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Rethinking Our Regional Identities

Robert Gleeson

Cleveland State University, r.gleeson@csuohio.edu

Joseph Andre

Cleveland State University, j.m.andre@csuohio.edu

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Focus on Facts

Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs – Cleveland State University

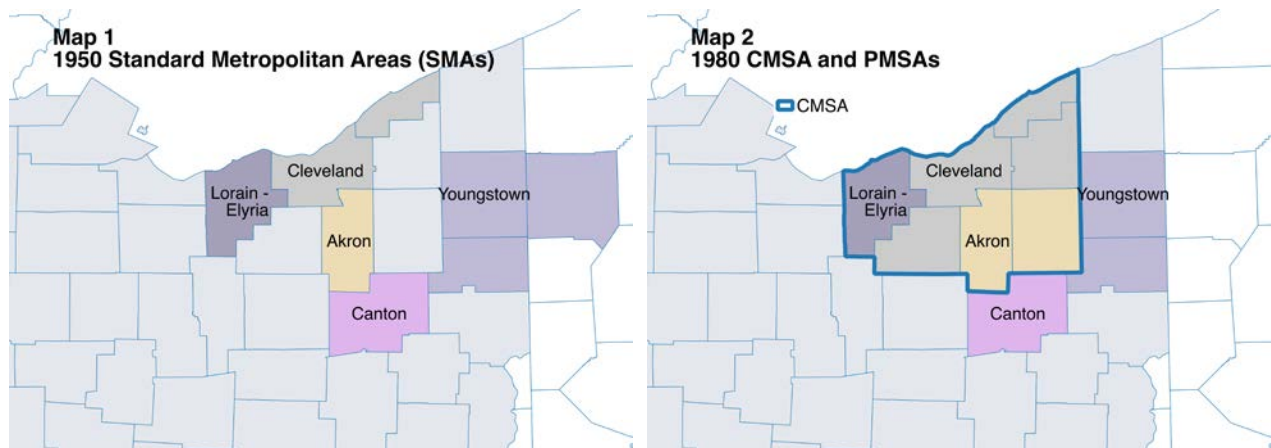
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Rethinking Our Regional Identities

Robert E. Gleeson, Ph.D., Professor, Levin Chair, and Associate Dean, r.gleeson@csuohio.edu

Joseph Andre, Research Associate, j.m.andre@csuohio.edu

- “Where are you from?” The answer we give to that simple question is not trivial. Most people live in one place and work in another. We identify with the region that contains both. We consider those who share that region to be our neighbors, and we want our elected officials to work together for its success.
- In 1950, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in Washington, D.C. began defining metropolitan regions by grouping together central cities and their suburbs based on common patterns of where people lived and where they worked. Using commuting data, the OMB in 1950 defined five different “standard metropolitan areas” (SMAs) in Northeast Ohio that met their criteria: Cleveland (Cuyahoga and Lake counties), Akron (Summit County), Canton (Stark County), Lorain-Elyria (Lorain County) and Youngstown (Mahoning and Trumbull counties in Ohio and Mercer County in Pennsylvania). Each SMA was self-contained at that time in terms of where people worked and lived. See Map 1.
- These definitions were created for statistical convenience. Yet they matched how people lived, so people expected their elected officials to collaborate within those areas. Since 1950, however, regional commutes have changed. Every ten years the OMB re-evaluates them based on the latest data.
- By 1980, SMA boundaries from 1950 no longer described how people commuted. The OMB proposed combining three of the 1950 areas in Northeast Ohio (Cleveland, Akron, and Lorain-Elyria) into one newly-defined “Consolidated” metropolitan area (CMSA). Local officials objected, not wanting to lose local identities. Consequently, each 1950 SMA was designated as a “primary” area (PMSA) within the larger consolidated boundary. In addition, Geauga and Medina counties were added to the Cleveland primary area and Portage County was added to the Akron primary area. Mercer County, PA was removed from the Youngstown MSA. See Map 2.



- By 2010, the OMB eliminated input from local officials in redefining metropolitan areas. OMB now uses commuting data only to recognize two scales of intensive metro region connections. MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) designates a group of very intensely interconnected counties: at least 25 percent of the workers who reside in an outer county work in a central county, or at least 25 percent of the jobs in an outer county are held by workers who live in a central county. CSA (Combined Statistical Area) designates a wider group of counties where those same ties are between 15 and 25 percent.
- In 2010 Northeast Ohio contained four MSAs with ties above the 25 percent level: the Akron MSA (Summit and Portage counties); the Canton-Massillon MSA (Stark and Carroll counties); the Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor MSA (Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, and Medina counties); the Youngstown-Warren-Boardman MSA (Mahoning and Trumbull counties, and Mercer County, PA). Hundreds of thousands of people experience these ties every day. See Map 3. “Cleveland area,” “Akron area,” “Canton area,” and “Youngstown area,” are still reasonable answers to the question, “Where are you from?”
- Yet intense commuting ties (15-25 percent range) also define a broader Consolidated Statistical Area (CSA) in Northeast Ohio. See Map 4. The Cleveland-Akron-Canton CSA combines three of the four MSAs and adds four additional counties (Ashtabula, Tuscarawas, Huron, and Erie). In 2010, Northeast Ohio’s CSA ranked as the 16th largest CSA in the nation with a combined population of 3.52 million people. And despite the region’s image of decline, the wider CSA lost fewer than 30,000 residents between 2010 and 2017, retaining its status as #16 nationwide. In 2017 this intensely connected CSA contained 1 million more people than the CSA that includes Columbus and 1.3 million more people than the multi-state CSA that includes Cincinnati.
- The OMB’s proposed boundaries for the 2020 Census retain the 2010 boundaries of the CSA. Commuting ties within the Cleveland-Akron-Canton CSA’s boundaries continue to grow more intense each year. What does this mean for how local residents answer the question, “Where are you from?” And what does it mean for how we expect – or do not expect – our local and state officials to work together to manage the collective success of the CSA in the decades ahead?

