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The Right Scale: Planning for Resilience in Northeast Ohio

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the right scale: planning for resilience in northeast ohio
sanda kaufman & kathryn hexter
We ask: what
- issues
- physical & social scales
- processes
- tools
- governance

favor planning for resilience?

We explore the NEOSCC case:
- We focus on: scale & scenarios
- We derive some cautionary lessons

planning for resilience kaufman & hexter
We propose that

*Planning* in complex systems has to *adapt* because:

- **Specifics matter:**
  - Context
  - The initial state (e.g., Legacy)
  - Scale – the level at which stakeholders feel interdependent & willing to collaborate

- Resilience, adaptation & transformation are choices
- Long-term predictions are faulty
- End-points (arbitrary target years) have little/no meaning
In this Legacy context, resilience could mean:
- Returning to previous “splendor”
- Adaptation to current/predicted conditions
- Transformation into a new regional/urban regime

- 12 counties in population, economic & environmental decline since the 1950s
- Political & administrative fragmentation
- Short- mid- & long-term challenges

Who should decide? How?
What is the role of planning?
Northeast Ohio – a snapshot

**Population:**
- 3.8 million – 1/3 of Ohio on 14% of total area
- 7% fewer people in 2010 than 1970, but
  - 5% more land developed
  - < 23 people/acre (4 km²)

**Land use:**
- 50% agriculture
- 25% residential
- 2.5%: industrial
- 3.5%: commercial
- < 5%: parks, open spaces

**Housing stock:**
- 75% single-family
- 50% > 50 years old
- 70% owner-occupied

**Poverty concentrated in central cities:**
- 52.8% of residents earn < $50K (36K €) / year.

**Pattern of out-migration from central cities:**
- Economic development incentives encourage it
- Do not reckon with infrastructure
Threats to the region

- Environmental:
  - Climate change effects on Lake Erie
  - Air, water & soil pollution
  - Open, agricultural land and wetlands shrinking
  - Ecosystem fragmentation
  - Invasive species

- Political/administrative:
  - Fragmentation
  - Intra-regional competition for development
  - Lack of coordination across administrative borders
  - Rising costs of government

- Socio-economic:
  - Foreclosures
  - Poverty
  - Poor education
  - Mismatch between demand & supply of skills
  - Segregation
  - Economic competitiveness

Planning for resilience
NEOSCC: The Northeast Ohio sustainable communities consortium

- Since 2011, with $4.25M grant from the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (HUD, DOT & EPA, 2009)
  - to coordinate housing, transportation, water, & infrastructure decisions.
  - to help residents live closer to work, save household time & money, & reduce pollution.
- Includes 33 entities
  - organizations
  - agencies
- Seeks to
  - be vibrant, resilient, and sustainable
  - produce
    - shared vision
    - mission
    - dashboard
    - recommendations
    - toolkit
Why in Northeast Ohio?

☐ Cleveland

- was part of the federal planning for the grant (HUD, DOT, EPA)
- is the locus of many regional initiatives:
  - Sustainable Communities 2000
  - Fund for our Economic Future/Advance Northeast Ohio
  - EfficientGovNow
  - Regional Prosperity Initiative

☐ Northeast Ohio’s proposal ranked 4th because it was linked to a regional economic growth strategy (B. Whitehead interview, May 19, 2014)
NEOSCC’s mission:

- create conditions for a more VIBRANT, RESILIENT, and SUSTAINABLE Northeast Ohio:
  - full of vitality
  - a good steward of its built and natural resources
  - adaptable and responsive to change

- VIBRANT – Full of energy & enthusiasm; vigorous, lively, and vital.
- RESILIENT – Responsive to change; adaptable; able to spring back; rebound
- SUSTAINABLE – Meeting present needs while retaining the ability to meet future needs
**NEOSCC**

**structure & operation**

- **Goals:**
  - Improve quality of life
  - Connect communities
  - Diversity
  - Protect natural resources
  - Competitive economy

- **Modus operandi:**
  - Inspire people to create solutions & matching goals
  - Be data-based, nonpartisan
  - Obtain citizen participation
  - Provide tools for regional planners to make good decisions

- **Organization**
  - 60 board members
  - 7 employees
  - Chairperson & director
  - Teams working on economic competitiveness, environment, housing & communities connections, quality connected places.

* according to NEOSCC
Focus on scale

Key to meaningful collaborative planning: participants’
1. sense of interdependence & shared interests
2. ability to assess how plans affect them now & in the future
3. Belief they can affect the decision process

The larger the scale, the weaker all 3 factors

The weaker the incentive to participate & plan
Approach:
- Take stock — baseline, trends (population / land uses/policies)
- Construct scenarios for 2040 + indicators
- Back-link the end-image to actions to be taken now
- Ask the public to choose a preferred scenario
- Recommend actions to make it happen.
Focus on scenarios

- Scenarios should:
  - Represent hypotheses about drivers outside stakeholders’ control, & their interactions
  - Allow exploration of ranges of variation in system responses
  - Test the robustness of decisions
  - Reveal unintended consequences

- NEOSCC scenarios were:
  - Rooted in (unrealistic) long-term trends
  - Explorations of decision rather than driver effects
  - Pre-favoring specific strategy for the target year 2040
  - Opaque with respect to unintended consequences
Outcomes - The balance

Costs

Most funding went to consultants for base data & scenarios leading to:
- preconceived
- non-robust
- non-specific recommendations

Benefits

- Networking among politicians & administrators
- Land use maps (widely accessible)
- both side-effects, not goals/objectives
- would have cost a fraction of the total

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Future: Implementation

- Can NEOSCC be sustained?
  - Membership dues?
  - Value added?
  - Champions?

- Who should act and how?

- Role of MPOs:
  - Champion?
  - Expand scope beyond transportation & environment
  - Can a nonprofit model work in a public sector role?
Future:

Implementations:

- **5 programs:**
  - traditional MPO (transportation and air quality)
  - Local Development district under Appalachian Regional Commission
  - EDA district
  - capital planning
  - watershed planning

- **EAST GATE**
  - traditional MPO (transportation and air quality), water quality

- **NOACA**
  - traditional MPO (transportation, air & water quality), EDA district

- **NEFCO**
  - transportation only

- **AMATS & SCATS**
Future – responsibility for sustaining the collaborative process

**NEOSCC**
- only as strong as the commitment of the public officials involved.
- had a planning (not implementation) grant.
- did develop a dashboard, tool kits, resilience metrics but who cares?

**Gov’ts**
- Who is accountable if citizens don’t care?
- At what level? Local? State? (Is there a role for the State?)

**Private sector**
- Would it help to bring it in?
- What are their stakes?
- Would they consider the community’s benefit as their benefit?
Conclusions – some predictions

☐ NEOSCC
- not self-sustaining
- bit more (land and population) than it can chew
- has low likelihood of implementing plans

☐ The partners will act as in a commons dilemma
  - participate in the process
  - make unilateral decisions for their communities

☐ The public will remain largely unaware of the Vibrant NEO initiative

☐ The planning discourse will continue to tout the virtues of regionalism
Conclusions: resilience & planning

Failed change processes worse than none:
- The scale of the undertaking led to reinstating the “rational planner” as “consultant”
- Collaboration very limited, undermining trust in future initiatives

Weak outcomes detrimental:
- Opportunities/resources for adaptation & transformation should not be missed
- Big shows with few results undermine participation & collaboration
- Lack of implementation undermines resilience
Thank you!