



CLOSUP Working Paper Series  
Number 24

April 2010

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March 15, 2010

### **Abstract**

*We assess the potential for expanding regional planning by asking local government officials their perspectives on the potential for increasing regionalism in their communities, and the most promising approaches to achieving greater regionalism. Our study involves analyzing data from a recent survey of local government officials in Michigan. We find that support for regional planning declines amongst local officials who are already heavily involved in regional efforts, and increases amongst those who perceive greater fiscal challenges. However, local government officials who support expanding regional planning are less supportive of working through existing regional institutions; they prefer to create new regional entities to pursue additional cooperation. Those with experience with regional planning efforts are more supportive of working through existing institutions.*

## **Introduction**

For at least the past three decades, researchers, planners and policy advocates have promoted regional approaches to some government functions, including land use planning, on the grounds of efficiency (Friedmann and Weaver 1980; Benjamin and Nathan 2001; Norris 2001a), equity (Downs 1994; Jackson 2000; Powell 2000; Rusk 2000), and global economic competitiveness (Norris 2001a; Mohamed 2008). At the same time, a lack of regional planning has been implicated in the extensive exurban development seen in the U.S. and elsewhere, which alarms many planners and environmentalists (Burnley and Murphy 1995; Lewis 1996; Norton 2005). Some of the calls to arms for more regional planning are quite forceful. Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton, for example, assert, “Metropolitan regions that promote and manage growth, educate their populations, and maintain the quality of life will succeed. Those mired in conflict and inaction will fail” (Calthorpe and Fulton 2001).

Yet, in the United States, meaningful regional planning efforts have been few and far between, in large part due to the political strength of local governments and their desire for economic and political autonomy (Norris 2001b; Basolo 2003). Local control of planning is firmly entrenched in the American political structure and culture, particularly in many eastern and Midwestern states that operate under home rule and/or township forms of government.<sup>1</sup> Local officials often face strong political pressures to resist regional control over planning and other land use decisions, and must balance these political costs against the potential benefits of more efficient and potentially more effective regional planning efforts (Gerber and Gibson 2009).

Despite the wide popularity of the concept of regional planning, there is some debate over whether regionalism is a desirable goal. The strength and fragmentation of local

governments in the U.S. provide strong evidence for Tiebout's hypothesis of a "market" for localities, where individuals choose among communities with different levels of service provision (Tiebout 1956). In fact, this fragmentation has been theorized to be "more in keeping with the basic constitutional principles of limited government and separation of powers" (Howell-Moroney 2008, p. 100).

Beyond the question of whether localities can and should move towards more regional approaches to land use planning and policy, there is also a practical question of how such efforts might be organized. The pervasive pattern of local control, combined with the absence of strong and effective regional governance institutions, creates a serious governance problem for regional planning efforts. Two obvious possibilities exist: create new regional institutions or expand the role of existing regional institutions.<sup>2</sup> There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. Creating new regional institutions allows participants in regional planning efforts to start with a clean slate and design institutions that are well tailored to the task at hand. At the same time, however, creating new regional institutions may require substantial resources and strong leadership, and involves creating a new layer of bureaucracy. Adapting existing regional institutions may require fewer initial resources, but may result in governance institutions that are less well suited to undertaking the immediate activities required for effective regional planning.

Our research seeks to assess the potential for expanding regional governance by asking local government officials their perspectives on the two sets of questions raised above. Our study involves analyzing data from a specially designed survey of Michigan local government officials collected in spring 2009 by the University of Michigan, Center for Local, State and Urban Policy's "Michigan Public Policy Survey" (MPPS). MPPS surveys the top

administrative official in a large sample of Michigan counties, cities, villages and townships on a variety of topics, including regional planning. Given the availability of this unique dataset, we limit our analysis to local governments in the state of Michigan. In some respects, Michigan offers a particularly challenging setting for regional planning, since it maintains a strong home-rule culture; vests planning authority and service delivery in fragmented local governments and townships<sup>3</sup>; offers few state mandates, incentives or resources for regional planning; and enforces several statutes that impede strong regional planning efforts. Despite these barriers, we do see regional planning efforts throughout the state (Gerber et al. 2005). We believe our results are generalizable to other contexts that share a similar form of local government and legal structure, in which fragmented local governments control planning and zoning and most regional activities are voluntary.

We are first interested in understanding how involved local governments are in regional planning efforts and whether they themselves perceive value (and if so, what sorts of value) in an expanded role. We ask local political officials to characterize their jurisdiction's involvement in regional planning efforts. We then ask whether they believe that role is too much, just right, or not enough. The combination of responses to these two questions tells us a lot about prospects for expanding regional planning activities. If jurisdictions across the board believe there is too little regional planning at present, then efforts to expand these activities are likely to be met with a basic acceptance across jurisdictions. If only those communities with low levels of current involvement say more regional planning is warranted, there may be natural limits to the capacity for expanding regional efforts. If most communities say their current involvement is too much, especially those with minimal involvement already, this implies even greater limits on the ability to expand regional planning efforts.

Second, we are interested in whether local governments that seek an expanded regional role prefer to achieve regional planning outcomes via new institutions or whether they believe they can achieve their regional planning objectives via existing institutions. To the extent that participants are comfortable working through existing regional institutions, the barriers to expanding regional planning may be lower and fewer resources may be required to initiate new regional planning efforts. When new institutions are required, participants must not only solve the immediate collective action problems inherent in any regional endeavor (Gerber and Gibson 2009), they must also mobilize additional resources and create the institutions within which their cooperative efforts will take place.

In the analysis that follows, we find widespread support for further regional planning activities at the local level, and moderate support for pursuing those activities through existing regional institutions, even in a strong home rule state with extremely fragmented local governments. We also find strong evidence that troubled local fiscal conditions increase support for regional land use planning, an issue around which there has been a lack of clarity in previous studies. We believe these results are helpful in identifying specific circumstances that are ripe for beginning or expanding regional land use planning involvement. Such efforts may be especially important in today's global economy that requires regions to compete and work proactively to gain a competitive economic advantage.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we briefly review several existing literatures that consider when and why local governments are likely to engage in regional planning. Those literatures form the basis for a series of empirically testable hypotheses. We present our hypotheses and describe the data and empirical models we use to

test them. We then present the results of our empirical analyses and end with a discussion of the implications of our research for prospects for expanding regional planning.

### **Why Cooperate?**

Numerous scholars have sought to identify the conditions that increase the probability that a locality will engage in regional cooperation in general, and regional planning in particular. Existing research has focused on characteristics of policy problems, communities, local government decision-makers, and the public to explain involvement in regional cooperation.

*Policy Problems:* American local governments provide a wide range of services to their constituents. Researchers have found it useful to differentiate between service-related or “systems maintenance” functions such as police, fire, and water and sewer, and “lifestyle” functions such as land use planning, social services, and traffic management. Systems maintenance functions tend not to involve “spillover” governance problems, where negative externalities from one community affect its neighbors, and so typically do not threaten local governments’ jurisdictional boundaries (Williams 1967; Kanarek and Baldassare 1996; Gainsborough 2002; Howell-Moroney 2008). Conversely, “lifestyle” functions often do create such spillover effects, making cooperation around them more difficult (Gainsborough 2002; Howell-Moroney 2008). Furthermore, garnering political support for regional collaboration around issues which involve winners and losers (let alone those that involve outright redistribution of resources) is more difficult than it is for those where all parties expect to save money (Nunn and Rosentraub 1997). It is therefore perhaps not surprising that regional efforts that focus on systems maintenance functions tend to be the most successful in the U.S. (Carr et

al. 2009). Regional efforts that do emerge around systems maintenance issues often take the form of single-purpose regional governments, which have been criticized as “shadow regionalism,” that is, an “imperfect and faint representation” of real, comprehensive regionalism, with serious limitations for facilitating meaningful, large-scale regional cooperation (Bollens 1997, p. 119).

Despite the scarcity of regional governments and formal regional governance efforts, cooperative service provision agreements between two or more local units of government are quite common (Thurmaier and Wood 2002), possibly because of their flexibility and potential impermanence (Leroux and Carr 2007, p. 345). These efforts may be seen as new forms of governance that attempt to respond to larger-scale processes (such as globalization) (McCarthy 2003, p. 141). However, small-scale interlocal agreements have been criticized as not really “governing” in the sense of controlling behavior (Norris 2001b, p. 535). Others emphasize that while collaboration implies true interdependence around a problem, cooperation just means “working jointly with others”, which may be less meaningful (McGuire 2006, p. 678). Cooperation can also be seen as simply the exercise of localities’ self-interest, without an overarching regional purpose (Axelrod 1984, p. 6).<sup>4</sup>

*Community Characteristics:* Well-founded as these criticisms may be, the ubiquity of cooperative agreements and other small-scale regional efforts, including those organized around land use planning, makes it worthwhile to explain who participates in these efforts, and why. In their recent study of interlocal agreements, LeRoux and Carr (2007) find that larger communities and those experiencing higher growth are more likely to engage in interlocal agreements. Neighboring jurisdictions with similar demographic profiles and political and

social preferences are more likely to engage in collaboration, with local officials reporting higher levels of trust that other participants will not renege on agreements (Feiock 2007, pp. 52, 54). Factors that seem to most strongly influence support for regional economic development efforts include a tradition of regionalism amongst local government officials (such as involvement in another regional strategy), need (limited resources or problems such as high unemployment), and economic similarity among governments (Olberding 2002, pp. 481-482).

One factor whose role has largely confounded researchers is that of local fiscal capacity (Leroux and Carr 2007). Several studies find significant effects. Fiscal concerns seem to drive cooperation more often on services where the government has little choice about the quality or quantity of provision such as water supply (Leroux and Carr 2007). Thurmaier and Wood (2002, p. 586) find that the most commonly cited reason for participating in interlocal agreements is economic, especially when it reduces uncertainty (for example, around price or demand for a service). The provision of capital-intensive goods or services (e.g., mass transit, water and sewer systems, buildings and equipment, etc.) is particularly likely to spur cooperation by small local governments, as they are better able to achieve economies of scale around such projects (Post 2002). By contrast, other studies emphasize the importance of non-economic factors (Thurmaier and Wood 2002).

*Local Decision-Maker Characteristics:* At the level of local decision-makers, Baldassare and his colleagues find that planning directors in California who perceive regional governments as locally responsive and effective in problem solving are more likely to favorably view regional government (Baldassare et al. 1996). In addition, those who favor specific roles for regional government in environmental protection and local growth regulations are more likely to support

a multi-purpose regional governing body (Baldassare et al. 1996). However, city planners and mayors in California tend to support state involvement rather than regional involvement on lifestyle issues, possibly because they are already used to state involvement in environmental reviews and because regional involvement on such issues is seen as an unnecessary extra layer of government intervention (Kanarek and Baldassare 1996, p. 100).

Regional efforts can be made or broken on the strength of the individuals involved in creating them, as trust and good personal relationships between local government staff are important for establishing successful interlocal agreements and cooperative planning efforts (Gerber 2005, Thurmaier 2006). Although a lack of knowledge about other participants' intentions initially presents a barrier to regional cooperation, once such cooperation is established, the creation of social capital during the process "provides an incentive to keep people at the table" (Gruber 1994, p. 3). Pre-existing relationships reduce uncertainty, thereby reducing the transaction costs of cooperation (Feiock 2007, p.56). Regional norms around cooperation and collaboration also strongly affect the likelihood of the formation of regional governance structures (Olberding 2002).

*Constituent Characteristics:* At the level of individual citizens, one study finds that liberals, whites, those who think sprawl is a problem, and those who are satisfied with local services are more likely to report support for regional land use policies in public opinion surveys than their otherwise similar counterparts (Mohamed 2008). Another study confirms that those who find sprawl to be a local problem are more likely to support regional planning efforts, and also finds that African Americans, Latinos, and college graduates tend to be more supportive of such efforts (Wassmer and Lascher 2006).

## Hypotheses

Our research questions and review of the literature lead to the following empirically testable hypotheses. The first relates to the potential value of small-scale interlocal agreements in cultivating support for regional planning efforts.

- H<sub>1</sub>: Communities that participate in interlocal agreements are more likely to support cooperation on land use planning.

We hypothesize that small-scale interlocal agreements may set the stage for more far-reaching regional efforts, either in terms of scale or scope. Participation in interlocal agreements may provide opportunities for local actors to develop familiarity and trust with potential planning partners, factors that several researchers discussed above find to be critical in initiating cooperation on land use matters. However, existing evidence for this hypothesis is inconclusive (Leroux and Carr 2007; Howell-Moroney 2008). Howell-Moroney (2008, p. 105) insists that “those who advocate regional governance, or new regionalism, have [...] erroneously mistaken the extensive cooperation around service problems as evidence that there is potential for cooperation around spillovers.” However, he and others suggest that growth management may in fact be the one “lifestyle” issue for which enough widespread support exists to drive regional efforts (Orfield 1997; Feiock 2007, p.55; Howell-Moroney 2008, p. 105). Our analysis allows us to test this hypothesis against the null hypothesis of no effect and the alternative of a negative relationship between participation in interlocal agreements and support for regional planning.

Our second hypothesis concerns the potential relationship between current levels of regional planning and support for additional regional efforts.

- H<sub>2</sub>: Communities that already participate in some regional land use planning efforts will support additional regional planning efforts.

This hypothesis parallels H<sub>1</sub>. Involvement in small-scale regional planning efforts (such as joint planning commissions or sub-county councils of governments) has the potential to increase familiarity and trust amongst potential partners and lay the groundwork for expanded regional efforts. Conversely, the opposite may be true: there may be a low natural “threshold” of regional planning activity that local participants quickly meet, or involvement in regional planning efforts may produce animosity or reveal hidden costs of cooperation (Gruber 1994, p.10), thereby resulting in less support for additional regional planning efforts.

Hypothesis 3 picks up on the focus in the literature on fiscal conditions and applies it to support for regional planning.

- H<sub>3</sub>: Communities experiencing or anticipating fiscal stress are more likely to be interested in cooperation on land use planning.

Although communities often cite economic concerns as motivation for cooperation, the evidence from the literature is again inconclusive as to exactly what effects fiscal stress may have on willingness to join regional efforts (Nunn and Rosentraub 1997; Thurmaier and Wood 2002; Leroux and Carr 2007). The literature does not directly address whether fiscal stress can make collaboration on lifestyle (as opposed to systems maintenance) issues more attractive. Although capital-intensive projects tend to attract more collaboration because of obvious economies of scale, it is not clear where processes (rather than products), such as planning, where communities pay for expertise, fit into this picture. Certainly some economies of scale would be possible from regional planning efforts, for example in producing maps and conducting public participation processes.

Our final hypothesis concerns support for existing versus new institutions as a way of pursuing additional regional planning efforts.

- H<sub>4</sub>: Communities currently involved in regional planning efforts are more likely to want to work through existing institutions in future regional planning efforts.

We expect that both because of the establishment of regional norms around collaboration (Olberding 2002) and because of issues of trust (Gruber 1994; Gerber 2005; Thurmaier 2006) and inertia (Abbott 2005), communities that already participate in some regional efforts are more likely to want to use the institutions with which they have existing relationships in any future regional planning efforts. As with our discussion of H<sub>2</sub> above, we recognize that the opposite may also occur: involvement in regional planning efforts may sour participants towards the institutions in which they work and lead them to support new institutions as the basis of expanded regional planning efforts.

## **Data and Methods**

We test these hypotheses with data from a unique survey of local government officials in Michigan. The data were collected as part of the “Michigan Public Policy Survey” or MPPS, a semi-annual web-based survey of local elected and appointed officials in Michigan’s cities, villages, townships and counties. The MPPS is conducted by the University of Michigan’s Center for Local, State and Urban Policy, in collaboration with the Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Township Association and Michigan Association of Counties, and is partially funded by the Kellogg Foundation.

The data for this study were collected during the spring 2009 wave of the MPPS. An email was sent to the top elected official in each of the 1859 general-purpose governments, as well as the top appointed official in each jurisdiction that has one.<sup>5</sup> The email invited officials

to participate in the survey and provided a link to a web-based version of the survey instrument.<sup>6</sup> Those units for whom a current email address was not obtained received an invitation by U.S. mail, and all respondents were given the opportunity to request a hard copy of the survey. Officials received two follow-up emails; targeted phone calls were also made to ensure adequate sub-sample sizes across regions, jurisdiction type, and size. The final sample includes useable responses from 1591 respondents in a total of 1204 unique jurisdictions for an overall response rate of 65% (for jurisdictions) and 45% (for respondents). Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the sample.

### **Table 1 Here**

Our analysis proceeds in several steps. First, we explore our four hypotheses by conducting multivariate regression-type analyses on each of the four hypothesized relationships, controlling for a variety of potentially intervening factors. We then specify and estimate a multi-equation model that links several of the individual relationships. This more complex causal structure allows us to estimate the separate direct and indirect influences of our independent variables on our two main outcomes of interest: support for higher levels of regional planning, and support for working through existing institutions.

### **Empirical Models, Variables, and Methods**

To test hypothesis 1, we estimate a multivariate regression-type model in which the dependent variable is whether the respondent believes the level of regional planning in his/her community is not enough, just right, or too much, and the main independent variable is the number of interlocal agreements currently in force in the respondent's community, based on his/her survey responses. This dependent variable is labeled *More Plan* in the tables. Since *More Plan*

contains three discrete but ordered values (not enough, just right, and too much), we employ an ordered probit analysis that appropriately captures the assumed underlying probability model.<sup>7</sup>

The main independent variable in our test of hypothesis 1 is the number of interlocal agreements currently in effect in the respondent's community (labeled # *Interlocal: Total* in the tables). The MPPS survey asked respondents to indicate whether their jurisdiction was very involved, somewhat involved, or not at all involved in intergovernmental or regional efforts in eight policy areas: land use planning, transportation/public transit, police services, fire services, utilities/water/waste, parks/recreation/libraries/culture, economic development, and emergency preparedness. We construct a variable that counts the number of policy areas, excluding land use planning, in which a particular jurisdiction is either somewhat involved or very involved. The resulting variable ranges from 0 to 7, with a mean value of 4.81 across respondents. According to hypothesis 1, we expect the coefficient on # *Interlocal: Total* to be positively signed. To account for possible differences in interlocal agreements formed to manage systems maintenance versus lifestyle services, we also construct two separate variables from this data: # *Interlocal: Systems* (which includes police, fire, utilities/water/waste, and emergency preparedness) and # *Interlocal: Lifestyle* (which includes transportation/public transit, parks/recreation/libraries/culture, and economic development).

Our tests of hypotheses 2 and 3 utilize the same dependent variable (support for more regional planning or *More Plan*) in separate ordered probit regressions; each includes a different main independent variable. To test hypothesis 2, the main independent variable is the number of regional planning efforts in which a jurisdiction is currently involved. MPPS respondents were asked to indicate which of the following their jurisdiction is currently involved in: partnerships or joint planning efforts with one or more neighboring communities;

council of governments within their county; county-led planning efforts; and multi-county council of governments. The resulting variable (*# Regional Planning*) ranges from 0 to 4, with a sample mean of 0.97.

To test hypothesis 3, the main independent variable is a measure of the respondent's expectation of future fiscal conditions. The variable is based on a question in MPPS which asked whether the respondent thinks that during the next twelve months, his/her community will have good times financially, or bad times financially. The variable is coded "one" if the respondent reported "bad times" and is coded "zero" if he/she reported "good times" or "neither." Perhaps not surprisingly, given Michigan's fiscal conditions during spring 2009, 68% of respondents reported 'bad times.'

To control for other factors that might also affect a respondent's support for additional regional planning, we include a number of variables measuring community characteristics, including dummy variables for cities, villages and counties (with townships as the omitted category); median household income; percent white; natural log of population; percent under 18; percent over 65; percent with bachelor's degree; percent with graduate degree; median property tax; number of full time employees; number of part time employees; and percent of county voting for the Democratic presidential candidate in 2008.<sup>8</sup>

Our test of hypothesis 4 requires a different dependent variable: support for existing regional institutions (*Existing*). MPPS respondents were presented with the following question: "If your jurisdiction were to engage in a new regional land use planning effort, do you believe that existing organizations in your region – such as the county government, a metropolitan planning organization, a regional council, or a joint planning commission – have the capacity to engage in those efforts, or do you think a new organization would be required?" Responses that

indicated “existing organization(s) have the capacity” were coded “one,” while those that indicated “a new regional planning organization would be needed” were coded “zero.” Given this binary dependent variable, we utilize a simple probit regression model.

The independent variables to test hypothesis 4 include measures of current regional planning activities. In one specification, we include binary measures of each of the four current regional planning efforts described in the context of hypothesis two above. In an alternative specification, we include the same summary variable of the number of current regional planning efforts identified. We also include the variable *More Plan* to capture whether the respondent feels that his/her community ought to engage in more regional planning; control variables indicating whether the jurisdiction is a city, village or county (again, with township as the omitted/comparison category); and whether the jurisdiction is located in southeast Michigan.<sup>9</sup>

## **Results**

To summarize our results, we find little support for H<sub>1</sub>, which posits that communities currently involved in interlocal agreements are more likely to be interested in cooperating on land use planning. We find that for H<sub>2</sub>, in which we hypothesize that communities that already participate in regional land use planning efforts will support expanded efforts, the relationship in fact runs in the opposite direction: governments already involved in regional planning efforts show little support for additional regional planning. We do find strong support for H<sub>3</sub>, which suggests that fiscal stress is a motivator for support for regional planning efforts. We also find that, as hypothesized in H<sub>4</sub>, communities currently involved in regional planning efforts are

more likely to want to continue to work through existing institutions in the future. A detailed discussion of the results follows.

Table 2 reports our estimates of the relationships described in H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, and H<sub>3</sub>. Each column corresponds to the results from a separate ordered probit regression in which the dependent variable is our measure of support for more regional planning (*More Plan*), and the main independent variables measure participation in interlocal service agreements, involvement in regional planning efforts, and perceived fiscal stress, respectively.<sup>10</sup>

### **Table 2 Here**

Columns 1 and 2 report the estimates of our test of H<sub>1</sub>. The results show no support for H<sub>1</sub>. The estimated effect of participation in collaborative service delivery is negative, contrary to our hypothesis, and is not significant.<sup>11</sup> In other words, localities that report higher levels of participation in interlocal agreements are less supportive of additional regional planning efforts, but our confidence in these estimates is low and we cannot confidently differentiate these small negative effects from zero. In column 2, we see that neither of the separate interlocal variables (for systems maintenance and lifestyle services) are significant. Interestingly, the coefficient on *# Interlocal: Lifestyle* is negative, suggesting that experience with those arrangements (which are the most similar to regional planning) make jurisdictions less supportive of additional regional planning. The coefficient on *# Interlocal: Systems* is positive, with those arrangements making jurisdictions more supportive of additional regional planning. However, neither of those separate interlocal coefficients is significant.

By contrast, several of the control variables are significant: cities, villages and counties report more support for regional planning relative to townships. Jurisdictions with higher median income are less supportive while those with more part-time employees are more

supportive. None of the other control variables are significant in these or any of the other regressions, and are dropped from the analyses.

The ordered probit results reported in column 3 show our test of H<sub>2</sub>. The dependent variable is again support for increasing regional planning; the primary independent variable is a count of the jurisdiction's current regional planning efforts. Control variables are the same as in the previous model. The results in column 3 show that participation in regional planning efforts is negatively related to support for additional regional planning. In other words, officials in jurisdictions that are already heavily involved in regional planning are less likely to report that their level of involvement is "not enough" and are more likely to report that their involvement is "just right" or "too much." This is contrary to H<sub>2</sub>; rather than creating demand for expanded regional planning activities, it appears that once local governments become active participants in regional planning efforts, they are less likely to see the need for still more such regional planning. Local units that are not currently involved are the ones who welcome more regional planning. Of course, there are several possible explanations for this effect. One possibility is that current participants have had negative experiences with regional planning. A second possibility is that they have had positive experiences but simply feel they are already receiving whatever benefits might accrue from cooperation. From the existing data, we cannot distinguish between these two possibilities. The effects of jurisdiction type, income, and staff size are significant and similar to the previous regressions.

Column 4 reports the results of our test of H<sub>3</sub>. The independent variable of interest is our measure of the respondent's expectations of next year's fiscal conditions. As explained above, this variable is created from a survey question which asks whether the respondent expects the community to experience good times, bad times, or neither during the next twelve

months. The variable is a dummy variable scored one if the respondent said “bad times” and scored zero if he/she said “good times” or “neither.” This effect is positive and significant, indicating that officials in local units who expect fiscal stress are more willing to turn to regional planning, presumably to achieve cost savings and economic efficiencies, than those who are more optimistic about their fiscal situation.

In column 5, we include all of the independent variables from the previous regressions to test the marginal effect of each of our hypothesized relationships, controlling for the effects of the other relationships. As in the individual regressions, we find little support for H<sub>1</sub>, evidence contrary to H<sub>2</sub>, and confirming support for H<sub>3</sub>.

Table 3 reports the results of our test of H<sub>4</sub>. The dependent variable measures support for working through existing regional planning institutions, created from the survey question described above. Column 1 reports probit estimates for the full model, including four separate indicator variables for whether the jurisdiction currently participates in various regional planning efforts. Column 2 substitutes those four indicator variables with a count of current regional planning efforts. Since many existing regional planning efforts in Michigan are led or dominated by county governments, columns 3 and 4 omit responses from county officials and restricts the sample to cities, villages and townships.

### **Table 3 Here**

The results in column 1 show that participation in some forms of regional planning are positively and significantly related to support for existing institutions. Specifically, respondents from jurisdictions that are engaged in county-led planning efforts and those conducted within multi-county councils of governments are more likely to report support for existing institutions, while those that report working in joint planning efforts with one or more neighboring

communities or in single-county councils of governments are not significantly different from their counterparts who do not participate.<sup>12</sup> These results are consistent with H<sub>3</sub>. When responses to these four participation questions are combined into a count variable in column 2, the effect is positive and significant, indicating that higher levels of participation in regional planning efforts is associated with greater support for existing institutions.

The results in columns 1 and 2 also show that support for more regional planning is associated with lower support for existing regional institutions. In other words, those who report that the level of regional planning in their communities is not enough are less likely to see existing institutions as having the capacity to take on additional regional planning activities. We also find that respondents who report higher level of trust in local government are more likely to support existing institutions.<sup>13</sup> Together, these results imply that a lack of confidence in the capacity of existing institutions and a lack of trust in the local governments who participate in those institutions may be major barriers preventing the expansion of regional planning efforts. Finally, cities are less supportive of existing institutions, while respondents from jurisdictions in the more densely populated southeast region of the state (which contains the Detroit metropolitan area) are more supportive. We speculate that support for existing institutions amongst southeast Michigan respondents may result, at least in part, from the prevalence and diversity of existing institutions in that region. Interestingly, numerous observers note that the metro Detroit region poses vexing challenges due to its severe and persistent racial segregation and lack of regional leadership (Rossman-McKinney 2007). The results reported here present some reason for optimism.

The results in columns 3 and 4, which omit counties and are limited to cities, villages and townships, mirror the results in columns 1 and 2. Respondents whose cities/villages/

townships are involved in county-led planning efforts, and to a lesser degree multi-county council of governments planning efforts, are more supportive of existing institutions. Those who believe that the current level of planning is not enough are less supportive, while those who report higher levels of trust in local governments are more supportive of existing institutions.

The results in tables 2 and 3 show a great deal of overlap. Several of the same factors – particularly jurisdiction type and the number of regional planning efforts – are posited as independent variables in both sets of equations, and one factor – support for more regional planning activities – is conceived as both a dependent variable in some of the estimations and as an independent variable in others. One serious concern with this initial analysis is that it is unclear how the numerous factors fit together. Does support for expanded regional planning efforts affect support for existing institutions directly, as implied in our model specifications in tables 2 and 3, or are the factors which determine support for more regionalism (i.e., jurisdiction type, experience with regional planning, fiscal stress and population characteristics) really driving support for existing institutions through their indirect effects? We investigate this possibility by combining our two equations and estimating them as a hierarchical system of equations, treating support for more regional planning as an included endogenous variable (Gelbach 2009). Since support for existing institutions is coded as a binary outcome variable, we use the instrumental variables probit command (*ivprobit*) in Stata 9.1 to estimate our model. Instrumental variables probit estimates two related equations using maximum likelihood. It estimates a reduced form equation for the included endogenous variable (in our case, *More Plan*) which includes all of the independent variables in both equations. The predicted value from that estimation represents an estimate of *More Plan* “purged” of the effects of the

independent variables. That predicted value is used as an independent variable in the structural estimation of the equation for (*Existing*). The coefficient on this predicted value for *More Plan* is interpreted as the effect of support for more planning on support for existing institutions, purged of any effects of the independent variables on *More Plan*.<sup>14</sup> Results are reported in table 4.

#### **Table 4 Here**

The first column of table 4 reports the reduced form estimates for *More Plan*. It includes the independent variables from table 2, as well as a number of personal characteristics of the respondents (including partisanship, gender, and tenure in office). While these personal characteristics are not to be interpreted as necessarily affecting a jurisdiction's support for additional regional planning, they are included to improve the fit (and hence the validity of the predicted value) of the reduced form equation.

The second column of results shows our probit estimates for support for existing institutions (*Existing*). The independent variables are the subset of significant independent variables from table 3, except for *More Plan*, which is instead the predicted value from the reduced form equation reported in column 1. We see that after accounting for the indirect effects of the independent variables on *More Plan*, it no longer has a significant effect on support for existing institutions. In other words, jurisdictions that favor more regional planning are no more or less supportive of existing institutions. Rather, the important factor is whether they are currently engaged in regional planning efforts. Examining the other coefficients in column 2, trust in local governments remains positive but is now insignificant. Differences between jurisdiction types become insignificant, while respondents from southeast Michigan remain somewhat more likely to support existing institutions.

## **Discussion**

What factors determine support for regional planning and existing regional planning institutions, and how do those factors inter-relate? Our analysis of survey responses from local government officials in Michigan suggest that there is ample room for expansion, but that officials differ in their views of the best way to pursue new regional planning initiatives. Over 43% of local officials surveyed report that their jurisdiction's involvement in regional planning is "not enough," while only 2 percent report that their involvement is "too much" (the remainder report "just right"). Officials who are currently less involved in regional planning and who perceive greater fiscal stress are more likely to favor expanded regional planning. Demographic characteristics appear to be less relevant. Officials from cities and village are more supportive of regional planning than respondents from townships. This is not surprising, given that counties and townships originated as "arbitrarily designed administrative units," provide limited services, and tend to embody a culture of limited government, whereas cities and villages "formed when people came together to organize a governmental entity to provide a higher level of services" (Citizens Research Council 1999, p. 5). Thus one can expect the greatest support for regional planning to come from communities with greater fiscal need and fewer existing regional opportunities.

How they go about expanding their regional planning activities, though, is a matter for debate. 72% of respondents report support for existing institutions, while 28% believe new institutions are necessary to expand regional planning efforts. This may be good news for advocates of regional planning, since the costs of expanding the scope of existing institutions may be lower, in terms of time, money and political capital, than creating new institutions.

However, those communities that support existing institutions are likely to already be involved in regional planning activities and to be from southeast Michigan, where numerous regional planning efforts already exist. Those who are most supportive of expanded regional planning activities – jurisdictions that are not already involved in regional planning efforts and that are located outside of the Detroit metro area – may require new institutions to engage them in the regional planning process.

## **Conclusion**

The “new regionalism” called for in the 1990s and early 2000s, with its emphasis on regional cooperation and holistic governance around economic, environmental, and social issues (Calthorpe and Fulton 2001, Wheeler 2002, p. 270) has not yet come to pass, except in a few notable locations (Norris 2001b, Basolo 2003). Large-scale regional governance and planning has, thus far, failed to catch on even among communities that would seem to have every incentive to support it (such as central cities and aging inner-ring suburbs) (Orfield 1997). In this study we turned our attention first to more incremental interlocal and small regional efforts, because we originally suspected that these efforts might eventually be the “gateway” to expanded forms of regional governance. Although we did not find evidence to support this particular idea—it turned out that participation in interlocal agreements appeared unrelated to interest in regional land use planning, and that officials in communities that already participate in regional planning efforts are not terribly interested in expanding that participation—we did find some patterns that raise interesting and positive possibilities for future regional planning efforts.

One issue of particular salience right now is that officials in communities that are experiencing fiscal stress tend to be more supportive of participation in regional land use planning, presumably on efficiency grounds. As many local governments find themselves under strain due to eroding tax base, opportunities may arise for cooperation that would not have been possible in better economic times. Another important finding is that officials in communities that are already participating in regional planning efforts tend to be satisfied both with their involvement and with the institutions leading the process. In other words, there may be a “if you try it, you like it” effect going on (although the causal direction is not entirely clear here). These results suggest that if local government officials are enticed into regional planning efforts by economic circumstances, those regional relationships and structures may endure after the crisis has passed, changing institutional norms for the long term. Finally, officials from communities that are “regionally underserved” in terms of institutions and/or planning efforts, express interest in expanding their involvement in regional land use planning.

Future research in this area should focus both on what factors influence officials to take the first step in regional planning involvement (for example, is it a relationship with another official, a specific economic event or budget process, citizen interest, etc.) and barriers to participation in regional planning.

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Table 1: Summary Statistics, MPPS survey, Michigan local governments, spring 2009

| Variable                  | N    | Mean  | Std. Dev. | Min   | Max    |
|---------------------------|------|-------|-----------|-------|--------|
| City                      | 1591 | .18   | .38       | 0     | 1      |
| Village                   | 1591 | .084  | .28       | 0     | 1      |
| County                    | 1591 | .038  | .19       | 0     | 1      |
| Township                  | 1591 | .60   | .49       | 0     | 1      |
| Median Income/1000        | 1591 | 43.48 | 14.20     | 17.47 | 170.79 |
| # Part Time Employees     | 1591 | 29.89 | 47.87     | 0     | 640    |
| Southeast MI              | 1591 | .20   | .40       | 0     | 1      |
| Support for more RP       | 1025 | .42   | .53       | -1    | 1      |
| # Interlocal: Total       | 994  | 4.81  | 1.89      | 0     | 7      |
| # Interlocal: Systems     | 1101 | 3.048 | 1.062     | 0     | 4      |
| # Interlocal: Lifestyle   | 1071 | 1.82  | 1.056     | 0     | 3      |
| Joint Planning            | 1481 | .30   | .46       | 0     | 1      |
| County COG                | 1481 | .24   | .43       | 0     | 1      |
| County-led RP             | 1481 | .29   | .46       | 0     | 1      |
| Multicounty COG           | 1481 | .13   | .34       | 0     | 1      |
| # Regional Planning       | 1481 | .97   | 1.072     | 0     | 4      |
| Support for existing inst | 959  | .72   | .45       | 0     | 1      |
| Bad Fiscal Outlook        | 1260 | .68   | .47       | 0     | 1      |
| Trust in local government | 1442 | 2.73  | .74       | 0     | 4      |
| Republican                | 1591 | .41   | .49       | 0     | 1      |
| Male                      | 1427 | .59   | .49       | 0     | 1      |
| Tenure                    | 1418 | 8.97  | 8.70      | 1     | 46     |

Table 2: Support for Regional Planning  
 Ordered Probit Regression Estimates, Michigan local governments, spring 2009

| <b>Variable</b>           | <b>H<sub>1</sub></b> | <b>H<sub>1</sub></b> | <b>H<sub>2</sub></b> | <b>H<sub>3</sub></b> | <b>Combined</b>   |
|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| #Interlocal:<br>Total     | -.014<br>(.026)      |                      |                      |                      | .014<br>(.029)    |
| #Interlocal:<br>Systems   |                      | .044<br>(.053)       |                      |                      |                   |
| #Interlocal:<br>Lifestyle |                      | -.074<br>(.055)      |                      |                      |                   |
| #Regional<br>Planning     |                      |                      | -.19***<br>(.035)    |                      | -.16***<br>(.046) |
| Bad Fiscal<br>Outlook     |                      |                      |                      | .22**<br>(.086)      | .28**<br>(.10)    |
| City                      | .43***<br>(.11)      | .45***<br>(.11)      | .44***<br>(.10)      | .39***<br>(.11)      | .46***<br>(.12)   |
| Village                   | .37**<br>(.15)       | .38**<br>(.16)       | .33**<br>(.14)       | .33**<br>(.14)       | .44**<br>(.17)    |
| County                    | -.020<br>(.24)       | .011<br>(.24)        | .15<br>(.22)         | .032<br>(.22)        | .065<br>(.25)     |
| Median HH<br>Income       | -.0065**<br>(.0033)  | -.0066**<br>(.0033)  | -.0051*<br>(.0029)   | -.0056*<br>(.0030)   | -.0053<br>(.0034) |
| # Part Time<br>Employees  | .0020*<br>(.0011)    | .0019*<br>(.0011)    | .0021**<br>(.00093)  | .0016*<br>(.0009)    | .0017<br>(.0011)  |
| Cut 1                     | -2.36***<br>(.22)    | -2.30***<br>(.23)    | -2.38***<br>(.17)    | -2.01***<br>(.18)    | -2.21***<br>(.24) |
| Cut 2                     | -.039<br>(.19)       | .02<br>(.20)         | -.096<br>(.14)       | .23<br>(.16)         | .14<br>(.22)      |
| N                         | 761                  | 761                  | 1025                 | 911                  | 681               |

Standard errors in parentheses.

\* p<.10; \*\* p<.05; \*\*\* p<.10; two-tailed test.

Table 3: Support for Existing Regional Institutions  
 Probit Regression Estimates, Michigan local governments, spring 2009

| Variable                    | H <sub>4</sub>           |                          |                    |                    |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
|                             | <i>All jurisdictions</i> | <i>All jurisdictions</i> | <i>No counties</i> | <i>No counties</i> |
| Joint Planning              | .082<br>(.11)            | --                       | .061<br>(.11)      | --                 |
| County COG                  | -.036<br>(.11)           | --                       | -.021<br>(.12)     | --                 |
| County-led Regional Effort  | .38***<br>(.11)          | --                       | .40**<br>(.11)     | --                 |
| Multicounty COG             | .29**<br>(.15)           | --                       | .25*<br>(.16)      | --                 |
| # Regional Planning - Total | --                       | .16**<br>(.048)          | --                 | .16**<br>(.050)    |
| Support for More Planning   | -.59***<br>(.099)        | -.59***<br>(.098)        | -.59***<br>(.10)   | -.59***<br>(.10)   |
| Local Government Trust      | .14*<br>(.071)           | .13*<br>(.070)           | .15**<br>(.072)    | .14*<br>(.072)     |
| City                        | -.23*<br>(.12)           | -.23*<br>(.12)           | -.23*<br>(.12)     | -.23*<br>(.12)     |
| Village                     | .13<br>(.19)             | .14<br>(.19)             | .14<br>(.19)       | .14<br>(.19)       |
| County                      | -.063<br>(.24)           | -.022<br>(.23)           | --                 | --                 |
| SE Michigan                 | .19<br>(.13)             | .21*<br>(.13)            | .21*<br>(.13)      | .23*<br>(.13)      |
| Constant                    | .36*<br>(.22)            | .38*<br>(.22)            | .33<br>(.22)       | .36<br>(.22)       |
| N                           | 801                      | 801                      | 761                | 761                |

Standard errors in parentheses.

\* p<.10; \*\* p<.05; \*\*\* p<.01; two-tailed test.

Table 4: Support for Existing Regional Institutions  
 Instrumental Variables Probit Estimates (MLE), Michigan local govts, spring 2009

| <b>Variable</b>           | <b>Support for Regional Planning</b> | <b>Support for Existing Institutions</b> |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
|                           | <i>Reduced Form Estimation</i>       | <i>Structural Estimation</i>             |
| Support for More Planning | --                                   | -.70<br>(.73)                            |
| # Regional Planning       | -.058**<br>(.021)                    | .18**<br>(.080)                          |
| Local Government Trust    | -.055*<br>(.033)                     | .12<br>(.10)                             |
| City                      | .21***<br>(.054)                     | -.21<br>(.22)                            |
| Village                   | .21**<br>(.076)                      | .14<br>(.26)                             |
| County                    | .11<br>(.092)                        | .12<br>(.28)                             |
| SE Mich                   | -.078<br>(.052)                      | .26*<br>(.15)                            |
| # Interlocal: total       | -.0074<br>(.014)                     | --                                       |
| Bad Fiscal Outlook        | .11**<br>(.046)                      | --                                       |
| Republican                | -.067**<br>(.045)                    |  |
| Male                      | -.068<br>(.052)                      |  |
| Tenure                    | -.0061**<br>(.0029)                  |  |
| Constant                  | .59***<br>(.14)                      | .38<br>(.55)                             |
| Wald test                 |                                      | $\chi^2(1)=0.04$                         |
| N                         |                                      | 542                                      |

Standard errors in parentheses.

\* p<.10; \*\* p<.05; \*\*\* p<.01; two-tailed test.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> In states with home rule and/or township government, land use authority is devolved to many small, decentralized local governments.

<sup>2</sup> Other, more informal efforts, such as grass-roots task forces, may accompany the formal regional planning efforts that are the focus of this research study.

<sup>3</sup> Townships are unincorporated county subdivisions, found in many Midwestern states. They have fewer service provision requirements than do cities. In Michigan and several other home rule states, townships are empowered to conduct their own planning and zoning activities.

<sup>4</sup> McGuire 2006 discusses the wide range of intergovernmental interactions, from coordination to cooperation to collaboration to consolidation. Each form of interaction involves a different level of commitment, action, formality and institutionalization.

<sup>5</sup> Many townships have no permanent staff; elected officials are responsible for the unit's ongoing administrative and governmental functions.

<sup>6</sup> Detailed information on the survey is available at <http://closup.umich.edu/research/projects/mpps/mpps.php>.

<sup>7</sup> Specifically, ordered probit assumes that the underlying probability model is normal and that the outcome values are ordered but not necessarily measured as equal intervals. The ordered probit command in Stata 9.3 estimates a single set of probit coefficient estimates and two cutpoints that segment the underlying probability space.

<sup>8</sup> Demographic variables are from American FactFinder, U.S. Census, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> The seven-county metro Detroit region contains approximately 40% of the state's 10 million residents and 239 of its 1859 local governments. Perhaps most relevant to the current analysis, it has been the focus of numerous high-profile regional governance and regional planning efforts.

<sup>10</sup> We obtain similar results, in terms of sign and statistical significance, when we estimate the model using ordinary least squares.

<sup>11</sup> In separate analyses, we included each of the seven service delivery areas as separate indicator variables. Six of the seven effects were insignificant; the coefficient on police was positive and significant at  $p < .10$ .

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, the four forms of regional planning are all positively correlated, but none of the correlations between any two forms of participation exceed .23. All are negatively correlated with *More Plan*.

<sup>13</sup> The *Local Government Trust* variable is created from an MPPS survey question which asked "How much of the time do you think you can trust other local governments to do what is right?" Responses are scored 4 (nearly always); 3 (most of the time); 2 (some of the time); 1 (seldom); and 0 (almost never). The variable takes on a mean value of 2.73 in the sample.

<sup>14</sup> IV Probit assumes one binary dependent variable and one continuous dependent variable. Although *More Plan* takes on only three values, we treat it as a continuous variable in this estimation. We find that the signs and levels of significance from this estimation are roughly the same as the ordered probit estimates reported in table 2.