

OBJECTIVES

My objective is to investigate the multilevel governance of urban growth through a comparative case study of three carefully chosen metropolitan areas, one each in Canada, the United States and Europe. I will use comparative case study methods that I have employed successfully for decades to develop a research area that has received very little attention in the literature, but knowledge of which will be critically important in the 21st Century.

Political theory. In theoretical terms, my study of the politics of urban growth builds on coalition theory, which focuses on the question of how coalitions are built to achieve political objectives in cities. However, in place of the focus on coalition-building within the urban community, which is conventional in the urban politics literature, my work highlights the importance of political players at the regional and national, as well as local levels in forging coalitions and determining political outcomes in cities.

Theory underlying the administration of urban growth. The theory underlying my study of the administration of urban growth, which is grounded in a vast literature on city planning, asserts the centrality of transportation planning in determining patterns of urban growth, and considers what regulatory measures can be taken to assure patterns of urban growth that represent a reasonable accommodation of two necessities: environmental sustainability and urban growth and change.

CONTEXT

My proposed research will be a study of the politics of urban growth in Canada, the United States and Europe. Using comparative case study methods, I will shed new light on a major, but much-neglected question: What can we learn from Europe and each other about how best to achieve sustainable growth in North American cities?

A large interdisciplinary literature establishes numerous critical connections between the management of metropolitan growth and a long list of environmental concerns. (Johnson, 2001; Wu, 2006; Rees, 1996) The health of the environment is strongly influenced by such factors as:

- The density of development.
- The question of whether or not the layout of infrastructure and neighbourhood design mandate automobile dependence, or make public transit a feasible alternative.
- The question of whether development patterns facilitate environmentally sustainable management of water and sewage, protect ground water, and ensure the continuing viability of agriculture near the city.

Environmental issues and the politics of urban growth. In both Canada and the United States, urban growth management has been largely left to local governments, and many

local governments have failed to institute measures that respond seriously to environmental concerns. Many will never succeed because local councils are often not able effectively to resist development interests.

As a result, the growth of most cities is, in practice, primarily responsive to the interests of developers. A large number of case studies of urban development in North American cities show this pattern of political dominance repeating itself again and again. To be sure, not all municipal governments are dominated by developers. Two exceptions are Portland, Oregon, (Leo, 1998; Hagerman, 2007) and Vancouver (Leo, 1994; Punter, 2007, 2003), but even in those cases, two other points must be added:

- Strict regulation changes the rules, but does not prevent developers from playing a very important role in land use decision-making.
- More significantly, there is a big difference between managing land use for a city and managing it for an entire metropolitan area.

For example, developers who do not wish to live by Vancouver's punctilious rules need only cross the boundary into a vast vista of sprawl. By contrast, the City of Portland's careful land management is complemented by rules governing the development of Metropolitan Portland – but only because of substantial interventions by the State of Oregon. A comparison of these two cases strongly suggests that the involvement of senior governments is critical in determining the character of urban growth management – a point that is central to this proposal, as I will show shortly.

All of this is important to the health of our environment because the interests of developers are frequently at odds with the considerations that bear on the preservation of the environment, the viability of peri-urban agriculture, and an infrastructure network that consumes land and resources as economically as possible. For example, the ideal density, location and design of a new subdivision from a developer's perspective may or may not be suitable from an environmental perspective. Finding an approach to urban growth that more effectively balances the interests of development companies against a wider public interest will be a major policy challenge in the decades to come.

If local governments cannot control land use, the only alternative is a meaningful degree of land use regulation at another level of government. Urban sprawl is a global phenomenon, but there are very significant differences between jurisdictions regarding both the extent of sprawl and the seriousness of problems it poses for the environment. Europe has, in general, been more successful at urban land use planning than North America, and I have provided evidence elsewhere (Leo, 1997) that European national urban plans lay down rules which are not easily revoked by the political clout of developers, whose greatest influence is exercised at the local level of government.

At the local level, land developers are a very prominent part of the local business community, and the business community as a whole, including developers, are virtually an immovable object in North American municipal politics. However, if developers are required to look to the national government for regulatory concessions, they appear as

small players in a national political scene dominated by such political forces as the heights of finance and industry.

The comparative politics lacuna in the politics of urban growth. Though planning scholars are generally well aware that there are major differences between European and North American urban planning practices, there is very little literature embodying careful comparisons of the two. Two partial exceptions are Summers *et al* (1999) and Salet *et al* (2003), but these are series of case studies, together with some broad generalizations, rather than systematic comparisons. Political scientists have a keen understanding of the value of careful comparative studies, as witness the large political science literature on comparative European, North American and developing-world national politics, and another significant literature embodying cross-national comparisons of other aspects of city politics. Though comparisons of North American and European planning and development practices could shed similar light on the politics and administration of urban growth, scholars concerned with land use issues have done little to develop such a field of study. My research will address that lacuna.

My proposed research is a three-city comparative case study designed to provide a clearer picture of the extent and the significance of differences in the way the growth of the European and North American cities under study is managed, while developing a more nuanced understanding of the political and administrative realities underlying them. A preponderance of my scholarly career has been built on case studies, particularly comparative studies of urban political and administrative problems. (See more detail in the sub-section below entitled “Analysing the administration of urban growth”.) I have an excellent track record of bringing such studies to a successful conclusion and using them as a means of generating fresh insights into city politics. The following paragraphs set out briefly the foundations on which I propose to build my next three case studies.

Extensive national regulation of urban growth is not likely, for the time being, to be an option in North America, but there have been serious attempts at provincial or state government intervention, and this could be a reasonable substitute for European-style national plans, or possibly a meaningful step in the direction of more coherent national planning. The best-known, and most vigorously pursued, senior-government intervention in the US is that of Oregon. Recently, in Canada, Ontario has undertaken an effort in the Greater Toronto Area that is in some ways similar to Oregon's. A suitably focused investigation of these two cases will allow for a meaningful assessment of the state of the art in the multilevel governance of urban growth in North America, including both measures taken and problems encountered.

The European case in my three-city comparison will be Hamburg, which I have chosen because it exhibits many of the kinds of complexities that have been used to excuse failed growth management in North American metropolitan regions: multiple municipalities, sprawling across three Länder, including Hamburg itself, Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony. A systematic comparison of how the growth of cities is managed, considering both political and administrative dimensions of the problem, in Europe, in the Greater Toronto Area and in Portland should make it possible to gain an overview of what the possibilities are, as well as problems and possible solutions to them.

METHODS

My method will be a cross-national comparison, in these three metropolitan areas, of different systems of land use management. The topic is potentially vast, so it is very important to limit the research in such a way as to keep it manageable and truly comparative. At the same time it has to be broad enough to permit a meaningful look at the question of whether growth is being managed effectively. I propose the following research questions, one of which bears on procedure, with the other two addressing results:

1. What political and administrative steps are taken, and what rules are applied, in deciding on the location and structure of new subdivisions?
2. What is the condition of infrastructure (roads, public transportation facilities and underground municipal services) throughout the urban area?
3. How well served by public transit is the urban area?

Answers to these questions, with all the complexities they will bring to the surface, should provide a reasonable test of the effectiveness of growth management in these three regions. Getting those answers will involve the pursuit of a long list of more specific questions, such as:

- How is authority exercised over public transportation? If a single authority is in charge, what political and social forces are at play in deciding how that power is wielded?
- What are the sources of authority and/or co-ordination among authorities, to achieve planning and management of regional roads and underground services?
- For both roads and transit, how does the administration function, and how does it interact with political authorities at all levels of government?

Answers to these and many other, similar kinds of questions will provide insights into some of the political, administrative, and regulatory sources of success and failure.

My data will be documents, semi-structured interviews and secondary materials. In evaluating the materials I gather, I will apply two different theoretical frameworks, one for materials relevant to the politics of urban growth and the other for materials bearing on administrative questions.

Analysing the politics of urban growth. In making sense of the politics of urban growth management, my evaluative frame will be coalition-building (Stone, 1989; Gendron and Domhof, 2009), aiming to answer such questions as the following: Which groups were involved in the production of particular political outcomes? What were the administrative interests involved? What roles did political bodies at different levels of government, or individual politicians or parties, play? What private sector interests were involved? What role did environmental, social, resident, or other interest groups play? What popular pressures and practical limitations were encountered, and how were they addressed?

I will raise such questions in the knowledge that different national constitutions, administrative practises, and political cultures strongly influence outcomes, and play an important role in determining how political influence is exercised and who gets to exercise it. The development of an understanding of such differences will form part of my study, and will be critical to a subsequent assessment of the degree to which experiences in one jurisdiction can be used as a basis for policy elsewhere.

I am well placed to do an analysis along these lines because I am well familiar with the political culture of all three countries. Though I have lived and worked in Canada almost all my adult life, I was born, raised and educated to my first degree in the United States and have carried out scholarly research there. My mother tongue, however, is German and I have lived and done university studies in Germany.

Analysing the administration of urban growth. In analysing the data I gather on the administration of urban growth in the three jurisdictions, I will draw on the literature on urban planning, rooted primarily in geography. It is this literature that directs our attention to the centrality of urban transportation systems in setting the conditions of urban growth. An urban transportation system heavily focused on roads, as most North American ones are, necessarily produces a preponderance of auto-dependent sprawl development. A major counter to this trend, widely practised in Europe, is to place primacy in the development process on rapid transit systems. That, in turn can lay the basis for more compact, less auto-dependent development.

Therefore, in a comparative study of the politics of urban growth, it will be essential to gain an understanding of the transportation systems in question, and the politics driving their development. That is why one of the three major research questions I intend to answer, outlined on the previous page, focuses on transportation and the accompanying infrastructure.

The same literature that supplies the emphasis on transportation systems in a study of urban growth is also rich in scholarship regarding administrative measures for the management of urban growth (Bengston *et al*, 2004). These measures include such things as zoning, building codes, municipal land ownership and control, environmentally-driven regulations, measures for the protection of agriculture, and urban growth boundaries. I have been researching the politics and administration of urban growth for decades, beginning with my first book, *The politics of urban growth: Canadian urban expressway disputes* (1977), and continuing with case studies in Toronto (Leo and Fenton, 1990) Winnipeg (Leo and Brown, 2000) Edmonton, Vancouver (Leo, 1977, 1994) and Portland, Oregon (Leo, 1998), and an article embodying a review of studies in Paris, London and New York (Leo, 1997). These and other studies I have published dealt with the politics of urban growth, discussed in the previous section, as well as the administration of urban land use. Thus I am well prepared to address both the political and administrative dimensions of my three-country comparison.

The multilevel governance of urban growth. Since my research in the three cities will involve considering the contributions of two to four levels of government to urban development, it constitutes a logical extension of research I have been pursuing for the

past 35 years. In the 1970s and 1980s, much of my urban politics research and publication focused on urban development issues. In the 1990s, I turned my attention to the multilevel governance of urban development, beginning with Leo, 1990. In the past decade, as multilevel governance has occupied a growing profile in the literature (Lazar and Leuprecht, 2007), I have carried out extensive research on multilevel governance questions not related, for the most part, to urban development issues. (Leo, 2006; Leo and Enns, 2009; Leo and August, 2009). The current research takes a further step in both the urban development and multilevel governance research agendas.

Much of my past research in multilevel governance, more of which is cited in my CV, has turned up evidence favouring a greater degree of local participation in the formulation and implementation of national policies at the local level. It is possible that the proposed research will provide evidence favouring more centralized policy-making and implementation. Whether that proves to be the case or not, my overall research agenda is designed to allow for the development of a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of both urban growth management and multilevel governance.

COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS

I intend to circulate my findings through a book and/or a series of articles in national and international journals. Though I have published books (Leo 1977, 1984, 1989), I have come to appreciate the careful reviews and the often wider and more thorough readership that comes with publication in national and international journals. The central focus of my research production, therefore, has been on double-blind reviewed journal articles, and that will continue. I will also continue my practise of presenting frequently at national and international scholarly conferences, as well conferences attended by policy-makers. I will pursue opportunities to publish in journals and other publications aimed at policy-makers, such as the CCPA, IPAC and *Policy Options*. As well, I will continue respond to requests for interviews with the media (I do dozens of these each year) and invitations to publish in newspapers.

Moreover, in line with SSHRC's encouragement to seek new means for the circulation of scholarly research, I have been maintaining a research-based blog, available at <http://blog.uwinnipeg.ca/ChristopherLeo/>. This web site has now had more than 60,000 page views, and has gained readers from around the world.

Many of my readers are academics, but my blog is clearly well received by non-academics as well. I believe there are opportunities to make it available to a wider non-academic readership, and therefore I am currently working with a web development specialist to move it to a new platform. In the process, I am expanding the content and initiating the use of social networking to broaden the readership further. Expansion of the readership will under no circumstances become a pretext for watering down the content. One of the ground rules I have set for the blog is that I will express no opinions that are not based on scholarly-quality research. This insistence on academic standards in an informal format has undoubtedly contributed to the fact that a fifth to a quarter of my readers spend five minutes or more at the blog – an indication of actual readership, as opposed to surfing.