

What is rural?

What is policy?

What is rural policy?

What is comparative rural policy?

ICRPS

International Comparative Rural Policy Seminar

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Outline

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What is rural?

- Discussion:
 - Measures of density / Measures of distance-to-density
 - For research / analytic purposes
 - Thresholds for statistical tables / target groups for policy programs

What about the non-spatial characteristics of “rural”?

What is policy?

What is rural policy?

What is development policy?

What is rural development policy?

What is an indicator?

What is a rural indicator?

Summary

Key points

Rurality is a spatial concept

There are two dimensions that define rurality

Density (population size) and Distance-to-density

All other features of rural populations are what you find when you get there

Select thresholds of D and D2D for:

Statistical tabulations

Policy/program target clients

Rural policy is the attention to D and D2D for each and every policy proposal (rural lens / rural proofing)

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Summary

What is rural?

- **Density and distance-to-density**
 - **Not much of the former and a lot of the latter**
 - World Bank. (2009) **Reshaping Economic Geography** (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, World Development Report).
 - Reimer, Bill and Ray D. Bollman. (2010) “Understanding Rural Canada: Implications for Rural Development Policy and Rural Planning Policy.” Chapter 1 in David J.A. Douglas (ed.) **Rural Planning and Development in Canada**. (Toronto: Nelson Education Ltd.) (<http://www.uoguelph.ca/fare/FARE-talk/BOOK-Chapter-1-Bill-and-Ray-NEL-DOUGLAS-09-0405-001.pdf>).
 - Bollman, Ray D. and Bill Reimer (in review) “What is rural? What is rural policy? What is rural development policy? Chapter 1 in Vittuari, M., J. Devlin, M. Pagani and T.G. Johnson (ed.) **The Routledge Handbook of Comparative Rural Policy** (London: Routledge).

The Two Dimensions of Rurality: Density and Distance to Density

	Index of rurality in the DENSITY dimension (from lower rurality (i.e. higher density) to higher rurality (i.e. lower density))									
Index of rurality in the DISTANCE dimension (from lower rurality (i.e. shorter distance) to higher rurality (i.e. longer distance))	10 {low rurality, high density}	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100 (high rurality, low density)
10 {low rurality, short distance}										
20										
30										
40										
50										
60										
70										
80										
90										
100 {high rurality, long distance}										

Small town near to metro centre;
“very” metro re: labour markets
“very” rural re: population density

Big town far from metro centre;
Only “town” jobs – no metro jobs here
But quite urban in population density

The Two Dimensions of Rurality: Density and Distance to Density

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100 {high rurality, long distance}										

For everyone in any given cell in this grid, they face the same “prices” in terms of

- the “price” of (lower) density and / or
- the “price” of (longer) distances

What is rural?

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**For everyone in any given cell in this grid,
they face the same prices (advantages / disadvantages)
in terms of**

- **the price of low(er) density (e.g. lack of agglomeration economies)**
and / or
- **the price of long(er) distances (e.g. access to higher-order services;
access to a larger market)**

AND

**these prices will drive (enhance, constrain) behaviour / outcomes
THEN,**

- **within each cell, one will find:**
 - **different perceptions of identity;**
 - **different social constructions of rurality, etc.**

HOWEVER,

- **everyone within a cell will face the same “prices” of (lower)
density and / or (longer) distances-to-density**

What is rural?

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For everyone in any given cell in this grid,
they face the same prices (advantages / disadvantages)
in terms of

- the price of low(er) density (e.g. lack of agglomeration economies)

- On the role of agglomeration economies, I am reminded of the anecdote from Adam Smith (1776):
 - “ *entrepreneurs preferred to start their business in the high rent / high wage location of London rather than the low rent / low wage location of northern Scotland.*”

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For research / analytic purposes:

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There is a continuum:

- from low density (“rural”) to high density (“urban” or “metro”); and a continuum
- from long distance-to-density (“remote”) to short distance-to-density (“urban-adjacent” or “metro-adjacent”).
- Thus, we would search for a continuous variable (such as an index from 1 to 100) to assign to each study observation.

Thresholds for statistical tables / target groups for policy programs

We want to classify people / firms / organizations according to their geographic dimensions.

- We do not want to classify people according to the land or landscape.
- The characteristics of people / firms / organizations in rural areas is not what defines rurality.
 - These characteristics describe who we find in each cell in the grid of Figure 1.

Analysts face two challenges:

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- **as an analytic variable for research purposes,**
 - **how does one measure “density” and**
 - **how does one measure “distance-to-density”****when explaining the behaviour of individuals (or enterprises or institutions, etc.).**
- **In most cases, we would be searching for**
 - **a continuous measure of the degree of density and**
 - **a continuous measure of the degree of distance-to-density; and**
- **as a classification variable for preparing statistical tables and for targeting government programs for specific populations.**
 - **This is case of drawing horizontal lines and vertical lines on Figure 1.**
- **Most countries use density and some countries use distance-to-density to generate a protocol to classify their population as “rural” or “urban”.**

Research purposes

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- This is the case where analysts want to understand (and predict) the behaviour of individuals, enterprises and institutions.
- Alternatively, economic or social outcomes may be the subject under investigation.

- One might construct a simple model such as:

Behaviour = f {various **factors** that influence or determine behaviour}

or

Outcomes = f {various **factors** that influence or determine outcomes}.

- Q: how to measure the **rurality factors** that are hypothesised to influence behaviour (or outcomes):
 - Density as a “factor”; and
 - Distance-to-density as a “factor”.
- A: The answer, perhaps not surprisingly, is that it depends.

Research purposes

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- First, in most cases, we would want a **continuous** variable that measured the degree of rurality (i.e. the degree of density and the degree of distance-to-density).
- In most cases, we would not be looking at classification variable (such as rural vs urban or remote vs rural-metro-adjacent).
- The way one would measure **“density” would depend** whether one is studying
 - the presence (or access to) day-care or
 - the presence (access to) the market for selling a very specialized widget or
 - the presence (access to) a brain surgeon
- Similarly, the way we would measure **“distance to density” would also depend** upon the issue (day-care, selling a specialized widget, brain surgery).
- In many cases, it would be the economic “price” of traversing the distance.
- Canadian researchers might start with:
 - Alasia, Alessandro, Frédéric Bédard, Julie Bélanger, Eric Guimond and Christopher Penney. (2017) **Measuring remoteness and accessibility: A set of indices for Canadian communities** (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Centre for Special Business Projects, Reports on Special Business Projects, Catalogue no. 18-001-X) (<http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/olc-cel/olc.action?objId=18-001-X&objType=2&lang=en&limit=0>).
- Importantly, for some transactions, such as moving to the city to access a university, there are **also psychological, emotional, cultural and familial “prices” (some are positive and some are negative)** that are incurred by the individual involved in this decision. In addition, there are often psychological, emotional, cultural and familial “costs” (or “benefits”) born by others as a result of the decision by an individual.
- It is better to use the word “price” because the behaviour of individuals / firms / organizations is driven by the “price” that they incur. Many use the word “cost” in common conversation. However, we prefer to use “cost” when we include the “price” plus the value of any (positive or negative) externalities. For example, when one buys an item at a store, one pays the “price.” As an example, the negative externality of any pollution in the production process is (typically) not factored into the price. Thus, **we use “price” as the driver** of decisions of individuals / firms / organizations and **we use “costs” when we include the value of all externalities** attributable to these decisions.

Purposes of statistical tables or targeting government programs

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- This requires selecting thresholds for density and distance-to-density in Figure 1.
- One consideration is the nature of the geographic grid to be classified.
- The nature of the research or policy **question would determine** whether one would choose **the grid** unit to be a neighbourhood or community or administrative unit or region or
- The eligibility for government programs **need not be a yes<>no choice for rural<>urban jurisdictions**. Our dimensions of density and distance-to-density could be measured on a continuous scale (from 0% to 100% rurality in each dimension) and the degree of government support for any project could be adjusted by each degree of rurality such that jurisdictions for 100% rurality (or 'close' to 100% rurality) would receive the full allocation of available funding. Jurisdictions with a lower degree of rurality would then receive only a proportion of the available funding.

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Summary

What about the non-spatial characteristics of “rural”?

- **Individuals at any given location in Figure 1 will have many other factors that influence behaviour.**
 - **These are characteristics of individuals – these characteristics do not define the rurality of the individuals.**

The World Bank (2009, Chapter 3) acknowledged a third “D”, namely “division” which includes:

- **the thickness of borders (e.g. tariffs, non-tariff barriers) for the transfer of goods, services and people from one jurisdiction to another; and**
- **ethnic / cultural / language differences (“divisions”) that sometimes constrain the transfer of goods, services and people from one jurisdiction to another.**
 - **imagine a person standing outside a health centre in any cell of Figure 1 and being unable to access the health centre due to issues of skin colour or ethnicity, for example.**
- **In my view, “division” (as with all other characteristics of individuals in any given cell) will influence behaviour but density and distance-to-density remain as the two dimensions of “rurality”.**

Thus, access to services (or access to a market for one’s goods or services) is too often determined by more than density and distance-to-density.

- **However, the facts / dimensions of density and distance-to-density remain as the key rurality dimensions, in my view.**

What about the non-spatial characteristics of “rural”?

A feeling of rural or a rural **identity** or a rural ideology is an important feature that may influence behaviour within any cell of Figure 1.

- Again, the fact of density and distance-to-density remain as the key rurality dimensions, in my view.

The **resource base** will influence behaviour for each individual or organization in each cell of Figure 1.

- Examples include natural resources (e.g., a gold mine, agricultural land) or the presence of a built infrastructure (e.g. a regional college).

Finally, the concept of “rural” may viewed as a **social representation** or social construct.

- How people are represent themselves in “rural” geographic space or how people imagine themselves imagined in “rural” geographic space will influence behaviour
 - but the behaviour will necessarily be constrained (or advantaged) by the rurality dimensions of density and distance-to-density.
- Similarly, the behaviour of non-rural actors (policy makers, retailers, etc.) will be influenced by their representation / imagination of “rural” people **but the behaviour of individuals in each cell of Figure 1 will be influenced by their degree of rurality (i.e. density and distance-to-density).**

What about the non-spatial characteristics of “rural”?

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- **We suggest that rurality is density and distance-to-density**
- **And**
- **All hypothesized characteristics / typologies of rural is what you will find in each cell - - - when you get there.**
- **But**
- **These characteristics do not define rural, in my view.**

Density and distance to density

- **As “ICRPS-ers”, we may want to quiz ourselves during the next 2 weeks re: “what is rural about this issue”?**
- **Is this research outcome different in rural?**
- **What are the implications of “rurality” for this policy proposal?**

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Summary

Policy IS decisions

- *the lack of a decision IS a decision not to decide*
- *our focus is public policy*
 - *as opposed to private policy*

Policy Regulates Behaviours*

- ***“A policy is a relatively high level intention to act in particular ways.”***

* Rivers, Rod. (2016) **Policy Regulates Behaviours** (Blog posted to www.WellBeingAndControl.com on March 28th).

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But there is more!

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Summary

What is rural policy?

I C R P S

- Rural is density and distance to density
- Rural policy, by definition of “rural”, means that rural policy deals with:
 - “low population density” and / or
 - “long distance to population density.”
- Therefore, I would argue, analysts studying rural want to understand, for each policy issue, the role of:
 - the **price* of density**; and the role of
 - the **price* of distance-to-density**.

*For some discussions, “price” could be viewed as “advantages” and “disadvantages”.

What is rural policy?

I C R P S

- Rural is density and distance to density
 - Rural policy, by definition of “rural”, means that rural policy deals with:
 - “low population density” and / or
 - “long distance to population density.”
 - This implies “rural policy” constitutes a “rural lens” or “rural proofing” to ascertain:
 - the implications for density; and
 - the implications for distance-to-density
- for each policy proposal.**

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Summary

What is development policy?

- **Generally, the role of policy is to improve the well-being of citizens.**
- **There are various aspects of so-called development policy:**
 - **community development policy**
 - **social development policy**
 - **economic development policy**
 - **etc.**

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Summary

What is “rural” development policy?

- Rural development policy, again by definition of rural, is an **explicit consideration of density and distance-to-density** in the design and implementation of community or social or economic development policy.
 - **Note: economic development policy is necessarily regional.**
Partridge, Mark D. and M. Rose Olfert. (2011) “The Winners’ Choice: Sustainable Economic Strategies for Successful 21st-Century Regions.” **Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy** Vol. 33, No. 2 (Summer), pp. 143-178.
- In order to be effective, economic development policy should be focussed on a **functional economic area**
 - specifically, an area where the benefits of an investment in an area accrue to the residents of an area
 - typically defined as an area where there are few commuters into or out of the area and thus jobs that are created in an area are taken up by the residents of the area or by new residents who move into the area.

What is “rural” economic development policy?

- One should not promote rural economic development.
- Instead, one should promote regional economic development within functional economic areas
 - The considerations of the density and distance-to-density dimensions of the region will comprise the “rural” aspect of regional economic development policy.

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What is an indicator?

- **Most indicators (e.g. infant mortality rates) apply equally to rural residents and urban residents.**
- **Thus, for every economic or social or health indicator, one would want to see the information for rural residents and for urban residents.**
- **Here, quite obviously, the protocol to apply thresholds in Figure 1 to separate rural versus urban will influence the results.**
- **Thus, this is the usual case where a given indicator is tabulated for ‘rural’ residents and for ‘urban’ residents.**
- **However, tabulating usual indicators for rural citizens is not a rural indicator, in my view.**

So, what is a “rural” indicator?

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What is a “rural” indicator?

- By the definition of rural, a rural indicator recognizes the role of density and distance-to-density.
- For the example of mortality rates, the ‘rural’ part of the indicator would search for:
 - the role of low **density** (perhaps causing less local availability of information and counselling for the expectant mother); and / or
 - the role of **distance** to attain such information and services.
- Thus, a ‘rural’ indicator means that the rurality (i.e. density and / or distance-to-density) is recognized in the construction and presentation of the indicator.
- A rural indicator is not simply the tabulation of a usual indicator for the rural population, in my view.

I

Comparative

Rural

Policy

S

- 1. Case studies are good***
- 2. But it is often hard to get the important results until one pursues a comparative analysis***
- 3. Thus, what other observations should be in the peer group (i.e. the comparative group)?***
- 4. What specific characteristics do you want to compare?***
- 5. And, how many observations do you need in your sample to be sure that you have learned something?***



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HOTEL

LIQUOR
STORE

124

2
3
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LINCOLN

FERINTOSH HOTEL
WHISTLING PIG PUB



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There is a lot of diversity across rural Canada

If you have seen one rural community . . .

You have seen one rural community.

- 1. Case studies are good**
- 2. But it is often hard to get the important results until one pursues a comparative analysis**
- 3. Thus, what other observations should be in the peer group (i.e. the comparative group)?**
- 4. What specific characteristics do you want to compare?**
- 5. And, how many observations do you need in your sample to be sure that you have learned something?**
- 6. The plural of anecdote is not evidence!**

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Summary

Rural is a spatial concept – it is not a set of socio-economic characteristics.

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Two main dimensions of rurality:

- (low) density; and
- (long) distance-to-density.

These spatial dimensions are the key components for our understanding of the behaviour of individuals, enterprises and organizations.

Within any given locality, many other factors also influence behaviour such as

- the resource base (e.g., a gold mine) or
- an attitude / identity (e.g. rurality *per se* has value) or
- the presence of a built infrastructure (e.g. a regional college).

but their behaviour would be constrained (or advantaged) by their rurality dimensions of density and distance-to-density.

We argue that rural policy is, by the definition of rural, a consideration of the density and distance-to-density dimensions of every policy proposal.

Thus, rural policy is a constituent component of each and every policy discussion / decision.

- At one time in Canada, the federal government had a “rural lens” that had this exact objective.
- Other countries have a “rural proofing” protocol.

We argue that rural development policy is the same as metro development policy

- except that “rural” development policy constitutes a focus on the constraints or opportunities arising from the rurality dimensions of density and distance-to-density.

Similarly, rural community development policy is the same as urban community development policy,

- except for the need to take into account the rurality dimensions of density and distance-to-density.

The choice of geographic unit (or building block) for implementing a rural policy or program will depend upon the objectives of the policy or program.

- A community-focussed policy or program should classify “communities” according to their rurality dimensions of density and distance-to-density.
- Similarly, a regional-focussed policy or program should classify regions according to their rurality dimensions of density and distance-to-density.

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***Discussion /
Questions***

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