Regional Landscapes of the United States and Canada

MEGALOPOLIS: The Urban Landscape of the Northeast

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Regional Landscape Studies

For each region:
1. Know its physical geography.
2. Identify its unique characteristics.
3. Be able to explain the human imprint.
4. Discuss its sequence occupancy and economic development.

MEGALOPOLIS

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

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MEGALOPOLIS

MEGA = 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")


Visualizing Megalopolis: Night View

Stretches over 500 mi. along the mid-Atlantic coast from Boston, MA to Washington, DC.

Some argue that it now extends 700 miles from Portland, ME to Norfolk, VA.

This region is defined by population density and urban land use.

- Portland, ME
- Boston
- Providence, RI
- Hartford, CT
- New York City
- Philadelphia
- Baltimore
- Washington
- Richmond, VA
- Norfolk, VA

Megalopolis: USA’s Urbanized Northeast

- Made up of 117 contiguous counties in 12 states + DC that exhibit some urban characteristics.
  - There are 9 metro areas with over 1 million people; 11 with Richmond and Norfolk.
  - Referred to as the “Northeast Corridor” because it is linked by Interstate 95 and Amtrak.

This region has changed shape ( gotten longer and wider) as new means of transportation allow people to travel from distant areas to its cities daily.

See Textbook Ch. 5 and 14
Megalopolis’s Landscapes

Includes large cities, small towns and rural areas where most of the people reside in an urban setting.

Urban places have sub-landscapes.

Identifying Landscape Change

The area we call Megalopolis was once a rural landscape dotted with Indian villages, then a rural area with small colonial settlements. It became a rural area interspersed with factory-based cities. Something was “good here” to attract people and activities!

Gottman’s studies in the 1950s noted an evolving densely populated landscape along the northeast coast of the U.S. The five core cities (Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington) were growing toward each other to form one c.500 mi long large urban conglomeration. This area has densities approaching 1,000 people/sq mi compared to the population density for the entire US of c.75 people/sq mi.

Creation of Megalopolis

CONURBATION: Smaller urban areas grow toward each other, filling the non-urban gaps between them. But they remain independent of each other, politically and services-wise.

Urbanization will spread along transportation lines. 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 and people move easily within the area.

Growth of Megalopolis 1900-2050

Rural gaps are quickly being filled by suburbanization and exurbanization processes, mostly at the expense of farmland and other unprotected open space.

Defining Questions: Megalopolis as an Urban Region

Does this large region (land area and population) have the characteristics of an urbanized place?

- What are the unique circumstances that support its creation? (site characteristics)
- Are there situational advantages? (reasons for being)
- Does it have pull factors? (“functions” and reasons to concentrate people).
- Does it reap the economic advantages associated with concentration, accessibility, and movement (acting as both a collection and distribution point).
- What types of spatial organization are present? (geopolitical needs to deal with intense and complex situations)
- Has it evolved? (what changed; push factors; new pull factors)
### 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 (site of water power).

### The Fall Line

A unique regional feature

- Marks the border between the Appalachian Piedmont and the Atlantic Coastal Plain from NJ to GA.
  - Rapids and waterfalls are present. Rivers flow from the Piedmont’s (hard rock) higher elevation onto the soft rock coastal plain.
  - Blocked inland water passage from the sea; became portage sites.
  - These were the sites for the first colonial water mills that were the catalyst for urban development.

### Fall Line Cities

Cities developed at the Fall Line because ships reached the inland limit of river navigation and had to surrender their loads to land-based carriers (break-of-bulk/porriage site). Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Richmond developed this way without any planning. Other cities made use of the drop in elevation to build mills powered by the falling water; as Paterson and Trenton, NJ and Wilmington, DE.

### SITUATION of Megalopolis

- **Good location** for trade and immigration relative to Europe.
- **Accessible.**
  - Along the natural “triangle” trade routes between Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, South America (wind/ocean currents).
  - Routes to the interior: natural and man-made, esp. 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 NYC had direct access to the interior of North America (see Slide 5). Other ports were Europe-focused. 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.

### Megalopolis the Region: Today

- **Locational significance of Megalopolis:**
  - Has 17% of the total US population but only 1.5% of the total land area
  - 20% of all U.S. export trade moves through its ports.
  - A region of international significance and influence.
    - Employment has shifted away from the factory to the office, service, management and technology fields.
    - Has the nation’s richest and poorest people, as well as its most and least influential groups.
Linkages in Megalopolis

Urban places are linked by a dense transportation grid of road, rail, air and telecommunications. Water travel was important, too.

Landscape Development within Megalopolis

It began with settlement of New England and Mid-Atlantic areas: Massachusetts & Pennsylvania hearths.

- N. American landscape took on a new appearance:

  English land-settlement scheme:
  - Town inhabited by farmers and craftsmen located near water.
  - Pasture/forest land administered by a local governing board: "Commons."
  - Cultivated land surrounding the village.

Colonists’ Sources of Wealth

New England/Mid-Atlantic settlements engaged in income-generating activities from available resources:
- Fishing
- Whaling
- Ironworks
- Naval stores (tar, pitch, turpentine from pine trees)
- Shipbuilding

Irregular Landscape Pattern within Megalopolis resulting from the Metes and Bounds Land Survey System

Landscape composed of parcels that vary in shape and size.

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 Developments within Megalopolis

- Sources of the visual landscape in colonial cities are evident: place names, land division and road networks.
- Cities grew as people focused on best areas: economically sound, had links to the outside and were culturally inviting (pull factors).
- Mid-Atlantic cities took on a European flavor and appearance because those colonies (NY, NJ, PA, DE, MD) where more tolerant of outsiders’ customs, languages and religions.
- Technological developments changed their appearance (modernization): inventions, public health measures, construction methods, landscaped parks, paved streets, sewers, mass transit, etc.
**Landscape Developments within Megalopolis**

- Manufacturing grew in cities: sources of labor, money and ancillary services.
- Cities’ need for workers attracted people: local farmers, laborers from other regions, and immigrants.
- Transportation routes focused on the cities: need to move people, raw materials and finished products to market (ship/road/rail).
- 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 (for the rich to get away from city conditions).

**Evolution of the Urban Landscape**

- As the inner city ages, becomes crowded, dirty and unsafe (a new type of landscape; push factor), there is movement away by those who could.
- Manufacturing areas begin to decay as facilities, structures and methodologies become outdated: industry abandons the city.
- Abandonment takes away jobs: tax base suffers.
- Housing areas (neighborhoods) begin to decay as workers move away and poverty levels rise.

**Evolution of Settlement Patterns: Population Redistribution**

- Growth of suburbs (1950s).
- Out-migration of urbanites/suburbanites to small, distant towns between cities (1980s).
- Clusters of high-rise buildings (office and residential) in the CBD/central business district (1990s).
- Slowing of movement out of city centers.
- Movement back to cities: “gentrification” (2000s).

**RECAP: Urban Landscape Development Sequence**

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

1. Creation (reason for being)
2. Growth
3. Stagnation
4. Demise
5. Resurgence

Resurgence leads to the creation of a new identity.
Megalopolis has a Human-dominated Landscape

How has urbanization altered the region’s ecological landscape?
1. Damaged/destroyed native biomes.
2. Has led to a conflict between native and introduced species.
3. Changed the area’s hydrology (stream diversion, wetlands drainage, pumping groundwater, paving, slope alteration).
4. Altered shorelines (land fill; hardening; groins/jetties).
5. Created microclimates (reduced open space; concrete and asphalt surfaces).
6. Polluted its area (air, water, land, noise).
7. Has increased the dangers from natural processes, now deemed hazards.

PROBLEMS facing Megalopolis and its cities

Can urban problems be visualized?
Can a “problem” urban landscape be recognized?
Once recognized, how are they dealt with?

- Congestion: large numbers of people and vehicles: need for adequate transportation systems, housing and services
- 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, rising sea level, flooding, fire, terrorism

Components of Megalopolis:
Comparing Anchor City Metro Areas (all at same scale)

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.
New York City
Original site on high ground on a peninsula between two rivers.

Philadelphia

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

Canada’s National Core