

Spatial Heterogeneity

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Definition: Spatial heterogeneity is the “patchiness of the host population” (Hagenaars, Donnelly and Ferguson, 2004). In other words, it refers to the unequal and uneven distribution of a population (or resources, or whatever) across space and spatial units. It is also important to note that spatial heterogeneity is very scale-dependent. For example, census tracts within a metropolitan area may appear to be homogenous when you examine a variable such as race. However, if you look at a smaller unit of analysis, such as blocks or block-groups, you may find that within each census tract, there is considerable variability, with whites living in certain blocks and blacks living in others. Thus, what can appear homogenous at a broader level turns out to be heterogeneous at a finer level.

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