

**EXPLORING POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF METROPOLITAN SIZE:  
ACCOUNTING FOR THE MID-SIZE URBAN AREA**

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## **EXPLORING POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF METROPOLITAN SIZE: ACCOUNTING FOR THE MID-SIZE URBAN AREA**

### **Abstract**

The paper is about differences between large and mid-size urban areas (MSUAs), with populations ranging from 100,000 to 500,000, and their implications for municipal policy-making. It contends that municipal policy models, which generally origin from large metropolitan regions, are often ill-suited to the circumstances of MSUAs. In its view, differences between these two categories of cities related to their economic structure, urban form, built environment, quality of life and governance are of sufficient magnitude to demand policies that conform to the specific reality of MSUAs. After a categorization of municipal policies according to the ease or difficulty with which they can be transferred from large metros to MSUAs, the paper centres on two policy areas: economic development strategies and the introduction of smart growth planning.

### **Introduction**

Most work on the size of urban areas has sought to describe and explain population and activity distribution among different size categories, with occasional consideration of regional economic development implications (Anas, 2004; Berry, 1961; Darwent, 1970; Fonseca, 1989). In this paper we examine rather how size-related differences permeate different spheres of municipal policy-making. The focus is on middle-size urban areas (MSUAs). Our contention is that medium-size urban areas are disadvantaged because most urban-related knowledge is spawned in large-city contexts and can, accordingly, be at variance with the circumstances of smaller-size urban areas. This is not only a matter of academic interest; there are important policy implications to size-related differences. Indeed, predominant urban policy models, which tend to reflect situations experienced in large metropolitan regions, may be responsible for interventions that are ill-suited to the circumstances of middle-size urban areas. The purpose of this paper is to query, generate debate and perhaps point to new perspectives on existing ways of conducting municipal business in MSUAs.

We define mid-size urban areas (MSUAs) as urbanized regions with populations ranging between 100,000 and 500,000.<sup>i</sup> Urban areas within this size category share features that distinguish them from both smaller and larger counterparts. Unlike smaller urban areas, they confront many issues encountered in large metropolitan regions, but generally with less intensity. At the same time, however, MSUAs generally have less resources and expertise to deal with these issues. The paper concentrates on metropolitan regions from the United States and Canada. It thus pertains to an urban context that is specific to North America and mostly characterized by relatively low density, dispersion of activities and heavy reliance on the automobile.<sup>ii</sup>

The paper unfolds in three stages. The first stage proposes a framework which relies on the identification of properties that define the urban phenomenon, in order to foster a multifaceted exploration of size-related differences. In the next stage, these properties serve to organize the discussion on the features that distinguish MSUAs from their larger counterparts. And the final stage draws the policy implications of the size-related differences we document. We consider problems associated with a tendency for MSUAs to mimic large metropolitan regions and conclude with a call for policies that are attuned to the specificities of MSUAs.

It is worth cautioning that by concentrating on distinctions between large and medium-size metropolitan areas, the paper plays down similarities between these two categories of urban areas. In reality, mid-size and large metropolitan regions share numerous features common to all urban settlements over a certain dimension – those related to the production and management of the built environment, and to the provision of a range of services to both residents and different types of organizations. Still, we demonstrate that there are sufficient size-related differences between these two groups of urban areas to warrant their discussion and the exploration of their policy consequences.

To make our case about the distinctiveness of MSUAs and the ensuing need for policies that heed their distinctive circumstances, we rely on various sources of data. Since these data are adduced to support deductively an argument (by opposition to a reverse approach where a thesis would be constructed around a pre-existing data base), there is inevitable unevenness in the range of the different sources of evidence used in this paper.

### **Properties of the Urban Phenomenon**

To structure the discussion on differences between large and mid-size urban areas, the object of the next section, we now identify five properties which together strive to present a comprehensive perspective on the urban phenomenon. We label these properties: production, proximity, capitalization, reproduction and governance (Filion, Bunting and Gertler, 2000).

#### Production

Because urban areas are unable to produce all they consume, they are forced to export in order to generate the resources needed to procure externally extracted or produced resources, goods and services. Throughout history, cities have engaged in different types of exports – military, political, religious, commercial, services and goods – in order to secure the inflow of imports. Today, the once predominant city-hinterland pattern of exchange has given way to complex networks that operate at an international scale. Not only has the market for natural resources become global, but the specialization and segmentation of production have shifted the vast majority of economic exchanges from regions producing natural resources to other urban areas, as has the rising importance within the economy of services and knowledge-intensive goods (Dunning, 2000). But the iron law that urban areas must export in order to be able to sustain internal consumption needs is as relevant as ever in our advanced economic environment.

#### Proximity

Cities can be depicted as markets of frequently repeated exchanges, some monetary, some not. The need for physical proximity, inherent in this type of exchanges, lies at the heart of these markets and, it follows, of the urban phenomenon. Examples of such markets are multiple: work, education, different forms of consumption and social relations. It is to partake in different markets involving frequent exchanges that people and organizations gravitate to urban areas (Brown and Holmes, 1971; Clark and Kuijpers-Linde, 1994; Smart, 1974; Van der Laan and Schalke, 2001).

The need for repeated exchanges not only accounts for the existence of cities, but also dictates their structure. Land values echo variability in accessibility potentials, and thus in the range of possibilities of engaging in frequently repeated exchanges (see, for example, Martinez and Araya, 2000; McDonald and Osuji, 1995; Sheppard and Stover, 1995). Accessibility, in turn, is shaped by transportation systems. With the advent of rail

transportation, large downtown clusters emerged and the appeal of residential areas became largely a function of their accessibility to the downtown (expressed in well-defined land-value gradients peaking at the core and sloping downwards towards the periphery – see Alonso, 1960; 1964; Wingo, 1961). Overall, however, the tendency over the last sixty years has been towards an adaptation of urban structures to the automobile. The result has been low densities, rigid land use specialization, and dispersal of activities. Rather than being concentrated in the core, most activities are either present in nodes distributed throughout the metropolitan region or simply scattered along expressways and arterials (Ding and Bingham, 2000; Gordon and Richardson, 1996; Lang, 2003; Marshall, 2000; Rowe, 1991). Inevitably, in this type of urban structure, markets of repeated exchanges take a different form than in centralized urban configurations. Urban structure now consists of multiple overlapping catchment areas radiating from dispersed activity sites. In such circumstances, land values assume an irregular pattern, reflecting a reduced influence of metropolitan-wide relative to local accessibility advantages (Anderson, 1985; Berry and Kim, 1993; Heikkila et al., 1989).

#### Capitalization

Capitalization refers to investment in the urban built environment. Such investment is both durable and costly. The urban built environment absorbs an important share of resources generated by a society, in the form of expenditures on infrastructures, institutional and corporate developments, and housing. Virtually all spaces within an urban area are engineered and therefore the object of capitalization – even parks and so-called ‘naturalized areas’, which tend to be artificially ‘groomed’ in one way or another.

The built environment shapes the behaviour of individuals by setting the location of their origins and destinations and prescribing the usage of each space and structure (Gallagher, 1993; Hägerstrand, Pred and Törnqvist, 1981; Relph, 1987). Also, different built environments (including infrastructures) beget different types of economic activities. But the transformation of the built environment with the aim of inducing a reorientation of the economy can be costly, and the risk of excessive expenditure is always present.

#### Reproduction

Reproduction is understood here in the Marxian sense of the term and thus refers to the conditions that are needed to maintain human life and the succession of generations (Castells, 1977; Jessop, 2002, 47 and 77). The biological dimension of reproduction concerns the necessities of life: clean air and water, shelter, food, health care. Biological needs can be extended to include less immediate requirements for a healthy physical and mental condition – for example, time away from work or from stressful situations (such as commuting), the presence of green space and other soothing environments, and recreational opportunities. The Marxian understanding of the concept also embraces the educational process and the social conditioning essential to assure the availability of a work force compatible with the requirements of the production sector. This social perspective on reproduction highlights the existence of different circuits of training, culture and conditioning, which are tailored to hierarchies within the production process and perpetuate class division (Jessop, 1999; Lee, 1995; Mitchell, 1995; Somerville, 1998). We might add another dimension to the reproduction property: consumption beyond the necessities of life. This dimension refers to the plethora of mechanisms whose purpose is to stimulate consumption and thus secure outlets for the production process.

## Governance

In the present context, governance points to the need for forms of decision-making and management that are adapted to the characteristics of cities. Municipal administrations and other agencies involved in urban policy-making cannot rely entirely on models of governance borrowed from senior levels of government or, for that matter, from organizations that do not deal with urban issues. They must evolve their own models of governance or adapt the ones they borrow to the realities they confront. Urban governance thus pertains to ways of achieving forms of management and representative democracy that are suited to the geography of urban areas and to manifold issues so encountered (for example, Bish, 1971; Graham, Phillips and Maslove, 1998, 19-41; Judge, Stoker and Wolman, 1995; Magnusson, 1985; Yates, 1977).

Urban governance must tackle matters arising from the properties of the urban phenomenon. It needs to handle issues associated with the presence in close proximity of a large number of people and of the multiple activities they generate. For example, zoning, nuisance bylaws, green space, and various buffering techniques serve to minimize the adverse impacts of proximity (Hebbert, 1999; Lawton, 1992; Miller, 1992). Urban governance must also create the conditions needed to secure markets of frequently repeated exchanges and address issues related to the durability of the built environment and its high construction and replacement costs. Regarding production, cities must provide required infrastructures and services, and assure the presence of a suitable work force in a context of intense inter-municipal competition for sources of employment (Cheshire and Gordon, 1998; Clark and Montjoy, 2001; Ellis and Rogers, 2000). And reproduction requires that attention be given to a multiplicity of services that are considered to be of local jurisdictional concern, such as education, recreation, public health and certain social programs. However, because less directly related to the physical characteristics that define the urban phenomenon, the range of reproduction-related services under the responsibility of municipal administrations varies considerably across different national, state or provincial environments. Infrastructures and services essential to the functioning of cities can come under the direct jurisdiction of municipal or regional governments, be delegated to other agencies (public authorities, for example) or be privatized.

### **Distinctions of Mid-Size Urban Areas**

We now utilize the framework provided by the five urban properties to organize our exploration of the distinctions between MSUAs and large metropolitan regions. There are size-related distinctions associated with each of these properties.

#### Production

Whereas both large and middle-size urban areas must export so as to generate the revenues necessary to sustain their internal consumption, we can expect important variations in the types of economic activities, and hence employment, they host. The integration of large metropolitan regions into international networks and the presence in these regions of a diversified labour force warrant the anticipation of a strong representation of senior administrative and highly specialized positions (Skinner, 2004). In contrast, with an under-representation of facilities and organizations (such as Fortune 500 headquarters) that promote insertion within international decision-making networks and a usual absence of large critical masses of highly skilled people due to fewer and

smaller research, cultural and specialized service organizations, we can expect most mid-size cities to register a lesser presence of high-order tertiary occupations.

Results from Table 1, which presents a breakdown of selected employment categories in Canadian census metropolitan areas, confirm our expectations. In terms of differences in the respective weight of selected employment sectors within their total employment pool, large CMAs are over-represented relative to mid-size metros in the following sectors: specialist managers; professional occupations in business and finance; professional occupations in natural and applied sciences; professional occupations in arts and culture. These statistics confirm the leading role large CMAs play in corporate decision-making, the management of financial resources, research and development, and cultural pursuits. On the other hand, MSUAs are over-represented relative to larger urban areas in other sectors: retail sales persons and sales clerks; occupations in food and beverage services; transportation equipment operators and related workers; primary product labourers; assemblers in manufacturing. These are sectors that are either related to primary and secondary levels of production or are lower level service provision jobs catering to the local consumer market.<sup>iii</sup>

### Proximity

There are two types of land use-transportation relationships among large North American metropolitan regions. In the first category we find metropolitan regions distinguished by a strong downtown and dense inner city, as well as by the presence of an elaborate rail transit system. These regions can be labelled as 'centralized'. The New York metropolitan region is emblematic of this urban form. Among other examples are Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Montreal and Toronto. However, even in the case of these urban regions, most growth over the last six decades has taken the form of low-density suburban-like developments, which are nearly fully automobile reliant (on employment decentralization, Carlini and Chatterjee, 2002; on automobile-dependent suburbanization, Bottles, 1987; Fishman, 1987; Hayden, 2003; Jackson, 1987). These regions are thus characterized by the superimposition of the two urban forms (Filion, 2000). The older, inner part of the region which registers relatively high densities and public transit usage is still largely focused on the CBD. From an accessibility point of view, the suburban realm, where activities are dispersed and for the most part reachable by car only, can be portrayed as composed of a multitude of overlapping local markets defined by a driving time from the home of 10-15 minutes on average. Indeed, the size of the consumer market within such a drive was a major factor guiding the location of regional shopping malls (Jones and Simmons, 1993; Simmons, 1991).

The second type of land use-transportation relationship concerns newer decentralized metropolitan regions, which are fully dispersed. In these cases, it is the entire metropolitan region that assumes a suburban pattern (Bunting and Filion, 1999). Such regions are therefore heavily dependent on the automobile.

Both types of large metropolitan regions, centralized and fully dispersed, are prone to severe traffic congestion (Cervero, 1986; Downs, 1992). The presence of a core area with a strong concentration of employment is an obvious factor of congestion. But so is a near total dependence on the automobile. If it is possible to circulate within 10-15 minute markets without wasting too much time in traffic tie-ups, the situation is different when venturing beyond these markets. Location trends in employment and education alongside the wish to partake in metropolitan-wide activities (sports, recreation,

specialized retailing...) mean that most households at least occasionally engage in these longer journeys. Inter-firm linkages can also involve extended intra-metropolitan journeys. The problem with these longer trips is that they tend to converge on expressways and thereby frequently overwhelm their capacity. In large metropolitan regions, arterial roads, with their numerous intersections, are poorly suited to journeys that span a large portion of their territory.

Virtually all cores of MSUAs have lost so much of their vitality that their effect on the urban structure of their metropolitan region is now negligible. Even in formerly centralized mid-size cities, research has found that core area decline has been abrupt because these metropolitan regions typically did not possess the means that were available to at least some of their larger counterparts to resist decentralization and promote downtown revitalization – the presence of an effective and heavily used transit system, a major employment cluster, a dense inner city, tourist appeal (Filion et al, 2004). In consequence, the land use-transportation dynamic of virtually all MSUAs is of a dispersed, automobile-oriented nature (Bunting and Filion, 1999; Filion, Bunting and Curtis, 1996; Filion, Bunting and Warriner, 1999).

Most MSUAs thus conform to the type of land use-transportation dynamic identified among the second category of large metropolitan regions. They too are decentralized and composed of multiple overlapping markets. In their case, however, local markets are fewer and smaller, closer to a ten- than fifteen-minute span. Table 2 highlights differences in median automobile driver trip length within different types of urban settlements that make up the Greater Toronto Area: central city and inner suburbs, outer suburbs, and MSUAs. It demonstrates that journey length peaks in outer suburban regions (from 5 to 6.4 km) and is lowest in MSUAs (from 2.9 to 3.6 km). This discrepancy can be attributed to both MSUAs' smaller local markets and a reduced distance to their own metropolitan-wide activities, and perhaps to a somewhat diminished appeal of metro-wide activities in this category of urban areas relative to Toronto's central city and inner and outer suburbs.

MSUAs are further distinguished by more traffic fluidity. Table 3 shows that in the U.S., mid-size metros endure far less traffic congestion than larger metropolitan regions do. It is noteworthy that while MSUAs register somewhat less freeway lane-miles per 1,000 residents than metros in the 500,000-3,000,000 population range (but the same amount as 3-million-plus regions), their expressway mileage traveled per person is considerably lower (5.2 versus 8.9 and 9.3 miles). These statistics may hold the key to the understanding of the relative absence of congestion in MSUAs. Their lower use of expressways can be attributed to fewer trips to metropolitan-wide destinations, a consequence of the depleted condition of their downtowns, and, most likely, to a satisfactory performance in such urban areas of arterial roads for virtually all destinations. Table 3 data indicate that arterial roads account for a higher proportion of vehicle-miles in MSUAs than in larger urban regions.

#### Capitalization

There is much in common in terms of capitalization between large and medium-size urban areas. They both contain a wide range of building types and infrastructures. But needs that are specific to large metropolitan regions, mostly those related to higher usage and density-related requirements, account for the presence in these regions of more elaborate infrastructures. It is in response to issues stemming from urban density that

daring engineering achievements such as the ‘Big Dig’ in Boston and the Chicago underground storm water retention and treatment system have been realized (Garfinckel, 1998). There is also the necessity in large centralized metropolitan regions to provide both a well-developed public transit system for their inner realm and an extensive highway network for their suburban portion.

Moreover, large urban areas can marshal the vast resources at their disposal to erect infrastructures facilitating their insertion within international economic networks (see on globalization and cities, Keil, 1998; Knox and Taylor, 1995; Scott, 2001). Just as in the past large cities lobbied vigorously to be well provided in terms of railroad and interstate highway connections, today they erect large convention centers and (preferably hub) airports (Logan and Molotch, 1987). The building of such facilities is intended to attract tourists, conventions, head offices and research and development activities (Brueckner, 2003; Sanders, 2002). Neither should we overlook the tourist appeal of imposing and architecturally distinctive buildings – New York and Chicago skyscrapers for example – and the attraction of the museums, art galleries and theatre districts of large metropolitan regions (e.g., Zukin, 1991).

By comparison, there is little need in MSUAs for the elaborate and innovative infrastructures present in their larger counterparts. For middle-size cities, run-of-the-mill infrastructures generally suffice. Another distinction between the two categories of cities pertains to the financial and market-size limits MSUA jurisdictions encounter in their infrastructure investments, which tend to rule out the type of facilities that could allow them to compete with larger centers on the global scene. For example, unless they are close to a large metropolitan region, MSUAs do not have access to airports with full rosters of international flights.

At the same time, however, more modest infrastructure needs can translate into lower costs and taxes. Table 4 presents per capita spending by selected objects of expenditure for Metro Toronto (now the new City of Toronto), outer-suburban Toronto regions and four southern Ontario middle-size metropolitan areas. It shows that Metro Toronto expenditure on transit operations is considerably above that of any other listed jurisdiction. Meanwhile, if it is true that road capital expenditure in Metro Toronto is among the lowest, which stands to reason given its centralized (as opposed to dispersed) urban form and its fully urbanized territory, this jurisdiction records the highest transportation capital expenditures (including both roads and public transit). A close second is Peel Region, which invested heavily in roads to provide for its expansion, and which includes Mississauga, a city with a high-density core and an expanding bus fleet. Transport capital expenditures in the MSUAs were much lower.

### Reproduction

As regards the reproduction property of urban areas, we note to begin that large metropolitan areas are able to provide a rich variety of services to their population. They are typically endowed with a large number of specialized educational establishments and health care facilities, and attract people seeking such services. Their cultural life is often vibrant and their recreation opportunities abundant. In essence, large metros are well equipped to respond to specific needs and give cultural expression, and thus identity, to a variety of sub-groups (Fischer, 1975). But there are equally grievous downsides to reproduction in large metros. Congestion, crime, high cost of living, pollution impair

quality of life (on quality of life in urban areas, see Alonso, 1975; Donald, 2001; Pacione, 2003; Stover and Leven, 1992).

Meanwhile, MSUAs are considered to be 'good places to live in'. They do not provide the wealth of specialized services, or the diversified cultural or recreational life of large metropolitan areas, but are perceived as less exacting living environments. Hence, their frequent description as ideal settings to raise a family. For example, in a sample of U.S. MSUAs, the annual delay induced by road congestion is only seven hours per person. The equivalent figure for metros with populations between 500,000 and 1 million is fifteen hours, for those with between 1 and 3 million it is 23 hours, and for SMAs above 3 million it reaches 33 hours (Table 3). In the same vein, housing costs are much lower in mid-size SMAs than in larger ones. In the U.S., the median value of an owner-occupied housing unit in a metropolitan region with a population between 100,000 and 249,999, is \$93,300 (year 2000 values). The equivalent figure for SMAs with populations between 300,000 and 499,999 is \$99,000. In metropolitan regions with 5 million residents and more, median housing value is \$176,100 (see Table 5). Rented dwellings present similar discrepancies. The median rent is \$415 for urban areas with a population between 100,000-249,999, and \$452 for those with a 250,000-499,999 population. By contrast, this value reaches \$649 in statistical metropolitan areas with 5 million residents and more.

Many crime statistics, though not all, also paint a favourable picture of mid-size urban areas. This is the case of violent crimes (417 per 100,000 in SMAs between 100,000 and 500,000 population versus 541 in metros with 1 million population or more), murder and man slaughter (4 vs. 6), robbery (94 vs. 178) and aggravated assault (279 vs. 324) (see Table 6). From an environmental perspective, MSUAs are less affected by air pollution than are larger metropolitan regions. As indicated in Table 7, the metros with the least year-round particle pollution nearly all belong to the 100,000-500,000 population category, whereas those with the worst pollution include many large metropolitan regions.

There is another side to quality of life in MSUAs that deserves mention. North Americans tend to value proximity to the countryside (Bunce, 1994; Nelson and Dueker, 1990). This is one of the factors that explain ongoing outward development in metropolitan regions. Middle-size metros are much better positioned than larger ones to provide this advantage to their residents. A survey carried out in Kitchener census metropolitan area (population 412,284) has identified proximity to an attractive rural area as a foremost factor of attachment to this region (Filion, Bunting and Warriner, 1999).

To conclude on this theme, middle-size urban areas generally perform well in quality of life rankings. Recently, this has been the case of the composite quality of life index devised for SMAs by Sperling and Sander (2004, 814-817). The index attempts to weight several variables to represent the needs and interests of the typical individual or family: economy and jobs; cost of living; climate; education; health and healthcare; crime; transportation; leisure; arts and culture. The first five metropolitan regions on the list (Madison, WI; Ann Arbor, MI; San Luis Obispo-Atascadero-Paso Robles, CA; Santa Barbara-Santa Maria-Lompoc, CA; Asheville, NC) either belong to the middle-size category or have a population that is only slightly above 500,000.

Governance

It is difficult to compare urban governance between metropolitan regions, because so much of it is carried out by municipal governments, each of which generally administers a parcel only of a metropolitan area. In these circumstances, intra-metropolitan variance is likely to be at least as important as inter-metropolitan differences attributable to size. Nonetheless, some metropolitan region size-related distinction is notable. With their larger, poorer and more diversified population, we can expect the administration of central cities to be more complex and costly than that of suburban municipalities (for example, Krumholz, 1999). Central cities therefore require larger bureaucracies than smaller and less diversified jurisdictions do. Most MSUAs replicate this central city-suburban dichotomy, but obviously none of their governments is of a size that is comparable to that of the central cities of large metropolitan regions. Table 4 indicates that in 1997 per capita general government costs (that is, administrative expenses) were substantially higher in jurisdictions within Metro Toronto, the central portion of the Toronto CMA, than in Toronto outer-suburban or Ontario MSUA jurisdictions. Outer-suburban and mid-size metropolitan region jurisdictions within this sample post comparable levels of general government expenses.

Another difference between large- and mid-size urban areas in terms of governance is the more intense need in the first case for some form of metropolitan coordination to deal with traffic and environmental issues. While present in middle-size metros, such requirements are felt with less acuity therein.

Size bias in policy matters is exposed through surveying North American cities mentioned in the abstracts of articles published in the *Journal of the American Planning Association* over the last ten years, that is, between the summer of 1994 and the summer of 2004. We rely on this journal because it is the most widely distributed within the North American planning community. Table 8 indicates that a large majority (87 percent) of the cities cited in these abstracts belong to metropolitan regions with populations of 1 million or more. Note that this proportion is well above that of the North American population this group of regions accounts for (50.2 percent). The table also reveals that only 7 percent of city citations concern jurisdictions that are part of MSUAs. In this case the percentage of citations is considerably inferior to the portion of the North American population this category of urban areas represents (20 percent).

### **Policies for Mid-size Urban Areas**

It is evident from the above review that there are substantial differences between large and mid-size urban areas. We now examine the policy-making (that is, the governance) implications of these differences. We discuss policy implications of the identified size-related metropolitan region distinctions. Given our present focus on policy-making, the different properties will be considered through the lens of the governance property.

There are three possibilities regarding the adaptability of large metro experiences to the circumstances of MSUAs. In the first instance, policy models can trickle down from large to medium-size metropolitan regions, with minimal adjustment. For example, planning instruments in both large and mid-size urban areas have much in common, even if reliance on zoning, official plans and secondary plans usually took place first in large cities. In addition, though generally initiated within the context of large metropolitan regions, critical change to the planning process quickly finds its way to MSUAs. This has notably been the case for participatory planning, which came later in mid-size urban areas than in large ones, but with effects that are remarkably similar. In both instances,

increased public involvement has translated into a protection of existing neighbourhoods (Ehrman, 1990; Horah, 1993). Today, there is little to differentiate large and medium-size urban area neighbourhood planning.

The second possibility concerns situations where scale variations call for modified approaches. This is the case where the influence of large metro models on MSUA administrations or on senior government programs result in MSUA interventions that are more elaborate than need be, or not fully adapted to the circumstances of such urban areas. Two situations illustrate such mismatches. First, MSUAs may be tempted to rely on expressway building to relieve traffic congestion, which is, in any event, of a far lesser magnitude than in large metros. They may, in these circumstances, overlook differences in the respective role arterial roads and expressways play in catering for long intra-metropolitan journeys in large and mid-size metros. Arterial road expansion is often better suited to the needs of MSUAs because of a smaller built-up area and a dispersal of activities reducing the need to channel large amounts of journeys to a limited number of destinations.

Second, perhaps no category of policy making is more apt than downtown revitalization to illustrate the need for the adjustment of approaches to urban area size. It has not been unusual for the central cities of MSUAs to plan for scaled-down versions of the imposing office, hotel and mixed-use developments that were proliferating in the downtowns of large metros across North America (Frieden and Sagalyn, 1989; Robertson 1995). Without the urban structure and transportation advantages of their large counterparts, and deprived of their abundant public and private sector resources, many such MSUA initiatives faltered (for example, Cobban, 2003; Robertson, 1997). Even when sought after projects materialized, generally thanks to the granting of exceptionally favourable conditions to developers, their performance was frequently wanting. This was notably the case of downtown indoor shopping malls developed in MSUAs from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. In large centralized metropolitan regions, such developments were occupied mostly by chain stores and often performed well. The situation was very different in MSUAs. Without the benefit of the substantial core-oriented markets found in large metros (downtown clusters of jobs, dense inner-city residential areas, transit users, tourists), MSUA downtown malls proved to be no match for their suburban competitors.<sup>iv</sup>

Finally, the last possibility refers to situations where large metropolitan region policies have little relevance for MSUAs. These policies are either ruled out by insufficient population and financial resources or a dispersed urban structure, or are incapable because of these circumstances to meet their objectives. Examples abound. The type of cultural facilities, sport franchises, international or national events favoured by large metros for their catalytic effect on the tourist industry, and thus the economy in general, tend to be beyond the means of MSUAs. In a similar vein, in MSUAs, facilities that rely on a large population, such as festival markets, are unlikely to pull in the crowds required to foster an animated atmosphere and thereby assure their success. Also irrelevant to most MSUAs is the present enthusiasm in larger urban areas for LRTs and land uses that are adapted to rail transit services. In most cases, the viability of such systems is impeded by insufficient population, low density and dispersion of activities.

We now consider two policy areas, economic development and the adoption of alternative forms of urban development, to illustrate the need to heed differences between large metropolitan regions and MSUAs, and highlight means of tailoring interventions to

these urban areas. The policy areas will highlight the advantages MSUAs can derive from policies that build on their distinctive features.

Any exploration of the economic development potential of MSUAs must acknowledge the diversity of their economic circumstances. The development potential of these urban areas varies widely according to their economic specialization (manufacturing, resource extraction and transformation, service centres, government...) and location. Those MSUAs that are near large metropolitan regions can take advantage of their externality fields. Yet, overall, present tendencies appear to enhance the economic advantage of large metropolitan regions over their mid-size counterparts. To be sure, a stronger presence of high-order tertiary employment as well as more linkage opportunities and larger employment and consumption markets have always favoured large relative to mid-size urban areas. But with advancing globalization, the presence of hub or large international airports and concentrations of multinational firms further accentuate the economic control and/or innovation centre role of many large metros (Esparza and Kremenec, 2000; Knox and Taylor, 1995; Konvitz, 1994; O'hUallachain, 1999). Meanwhile, the prevalence of manufacturing among MSUAs makes them particularly vulnerable to the de-industrialization that accompanies globalization in North America.

Clearly, big metropolitan region economic development strategies are frequently inappropriate for MSUAs, because these urban areas lack some key economic attributes of their larger counterparts. For example, head offices and large conventions are deterred by inferior air services and MSUAs' cultural activities rarely meet the standards and critical mass required to attract distant visitors. What is more, in bidding wars for investments, MSUAs are incapable of matching generous offers originating from large metropolitan regions.

Still, MSUAs are not deprived of advantages they can play-up in their economic development strategies. One is their lower cost of living, of particular appeal to activities such as back offices, distribution centres and manufacturing. There is also the ease with which informal networks based largely on face-to-face contacts among enterprises belonging to a given sector can be forged within these metropolitan regions by virtue of the spatial proximity they afford. The regional systems of innovation perspective has stressed the growth potential of such networks (Boschma and Lambooy, 2002; Boekena et al., 2001; Malecki, 1997). Another avenue of economic development consists in targeting specific economic sectors with a strong growth potential, and which match the skills of a MSUA's human capital. This approach is most promising in urban areas that contain large post-secondary educational establishments, especially if they are technologically oriented. There is finally the possibility of centering economic development strategies on quality of life features, for example, limited congestion and pollution, and proximity to rural amenities.

The second policy area concerns present attempts at changing the course of urban planning. Presently, while the influence of smart growth on development is highly variable, most North American planning jurisdictions claim to subscribe to this perspective. Smart growth is a response to growing dissatisfaction with prevailing forms of urban development (Benfield, Raimi and Chen, 1999; Downs, 1992; Gillham, 2002; Kunstler, 1993). It proposes growth patterns that minimize traffic congestion, urban

development expenses, air pollution and the loss of rural or natural land (Bolbier, 1998; Freilich, 1999).

In a large metropolitan area, we might expect the successful outcome of a smart growth strategy to feature a strong multi-use downtown offering both mass and specialized retail and services, along with abundant employment, culture and tourism-oriented activities and housing. This strategy would also bring about an intensification of the region's built environment, particularly of its inner portions, a consequence of the containment of outward development by growth boundaries or green belts. But above all, in an effort to increase modal shares, transit systems would be upgraded and expanded. Urban areas actively involved in a smart growth strategy would experience a reduction in their energy consumption and air pollution, and improved quality of life resulting from abated congestion and the possibility of choosing between auto- and transit- (or walking-) oriented life styles. These metropolitan regions would further benefit from reduced peripheral infrastructure development expenditure (Blais, 1995).

It is unlikely that such smart growth prescriptions would rally as much support in MSUAs as in large metropolitan regions, or achieve their objective therein if ever implemented. There are three reasons for this. In the first place, because downsides of prevailing forms of development and transportation (traffic congestion and air pollution, for example) are felt with less acuity, pressures to alter development patterns are not as intense in MSUAs as in large metropolitan regions. In the second place, the advanced decentralization and dispersion, as well as the low density and automobile reliance of most MSUAs pretty much disallow redevelopment or revitalization projects comparable to those occurring in large metros, or the creation of transit systems of sufficient quality to capture automobile modal shares. Lastly, resistance to changes in urban form may be stronger in MSUAs because of the attachment of their residents to the small-town feel of their neighbourhood, and a lesser awareness than their large metro counterparts of the upsides of high-density living.

Accordingly, smart growth inspired measures must be adapted to the context of MSUAs. For example, their downtowns can be revitalized, but they must target niche markets, for they are unlikely to ever recapture mass retailing, which has long left for the suburbs (Gratz and Mintz, 1998; Milder, 1997). These downtowns can also serve as retail and service districts for nearby densified residential areas. But since it appears that attitudes towards density vary according to urban region size, one cannot expect residential densities in these neighbourhoods to ever reach levels found in large urban areas. What is more, MSUAs offer few concentrations of activities and sectors with high levels of urbanity (mixed-use, street life, pedestrian orientation), appealing to people willing to trade consumption of space for immediate accessibility to these areas.

Given their limited transit potential, MSUAs must seek other means of abating reliance on the automobile, in conformity with smart growth principles. Thanks to their relatively short intra-urban distances, walking and cycling paths can provide possible alternatives to automobile use. Such facilities can be created at considerably reduced cost, relative to transit service improvements. Walking and cycle paths represent a good example of a MSUA-compatible smart growth solution, which is consistent with the financial resources available to mid-size city administrators. Walking and biking might even be billed as contributing directly to the quality of life and health of residents. To further enhance the connection of MSUAs with their countryside, paths could reach into

rural and natural areas. Other smart growth outcomes can ensue from the establishment of ‘pedestrian pockets’, consisting of a juxtaposition of housing and daily activities within a walking-conducive environment. Foremost candidates for pedestrian pockets would be revitalized downtown areas along with adjacent neighbourhoods.

### **Conclusion**

The easiest option for MSUAs is to borrow policy models from large metropolitan regions. These are often formulated by reputed experts, are widely broadcast in mass media and the specialized literature alike, and often inspire senior government urban programs. But such reliance comes at a price, because large city solutions are not always in harmony with MSUA circumstances. We noted differences between these two categories of urban areas pertaining to each of five properties: production, proximity, capitalization, reproduction and governance. One adverse consequence of a poor adaptation of policy models to the reality of MSUAs is reliance on more elaborate and expensive solutions than need be. The paper has made a case for an improved tailoring of policies to the circumstances of MSUAs and has sketched out how economic development strategies and smart growth policies could be better suited to these urban areas. Future research could explore a wider range of policy areas and engage in more advanced and systematic comparisons and evaluations of municipal policy-making in large and medium-size urban areas.

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<sup>i</sup> The focus throughout the paper is on metropolitan regions, rather than municipalities, because of our attention to metropolitan level dynamics that singularize urban areas within our size categories from their larger counterparts. We also wanted to avoid including jurisdictions whose population corresponds to our criteria, but which belong to metropolitan regions exceeding our threshold.

<sup>ii</sup> In this paper we use a definition of North America that includes Canada and the United States, but excludes Mexico.

<sup>iii</sup> There is a tie in one selected sector where we anticipated over-representation in large metros: finance and insurance administration occupations. This is likely related to a more or less even distribution of financial and insurance service employment targeted at the public and an occasional presence of insurance company headquarters in MSUAs.

<sup>iv</sup> In Ontario all eight MSUA downtown indoor malls have faltered from a retailing perspective. They are now largely vacant, occupied by public services or converted into office space.