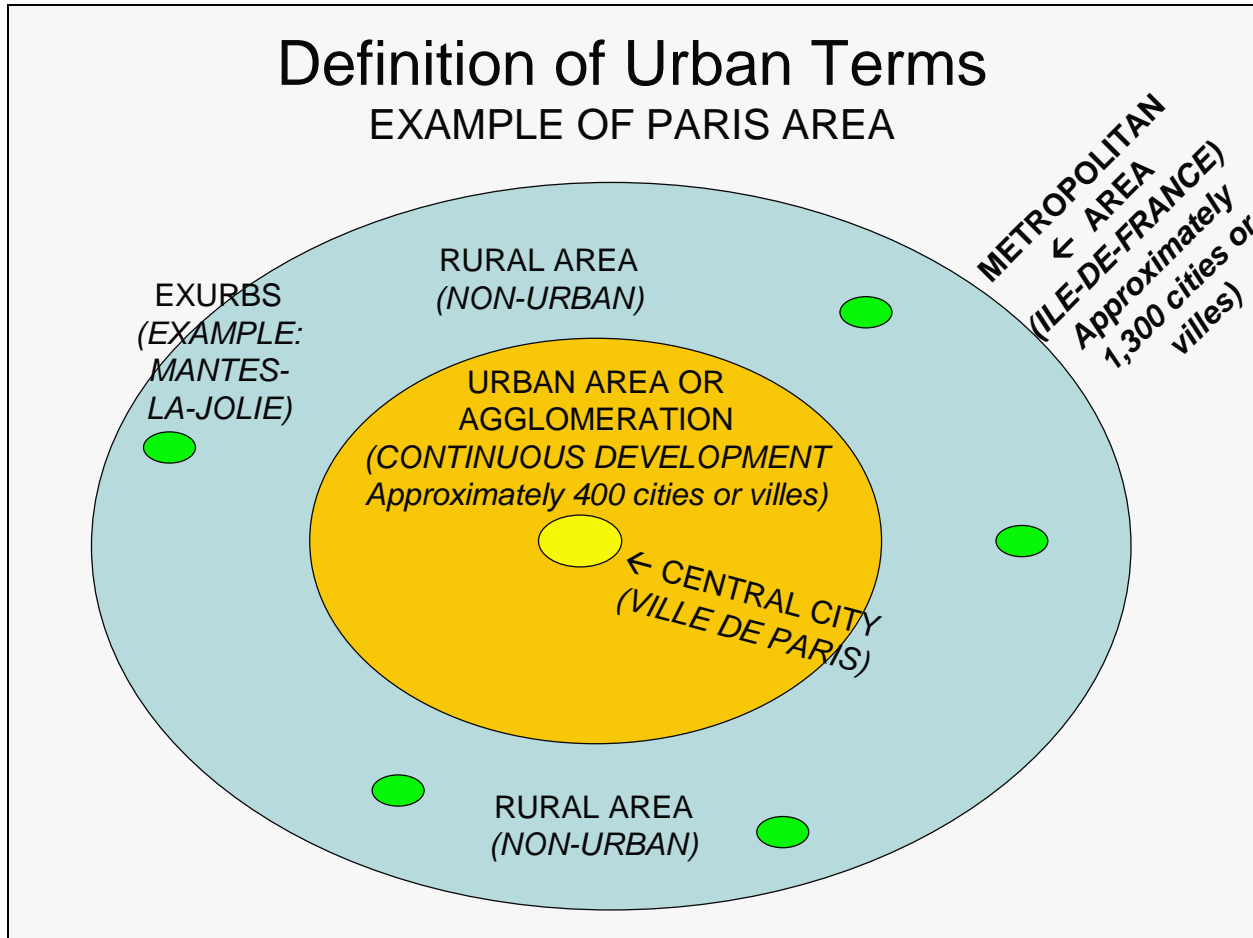


## Definition of Urban Terms



### Confusion about Urban Terms

There is considerable confusion about terms used to describe urbanization, especially the term *city*.

- The City as a Municipality or Local Authority Area:** The term *city* might be simply the historical core municipality (local authority area), such as the city of Chicago or the ville de Paris or any other municipality. Thus, a metropolitan area or an urban area generally has many municipalities or cities. The Paris metropolitan area has 1,300 cities, the New York metropolitan area more than 700 cities and the St. Louis metropolitan area nearly 400 cities. There are few major metropolitan areas in the world that do not contain multiple cities. *No metropolitan area with more than 1,000,000 population in Western Europe, the United States, Japan, Canada, Australia or New Zealand has a single municipal government.* The term *city* is principally used in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada to denote a municipality, rather than an urban area or a metropolitan area.

- **The City as a Metropolitan Area:** The term *city* is also sometimes used to describe an entire labor market, which includes the historical core municipality, continuously developed suburbs and exurbs, which are not connected by continuous development to the urban area or agglomeration. The term *city* is most often used in Australia and New Zealand to denote a metropolitan area or an urban area, rather than a municipality or a local authority (see “Metropolitan Area” below).
- **The City as an Urban Area:** The term *city* is also sometimes used to describe an urban area, which is an area of continuous urban development (or an agglomeration or urban footprint). An urban area includes the historical core municipality, and the adjacent suburbs, but not the exurbs, which are not connected by continuous development to the urban area (see “Urban Area” below).
- **The City in China:** Chinese cities (as the word is translated) are provincial level, sub-provincial level or prefectural level and, as a result, are significantly different than the definitions above.

This lack of clarity can be noted in press reports that often use the term *city* to denote any of the alternative meanings above. For most overall urban analysis, either the urban area (agglomeration) or the metropolitan area (labor market) is most appropriate.

It is important to understand how an urban term is being used, because there are substantial demographic differences between *cities* when denoting municipalities or local authority areas and *cities* when denoting metropolitan areas or urban areas.

For example, the city of St. Louis (municipality) has experienced a population loss from 857,000 in 1950 to 348,000 in 2000. Yet St. Louis as an urban area gained from 1.4 million to 2.1 million between 1950 and 2000. All of the city of St. Louis (municipality or local authority area) losses in population were captured by the suburbs of the urban area, which added an additional 700,000 residents.

## Terms Defined

As used generally on Demographia websites,<sup>1</sup> urban terms are defined as follows (Figure):

**City** generally means a municipality, which would typically have locally elected administration, such as a city council and a mayor. In some cases a city can *also* be a higher-level region, such as the ville de Paris, which is also a department; San Francisco, which is also a county; the city of Shanghai, which is also a provincial level administrative district, the city of Vienna, which is also a state, the city of Berlin, which is also a lander, the city of Mumbai, which is also a region. In each of these cases, there is a single municipality, though there may be divisions of the municipality that have varying degrees of control over local functions (such as the arrondissements of Paris, the municipalities of Berlin or the wards of Mumbai)

**Central City:** The central city or core city is the municipality in an urban area or metropolitan area that emerged historically as the most prominent in the urban area. Almost without exception, the name of the core city is also shared with the urban area and the metropolitan area.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.demographia.com>, <http://www.rentalcartours.net>, <http://www.publicpurpose.com>.

For example, the metropolitan area that includes and surrounds the city of New York is the New York metropolitan area or the New York urban area.

Usually the core city will be the largest in the urban area or metropolitan area. However, this is not always so. San Jose, not a core city, is now the largest city in the San Francisco metropolitan area. Usually an urban area or metropolitan area will have many cities (the Paris metropolitan area has more than 1,000 municipalities or communes). The core city of Chicago, with nearly 3,000,000 residents, is just one of many cities in the Chicago metropolitan area or the Chicago urban area. It is, however, possible for the city to be larger than either the urban area or the metropolitan area. Examples are Anchorage, Alaska, and the Chinese cities of Chongqing, Shanghai, Beijing, and Tianjin.

At the same time, a central city may be relatively small in relation to the corresponding urban area or metropolitan area. For example, according to the 2001 census, the city of Sydney had a population of less than 50,000, out of an urban area with 3.5 million residents, while Adelaide had a population of under 20,000, out of an urban area of approximately 1.0 million.

A core municipality usually includes the historical core. However, through annexation and consolidation, a central city can absorb areas that are suburban in character. This has occurred in cities such as Portland, Los Angeles, San Antonio, Toronto, Mumbai and Rome.

***The Urban Core:*** Generally the urban core or the *inner city* is in the central city. Sometimes the urban core includes adjacent municipalities that developed during the same period as the core city. For example, Frederiksburg is a part of the core of the Copenhagen urban area, L'Hospitalet is a part of the core of the Barcelona urban area, and Cambridge is a part of the core of the Boston urban area core.

***Suburb:*** Collectively, the *suburbs* are all of the continuous urbanization that extends beyond the core city (all of the urban area except the historical core municipality and other adjacent historical municipalities). A specific suburb can be an individual municipality or community in the suburbs. For example, the cities of Evanston and Oak Park are suburbs of Chicago. In the London area, municipalities that are outside the Greater London Authority, but inside the greenbelt are suburbs, such as Epsom and Ottershaw (the London urban area is within the green belt).

***Exurban:*** Exurban refers to non-rural development that is within a metropolitan area, but outside the urban area. There are two types of exurban development:

***Exurb:*** An *exurb* is a municipality (or a community) or urban area in a metropolitan area that is separated by rural territory from the principal urban area. For example, DeKalb and Kankakee are exurbs of Chicago. The urban areas that are within the London metropolitan area, but outside the greenbelt, are exurbs, such as St. Albans and Milton Keynes.

***Low Density Exurban Development:*** Low density exurban development is generally large lot residential development that is not of sufficient density to be considered urban and is not agricultural.

***Urban Area*** means an area of continuous urban development. An urban area will virtually never be the same as a municipality. Usually it will include many municipalities, though in the case of

many geographically large municipalities, such as Anchorage or Shanghai, the urban area will be smaller than the core city. The Chicago urban area (population over 8,000,000) includes the city of Chicago and many other cities. An urban area might be thought of as defined by the lights seen from an airplane on a clear night. Some nations formally designate urban areas, which are called “urbanized areas” in the United States, “unités urbaines” in France, urban areas in the United Kingdom and Canada, “urban centers” in Australia and “urban agglomerations” in India. An urban area is also an *agglomeration*. A *conurbation* is an urban area that forms when two or more urban areas grow together, as has occurred in Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto, Essen-Dusseldorf (the “Rhine-Ruhr-Wupper”), Katowice-Gliwice (Poland), or the Washington and Baltimore urban areas, which are converging into a single urban area. Demographia has developed the only comprehensive list of world urban areas over 500,000 population with land area and densities.<sup>2</sup>

**Metropolitan area** means a labor market, or the area from which the urban area draws its employees. For example, the Chicago metropolitan area (population nearly 10 million) includes the city of Chicago, the Chicago urban area, and adjacent rural areas from which many people travel to work in the urban area. A metropolitan area will nearly always be larger than the urban area, because urban areas routinely draw a large number of workers from surrounding rural territory. A metropolitan area may include more than one urban area. For example, the Washington urban area and the Baltimore urban area are in the Washington-Baltimore metropolitan area, while the Los Angeles metropolitan area includes a number of urban areas, such as Los Angeles, Riverside-San Bernardino, Mission Viejo, Santa Clarita, Simi Valley, Oxnard-Ventura, and Palm Springs. The United States designates consolidated metropolitan areas, which are routinely used where they exist, as opposed to their metropolitan statistical area (MSA) components. A metropolitan area will usually include many cities, but, as noted above, in rare cases the core city may be larger than the metropolitan area. Many nations, such as the United States, France, Brazil, India, Argentina, and Canada formally designate metropolitan areas.

Caution must also be used with respect to the term “metropolitan.” For example, some jurisdictions within metropolitan areas are called “metropolitan” but are only a part of the metropolitan area. For example, Metro Manila (the National Capital Region) represents less than two-thirds of the metropolitan area. The municipality of metropolitan Toronto comprises less than one-half of the metropolitan area.

Further, the term “Greater” is often used to denote a metropolitan area, such as “Greater Los Angeles” or “Greater Chicago.” Again, this term is imprecise, because it is also used in some situations to denote municipalities that are only a part of a metropolitan area. For example, “Greater New York” is the official name of the city of New York, which contains only 40 percent of the metropolitan area population. The municipality of Mumbai, which is formally called the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, comprises approximately two-thirds of the Mumbai metropolitan area.

## **CITIES IN CHINA**

Analysts are often confused by the “city” (“shi” or 市 in Chinese) terminology used in China. Most (if not all) Chinese urban areas are contained within a single city (“shi”). While Chinese “cities” are municipalities, they are far different from municipalities in the western world, by

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<sup>2</sup> Demographia World Urban Areas, <http://www.demographia.com/db-worldua.pdf>.

virtue of their geographical size and vast rural territories. A better rendering of the Chinese word “shi” would be region or prefectures.

All Chinese cities have internal political subdivisions (often translated as counties). The provincial level cities are Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin and Chongqing and represent the second level of government, under the central government, for their geographical areas. Each of the provinces and regions is divided into prefectural cities, sub-provincial level cities or other regions, each of which has considerable rural territory. Out of 333 prefectural level subdivisions of Chinese provinces and autonomous regions, 283 are cities, according to the *China Statistical Yearbook*.<sup>3</sup>

In most cases, the prefectural and sub-provincial level cities are far larger than any reasonable definition of either a metropolitan area or an urban area. Three of the provincial level cities are small enough to approximate metropolitan areas (Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin). Generally, Chinese cities are “regions” and all territory in the nation is divided into cities.

**County level cities:** To confuse the matter even further, some cities have county level subdivisions that are also cities. For example, Changsha, the prefectural level city and capital of Hunan has the usual county level subdivisions, one of which is a city, Liuyang. Like prefectural level cities, county level cities have considerable areas of rural territory. According to the *China Statistical Yearbook*, there are 368 county level cities in China.

**The urban area:** Within the city or shi is the “shixiaqu” (市辖区), which is called the urban area and encompasses the urban districts (referred to as “qu”). Much of some urban districts is actually rural, especially those on the periphery of the urban area. Thus, the shixiaqu is not an urban area in the sense of an agglomeration (because an urban area or agglomeration is an urban footprint). Like most governments in the world, China has no formal urban area or agglomeration designations that are consistent with those used in France, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.

**An Example:** This is a confusing situation that baffles even experts. For example, a recent book on Chinese urbanization (*The Concrete Dragon: China’s Urban Revolution and What it Means for the World* by Thomas J. Campanella) states that the United States has 9 cities over 1 million population and that China has 102 (page 14).<sup>4</sup> The author is referring to very different entities. His 9 US cities are central cities or municipalities that are at the core of larger urban or metropolitan areas. Campanella’s 102 Chinese “cities” are large regions (provincial level, prefectural level and sub-provincial level cities) that are nearly all far larger than their core urban areas or metropolitan areas. According to the *Demographia World Urban Areas* database, there were 36 urban areas in the United States with more than 1,000,000 population in 2009 and 62 in China. There are more large urban areas in China than in the United States, but the difference is by no means as large as Campanella indicates. A count of metropolitan areas is not possible, since there is no reliable definition of metropolitan areas in China.

The error is compounded by a statement to the effect that Wuxi (in the province of Jiangsu) is larger than Los Angeles. Yes, the prefectural level city of Wuxi has more than 4 million people and is larger than the city of Los Angeles, which has less than 4 million. However, the term

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2008/indexeh.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon: China’s Urban Revolution and What it Means for the World*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008.

“city” means very different things in the comparison. The “city” of Wuxi is a large region of more than 1,600 square miles (nearly 4,800 square kilometers). The core urban area of Wuxi, also called Wuxi covers only 150 square miles (390 square kilometers) of the “city,” with more than 90 percent of the “city” being rural --- outside the urban area. The Wuxi urban area has a population of approximately 1.6 million. The city of Los Angeles, however, is at the core of an urban area with nearly 15 million people, nearly 10 times the size of the Wuxi urban area.

On the same page, the author compounds the misunderstanding by noting that building the Three Gorges Dam destroyed nearly a dozen cities. The dam did not destroy a single “city” as translated from the Chinese. It destroyed 12 small urban areas (some sources report 13).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The book itself, in the view of *Demographia*, is quite useful as a description of the general trends and concepts of urbanization in China. However, caution should be employed wherever numbers are used in the text.