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COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

UNDERSTANDING DECENTRALIZATION

LOCAL POWER OVER DECISION-MAKING FOR COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

IN FLORIDA

By

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Dedicated to:  
the memory of my parents, whom I miss very much  
“To ALLAH (God) we belong and to HIM shall we return”  
(Translated from the Quran, 2: 156)

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## ABSTRACT

Decentralization strategies have been applied widely in both developed and developing countries. Previous research analyzes decentralization from above by dealing with two aggregated levels of government: the state and the local. Measures adopted by previous studies fail to reflect the various dimensions of decentralization. They do not show how decentralization is performed at the local level or whether local governments are empowered and able to make independent decisions without direct or indirect intervention from the central government. In this research, I argue that local power over decision-making for comprehensive planning reflects governmental decentralization and captures its economic, political, and administrative dimensions.

This research develops and tests a set of empirical measures of local agency power over decision-making for comprehensive planning. The measures analyze decentralization from below by investigating the extent of agency power over decision-making for comprehensive planning at the municipal level. It deals with local governments as disaggregated units, which enables us to compare and trace levels of power over decision-making across municipalities and over time.

Major questions of the research are: what are empirical measures of local agency power over decision-making for comprehensive planning? and to what extent do proposed measures of local agency power succeed in reflecting levels of governmental decentralization? Florida was selected as the case study, because it has experienced

changes in its governmental decentralization levels since the adoption of its growth management system in the late 1960s. The unit of analysis is a governmental planning agency within municipalities having 10,000 or more inhabitants.

A Delphi study was conducted to develop measures of each major dimension of local agency power over decision-making for comprehensive planning. Dimensions of power include agency legal authority, relative autonomy, control over local planning actions, and capacity to make planning decisions. Agency capacity consists of four sub-dimensions: technical, fiscal, institutional, and enforcement capacity. The proposed set of measures of local agency power over decision-making was tested empirically in Florida. Its applicability as an indicator of governmental decentralization was investigated by contrasting the model with measures of decentralization proposed by previous studies. The proposed empirical measures succeed in: 1) analyzing decentralization from below by dealing with local governments as disaggregated units, 2) demonstrating the variation in levels of power across Florida's municipalities, and 3) providing a comprehensive picture of decentralization by capturing its economic, political, and administrative dimensions.

The research indicates that Florida's growth management system has shaped the structure of power over decision-making for comprehensive planning. The Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has been given a dominant role in the process of local planning. Regional planning councils (RPCs) have no power over decision-making despite their responsibilities as technical assistants, facilitators, and negotiators. Local governments have been required to prepare local comprehensive plans/plan amendments consistent with state and regional plans. Sanctions are used to ensure local compliance

with state requirements and standards. Therefore, the growth management system of Florida has reduced the power of local governments over decision-making for comprehensive planning, which increases levels of centralization in Florida.

This research fills partially a gap in the literature of international development planning by presenting a tool to analyze decentralization from below, which enables us to design better strategies to establish decentralization at the local level. The research also contributes to the field of growth management by providing empirical measures of local agency power over decision-making for comprehensive planning. These measures should be addressed in policy analysis of growth management in order to improve planning systems and practices.