

Ranking Urban Centers

What is the most efficient way to measure the centrality, or pull of a settlement in the modern world? Although population size is important to the area served by a city, as Walter Christaller stated through his Central Place Theory. However, what may be even more important is the variety of services offered there – in attracting people and more specifically, consumers.

When comparing cities across countries, population becomes even less of a significant indicator of the importance of a settlement. For example, a settlement may often be considered urban in Denmark with a concentration of just over 250 people, whereas in the United States it's often closer to 2,500. In regions with even greater arithmetic population density, the number climbs even higher, such as in Japan where a settlement isn't often considered urban until the number approaches 30,000 people. Knowing these disparities, ranking settlements by the numbers and types of services offered creates a more reliable means of measurement, as opposed to overall size.

Rural Settlement Types

The smallest type of settlement in which people live is called a **hamlet**, which usually constitutes a small community in a rural area with few services, if any. Hamlets are often unincorporated areas that have no local government or official boundaries.



A **village** is larger than a hamlet and usually rural, with dozens of services and even more specialization. As a result, there tends to exist a greater variety of jobs and amenities in a village as opposed to a hamlet. Villages are normally permanent, with fixed dwellings that are fairly close to one another, and not scattered broadly over the landscape as a dispersed settlement.

Although villages are often located in rural areas, the term urban village is also applied to certain urban neighborhoods, such as Greenwich Village in New York City (which was incorporated as an actual village in 1712).



Urban Settlement Types

The term “urban” begins to be used when a settlement grows into a **town**, which has even more population, services, and specialization. They differ from their smaller rural counterparts primarily in respect to its economic character, in that most of a town's population will tend to derive their living from manufacturing, commerce, and public service rather than primary industries such as agriculture.

Towns will contain a downtown area, and a hinterland (which literally means the “land behind” the city). They will possess a market area or surrounding service area, which enables a greater degree of services and businesses to exist within its economic reach.



A **city**, as compared to a town has an even greater population and even more specialization. While towns possess downtowns, cities possess central business districts. And while towns possess hinterlands, cities will contain suburbs, which are larger residential areas connected to the city itself. Because of their size and range of services, cities have greater centrality, or pull towards them.

Cities generally have complex systems for sanitation, utilities, land usage, housing, and transportation. The concentration of development greatly facilitates interaction between people and businesses, benefiting both parties in the process.



Santa Fe, New Mexico



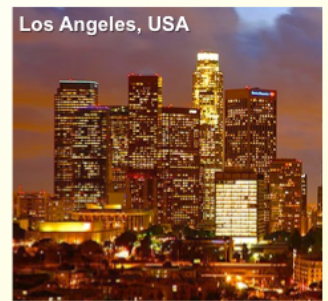
Florence, Italy



Canberra, Australia



Tokyo, Japan



Los Angeles, USA



Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Even greater than a city, is a **metropolis**, which in Greek translates to the “mother city”. Metropolitan areas include one or more urban areas, as well as satellite cities and intervening rural areas that are socio-economically, politically, and culturally tied to the urban core, typically measured by commuting patterns. In defining a metropolitan area, it is sufficient that a city, or cities, form a nucleus that other areas have a high degree of integration with. A metropolis usually combines an urban **agglomeration** (the contiguous, built-up area), comprised of multiple jurisdictions and municipalities such as neighborhoods, townships, cities, exurbs, and counties.

Dhaka, Bangladesh (15 million), and Jakarta, Indonesia (11 million people).

A **megalopolis** is typically defined as a chain of roughly adjacent metropolitan areas. The terms conurbation, megaregion, or metroplex are also applied to the megalopolis. Modern interlinked ground transportation corridors, such as rail and highway, often aid in the development of megalopolises. As a result, this is an occurrence most commonly seen in the more developed regions of the world, where expansion and wealth is more widely distributed. One of the most well known megalopolises is “Bosnywash”, which is not a legal entity, but encompasses many urban areas such as Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. Other seemingly strange names have been applied unofficially to places in the U.S., such as “Chipitts” (Chicago through other cities, including Detroit, Cleveland, and Pittsburg) or “SanSan” (from San Francisco down through San Diego).



Manila, Philippines



Guangzhou, China



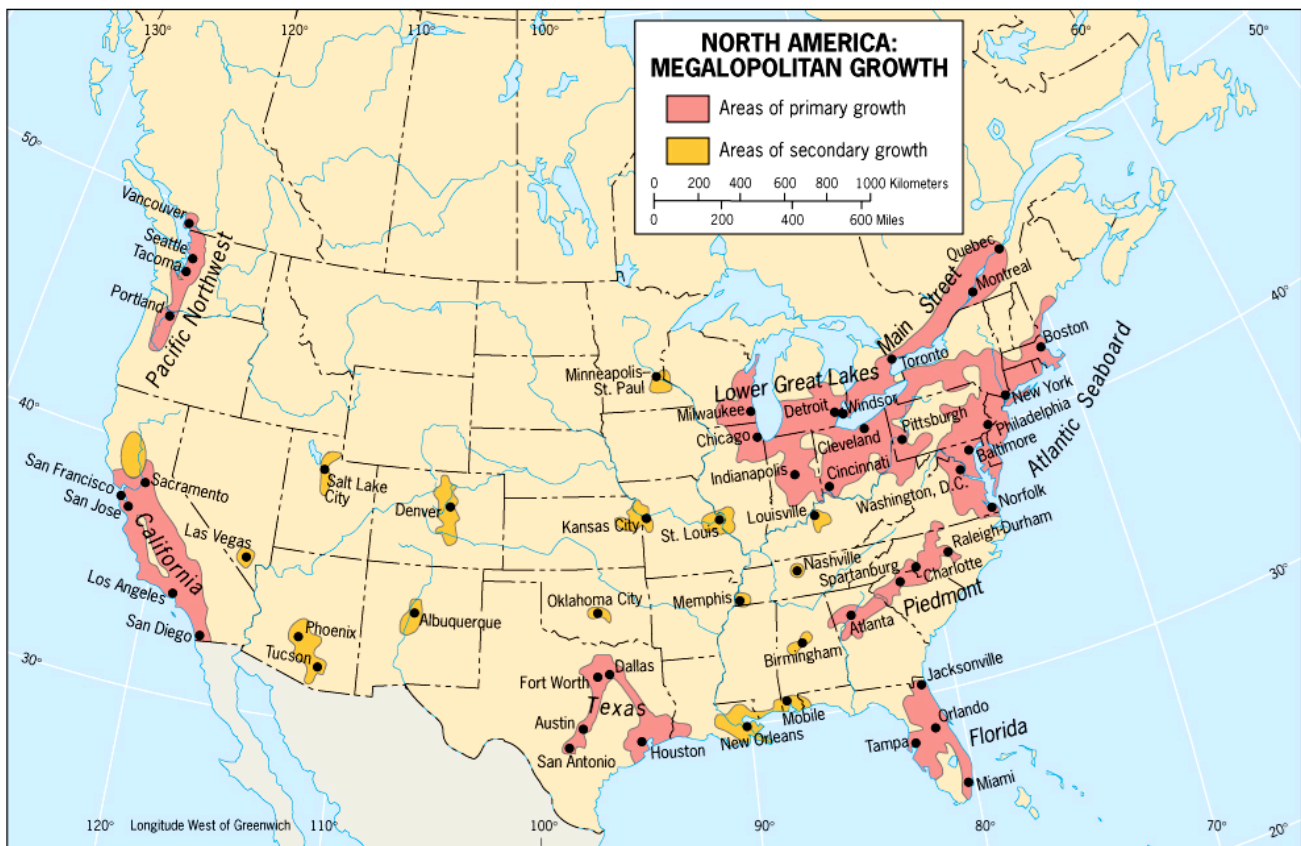
New York City, USA

Continuing up the urban hierarchy is the **megacity**, which is usually defined as a metropolitan area with a total population in excess of 10 million people. Most of the time a megacity refers to a single metro area, but it can technically consist of more than one. The largest of these is the metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Japan, with a population in excess of 34 million.

Bear in mind, as cities grow the people & governments within and around them must deal with increased crime, energy cost, pollution, and many other issues such as traffic congestion. The fastest growing megacities, and urban growth in general, are in the developing world where the growth rates are the fastest. Some of these urban giants include including Mumbai, India (24 million), Lagos, Nigeria (20 million), Karachi, Pakistan (17 million),



Bosnywash



Major Megalopolitan Development

As with anything else on the globe, urban development is not evenly distributed. The three greatest areas of megalopolitan development are in different regions of the Earth. The third largest megalopolis in the world is the "Blue Banana", a discontinuous corridor of urbanization in Western Europe with a combined population around 110 million people. Major cities include Manchester, Amsterdam, Brussels, the Ruhr area, Luxembourg, Munich, and Venice. The name was either rendered blue because it represented the core of Europe, and the flag of the European Union is largely blue, or the color refers to the "blue collar" industrial workers. The region is of interest to multinational companies, not only for its good transport infrastructure, but also for its convenience as a center of operations among some of the most developed countries on the planet.

The second largest megalopolis is along the Pearl River Delta (PRD) in China with over 120 million people. Until 1985 farms and small rural villages had mainly dominated the PRD, but after the economy was reformed and opened, a flood of investment turned it into the land's economic powerhouse. It is one of the most densely urbanized regions in the world and one of the main hubs of China's economic growth, containing cities such as Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Hong Kong. High-speed rails connect many of the urban regions and it may even coalesce into one giant megacity.

The largest region of megalopolitan development is along the Northern Indian River Plain (Indo-Gangelic Plain), containing over 200 million people. Geography plays an

enormous role in the urban development along the Indus and Ganges Rivers, creating very fertile agricultural land. Additionally, the Himalayan Mountains create a physical barrier, as well as provide water through runoff, which adds to the arability of the land. Major cities include Dhaka, Kolkata, Delhi, and Karachi. While these are not the most sophisticated cities, they constitute some of the fastest growing in the world, as people flock to these urban areas seeking work and a better life.

The world's rate of urbanization shows no signs of slowing down. Future generations increasingly will be born, raised, and employed in metro environments. While the form of future cities may be in question, there is little doubt that the size and scale of urban areas will continue to expand, especially into areas that are minimally urbanized today.

