

Micropolitan: A New Statistical Tool for Preservationists

by *John Robbins*

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines geographical categories and designates geographical areas used in Federal Government statistics.

OMB's four current categories are Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Micropolitan Statistical Areas, Combined Statistical Areas, and New England City and Town Areas. Of these, Micropolitan Statistical Areas is a newly defined and designated category. The micropolitan category may be useful to preservationists for statistical research and analysis.

Metropolitan and micropolitan areas are the two types of what OMB calls Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSA). According to OMB definitions, metropolitan areas are a county or counties that have a core city with a population greater than 50,000, and micropolitan areas are a county or counties that have a core town or city with a population between 10,000 and 50,000. Counties beyond metropolitan or micropolitan areas, rather than being specifically defined or designated, are considered "nonmetro noncore" or simply "outside CBSAs."¹

Journalists and scholars agree that the revised federal statistical categories probably will affect government programs.² This report describes the micropolitan statistical category in its historical context and summarizes an initial inquiry into using the new tool to gauge the distribution of public participation in preservation activities nationwide.

Background

The need for standard geographical statistical categories is recounted by OMB: "Prior to [the 1940s], Federal agencies defined a variety of statistical geographic areas at the metropolitan level (including 'metropolitan districts,' 'industrial areas,' 'labor market areas,' and 'metropolitan counties')... Because of variations in methodologies and the resulting inconsistencies in area definitions, one agency's statistics were not directly comparable with another agency's statistics for any given area."³ To minimize inconsistencies, OMB's predecessor, the Bureau of the Budget, defined the "standard metropolitan area" in 1949. Over the past half-century, as recounted by the U.S. Census Bureau, federal statistical categories have evolved, most recently towards the definition of a micropolitan category: "The term [standard metropolitan area] was changed to 'standard metropolitan statistical area' (SMSA) in 1959 and to 'metropolitan statistical

FIGURE 1

This map shows Metropolitan Areas in 1999.

Source:

<http://www.census.gov/geol/www/mapGallery/macb-page.html>.

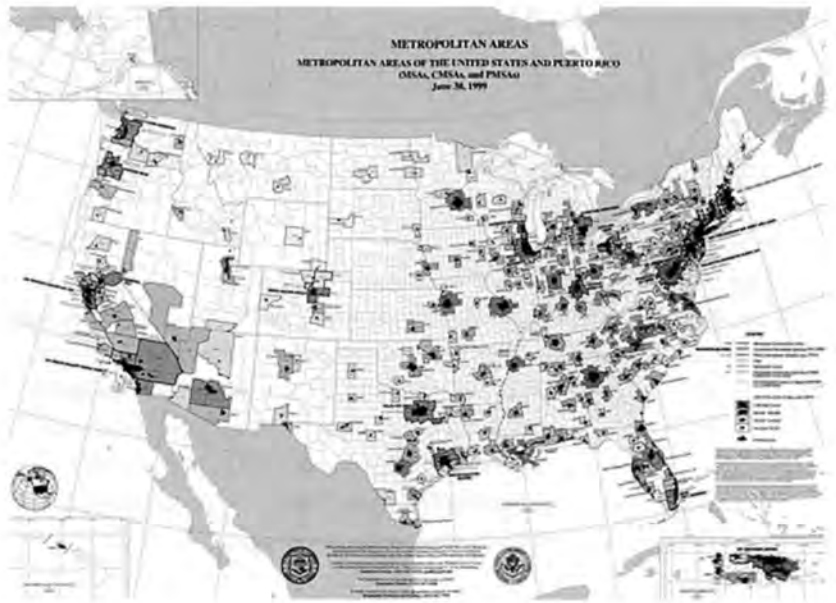


FIGURE 2

This map shows Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas in 2003.

Source:

http://www.census.gov/geol/www/maps/msa_maps2003/us_wall_0603_rev.htm.



area' (MSA) in 1983. The term 'metropolitan area' (MA) was adopted in 1990 and referred collectively to metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), consolidated metropolitan statistical areas (CMSAs), and primary metropolitan statistical areas (PMSAs). The term 'core based statistical area' (CBSA) became effective in 2000 and refers collectively to metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas.⁴

In 1950, as now, 50,000 or more population was the threshold for metropolitan designation, and, for the first time, metropolitan designations were county-based. In the 1950 census reports, 169 Standard Metropolitan Areas were designated nationwide. By 1999, based on the same county criterion and 1990 census data, 286 Metropolitan Statistical Areas were designated. Differences

from 1950 to 1999 mostly are attributable to new combinations of existing metropolitan areas and the designation of additional metropolitan areas, both due to population movement and growth. Consistent through the permutations since 1950, all lands outside metropolitan areas were undifferentiated as nonmetropolitan. (Figure 1)

OMB recently reconsidered statistical categories used by the U.S. Census Bureau and other bureaus and organizations to develop statistics that are precise, meaningful, and useful. In 2000, following a 10-year study, OMB inserted the new micropolitan category between the old twins of metropolitan and nonmetropolitan. In December 2003, OMB issued the current list of Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas.⁵ The 2003 list expands the number of metropolitan areas—an expansion again attributable chiefly to population growth and movement—and identifies the new micropolitan areas. Counties in the expanded metropolitan areas and the new micropolitan areas were drawn from counties previously considered nonmetropolitan. (Figure 2) OMB's 2003 list is the structure for more comprehensive and seamless national statistics that bring into clearer focus the populations and resources of large and small cities, large towns, and areas outside of cities and large towns.

Public Participation Demographics of Four National Historic Preservation Activities

As Robert Lang and Dawn Dhavale of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech explain, the United States population is a moving target: "In 1890, America's census-designated frontier closed as settlement swept into remote corners of the nation. By the 1920s, the US was for the first time majority urban. At mid-century (1950), more than half lived in metropolitan areas. As of the 1970 census, America had become a suburban-dominated nation—with more than half of all metropolitan residents living outside central cities. Now a new milestone has been reached: as of 2000, rural areas cover less than half of the Continental US."⁶

As demographics change, recurring questions for preservation program managers include "Who is our audience?" and "Where should we target our efforts?" Such questions arise regarding a wide variety of preservation activities, including publications such as this journal.

Towards answering such questions, and to test how metropolitan, micropolitan, and outside-CBSA data might reflect public participation in preservation activities, I compared the distribution of the United States population and the distribution of four preservation activities administered by the National Park Service. My inquiry could be phrased several ways, such as "Do historic preservation programs reach the public in a distribution comparable to the overall distribution of the population?" or "How does the distribution of

preservation activities compare to the distribution of taxpayers who fund the activities?"

The four programs selected for analysis are Save America's Treasures grants, Certified Local Governments, the National Register of Historic Places, and federal historic preservation tax incentives.⁷ The sample of preservation activities are Save America's Treasures grants awarded in the years 1999-2004, all designated Certified Local Governments, National Register actions in 2004, and tax incentives Part 2 applications in 2004.

Save America's Treasures grants were first available in 1999 to federal agencies and nonprofit owners to preserve and conserve nationally significant historic properties and collections. The grants are administered cooperatively by the National Park Service, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute for Museum and Library Services, and the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, with assistance from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The National Register of Historic Places, established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, is the nation's official list of prehistoric and historic resources worthy of preservation. Anyone may prepare a nomination for consideration by state, federal, or tribal historic preservation officers regarding properties in their jurisdictions. Proposals for listing and other actions are forwarded to the Keeper of the National Register in the National Park Service for final action.

Since 1985 local governments have been certified to undertake certain historic preservation activities and, in return, Certified Local Governments are eligible for federal funding and other assistance. The program is administered cooperatively by the National Park Service, State Historic Preservation Officers, and local governments.

Begun in 1977, the federal historic preservation tax incentives program is administered cooperatively by the National Park Service, State Historic Preservation Officers, and the Internal Revenue Service. Owners or developers of certain types of historic properties may apply for certification of rehabilitation projects to qualify for federal tax credits.

Overall, the sample analyzed represents the range of our national historic preservation partnership activities. While the four activities share important characteristics, the activities are also dissimilar in substantial ways. All four activities are administered collaboratively by the National Park Service and partners such as other federal agencies and state and local governments; all activities have a large number of potential participants throughout the United States; all public participants self-identify their interest in participating; and all

FIGURE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN FOUR NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM ACTIVITIES.

Sample set	Sample	Sample sorted by statistical areas					
		Metropolitan		Micropolitan		Outside CBSAs	
2000 U.S. population ⁹	281,423,000	231,319,000	82%	28,561,000	10%	21,543,000	8%
1999-2004 Save America's Treasures grants ¹⁰	354	276	78%	42	12%	36	10%
Current Certified Local Governments ¹¹	1,401	887	63%	263	19%	251	18%
2004 National Register actions ¹²	1,623	1,095	67%	246	15%	282	17%
2004 federal historic preservation tax incentives Part 2 applications ¹³	737	609	83%	82	11%	46	6%
Averaged percentages of the four preservation activities	—	—	73%	—	14%	—	13%

Using federal statistical categories of metropolitan and micropolitan areas and outside CBSAs, the table compares the distribution of public participation in four historic preservation activities and the distribution of the U.S. population.

activities provide benefits directly to the public participants. On the other hand, each activity has distinct restrictions. Only nationally significant properties and collections are eligible for Save America's Treasures grants, and most grants require dollar-for-dollar nonfederal matches; Certified Local Governments must meet specific competency criteria; National Register listing requires substantial research and documentation; and projects eligible for tax credits must meet several tests and applicants must pay a fee for Part 2 review.

The sample analyzed represents historic preservation activities in all 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia.⁸ The sample for each activity was selected to assure adequate sample size. All funded Save America's Treasures projects and all Certified Local Governments were included in the analysis. For National Register actions and Part 2 applications for tax incentives, program activity in 2004 provided adequate samples.

Figure 3 shows the correspondence between the distribution of public participation in the four activities and the distribution of the population in the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia. (Figure 3) Preservation professionals and many in the public might expect that our national preservation programs and activities have a metropolitan focus or bias. Factors such as the location of universities that teach historic preservation, the location of govern-

ment agencies and nonprofit organizations that guide and support historic preservation, and assumptions about where historic resources are concentrated might influence this expectation. A different picture emerges when samples of public participation in preservation activities are sorted by metropolitan, micropolitan, and outside CBSAs categories.

Figure 3 shows that, by percentage, distribution of public participation in the Save America's Treasures and historic preservation tax incentives programs closely matches the distribution of the population nationwide. For Certified Local Government and National Register activities, participation is skewed towards the micropolitan and outside-CBSA population at twice the rate for Certified Local Governments in micropolitan areas, and over twice the rate for Certified Local Governments and National Register actions outside CBSAs. Averaged percentage participation in the four activities is also skewed towards the micropolitan and outside-CBSA populations, with participation nine points below metropolitan distribution by population, and four and five points above micropolitan and outside-CBSA distribution respectively.

Other Inquiries

Micropolitan area data and other statistical data can help researchers with inquiries about relationships among people, resources, and places in a changing statistical environment. From my analysis comparing national demographic data and national participation in four preservation activities, geographical distribution of public participation in the activities appears to be consistently comparable to the distribution of potential participants nationwide, at rates beyond what preservationists might have expected.

My analysis does not answer questions such as why the distributions correspond closely or what factors might affect the geographical distribution of public participation in preservation activities, nor does my analysis address finer-grain issues such as public participation in national preservation activities by region or state. Colleagues may wish to pursue these and other questions.

Considering the history of designated metropolitan areas, one might predict a continued increase in the number of metropolitan areas, an increase in the number of micropolitan areas, a decrease in the number of outside-CBSA counties, and ongoing recalculation of the three categories. In tracking demographic shifts, statistics are and will be available that may particularly interest preservationists, especially regarding changes within and among statistical areas. For micropolitan areas, Lang and Dhavale have already highlighted volatile types of micropolitan areas to watch: boomtowns ("fast growing Micros"), dwindleilles ("fastest shrinking Micros"), nearburgs ("closest to big metropolitan areas"), and lonesometowns ("most remote Micros").⁴ The four

types indicate potential for change and, for preservationists, possible historic-resource hotspots. Prehistoric and historic resources are sensitive to both population growth (often meaning development pressure and destruction of heritage resources) and decline (often meaning abandonment and destruction of heritage resources). Growth could affect heritage resources in boomtowns and nearburgs, and decline could affect heritage resources in dwindlevilles and lonesometowns. Tracking such trends may help preservationists in calculating and planning regional and national distribution of our research, education, protection, and preservation efforts.

John Robbins is assistant director for cultural resources, National Park Service. He can be contacted at john_robbins@nps.gov.

Notes

1. Commenters are reluctant to equate “outside CBSAs” and “rural.” Jason Henderson and Stephan Weiler note that “this newly designated classification of rural counties is defined by what the counties are *not*—namely nonmetro noncore—rather than what they are,” and offer that “[t]hese counties, with towns of less than 10,000 inhabitants, might also be called *town counties*.” See Jason Henderson and Stephan Weiler, “Defining ‘Rural’ America,” in *The Main Street Economist*, July 2004, 2, Center for the Study of Rural America, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, online at http://www.kc.frb.org/RuralCenter/mainstreet/MSE_0704.pdf. Kathleen Miller cautions that while the new OMB designation scheme provides greater detail than past categories, “[t]his still, though, lacks a complete picture showing the diversity across rural America . . . While OMB’s revised standards do address many previous concerns with the former metropolitan/nonmetropolitan classification system, shortcomings still remain.” See Kathleen K. Miller, “What is Rural?,” in “Rural by the Numbers,” January 20, 2004, Rural Policy Research Institute, online at <http://www.rupri.org/resources/rnumbers/rbntn.pdf>.
2. For example, the *New York Times* reported that “[t]he point of the micropolitan category is not so much to give government agencies extra data to crunch. It’s to track the growth—as well as the character—of a type of influential urban area that already exists but is barely understood by demographers.” See *New York Times Magazine* (December 12, 2004): 83. The Brookings Institution reports that “[a]n overhaul of the widely-recognized metropolitan classification system by the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) will refashion the way research is conducted and federal dollars are spent.” See William H. Frey, Jill H. Wilson, Alan Berube, and Audrey Singer, “Tracking Metropolitan America into the 21st Century: A Field Guide to the New Metropolitan and Micropolitan Definitions,” November 2004, online at http://brookings.edu/metro/pubs/2004115_metrodefinitions.htm.
3. Office of Management and Budget, “Standards for Defining Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas.” *Federal Register* 65, 82228, online at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov>.
4. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2004-2005, 901, online at <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/statistical-abstract-04.html>.
5. OMB Bulletin No. 04-03, Appendix, online at http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/bulletins/fy04/b04-03_appendix.pdf.
6. Robert E. Land and Dawn Dhavale, *Micropolitan America: A Brand New Geography*, Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech Census Note 5 (May 2004), 2-3, online at <http://www.mi.vt.edu/uploads/micropolitan%20census%20note%2005%2001a.pdf>; accessed April 29, 2005.

7. Information about the four activities is available online at <http://www.cr.nps.gov>; select "A Cultural Resource Subject" or "A Cultural Resource Program."
8. CBSAs in the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia share characteristics (county structure, CBSAs that cross state lines, etc.) not shared with Alaska and Hawaii, and are therefore more directly comparable. Note that the District of Columbia and the entire States of New Jersey and Rhode Island are designated Metropolitan Statistical Areas. There are no Micropolitan Statistical Areas or "outside CBSAs" in the District of Columbia, New Jersey, or Rhode Island.
9. For the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia only; for populations of the states and the District of Columbia, see <http://www.census.gov/statab/www/pop.html>; for populations in Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas in the states and the District of Columbia, see <http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/phc-t29/tab04b.xls>.
10. See <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/treasures/search.htm>
11. See http://grants.cr.nps.gov/CLGs/Get_All_CLG.cfm; accessed January 10, 2005.
12. See <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/nrlist.htm> for the weeks of January 2-December 31, 2004. The sample of National Register actions comprised properties and districts that were "listed," "removed," "additional documentation approved," etc., but excluded the small number of multiple-county actions. For example, the sample did not include "ALABAMA/TENNESSEE, MULTIPLE COUNTIES, Paint Rock Valley, 1820-1954, MPS COVER DOCUMENTATION ACCEPTED, 9/02/04."
13. The source of this information is program records.
14. Robert E. Land and Dawn Dhavale, *Micropolitan America: A Brand New Geography*, 7-9.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Center for Cultural Resources



CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship

Volume 2 Number 2 Summer 2005



CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship
Summer 2005
ISSN 1068-4999

CRM = cultural resource management

CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship is published twice each year by the National Park Service to address the history and development of and trends and emerging issues in cultural resource management in the United States and abroad. Its purpose is to broaden the intellectual foundation of the management of cultural resources. *CRM Journal* is edited in the offices of the National Center for Cultural Resources, National Park Service, in Washington, DC.

The online version of *CRM Journal* is available at www.cr.nps.gov/CRMJournal. Back issues of *CRM* magazine (1978–2002) are available online at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/crm>.

Guidance for authors is available online at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/CRMJournal>.

Manuscripts, letters to the editor, and all questions and recommendations of an editorial nature should be addressed to Antoinette J. Lee, Editor, email Toni_Lee@nps.gov, telephone (202) 354-2272, or fax (202) 371-2422. Incoming mail to the Federal Government is irradiated, which damages computer disks, CDs, and paper products. These materials should be sent by a commercial delivery service to Editor, *CRM Journal*, National Park Service, 1201 Eye Street, NW (2251), Washington, DC 20005.

Views and conclusions in *CRM Journal* are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions or policies of the U.S. Government. Acceptance of material for publication does not necessarily reflect an opinion or endorsement on the part of the *CRM Journal* staff or the National Park Service.

CRM Journal is produced under a cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers.

To subscribe to *CRM Journal*—

Online <http://www.cr.nps.gov/CRMJournal>
email NPS_CRMJournal@nps.gov
Facsimile (202) 371-2422

U.S. Mail—
CRM Journal
National Park Service
1849 C Street, NW (2251)
Washington, DC 20240-0001