

Exploring the requirement for Place-Specific Geodemographic Classifications

An accurate understanding of area characteristics is critical in making informed decisions for the public and private sectors. This is particularly true at a time where the promotion of data-led strategies across both sectors is on the rise.

Geodemographic classifications present a popular framework for sorting populations based on distinguishing features, highlighting socio-spatial patterns. Evidence increasingly suggests that traditional methods of generating classifications at a national extent do not always appropriately represent local-level structures. Instead, locally specific attributes may be smoothed out and crucial granular insights lost. Previous studies highlighting and addressing these concerns have proposed place-specific classifications as an alternative. Place-specific classification is currently in its infancy, with initial applications re-applying national-level methodologies to a filtered subset of the data notably for the city of London (UK).

This research initially explores the same approach for a second English city, Leeds, to investigate whether this regional city exhibits specific local structures. Then, latent variable models are employed to compare the underlying structures of 10 English cities. Variation in the characteristics driving population composition within each is demonstrated and the universality of area attributes is brought into question.

The results suggest a need for place-specific classifications, illustrating that the process of classification development should be extended to incorporate place-specific selection of input variables to appropriately reflect the bespoke complexities of twenty-first century cities. We outline ongoing collaborative research which uses this insight to develop a data-driven bespoke city-specific classification for the City of Leeds.