

CONCLUSION

The wide application of decentralization strategies points to the need for valid measures to evaluate and trace changes in decentralization levels over time, and compare these levels across countries/states. Previous studies adopted measures reflecting economic, political, or administrative dimensions of decentralization. Scholars used multiple measures or composite indices to overcome the limitations of each group of indicators and its failure to express various dimensions of decentralization. These measures analyze decentralization from above by dealing with two aggregated levels of government: the state and local, which do not allow an analysis of decentralization at the local level.

Since local power is perceived as the core of decentralization (Samoff 1990), in this research, I argue that an investigation of local power over planning decision-making provides a more comprehensive picture of the extent of decentralization. This research develops and tests a set of empirical measures of local agency power over decision-making for comprehensive planning. These measures are used to analyze decentralization from below by dealing with municipal governments as disaggregated units, which enable us to compare levels of power across local units and trace changes in these levels over time. It assumes that the more power given to local governments over decision-making for comprehensive planning, the greater the degree of decentralization.

The state of Florida within the United States of America (USA) was selected as the focus for this study. Florida's intergovernmental growth management program has given the state-level Department of Community Affairs (DCA) a dominant role in planning processes. The preparation and implementation of local comprehensive plans are mandatory. Local compliance with state requirements is achieved by sanctions, which reduces the power of local planning agencies over decision-making for comprehensive planning and governmental decentralization (see Chapter Two).

To develop a set of empirical measures of local agency power over decision-making for comprehensive planning, the study followed three stages. The first stage was to conduct a Delphi study proposing measures for each dimension of power: agency legal authority, relative autonomy, control over local planning actions, and capacity to make planning decisions. Measures proposed by participants in the Delphi study were examined empirically in the next stage through surveying planning agencies within Florida's municipalities to investigate the extent of their power over decision-making for comprehensive planning. A comparison was then made between classifications based on measures of power and ones based on decentralization measures adopted by previous studies (see Chapter Three).

In the Delphi study, discussed in Chapter Four, professional planners knowledgeable about Florida's growth management program participated in a survey consisting of three rounds. Participants suggested a list of measures for agency legal authority, relative autonomy, control over local planning actions, and capacity to make planning decisions. Afterwards, two scholars and a practitioner were interviewed to validate measures proposed by participants in the Delphi survey. Based on the findings of

the survey, the interviews, and the literature of power, a more definitive list of measures of power was prepared. Moreover, Florida's statutes were reviewed to identify measures proposed by the Delphi study that were addressed by statutes. These measures were excluded from the survey because of their uniformity across municipalities. Then, a final list of measures expected to vary across Florida's municipalities was prepared to reflect the extent of major dimensions of local agency power over decision-making.

In the second stage of the research, explained by Chapter Five, the proposed set of measures of local agency power over decision-making was examined empirically. Planning agencies within Florida's municipalities of over 10,000 inhabitants were surveyed to investigate the extent of their power over decision-making for comprehensive planning. Planning agencies within large municipalities (25,000 or more people) were found to have higher levels of power than their counterparts in smaller communities (less than 25,000 inhabitants).

In the last stage of the research, findings based on the proposed measures were compared with those based on three measures of decentralization adopted by previous studies. The analysis shows the limitations of previous measures in reflecting all the dimensions of decentralization.

The proposed set of measures of power provides a comprehensive picture of governmental decentralization. It enables the analysis of decentralization from below by investigating the level of local agency power over decision-making for comprehensive planning. The findings of this research provide important policy implications for the growth management system of Florida and contribute to the fields of international

development planning and growth management as demonstrated by the following sections.

Policy Implications

Since the initial adoption of an intergovernmental growth management program in Florida in the 1970s, the locus of decision-making has shifted. Local planners have been frustrated with their minimal power over the process of planning decision-making for two reasons. First of all, they have advisory roles in the process of local comprehensive planning. The governing body is the major determinant of whether planner recommendations are implemented. In addition, the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has a dominant role in the process of decision-making for planning. The DCA should approve local comprehensive plans/plan amendments before adoption. Therefore, local planning staff has limited autonomy over planning decision-making. This reduces the magnitude of local planning agency power over decision-making for comprehensive planning.

The intergovernmental growth management system of Florida created uniformity in many aspects related to local planning agency legal authority, relative autonomy, control over local planning actions, and capacity to make planning decisions. This uniformity makes the system rigid by treating local planning agencies equally despite the variation in their capacity to make planning decisions, as shown by Chapter Five. However, this rigidity has begun to be relaxed. For example, Senate Bill 1906, enacted in 2002, establishes an incentive approach under the Local Government Comprehensive

Planning Certification Program to reward local governments committed to planning. This program enables local governments to operate with less oversight from the state and regional planning agencies if they have a record of compliance with state requirements (see Chapter Two).

This study finds that municipalities vary in the extent of power over decision-making for comprehensive planning they enjoy. Planning agencies within large municipalities have higher levels of authority, and technical and institutional capacity than those of small communities. However, in average levels of agency autonomy, control, and overall capacity are similar for small and large municipalities (see Chapter Five). This suggests uniformity in the distribution of power over decision-making for comprehensive planning is incomplete across Florida's municipalities.

The variation in the extent of power between local planning agencies within small and large municipalities points to the need for different sets of growth management policies for each group of planning agencies. Planning agencies with high levels of capacity could play a leading role in the development of their counties/regions. They can operate with less oversight from RPCs and DCA. Technical and financial support should be directed to agencies that lack the capacity to make decisions for comprehensive planning. Consideration should be given for major components of capacity: technical, fiscal, institutional, and enforcement. These components should be addressed in programs seeking to build the capacity of municipal planning agencies to empower and enable them make effective planning decisions.

In addition, the research shows that many municipal agencies lack the authority, autonomy, control, and/or the capacity to make planning decisions. The DCA has a

dominant role in the process of local comprehensive planning. Therefore, governmental decentralization is not completely established in Florida. Decentralization strategies should seek to strengthen the capability of municipal governments to make effective planning decisions. The more power local planning agencies have over decision-making, the greater the governmental decentralization in Florida.

Implications for Growth Management

The decentralized intergovernmental system of the United States of America (USA) gives planners advisory roles leaving them with persuasive power over decision-making for comprehensive planning. Implementation of recommendations by planners is controlled by decisions of local elected officials. In addition, intergovernmental growth management programs adopted in some states create oversight agencies with power to approve or disapprove decisions of local planning agencies, thus centralizing decision-making. More centralized systems are characterized by less responsiveness to local needs (McClure 1995, Sewell 1996) and low administrative capacity (Rondinelli 1981, 1984, 1990).

Intergovernmental growth management programs limit power given to local planning agencies over decision-making for comprehensive planning (see Chapter Two). That points to the need to analyze the power of local planning agencies over decision-making in the context of adopted growth management strategies. Findings of such analyses would help policy makers design strategies reducing conflicts among participants in decision-making for planning.

The proposed set of measures of power diagnoses the extent of local agency power over decision-making. It deals with municipal governments as disaggregated units, which enables us to trace changes in the extent of this power over time, and compare power levels across municipalities. In addition, it is a tool to analyze components of planning agency power over decision-making. It indicates the extent of agency legal authority, relative autonomy, control over local planning actions, and capacity to make planning decisions. Therefore, the measures increase our understanding of how adopted growth management programs affect the extent of local power over decision-making. This would enable us to design better policies to improve planning practices.

Implications for International Development Planning

Despite the perception of decentralization as an effective strategy to achieve development goals, there is no prescription of what combination of decentralization or centralization accomplishes these goals. Measures adopted by previous studies reflect certain dimensions of decentralization by analyzing it from above. They neither indicate how decentralization operates at the local level, nor how local governments are empowered to make autonomous decisions.

The proposed measures of power provide an initial tool to analyze decentralization from below by investigating the extent of local agency power over decision-making for comprehensive planning. They partially fill a gap in the literature of international development planning by presenting a comprehensive indicator capturing economic, political, and administrative dimensions of decentralization, while measures adopted by

previous studies reflect certain dimensions of decentralization. The measures deal with localities as disaggregated units, which enables us to compare differences in levels of power across local governments. They present a policy analysis tool by providing a framework to analyze power components reflecting decentralization. The measures improve our understanding of decentralization at the local level and help us design more effective decentralization strategies by addressing the components of power. The flexibility of the set of measures allows its use as an evaluation tool by investigating the success/failure of strategies adopted to establish decentralization at the local level, indicate whether changes in these strategies promote decentralization, and trace levels of power over time.

In summary, the findings of this research present important implications for planning practice and for growth management programs. The measures partially fill a gap in the literature of international development planning by developing and testing empirical measures capturing economic, political, and administrative dimensions of governmental decentralization.

Further research is needed to replicate this study in other states with different planning systems in an effort to construct a more general set of measures indicating the extent of local agency power over decision-making for comprehensive planning. Moreover, the measures could be used to investigate how adopted growth management programs affect local power in states with and without programs to manage growth. That will improve our understanding of growth management programs and enable us to design better policies improving planning practice. In addition, future research should be conducted to investigate how the proposed measures of power can be used to 1) design

and analyze more effective decentralization strategies, and 2) whether the proposed empirical measures can be aggregated and used in comparative studies related to the application of decentralization strategies.