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## Thinking like a Region in Northeast Ohio? Factors that Predict Local Government Participation in Collaborative Policy and Planning

Meghan Rubado  
*Cleveland State University, m.rubado@csuohio.edu*

Joanna Ganning  
*Cleveland State University, j.ganning@csuohio.edu*

Thomas Hilde  
*Cleveland State University, t.hilde@csuohio.edu*

Wendy A. Kellogg  
*Cleveland State University, w.kellogg@csuohio.edu*

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## Focus on Facts

Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs – Cleveland State University

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# Thinking like a Region in Northeast Ohio? Factors that Predict Local Government Participation in Collaborative Policy and Planning

Meghan Rubado, Assistant Professor: [m.rubado@csuohio.edu](mailto:m.rubado@csuohio.edu)

Joanna Ganning, Associate Professor: [j.ganning@csuohio.edu](mailto:j.ganning@csuohio.edu)

Thomas Hilde, Assistant Professor: [t.hilde@csuohio.edu](mailto:t.hilde@csuohio.edu)

Wendy Kellogg, Professor: [w.kellogg@csuohio.edu](mailto:w.kellogg@csuohio.edu)

- Local governments in Northeast Ohio often collaborate with one another to provide services, pursue regional initiatives, and create regional plans. Collaborative arrangements can create efficiencies, save money, improve service quality, and boost regional vitality. But they also present costs and risks that leaders must weigh against potential benefits.
- Urban decline poses additional challenges for collaboration in "shrinking" or "legacy city" regions. Population loss in Northeast Ohio paired with economically and environmentally unsustainable sprawl has produced many zero-sum choices in planning and policy making.
- Studies about the region's future<sup>1</sup> recommend policies to focus growth and development in established communities rather than in exurban areas. The lack of regional growth, however, produces a climate of conflict and skepticism as municipal leaders compete over scarce resources, particularly tax base.
- To assess collaboration in this context of scarcity, we compiled 30 years of financial data from local governments throughout the region<sup>2</sup> and paired it with regional planning participation data from the Levin Regional Cooperation Survey.<sup>3</sup> We measured local participation in Northeast Ohio planning initiatives as well as the use of collaborative service arrangements. We find that:
  - Engagement in collaborative regional planning is low compared to collaboration for service provision. For example, in Cuyahoga County, financial data indicate that nearly all local governments used collaborative service agreements during the study period. Cities with stronger financial resources, larger population size, and/or higher voter turnout had greater rates of municipal collaboration for service provision, on average.
  - Engagement in collaborative regional planning initiatives is stronger for places that are closer to the City of Cleveland, have higher shares of black residents, have larger populations, have higher median household incomes, and/or have lower poverty rates.

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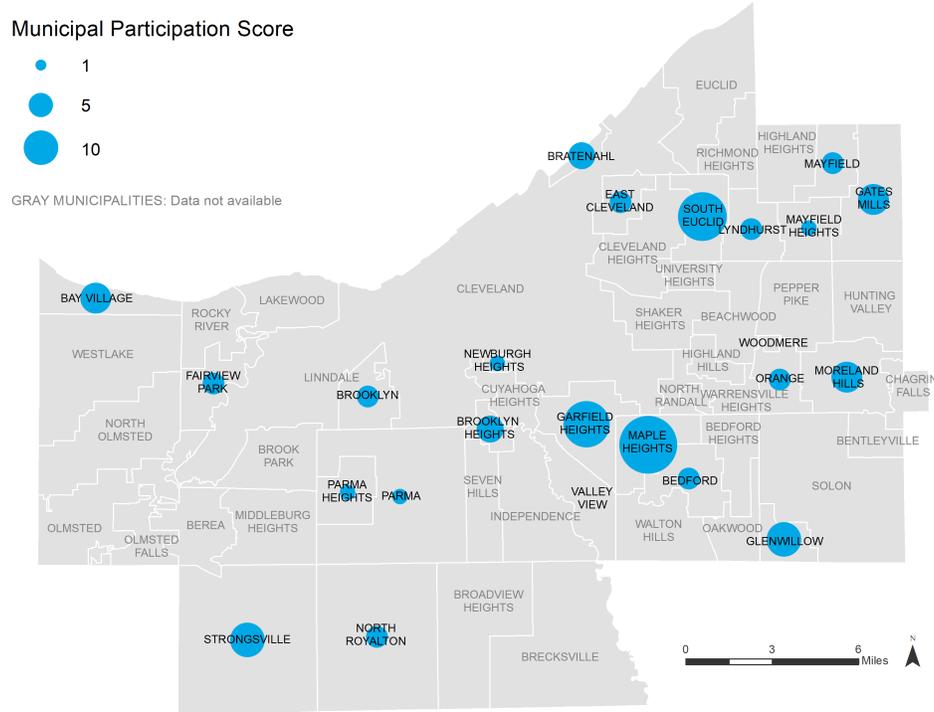
<sup>1</sup> Including the recent and award-winning Vibrant NEO 2040, which provided an early framework for this research.

<sup>2</sup> Data on localities in the 12-county Northeast Ohio region come from the U.S. Census of Governments full finance censuses of 1977 through 2007.

<sup>3</sup> The 2018 Levin Regional Cooperation Survey of mayors and city managers in Cuyahoga County yielded 33 responses (58% response rate), with 26 providing enough detail to be included in this analysis. Leaders scored their participation in specific regional planning initiatives from 0 (no participation) to 4 (maximum participation).

- Figure 1 shows how participation in regional collaborative planning varies across Cuyahoga County's municipalities.

**Figure 1: Municipal Participation in Collaborative Regional Planning Initiatives**



- Interestingly, a city's past experience with interlocal collaboration to provide services appeared to be unrelated to its level of engagement in collaborative regional planning. This suggests that previous collaborative relationships did not inspire participation in regional-scale planning and policy efforts.
- Despite the challenges to collaborative governance that are distinct to the context of shrinking city regions, municipal leaders in Cuyahoga County have engaged in a wide range of collaborative engagements, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Municipal Participation in Collaborative Regional Planning**

