

## **Do big cities, small rural areas or suburbs offer a better quality of life?**

### **In search of well-being**

The growing dynamism of cities, which for several years has attracted more and more people in search of employment opportunities and prosperity, has often been at the root of profound inequalities.

These inequalities are not limited to differences between neighbourhoods or between peripheral and central areas, but extend across the whole territory.

Urban-rural population movements have been particularly strong in Europe since the mid-twentieth century. This phenomenon has led to great fragility in remote areas - both physically and mentally - which, generally because of their distance from the dynamics of major cities, often suffer from problems of an ageing population, poverty, abandonment, ruin and desertification. The "distance penalty" in these economies can be quite significant.

Rural regions, particularly those that are far from cities, felt the effects of the 2008 global financial crisis most acutely, leaving many of them in a vulnerable position. but there are also small and medium-sized towns Their sustainability is one of the main challenges facing Western societies today.

While on the one hand these regions have felt the effects of the physical isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic, on the other, many studies show a certain shift in population from large cities to suburbs and small rural towns over the same period: suggesting that living in the suburbs can have advantages.

### **1. Some definitions**

In March 2020, the United Nations (UN) Statistical Commission approved a new global definition of cities, urban and rural areas called the "Degree of Urbanisation".

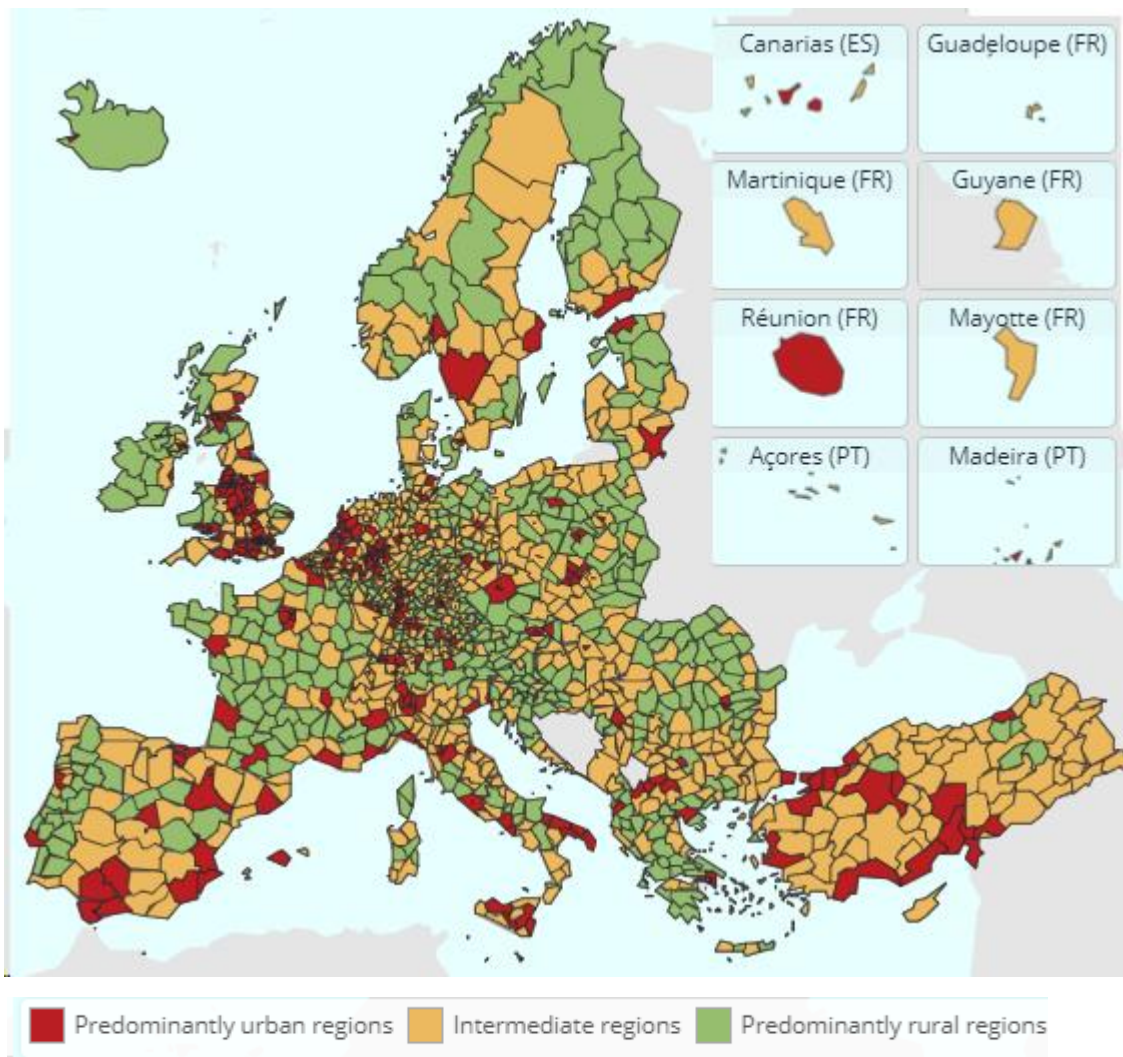
The Degree of Urbanisation is the first global definition of rural areas to be approved by the UN and goes beyond the traditional rural-urban dichotomy by offering concrete measures of places in the rural-urban continuum.

Based on the proportion of local populations residing in urban clusters and urban centres, local administrative units (LAUs or municipalities) are classified into three types of area:

- Cities or agglomerations (densely populated areas)
- Less populated cities and suburbs (intermediate density areas)
- Rural areas (sparsely populated areas)

To satisfy the demand for statistics at the local level, Eurostat disseminates statistics by degree of urbanization, which enables an analytical and descriptive observation of urban, rural areas and suburbs.

*Figure 1: Urban-Rural typology by Nuts3 in Europe- 2021*



Data by degree of urbanisation is currently available for the following statistical areas: labour market, education, living conditions, well-being and tourism.

Therefore, the degree of urbanisation also provides a precise definition of areas of moderate and low density, which include towns, villages, scattered areas and predominantly uninhabited areas. This new definition of space outside cities opens up new possibilities for measuring diversity within rural areas and emphasises the role of rural-urban linkages in future work. As a definition designed for international comparability, the degree of urbanisation is not intended to replace national

definitions. National definitions can incorporate more indicators, be adapted to reflect specific circumstances and better meet national policy needs.

In recent years, and especially in the aftermath of the pandemic, the debate on whether to live in the city or in the suburbs has emerged strongly to the attention of world public opinion. The crises of recent years (food, energy and environmental, financial, economic social) have made it urgent to develop new parameters of a statistical nature capable of guiding both policy makers in policy design, as well as the individual behaviour of companies and individuals in relation to measuring the well-being of individuals and societies .

Without prejudice to the importance of Gross Domestic Product as a measure of the economic performance of a community, it is indispensable to supplement this measure with economic, environmental and social indicators that make a comprehensive assessment of the state and progress of a society

The importance of the debate on indicators depends on the fact that 'what is measured' influences 'what is done'.

If the instruments used are incorrect, or fail to capture the relevant features of the phenomenon of interest, they may lead to ineffective or even wrong decisions-

There is a wide literature concerning the use of subjective well-being measures: indeed, according to some it should be the indicators that guide public action, as the ultimate goal of policy should be the improvement of perceived well-being, often associated with the concept of happiness.

Following the recommendations of the OECD, Eurostat and the national statistical institutes, the objective of this work is to calculate a representative indicator of "overall life satisfaction" broken down by degree of urbanisation and by country including the degree of satisfaction with specific aspects of life: economic status, work, social relations and so on.