Revista Contexto Geográfico

ISSN: 2595-7236

Artigo | *Translation*

The incomplete cities of underdeveloped countries

Les villes incomplètes des pays sous-développés
As cidades incompletas dos países subdesenvolvidos

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The incomplete cities of underdeveloped countries

The expression “incomplete cities,” which we use when referring to metropolises, needs some explanation. We want to show that the metropolitan role in underdeveloped countries operated on two levels. A complete metropolis is capable of meeting expanded economic and social needs with resources it generates itself, such as producing capital goods or developing technologies adapted to the requirements of the national economic society. Incomplete metropolises, which also influence a vast territory, cannot, however, fully take on comparable functions except through external contributions, mostly coming precisely from the complete metropolises. So, it is because they need to rely on the productions of other urban entities that these cities are considered incomplete metropolises.

However, among the incomplete cities, there are not just metropolises. A number of cities with a dominant function, starting with production clusters, should be included under the same term. We prefer to call them cities.

Metropolises and incomplete cities are responsible for a particular organization of the urban and national economy, as well as for a particular organization of space.

https://doi.org/10.28998/contegeo.11i.11.22080

Submetido em: 10/10/2026
Aceito em: 30/10/2026
Publicado: 18/11/2026

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These two factors are important regarding urban, regional, and national growth, which explains the interest in the topic.

A recent phenomenon

Incomplete cities and metropolises emerged with the recent modernization of underdeveloped countries, under the influence of global and national industrialization. The major Latin American cities before the second industrial revolution, for example, couldn't really be considered metropolises if we reserve that term for large cities that stretch over a vast territory and, moreover, offer a significant range of activities that meet the everyday needs of the entire population, meaning they serve both the masses and the small privileged classes. Furthermore, cities like Salvador or Lima from the 18th or early 19th centuries, which dominated a large territory, were unable to provide their wealthy classes with the goods and services they considered essential.

The phenomenon of the metropolis is inherent to big cities or the capitals of modern states. The phenomenon of the city is linked to the transformation of production or consumption models and drivers. All of this, although it didn’t appear everywhere at the same time, is a direct consequence of industrialization and a new type of urbanization, which naturally intensified after World War II.

The big city became a metropolis with the revolution of needs in the world. New needs, both in international relations and on an individual level, not only increased the size of cities but also led to a broadening and diversification of activities.

In fact, the two phenomena have reciprocal cause-and-effect relationships. That's why the large cities in underdeveloped countries are macrocephalic, and these countries, previously lacking cities, entered the era of modern urbanization with large-sized cities.

The new forms of production, resulting from the technological revolution, couldn't take root in any environment other than that of large urban centers; moreover, modernization, which reaches even the most remote regions of countries, acts as a trigger for migrations that support the demographic growth of the better-located urban areas.

The revolution in needs and tastes spread quickly all over the planet, resulting in a new demand profile; however, production couldn’t keep up with this pace

everywhere. This is due to differences in conditions between countries and explains the respective position of national metropolises.

The other countries, those whose industrialization only started or developed after World War II, generally have incomplete metropolitan areas. The reason for this still has to be found in the historical moment that marked their takeoff effort. When the process of industrialization happens within a global economy dominated by economic superpowers, through the trio of big international companies, cutting-edge technology, and advertising meant to push a certain way of consuming, countries that start industrializing face tough conditions; their dependence on the outside world is why their main cities end up being incomplete.

It also happens that, in industrialized underdeveloped countries, there are incomplete metropolises that depend on the complete internal metropolis. In the second case, the dependence is on a foreign metropolis.

Cities share the same historical origin. The demands of modern production drove the creation of industrial clusters in places where local conditions were favorable, anywhere in the world, thanks to the huge transportation and communication facilities.

The new economic conditions are also responsible for other types of complexes, like those for leisure, healing or rest, and education...

Incomplete cities and metropolises have in common the lack of autonomy in carrying out their basic activities. Surely, there are differences in the degree and also in the nature of dependence, but this dependence is the common feature.

Without a doubt, the full-fledged metropolises of underdeveloped countries also rely on foreign support, and it's already been said that the more industrialized an underdeveloped country is, the more dependent it will be. However, if we consider the responses required by the national economy within the country itself, it quickly becomes clear that full-fledged metropolises are capable of producing the goods needed for the growth of the incomplete metropolises in the same country (the difference compared to developed countries being that there, full-fledged metropolises can support both the incomplete metropolises in their own country and those abroad), since incomplete metropolises don't have a comparable level of industrialization. This comes along, in the case of incomplete metropolises, with the lack of complementarity of high-level activities and their disconnection within the city, trends that are even more noticeable because they are often linked to the formation of monopolies. The slowdown

in urban and national economic growth comes as a consequence. There are also consequences in the spatial dimension.

The incomplete metropolises and their connections

It seems useful to us to distinguish incomplete metropolises according to two main criteria. The first considers whether or not a complete metropolis exists in the country itself; the second is related to the processes that oversaw the country's industrialization. The operating conditions of incomplete metropolises vary depending on these factors.

In a country that has an industrial metropolis, the dependency relationships it has with other cities, including the incomplete metropolises, end up contributing to the growth of the whole, even if, for the moment, regional imbalances worsen or arise. The privileged relationships between complete and incomplete metropolises drive a considerable flow of all kinds of movements, and also affect less important cities.

The phenomenon is different in the case of the external complementarity of an incomplete national metropolis. As a dominated city, it is forced to export a part of its accumulation that it cannot multiply locally far away, and in this way, it contributes to the growth of the dominant economy.

From a more strictly spatial perspective, the differences are also significant. The industrial metropolis organizes, or tries to organize, all the national space that it can put at its service thanks to a superior economic position. The other cities in the system, therefore, depend on the metropolis as a whole regarding most of the solutions they themselves are not able to provide to local residents and activities or to those in their region of influence. In the case of an incomplete national metropolis, territorial integration, as well as significant centralization, seems impossible. A strong political role can, without a doubt, give the city a remarkable concentration of activities, but it is unlikely that this can happen without territorial integration and industrialization.

Only countries that met the conditions to create a significant transportation network even before they industrialized escape this rule, but from this point of view, they themselves are exceptional, like certain oil-producing countries, for example. The modern organization of space for commercial agriculture is rarely dense and complete

enough to allow the country's capital to dominate indisputably, unless roads and railways all converge on the port-capital city created at the same time.

Regarding the processes that led to the country's industrialization, they also appear as an essential element for explanation. Some underdeveloped countries, which started an import substitution process early, manage to gradually reach and surpass various levels of industrialization, although the pace of industrial growth is not necessarily the same for different cities in the system. If favorable conditions come together, one of these cities can become a fully developed metropolis, while others evolve into incomplete metropolises or simply regional cities. In countries with recent industrialization, that is, carried out according to a modern technological model, the conditions favor the already important central areas of the country or points in the territory where fixed external economies determine the locations.

Old and gradual industrialization has a very different meaning from recent industrialization, whether in terms of employment, migrations, the relative importance of centers, or the process of national development.

If industrialization as well as modernization is already old, the industry would have created, in turn, in the early stages of its establishment, a significant number of jobs, a number that becomes even more impactful if we consider that, at that time, rural migration had not yet reached large proportions. Since transportation and communication were still precarious and technological advances less widespread, cities farther from the center were able to develop industries that met regional demand. This contributed, in a way, to strengthening spatial ties on a regional scale; thus, these cities could absorb part of the rural surplus, whose integration was facilitated by the reasons already mentioned. When the country had to face the new demands of modernization, the system of cities was less affected by the centralizing push that was unleashed.

The process is different in countries where industrialization is late or where modernization arises suddenly. The industry is already born unable to provide a large number of jobs, the most recent modernizations, supported by effective means of communication and transportation, spread intensely throughout the nation and cause a rapid rural exodus, whose flow is discharged right into the main city. Here, alongside an ultramodern industry and other activities of the same era, the stream of new urban residents feeds a variety of new trades that multiply tasks to accommodate more people in work and to become more accessible to low-income consumers. Since

regional and local cities no longer have a developed and significant tertiary sector, it's in the “single” city that the conditions are gathered for boosting the activity of modern economic sectors, while at the same time it is forced to house the largest mass of activities from the non-modern sectors.

When industrialization is accompanied by the formation of monopolies, the selectivity of consumption, once established, tends to lead to a more pronounced concentration of modern activities: Outside the center, it’s hard to reach the scale needed for setting up many activities. This further contributes to the outsourcing of all clusters. Except for productions that benefit from location advantages, these clusters industrialize through a process of gradually replacing imports from the center, which resembles what we described regarding early-industrialized underdeveloped countries.

Intercity relations are, therefore, dominated by cumulative growth in the center, alongside a worsening disparity in growth between the incomplete national-capital metropolis and the other cities in the system, both economically and spatially, at least when it comes to the modern sector, since the respective firms rarely generate efficient downstream effects.

As for the under-equipped or outdated sector, it isn’t set up to promote interurban relations. Its advantage lies in easily communicating with the surrounding regions, thus serving as a support structure for uprooted people from rural areas and the underdeveloped urban population who haven't yet moved to the center. This important benefit, achieved through medium-sized cities within a national system led by an incomplete metropolis, can’t offset the reality of a slowed overall growth or the prospect of a bottleneck if the limits of the non-modern sector are exceeded, and if the modern sector, which doesn’t interact with the other circuit, finds itself blocked or about to be; or if its growth slows down for the same reasons.

The joints of the cities

As for the cities, we will limit ourselves to quickly examining the typical cases related to their accessibility. The results differ depending on whether the cities are

close to the country's dynamic center or far from it, and whether the production in question is at a higher or lower level compared to the rest of the regional activities.

The distance from dynamic centers hinders or makes complementarities and exchanges difficult. As a result, it's not uncommon for the city to act like an enclave, which negatively affects the national growth process. The same applies to the level of activities, whenever, due to a high technological level or a different nature of the activity, the city is neither complementary to nor complemented by other local activities, or doesn't act as a multiplier.

The results, in the medium term, vary depending on the size and characteristics of the population, which are not directly affected by the local activity processes, since the city's demographic conditions are themselves a consequence of the economic and spatial system that existed before the city's development.

Anyway, cities with a dominant function have a very limited spatial reach and play a fairly small regional role. However, in terms of organizing national space, cities have an important influence because they redirect in their favor the forces of territorial infrastructure, and the stronger the economic activity, the more powerful this effect. This means that the organization of national space is often shaped by foreign interests, even if it is funded directly or indirectly by the national community, which in turn has consequences, even if it's a national industrial metropolis that drives the city's activity.

Problems posed by incomplete cities

Considered from the perspective of national development, incomplete cities thus pose serious problems for underdeveloped countries. They undoubtedly contribute to a certain form of overall economic growth, but their contribution to structural changes is not negligible; this contribution can have an even more negative impact than if the country's modernization had been more brutal and rapid alongside more recent industrialization.

The presence of metropolises or incomplete cities implies, therefore, a series of problems for a country. We can then suggest a broad classification of

underdeveloped countries, depending on whether they have complete metropolises or not. This is quite valid from a national development point of view.

The situation described, therefore, calls for a solution. This can be found either within the same political framework or through more or less deep institutional changes. It's quite clear that the first approach turns out to be slower and harder, or even impossible in many cases, given the solidarity of the system's elements. In any case, the problem of the possibilities for national development based on the privileged growth of the economy comes to be fundamental.

The analysis of current situations in Third World countries shows that the recent acceleration of modernization usually leads to a considerable productivity gap compared to less modern or non-modern activities, this gap being responsible for serious economic and social problems. The outbreak of internal migrations, worsened by underemployment, is among the notable consequences of the imbalance created in this way. The change in the profile of the urban system, with the worsening of distortions in interurban relationships, as well as in the relationships between cities and their reference spaces, is another serious consequence, especially since the changes in the conditions for producing and distributing goods end up affecting the relative importance of smaller cities, making them more vulnerable. This amounts to a strengthening of the center, even for basic supplies, and, consequently, to an intensification of the modern sector, and again, to the worsening of distortions on the economic and spatial levels. In this way, we are, day by day, further from a desired solution.

An appropriate approach to growth cannot, therefore, ignore the concrete analysis of traditional or non-modern sectors of the economy, with the aim of allowing them to participate in the urban, regional, and national economy, not only as a means of survival for impoverished masses but also as a growth factor. Now, the big problem is that these less modern, or even traditional sectors, work with statistically high capital productivity simply because they almost have none of it, but with very low labor productivity, which affects the entire economic society.

If we agree with Gunnar Myrdal and other economists that productivity is ultimately responsible for growth, we can't imagine a growth model based solely on the expansion of the traditional sector, nor can that sector achieve growth just by increasing production volumes without higher incomes. So, we see a solution in gradually implementing small and medium activities, with types of production that

involve or resemble modern models. The so-called traditional sector would be absorbed without friction, while the economic society would adopt modern forms of production, yet still providing jobs. The main problem remains finding the right location in the so-called economic space, which is essential for success. It's clear that we're still far from establishing the theoretical foundations for such an operation. For a long time, economic analysis neglected the entirety of the economies of developed countries and put too much focus on everything related to the modern sector. Looking at the problems posed by incomplete cities helps us better pinpoint the serious shortcomings of urban economic theory when it comes to poor countries.