SCORUS Conference - 17 - 19 October 2007 - The Strength of Cities and Areas

Presentation: Recent trends in the urban and regional evolutions in Metropolitan France

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Abstract

Between 1995 and 2005, the regional evolutions of GDP reveal a clear dichotomy between the areas located along the western littoral or in the south of the Metropolitan France and the remainder of the territory. The capital region, Île-de-France, because of its weight and its particular role in the organization of the French territory, is outside this dichotomy.

From Bretagne in far west, to the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur and Corse in the south-east, an arc takes shape in which the strongest regional growths concentrate. The dynamism of this arc is at the same time economic, demographic, it also results in relatively favorable orientations of the labour market.

In ten years, the share in the GDP measured for the “west-south arc” increased by 1,5 point, while that of the other regions except Île-de-France decreased by 1,9 point. The same variations, a little less pronounced, are visible on the number of inhabitants (respectively +1,3 point and -1,2 point).

Can this dichotomy of regional spaces be translated in a homogeneous way on spaces at an infra-regional level, in particular at the level of cities and urban spaces? Are the cities of the most dynamic regions always the most dynamic cities? Can we show, and how, that the dynamism of the regions reflects the dynamism of the regional cities? The relation between regions and infra regional spaces is not a simple relation. One knows, to speak only about demography, that the shifts in population at the regional level are the resultant of complex exchanges between urban, semi urban and rural zones, which illustrates, for the most part, the consequences of urban sprawl.

The presentation will concentrate on a set of data covering the period 1990-2005. The first part of the presentation will be devoted to a regional typology, according to demographic and economic criteria. The objective of this part will be to characterize the dichotomy of dynamic between the regions of the “west-south arc” and the remainder of the territory of the Metropolitan France, except Île-de-France.

The second part will be devoted to a recall of the definitions of cities and urban zones used by INSEE and the choice of a wide definition of the city based on the concept of “urban area”. The tendencies concerning urban sprawl will be shown using the most recent information available from census.

The third and last part will provide, for the urban areas grouped according to the regional sets defined in the first part, descriptive indicators of the weight of these urban areas and their characteristics in terms of populations, employment and income. The objective of this part will be to show if there is or not at the same time strong homogeneity inside and strong heterogeneity between the classes. The presentation will then try to conclude on the place of cities in regional trends.

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