

Introduction

Researchers, policy makers and analysts often need to differentiate between rural and urban areas. Broadly speaking, urban areas are areas where most of the population is located, and rural areas are the opposite. But, in order to conduct proper analysis and draw conclusions, a more detailed definition is required. In this report, I will be describing and mapping the standard definition provided by Statistics Canada along with 5 other alternatives Statistics Canada described in a 2002 report entitled "Definitions of Rural" (du Plessis et al, 2002), attempting to provide researchers with a visual guide for defining urban and rural areas.

Census Rural Areas

This is the standard definition provided by Statistics Canada – **Population living outside POPCTRs** (areas with population larger than 1000 or areas with a density of 400 people per KM² or more). One issue we can see is a lack of degree of rurality: rural areas outside Toronto are defined the same as rural areas outside of towns in Northern Ontario.

Rural and Small Town (RST)

RSTs are defined as areas outside of Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and Census Agglomeration Areas (CAs). CMAs are defined as areas with an urban core population of at least 10,000, including all neighboring CSDs from which 50% or more of the employed labor force commutes to the urban core, and at least 25% of the employed labor force commutes from the urban core to the CSD. This type of definition is useful for labor market analysis, as mentioned by du Plessis (2002). This map (Figure 2) is not as patchy as Map 1 and has fewer but larger urban areas.

OECD Rural Communities

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an international economic organization, has a global definition for rural communities: population in communities with less than 150 people per KM². When applied to Canada, communities are defined as Census Consolidated Subdivisions (CCSs), which are made up of generalized census subdivisions, combining smaller dense subdivisions with larger rural subdivisions. The map (Figure 3) is quite different, with only two cities in Northern Ontario being urban: Thunder Bay and Sault Ste Marie. Also, Areas that are just outside of the Toronto Downtown Core are considered rural.

OECD Predominantly Rural Regions

Another OECD classification divides CDs into three categories:

- Predominantly Rural Regions – more than 50% of the population living in a rural community (CCS)
- Intermediate regions – between 15% and 50% live in a rural community.
- Predominantly Urban Regions – less than 15% live in a rural community.

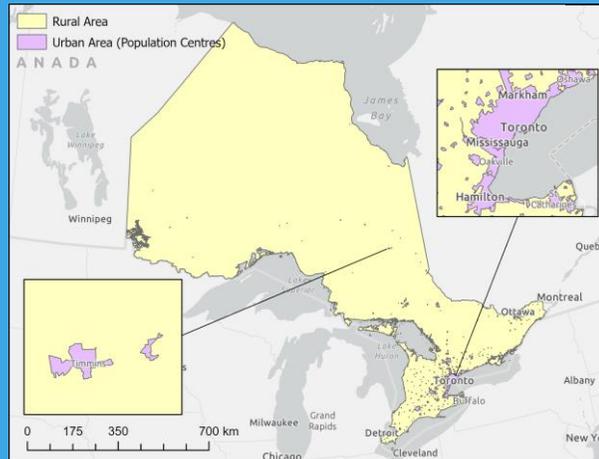


Figure 1 Census Rural Areas, as defined by Statistics Canada (population living outside population centers)

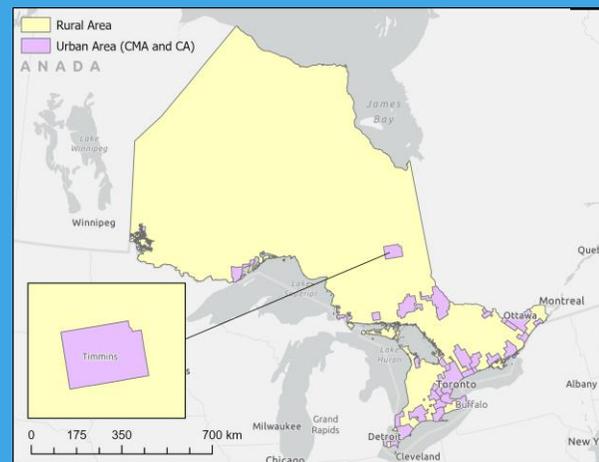


Figure 2 Rural and Small Town (RST), defined as Non-Census Metropolitan Areas or Census Agglomeration Areas

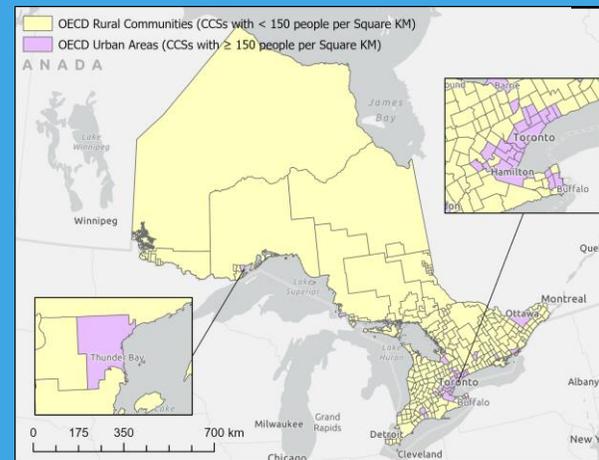


Figure 3 OECD Rural Communities (Census Consolidates Subdivisions with less than 150 people per KM²)

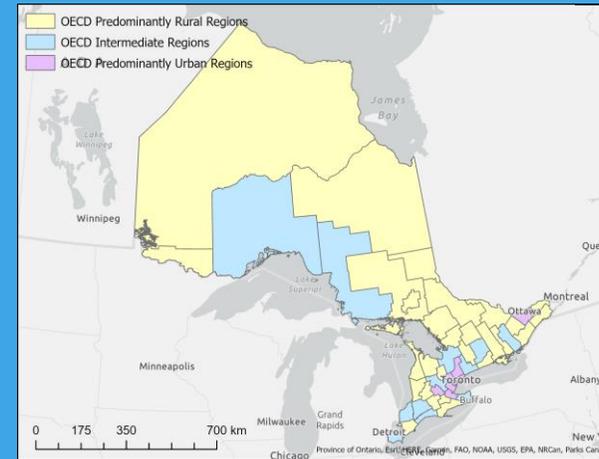


Figure 4 OECD Predominantly Rural Regions (Census Divisions in which more than 50% of the population living in a rural CCS)

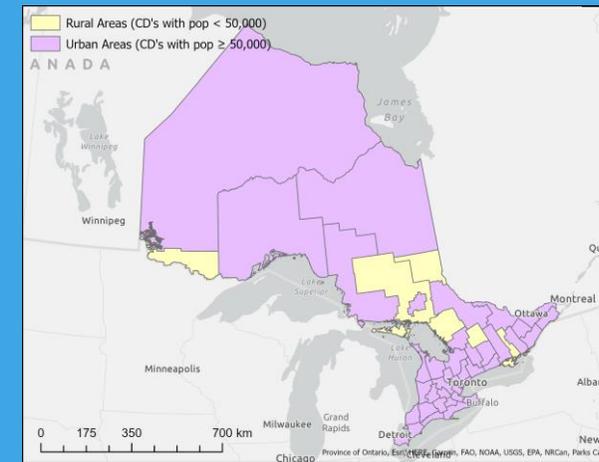


Figure 5 Rurality defined as Non-Metropolitan Regions – Census Divisions with less than 50,000 people

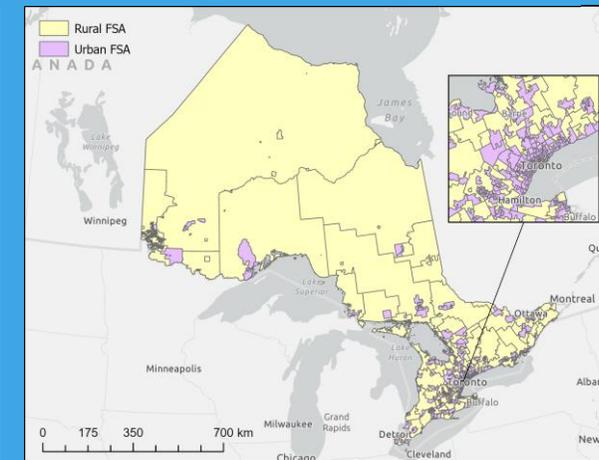


Figure 6 Rurality as defined by Forward Sortation Areas (a 0 in the second digit of the FSA code)

Urban area locations (Figure 4) are spatially similar to those in the previous OECD definition, but here we also have Intermediate regions, allowing for some more flexibility, rather than having a black and white definition of rural vs urban.

Non-Metropolitan Regions

This definition is also based on CDS. Rural communities are defined as CD's with less than 50,000 people and with no urban settlements of 2500 people or more. This was mapped using graduated colors with two classes and 50,000 population as the cutoff for urban vs rural. Then, I checked whether population centers exist (although those have a minimum of 1000 people) in each the rural CD's. None were found, but if there were any, they would be further explored and possibly considered urban.

Forward Sortation Area (FSA)

The final definition is based on FSAs. An FSA is the first 3 characters of a Canadian postal code. The second digit of an FSA identifies whether it is rural or urban – with 0 being rural, and anything else being urban. Unfortunately, there was no information available on how this was coded. This map (Figure 6) is quite patchy, with rural areas existing within urban areas in downtown Toronto.

Urban Area Coverage

To highlight the disappearances between the definition, total urban area coverage was calculated for each (Table 1).

Definition	Urban Area Coverage
Census Rural Areas	0.69%
Rural and Small Town (RST)	6.21%
OECD Rural Communities	1.42%
OECD Predominantly Rural Regions	1.1%
Nom-Metropolitan Regions	89.72%
Forward Sortation Area (FSA)	4.73%

Conclusion

As the maps in this project have demonstrated, there are many ways of defining rurality, all resulting in different sizes and distributions of rural and urban areas, with an urban coverage ranging from 0.69% to 89.72%. Researchers, Policy Makers and market analysts should all make important considerations regarding the research question being studied before choosing or coming up with a definition of rurality.

References

1. du Plessis, V., Beshiri, R., & Bollman, R. D. (2002). Definitions of "Rural." Agriculture and Rural Working Paper Series, 21-601-MIE(061).
2. Government of Canada, S. C. (2019, November 13). 2016 Census Boundary files. Retrieved from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/geo/bound-limit/bound-limit-2016-eng.cfm>
3. Government of Canada, S. C. (2017, February 08). Population Centre and Rural Area Classification 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/subjects/standard/pcrac/2016/introduction>