

Work Session on Methodological Issues Involving the Integration of Statistics and Geography
(25 – 28 September 2001, Tallinn, Estonia)

Background note for participants in the Workshop on Standardisation of Geographic Areas

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This workshop has the objective of exploring whether there is interest in moving towards a common international definition of functional or statistical areas. It will be mostly a discussion and exchange of views and information of those countries participating. The Canadian approach will be presented first as a benchmark to aid discussion. The supposition of the workshop is that in the same way consistency is required in concepts and measurements of economic well being for meaningful comparisons between countries, there is a need for consistent geographic concepts and measures for meaningful comparisons between places. Metropolitan areas will be the primary focus for discussion as increasingly economic power is being concentrated in our major cities and adjacent urban areas. In a global economy, comparisons between metropolitan areas located in different countries are more frequent and often the basis for key business decisions like plant location, expansion and closure. The statistical community is obliged to review and consider whether common concepts and definitions can be developed to make these comparisons more meaningful.

There are 3 sections to the workshop:

The first section will present, in some detail, the concepts and definitions of functional areas in Canada including Metropolitan areas and a new classification of Metropolitan Influence Zones that extends across the country.

The second section will present summary results from a survey of a number of OECD countries on functional areas, their definition and use in 2000. As well Sweden will be describing their approach on functional areas. Participants will be invited in this section to note similarities or differences in their country's approach to functional areas. **It is hoped that each participant will review the concepts and definitions used in defining metropolitan areas in their country before the workshop to further the discussion.**

The last section of the workshop will discuss if there is really a perceived value in standardising as supposed above, the degree to which current concepts and definitions generally align and if there is agreement, how the National Statistical Offices could work together to create common concepts and definitions.

In the event there is agreement to pursue harmonisation on functional areas, a copy of any review of concepts and definitions completed by participants for the workshop would be appreciated as input into future work that could arise.