

What is a rural region? A comparative study on Eurostat data and methods for rural areas delimitation

Delimitation of rural (and urban) areas has been in the scope of many scholars and experts for decades. In the European context, there already exist typologies of rural and urban areas using administrative units or regular population grids. Moreover, the definition of rural and/or urban areas vary from one European country to another, which makes the situation even more complicated. Hence, it is essential to delimit rural (and urban) areas accurately, since EU and national funding represents significant support (in terms of absolute numbers) for such areas.

This study assesses three aspects of rural areas delimitation. First, we compare different methodological approaches of rural-urban typology on both European and national level. We pinpoint the specific examples (extremes and paradoxes) in those approaches to demonstrate the complexity of rural-urban areas delimitation. Second, we touch Eurostat statistical data availability at LAU 2 level, more specifically, we present issues raised during joining attribute and spatial data - from timely issues, through different coding systems, to overall coherence of data. Last, we introduce a novel approach using fuzzy theory to model urban and rural areas. Based on our previous research, fuzzy arithmetics is applied to communes units (LAU 2 level) in Europe in order to estimate their degree of rurality. In sum, this contribution shed light on the question posed in its title (what is a rural region?) and presents the most significant findings of the research.

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