhanced distribution system (roads/railroads/canals) to ship product and receive raw materials to/from the hinterland was focused on the cities.
- Concentration of industries within cities for mutual convenience.

### THE SUBURBS

Suburbanization began in Nassau County, NY, in the 1950s. People wanted a better quality of life while still working in NYC.

60 yrs later all suburbs have problems:

- Aging infrastructure.
- Political fragmentation/service fragmentation.
- Sprawl.
- Need for more commuter and mass transit connections.
- Need for municipal and social services.

### Redistribution of Megalopolis’ Population

- Growth of suburbs (1950s).
- Out-migration of urbanites/suburbanites to small, distant towns between cities (1980s).
- Clusters of high-rise office and residential buildings in the “CBD”- central business districts (1990s).
- Slowing of movement out of city centers.
- Movement back to cities: “gentrification” (2000s).
  - Attraction of jobs/amenities to higher-income workers.
  - Displacement of low-income residents.
  - Ethnic neighborhoods change.

### Gentrification

The process of change that occurs when wealthier people (the “gentry”) buy and move into housing property in urban areas where the existing population is less prosperous.

Includes the conversion of properties (as warehouses and factories) into upscale uses.

Characteristics of neighborhoods change.
# PROBLEMS facing Megalopolis and its cities

Can urban problems be visualized?
- Can a “problem” urban landscape be recognized?

- **Congestion**: large numbers of people, local transportation, housing
- **Health Issues**: food, water supply, waste management, controlling disease, dealing with dying and dead people.
- **Quality of Life Issues**: crowding, crime, poverty, health care, pollution
- **Pollution**: air, water, land, noise
- **Hazards**: storms, earthquakes, flooding, fire, terrorism

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# NEXT

Canada’s National Core