

Decentralization as an Alternative: The case of Rockford Illinois

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There is no American State more centralized than Illinois. It is centralized on everything but mainly in politics and economics as Chicago plays an enormous role as indisputable world class business and information center. It is an international hub for finance, commerce, industry, technology, telecommunications, and transportation. Chicago's O'Hare International Airport is the second busiest airport in the world when measured by aircraft traffic; the region also has the largest number of U.S. highways and rail road freight.¹ Chicago has the third largest gross metropolitan product in the United States—about \$630.3 billion according to 2014-2016 estimates.² Also, the Chicago metropolitan area recorded the greatest number of new or expanded corporate facilities in the United States for calendar year 2014,³ and it ranks third in the U.S. in number of conventions hosted annually.⁴ Illinois is No. 25 in territorial extension within the 50 states that make up the nation, but more than half of the state's population lives concentrated in the Chicago metropolitan area.

There was a time, at the end of the 19th century, when having a solid focal location of development in the United States was a good strategy that benefited economically throughout a whole State. Cases like Detroit, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Cincinnati, New York, Atlanta, Dallas and, of course, Chicago, speak of important anchors of manufacturing production and generation of employment, as well as large sums of investment attraction. However, development during the 20th century has taught other strategies and requirements by which centralization has become more a problem than an advantage. The deep crisis that is currently suffering the State of Illinois is largely because of it, while it is its main obstacle to solve it. While the city of Chicago is handled independently and is remarkably self-sufficient, all other towns within the State have followed a same pattern since the mid of the last century: population decline, factories closing and abandonment of large companies, vandalism, corruption, etc. In addition (or consequence?) to this, State Government mismanagement has been lately much labeled: 4 out of previous 7 Illinois governors went to prison⁵.

Many of the premises given by Lewis Mumford about balance in relation to urban development outstand once again today when facing such situations. Planning of strategic development focal points (with constructive complementarity and avoiding destructive competition), their communication and interrelations, planned products and information transference, etc. are factors that can strengthen an entity, in this case a U.S. State. In the present work there is contained a mapping of the different potential centers of development around the State. It refers to current ways of terrestrial communication, their historical data and their manufacturing background. The paper shows the possibilities of a State decentralized development. It proposes the specific case of Rockford, 90 miles west of Chicago, following a novel scheme where instead of retaking the city as it has been for almost 200 years, by fashioning a new town 30 miles away and developing a twin-city system, similar to other successful ones, compelling the advantages of the existing Rockford's infrastructure, like its International Airport. The new town, to be called Newrock, would add the development of the zone between existing Belvidere, Poplar Grove and Timberlane by considering them three districts of the new city, while a new designed area will be called Central District (the fourth one) and where the future downtown will be located.

The main conclusions of this work spin around two main facts: first, creating a strategic network of productive infrastructure throughout the State, with Chicago as the main actor but pushing other Centers all around to balance its whole development; and secondly the intensified contact with towns of neighboring States to strengthen buying and selling relations as well as services' interaction that facilitate the entire State strengthening, similar to what already happens in other cases, such as Texas and California.

¹ Rodriguez, Alex (January 26, 2014). "Chicago takes on the world". Chicago Tribune (Sec. 1 p. 15).

² U.S. Metro Economies: GMP and Employment 2014-2016. Global Insight. 2015. p. 15.

³ Rasmussen, Patty. "Strength in Diversity". Siteselection.com. Retrieved March 7, 2015.

⁴ "Retrieved January 26, 2010". Exhibitorhost.com. September 26, 1987. Retrieved April 17, 2010.

⁵ <http://abc7chicago.com/archive/8973798/> consulted on 01/10/2017