Reporting Métis in Urban Centres on the 1996 Census

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ABSTRACT

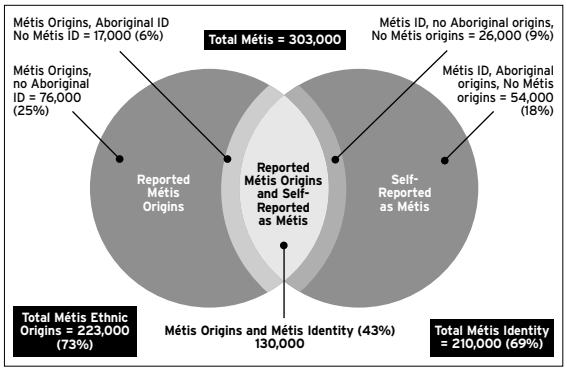
This paper argues that the geographical location of the Métis in Canada, particularly their presence and situations in urban centres, need to be more carefully investigated. The author proposes that in order to provide researchers with a more holistic understanding of the integration of the Métis within the Canadian urban landscape, the census questions should be formulated in such a way as to maintain the broadest possible definition of the concept of Métis identity. In fact, the melding of the data collected about Métis origin and about Métis identity into a "total Métis" category may provide a more comprehensible approach for future research on the Métis population in urban centres.

The number of people reporting Métis origins on the Census has increased dramatically over the last 20 years, as has the number of people who self-identified as Métis over the last decade. A majority of people reporting Métis origins or identity live in Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) or Census Agglomerations (CAs)[1], but the circumstances of their well-being has remained relatively unexplored. How are Métis faring relative to the non-Aboriginal and other Aboriginal populations? Do people reporting Métis reside in particular geographic communities? Are people who have only recently reported either Métis origins or identity socio-economically different from the non-Aboriginal population? Do urban Métis perceive barriers to their participation both in non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities? These are examples of some of the questions that need to be answered in order to have a more complete understanding of how this urban population is faring.

As a starting point, the Census provides benchmarks for the Aboriginal identity and ethnic origin questions. As shown on Diagram 1, the identity and origin numbers appear comparable. However, when cross-tabulated, only 43% reported both Métis identity and Métis origin on the 1996 Census (Diagram 1). This paper applies 1996 Census data to consider whether or not combining origin and identity results would help researchers achieve higher counts at the Census Tract[2] (CT) level and thereby provide a more complete understanding of Canada's urban Métis population[3]. The first section will present a brief historical overview of Métis in Canada. The second section will provide an overview of the census concepts where Métis is reported and consider reporting patterns and geographic distribution. The third section will look at what happens when these two concepts are combined and whether (or not) this can enrich our understanding of urban Métis. This paper will illustrate that there are many different ways in which people report Métis on the census and will highlight that the concept of Métis remains fluid. It will be suggested that definitions of Métis should remain broad so that more detailed research of these communities can reflect the urban Métis reality.

Diagram 1

People who reported Métis on the 1996 Census (20% Sample)



Total Métis Origins: people who reported "Métis Single Response", Métis and Others", or a "Multiple Aboriginal Response" to Question 17 (Ethnic Origin) on the 1996 Census. "Multiple Aboriginal Response" was included as 97% of combinations include a Métis response.

Total Métis Identity: people who reported "Métis Single Response", "North American Indian and Métis", "Métis and Inuit", or "North American Indian and Inuit and Métis" to Question 18 (Aboriginal Identity) on the 1996 Census.

Defining Métis

The concept of Métis comes from the word mestizo, which means a person of mixed ancestry, and usually refers to people of European and Aboriginal origins (Canadian Oxford Dictionary). Patrick Douaud, from Canadian Ethnology Services, at the National Museum of Man (1985) takes us back to the 1600s and 1700s when there was a lot interaction between Indians and "Whites" in the St. Lawrence and Upper Great Lakes regions and how they were mostly Indian and French Canadian, but Highland Scot, English and Yankees as well (Douaud,1985, 8). By 1885, a Prairie nation under the leadership of Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumond, local Métis inhabitants defended their right to the land and to self-government in what became known as the Northwest Rebellion. However the defeat of the Métis rebellion, similar to their defeat at Red River (1869-70), resulted in several thousand Métis suffering the consequences of displacement (Peterson and Brown, 1985, 4).

During the 19th century, mixed marriages were occurring between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples across Canada. Unlike in Manitoba, the degree to which this mixing occurred is difficult to discern. In the case of Quebec, for instance, biologist Jacques Rousseau has suggested that forty percent of French-Canadians could find at least one Amerindian in their family tree (Dickson, 1985, 19). However an important question remains: Why was Red River so different from other regions in Canada? Dickson identifies how the French government viewed intermarriage as a means to populate French nationals in Canada (1985, 22). It seems that many regions either assimilated or did not recognize mixed marriages and their offspring and it is difficult to know how large the Métis population could possibly be if the definition of Métis remains broad.

The question of terminology and when to apply Métis or métis has also become an issue. Francophones have, up until the 1960s, applied the term métis to refer to the offspring of Indian and white parentage, but more specifically to the French- and Cree-speaking descendants of the Red River Métis (Peterson and Brown, 1985, 5). However, by the 1970s the situation had changed and the term Métis had expanded and was regularly applied in English to those people who had Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal origins even though individuals had no lineage to Red River. Peterson and Brown assert that this terminology transition confuses a historically-based political and ethnic identity with the genetic attributes of individuals, regardless of their ethnic or cultural identities (1985, 5).

The definition of who is and who is not Métis is very much at issue. As the rights of Métis are discussed in the media, amongst parliamentarians, in the courts, and by Canadians in general, as the place of Louis Riel in Canada's history is publicly reconsidered, as more people feel comfortable expressing or recognizing their aboriginality, so the number of people reporting both an Aboriginal identity and/or origin grows. The Census does not attempt to clarify whether or not someone is reporting as métis or Métis. However, it is clear that today more people are reporting either one of these terms on the Census. In this essay I refer to "Métis" since that is how Statistics Canada releases the Census data and more than likely some people have reported Métis as a distinct socio-economic group and others have reported Métis as an indication of their mixed ancestry.

The Census Concepts

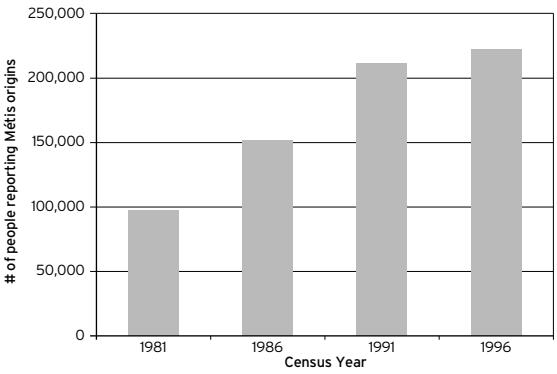
Ethnic Origin

An origin question has been on the Canadian Census since 1887, with the sole exception of 1881. However, this information has not been collected uniformly over time making historical comparison difficult and questionable. Prior to the 1981 Census, the ethnic origin question asked people only about their paternal ancestral origins thereby not always capturing peoples' Métis origins. Then, 1981 Census questions requested information on origins of both paternal and maternal ancestors and multiple responses were accepted. By 1996 the question becomes a write-in question with space for multiple responses and a list of examples, one of which is Métis. It is clear that reporting Métis on the ethnic origin question does not always equate with lineage back to the original Red River community.

As shown on Graph 1, the number of people reporting Métis origins has increased from 98,300 in 1981 to almost 223,000 in 1996. This increase can be attributed in part to

Graph 1

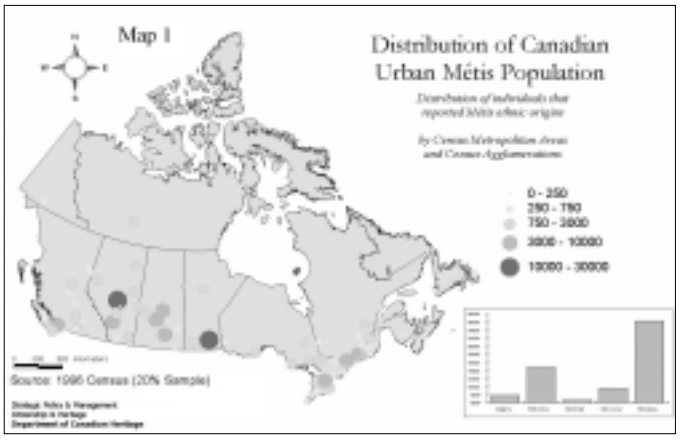
People Reporting Metis Origins, 1981-1996 Census



births, but also to ethnic mobility, the fluidity of defining who is Métis and the many different ways in which Métis origins can be reported.

Given that the concept of Métis means mixed, people reporting Métis origins often report multiple origins. On the 1996 Census, 77% of people reporting Métis origins reported it as a multiple response compared to 55% of people reporting North American Indian origins and 33% of people reporting Inuit origins. Of those who reported multiple responses Métis origins, 26% reported two responses, 24% reported three responses and 27% reported four or more responses to the ethnic origin question. 67% of people who reported Métis origins reported it in combination with Canadian, British and/or French. Trying to derive this population using the ethnic origin data is difficult since people could report in a variety of ways.

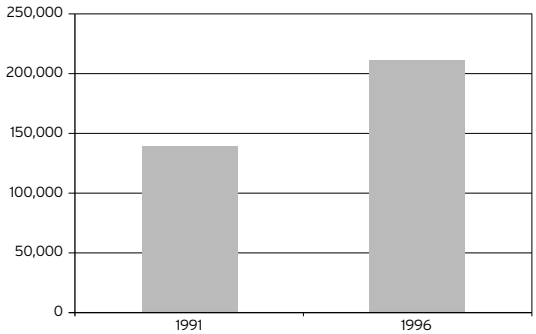
The ethnic origin results highlight that Métis are not only a Prairie group. The top six Métis provinces were: Manitoba (22%), Alberta (21%) Saskatchewan (15%), Ontario (15%), British Columbia (13%), and Quebec (10%). Sixty-seven percent of people reporting Métis origins resided in CMAs or CAs and the top five CMAs were Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Calgary, and Montreal (Map 1).



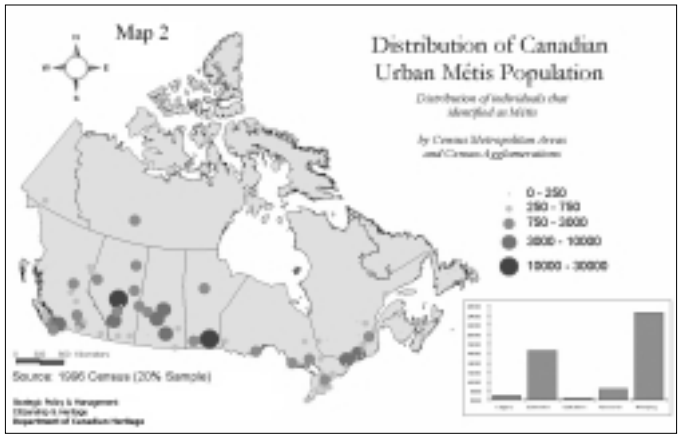
Aboriginal self-identification

On the 1996 Census a new question on Aboriginal self-identity was introduced, helping researchers hone in on those people who reported themselves as Aboriginal. This question was similar to one posed on the 1991 post-censal Aboriginal Peoples Survey. (Graph 2)[4]

Graph 2
People Reporting Metis Identity, 1991 Aboriginal Peoples' Survey and 1996 Census



The identity population is centred in the Prairie provinces as illustrated by the top 6 Métis provinces: Alberta (24%), Manitoba (22%), Saskatchewan (17%), British Columbia (13%), Ontario (11%), and Quebec (8%). Approximately 64% of the Métis identity population resided in CMAs and CAs in Canada and the top five cities were : Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Calgary and Saskatoon. (Map 2)

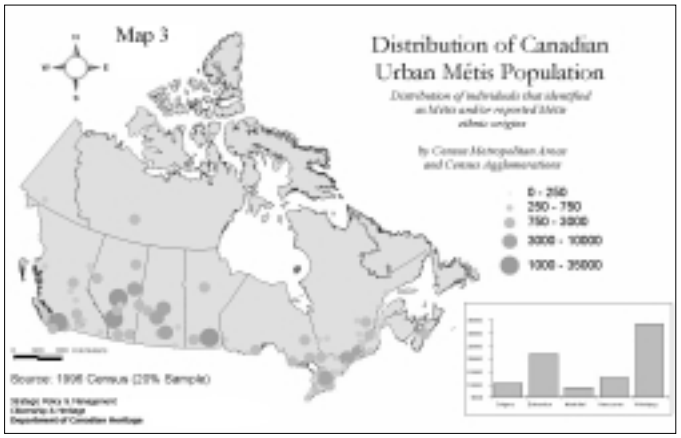


Total Métis – Combining Origin and Identity

The case of Métis reporting on the Census in Canada is unique and it is only because of this uniqueness that data from these two different concepts, ethnic origin and Aboriginal identity, can be melded into a "Total Métis" count. Totalling all people reporting Métis provides a concept with which to work towards a more complete understanding of Métis in urban centres.

According to the 1996 Census approximately 303,000 (Diagram 1) people reported Métis on the Census and 64% of this population resided in CMAs and CAs. The remainder of this paper will apply the "Total Métis" concept to the top four Métis CMAs (Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, and Calgary) since it may provide insight into the geographic situation of Métis in cities and provide a base for future research on Métis in urban centres. (Map 3)

A geographic overview of people reporting Métis on the census will provide the basics to complete analysis of this population and help determine whether some of these urban Métis live in the same area of a city. Here a 250-person cut-off at the CT level will be applied, a cut-off that



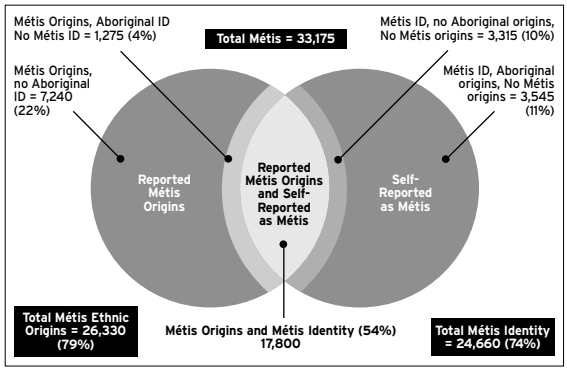
Statistics Canada often applies when deciding whether a geographic unit has a sufficient population to apply socio-economic indicators.[5] If people are living in similar regions within a particular CMA, this may indicate numerous different scenarios, two of which are that people are moving to this region of the city due to discrimination in the form of housing and labour force (Olson and Kobayashi, 1993) or that people move there because of the perceived benefits of close proximity, such as similar values, norms and ethnic identity (Balakrishnan and Hou, 1999).

Winnipeg

Of all Canadian cities, Winnipeg has the largest Métis population with 26,330 reporting Métis origins, 24,660 people reporting Métis identity and 33,175 reporting Métis as either their ethnic origins and/or their identity. Winnipeg also has the largest proportion of the Métis population that reported Métis origins and identity; conversely Winnipeg has a relatively low proportion of people reporting Métis identity with either no Aboriginal origins or no Métis origins. (Diagram 2)

Diagram 2

People who reported Métis in Winnipeg on the 1996 Census (20% Sample)



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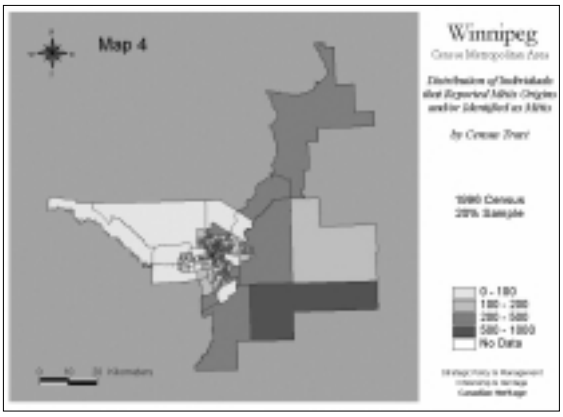
Total Métis Identity: people who reported "Métis Single Response", "North American Indian and Métis", "Métis and Inuit", or "North American Indian and Inuit and Métis" to Question 18 (Aboriginal Identity) on the 1996 Census.

When the total Métis calculation is applied there are 50 CTs with over 250 persons reporting Métis, indicating that in these small geographic units there are Métis from both the identity and origin side of the equation living in the same area. The 50 CTs is higher than the 28 CTs for Métis identity only, and the 29 for the Métis origin population. (Map 4)

Nine CTs had over 500 people reporting Métis, with identity there were six and with origin there were three, while in one CT 22% (915 people) of the population reported Métis on either the origin and/or identity questions on the Census (Map 4).

Winnipeg not only has the largest Métis population, but it also has the highest proportion of people reporting both identity and origin. Even so, applying a total Métis number provides more CTs with adequate numbers to complete future socio-economic analysis of this population.

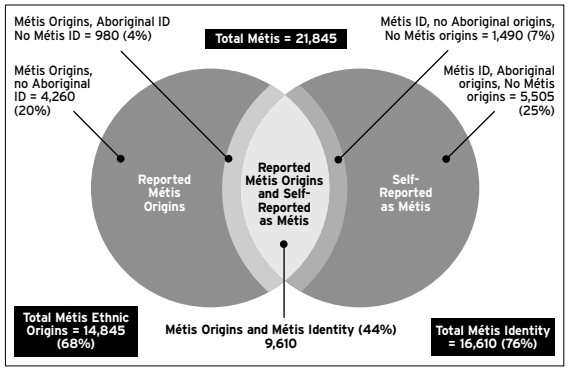


Edmonton

Edmonton had the second largest Métis population with 16,600 people reporting Métis identity and 14,845 reporting Métis origins and 21,825 reporting Métis to at least one of these questions. Edmonton was the only city where more people reported Métis identity than those reporting Métis origins. This CMA had the largest proportion of people reporting a Métis identity with Aboriginal origins but no Métis origins (25%), while conversely it also had the lowest proportion of people who reported a Métis identity with no Aboriginal origins (20%). (Diagram 3)

Diagram 3

People who reported Métis in Edmonton on the 1996 Census (20% Sample)



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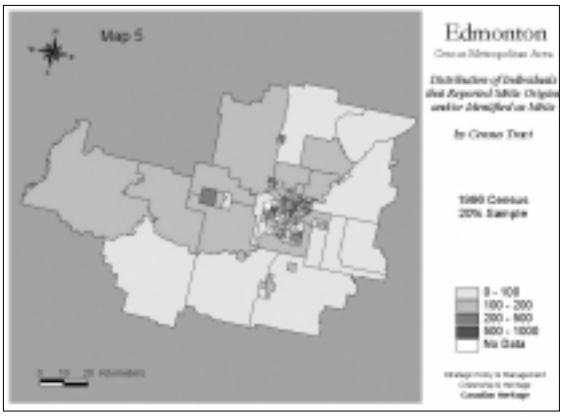
When applying the total Métis calculation, there were 14 CTs with over 250 people reporting Métis while there were 8 and 4 CTs for Métis identity and Métis ethnic origin respectively. Varied reporting patterns help to increase the size of the population in selected CTs and provide a broader base for analysis (Map 5). Comparison of the results of these two surveys is questionable, especially since the questions were not exactly the same and the Census is based on proxy responses. However, these are the only benchmarks currently available.

Vancouver

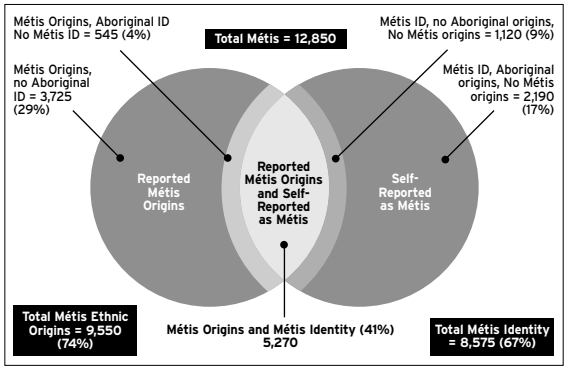
In Vancouver there were 8,580 reporting a Métis identity, and 9,550 people reporting Métis origins, for a



total Métis count of 12,855 people. This CMA had a relatively high proportion of people reporting Métis origins with no Aboriginal identity (29%) and an 8% gap between the proportions of its population reporting origins (74%) compared to identity (67%). (Diagram 4)

Diagram 4

People who reported Métis in Vancouver on the 1996 Census (20% Sample)



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No CT in Vancouver had a Métis population over 250 people and this may reflect the fact that this larger origin population with no identity is not living in the same neighbourhood as people reporting Métis identity (Map 6)

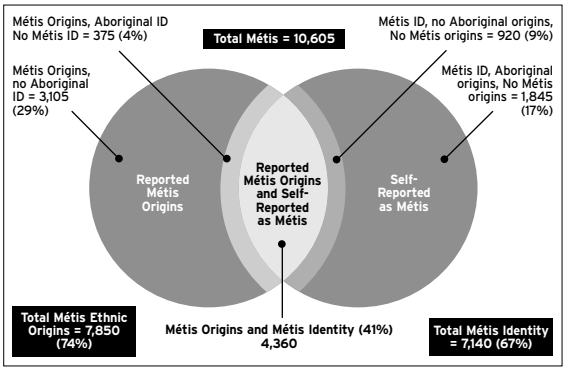


Calgary

In Calgary 7,135 people reported Métis identity and 7,850 people reported Métis origins, 10,600 people reported Métis in general on the 1996 Census. The distribution of identity and origin populations in Calgary is similar to that of Vancouver, with a larger Métis origin population; 29% of the total Métis population reported Métis origins with no Aboriginal identity. (Diagram 5)

Diagram 5

People who reported Métis in Calgary on the 1996 Census (20% Sample)



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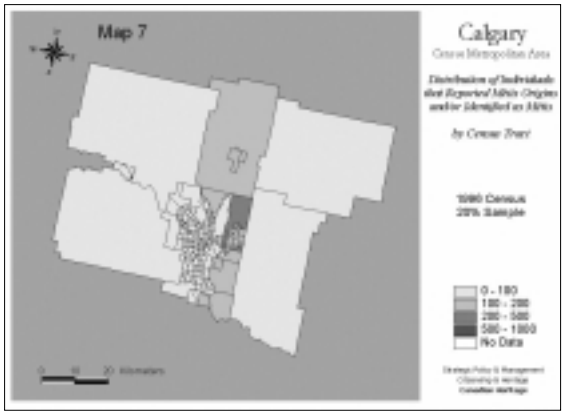
Calgary unlike Vancouver has two central CTs with a total Métis population of over 250 people, something the identity CTs and origins CTs did not provide. In this city, combining the Métis identity and origin populations provides an improved opportunity to understand this population and further analysis needs to occur within these CTs or by using Census information so as to provide a more complete understanding of the situation in this rapidly growing centre. (Map 7)



Conclusion

The case of the Métis in urban centres across Canada needs to be more closely examined from a different perspective and a total Métis perspective provides researchers with a more holistic understanding of how this population is integrating into the urban landscape. The case of the Métis is different from any other origin on the Census since the

definition of Métis is still being discussed in numerous circles, there is a high degree of ethnic mobility, and someone could report as Métis in a variety of ways. For these reasons the melding of these two concepts should be considered.

It is apparent that in three of the four cities examined here, Métis who self-identify and have Métis origins often reside in the same residential area, thereby helping researchers to understand where this population is located and where the overlap occurs. When using the combined Métis variable more socio-economic and residential segregation analysis could be completed to attain a fuller understanding of what is happening in these areas and why these people have chosen to reside in the same region of the city. When this new total Métis variable does not produce Census tracts, then this also provides useful information. The fact that in many cases the origin and identity populations may not be reporting the same way and they may not have exactly the same socio-economic standing, but they do in each of these cities reside in similar neighbourhoods. This is something that needs to be explored more fully to help researchers, community groups and governments more fully understand the circumstances of urban Métis in Canada.

References

[1] Census Metropolitan Area or a Census Agglomeration is formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a large urban area. The census population count of the urban core is at least 10,000 to form a census agglomeration and at least 100,000 to forma a census metropolitan area (2001 Census Dictionary).

[2] Census Tracts are small, relatively stable geographic areas that usually have a population of 2,500 to 8,000. They are located in census metropolitan areas and in census agglomerations with an urban core population of 50,000 or more in the previous census.

[3] The idea for totalling the Aboriginal origin and identity populations emerged from a lively debate at the Aboriginal Peoples' Survey's Implementation Committee on which I was a federal representative. Several of the Aboriginal organizations represented at the Committee suggested that total combining origin and identity was a more inclusive and realistic count than one that focused purely on Aboriginal identity.

[4] Comparison of the results of these two surveys is questionable, especially since the questions were not exactly the same and the Census is based on proxy responses. However these are the only benchmarks currently available.

[5] This issue has been discussed at the Aboriginal Peoples' Survey Implementation Committee.

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