GRANULAR

Overview of Rural Typologies in Europe

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GRANULAR Task 4.6: Characterising rural diversity

- There is a need for a more nuanced understanding of the diversity of rural areas and the interlinkages within the rural-urban continuum in Europe.
- Two main outputs from this part of the project.

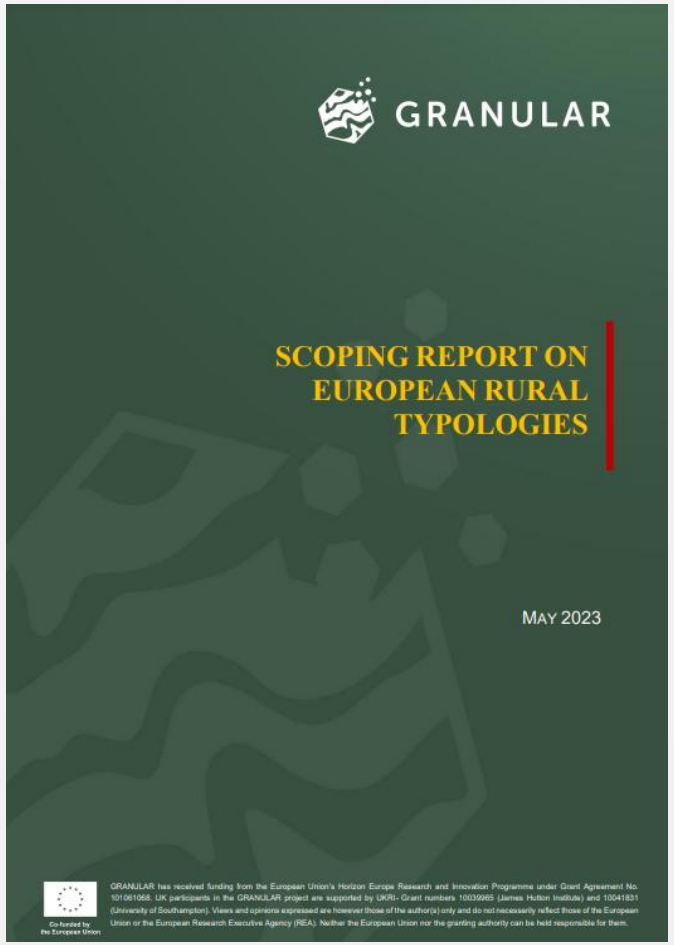
Typology scoping report (May 2023)

- A **report** including **an inventory of existing typologies** (European-wide and national/local) and a **comparative assessment** of these typologies regarding policy use, dimensions covered, limitations, technical aspects (data, scales, thresholds, criteria), etc.

Novel rural typology for the EU (July 2026)

- A **multi-criteria typology** of rural areas at local/grid level that is aligned with existing definitions and consensus building initiatives (e.g., DEGURBA) and evaluation frameworks currently under preparation (e.g., DG-AGRI 2021).

Scoping Report on European Rural Typologies



Access the report

Purpose of the report

- **Providing an inventory of existing territorial typologies** and a **comparative assessment** of these typologies focusing on:
  - i) how they are used for analytical purposes and for supporting policy work;
  - ii) how they are constructed;
  - iii) the main strengths and weaknesses of the different typologies and approaches.
- Focus on: i) European-wide typologies for delimiting rural areas; ii) national, regional, and local typologies that exist in different European countries.
- This report **provides a way forward towards the typology development in GRANULAR** based on the different ways of characterizing rural areas in Europe, and what can be learnt from the different examples.

Different approaches for delimiting and classifying rural areas

Two main types of typologies

- (i) Typologies for **delimiting** rural areas
  - Identifying rural areas as homogeneous spatial units based on specific parameters.
- (ii) Typologies for **characterising** rural areas
  - Rural areas classified based on stock (structural characteristics) or flows (e.g., commuting patterns)
- These two can be combined and many typologies first delimit rural areas and then classify them.

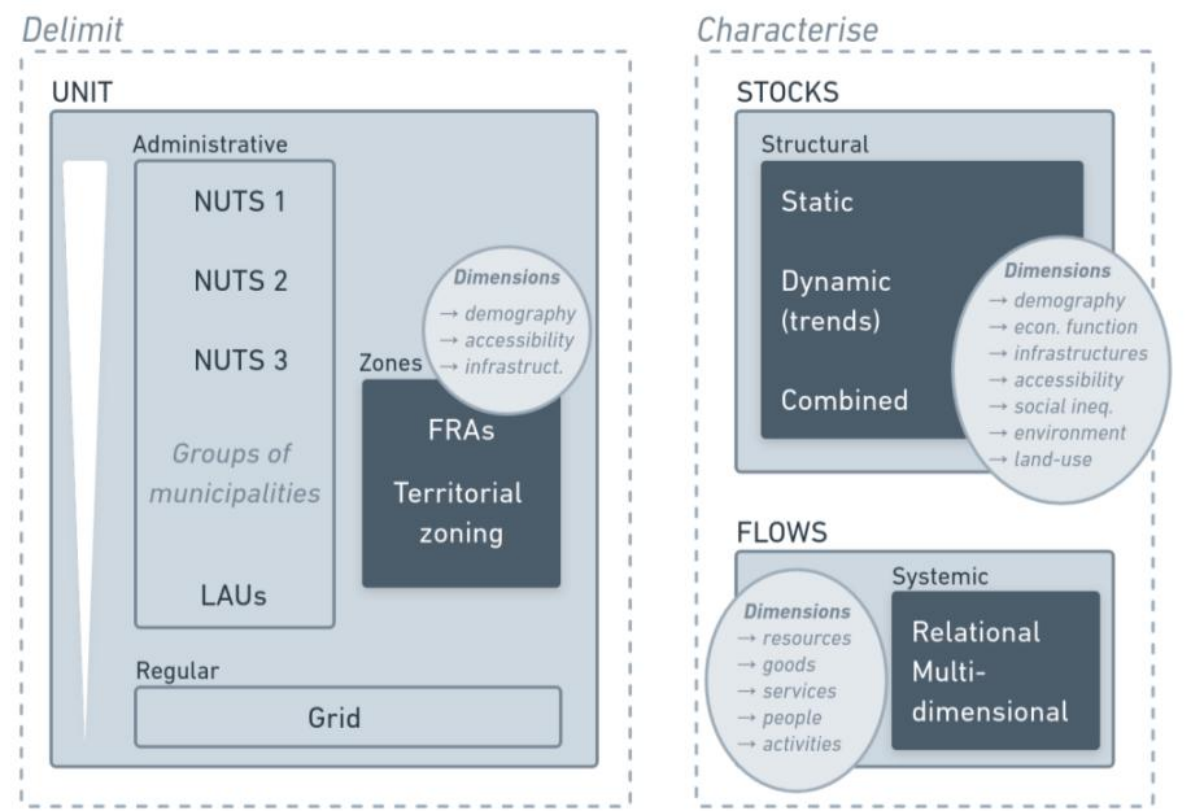


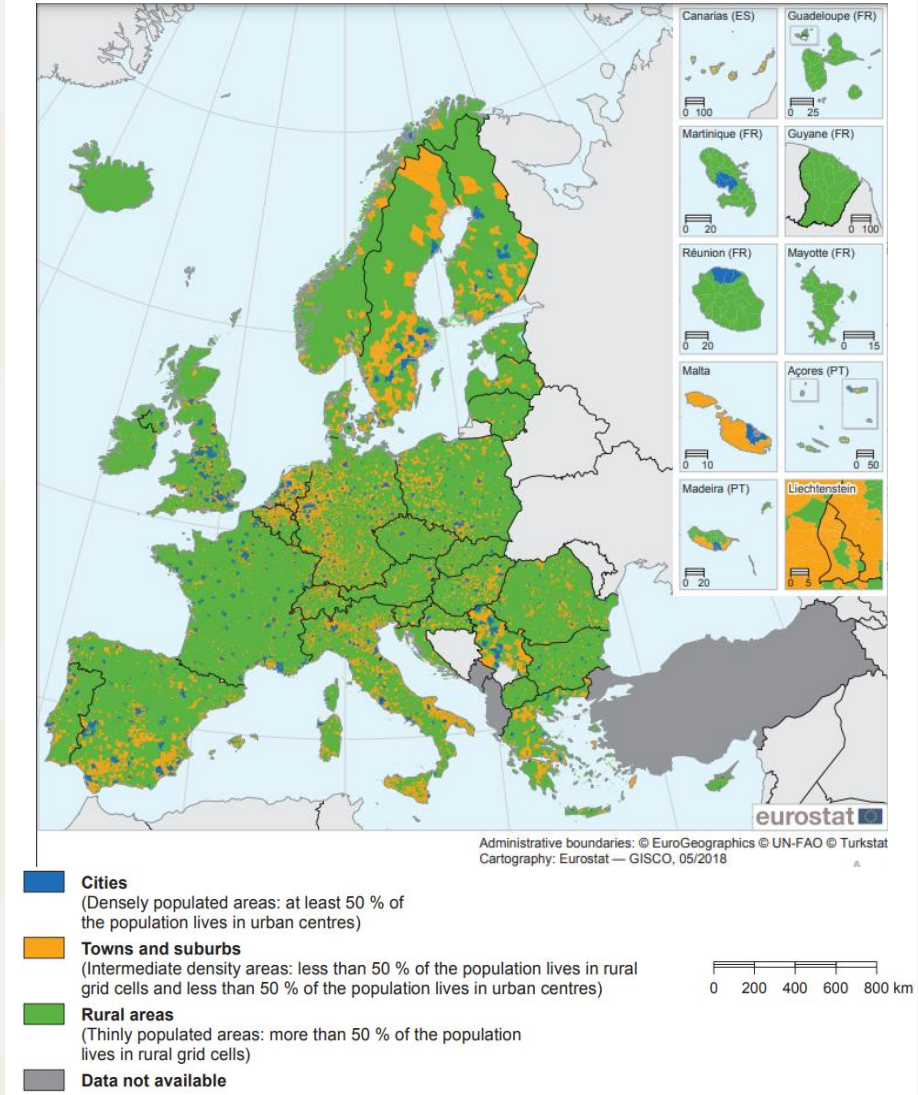
Figure 1: Main approaches to identify and classify rural areas

EU-wide and macro-regional typologies

Examples of different typologies

Eurostat	OECD
- Degree of urbanisation (LAU, grid) - Cluster types (1km² grid) - Urban-rural typology (NUTS3)	- Rural typology (1994) - Rural typology (2011) - Functional urban areas (2018)

ESPON	Other typologies for policy
- Typology of development opportunities (EDORA) - Typology of land use patterns (LUPA) - Typology of demographic status (DEMIFER)	- Foresight (FARO) - Disadvantaged areas (CAP)



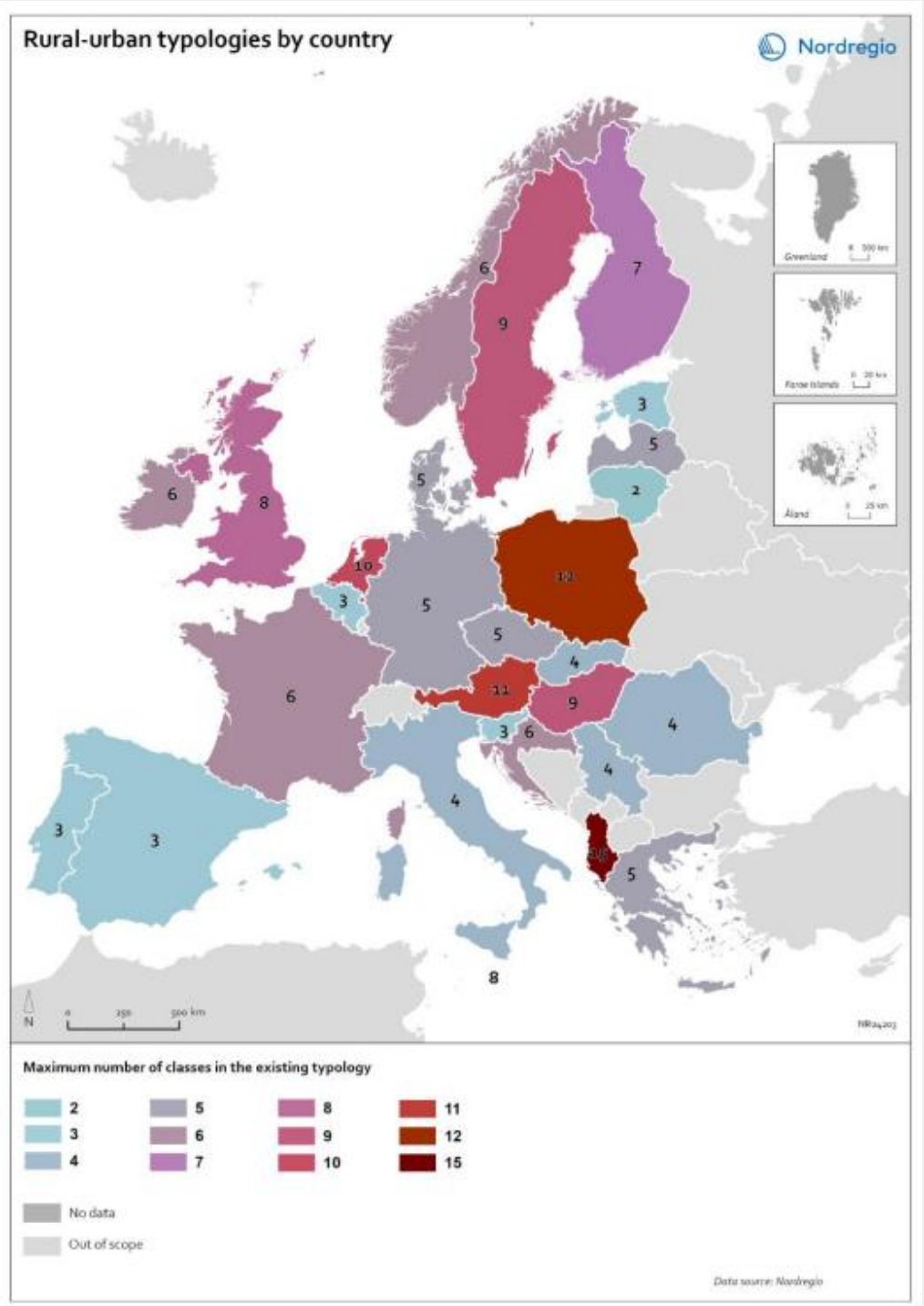
Degree of urbanisation (LAU level)

National and regional typologies

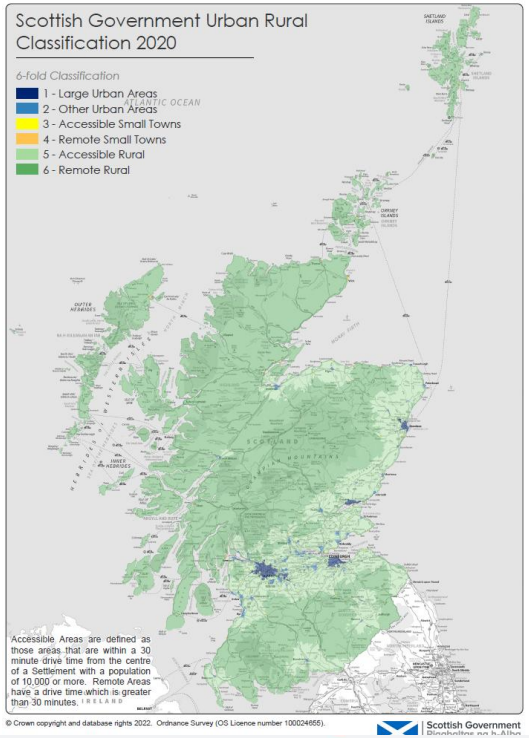
51 typologies from 27 countries identified and examined

EU 27 countries covered	
Austria	Italy
Belgium	Latvia
Bulgaria	Lithuania
Croatia	Luxembourg
Cyprus	Malta
Czech Republic	Netherlands
Denmark	Poland
Estonia	Portugal
Finland	Romania
France	Slovakia
Germany	Slovenia
Greece	Spain
Hungary	Sweden
Ireland	

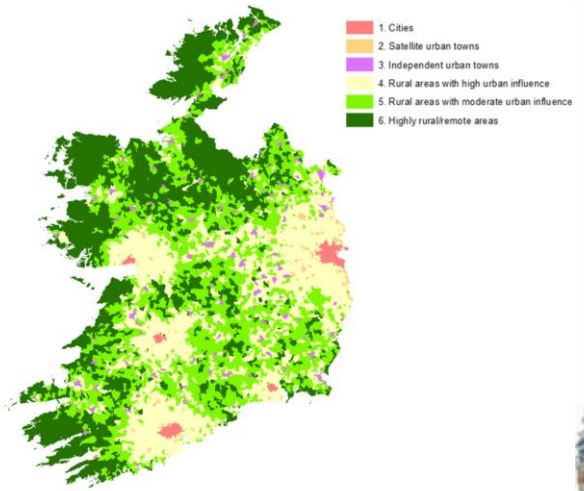
Other countries covered
Albania
Norway
Serbia
UK (Scotland)



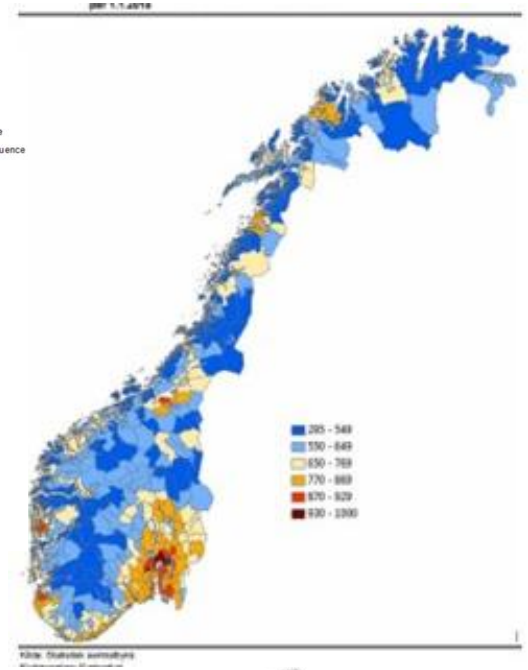
Scotland: Government Urban Rural Classification 2020



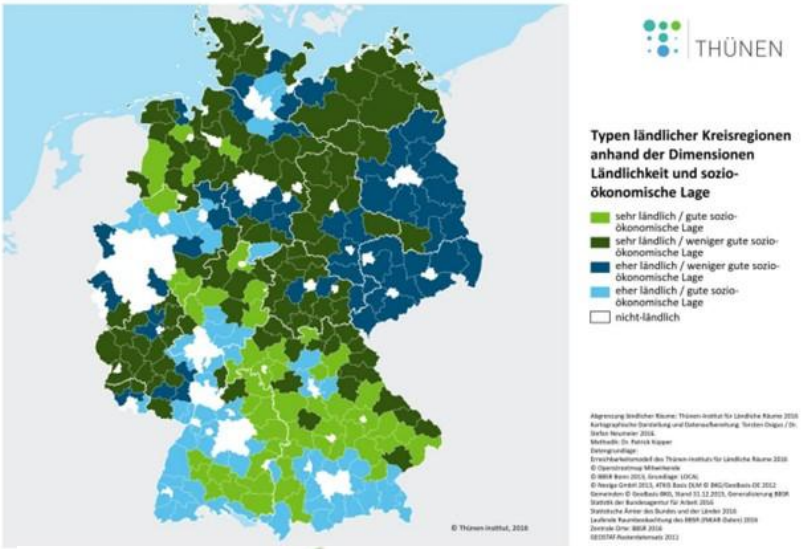
Ireland: Typology for Urban and Rural Life

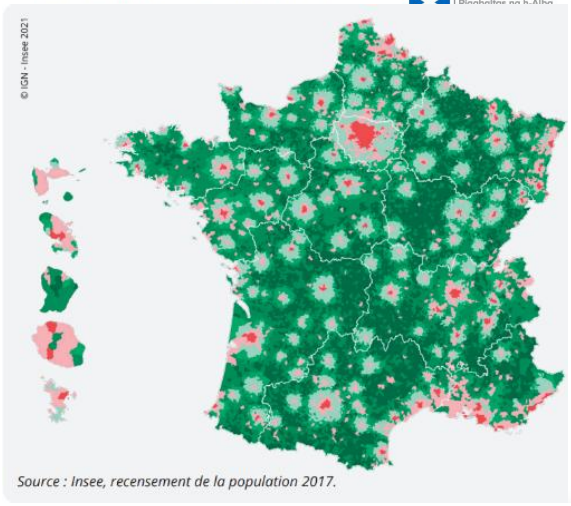


Norway: Centrality index

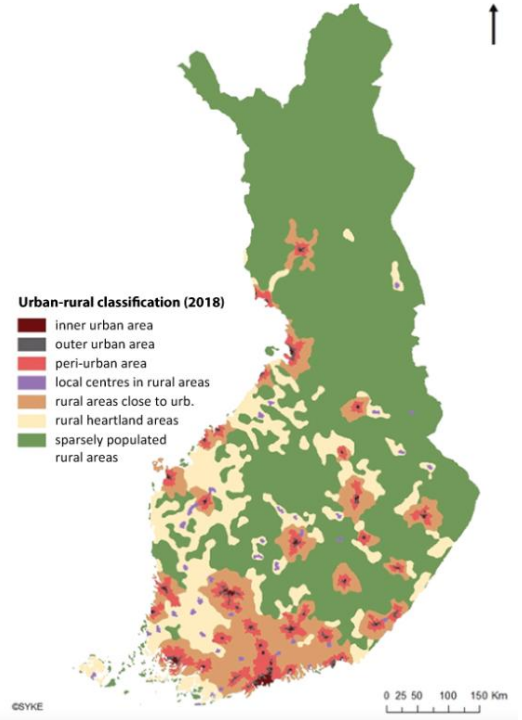


Germany: Thünen Typology of rural areas



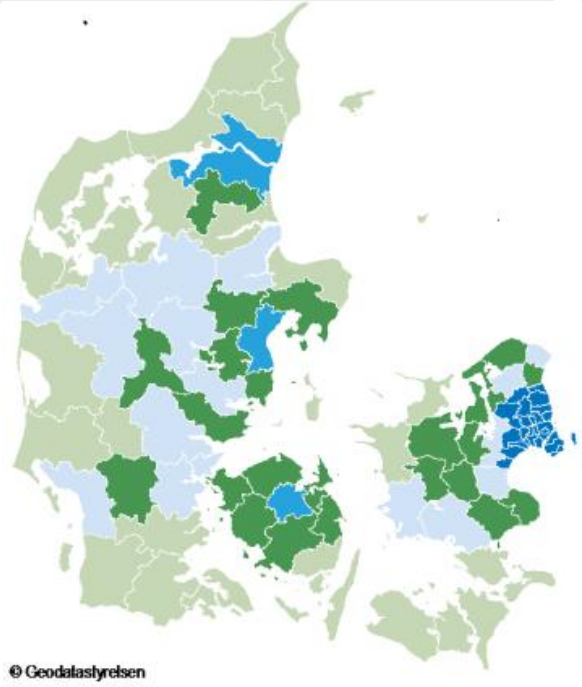


France: Urban-rural zoning



Finland: urban-rural typology

France: Typology of French rural areas



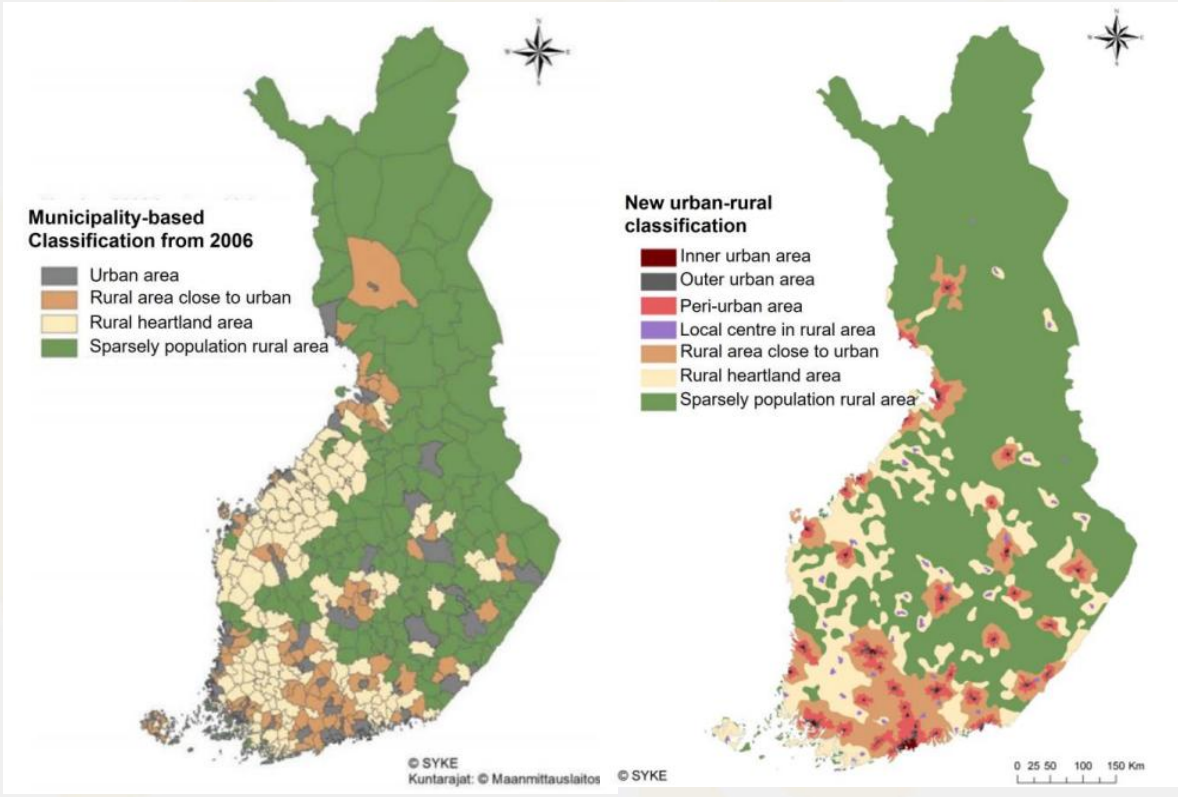
Denmark: Municipality groups

Purpose and key uses of the typologies

Purpose and key uses of the typologies examined

Grasping rural diversity

- The **typologies** examined in the report **seek to provide a richer understanding of territorial differences and rural diversity**.
- Several typologies created based on previous ones.
  - Going from more aggregated territorial levels towards more fine-grained typologies to better capture local characteristics (e.g., *Finnish urban-rural classification)*
  - Adding new dimensions and indicators to identify new sub-categories of rural areas (e.g. *French urban-rural zoning*)



Finland: urban-rural typology

Purpose and key uses of the typologies examined

Key initiators or actors involved in the typology development:

- National governments
- National statistics institutes
- Research institutes/other public institutes
- Universities as part of research projects

- Typologies often developed through close **collaboration** between various actors and stakeholders and with support of different expert groups.
- **Anchoring the typology development with different perspectives** from a research, **policy and practice** point-view has contributed to the usefulness and relevance of the typologies.

Purpose and key uses of the typologies examined

1) Supporting policy and planning

- At different spatial levels: national, regional, local
- Supporting policy development more generally (e.g. *Albanian typology of communes and municipalities*)
- Supporting policy actions withing a more specific focus (e.g., *French rural typology based on services/levels of centrality*)
- Evaluation purposes (e.g. *Croatian typology of rural and urbanized settlements*)
- Identifying areas in need of specific interventions (e.g. *Italian typology for national strategic plan*)
- Distribution of funds (e.g., *Finnish urban-rural classification*)

2) Analysis

- To provide deeper insights on various rural and territorial development issues
- More general analytical purposes (e.g., *Danish municipality groups*)
- More specifically defined analytical purposes (e.g, *Thünen Typology of rural areas* for monitoring living conditions in rural areas, *Scotland's typology for sparsely populated areas* used for studying demographic change and forecasting)
- Typologies as analytical tools to which various data can be incorporated (e.g., *Finnish urban-rural classification* used for numerous studies)

➢ **Many typologies are tools for both supporting policy and planning and analysis**

Towards a multi-dimensional typology for classifying rural areas?

Technical aspects of the typologies

Territorial coverage and scales

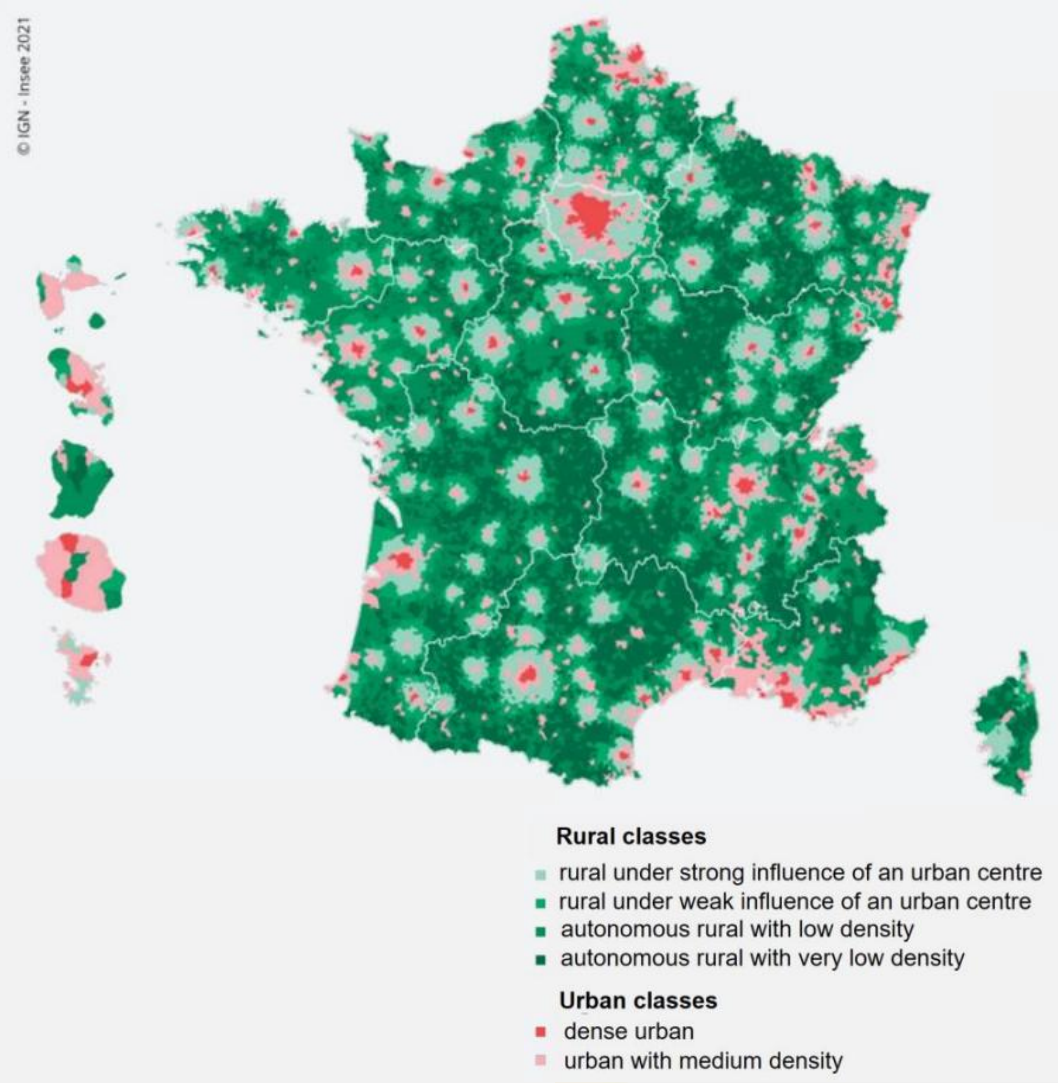
- The typologies examined include:
  - **General territorial typologies** based on different measures of urbanity and rurality that distinguish different types of rural, intermediate and urban areas (e.g., *Irish typology for urban and rural life*).
  - **Rural typologies** that seek to provide a more nuanced picture of different categories of rurality while not including non-rural areas. (e.g. *French typologies of rural areas*)

- Typologies at different territorial scales:
  - A few at more general territorial scales (NUTS3)
  - Most are at LAU level (municipalities or communes)
  - Several at sub-municipal level (various spatial units at sub-municipal level or grid level)
  - Scalability between territorial levels (in same cases possible to move between scales territorial scales)

Technical aspects of the typologies

Approaches and definitions of rurality

- Only a few typologies are based on a single dimension.
- **Most typologies** are based on a combined approach where rural areas are classified according to **multiple dimensions**.
  - Often a morphological component (population size or density) combined with other dimensions (e.g., accessibility, dependence of urban centres, land use/cover, economic criteria, employment, services, infrastructure).
- The typologies are diverse concerning the data and variables that they use.



Key takeaways and lessons learned

- Typologies are always **simplifications of reality**, and no typology can fully grasp the complexity that they seek to capture.
  - No single method or approach makes a typology more "right" or "accurate" than others.
- Decisions regarding **technical aspects** (approach, territorial level, data and variables) should be **based on** what the typology is intended for and **what you want to measure**.
- **Transparency** and openness about the limitations of the typology is important.
- Ensuring that the typology is **aligned** and responsive to specific **research or policy needs** can help make it more "useful" for its intended purpose.
- **Comparability, reliability and replicability** are important: having recurring, comparable and reliable data sources are crucial for ensuring continuity and possible future updates.

Thank you!

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