

## DEMOGRAPHIA



### BARCELONA: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population	4,500,000	Detroit, Belo Horizonte, Guangzhou, Cape Town
Urbanized Area* Population	3,900,000	
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	270	Rochester, Tucson, Mumbai, Manchester
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	700	
Population per Square Mile	14,400	Madrid, Budapest, Santiago, Hiroshima
Population per Square Kilometer	5,600	
*Continuously built up area		

23 May 2004

There are few urban areas in the world as attractively sited as Barcelona. The core city and inner suburbs are nestled along the Mediterranean coast of Catalonia, in front of a small mountain range just long enough to form a barrier separating them from the sprawling northern suburbs. The central city itself has approximately 1,500,000 residents, down more than 300,000 in barely a quarter of a century, qualifying Barcelona for one of the world's fastest population loss rates. Of course, this decline has occurred as Spain in general and Catalonia in particular have gained substantially in per capita income, with the inevitable result that people buy cars and move to the suburbs.

But still, the core area is one of Europe's most dense. The city itself has a population density of nearly 40,000 per square mile. But honors for the highest density go to inner suburban L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, with approximately 250,000 people living at a density of 50,000 per square mile. The other inner suburbs of Badonia, Cornellà and Santa Coloma combine with Barcelona and L'Hospitalet de Llobregat to form a core of 2,200,000 with a population density of 38,000 --- one of the most dense European cores, though well below that of Paris.

But outside the core, things look much different. There another 1,700,000 people live, at densities averaging somewhat more than Los Angeles suburbs. To the west of the city is the international airport and communities stretching along the coast and inland. North of the city are attractive residential areas to and between the mountains, and beyond that, to the north, northwest and northeast, sprawling residential and commercial areas. Suburban neighborhoods often look similar to the Spanish style housing found in the hills of Orange County or other Los Angeles suburbs.

Overall, however, Barcelona is among the most dense urban areas in the high-income world. Paris, with approximately 70,000 per square mile in its core, is less than 10,000 per square mile throughout the urban area. Barcelona is a least 40 percent higher than this, at a density slightly

above either Madrid or Seville. Despite its suburbs that stretch all the way to Montserrat, overall this urban area may be Western Europe's most dense urban area.

Wholesale distribution and commercial office facilities line the A-7 Autoroute, which traverses the area from southwest to northeast through the northern suburbs on the way between Valencia and Marseille. In a country with one of the best non-toll freeway systems in the world, the A-7 (and others) is a toll road. But like in France, within the urban areas there are no tolls. This assists in making the urban areas more efficient, as people of all income groups can access jobs throughout the urban area.

The highway A-7 is in the process of being expanded to four full freeway roadways, similar to the MacDonal Cartier beltway north of Toronto. From the city and the A-7, freeways radiate further into the next range of mountains, bringing with them the inevitable retail shopping malls and new single family dwellings. The mountainous backdrop of some suburbs, such as Montserrat, behind El Bruc is spectacular. So far, however, the suburbanization appears to be limited to the front of the second range of mountains. The first range, behind Barcelona is ringed by freeways with other roads operating in tunnels below. The mountain range itself has a large largely undeveloped area, similar in size to Griffith Park in Los Angeles.

But beyond the tunnels and passes are areas well suited for additional exurban development as the unsustainably high densities of the core are eroded away by people who increasingly have the money to live the more suburban lifestyle they prefer. Europeans seem to like their more privacy and larger living quarters just as much as Canadians and Americans.

One of the city's leading tourist attractions is the Holy Family Church (Sagrada Familia). As a devotee of genuine Gothic architecture, I find the structure wholly unpleasing. But then, architecture is a matter of taste.

The planners have had a pleasing influencing on much of the core, where the corners of intersections do not meet at the usual 90 degree angles. Instead, it is as if a diagonal box-cut was taken out of each intersection, so that there is a 45 degree angle on each corner, with building frontages so shaped (picture). Architectural associates indicate that the terms for this are "chanflans" in Spanish and "Xanfrans" in Catalan. One consequence of this is design that there is plenty of additional room in most intersections for double parking and other illegal parking, opportunities that are eagerly taken advantage of by the locals.

In the northeastern corner of the city there is substantial redevelopment, as officials seek to develop what appears to be a walking and transit city within the city. There is an under-construction copy of London's soon to open Gherkin, together with the obligatory light rail line. In the center of the main boulevard is a pedestrian area wide enough to accommodate four or perhaps even six lanes of traffic. Cars, which apparently local officials prefer to pretend do not exist, are crowded into two lanes in each direction on each side of the thoroughfare. This kind of mindless ideology is to be found all across Europe, where planners seem determined to make traffic worse and intensify air pollution.

To the ultimate detriment of the city, trying to drive out the cars without driving out the people is a difficult task. Yes, new urbanists from around the world will come to "ooh and aah" Barcelona's new development. But there is much more than meets the eye. What they won't see, is the households that anti-mobility policies drive to the suburbs, and the jobs that follow them.













## PICTURES

Shopping Center  
Doubling Freeway Capacity  
Suburban Housing  
Suburban Housing  
Family Visiting Under Construction House  
Commercial Development Along the A-7  
"Xanfrans" in Central Barcelona  
Barcelona's "Gherkin"  
View toward City of Barcelona  
*(Most suburbs are behind the hills)*

By Wendell Cox

Return: [www.demographia.com/rac-ix.htm](http://www.demographia.com/rac-ix.htm)

Home: [www.demographia.com](http://www.demographia.com)