

Collisions in Relation to School Safety Zones in Toronto *

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This paper reports our analysis of motor vehicle collisions in Toronto, Canada, and its relationship with the presence of school safety zones. Data were obtained from the City of Toronto open data website, as well as the City of Toronto Transportation Services department, and 311 Toronto.

Keywords: crash, motor vehicle collisions, schools, spatial analysis

Introduction

The goal of this project is to explore the relationships between motor vehicle collisions (strictly involving pedestrians), and school safety zones within Toronto. To draw conclusions, data from various sources have been acquired in order to establish trends from previous years. General trends on this relationship were determined before the data were further analyzed. Having an opportunity to examine these data allowed for some rough predictions to be made in terms of the reasons for these incidents occurring more and less frequently within specific areas of Toronto. For instance, the number of collisions in school safety zones should drop where the speed limit is lower. Further analysis is required to determine if this is the case.

This is intended to find ways to reduce these incidents as injury and fatality rates are higher in some areas. If fines can be increased in these areas, along with adding additional traffic enforcement, these incidents may be prevented from occurring in the future. There are likely more conclusions and solutions that will be determined as the data is further analyzed as various other factors will be examined, supplementing this general outlook. Overall, having a better insight on this issue can help generate ideas on how to reduce motor collision incidents within school zones in the City of Toronto.

Background

Canada has shown an improvement in road and transport safety over the years as collision fatalities and injuries have exhibited a declining trend. Nevertheless, vehicular collisions remain a prominent threat to the lives, bodies, bank accounts, and general well-being of Canadians. In 2018, collisions resulted in 1500 fatalities and 152,847 injuries (Transport Canada, 2020). “On-road” collisions have been a majority source of child fatalities for many years in Canada, and despite the lowering rate, these collisions comprise 49% of fatalities affecting children aged 0-14 with only 13% of them occurring when the child is a passenger (Parachute, 2016). This outlines that child pedestrians are at risk of being fatally struck by vehicles. To counteract this, school zones are established to protect children in and around areas they frequently gather (i.e. schools). School zones are strips of road near schools or childcare areas, delineated by a lower maximum speed limit and an inability to pass in either lane. These zones have been shown to effectively reduce the number of fatal and injury inducing crashes by ~4% per a 1km/h decrease in speed limit (Sun et al., 2018, p. 1087).

School zones seem to be effective in idealized scenarios but concerns exist due to unequal zone states in which municipalities and drivers are responsible for creating. Municipalities establish school zones and determine their features (location, length, speed limit, etc) and in the end, drivers must make the effort to consciously follow the rules and make safe choices when in a zone. This is not guaranteed: on average in Toronto 21% of drivers speed while in school zones with percentages climbing as high as 85% in specific zones, which road safety advocates blame partially on infrastructure that promotes fast driving (ex. straight-aways and four-lane traffic) (Rocha & Pelley, 2020). Speeding alone is not the only threat to school zone safety; illegal parking and distracted driving have both been identified as some of the most common unsafe

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behaviours demonstrated by drivers in school zones (CAA polling, 2019). If these actions are as common as they are reported to be, then are school zones not uniformly deterring drivers from unsafe behaviours?

In conclusion, school zones are effective, but are they effective unilaterally and are their features optimized for reducing the ever-present threat of collisions for younger generations? This study has value in that it provides a deeper understanding of the efficacy of school zones as it gives insight into the spatial distributions of crashes within them, potentially establishing zones with varying intensities, opposed to taking efficacy averages. Through this, hotspots and trends in school zone contained collisions can be developed, outlining regions that should be addressed.

Predictions

The research question asks if there is a direct relationship between collisions involving pedestrians and the presence of school safety zones. Due to the proven efficacy of safety zones, it is predicted that these areas will experience fewer collisions than areas without safety zones. Conversely, it is probable that areas that experience more collisions than others will be found to lack adequate safety features.

Several factors may affect the reliability and accuracy of the data analysis conducted. If a safety zone was recently established in an area, it is possible that a significant number of collisions occurred there to necessitate its creation, skewing the number of events in this zone. This is solved by comparing the zone implementation date to the collision event date, both of which are fields present in the collisions shapefile. As well, areas with a higher population density and greater traffic flow are more likely to have collisions. The active hours of a safety zone are also of relevance. Some safety signs are turned off after school hours, raising the speed limit to facilitate greater traffic flow. If collisions occurred at this time, this would give the appearance of greater collisions in a safety zone, when in fact the zone was not active. Fortunately, collision time and zone active hours are recorded in the collision and safety zone shapefiles, respectively, solving this issue. Finally, other roadway conditions play a role in collision frequency, such as lighting, road state (icy, dry, etc.), and visibility. If little correlation is found between safety zones and collisions, perhaps one of these fields will prove more significant.

Study area

Toronto has adapted to be a very diverse city over the last 30 years with a mass increase in car usage and general population living near the downtown core. As this high density area has had a dramatic increase in car usage, more collisions are prominent to occur. As Toronto is a city known by all of Ontario, it is beneficial to examine this particular area of study in order to see if there are any trends between car collisions and school safety zones. This is of great benefit to all individuals within the surrounding area. The data will go through a series of tests in order to further analyse trends and determine if any changes need to be made or if solutions can be created to solve/reduce them.

Other cities such as New York, Chicago, Houston, and Los Angeles could have been used, although it was determined that the best choice would be Toronto as it is the area closest to McMaster, and the one that the majority of McMaster students are familiar with. To determine the relationship between collisions and safety zones, sources from the City of Toronto along with transportation trends within the area are examined. Using R-Studio, these data will be plotted on maps and further analyzed to find common trends between the different datasets to determine a conclusion.

It is extremely beneficial to choose an area of study that is significant to the researchers. This will allow connections to be made with the areas affected or specific trends that are seen throughout the analysis. Having background knowledge on a specific area or type of data can always allow for an easier, but more in depth analysis. For this instance, the most beneficial would have been a specific area in Toronto, although all of Toronto was chosen in order to have more variety in trends and to be able to truly see the impacts of collisions and school safety zones.

The area of Toronto that will be examined is shown below in Figure. 1



Figure 1: Boundaries of Toronto, Canada (2021)

Data & Methods

The data for this project is sourced from the City of Toronto Open Data website. The data on the school safety zones is provided by the Transportation Services department of the City of Toronto. This dataset displays points for where the school safety zone radars are located, the speed reading at which the device flashes, the speed limit, as well as other attributes. These school safety zones are used by the Watch Your Speed Program (WYSP). To compliment these data, a detailed count of speeds measured by the aforementioned radars is also used and is also provided by Transportation Services. To give geographical context as to where the schools in Toronto are located, a dataset featuring the location of schools is used. This dataset is provided by 311 Toronto and is collected by the Planning Division of the Toronto District School Board. The primary examination of this project is to analyze the effectiveness of school safety zones. To do this, a dataset featuring motor vehicle collisions is used. This dataset, provided by the Toronto Police Services, features the participants involved in the collision (pedestrians, cyclists, automobiles, etc.), when and where the collision occurred, as well as other key factors such as the visibility at the time of the collision. As previous studies have shown, school safety zones are effective at reducing the number of collisions in the zone. Analyzing the data for Toronto helps verify this notion and can also act as an incentive to improve the school safety zones in Toronto if they are deemed ineffective.

Since data variations occur over the years, more recent data will be used to be as accurate to current as possible. Some of the datasets date as far back as 2006 which could be of benefit to see if there were any improvements or decline over time. Multiple factors will be examined to determine our final conclusions. Quadrat analysis, heat maps, buffer zones around the safety zones, and statistical tests will all be applied.

A GitHub repository was used to store relevant project data, including the City of Toronto data, which was able to be imported into RStudio through the GitHub pathway. The source data used includes the WYSP sign locations, 2006 - 2019 collision locations, and the location of all learning facilities (schools, daycares, montessori etc) within Toronto. This data, including the Toronto boundary polygon, were initially assigned the WGS84 geographic coordinate system geometry, which proved to be an issue with quadrat analysis as that method requires a projected coordinate system. As such, the points of the source data were converted to WGS84's corresponding UTM zone (UTM 17N), and the northings and easting were then able to be used by the quadrat function. To transform the Toronto boundary polygon geometry it was first converted into polyline segments, points were then spaced at uniform distances along each polyline. These points were then converted to UTM 17N and built back up into the Toronto boundary polygon. This enabled analysis via quadrats.

Quadrat, heatmap, and buffer analysis all provide an insight into the distribution of collisions but in various forms, each with their own specialty. Heatmap analysis is highly qualitative as far as its look into distribution goes. It provides a clear visual of high and low density zones by drawing a coloured circle at each observation, with the colour becoming more intense as these circles overlap. To actually analyze the data, a quantitative approach was also used to, instead of visualizing distribution, understand it through quadrat counts. This works by laying a grid of specified dimensions over an analysis window, in this case the Toronto boundary, and then counting the number of observations in each grid square. Quadrat analysis was also applied to the WYSP locations and the learning facility locations, allowing us to compare and contrast the datasets' distributions and learn of any major discrepancies in quadrat counts between them. Buffer analysis works via drawing a circle of specified radius around each observation and then counting the observations within that radius; in this case the circle is placed around the WYSP locations and collisions within its buffer are counted. This gives a view into how collisions are distributed relative to the school zone signs, and if existing school zones are helping prevent collisions by deterring unsafe driving practices. With these three analysis methods, it is possible to portray a clear picture of the efficacy of school zones and where new school zones are needed across Toronto.

Results

Below is a leaflet map showcasing all accidents (red), schools (black), and speed signs (purple) present in Toronto from 2006-2020.

Collisions & Schools & School Zones

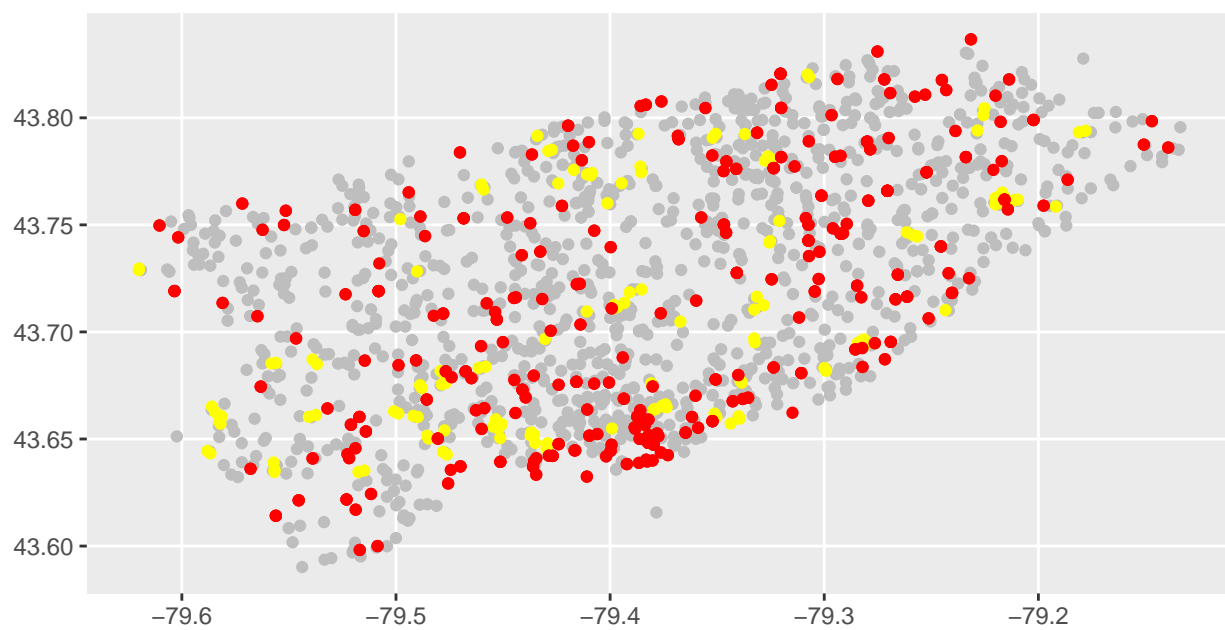


Figure 2: Collisions, Schools and School Zones of Toronto, Canada (2006-2019)

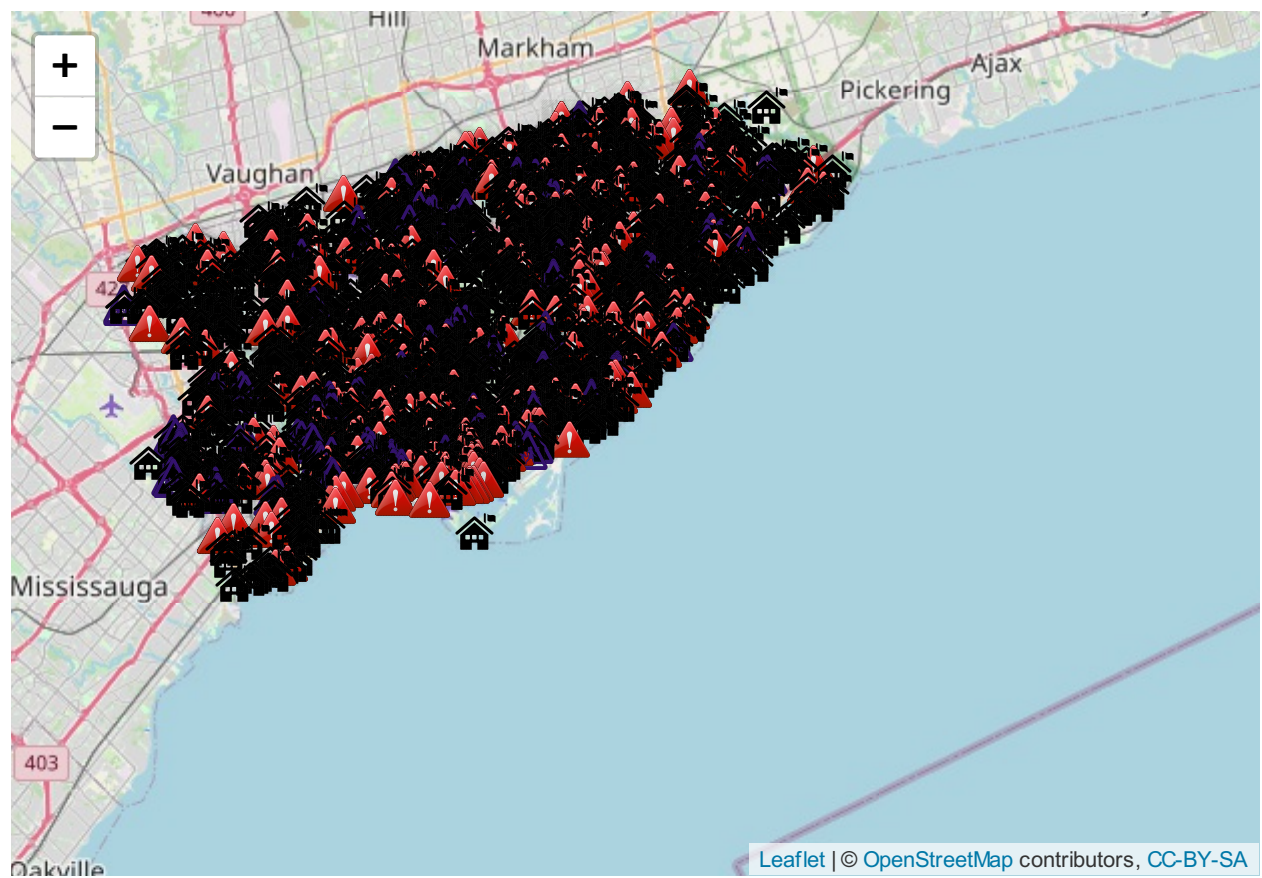


Figure 3: Leaflet of Collisions, Schools and School Zones Toronto, Canada (2006-2019)

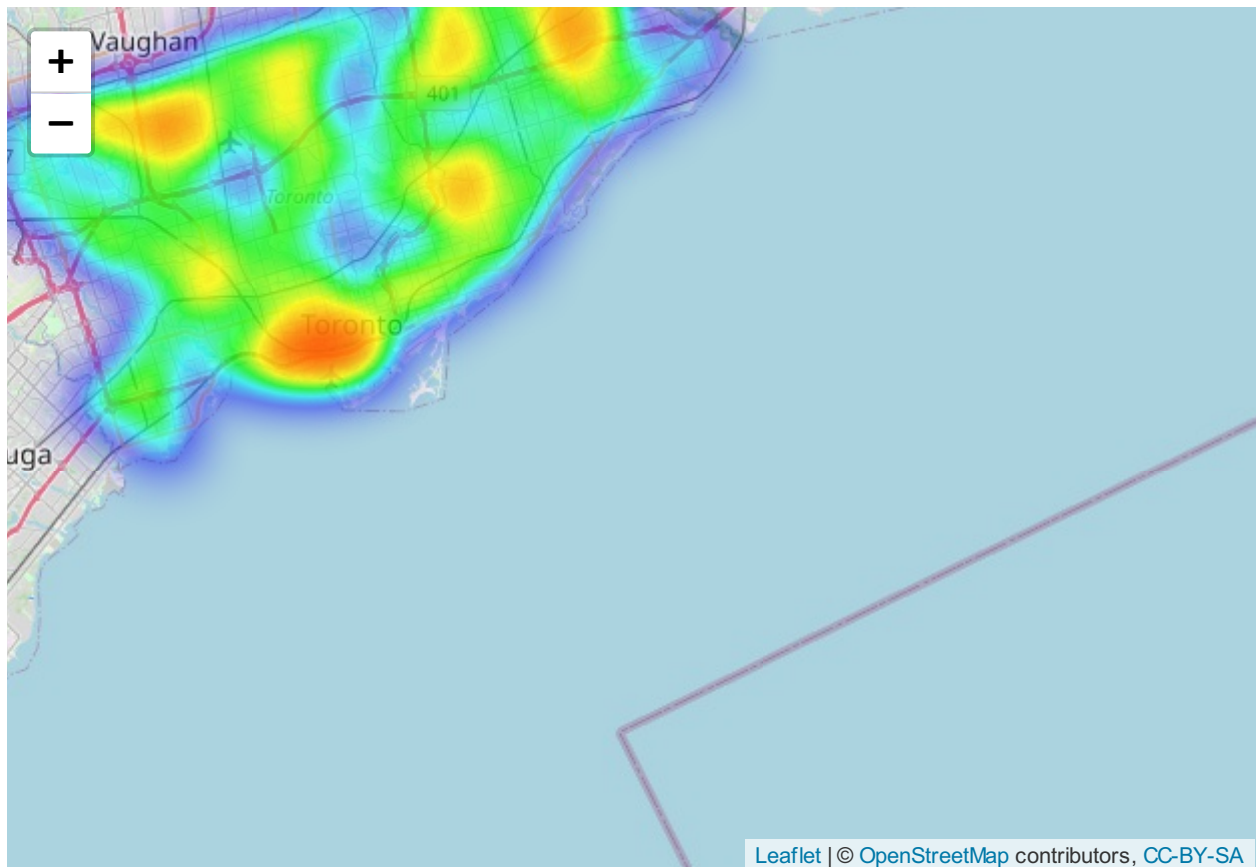
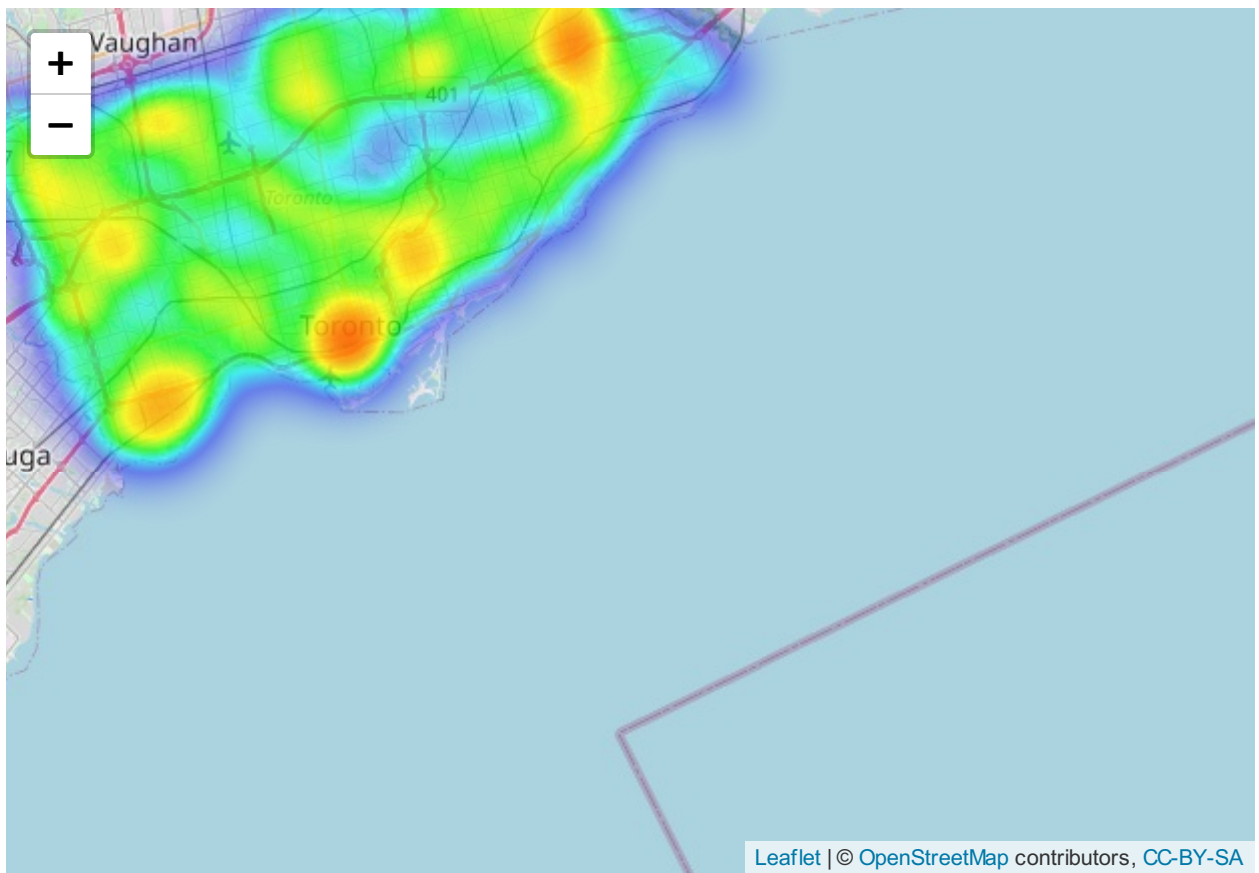


Figure 4: Heat Map of Collisions with School Zones in Toronto, Canada (2006-2019)



##	Collisions	Speed Signs	Schools
## P-Value	2.2000e-16	2.9880e-08	2.2000e-16
## Number of Tiles	2.1000e+01	2.1000e+01	2.1000e+01
## Chi-Squared Test X2	2.8890e+02	7.6561e+01	1.9586e+02

Quadrat_Count_of_Collisions

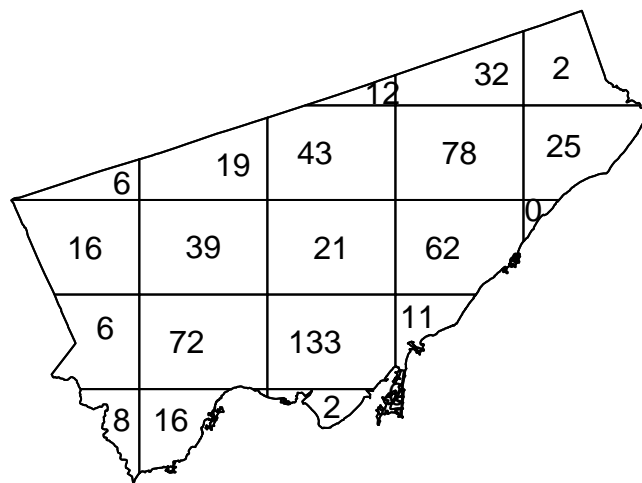


Figure 5: Quadrat of collisions in Toronto, Canada (2006-2019)

Quadrat_Count_of_Speed_Signs

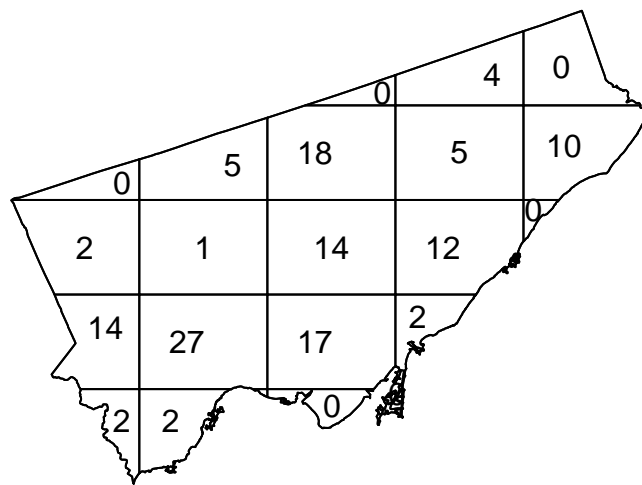


Figure 6: Quadrat of Speed Signs in Toronto, Canada (2006-2019)

Quadrat_Count_of_Schools

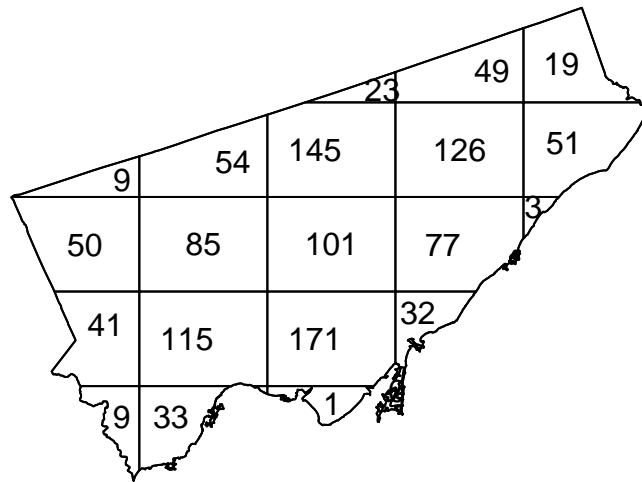


Figure 7: Quadrat of Schools in Toronto, Canada (2006-2019)

Analysis

Conclusion

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