Metropolises

"A metropolis is a major urban centre where power and services are concentrated, and where issues abound. People in the surrounding region and even in the national territory as a whole are drawn to it. Today metropolises are increasingly powerful, which has repercussions for the entire planet."
Québec Education Program, Secondary School Education, Cycle One, p. 276 The following geography collection was originally produced by the [Service national du RÉCIT du domaine de l'univers social](#).

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Territories considered in this collection:

Urban territory: Metropolises

Study Territory: Montréal

Study Territory: Cairo

Designated focus

> [Ebenezer Howard](#) *believed that new cities should be built in the countryside, so their residents could breathe the fresh air !*

All cities, whether large or small, are by definition centres where services are concentrated: administrative services, educational services, health services, cultural facilities, etc. The larger the city, the greater the **concentration** and diversity of its services and the larger the region it serves. When does such a large city become a metropolis? What criteria must it meet to do so?
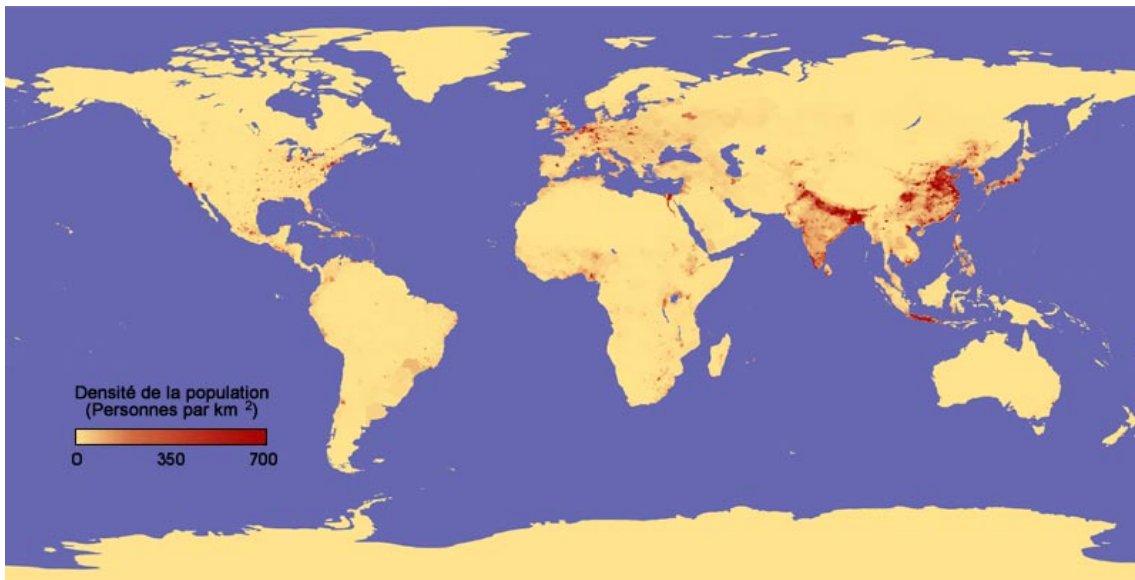
What is a metropolis?

What differentiates a metropolis from other large cities is mostly the **power** that concentrates there, power that is conferred by the size of its population, which is significantly greater than that of other large cities in its regional sphere of influence. Not only are **services** concentrated in a metropolis but also the power attached to them, which is related to the economy, politics, social services and culture.

Thus, in the province of Québec, although political power is concentrated in Québec City, real power often resides in Montréal due to its demographic weight. What does this concentration of population, power and services imply for the inhabitants of a metropolis? Is it harder to find housing? Are services really more accessible, given congestion problems in crowded downtown cores? The issues are often highly complex.

Scales of influence

Are some metropolises of the world more important than others? A metropolis exists first in relation to its own **regional territory** upon which it exercises a direct influence. However, it also exists within national and international **networks** of metropolises, within which its influence is exercised to various degrees. Geographers use the analogy of the archipelago to

evoke the network of major metropolises of the world. To what extent does a metropolis act as a **magnet**, attracting people from within its region, country or even the rest of the planet?
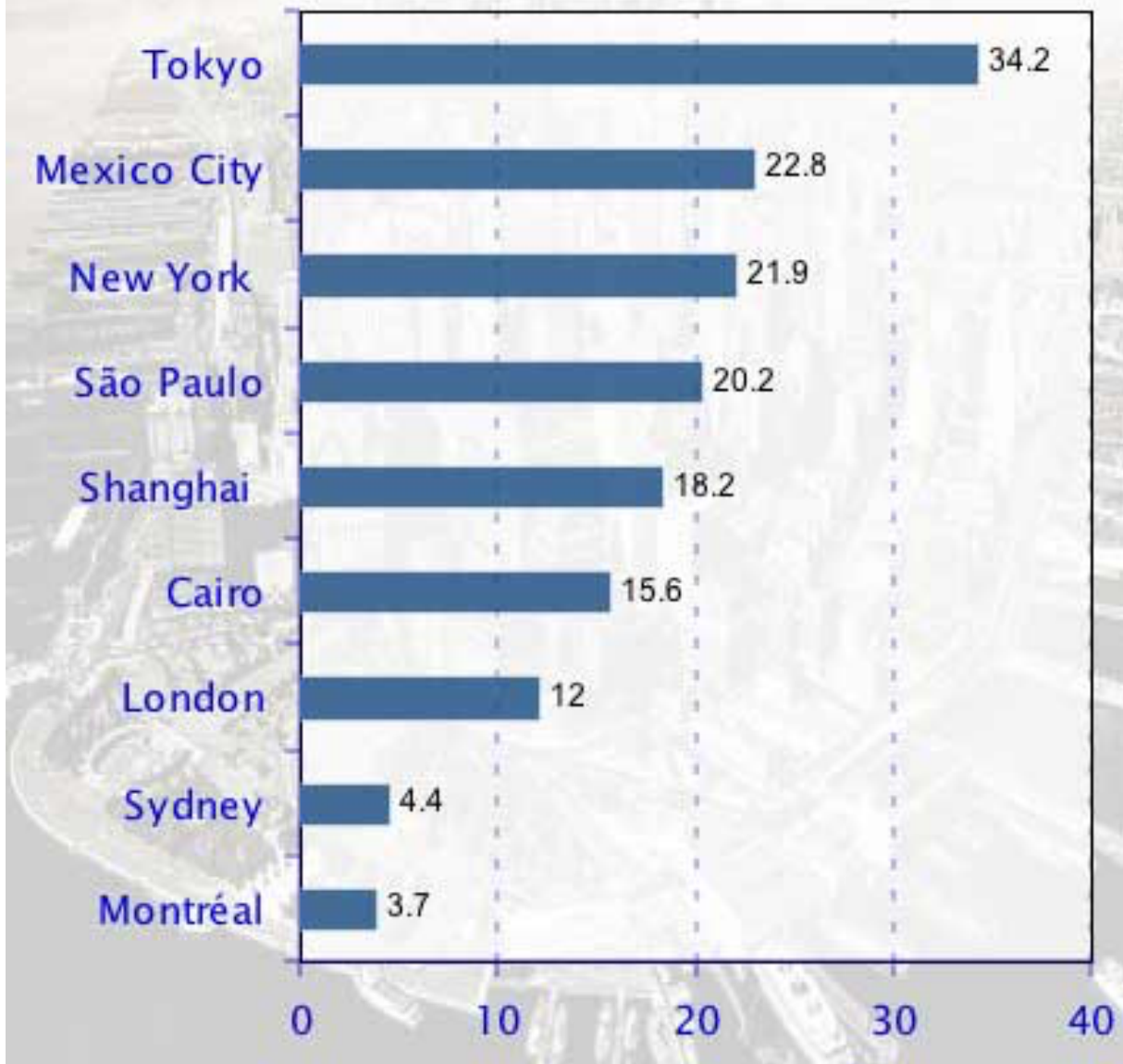

Source: NASA

Source: Service national du RÉCIT

Metropolises (population in millions)

City	Population
Tokyo	34.2
Mexico City	22.8
New York	21.9
São Paulo	20.2
Shanghai	18.2
Cairo	15.6
London	12
Sydney	4.4
Montréal	3.7

*Graph created with a spreadsheet program (Excel, StarCalc, Apple Works)

Source: www.citypopulation.de Updated to January 2006 populations.

Classified ads

For sale

Move south and make your dream come true!

Superb shelter in a slum on the outskirts of a huge polluted city in a third-world country.

No running water, no garbage collection, and the traffic on the way to work is absolute hell.

A real bargain!

To find out more about major metropolises, visit:
Demographia
Major Cities and Agglomerations of the World
Metropolis

Concepts

These definitions are intended primarily for teachers.

Urban territory	Metropolises
Concentration	Metropolis
Density	Growth
Development	Imbalance
Suburbs	Multiethnicity
Urbanization	Slums
Urban sprawl	

A few concepts that could be addressed:

- Levels of development
- The socioeconomic profile of a territory (rich and poor)
- Demographics
- Sustainable development
- Immigration
- The concept of scales and their relation: local, regional, national and international spaces
- The environment

A few geographical techniques that could be used:

- City map
- Geographical sketch
- Simple map

Tools that could be used:

Cartograf - An online collaborative mapping tool
LEARN version at http://cartograf.learnquebec.ca

Popplet (concept mapping
Evernote (note taking)
Skitch (mobile mapping)
My Map Editor (mobile mapping)
Google maps

Concepts related to the urban territory
These definitions are intended primarily for teachers.

Concentration

The *Longman Dictionary of Geography* (1985) defines *concentration* as "coming together, being brought together in a mass, an agglomeration, e.g. the localization of a particular economic activity in areas favourable to it." More specifically, concentration can refer to **a very high population density** or the convergence of some of a territory's management functions in a given core or centre. One example is the monocentric city of Paris in France (which is surrounded by what is dubbed the "French desert"). Major metropolises are by definition concentrations of populations, activities and services.

Density

A Modern Dictionary of Geography (2001) defines *population density* as "the number of people per unit area." Mean population density, which is most commonly used, refers to the average number of people per unit area in a given territory. In the case of territories that are unevenly populated, such as Canada, it is more accurate to use actual population density, which is obtained by calculating the actual number of people per unit of inhabited area. **In both cases, density usually measures the number of people per square kilometre (km ^{2}).**

For example, rural Canada has a population density of fewer than 10 inhabitants per km^2, whereas urban centres may reach densities of over 50,000 inhabitants per km^2.
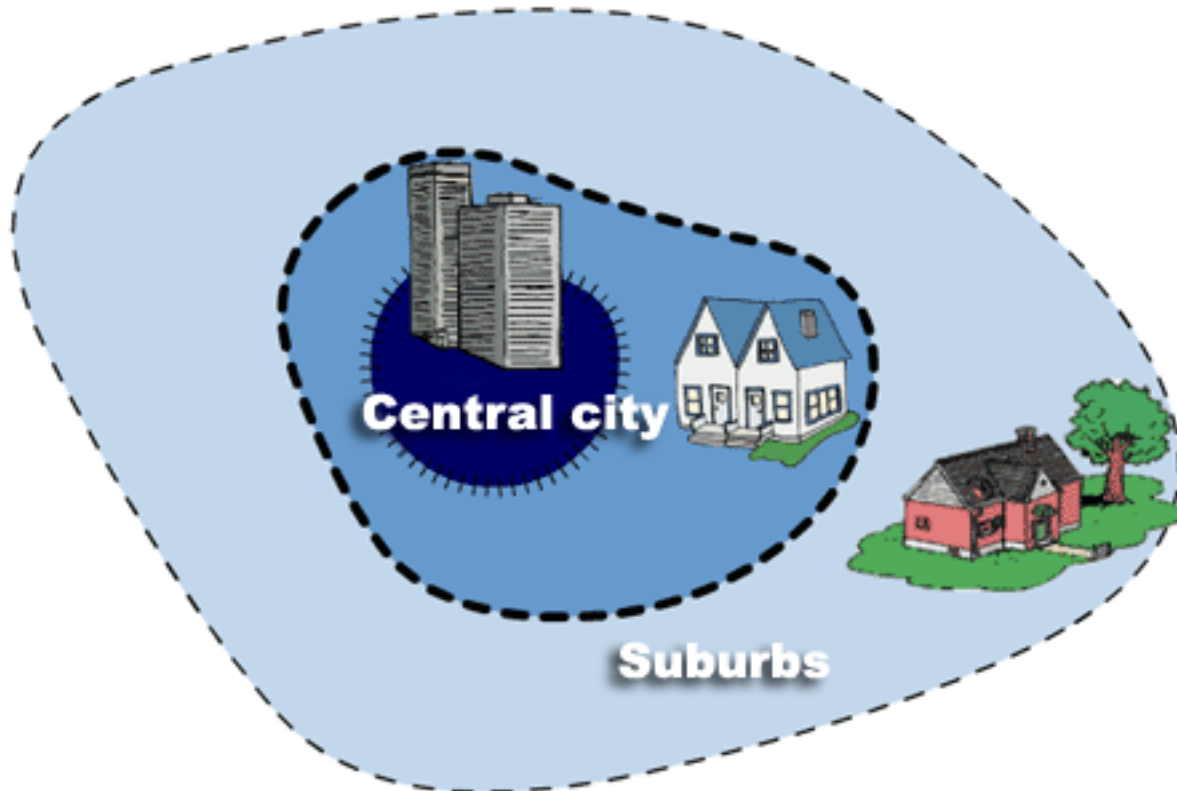
Development

The *Longman Dictionary of Geography* (1985) defines *development* as "the act of causing to grow, to expand, to realize what has formerly been potential." Developing a territory therefore means organizing and balancing a space to make it more coherent and enhance it in accordance to pre-determined goals. In geography, the development of a territory is a planned activity undertaken in response to various motivations that must take into account the various scales of the space. In reality, however, this global or holistic vision of the space is often not taken into account by land developers. In other words, development is not necessarily synonymous with improvement.

Geographer Sylvain Lefebvre, a professor at UQAM, summarized the essence of the concept of development in geography: " **Developing a territory is an activity that responds to the need for the organization, distribution, balance, development and control of populations, functions and resources**." [translation]

Suburbs

Suburbs are an urban space made up of the municipalities just outside a central city that may eventually become physically attached to the city by spreading urbanization. Suburbs are therefore part of a continuum in relation to a central city, while maintaining political autonomy. The space occupied by the central city and its suburbs is called an agglomeration or urbanized area.

The concept of *suburbs* remains a very broad one. There are in fact several types of suburbs that are distinguishable based on various characteristics: their distance from the central city, their vocation, the type of planning and development involved, etc. In addition, the term has different connotations depending on the culture. **For a Montrealer, suburbs are residential, middle-class neighbourhoods of mostly single-family dwellings.** In France, the term refers to poor residential areas characterized by low-income high-rises often inhabited by immigrants. Because **South American slums could also be considered suburbs**, we generally prefer the term *outskirts* to designate the areas surrounding cities.

Urbanization

Urbanization is the process by which rural space becomes urban due to the population growth of a city and/or urban sprawl. This process may be planned or spontaneous.

Urban sprawl

A Modern Dictionary of Geography (2001) defines *urban sprawl* as "a largely unplanned, straggling and low-density form of urban or suburban growth occurring around the margins of a town or city." Urban sprawl is therefore the ongoing extension of a city's outlying areas into the countryside. Especially noticeable in North America, **this phenomenon is encouraged by the development of road networks and the use of vehicles**. It is above all characterized by low-density land use (the city expands outwards instead of concentrating its functions, which is normally the distinguishing feature of cities).

Concepts related to metropolises

Main concept: Metropolis

A Modern Dictionary of Geography (2001) provides the following definition of *metropolis:*

A city that predominates as a seat of government, of ecclesiastical authority, of commercial activity, or of culture. Strictly the chief city (but not necessarily the capital) of a country, state or region. The term tends to be used loosely to refer to any large city, as in *metropolitan county* and *metropolitan region*, i.e. the area served or governed by such a city.

As is pointed out on the Wikipedia site, the word comes from the Greek *metropolis* ("mother city"), which is how the Greek colonies of antiquity referred to their original cities, with which they retained cultic and political-cultural connections. The word was used in post-classical Latin for the chief city of a province, the seat of the government, and in particular ecclesiastically for the seat or see of a metropolitan bishop to whom suffragan bishops were responsible. This usage equates the province with the diocese or episcopal see.

According to the *Dictionnaire de la géographie* (2003), the term *metropolis* is part of a more global concept linked to urban hierarchies. Thus, **a city is a diffuse reality that masks wide disparities.** Urban hierarchies are complex: many intermediaries exist between large cities and small towns.

The largest cities in the world are known as megacities (megapolises or megalopolises). According to Wikipedia, a megacity is usually defined as "a recognized metropolitan area with a total population in excess of 10 million people"; there are currently 25 such areas in the world (see www.citypopulation.de/World.html for a list of these cities).

In Canada, a megacity may also refer informally to the results of merging a central city with its suburbs to form one large municipality. However, a Canadian megacity is not necessarily an entirely urban area, as many such cities have both rural and urban portions, and do not necessarily constitute a large metropolis.

According to *Roget's International Thesaurus* (1977), synonyms for metropolis include **"city, metropolitan area, megalopolis, conurbation, urban complex, spread city, urban sprawl [and] urban centre."**

Specific concept: Growth

The *Dictionnaire de la Géographie* (2003) defines *growth* as " **a sustained increase in industrial production, investments, income and consumption.** […] Growth is not only economic; it is also accompanied by social and spatial change. It implies various significant structural changes, which sometimes makes it a requisite for development" [translation]. In terms of the designated focus and main concept, **growth is associated with an increase in the size of cities, which is linked to population growth and an increase in socioeconomic activities leading to spatial change**.

Specific concept: Imbalance

Imbalance can be defined with respect to the level of development. **In the major urban centres of the Western world, the richest often live side by side with the poorest.** Manhattan and Harlem are perfect examples of this in New York City. In developing countries, the population living in slums or shantytowns may represent between 30% and 90% of the total urban population; shantytowns often lack basic necessities such as running water and electricity. In such countries, the gap between the rich and the poor is even more pronounced.

Imbalance can also be seen in terms of population concentration on a given territory. For example, half of the population of the province of Québec lives in the Greater Montreal region. **As Montreal is the economic, social and cultural heart of the province, the political power concentrated there often focuses effort and action in the metropolis to the detriment of the rest of the province.**

Specific concept: Multi-ethnicity

A Modern Dictionary of Geography (2001) defines *ethnic group* as "a group of people united by a common characteristic or set of characteristics related to race, nationality, language or some other aspect of culture." A multiethnic society is thus a "society containing a mix of people of different racial origins, language, religion or national extraction." Although multiethnicity is not an exclusively urban phenomenon, in Canada in 1996, 88% of immigrants lived in urban rather than rural areas. In addition, ethnic groups tend to concentrate geographically in certain neighbourhoods. Montréal's Chinatown is an example of this phenomenon.

Ethnic diversity manifests itself in a metropolis in various cultural behaviours that impact choices with respect to food, clothing, music, entertainment, etc. Ethnic diversity may also lead to exclusion.

Montréal's multiethnic face:
http://www2.ville.montreal.qc.ca/urb_demo/chiffres/atlas/immigra.htm

Specific concept: Slums

A Modern Dictionary of Geography (2001) defines *slum* as **"an overcrowded and squalid neighbourhood of grossly substandard housing and inadequate services."** The word *slum* is heavily charged with sociological and political significance. Another, perhaps less derogatory, word for slums is *shantytown*.

The *Longman Dictionary of Geography* (1985) provides the following definition of *shanty-town:*
A settlement, lacking services, which consists of **a collection of small, crude shacks made of discarded materials** and serving as habitations for poor people **on the outskirts of town**, especially in South American and parts of Africa, variously termed (South America) *favela* or *rancho*; (Central America) *barrio*; (Asia) *busti* or *kampong*; (Africa) *bidonville* or shanty-town.

Similarly, *A Modern Dictionary of Geography* (2001) provides the following definition of *shanty town*:
An area of substandard housing, often occupied by squatters and found mainly in third world cities. **Usually constructed either at the city margins** or on difficult ground (e.g. steep slopes, areas prone to flooding) within the city, hitherto avoided by the built-up area. […] Such areas of densely packed, shack housing, initially at least, lack basic physical amenities such as piped water, sewerage and power supplies, as well as being unserved by educational and health facilities. […] However, there is some evidence from Latin America of a degree of self-improvement in the longer-established shanties, as the residents make attempts to introduce communal basic services. […]

In some extreme cases, shantytowns can have populations approaching that of a city.

According to Wikipedia, the first recorded use of the word *shanty*, as meaning a crude dwelling, occurred in Ohio in 1820. It may have been derived from the French word *chantier*, meaning a building site. Alternatively, it could have been derived from the Irish *sean tigh*, meaning "old house" or from the Nahuatl word *chantli* meaning "home."

Sources

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