1 Introduction: Deconcentration of economic activities within metropolitan regions: A qualitative framework for cross-national comparison

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Abstract: The chapter outlines a comparative framework for the study of employment deconcentration within metropolitan areas, aiming to explain processes and forms of deconcentration and the impact of different governance systems. It introduces processes of deconcentration, followed by a discussion of the two extremes of the spectrum among developed economies: the United States and Western Europe. Governance systems, assumed to be major explanatory factors of deconcentration, are defined by various combinations of welfare state regimes and central government-local government relationships. A classification of market determinants is followed by a classification of types of employment deconcentration, linking these types with governance systems. Also mentioned is the broader context that includes residential sprawl, quality-of-life outcomes and particular policy packages. The chapter concludes with some preliminary remarks on the national case studies discussed in subsequent chapters

Key words: Employment deconcentration, sprawl, governance, welfare state regimes

1.1 Introduction

The deconcentration of economic activities has become a familiar sight at the edges of large European metropolitan areas. Such deconcentration has ceased to be dominated by manufacturing plants, warehouses, and other facilities that can now hardly locate in inner urban locations. Hypermarkets, superstores, and do-it-yourself stores now proliferate at urban fringe locations in numerous metropolitan areas; such locations frequently serve as nuclei for the evolution of major suburban retail, service, and entertainment concentrations. Modern suburban office complexes have also become prominent in the economy of certain European metropolitan areas.

In American metropolitan areas, employment deconcentration came earlier and on a much larger scale; it has now also become a policy concern in Europe. In many ways, the urban landscape formed by employment deconcentration in Europe resembles the North American prototype, as reflected by big-box retail structures and their surrounding parking lots, single-use modern office complexes, entertainment centres, warehouses and distribution concentrations, all located in accessible suburban locations along main roads and near motorway intersections. This scenario raises the question of whether market forces and
technological improvements work towards the formation of North-American-type patterns of deconcentration of economic land uses in Europe, or whether European metropolitan areas remain fundamentally different.

Numerous studies have assessed the broader phenomenon of urban sprawl, but the bulk of research, which has become particularly voluminous since the 1990s, has focused on processes and policy debates in the United States (recent examples include Gillham, 2002; Wiewel & Persky, 2002; Burchell et al., 2005; and Wagner et al., 2005). Moreover, most studies have dealt in general with urban form or specifically with residential sprawl. The deconcentration of economic land uses has not received the same systematic coverage, although a few recent studies have focused on employment deconcentration (Persky & Wiewel, 2000) have provided a cost-benefit analysis of employment deconcentration in the American context, and Lang (2003) focused on the deconcentration of office space in American metropolitan areas.

Interest in sprawl has also grown in Europe, with transportation and environmental aspects frequent subjects for debate (for example, Breheny, 1995; Dieleman et al., 1999). American-European comparisons have been inspired by the desire of anti-sprawl advocates in the United States to learn lessons from European policies and experiences of compact development (Nivola, 1999; Beatley, 2000). Studies of the location of economic activities in European countries have emphasized trends of deconcentration and discussed the effectiveness of public policies attempting to influence the location of retail and other business establishments (Guy, 1998; Schiller, 2001). However, these studies have usually been limited in their scope and, in most cases, have lacked a cross-national comparative perspective.

A comparative perspective on the deconcentration of economic activities is capable of contributing substantially to the explanation of processes and forms of deconcentration, particularly to the assessment of the impact of different governance systems on deconcentration. Such assessment offers insights for formulating and evaluating public policies that concern sprawl, not only by surveying the range of policies employed in different countries, but also by demonstrating that specific policy packages should be fitted to particular governance systems. Insight can also be provided into the implications of reforming metropolitan governance on deconcentration.

Our book has the following objectives:

1. To identify the forms and processes of employment deconcentration in selected metropolitan areas within Europe (and in Israel), commenting on whether the processes in Europe are fundamentally different from those that took place in North America, and whether processes in European metropolitan areas indicate a unique European model or a variety of models of deconcentration.
2. To assess the determinants of employment deconcentration in different European countries and in different metropolitan areas within these countries.
3. To position the forms and processes of employment deconcentration in European metropolitan areas within a broader cross-national comparative framework.