

From Global Maps to Local Meaning

Building Colloquial Regions in Search

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The Problem

Query	Bing Result
"Central Texas"	Central Texas College
"West Africa"	Western Province, Rwanda

>100K impressions/week on this query class

We misunderstood the **type of geography** the user meant.

What Are “Colloquial Regions”?

Informal geography that users search for, but maps don’t model.

Example	What It Is	Why It’s Hard
"Central Texas"	Cultural region	No official boundary
"South Florida"	Colloquial subregion	Doesn’t match county lines
"Silicon Valley"	Economic/cultural region	Fuzzy extent
"Puget Sound"	Natural + cultural	Geographic feature as region
"The Balkans"	Geographic/political region	Definition varies by context
"The Sahe1"	Climate/geographic zone	Spans 10+ countries

KEY INSIGHT

These aren’t edge cases. **Large % of defective query answers** across our top markets were caused by this kind of failure.

Why Map Models Fail Here

*The issue is not the missing region **name**.
It's the missing region **entity**.*

WHAT REGION INTENT REQUIRES

- Hierarchical modeling
- Spatial extent
- Name translations

FOR EXAMPLE

Latin America = Multiple subregions

Polygons

West Africa vs. Afrique de l'Ouest

If the entity isn't modeled → the system cannot reason about it → intent collapses to lexical similarity

What We Learned at Bing

Colloquial Regions are not map decoration. They are:



Understanding User Intent

"Tourist destinations in South India"



Spatial Containment for Ranking

"Best beaches in the Southern France"

FROM

"Nice to have for rendering"



TO

"Required for search understanding"

What Microsoft is Contributing

We are laying the foundation for **open** Colloquial Regions support, in Overture.

WHY WE BUILT IT OPENLY

- Colloquial Regions isn't a competitive differentiator
- Shared reference = Better interoperability for everyone
- Contribution model > Proprietary silos

Component	Description
Config	Name, Parent, Subregion, Source Attribution, Geochain
Schema	Entities created by Overture
Initial Data Coverage	200+ colloquial regions WW, with expansion path

How It Works

Config for Colloquial Regions

```
{
  "parent_admin": "overture:admin:texas"

  "Southern Virginia": {
    "parent": "Virginia",
    "regions": [
      "Brunswick County/R2534167",
      "Charlotte County/R2534171",
      "Greensville County/R2534181",
      "Halifax County/R2532627",
      "Henry County/R2532628",
      "Lunenburg County/R2534188",
      "Mecklenburg County/R2534191",
      "Pittsylvania County/R2532631"
    ]
  },
}
```

KEY DESIGN DECISIONS

Compositional

Defined as union of existing admin boundaries

Hierarchical

Links to parent admin entity

Derived geometry

Boundaries are well-defined, not fuzzy

How to Use and Extend

The contribution is **WIP**

FOR MEMBERS WHO WANT TO USE IT WHEN AVAILABLE

- 1 Access the Colloquial Regions supplemental dataset in Overture
- 2 Join to your existing data
- 3 Use for query understanding, relevance, local search

FOR MEMBERS WHO WANT TO EXTEND IT WHEN AVAILABLE

- 1 Contribute regions for your priority markets
- 2 Follow the schema and contribution guidelines
- 3 Add local expertise we don't have

WHAT WE'D LOVE NEXT

- More colloquial regions
- WW coverage expansion

We are building this openly because regional understanding shouldn't be proprietary.

When users search for "**Central Texas**" —
every search product should understand what they mean.

Solves a shared problem

Built for everyone

WIP: Use and extend

Let's make regions something all our products can reason over **together**.