

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE INFLUENCE OF LOCAL POLITICAL COALITIONS ON THE
EFFECTIVENESS OF URBAN CONTAINMENT POLICIES: EMPIRICAL
EVIDENCE FROM SIX U.S. STATES

By

SEVERINE MAYERE

A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of Urban and Regional Planning
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2007

The members of the Committee approve the dissertation of Severine Mayere defended on October 20, 2006.

Bruce Stiftel
Professor Directing Dissertation

Ivonne Audirac
Committee Member

Timothy Chapin
Committee Member

Richard Feiock
Outside Committee Member

The office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.

For Brigitte and Christian

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of many. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Bruce Stiftel, for his guidance, insightful comments and patience. Dr. Stiftel always provided me with the encouragement and support I needed, and I gained a lot from his experience as a scholar and educator. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Ivonne Audirac, Dr. Tim Chapin and Dr. Rick Feiock, for their invaluable support and guidance on my dissertation.

I am thankful to the faculty and staff in the Urban and Regional Planning Department for their help and support. I am also very grateful to my fellow PhD students and colleagues from Florida State University and the Technical University of Dresden. This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of the Devoe Moore Center and the Office of Graduate Studies at Florida State University who provided funding for my research.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their love, support and understanding, and for always believing that I could accomplish this journey.

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ABSTRACT

Urban containment policies have gained importance over the past decades in the American land-use policy landscape. Urban containment programs aim at containing urban growth and at protecting farmlands, open spaces and environmentally sensitive areas, by geographically shaping growth patterns. However, their effectiveness, defined as the ability of such programs to reach their intended outcomes and change the existing patterns of development, still remain a source of debate. In many cases, it appears that local governments are likely to be influenced by the local political demand in the way land-use policies are adopted and implemented. Often they are reluctant to counter the prevailing patterns of development and frustrate local interest groups or coalitions.

Following a regime theory approach, this research argues that the effectiveness of urban containment programs is influenced both directly and indirectly by local coalition politics. Previous studies do not clearly demonstrate the influence of local coalitions on the implementation of such programs, although the literature emphasizes the existence of such links, at least theoretically. Effectiveness is measured through questions concerning the effectiveness of the land-use management system in reaching fourteen goals associated with urban containment, further reduced to three main effectiveness components: accommodating, containing and restricting growth. Effectiveness is influenced by the extent to which local planning and local decision-making is dominated by coalitions that impose their views about growth and support or not the adoption and implementation of specific policies, based on the goals these coalitions seek to achieve. Three main hypotheses are derived from the conceptual framework regarding coalition politics. The first hypothesis states that the regime in place will directly influence the adoption of urban containment programs. The second hypothesis states that policies will be most effective in reaching urban containment goals when the local coalition reflects a broad-based consensus in favor of growth management. The third hypothesis refers to the

regime in place having an indirect influence on the effectiveness of policies in reaching containment goals through the adoption of urban containment policies

The hypotheses and other causal relationships are examined through a path analysis employing original survey data and secondary data, including views of planning directors from 242 local jurisdictions in six states. The analysis attempts to isolate the effects of coalition politics on the adoption and implementation of containment policies, controlling for the intergovernmental context, the mobilization potential and the multi-facets of the containment programs.

The results of the path analysis support the expectation that local coalitions directly and indirectly influence the effectiveness of containment goals. Adoption of urban containment programs is positively influenced by the existence of a local coalition reflecting broad-based consensus in favor of growth management. As coalitions move toward a pro-growth management stance, and become more broad-based, the adoption of policies aiming at containing growth, preserving environmentally sensitive areas and managing rural growth is increased. The effectiveness of urban containment goals is positively influenced by the local coalition reflects a broad-based consensus in favor of growth management. The jurisdictions where the dominant coalition is a broad-based coalition in favor of growth management therefore experience a greater success in containing urban growth and reducing urban sprawl, in protecting agricultural and open spaces, and in protecting environmentally sensitive areas. The findings also support the expectation that the effectiveness of containment goals is indirectly affected by the local coalition in place through its influence on containment policies. The findings support this expectation for the effectiveness of accommodating and containing urban growth.