Changes to urban form and commuting patterns: trends in two Danish city regions

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This paper compares indicators of polycentricity in a monocentric (MUR) and a polycentric urban region (PUR) in Denmark at two points in time (1982 and 2002). It describes how population, jobs and commuting indicators of polycentricity develop and interact over time. Both the MUR and the PUR tend towards more balanced development. The increasing size of the main node in the PUR is the only deviation from the general trend. The general tendency towards a more polycentric regional structure was most marked in changing interaction and commuting patterns. Inter-urban commuting increased, while intra-urban commuting decreased, leading to dispersion of commuters and a rapid increase in commuting across the region. Commuting distances were shortest in the polycentric region, but it also had the highest growth rates. In both regions, the balancing trend leads to a dispersal of commuting demand over an increasingly complex web of origins and destination nodes. This tendency compels us to question whether people’s choice of residence is becoming increasingly irrelevant to their place of work. In relation to polycentricity and sustainability, this calls into question the degree to which proximity can be a valuable ‘asset’ in terms of planning sustainable transport outcomes connecting residence, jobs and service.

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