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Inequalities in Labor Market Areas. Joachim Singlemann and Forrest A. Deseran (Eds.).
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Joachim Singleman and Forrest A. Deseran (Eds.) *Inequalities in Labor Market Areas*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993. \$44.00 papercover.

There is a small but rapidly growing literature on the consequences of the spatial organization of labor markets. Almost three decades ago, W. R. Thompson argued strongly that the local labor market, defined by commuting radius, was for income analysis an analytical unit on a par with the more traditional industry category. Until recently, most students of the field ignored his argument, but in the last five years or so the careful work of a few sociologists and economic geographers has clearly pointed to a need for a conceptual redefinition of the "economic space" within which workers operate. These researchers have begun the development of conceptions of labor markets that categorize and systematize the "market imperfections" of orthodox economics into crucial differences in local labor market structure, differences that usually inhibit mobility, and the lead to less than perfect competition.

One group of these researchers has been at work since the early 1980's empirically subdividing and mapping the U. S. into 382 distinct "labor market areas," (LMAs) both urban and rural, based on census journey-to-work data. Their painstakingly careful work has produced a publicly-available dataset that has set the standard for research in the area. Singlemann and Deseran have assembled a valuable collection of 14 original articles based on this dataset, most of the authors part of the group responsible for its existence.

Following an introductory chapter, the book is divided into a "theoretical and methodological" section containing four articles, and a "new empirical findings" section with nine articles. The latter is the most valuable part of the book. The two theoretical pieces offer useful, if attenuated, reviews of the literature and interesting arguments on the importance of space in social analysis, but both are seriously limited by an unfortunate focus on narrow slices of theory. One methodological article is a good review of the logic and method of LMA mapping, and the second makes a strong case for the use of multi-level models in analyses of inequality.

The empirical articles range from an insightful study of the economic performance of LMAs over time to a study of black migration out of southern LMAs and its effect on human capital concentration in those areas. In between there are several studies of LMA-level effects on within-area inequality, two quite interesting studies of the effects of black concentration in LMAs on inequality and underemployment of black residents, a careful examination of LMA effects on the labor force participation rates of females, and several other topics. Though some articles purport to be "multi-level" analyses, none are in fact, but their OLS results nonetheless provide interesting and insightful clues for further research. Though only a few authors explicitly note the fact, most of the articles tend to move beyond the LMA only as an area containing labor markets, and treat it instead explicitly as "locality" or as "local context," in the words of two of them. This focus is quite proper, and represents the most fruitful direction for future research.

The book is an eclectic collection that provides a thorough overview of the many aspects of adding a special context to social science research. The articles have some rough edges, as one would expect in research in a relatively new and undeveloped area, but are all competently done, and combine into an excellent overview of this new focus. The book's most serious lack is a good concluding chapter that ties together and places in context all that came before, while pointing to future research. Even without this, however, it is a book that should be owned by all embarking on research concerning the effects of local context, and that should be read by all who want to keep up with the increasingly complex models of social science.

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