



Work Network

Employment Growth and Change in the Canadian Urban System, 1971-94

WILLIAM J. COFFEY

with the collaboration of:
RICHARD G. SHEARMUR

Working Paper No. W|02|



CPRN

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The findings of this paper are the sole responsibility of the author and, as such, have not been endorsed by the agencies mentioned in Appendix 13.

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Foreword

As Canada has hurtled headlong into a knowledge-based economy, citizens, policymakers, and business and union leaders have begun to focus more attention on training. The skills of the work force matter for both social and economic reasons. They determine the type of job a person can do, the income one can earn, and to a certain extent, status and quality of life. Ultimately, training and the quality of the labour force has an important influence on the performance of firms and, in the aggregate, the overall economy.

In 1994, Gordon Betcherman and I initiated the development of a project designed to address some serious gaps in our knowledge base about training. We wanted to know more about the changing employment structure – the emerging skill profile required in the knowledge-based economy of the 1990s. We also wanted to get inside the black box of workplace training. It was evident, from the National Training Survey, that employers spend a lot of money on workplace training, but we wanted to assess its overall contribution to the human resource development effort in Canada from the perspectives of both employers and individual workers.

The project was conceived and the initial financial commitments were sought out while Gordon and I were employed by the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University. The project was then brought to fruition through a partnership of CPRN (which was launched in December 1994) and Ekos Research Associates. While much of the work was done in these two organizations, some key parts of the overall project were completed under contract by external specialists.

Funding for the work was provided by Human Resources Development Canada, the Canadian Labour Force Development Board, the New Brunswick Labour Force Development Board, and the provinces of British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Ontario. I wish to thank the funders for placing their confidence in us and for participating with a group of experts in the Advisory Committee that guided the project to a successful conclusion.

In this working paper, William Coffey, from the University of Montreal has explored how the Canadian employment structure has changed over the past quarter century, and particularly how the location of jobs has evolved as we have moved increasingly towards a high-technology, service-based economy. These shifts have important implications for a range of policies, including economic development and training and labour adjustment. This paper uses data from the Census and the Labour Force Survey to track the changing employment structure in Canada's urban

system between 1971 and 1994. The analysis documents the spread of the service sector and highlights the urban concentration of the new “high-order” services that are the engines of growth in a modern economy.

Judith Maxwell
President

Acknowledgments

This volume is part of a larger study on workplace training undertaken by Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. I am especially pleased to have had the opportunity to conduct the work reported here, as it represents for me a logical continuation of almost 20 years of research on urban systems and on the role of service industries in economic development. I am grateful to Judith Maxwell, President of CPRN, and to Gordon Betcherman and Kathryn McMullen of Ekos Research Associates Inc., for inviting me to conduct this detailed examination of employment change in the Canadian urban system. I am also very grateful for the excellent assistance provided by Richard Shearmur; my task would have been immeasurably more difficult without his expertise in organizing and manipulating huge quantities of data, and his ability to work efficiently and independently. Useful advice has been furnished by my colleagues Jean Renaud and Claude Marois at the University of Montreal, and by Nathalie Vachon of INRS-Urbanisation.

Finally, this volume is dedicated to my two research non-assistants: Marie Yulan, who non-assisted over the entire length of the project, and Anne Mei, who arrived to non-assist during the crucial final six weeks of work. I am grateful for their (mostly) cheerful, efficient and untiring non-assistance.

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