

Quality of Life



'Quality of life' is a term used to measure well-being. Well-being describes how well people feel about their environment, and collectively these feelings can be thought of as quality of life. To assess quality of life, indicators are used to represent the most important aspects of a person's life (called domains), which include, for example, housing, education, employment and household finances. Indicators are used to measure complex phenomena (such as quality of life) and can only provide us with an indication of the actual quality of life. The individual indicators (and their domains) were categorized into three broad groups called the social environment, economic environment and physical environment. The indicator data were compiled, transformed and analyzed to generate three quality of life maps for each environment, and then combined in a fourth map to show the overall quality of life. A fifth map, prepared in partnership with the Canadian Policy Research Networks' Quality of Life Indicators Project, shows various national indicators of quality of life.

To assess quality of life in 1996, two different classification methodologies were applied to the data. Census subdivisions were used to georeference the data, since they are the geographic areas that best represent different communities or urban areas across Canada. One methodology used the metropolitan influence zone classification to classify census subdivisions that lie outside the census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs) according to the degree of influence that these CMAs/CAs have on them. The other methodology treated each census subdivision equally without classifying the census subdivisions, and allowed for direct comparison of all census subdivisions, independent of other methodological considerations. The results of the unclassified census subdivisions were compiled in the following four maps:

- Quality of Life: Economic Environment Index
- Quality of Life: Physical Environment Index
- Quality of Life: Social Environment Index
- Overall Quality of Life

The results from the alternative methodology using the metropolitan influence zone classification, are available upon request from the Atlas of Canada, in the text for each of the four maps showing the quality of the physical, social, economic

environments and overall quality of life. This classification was used to evaluate quality of life among similar census subdivisions, based on their shared socio-economic characteristics and geographic location. To assist in the interpretation of the tables, refer to the Metropolitan Influence Zone Classification map, which shows the classification of the census subdivisions. See the Data and Mapping Notes section for more information on the classification methodology.

To illustrate the differences in the methodologies, the results from the metropolitan influence zone classification allow for comparison of Vancouver with Toronto but not with Brantford, Ontario or Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. In contrast, comparisons between all of the above locations is possible on the four maps, regardless of their differences in population, socio-economic characteristics and geographic location.

Mapping Quality of Life

The mapping of quality of life is very difficult because this concept is difficult to quantify and difficult to model. The Atlas of Canada model has been adapted from various quality of life models that have been previously used by geographers. Refer to the paper *Quality of Life in Saskatoon 1991 and 1996: A Geographical Perspective*, cited in the Data and Mapping Notes section, for references to the work of other social scientists in the field of quality of life research. The set of indicators used in The Atlas of Canada model has been validated by various experts and represents a broad selection of indicators to compare quality of life between communities (or census subdivisions) on a national scale.

The Atlas of Canada recognizes that regional variations in quality of life exist, and are probably not captured by these indicators. Nor do these indicators capture the internal diversity of the quality of life within communities. Nevertheless, by applying a consistent set of indicators and a common methodology, broad general patterns in quality of life can be identified among communities across Canada. Quality of life, as mapped here, is not a reflection of happiness or overall satisfaction with life. Instead, these maps show that some locations in Canada present a higher quality of life than other locations, based solely on these indicators.

For further information, see the “6th_Quality of Life Data and Mapping Notes” document.

Definitions of underlined terms

Census Agglomeration : A census agglomeration (CA) is a large urban area (known as the urban core) together with adjacent urban and rural areas (known as urban and rural fringes) that have a high degree of social and economic integration with the urban core. A CA has an urban core population of at least 10 000, based on

the previous census. However, if the population of the urban core of a CA declines below 10 000, the CA is retired. Once a CA attains an urban core population of at least 100 000, based on the previous census, it is eligible to become a CMA. CAs that have urban cores of at least 50 000, based on the previous census, are subdivided into census tracts. Census tracts are maintained for CAs even if the population of the urban cores subsequently fall below 50 000. A CA may be consolidated with adjacent CAs if they are socially and economically integrated. This new grouping is called consolidated CA and the component CAs are called primary census agglomerations (PCAs). (Source: 1996 Census Dictionary, Statistics Canada)

Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) : A census metropolitan area (CMA) is a very large urban area (known as the urban core) together with the adjacent urban and rural areas (known as urban and rural fringes) that have a high degree of social and economic integration with the urban core. A CMA has an urban core population of at least 100 000, based on the previous census. Once an area becomes a CMA, it is retained as a CMA even if the population of its urban core declines below 100 000. All CMAs are subdivided into census tracts. A CMA may be consolidated with adjacent census agglomerations (CA) if they are socially and economically integrated. This new grouping is known as a consolidated CMA and the component CMA and CA are known as the primary census metropolitan area (PCMA) and primary census agglomeration(s) (PCA). A CMA may not be consolidated with another CMA. (Source: 1996 Census Dictionary, Statistics Canada)

Census Subdivision (CSD) : Census subdivision is the general term applying to municipalities (as determined by provincial legislation) or their equivalent (for example, Indian reserves, Indian settlements and unorganized territories). In Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and British Columbia, the term also describes geographic areas that have been created by Statistics Canada in cooperation with the provinces as equivalents for municipalities for the dissemination of statistical data. According to the national hierarchy, census subdivisions add together to form census divisions. The CDs form provinces and territories. Two additional levels are defined in the national hierarchy to facilitate special data analysis. A special aggregation of census subdivisions called census consolidated subdivision (CCS) provides a level of geography between the CSD and CD which facilitates data analysis. In the rural context, the CCS is a grouping of smaller municipalities, usually contained within a larger municipality. For instance, a town located within a surrounding township will be grouped together with the township to form a CCS. In urban areas, CCSs are formed by contiguous groupings of CSDs. A principal user of the CCSs is the Census of Agriculture. (Source: 1996 Census Dictionary, Statistics Canada)