

Business Knows Best

Elite-Driven Regional Stewardship

Regional stewards are leaders who are committed to the long-term well-being of places. They are integrators who cross boundaries of jurisdiction, sector, and discipline to address complex regional issues such as sprawl, equity, education, and economic development. They see the connection between economic, environmental, and social concerns and they know how to “connect the dots” to create opportunities for their regions. . . . Stewardship means the careful and responsible management of something entrusted in our care.

—Douglas Henton and Alliance for Regional Stewardship (2000), 3–4

In May 2000, fifty business and public-sector leaders from regions around the United States gathered in Kohler, Wisconsin, to explore creating a national network that would support regional initiatives.¹ The result was the Alliance for Regional Stewardship. Recognizing limits to both federal power and local activism, and building on a growing regionalist movement across the country, the Alliance was committed to the idea that vibrant regions are built on the connections between an innovative economy, livable communities, social inclusion, and a collaborative style of governance. Since its founding, the organization has worked to develop regional leaders and support regional initiatives that advance these integrated and diverse goals (Henton, Melville, and Welsh 2003, 2004).

Though created in 2000, the network was building on many years of previous experience in developing this perspective, including being inspired in large part by the life and legacy of John W. Gardner, former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under president Lyndon

Johnson and founder of Common Cause. Gardner was a Republican who worked for a Democratic president and was committed to finding common ground across diverse constituencies in the broader public—a principle that is at the core of diverse epistemic communities. But while the Alliance for Regional Stewardship embraced multiple goals—including the three E's, economy, environment, and equity—it had its real roots in business-led and often elite-driven initiatives such as Joint Venture Silicon Valley, the organization that helped shape the consulting careers of those who helped staff its first phase. (We discuss Joint Venture in greater detail in chapter 7.) And, true to its roots, the Alliance no longer exists as a stand-alone organization but as a part of the American Chamber of Commerce Executives.

The three case-study regions in this chapter seem to particularly embody this elite-driven view of regional stewardship. In Grand Rapids, for example, it was key leaders in local, mostly privately owned companies who worked with local government to revitalize the downtown and help reverse patterns of urban decay that took hold in the 1970s. In Charlotte, executives in the area's banking industry took an enlightened approach to regional development, working, again with public-sector leaders, to transform the region from a sleepy textile town to a dynamic financial-services center with a high quality of life. In Oklahoma City, starting in the early 1990s, multiple Republican mayors worked (and continue to work) in concert with a powerful and conservative Chamber of Commerce to champion multiple rounds of voter-approved increases in regional taxes for major publicly funded development projects, transforming a dying urban core into a vibrant entertainment complex, and a revitalized downtown that stands as a symbol of a dynamic regional economy.

These are clear successes, but there are also clear limits to the levels of diversity that seem possible in this kind of elite-driven stewardship model of regional governance. Indeed, the very term *regional stewardship* reflects these limits, with its roots in the context of ecological stewardship in which enlightened environmentalists provide stewardship for nature, since nature is unable to protect itself in the face of human incursion (Cairns 1967; Knight 1998). Similarly, inherent in the notion of regional stewardship is a paternalistic ethos which is all too often reflected in processes and policies that seem to treat historically marginalized communities as subjects (not actors) in regional governance processes.

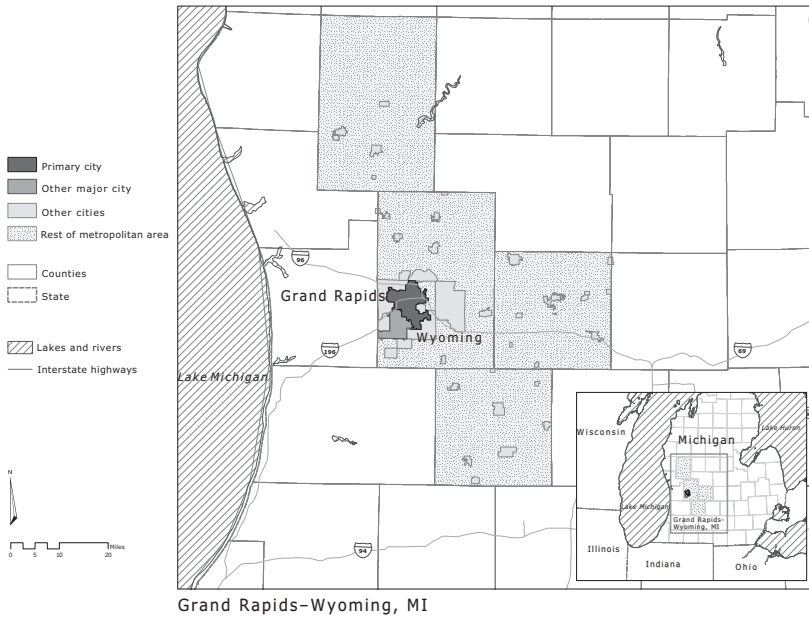
The limits of a regional-stewardship approach for the three cases we study here, Grand Rapids, Charlotte, and Oklahoma City, may also

be seen in the data on outcomes. While Grand Rapids had a relatively vibrant and inclusive economy in the 1980s and 1990s, this position started to erode in the 2000s. While Charlotte had a reputation for collaborative regional leadership that helped drive investment to the central city and not just the suburbs (Pastor et al. 2000), growth in the region has not been shared broadly in recent years. And while Oklahoma City showed a significantly better record on growth and equity than comparison regions in the 2000s, this was a dramatic turnaround from its record in the 1980s and 1990s; even today, inequality, poverty, and the marginalization of the growing Latino population in Oklahoma City remain significant challenges.

Below, we track the story of these three cases, beginning with a brief review of the patterns of equity and growth that each region has experienced since 1980 and a more detailed charting of the leadership networks in each region and how they have shaped regional development. We conclude each section by analyzing the character of epistemic communities in the region and highlight some of the current challenges facing the metro in question. We conclude the chapter with some final comments on both the strength and the limits of elite-driven processes and regional stewardship models in fully addressing metropolitan challenges.

GRAND RAPIDS

Until recently, Grand Rapids was one of the better-performing regions in the Midwest.² There is a long history here. In the mid-nineteenth century, Grand Rapids was one of the major hubs of the country's timber industry, and the region established itself as the premier furniture manufacturing center in the country. Unlike the many other manufacturing-based regions that experienced significant deindustrialization in the 1980s, the "furniture city" was able to sustain a vibrant manufacturing sector, providing good middle-class job opportunities for non-college educated workers as late as the mid-2000s (Vande Bunte 2013). According to the Brookings Institution, while the entire nation lost almost a quarter of its manufacturing jobs between 1980 and 2005, manufacturing jobs in the Grand Rapids region increased by 28 percent (Atkins et al. 2011).³ Other sectors—particularly health care services—also grew during this time, resulting in an overall increase in jobs of 34 percent in the 1980s and 26 percent in the 1990s. During these two decades, the region's average earnings increased by over 10 percent, and the proportion living in poverty decreased by 3 percent.



MAP 5.1. Grand Rapids Region.

But the 2000s ushered in a painful era for many Grand Rapids families, as the flight of manufacturing jobs that had swept the country in earlier decades finally caught up with the region and office furniture manufacturing firms moved production processes overseas (Atkins et al. 2011). Average earnings also decreased over that time, and so it is not surprising that between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of people living below poverty skyrocketed. Even amidst the Great Recession, Grand Rapids stood out from the crowd. While the Midwest and the top 192 regions in the United States (by population) experienced similarly devastating increases in poverty (50 percent and 29 percent, respectively), Grand Rapids nearly doubled its poverty rate, from 9 to 16 percent. A recent Brookings book finds that the city's poverty rate grew faster than that of any other metropolitan hub in the United States during the last decade (Kneebone 2014).

But despite the recent wave of job loss and increases in poverty, Grand Rapids fared better than most over the longer thirty-year period between 1980 and 2010. A few key features of the region—in addition to the delayed shrinkage of manufacturing—contributed to this pattern. First, Grand Rapids has a small group of wealthy business leaders

with deep roots in the area—indeed, many of their family histories in the region go back a century or more—who act as the “fathers” of the region. Partly because of their familial and financial commitment to place, this set of business elites have invested private money into planning and developing the city’s major civic projects as part of the downtown revitalization. A strong business presence—in the areas of both governance and philanthropy—is underpinned by a largely conservative electorate who believe that the private sector, not government, should drive growth.

While there is an awareness of the importance of inclusion, it is generally believed that faith-based institutions—predominantly the Dutch Reform Church—are responsible for both providing social services and advocating on behalf of marginalized segments of the population. As the data on social equity show, that’s not quite enough. As we will see, the story suggests that an epistemic community relying on elite-driven private-sector stewardship, small government, and a limited social justice organizing infrastructure—consisting of a handful of small faith-based efforts—has its limits.

The Fathers of Grand Rapids

A key feature of the history and development of Grand Rapids is the existence of a small but extremely powerful group of business elite who are deeply rooted and civically engaged in the community. Foremost among these is Grand Rapids-born Richard DeVos, who cofounded a health, beauty, and home product supplier called Amway in 1959 and whose subsequent philanthropic and business investments were key to the downtown revitalization. Other significant businessmen and families in the region have included Peter Wege and the Wege family, who founded a company in 1912 that would become Steelcase, now a global furniture manufacturer, and whose Wege Foundation has been an important philanthropic partner in creating a vibrant regional environment; the billionaire Meijer family, who in 1933 founded the privately held Meijer “hypermarket” chain combining groceries and general merchandise (now one of the twenty largest private companies in the United States) and who have also been active in Grand Rapids philanthropy; and David Frey, whose roots are in the region’s banking industry and who has played a critical role in building financial support for downtown revitalization, both individually and in his leadership role in one of the region’s larger family foundations, the Frey Family Foundation.

Unlike other regions such as Silicon Valley, this group of private-sector elite did not come from elsewhere; rather, they made their fortunes largely by founding and growing family businesses right in Grand Rapids. With generations in the region, they have had a commitment to being stewards of place, and this was invaluable for the revitalization of downtown Grand Rapids, a process that began in the 1970s. As the story goes, the central city then was like many others in the Midwest: a large number of the downtown businesses had either closed or followed white flight to the suburbs. But in an incident that echoes a similar realization of the empty hole in the middle on the part of the Oklahoma City elite (which we elaborate on below), business leaders had a bit of consciousness-raising in 1976 when the city wanted to throw a welcome-home parade for hometown hero Gerald Ford after he lost his presidential bid to Jimmy Carter. The problem was that there were so many vacant buildings in downtown that the Secret Service didn't have enough security personal to cover them all. The parade was only allowed to go ahead after a further mobilization of all available security personnel in the region—including off-duty sheriff's deputies and law enforcement retirees—collected enough staff to police the parade (Emrich 2008). This incident struck a nerve with the business elite, and it helped motivate their investment in downtown revitalization.⁴

Another major influence was the leadership of the city's first African American mayor, Lyman Parks, who served from 1971 to 1975. He created a committee of business and community leaders to raise funds to improve the convention center and build a music hall downtown. The committee included Amway cofounder Richard DeVos, who provided a crucial major donation to enable the creation of what is still called the DeVos Performance Hall, and who reportedly credits Mayor Parks with convincing him to purchase and renovate the aging Pantlind Hotel (with the other Amway cofounder, Jay Van Andel). These investments were the first of what became a wave of new development in downtown Grand Rapids—including the Van Andel Arena, Meijer Majestic Theatre, DeVos Place, and Michigan State University Medical School—that have completely revitalized the area (DeVos 2014).

Over time, key organizations emerged to institutionalize this individual-led philanthropic and economic development network. In 1991, DeVos convened a group of about fifty business, community, and civic leaders and founded a nonprofit called Grand Action (<http://grandaction.org>; originally called Grand Vision), which jumpstarted many of the downtown development projects mentioned above, including the

arena in 1996 and the convention center in 2003. It also has a philanthropic arm, Grand Action Foundation, that provides large grants for civic projects throughout the city. Around the same time that DeVos convened and founded Grand Action, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce—an extremely influential political player not only in the region but also at the state level—started an economic development initiative called The Right Place (www.rightplace.org). This program was fully funded by individuals and private companies to work on business retention, expansion, and attraction through research and training, and became an independent organization in 1997.

Since the community is fairly small and there are a limited number of players and organizations in the business elite network, these three entities—Grand Action, The Right Place, and the Chamber of Commerce—coordinate as the driving force behind regional economic development in Grand Rapids. And although government is noticeably absent from this picture, one of our private-sector interviewees called the Downtown Development Authority—the public partner in Grand Action’s three major developments—the “fourth leg of the stool” underpinning local economic development.

A Pattern of “Doing the Right Thing”

While a top-down, elite-driven decision-making process generally marginalizes less advantaged groups in terms of participation, it does not preclude considering the interests of those groups (albeit with more than a bit of *noblesse oblige*). The sort of regional stewardship-based leadership network evident in Grand Rapids has indeed exhibited some concern for the less fortunate, partly because of the commitment of these business leaders to place and also due to the relatively small size of the tightly knit Grand Rapids community.

Both factors have helped facilitate a leadership norm of “doing the right thing” by addressing equity concerns. For example, when Grand Action was founded in the early 1990s, DeVos and his partners intentionally pulled in leaders from diverse sectors—business, government, academia, and community—in order to build early consensus and support for the long-term vision of recreating the downtown through civic projects. They understood that early relationship-building and buy-in would help avoid conflict later on—and the approach seems to have worked, as remarkably little conflict arose around Grand Action’s major projects, specifically the arena, convention center, and baseball field.

Most recently, another project that could have raised conflict did not. The Grand Rapids Downtown Market is a multifaceted development consisting of outdoor and indoor markets featuring local food and businesses as well as classes educating residents about preparing fresh and healthy foods. Since the market is adjacent to a concentration of low-income and homeless communities in downtown Grand Rapids, Grand Action approached the missions and social service organizations in the area—rather than the other way around, which is more typical—to collaboratively figure out ways to avoid displacement and leverage the local investment to benefit existing residents. As a result, for example, Grand Action established a food stamp program at the market.⁵

An example of business more explicitly working with unlikely allies for the betterment of the community at large is the Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Grand Rapids program. This nine-month program brings together a diverse group of professionals—from sectors including financial services, education, manufacturing, health care, the arts, community organizations, and government—to expose them to community challenges and opportunities through tours, presentations, discussions, and group projects, and to help solidify their roles as “community trustees.” Since its founding twenty-five years ago, Leadership Grand Rapids has produced a network of 1,500 alumni (Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce 2013). While this is commendable, it is also important to note that Leadership Grand Rapids is limited to “professionals” rather than those who fall within a broader definition of leadership, like neighborhood residents—which suggests a narrower base of membership in the region's epistemic community.

In any case, the norm of “doing the right thing” is present, and not just in private-sector initiatives. The regional metropolitan planning organization, the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, engaged in a regional long-range planning process in 1993 which was very similar to the process in Sacramento (see chapter 4). This process resulted in the creation of the 1994 Metropolitan Development Blueprint, which laid out a shared vision for the region that emphasizes the protection of open space, the creation of centers of regional activity, and the promotion of compact, livable communities.

While this blueprint has had less lasting influence on planning processes in its region than Sacramento's has (Dutzik and Imus 2002), one tangible outcome was the creation of an urban utility boundary around Grand Rapids, essentially drawing a line beyond which sprawl may not proceed. This has helped promote population growth in the central city,

in contrast to the trend of other large Michigan cities in the 1990s. Additionally, in the early 2000s, the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council reportedly adopted a “fix it first” policy of spending on maintenance of existing transportation infrastructure before spending on any new road building, a strategy that tends to reduce sprawl and encourage denser development.⁶ A similar statewide policy was adopted in 2003, but only after community organizers and advocates, primarily in the Detroit area, organized for years to get it passed (Pastor, Benner, and Matsuoka 2009, ch. 3).

Finally, the strong presence of faith institutions—particularly the Dutch Reform Church—has played a role in raising awareness of equity concerns from the moral standpoint. Just as there is a belief that the private sector, rather than government, should drive development, there is also a belief that faith communities, rather than government, should be responsible for providing social services to those in need. Much like the Mormon Church in Salt Lake City, though not as heavily institutionalized, the strong role of faith in the Grand Rapids community helps expose business leaders to issues of social justice. For example, in the two years prior to our site visit in 2013, a Christian-based social justice advocacy organization called the Micah Center spearheaded a campaign to fight wage theft—the business practice of not compensating workers for overtime, paying less than the minimum wage, and misclassifying employees as independent contractors. Using faith as the common thread that ties business leaders, elected officials, and workers together—the eighth commandment declares, “Thou shalt not steal”—the Micah Center was able to garner support from key business leaders, like the former head of the Chamber of Commerce, and elected officials, like the Grand Rapids mayor, for a local Wage Theft Ordinance, which was passed unanimously by the City Council in November 2012.

“West Michigan Nice”

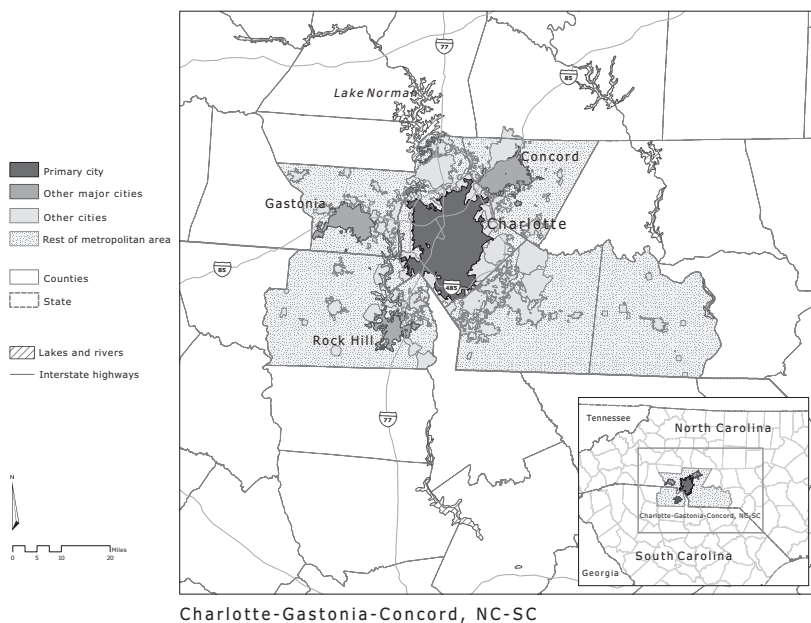
So is there a sort of epistemic community in the region that impacts governance? If by such a community we mean the norms of knowledge creation and interpretation as well as social interaction, it may be important to highlight what nearly all of our interviewees in the region characterized as a widespread regional culture: “West Michigan nice.” It’s a culture that actually represents a bit of a separation from the rest of the state. Interviewees were very eager to distinguish West

Michigan from East Michigan, particularly the race- and class-based conflict centered in Detroit. And it is a culture that has both an upside and a downside.

On the upside, the very reference to “West Michigan nice” reflects a strong regional identity and a desire to get along with everyone in the region. Even though we have characterized leadership in the region as elite-driven, we did see widespread concern for a diversity of interests and constituencies by regional stewards. In other parts of the country, we have found that top-down elite-driven decision-making processes receive significant pushback from advocates and organizers at the grass-roots level. The relative lack of this type of conflict in Grand Rapids, combined with our review of the quantitative data showing relative equity in the region (until recently), suggests that despite the elite-driven processes, there is at least enough attention to interests of disadvantaged populations to keep any significant oppositional or confrontational movements from gaining traction.

On the other hand, stewardship for others, combined with a reluctance to face tension head-on, can reinforce a business-led top-down approach and make it difficult for equity actors to get an actual seat at the decision-making table (something suggested to us more forcefully during a subsequent visit with equity actors in 2014). Additionally, besides the few small-scale, predominantly faith-based efforts focused on social justice, there is a noticeable absence of a community organizing infrastructure to ensure that traditionally marginalized communities have a voice in decision-making processes. Thus, while the business-driven governance structure of Grand Rapids does include a consideration of equity, it is still a fairly closed process with a handful of powerful private-sector leaders at the helm.

As a result, the Grand Rapids approach may be nice, but it is also somewhat paternalistic. There is a sense of a common regional destiny and clear collaboration around downtown civic projects—but it is driven by a small group of similar professionals who call the shots. This has echoes of the more traditional epistemic community, one which is not truly diverse and so lacks some degree of dynamism. This may help explain why Grand Rapids has been less effective so far in addressing more recent economic and demographic challenges facing the region. The past decade of lower economic growth and higher inequality suggest the need to broaden the decision-making circles to more diverse sectors, such as labor and community-based organizations, in the years to come.



MAP 5.2. Charlotte Region.

CHARLOTTE

Although Charlotte was once known as a sleepy, second-tier city, today the Charlotte region epitomizes many of the qualities of the twenty-first-century Southern metro. It is anchored by a central city that has a reputation as a growing, economically and culturally vibrant hub, and its urban center, replete with a soaring and shiny skyline, well-used light rail system, and art museums, is the built representation of this retooled identity.⁷ During the 1980s and 1990s, strong economic growth coupled with equity improvements underpinned Charlotte's positive transformation. Charlotte outpaced its urban counterparts in the South on many metrics and became somewhat of a “best practice” city, frequently visited by business and economic development professionals looking for ways to reinvigorate their own towns.⁸

Unfortunately, uneven growth and a poor performance on equity measures is a recent and unwelcome amendment to the once-rosy Charlotte story. Between 2000 and 2010, population growth continued, propelled by a mix of East Coast and Midwest expatriates and the growth of immigrant populations. But while aggregate employment continued to grow (although at a much lower rate than in the previous two

decades), earnings per job stagnated, poverty rose, and the income gap widened significantly. During this time, the economy shed middle-class jobs, producing an hourglass employment structure, with job growth skewed toward the top and bottom of the wage spectrum.

So, what happened? How did Charlotte—a “region that works”⁹—stop working quite so well? Some of the factors are structural. For example, many of the policies that tied together city and suburb fates—such as nearly automatic annexation of developing suburbs and relatively peaceful integration of schools through bussing—have ceased to exist. But, as we review in more detail in the next section, the nature of regional leadership is also important. Much of Charlotte’s development in the 1980s and 1990s was propelled by a remarkably coordinated group of corporate leaders who worked not just for the benefit of their own companies but also to stitch the region together, promote downtown development, and avoid the patterns of city–suburb division that have characterized so many other metropolitan areas.

Unfortunately, as Charlotte has expanded to become a major metropolitan region, the limits of this narrow and elite form of collaborative leadership—which lacks inclusivity and community voice—have become clearer. There have been efforts recently to bring together more diverse constituencies to address challenges in the region—to better welcome immigrants, create middle-class jobs, reduce poverty, and deal with post-annexation and bussing realities—but addressing these challenges seems likely to require a more diverse and dynamic leadership network than has existed in much of Charlotte’s history over the past three decades.

Reimagining the Region: The Charlotte Way

In 1998, Charlotte-based NationsBank acquired San Francisco-based Bank of America, then promptly renamed itself after the property it had acquired. Charlotte, once a mecca of southern finance, was now quite literally a national leader. A decade later, San Francisco-based Wells Fargo bought out Charlotte-based Wachovia (which had its origins in Union National Bank, founded in 1908) for \$15.1 billion and promptly renamed it Wells Fargo (DealBook 2008). The very symmetry of these two acquisitions suggests a sort of reversal of fortunes, which is evident in the data.

Charlotte has been well known for a thriving financial-services sector and strong overall growth. Employment grew by 37 percent in the 1980s and by 34 percent in the 1990s, and the finance, insurance, and

real estate sector grew from 7 percent to 10 percent of total employment in the region. There were also signs of broader inclusion. The poverty rate declined from 11 percent in 1980 to 9 percent in 2000; the population with less than a high school degree dropped from 40 percent to 19 percent; and average earnings in low-wage industries actually performed better in the 1980s than in higher-wage industries, growing another 15 percent in real terms in the 1990s. But Charlotte hit a rough patch in the 2000s. Although employment and earnings per job continued to grow, they did so much more slowly than in previous decades. Total job growth over the full decade was only 13 percent, only a third of the percentage in each of the previous two decades, and earnings per job grew by only 3 percent, down from a 17-percent earnings-per-job gain in the 1980s and a 22-percent increase in the 1990s. Likewise, poverty spiked in the 2000s, and the income gap widened. But, unlike the story in many other regions, it was not a matter of salaries at the top shooting upwards; instead, everyone earned less, and the top simply suffered a smaller loss in income than those at the bottom.

Given this pattern, many have looked backward, often nostalgically, to the economic boom of the 1980s and 1990s and the iconic industry figures that helped make it happen: a select group of leaders in the corporate sector who guided the transformation of Charlotte from a sleepy textile town into a leading financial center. These city fathers, many of whom rose to prominence in the 1970s as bank, energy, real estate, and department store CEOs, were alternately called the Group, the Titans, and the White Guys (*Charlotte Magazine* 2010). Although manufacturing was far from dead in the 1970s and 1980s—still representing one-quarter of the region's employment in 1980—the Group's efforts largely excluded manufacturing and instead focused on promoting other sectors, primarily banking and finance, and downtown development (Atkins et al. 2011).

Although their direct influence is often overstated, Charlotte's business leadership worked closely and often synergistically with business organizations, city government, and foundations to shape center-city development and regional growth. The deeply rooted business leadership, many of whom lived near each other in the Myers Park neighborhood, helped steer development out of a sense of civic pride and paternalism, but also to lay the foundations for future investment. Unlike leaders in other US regions, their focus was regional, not just the city of Charlotte, a perspective facilitated by North Carolina's 1959 annexation law. This law mandated that any area taking on the character of an urban locale

automatically became a candidate for annexation by the largest city in the county, which could then annex the area without requiring a vote of residents (Ubell 2004). Charlotte in particular took advantage of this law. In 1980 it annexed twenty-seven unincorporated areas totaling nearly 36 square miles of land, and in 1990 it annexed another 66 square miles, making it first in annexation among all cities in the state in both decades (Ingalls and Rassel 2005; Pastor et al. 2000, 140). As a result, fragmentation of local government was relatively low in the region, making it easier to develop regional collaboration.

Business leadership was critical in realizing this potential. In 1992, Ed Crutchfield of First Union Bank (which later became Wachovia) and Hugh McColl of NationsBank (which later became Bank of America) joined with Bill Lee of Duke Energy, Stuart Dickson of Ruddick Corporation, and John Belk of Belk department stores to create the Charlotte Regional Partnership (CRP), a public-private partnership devoted to attracting investment to the region that evolved from an older Greater Charlotte Economic Development Council. Through the CRP, the group sought to maximize regional development by creating a shared set of economic development goals and, by doing so, minimize intercounty economic development competition (Atkins et al. 2011). Meeting regularly with representatives from local jurisdictions across the region, CRP helped pool marketing resources, develop strategic partnerships around target industries, and mediate around common issues of regional competitiveness, such as transportation infrastructure and air quality.

Initially focused on finance and international business attraction, the CRP has subsequently expanded to other target industries including health, tourism, film, and a range of technology-led sectors like aerospace, energy, defense, and motor sports. But, as the Brookings Institution reports, “the major strategy employed by the private sector in Charlotte [in the 1980s and 1990s] was the aggressive expansion of the banks,” including what eventually turned out to be risky strategies of acquisition and consolidation (Atkins et al. 2011, 4). For example, after Hugh McColl was named CEO of North Carolina National Bank in 1983, the bank grew in one decade from a one-state bank with 172 offices in North Carolina to a franchise with 826 offices in seven states. It acquired C&S/Sovran Corporation in 1991 and took the new name NationsBank; this organization acquired BankAmerica Corp. in 1998 and took the Bank of America name. Now operating in all 50 states, it is still headquartered in Charlotte. Similarly, Ed Crutchfield became CEO of First Union Bank in 1985, and over the following sixteen years completed more than ninety

banking-related acquisitions, up to its merger in 2001 with Wachovia. By the end of this “merger craze,” Charlotte was home of two of the nation’s largest banks and boasted the second-most banking assets in the United States (Choi 2011; Rothacker 2010).

In addition to aggressively expanding the financial-services industry, business leadership also saw a vibrant downtown as a key ingredient for a successful future. An early planning document, the 1966 Odell Plan, called for a separation of uses downtown—a business and government hub flanked by separate high-rise residential towers areas bisected by a freeway. Over time, the business community would help champion a different vision: a 24-hour, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use downtown. North Carolina National Bank, the predecessor to Bank of America, played a leading role here, including creating a Community Development Corporation to acquire property, provide loans, and encourage revitalization and preservation in the downtown area, paving the way for investment—and also for gentrification (Smith and Graves 2005). The Community Development Corporation has now evolved into Charlotte Center City Partners, a public–private partnership devoted to continuing the vision of Charlotte Center City as “viable, livable, memorable, and sustainable, with modern infrastructure, a tapestry of unique neighborhoods and a diversity of thriving businesses”¹⁰ (Atkins et al. 2011).

Corporate influence also extended strongly into local philanthropy and the arts. The Foundation of the Carolinas, a local leading philanthropy, has been heavily supported by corporate donations from Bank of America and Duke Energy, which were known for their responsive and deep pockets.¹¹ Local museums have also benefitted. Bank of America, for example, donated a historic building to the Mint Museum of Craft and Design to house the Bank of America Gallery, a collection featuring American crafts (Nowell 1999).

While Charlotte’s elite-driven structure helped expedite deals and large projects, it was not known for being particularly inclusive or democratic. “They ruled by money and insider influence,” says Robert FitzPatrick, a Charlotte native and community organizer. “It was not by public participation. They didn’t encourage that and they didn’t respond to it very much” (St. Onge and Funk 2009). Indeed, community leaders and advocacy groups were noticeably absent from the conversation in Charlotte. Still, many argue that much of what happened behind closed doors was in the public’s interest, and this is supported by data showing that the region’s performance on equity measures in the 1980s and 1990s was better than that of much of the rest of the South. Leaders

like Rolfe Neill, former long-time chairman and publisher of the *Charlotte Observer*, are unapologetic: “By having the top decision makers, you get instant decisions. Nobody goes to a committee. Nobody has to ask anybody’s permission. . . . I don’t think anybody could cite anything that we worked on that was malevolent or not in the public’s interest” (St. Onge and Funk 2009).

In fact, business leadership has been progressive in Charlotte, at least by Southern standards. Business leaders were proud of a bussing plan that integrated Charlotte schools in the 1970s and generally spoke boastfully of the Charlotte Way, a combination of regional boosterism and racial moderation (Lassiter 2004; S. S. Smith 1997). Business groups were helpful in electing the city’s first African American mayor, Harvey Gantt, in 1983, and downtown and neighborhood interests have often been linked by policy as well as politics. For example, bond measures to revitalize commercial areas in Charlotte included funds for street improvements in low-income neighborhoods (Pastor, et al. 2000, 145). Similarly, Charlotte’s City within a City policy, first developed in 1991, was an initiative to strategically and comprehensively address economic development and quality-of-life issues in Charlotte’s poorest neighborhoods. This initiative grew out of civic and business leaders’ understanding of the interdependence of the poorest neighborhoods and the rest of the region (Borgsdorf 1995).

Business leaders recognized that regional quality-of-life improvements would help pave the way for attracting a skilled workforce and new industries. They were sensitive to portraying the region as an enlightened leader of the New South, with integrated neighborhoods (and schools) and a forward-looking business class. Business leaders might have been fierce competitors, but they collaborated regularly for the good of the region. As Ed Crutchfield, former CEO of First Union Bank, said of Bank of America CEO Hugh McColl: “We made up our minds that when it came to business we’d try to kill each other, which we spent thirty years trying to do. But when it came to the good of Charlotte, anything we could do to build the city, we’d cooperate fully and completely. And we did that. We’re kind of like two old generals or war horses that have a mutual respect for each other” (O’Daniel 2013).

Time of Transition: Outgrowing Paternalism

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, under the stewardship of the region’s business and public leadership, Charlotte flourished. Charlotte became

known as the second-largest finance center in the United States, and a growing number of Fortune 500 companies took root in the region (Atkins et al. 2011). The US Conference of Mayors declared in 1995 that Charlotte was the most livable of any city over 100,000 people in the United States (Borgsdorf 1995), and by 2000, “small-town Charlotte” had grown into a region of over 1.3 million people.

And Charlotte was not only growing but becoming increasingly diverse, moving beyond the Black-and-white racial dynamics that had historically characterized it and many other Southern cities. The region’s growing size, increasing diversity, and global integration have challenged the regional stewardship networks, at a time when many of the White Guys running the city were aging. Ed Crutchfield retired in 2000, followed by Hugh McColl in 2001. By Hugh McColl’s own admission, without the region’s “two rich uncles,” a broader leadership effort is needed (Braunstein 2012). But while there are signs of growing diversity and vibrancy in regional leadership networks, it is clear that the region is struggling to effectively address some of these new challenges.

Part of the issue is that Charlotte’s newest businesses, like its population, often have shallower roots in the region. The number of mid-size companies has proliferated, and finance and insurance executives increasingly have their main offices outside of Charlotte. One of the emblematic examples of the shifting leadership structure and global orientation is Chiquita, a company decidedly not in the financial sector and also one lacking a long history in the region. In November 2011, the company received \$22 million in incentives and moved its headquarters from Cincinnati to Charlotte, a move heralded at the time as a sign of Charlotte’s increasing global prominence. In addition to the incentives, the company cited Charlotte’s international airport as a major attraction, providing easy access to its grower and consumer markets in South America and Europe (Portillo 2011). Barely two years later, however, the company announced that it had merged with an Irish produce company, Fyffes, and was moving its headquarters to Ireland. Apparently, it had been considering the merger even as it was accepting the incentive package in Charlotte. Such a “footloose” corporate sector is a far cry from the rooted business leadership and regional stewardship of the previous era (Portillo 2014a, 2014b).

The Charlotte Chamber of Commerce remains a strong force in the city and represents a broader, more deliberative body than the tight group of corporate CEOs who previously dominated regional decision-making. Chamber members have generally come together to support

key infrastructure investments in the region, particularly transportation investments. In 1998, for example, the chamber, working in partnership with the City Council, helped lead a successful campaign to fund transportation investments, including light rail development, through an indefinite half-cent sales tax increase. Marketed as an investment in economic development, it was passed by 58 percent of Charlotte voters (Werbel and Haas 2002). Ridership exceeded projections, rail-oriented mixed-use projects took off, and in 2007, when there was a call to repeal the tax, the Chamber of Commerce worked with the City Council and the region's most prominent corporate citizens to retain the tax, a policy supported by 70 percent of the electorate (Spanberg 2007). Continued investment in light rail has continued to be an important part of economic development in the central city. The 9.6-mile Lynx light rail line, opened in 2007, cost \$473 million to build. By 2010, it had already attracted at least forty-five new development projects close to station areas, totaling more than \$247 million and including 1,400 new housing units and 700,000 square feet of office and retail space (Newsom 2010). Average weekly ridership, projected at 9,100, has actually been closer to 15,000 since shortly after its launch (Spanberg 2012).

But the success in rail belies a bigger regional challenge: the shrinking number of middle-wage industries and occupations. One side effect of the emphasis on finance and white-collar job growth in the Charlotte region is that little attention was given to protecting the region's substantial manufacturing base, which accounted for 25 percent of all jobs in 1980 but had shrunk to 7 percent by 2010. Many of these were good jobs, which had created a stable middle in the metro region (Atkins et al. 2011). Over the last twenty years, Charlotte's economic base has instead become an increasingly bifurcated "high-low" economy, with low- and high-wage jobs each growing by 60 percent while middle-wage jobs contracted slightly.

Addressing the growing economic separation in the region might be easier if there were a more profound sense of shared fates, but two factors that contributed to such a sense—school bussing and annexation power—have been challenged in recent years. From the mid-1970s through the 1980s, the region's school system was made up of Charlotte and the surrounding Mecklenburg County, and earned national acclaim as "the city that made desegregation work" (Morantz 1996). It wasn't a purely voluntary effort. A 1970 Supreme Court decision in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* held that mandatory bussing was an appropriate remedy for the problem of racial imbalance

in schools. But keeping everyone in the same system helped shore up support for public education, and when Charlotte started its bussing program in 1971 it found strong business support, in part to present the image of a New South city. As one business leader put it when the plan was later challenged (see below), “Had we taken a different course in 1972 (when schools were desegregated), then we would not be enjoying the prosperity that we now have” (Smith 2010, 189).

So why stop doing what seems to be working? It’s partly because of a changing populace. The region began to experience increasing migration from the Northeast and Midwest, and by 2010, only 61 percent of Mecklenburg County residents were born in the South (compared to 73 percent in North Carolina statewide), with 15 percent from the Northeast and another 7 percent from the Midwest (Chesser 2011). One result was a decline in support for the school bussing system. The district had already started shifting away from bussing in 1992, when it introduced a managed-choice program with racial targets, allowing a portion of parents to choose local magnet schools rather than have their children bussed. In 1997, a parent sued the school system when his daughter was denied entrance into a magnet school based on race, which ultimately ended in 2002 with the school district ending mandatory bussing and implementing a more decentralized school-choice plan. The result has been a gradual resegregation of schools in the Charlotte area (Godwin et al. 2006).

North Carolina’s annexation policy has also been under attack. Since the 1960s, this policy has helped minimize the “poor city–rich suburb” pattern which characterizes many regions, and has been important in maintaining the good fiscal health of Charlotte and other major cities in the state (Rusk 2006). Even though the annexation policy allows cities to annex surrounding communities without holding a vote of residents, the vast majority of annexations were voluntary—overall, only an estimated 9.6 percent of annexations in the thirty years up to 2010 were involuntary, and the portion actually declined to 7.4 percent in the most recent decade (Christensen 2011; Smith and Willse 2012).

Yet with the rise of the Tea Party and its emphasis on local power, a vocal minority opposed to involuntary annexations was able to create a powerful lobby in the state capital, resulting in laws allowing an affected area to stop an involuntary annexation if 60 percent of property owners sign a protest petition (Doran 2012). It remains to be seen what the effect of this legislation will be, but it certainly represents a step backward in terms of regional integration and building ties that bind

regional residents together. It may or may not be a coincidence, but it's also the case that Charlotte, which prided itself in being relatively welcoming to immigrants, has shifted direction to a more anti-immigrant stance, partly in reaction to a rise of more conservative elements (Pastor and Mollenkopf 2012).

When the New South Gets Newer

We selected Charlotte as a case study because of a particular anomaly. While it long enjoyed a reputation for strong regional collaboration, important central city–suburban links, and a relatively decent record (by Southern standards) in economic growth and social equity (Pastor et al. 2000), it has seemed to slip in recent years. This might of course be due to structural factors—and to some degree it is, in view of the sharp shrinkage in manufacturing—but we were also curious whether the connections that had forged the Charlotte Way had frayed and whether this might have impacted the outcomes.

Fraying does seem to have occurred. One reason is the growing in-migration of people from the Northeast and Midwest. These newer residents—and the newer businesses—have less sense of place and less pride in the hard-won compromises over schools. Another big shift has been the growth in the Latino population. Less than 1 percent of the region's population in 1980, Latinos grew to 5 percent in 2000 and 10 percent by 2010. This complicates what has traditionally been a sort of social bargain between white corporate leaders and Black political activists, even though Latinos remain largely invisible in regional leadership circles in the region.¹²

Incorporating the newer populations has been difficult in part because of the established leadership and political structure. What once worked to produce compromise and consensus—though within a narrow band of the White Guys—has not been able to morph enough to create forums in which “unlikely allies” can interact in sustained deliberative processes. The Chamber of Commerce, for example, has little collaboration beyond its membership and public officials, and has only recently begun reaching out to ethnic chambers and the Charlotte Business Guild (a membership association building support for businesses in Charlotte's LGBTQ community).

On the nonprofit side, many groups are creating successful coalitions with other nonprofits, but generally not across sectoral boundaries. For example, Action NC, one of the leading advocacy groups in the

region, helped organize Familias Unidas, a coalition-based anti-deportation campaign that included the NAACP, the Central Labor Council, and the Latin American Coalition. But many of the civic and advocacy groups which typically call attention to the equity issues of education, good jobs, and affordable housing are noticeably absent in Charlotte leadership networks. Part of the reason is that Charlotte's nonprofit community is largely service-oriented and possesses few advocacy or community organizing-oriented groups. In fact, there is generally less tolerance of public activism, community organizing, or advocacy work. As one long-term observer told us in an interview, "*activist* is a dirty word" in Charlotte.

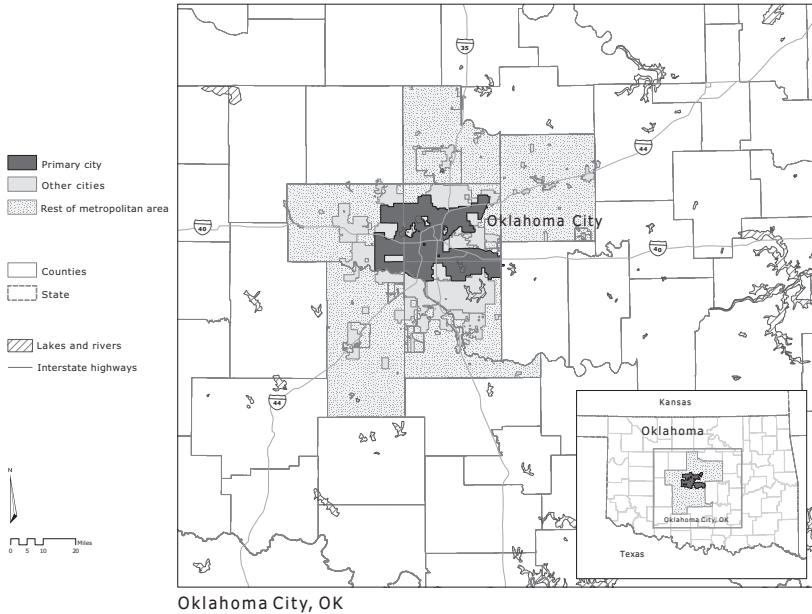
All of this suggests the limits to elite-driven approaches to regional governance. Charlotte's epistemic community was paternalistic, with a few strong and collaborative corporate leaders playing a critical role in stitching the region together, contributing to downtown revitalization, and supporting policies like annexation and school busing that kept fates and fortunes interwoven. As the population of the region has shifted and new challenges have emerged, the inadequacies of this relatively narrow form of regional stewardship have become more apparent.

OKLAHOMA CITY

In the mid-to-late 1980s, Oklahoma City¹³ was mired in an extended economic crisis, the result of a decline in the region's core energy businesses and damage to the region's banking and real estate sectors from the savings and loan meltdown. The region's downtown area was hit especially hard, since the legacy of classic urban-renewal policy had accelerated the hollowing-out of the urban core. By 1988, Oklahoma City councilman I. G. Purser declared: "Downtown is dead and we helped kill it. There is no major retail, no major attraction and no place to eat" (Lackmeyer and Money 2006, i).

Since the early 1990s, however, Oklahoma City has experienced a remarkable turnaround. In 2005, the *Wall Street Journal* wrote: "[T]oday Oklahoma City's downtown is thriving. The Bricktown district is buzzing with nightlife, people are moving downtown.... Add to that two successful stadiums, a performing arts center, a central library, a 'Riverwalk' type canal, clubs and restaurants, and the downtown of the once-sleepy city . . . is bustling" (Chittum 2005).

While the tailwinds of an energy boom in the 2000s are an important part of the story, the path forward has been led by a strong



MAP 5.3. Oklahoma City Region.

public-private consensus on the importance of increasing taxes to support major public expenditure on quality of life and educational improvements in the region. While this spirit of collaboration is partly rooted in strong regional integration prior to 1970, what makes the story more interesting is that the commitment to this public sector-led redevelopment effort has been headed by four successive Republican mayors and a conservative Chamber of Commerce, while the additional taxes have been supported by a majority of voters in a region who consistently vote overwhelmingly Republican.

Oklahoma City's experience suggests how a commitment to place can help leaders move beyond ideology and steer their regions off a track of negative growth and toward a more sustainable and shared growth trajectory. In the process, regional leaders explicitly made connections between unlikely allies and helped the broader public see important connections between these diverse interests in an interconnected region. While challenges remain—particularly in incorporating a growing Latino immigrant population into regional leadership processes—Oklahoma City's experience shows the potential for overcoming major economic challenges through collaborative regional efforts that bring together diverse interests, knowledge, and values.

Taking Care of Business

During the 1980s, the Oklahoma City region experienced a dramatic increase in poverty, from 11 percent of the population in 1980 to 14 percent in 1990. Employment growth for the decade, at 10 percent, was one-third that of the average metropolitan region in the South, while average earnings per job actually declined by 6 percent in real terms over the decade. Yet the subsequent decades saw a significant turnaround, as total jobs grew by 23 percent in the 1990s (despite the impact of the Federal Building bombing in 1995) and another 9 percent in the 2000s, (despite the dramatic national recession). Average earnings per job grew by 8 percent in the 1990s and another 13 percent in the 2000s.

One factor that may have helped Oklahoma City stage this rapid turnaround is a relatively centralized and integrated regional governance structure. A classic example of an “elastic city” (Rusk 1993), Oklahoma City has expanded its boundaries over time rather than let growth be captured by newly incorporated suburbs. In 1953, Oklahoma City was about 56 square miles. In 1958, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce sponsored an event in partnership with the mayor, focused on “Oklahoma City’s proposed metropolitan planning.”¹⁴ This conference led to a coordinated effort over the next fifteen years to rapidly annex land, with most of the increase coming quickly—by 1962 the city had encompassed more than 600 square miles. In effect, Oklahoma City created a strong regional government, similar to the city-county mergers in Nashville and Jacksonville in the 1960s, but in this case, through annexation that included expansion even beyond the county boundaries.

Interestingly, the Chamber of Commerce was a major leader in the push for this rapid annexation. Though the term *public-private partnership* began to appear in discourse in urban development only in the 1960s, and really took off only in the 1980s with the growing emphasis on market-oriented solutions to urban problems (Amdurksy 1968; Brooks, Liebman, and Schelling 1984), Oklahoma City has benefitted from public-private partnerships since its very origins in the nineteenth century. The city was essentially established in a single day, April 22, 1889, when 10,000 people settled there as part of the Oklahoma Land Rush after the Homestead Act made two million acres of public land in central Oklahoma available for settlement (Hoig 1984). The Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce (originally known as the Board of Trade) was established just three weeks later, and has had a strong influence on regional governance ever since. In essence, the chamber has operated as an arm of regional government for many years, playing a

key role in the operation of multiple airports, road building, and literally contracting with the city as its economic development arm.

The chamber has also played a key role in building ties with smaller local chambers elsewhere in the region, working to build a common strategy and identity for regional development in central Oklahoma. One of the key ways it has done this is through expanding the capacity of its research department. The chamber claims to have such detailed parcel-level data in the ten-county region that after the 2013 tornado that tore through the neighboring town of Moore, the chamber was able to provide information on businesses affected along the tornado's destructive path more quickly than the regional planning body or emergency services. In addition to detailed research and information on economic dynamics, social conditions, and urban site characteristics in the central Oklahoma region, the chamber also has detailed comparison statistics for all major competitor regions. This information is readily available to all chambers in the region that agree to be part of the chamber's network for collaborative marketing of the region. Sharing information and knowledge has helped hold business leaders throughout the region together, and also helped avoid devolvement into destructive competitive bidding for outside investment—exactly the sort of epistemic community we have suggested can be so valuable.

MAPS for the Future

It was this business-led regionalism that came to the rescue when Oklahoma City received an unwelcome bit of news in the early 1990s. United Airlines was considering the city as a potential site for a major maintenance facility, with the deal partly contingent on voter approval of a series of infrastructure improvements designed to lure the airline to the region. But although Oklahoma City was offering a superior set of financial incentives, United chose Indianapolis, citing “quality of life.” The rejection actually looms large as a sort of origin story for subsequent regional collaboration. It is said that United Airlines executives visited the city and simply could not conceive of their employees (or spouses) living there.

While the details of the actual event remain a bit murky, the fact that it is remembered this way suggests a deeply felt sting, which residents still recall today. Civic leaders realized the need for a major regional development effort, with the mayor supposedly thinking that “if our citizens are willing to tax themselves for somebody else, maybe they'd

be willing to tax themselves for themselves” (Rosenberg 2010, 21). The result was the development of the Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS) plan. The Chamber of Commerce took the lead in advocating a new five-year, 1-percent sales tax devoted to funding nine major projects to improve the quality of life in Oklahoma City, which voters approved with a 54-percent majority vote in December of 1993.

MAPS included a range of projects designed to cater to the needs of different constituencies while being part of a unified vision for improving quality of life in the region and renovating the urban core. Recreational projects included renovations to the Civic Center Music Hall, the Convention Center, and the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds; construction of a 20,000-seat indoor sports arena that eventually became the home of Oklahoma City’s first professional sports team, the Oklahoma City Thunder basketball team; the 15,000-seat Bricktown Ballpark, home of the Triple-A affiliate of the Houston Astros and frequent host of the Big 12 baseball tournament and periodic outdoor concerts. Other developments included a new public library; a trolley transit system; construction of the Bricktown Canal, which has become a major restaurant hub and entertainment attraction; and the transformation of a seven-mile stretch of the North Canadian River—which used to be derisively referred to by locals as “the river that needs mowing” due to its being choked by grass for much of the year—into a series of river lakes bordered by landscaped areas, trails, and recreational facilities. Renamed the Oklahoma River, this area has now become an attractive site for kayaking, canoeing, and sculling, and it was the first river to receive official designation by the US Olympic Committee as an Olympic and Paralympic Training Site.¹⁵ Funds raised by the tax over the five-year period totaled \$350 million, and all the projects were completed debt-free.¹⁶

In 2001, voters passed a second round of sales tax increases (by a 61-percent majority vote) in a MAPS for Kids initiative that generated \$514 million (along with a \$180 million Oklahoma City Public Schools bond issue) for school facility improvements, technology, and transportation projects. While 70 percent of the sales tax funds were designated for the Oklahoma City Public School District, 23 other public school districts that overlap part of the land area of Oklahoma City itself received 30 percent. Indeed, the overlap of the central-city and suburban school districts provided another mechanism of stitching together the region. Civic leaders also made a point of starting the MAPS for Kids school renovations at Frederick Douglass High School, in the heart of

Oklahoma City's African American community, a move meant to show that tax revenues were being shared with disadvantaged communities in the region.

The success of the original MAPS and the MAPS for Kids programs paved the way for the passage of a third round of temporary sales tax increases, this time in 2008 (with a 54-percent majority) for the MAPS 3 initiative.¹⁷ Projects planned under the ten-year MAPS 3 initiative include a new downtown convention center; a downtown public park; a streetcar system; improvements to the Oklahoma River and Oklahoma State Fairgrounds projects; the construction of four new state-of-the-art senior health and wellness centers, designed to serve as gathering places for active seniors; and an expanded trail system and improvements to the city's sidewalks, in efforts to promote a more walkable community. Again, the Chamber of Commerce played a strong role in advocating for the expanded taxes to support this major public investment.

While Oklahoma City is not unique in promoting major new development projects designed to attract populations and business back to the urban core, a number of the features of Oklahoma's experience are striking. One is that the projects that make up the revitalization plan were not developed and funded individually but were part of a diverse and integrated vision of transforming Oklahoma City from a hollowed-out urban core into a vibrant and dynamic place with a high quality of life and entertainment attractions. The mix of projects was designed to meet multiple constituencies' interests—when voters approved the additional taxes for these initiatives, the specific projects were listed on the ballot and voters had to vote for all or none of them. A second major feature is the diversity of projects developed under these ongoing initiatives. Projects include major renovations in schools throughout the region, substantial resources for seniors spread throughout the city, a library, and public parks and open space—along with the more typical arena, entertainment centers, and attractive restaurant districts that make up many downtown revitalization initiatives.

A third distinctive feature is the regional nature of the initiative. Much of this is driven simply by the sheer size of Oklahoma City in the region. Particularly because of the annexation powers described earlier, Oklahoma City is the third-largest city in the continental United States by land area (behind Jacksonville, Florida, and Houston, Texas). As a result, initiatives in the city immediately have a regional significance. But it's also the case that the use of a sales tax (rather than for instance a property tax) ensures that suburban residents who shop in Oklahoma

City are contributing to the core (which may be one reason why the MAPS for Kids initiative was sweetened by the inclusion of financing for suburban school districts).¹⁸ Perhaps most remarkably, the commitment to expanded taxes for public investment in this range of projects was led by a conservative Chamber of Commerce, in close cooperation with Republican mayors, and was supported by a majority of the predominantly Republican voters of the region.

While this level of collaboration and commitment is partly due to long-standing structural features, such as annexation, multiple informants also stressed the ways in which crisis events triggered cooperation. For example, the stagnation of the overall economy of the 1980s and the sterile and hollowed-out nature of the urban core forced regional leaders to recognize the need for some coordinated response. Common identity and purpose were also forged by the 1995 bombing of the Federal Building, in which 168 lives were lost and 324 buildings in a sixteen-block radius were damaged or destroyed. Meanwhile, coordination across jurisdictions is regularly reinforced by another set of crises: regular natural disasters that arise given Oklahoma City's location in the heart of Tornado Alley.

Despite collective experiences that have united the region's residents in a unique way, it is clear that Oklahoma City still faces significant challenges around diversity and inclusion. Between 2000 and 2010, the poverty rate remained high (going from 14 to 16 percent) and inequality rose, with earnings in the region's energy sector rising dramatically against a backdrop of low-wage service-sector industries—including accommodation, food services, arts, entertainment, and recreation—that also grew, partly because of the success of the MAPS initiative. African Americans and Latinos continue to have substantially higher unemployment rates and lower educational attainment and income levels than non-Hispanic whites. While growth and equity outcomes in the past decade have outpaced those in the rest of the South, African Americans remain junior partners at best in decision-making processes, and the growing Latino population (11 percent of the region's population in 2010) has yet to achieve meaningful representation in regional governance.

Who's In, Who's Out

Despite those gaps, and even with revitalization clearly driven by an elite stratum, a variety of features of the process in Oklahoma City have ensured that a diversity of constituencies' perspectives and knowledge

is included in regional considerations. Perhaps most important is the essentially regional nature of the Oklahoma City government following its aggressive annexation in the 1950s and 1960s, combined with the work of the Chamber of Commerce in collaboration with other chambers throughout the region, and the way in which the MAPS for Kids program served school districts throughout the region. All of these have helped ensure that typically suburban concerns and typically central-city concerns are tied together.

Similarly, the inclusion of many projects serving different constituencies in the various MAPS programs, along with the requirement that the projects all be voted on together as a single package, helps the broad electorate see connections between different constituencies in the region. The original projects in MAPS were developed in a process that involved broad citizen oversight. Indeed, the mayor who led the effort made a point of appointing the strongest opponent of the proposal to the head of an oversight committee, highlighting both an acceptance of disparate viewpoints and an appreciation of the value of gaining broad consensus for the program rather than a simple majority. Similarly, while putting a high school in Oklahoma City's African American neighborhood at the top of the MAPS for Kids renovation list might be criticized as simply symbolic inclusion, it also reflects a public acknowledgement of the importance of addressing African American concerns on some level in the region in a broad, public way that formed the basis for a majority vote of the entire electorate.

The ability of the region to continue the increased sales tax for multiple rounds of MAPS funding is also a tribute to the flexibility and dynamism of the leadership networks in Oklahoma City. Despite the growing anti-government and anti-tax sentiment in the Republican Party, both leaders and voters in Oklahoma City have continued to put a commitment to place above a commitment to ideology, and in the process have continued to pursue a diverse range of high-priority development projects in the region, stretching now across twenty-five years (1992–2017, when the current round of MAPS project funding expires).

We don't mean to exaggerate the diversity or inclusiveness of leadership networks in Oklahoma City. The region still struggles with high levels of poverty and inequality. The growing Latino immigrant population in the region remains largely excluded from regional decision-making processes, and our informants in community-based organizations and the African American community in the region expressed frustration at

being continually marginalized by the very conservative, elite leadership network in the region. Yet the turnaround in Oklahoma City over the past twenty-five years is remarkable, and a top-down approach to regional stewardship has nonetheless linked multiple constituencies and multiple interests in an ambitious set of long-term development projects. Whether it will fall prey to “success” as in Charlotte—with new residents and businesses less aware of the history and less committed to the process—remains to be seen.

THE LIMITS OF ELITE-DRIVEN REGIONAL STEWARDSHIP

As all three of these cases underscore, paternalistic models of knowledge sharing and regional decision-making can achieve significant success in promoting economic development and facilitating some degree of inclusion. At the same time, these sorts of regional stewardship efforts have their limits. Employment and investment have flowed into each of the regions, yet none has been able to achieve long-term equity gains. Charlotte and Grand Rapids achieved both growth and improved equity in the 1980s, but equity conditions have eroded in both regions since then, starting in the 1990s in Charlotte and the 2000s in Grand Rapids. Oklahoma City continues to struggle with high poverty rates and growing inequality, despite the economic turnaround.

In each of the cases, there were few channels for community concerns to rise to the level of policymaking and institutional change. Many of the key regional decision-making groups, like Leadership Grand Rapids, are made up of traditional “professionals,” not the broader leadership networks we see in other metropolitan regions. In Charlotte, paternalism has marginalized the advocacy voices, which are few and far between. As a result, many nonprofits are service-oriented, rather than focused on organizing around regional issues or policies. In Oklahoma City, efforts have been made to be inclusive economically, partly to stitch together broad support for tax-financed public investments, but large pockets of poverty remain in the African American community and the growing Latino immigrant community, which are largely unaffected by the dynamics of the new downtown.

Strong elite-driven regional decision-making processes have certain advantages, though, especially when pursued by “enlightened” regional leaders who see themselves as stewards for the region as a whole. With a strong commitment to place and deep histories in the region, dynamic

business leaders in Grand Rapids, Charlotte, and Oklahoma City, working together with public officials and other allies, were able to lead processes that have been remarkable in their ability to transform formerly struggling central cities. In a period in which many regions were struggling to overcome the negative effects of suburbanization and the shift from a manufacturing to a knowledge- and services-based economy, these three regions have had an important degree of success, and elite-driven leadership collaborations have been a key part of that success.

But the norms of paternalism also assume mute acquiescence from the communities elites purport to serve. Such quiet is not likely in light of growing ethnic diversity, entrenched inequality due to bifurcated employment structures, and rising poverty in older inner-ring suburbs. Epistemic communities rooted in elite-driven regional stewardship networks may be less effective in addressing these contemporary challenges, particularly the needs to forge a more inclusive economy and polity, develop a broader and more diverse leadership base, and quickly and widely share knowledge about conditions and solutions.

At the same time, addressing the conflicts often left simmering in paternalistic regionalism can be challenging. How can both regional elites and those pushing for more equitable development lift up tough issues in a way that produces a path forward and not just permanent warfare? To understand when conflict leads to collaboration—and when it just leads to more conflict—we turn our attention in the next chapter to the cases of Greensboro, Fresno, and San Antonio.