

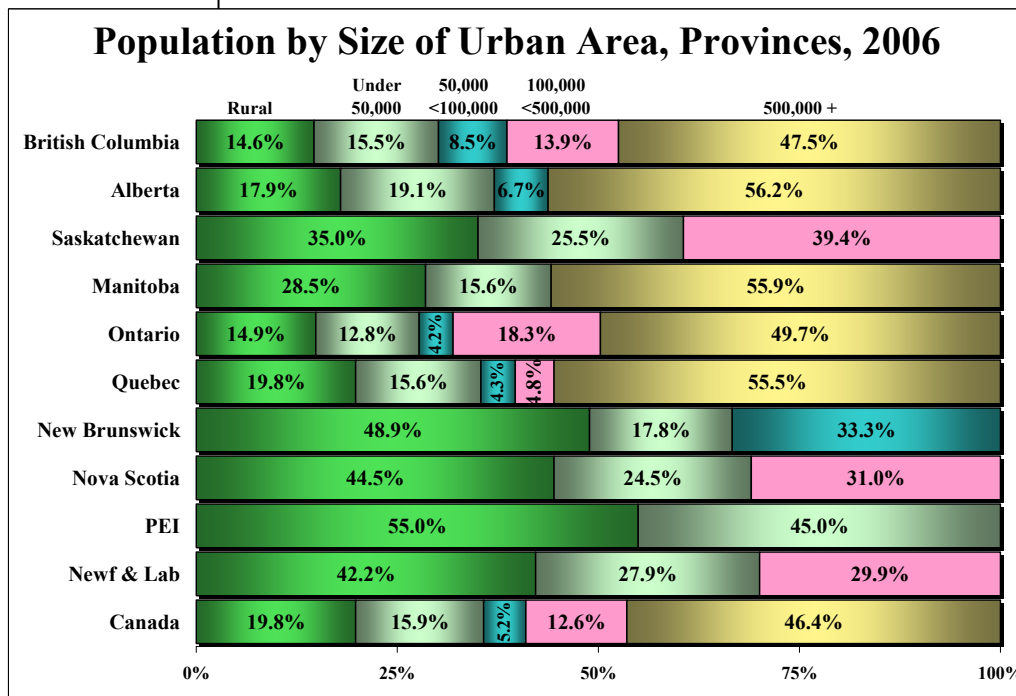
## Dimensions of Diversity: 2006 Census Snapshot

### Diversity in Location: Our Urban and Rural Portrait

Often the pictures painted by the Census data differ significantly from our common image or perceptions of our communities. For example, while British Columbia is commonly portrayed as a rural province, and Ontario as an urban one, in fact, a (marginally) greater percentage of BC's population lives in urban areas than in Ontario. Of the 4.1 million people counted in BC by the 2006 Census 85.4 percent (3,511,300) were living in urban areas and 14.6 percent (602,000) were resident in rural areas, compared to 14.9 percent rural and 85.1 percent urban in Ontario.

So the Census showed that by 2006 BC had become the most urban province in Canada; in 2001 BC and Ontario were tied, each having 84.7 percent of their population resident in urban areas. In a similar vein, while the common image of Alberta is of farms and ranches dotted with oil wells, only 17.9 percent of its population lived in rural areas, making it Canada's third most urban province behind BC and Ontario.

Figure 1



Québec, with 19.8 percent of its population in rural areas (just matching the Canadian average), was the fourth most urban. Canada's truly rural provinces were those in the Atlantic region (with PEI having 55 percent of its population in rural areas), plus Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Not only is BC not a rural province, is not really a small town province either: only 15.5 percent of the provincial population was living in urban areas of less than 50,000 people. The only province with a smaller proportion of its population living in these small urban areas was

Ontario, with 12.8 percent. With both provinces falling below the Canada wide average of 15.9 percent, in order to find small town Canada it was necessary to travel to Saskatchewan (25.5 percent) and the Atlantic provinces (where between 17.8 and 45.0 percent of the population are living in small towns).

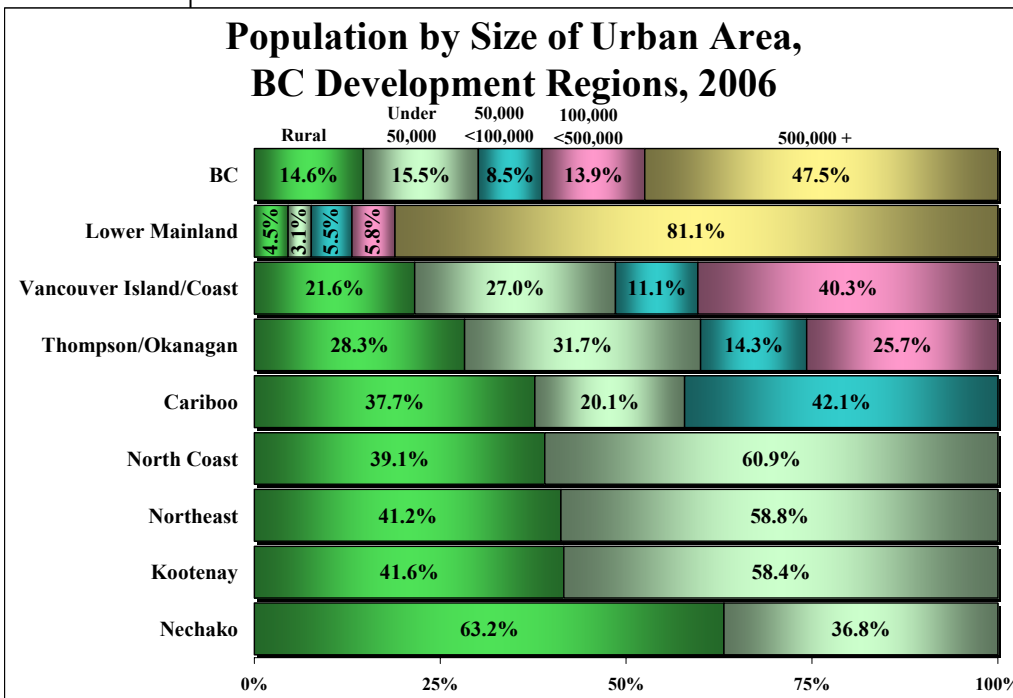
Where BC is significantly above average is in the share of its population in medium sized urban communities, those with populations between 50,000 to 99,999 – the Prince George, Kamloops, Nanaimo and Chilliwack urban areas. In 2006, British Columbia had 8.5 percent of its population in these regional urban centres, compared to the national average of only 5.2 percent, and to Alberta's 6.7 percent, Ontario's 4.2 percent, and Québec's 4.3 percent. British Columbia also had 13.9 percent of its population in large urban regions of 100,000 to 499,999 residents - in the Victoria, Abbotsford, and Kelowna urban areas - compared to the average of 12.6 percent for all provinces.

Metropolitan regions (urban areas with populations of 500,000 or more) are found in only five provinces in Canada. In three of the five, these most populous urban areas accommodate the majority of the province's population, with roughly 55 percent of the population of Alberta, Manitoba, and Québec living in metropolitan regions. While almost half of Ontario's population lived in a large metropolitan region, only 47.5 percent of BC's population lived in the Vancouver centered urban area (the province's only large urban area), the smallest percentage of the five provinces. In this regard note that Alberta, with 56.2 percent of its population living in a metropolitan region, is the province with the greatest percentage of its population living in a large urban area.

Not only is BC the most urban province, British Columbia is also the most diverse in terms of urban settlements, as it has urban communities in every size range, and the most uniform distribution of population between them. Compared to Ontario and Quebec, which also have communities falling into every size grouping, British Columbia has the smallest percent in both large urban areas and rural areas, with larger percentages in urban areas between these two extremes.

There is also a significant diversity in the distribution of population by community size within British Columbia, particularly with respect to where the province's rural residents live. In only one region of the province was the majority of the population living in rural areas (the 63.2 percent in the Nechako), and in only one was the majority in a large urban area (the 81.1 percent in the Lower Mainland).

**Figure 2**



Nechako, as the province's only primarily rural region, lies at the beginning of the rural to urban continuum. With the rest of its population in urban areas with populations of less than 50,000 people, it is similar to the other three regions that have a large minority of their population in rural areas. These three, Kootenay, Northeast and North Coast saw the majority of residents in small urban areas, (in the range of 58.4 to 60.9 percent), with the remainder living in rural areas.

Two regions mark the transition between the rural/small regions of the province and its urban regions. The first is the Cariboo, with over half of its population in rural and small urban communities of under 50,000 residents (37.7 percent and 20.1percent, respectively), and just under one half in the urban area centered around Prince George (42.1 percent, 65,082 people). The second region, the Thompson/Okanagan, has a slightly larger share (60 percent) of its population in rural and small urban areas than the Cariboo. However, in contrast to the Cariboo, the population in the Thompson/Okanagan living in larger urban areas was not as concentrated in a single community, with 14.3 percent (70,117) of the population in urban communities with populations between

50,000 and 99,999 (the Kamloops urban area) and 25.7 percent in communities with populations between 100,000 and 499,999 (the Kelowna urban area, 126,384).

With these two regions marking the transition, two other regions sit at the urban end of the settlement size continuum. Less than a quarter (21.6 percent) of the population in the Vancouver Island/Coast region were in rural areas, and only 27.7 percent in communities with populations of less than 50,000 people. The majority were in larger urban communities, with 11.1 percent in

urban areas with populations between 50,000 and 99,999 (the Nanaimo urban area, 83,751) and 40.3 percent living in communities with populations between 100,000 and 499,999 (the Victoria urban area, 304,683).

While the Victoria urban area played a dominant role within this region, its regional dominance pales in comparison to the Metro Vancouver centered urban area in the Lower Mainland Region. Eighty one percent (1,953,252 people) of the Lower Mainland's population lived in this urban community of more than 500,000 people, with a further 5.8 percent (138,986 people) living in large urban areas (between 100,000 and 499,999 population), primarily in the Abbotsford centered urban area, and 5.5 percent (132,459 residents) in small urban areas with a population between 50,000

Table 1

<b>Population by Size of Urban Area, BC Development Regions, 2006</b>						
	500k+	100k.. <500k	50k.. <100k	>50k	Rural	Total
Nechako				14,500	24,852	39,352
Kootenay				82,964	59,146	142,110
Northeast				37,862	26,549	64,411
North Coast				35,143	22,520	57,663
Cariboo			65,082	31,115	58,257	154,454
Thompson/Okanagan		126,384	70,117	156,012	138,966	491,479
Vancouver Isl./Coast		304,683	83,751	203,909	162,838	755,181
Lower Mainland	1,953,252	138,986	132,459	75,081	109,059	2,408,837
<b>BC</b>	<b>1,953,252</b>	<b>570,053</b>	<b>351,409</b>	<b>636,586</b>	<b>602,187</b>	<b>4,113,487</b>
	500k+	100k.. <500k	50k.. <100k	>50k	Rural	Share of BC Rural
Nechako				36.8%	63.2%	4.1%
Kootenay				58.4%	41.6%	9.8%
Northeast				58.8%	41.2%	4.4%
North Coast				60.9%	39.1%	3.7%
Cariboo			42.1%	20.1%	37.7%	9.7%
Thompson/Okanagan		25.7%	14.3%	31.7%	28.3%	23.1%
Vancouver Isl./Coast		40.3%	11.1%	27.0%	21.6%	27.0%
Lower Mainland	81.1%	5.8%	5.5%	3.1%	4.5%	18.1%
<b>BC</b>	<b>47.5%</b>	<b>13.9%</b>	<b>8.5%</b>	<b>15.5%</b>	<b>14.6%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

and 99,999 (the Chilliwack urban area). With larger communities playing such a dominant role, only 4.5 percent of the Lower Mainland's population was found in rural areas, the smallest share in the province.

Similar to the national image of Canada's urban and rural provinces, while this portrait of BC's rural and urban regions may match the common image, the portrait the Census data paint is quite different. While the rural population of the Lower Mainland accounts for a relatively small share of the region, it represents a relatively large number of people, with the 109,059 people living in rural areas in the Lower Mainland accounting for almost one fifth of the province's 602,187 rural residents. The Lower Mainland region was home to two of the province's Regional Districts with the largest number of people living in rural areas: the Fraser Valley Regional District with 48,537 residents (8.1 percent of the province's total) and the Greater Vancouver Regional District with 50,949 rural residents (8.5 percent of the province's total).

The Census therefore showed that the province's rural regions are not necessarily where its rural residents are. BC's three most *urban* regions are home to almost two thirds of the province's *rural*

population: 18.1 percent (109,059 people) in the Lower Mainland, 27.0 percent (162,838 people) in the Vancouver Island/Coast region and 23.1 percent (138,966 people) in the Thompson/Okanagan region. These are also the province's most populous regions (accounting for 81 percent of the total provincial population).

Thus the image of an urban Ontario and a rural/small town BC does not match the reality shown in the data, as BC has the country's smallest share of its population in rural areas and its largest share in urban areas. Further, contrary to what is often assumed, the concentration of population in big urban areas in British Columbia is the lowest of the 5 provinces with such areas; British Columbia is a province of medium sized urban areas. Finally, the image that the province's rural residents live in regions that are predominantly rural is not what the data show: rural populations are concentrated in the three regions that are predominantly urban. If you want to see BC's rural region's go to the north and the east; if you want to see its rural markets, look to the south-centre and the southwest.

### **Statistics Canada Census Data Definitions**

**Urban area (UA):** An urban area has a minimum population concentration of 1,000 persons and a population density of at least 400 persons per square kilometre, based on the current census population count. All territory outside urban areas is classified as rural. Taken together, urban and rural areas cover all of Canada. Urban population includes all population living in the urban cores, secondary urban cores and urban fringes of census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs), as well as the population living in urban areas outside CMAs and CAs.

**Rural area (RA):** The rural area of Canada is the area that remains after the delineation of urban areas which have been delineated using current census population data. Taken together, urban and rural areas cover all of Canada. Within rural areas, population densities and living conditions can vary greatly. Included in rural areas are: small towns, villages and other populated places with less than 1,000 population according to the current census; rural fringes of census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations that may contain estate lots, as well as agricultural, undeveloped and non-developable lands; agricultural lands; and remote and wilderness areas.

#### **Development Regions by Regional District:**

- 1 - Vancouver Island/Coast: Alberni-Clayoquot; Capital ; Central Coast; Comox-Strathcona; Cowichan Valley; Mount Waddington; Nanaimo; Powell River; and Sunshine Coast
- 2 - Lower Mainland: Fraser Valley; Greater Vancouver; and Squamish-Lillooet
- 3 - Thompson/Okanagan: Okanagan-Similkameen; Thompson-Nicola; Central Okanagan; North Okanagan; and Columbia-Shuswap
- 4 - Kootenay: Central Kootenay; East Kootenay; and Kootenay Boundary
- 5 - Cariboo: Cariboo and Fraser-Fort George
- 6 - North Coast: Kitimat-Stikine and Skeena-Queen Charlotte
- 7 - Nechako: Bulkley-Nechako and Stikine
- 8 - Northeast: Northern Rockies and Peace River