

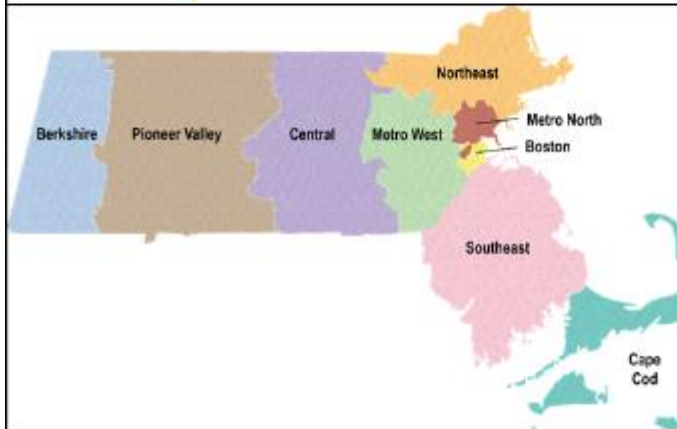
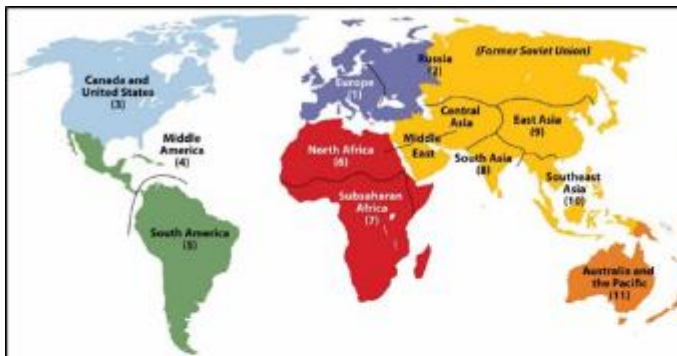
Region: An area characterized by similarity or by cohesiveness that sets it apart from other areas.

Regional Identity: An awareness of being a part of a group of people living in a culture region.



The Middle East (sometimes also called Southwest Asia) is an area frequently referred to as a “cohesive region” ... not “cohesive” in terms of politics, but very much so in terms of culture. In this case, we are looking at several different characteristics that are found throughout the area (and are different from those areas outside of here)... this is a “formal region”. As shown by the fact that you can find a MacDonalD’s almost anywhere in the world now... so research argues that many parts of the world are losing their distinctive “regional flavor” (There is a book titled “The MacDonalDization of the World!”)...





Formal regions are difficult to put boundaries around... it depends a lot on what characteristic or set of characteristics you are using to define the region. All of the above are examples of formal regions, at different scales... in a city (example at lower right), neighborhoods are regions within the city.

The four images on the left are examples of formal regions that we can easily understand – they are in common use.

The two images at right are also formal regions. In the “green” image, this is an “urban region” – known as Megalopolis or BosWash (standing for the urban area stretching from north of Boston to south of Washington DC). The “cohesive characteristic” in that case is the level of urban development, often reflected in the population density.

The far right image looks at language as a characteristic that is found throughout the Sea Islands off the South Carolina and Georgia coastline. “Gullah” was a language spoken here from the early days of the slave trade until the mid-1900s. Gullah is a “creole” language – a combination of several African languages and English. Gullah today is considered a “dead language” ... after World War II, the Sea Islands were connected to the mainland with bridges, and Gullah became a barrier to life rather than a way of life.

Functional Regions

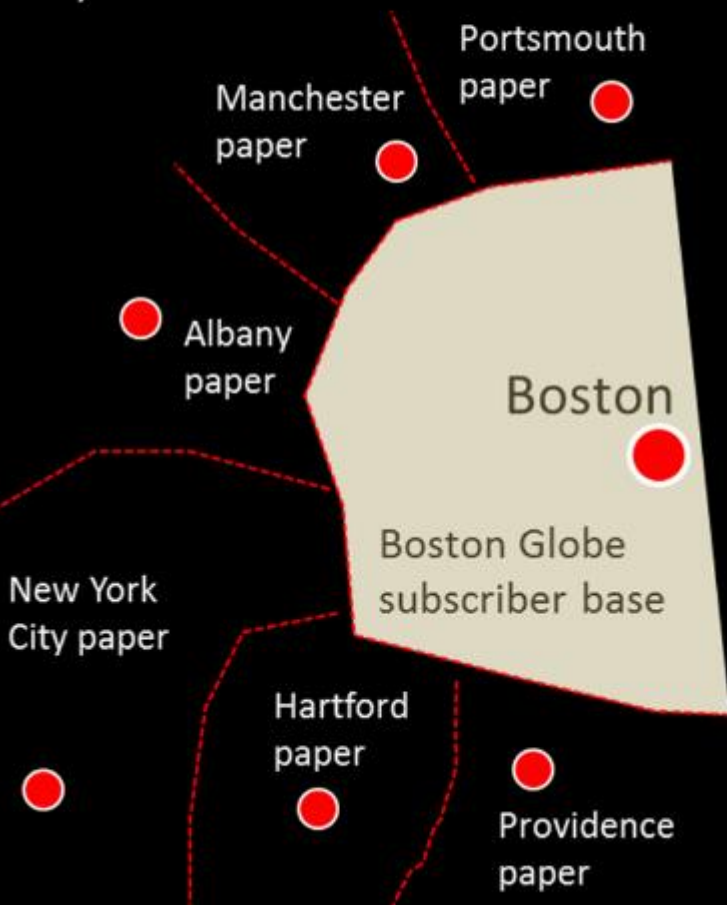
→ Economic and information transactions or exchanges between a node or central place and the hinterland (surrounding area)

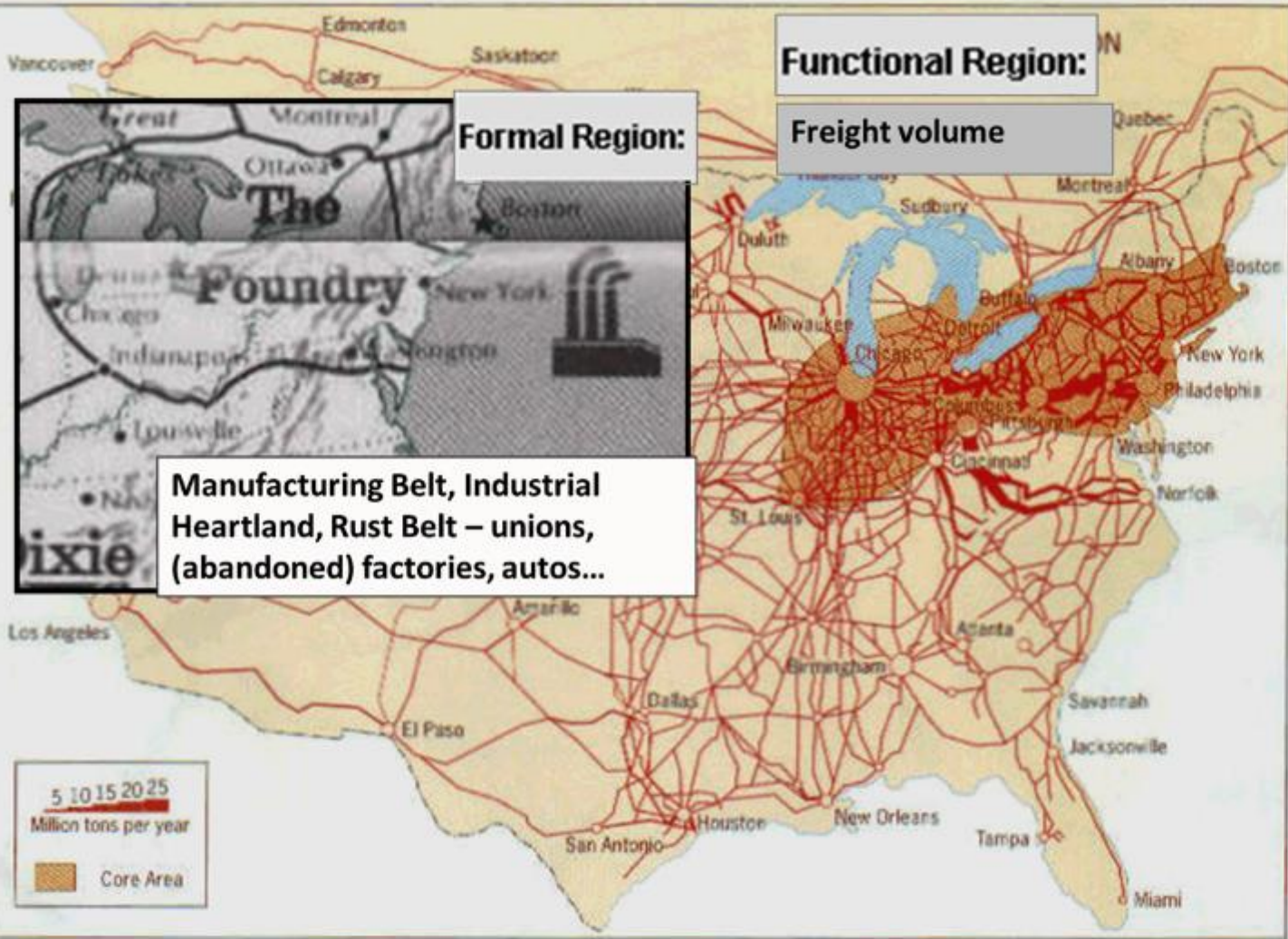
We also can create what are known as “functional regions.” Functional regions are based on economic or information flows from a central place or “node” to the surrounding area.

Newspaper subscriptions are one good way to image a functional region. For example, the “node” of Boston is where the Boston Globe is published, and for quite some distance outward into the surrounding area (the “hinterland”), the Globe is the main major newspaper that people subscribe to. But at some point... you will find that a different paper is the main source of news, not the Globe.

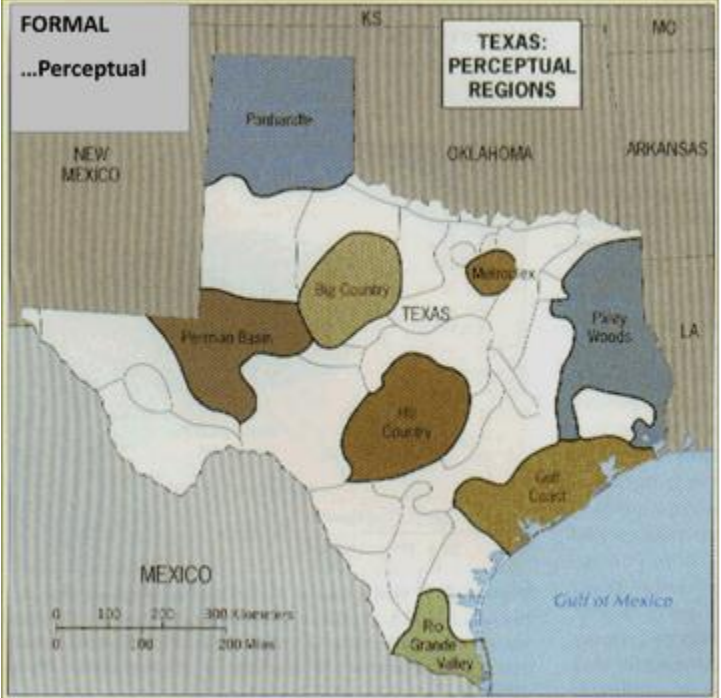
Commuting patterns are also a way to define a functional region, as a lot of people commute from homes in the suburbs to work places in the city... strange, perhaps, but this would be considered an economic flow!

Major Airlines also define functional regions. When you fly somewhere, you often have to stop at another airport first, then continue on to your destination – you may even have to change planes. Airlines create “hub” airports to collect as many passengers into that node as possible, and then transfer them back out. If done properly, this should all service from the major hub airports (the nodes) to the smaller airports in the surrounding area (in the hinterland) with planes that are fuller.

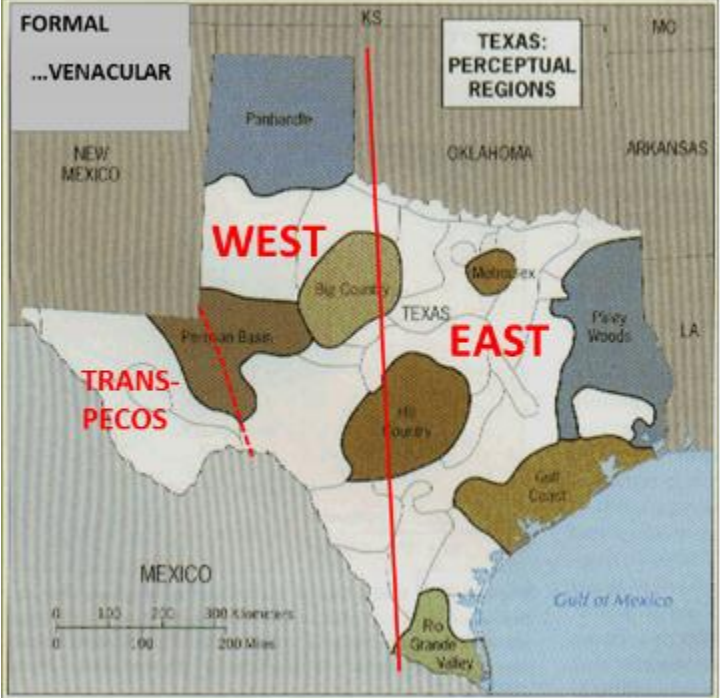




Sometimes, we can see that a functional region and a formal region are very similar. In the cases above, the functional region on the larger map is defined by freight flows (the larger and more complex network of red lines indicates the higher freight volumes in the shaded area). If we were also to look at a part of the US defined by where most of our manufacturing was located between 1850 and 1950, we would find that it overlaps with the functional region of freight movement. This makes sense – one reason why the freight volumes in this area are higher than everywhere else is because this is the “Manufacturing Belt” – it is where the US Industrial Revolution took place. The West was not yet settled much until after the war, and the South was held back from development during the period of slavery, the Civil War and the Reconstruction Era afterwards (which lasted until the mid-1880s). By the time that the South could have been part of the Industrial Revolution, the rail networks and the location of industry were too highly developed in the Northeast and Midwest. Neither the South nor the West saw any significant industrial development until after World War II.



Most formal regions are “perceptual” regions – how we define them is often how we perceive them. Perceptual regions in general are often defined by people living outside that region. At left top, the map of Texas has several regions noted, all defined by someone living outside the area (and in this case, outside of Texas). In the case of the “Piney Woods” region, this area is characterized by the landscape – lots of pine trees (this is the wettest part of Texas, in terms of annual rainfall). The Metroplex is the urban region of Dallas-Fort Worth. The Panhandle... more obvious, perhaps – it’s that part of the state that sticks up at the top, often referred to geographically as a “panhandle.”



The map at the bottom is a special type of perceptual region, known as a “vernacular region.” A vernacular region is defined by those who live there (“insiders”). In the case of Texas, while some of the regions noted above may also be called that by Texans, Texans also have another distinction – the difference between East Texas and West Texas. This comes about in part because of population and weather differences. The East Texas is wetter, greener... and a LOT more populated (about 3/4 of Texans live in the eastern half of the state. As a result, most of the political power in the state is in the east – eastern voters tend to control the state legislature, most government agencies, and, usually, the governor’s office. Western Texans live in a very dry area where life is already difficult, and as far as most of them are concerned, often made more difficult by decisions made by the state government (controlled by eastern voters). This is Ranching country, and that part of Texas where real cowboys are from (at least as far as most West Texans are concerned).

In the far west is another part of West Texas, the Trans-Pecos region. It requires more than 100 acres of land to support 1 cow... this area is high, arid desert, with very few people in it. That far western tip of Texas is where the city of El Paso is. Neighboring El Paso is Hudspeth County. Hudspeth county is about the same size as Connecticut in land area. Connecticut has over 3 million people living in the state... there are barely more than 2500 people in all of Hudspeth County (the largest town, Sierra Blanca, has only 650 people in it).