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Urban sprawl, environment and local land use policy determinants

Our work deals with the determinants of natural and agricultural space preservation policies at the local scale. We consider essential to understand motivations that lead local decision makers to adopt either compact city or sprawl oriented policies. The goal is to make recommendations for the design of more coherent policies at the regional scale, especially regarding environmental aspects. Land use change may indeed be the main factor affecting ecological resources (Hunsacker and Levine, 1995). However, despite many studies regarding sprawl, impacts and drivers are still hotly debated and empirical studies lack in the European context, especially at the main level of decision in numerous countries: the municipal one. We propose to analyze the determinants of local land use policy decisions in a region of Southern France (Provence) where sprawling is an important phenomenon menacing a very high biodiversity richness (Médail and Quezel, 1997).

As showed by Munroe et al (2005), land use policies such as zoning play an important role in the urban-rural fringe configuration. However, they are not always used to achieve a sustainable urban form and can even favor sprawl (Fischel, 1995; Pendall, 1999). To analyze the determinants of these decisions, median voter or rent equilibrium models are used and welfare promoting, fiscal competition, segregation and political fragmentation hypotheses are tested (see e.g. Rolleston, 1987; Richer, 1995; Brueckner, 1998; Carruthers, 2003; Nguyen, 2009). These studies allow to link socio-economical characteristics and even environmental one’s (Schläpfer and Hanley, 2003) to land use policy and consequently to urban shape.

Our presentation will first stress on problems and lacks in the existing studies. Consequently, it will continue by a discussion on methods that can be mobilized to improve our knowledge on the sprawl phenomenon. Our work consists in selecting the relevant indicators to characterize and make typologies of municipalities regarding environmental sustainability of urban configurations (see e.g. Galster et al, 2001; Jenks et al, 2000; Camagni et al, 2002; Barnes et al, 2007; Frenkel and Ashkenazi, 2008). Then, we will attempt to link these various configurations to political decision and its determinants. That’s why we propose a way to model the relationships between socio-economic characteristics and land use policy. This will be done thanks to an important database about location of people, firms and land uses on Provence Region, as well as zoning at the municipality level.