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Homogenized Diversity: Economic Visions in the Great Recession

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Abstract: Across U.S. regions, the idea that the resilient region of the future is an economically diverse one has gained increasing popularity. To diversify and adapt to change, many regional plans propose supporting knowledge-based sectors, such as biotechnology, and using livable, walkable (re)development to boost economic activity. This concern for resilience and its perceived connection to economic diversity took on new urgency as regions across the U.S. struggled to respond to the Great Recession.

In this paper we explore to what extent this new emphasis on economic diversification is actually shaped by and responsive to the histories, capacities, and strengths of particular regions. In particular, we examine how two regions (Orlando, Buffalo) approach their diversification efforts at the local and regional level. Through these comparative case studies, we explore how local and regional actors conceptualize economic diversity, what policy interventions they propose, and how they connect these interventions to long term stresses (deindustrialization in Buffalo, fast growth in Orlando) as well as to the immediate challenges of the Great Recession (widespread foreclosures and higher than average unemployment, especially among lower-skilled workers in the Orlando region and slightly less disruption in Buffalo).

We find that while these two regions diverge significantly in terms of both the long term and short term challenges they face, they approach the issue of economic diversification in surprisingly similar ways. Despite significant variation in their challenges as well as the nature of their civic capacities and regional coalitions, both Buffalo and Orlando propose economic development strategies that focus on ideas of regional competitiveness through encouraging life science and medical clusters and land use planning strategies that emphasize walkable, mixed use communities. We conclude by discussing the implications of this finding for regional resilience in these two regions as well as for regional economic development in the U.S. more generally.

Introduction:

The Great Recession was a significant blow to the United States economy as a whole. Across the U.S., however, regions experienced the Great Recession in their own unique ways, leaving some individual regions stumbling and others unscathed. Four years into formal recovery, we now have the opportunity to examine how experiences differed at the regional level and how these experiences, among other factors, shaped the economic development responses that were crafted at the regional level. In this study we discuss the regional experiences and responses seen in two distinct regions: the Buffalo-Niagara Falls MSA and the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford MSA. The two cases obviously vary substantially; they differ in terms of their longer term challenges (deindustrialization in Buffalo and fast growth in Orlando), in terms of their experiences during the most recent Great Recession (comparatively little effect in Buffalo and slightly more traumatic for Orlando), and in terms of their historical economic strengths (manufacturing and commerce in Buffalo and tourism in Orlando). Despite such differences, our research finds some interesting similarities in terms of how these regions responded, the implications of which we explore below.

Together, these similarities and differences provide ample fodder for comparative analysis using in-depth case studies. In this research we explore how the experiences of the recession were shaped by the longer-term challenges that each region experienced. In considering the resilience of regions, we also investigate how each region responded to the Great Recession, namely by conceptualizing and operationalizing economic diversity in their own ways and by purportedly relating these economic development efforts to both long-term stresses and to the immediate challenges of the Great Recession. Understanding that responses are not crafted in an actor-less void, we also compare regional civic capacity in the two areas by asking, what does civic capacity look like? Who does it involve and how does it function? To the extent that these diversification efforts have been extra-local in approach, we also investigate how regional plans have developed in both places, asking how economic diversification fits into larger regional planning efforts.

The paper begins with an overview of extant research in the fields of regional governance and civic capacity, economic development, and resilience, as well as a discussion of how these fields complement one another. We then provide a synopsis of the study, including a discussion of data and methods. The two case studies are then introduced, with particular attention paid to the striking differences in background and the qualified similarities observed in response to the Great Recession. We conclude with a discussion of our key findings and what they might mean for policymakers and practitioners who face difficult decisions regarding regional visions and economic development strategies in times of change.

Background/literature review:

Struggling with the highs and lows of global economic restructuring during the 1980s, ideas about diversification and the continual process of industrial change—linked to Joseph Schumpeter—resonated with planners and geographers (Markusen 1985; Marshall 1987). A series of studies exploring the relationship between industrial structure and economic performance later emerged during the 1990s, and many concluded that economic diversity was significant and beneficial to most regions (Glaeser, et al 1992; Henderson, et al 1995). In the last two decades, a number of detailed case studies have explored diversification efforts both in regions developing new industries (Sheng 2011) and in regions that rely on more mature industries (Fornahl and Guenther 2010).

Economic development policy has, to some extent, paralleled industrial and economic development research. During the 1980s, some regions followed the popular economic development strategies of the time by concentrating on downtown revitalization through the building of new sports stadiums, waterfront development, and federally funded enterprise zones (Ladd 1994). Others, however, chose industrial diversification through the attraction of service sector jobs and high-tech firms (Markusen and Carlson 1988), often focusing on 'sunrise industries', or industrial sectors that were growing quickly and were expected to become even more significant in the post-industrial economy (Thurow 1985). Though some regions did in fact reap benefits from such an approach, not all have. Many regions struggled with during the aftermath of the dotcom era (Knell and Oakley 2007) and more recently during the Great Recession (Hill et al 2012).

In light of such events, civic leaders continue to search for economic development strategies that will make regions less vulnerable to future economic challenges. Planning and economic development scholars have increasingly turned towards the resilience literature to frame the discussion about how regions respond and adapt in the face of uncertainty (Cowell 2013). Scholars have utilized the concept of resilience across a variety of disciplines (Pendall et al 2010), but most research frames resilience in one of two ways: ecological resilience, when a perturbation or disruption pushes a system from one equilibrium to another; and engineering resilience, when a system returns to its pre-disruption steady-state (Berkes & Folke, 1998, 12).

For economic disasters, like deindustrialization or the Great Recession, neither of these conceptualizations of resilience is appropriate. In the wake of an economic downturn or long-term restructuring, regional actors probably are not looking to achieve a new stasis or equilibrium nor are they trying to 'bounce back' to their pre-disruption state, especially if that state was less than desirable to begin with. Moreover, 'bouncing back' to 'normal' in the face of global restructuring and a prolonged national recession is not likely anyway. Thus, we find both the ecological view and the engineering view ill-suited for economic challenges we discuss here because both approaches emphasize the speed and ease with which a region 'bounces back' or recovers from a particular challenge. They also say nothing about the tradeoffs associated with achieving a new normal or adjusting to a new sub-optimal equilibrium. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the engineering and ecological views of resilience overlook the importance of regional governance and the ways in which regional actors adapt and learn from the mistakes they have made in response to a given challenge.

Regional actors can be incorporated when resilience is instead considered within a complex adaptive system. Such a system has the ability to change or adapt in response to stresses and strains, rather than merely striving for a return to normalcy or a resumption of pre-challenge behaviors or outcomes (Carpenter et al 2005). Rather than talking about equilibrium, returning to 'normal', or resilient outcomes, resilience instead becomes a ''dynamic attribute associated with a process of continual development'' (Pendall et al. 2010). In the face of deindustrialization and the Great Recession – economic challenges that in the long- and short-terms make a return to 'normal' for many regions seem unlikely and perhaps undesirable – it seems fitting to conceive of resilience through the adaptive systems perspective and to do so by looking at regional governance capacity.

This perspective then shifts our attention to the behavior of regional actors and the mechanisms through which they engage in regional decision-making. As the literature on regional governance suggests, regional decision-making is governed by both formal and informal institutions and involves actors from multiple levels of government as well as business and civic groups (Safford 2009). Governance is then "the pursuit of collective goals through an inclusive strategy of resource mobilization" (Pierre, 2005, p. 449). The concept of governance then brings attention to the influence and capacity of actors outside the formal confines of government. Even when regions share some apparent government formalities, governance processes may differ (Miller & Lee, 2009, see overview of typologies in Nuissl & Heinricks, 2011). Given Lester and Reckhow's (2013) assertion that diffuse regional governance may replicate existing inequities, we ask whether it matters if stakeholders from less powerful groups participate in governance and how their participation affects the dominant regional agenda. By adopting the adaptive systems perspective on resilience, we take into account governance responses to regional challenges and the extent to which these processes are sensitive to issues of social inclusion. Below we consider how regional governance has influenced diversification strategies in two regions, analyzing it through the lens of adaptive resilience.

Data/Methods:

To compare how regional governance and civic capacity shaped regional diversification efforts in light of the Great Recession, we analyze a variety of primary and secondary qualitative data. The data come from in-person and telephone interviews, published media reports, and in-depth analyses of relevant economic development planning documents. Interviews for this study were conducted in both regions with past and present planning and economic development officials, local policy-makers, and civic leaders, as well as authors of the pertinent plans whenever possible. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 min and followed a standard protocol intended to elicit open-ended responses. Interviews were conducted either in person or via telephone and were recorded, transcribed, and then summarized. Similar approaches incorporating both content analysis and supplemental interviews have been utilized widely in the urban planning literature and have proven useful as a method to explore both the intentions and execution of planning priorities (Berke & Conroy 2000).

While future research efforts may wish to compare cases that have more in common, this study focuses explicitly on the economic diversification efforts of two diverse regions. Their differences allow us to consider how economic histories combine with current realities and policy paradigms to shape a region's response in times of challenge. Furthermore, the various qualitative data help us to glean insight about how civic and public leaders in Buffalo and Orlando envisioned economic diversification as a response to the Great Recession. From the interviews, we acquire first-person accounts of the local decision-making processes and how they relate to the generation of economic development strategies in both regions. Such data has proven enormously useful in understanding how regions vary in their pursuit and execution of economic diversification and how their efforts in turn relate to regional resilience. We begin first with an overview of the recent challenges in each region and then discuss economic diversity and regional visioning, and finally regional governance capacity.

Case Studies and Analysis:

Compounding Long-term Stresses and Short-term Challenges

Both Buffalo and Orlando have had long-term struggles that were compounded by the stresses of the Great Recession, which officially began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009 (NBER 2013). The Great Recession was catastrophic at the national level; however, it affected regions and localities in surprisingly different ways, both in terms of the quantitative impact on measures like unemployment and foreclosures and in terms of the psychological or perceived impact at the local or regional level. For Buffalo – a region that is accustomed to the challenges of deindustrialization and population decline – the recession was actually less disruptive than in many other parts of the country. However, in Orlando — a region used to facing the vastly different challenges associated with fast growth — the recession was a blow to the region's image as a vibrant and growing place, especially when it became the epicenter of the foreclosure crisis gripping the nation. In both regions, however, the Great Recession (and its ill effects) was an impetus to heighten emphasis on economic development planning. What's surprising is the degree to which these very different regions ultimately arrived at fairly similar economic development strategies to chart their road to recovery.

The Buffalo-Niagara Falls MSA is a moderately sized metropolitan region consisting of two counties and approximately 1.1 million people in 2010 (See Table 1) (US Census 2010). Early industrial strengths during the 20th century – primarily in grain storage, steel production, railroad and shipping commerce, automobile production and aerospace design and construction — were largely due to locational advantages afforded by the Erie Canal System and inexpensive and plentiful hydroelectric power from the Niagara River. All that would change, however, in the latter half of the 20th century when significant employment losses, especially in steel, signaled the beginning of a long and challenging period of economic restructuring for much of the region (Cowell 2013). Since then Buffalo has weathered decades of economic restructuring, outmigration of people and employers, widespread vacancy, and fiscal woes (Silverman, et al 2013).

Table 1 - Population and Median Income (Source: US Census)

2009

	Buffalo		Orlando	
	City	MSA	City	MSA
Population[1]	273,335	1,128,813	227,961	2,023,605
Median Income (2009$)[2]	$30,376	$46,427	$43,196	$50,391

1980

	Buffalo		Orlando	
	City	MSA	City	MSA
Population	357,870	1,242,826	128,291	804,925
Median Income (2009$)[3]	$30,183	$44,917	$34,146	$36,817

Given the long-term challenges facing the region, it may have come as a surprise to many that Buffalo, like much of New York State, saw moderate effects due to the Great

[1] US Census Bureau. "ACS Demographic and Housing Characteristics". 2005-2009 ACS 5 year estimates. Table DP05. www.census.gov

[2] US Census Bureau. "Selected Economic Characteristics" 2005-2009 ACS 5 year estimates. Table DP03. www.census.gov

[3] Median Income Figures in 1980 dollars are as follows: Buffalo City: $11,592; Buffalo MSA: $17,251; Orlando City: $13,115; Orlando MSA: $13,898

Recession. Brookings research found that Buffalo had the 9th best overall performance in the recession and recovery among the largest 100 metropolitan areas in the United States (Fiedhoff, et al 2012) in part because the region fared comparatively well on indicators like employment, GDP growth, and housing foreclosures (Bradley and Shearer 2011). During the Great Recession, the Buffalo region saw sustained job losses (-3.4%) that were similar to New York as a whole but far lower than the national average (-6%) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Similarly, while the nation as a whole saw steep declines in home prices during the recession, the average median home price in the Buffalo region actually appreciated during that time (Friedhoff et al 2012).

Overall, Buffalo showed strong signs of recovery in 2010 and 2011 with economic productivity growth that was higher than the U.S. economy overall and a lower unemployment rate than the national average. Similar results continue throughout 2012 with modest increases in both total and private sector employment. Education and Health Services and Trade, Transportation, and Utilities have seen substantial growth in the Buffalo region, together adding more than 7,500 jobs to the local economy during 2012. The manufacturing sector also added jobs during the first half of 2012, but that trend reversed during the second half of the year. Overall, the Buffalo area economy has recovered the jobs it lost during the recession somewhat faster than the nation, though employment is still down about 5,000 jobs since the summer of 2008 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

The Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford MSA is a larger region of approximately 2.1 million people and four counties (See Table 1) (US Census 2010). The region, until recently, has seen strong growth in both population and employment, much of it tied to tourism and education (Institute for Economic Competitiveness 2013). The 20th century brought an influx of both people and jobs to the Orlando region, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s with the arrival of Disney and an associated construction boom (Archer and Bezdecny 2009). Growth within tourism and education, the latter of which largely related to the growth of the University of Central Florida, have brought tremendous gains to the region but have also sparked concerns regarding an overly specialized economic base in recent decades.

The Great Recession saw Orlando regional leaders grow increasingly concerned about the effects on tourism, a sector which saw a short term drop in employment in the region during the height of the recession (2008-09) but then began increasing employment again in 2010 (Holt & Colburn 2011, p.3). Although the reliance of the region on tourism was often cited by local actors as a concern both before and after the recession, "tourism in Orlando remained one of the more stable sources of revenue for the city and state during the recession" (Holt & Colburn 2011, p.3). The strength of the tourism industry is particularly important for Orlando and for the State of Florida because both are heavily dependent on sales and property tax revenue, which can make them extremely vulnerable to economic downturns.

Like the rest of the state, Orlando lost almost half of its pre-recession construction jobs. The construction industry was hit particularly hard as the housing market collapsed with record numbers of homes going into foreclosure and housing prices dropping substantially from their peak in 2007 (Friedhoff et al. 2012). Orlando also lost significant numbers of jobs in financial services, although on this dimension the region was less hard hit than the state as a whole (Holt & Colburn 2011, p.3). Overall, the region's unemployment rate, which had been several points below the national average, jumped more than 8 points to 11.4% in 2009, 1.5 points higher than the national average (Friedhoff et al. 2012).

For leaders in Orlando, losing, even briefly, their status as a fast-growth metropolitan area was an adjustment because so much of their current planning was premised on managing growth. Respondents in the region disagreed about whether the slowdown in growth was positive or negative from a planning perspective. On the one hand, the slow down gave the region some breathing room in terms of putting plans in place and thinking through development decisions. On the other hand, several respondents suggested that the reaction of developers to the downturn was to become more conservative in the kinds of projects they would build, reducing support for TOD and new urbanist style developments. In Orlando, domestic in-migration dropped precipitously during the recession (causing interviewees to laugh when told that Orlando was part of a study on "fast-growth metros"). Despite a pre-recession peak of over 2.5% population growth from domestic in-migration, the Orlando metro area actually lost population at the height of the recession. More recently, the numbers have rebounded and Orlando looks to be regaining its fast growth status with in-migration levels for 2011-12 more comparable to the period before 2008 (Frey 2013).

In the nearly four years since the official end of the Great Recession much has transpired in both regions. The decisions, policies, and plans made in Buffalo and Orlando shed light on how both regions ultimately perceived the local effects of the Great Recession in the short term; how these effects would interact with, or compound the effects of, longer-term stresses; and ultimately how both would factor into the crafting of each region's more recent economic development responses. Below we discuss how each region responded and the surprising similarities that were observed.

Economic diversity and regional visioning

The Great Recession was a wake up call for many economic developers and regional leaders across the country. As in prior recessions, regional responses to the Great Recession have covered the gamut; some regions responded with insular policies to bolster the status quo, others responded by tightening their belts in order to stop the bleeding (Cowell n.d). In both Buffalo and Orlando, regional leaders made incremental moves to diversify their economies, with only slight variations in how they proposed to do so.

In Buffalo, the move to diversify the core economic base is most clearly exhibited in Erie County's 2010 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which openly discusses the challenges that the region has faced in recent decades. The CEDS authors note that significant losses in durable and non-durable goods manufacturing resulted in the loss of more than 18,000 manufacturing jobs between 1971 and 1981 (ECIDA 2010, ii). Though that bleeding would continue for many more years, these early losses may have in fact prepared the Buffalo region for future challenges (Cowell 2013). The CEDS authors note that the region has been "to some degree more 'recession proof' than the State of New York or the U.S. as a whole" (p. iii). This may be in part because the region had "*already shed a lot of the jobs and people before this latest downturn" (Interview, local economist, 9/12/2010).* It may also be due to a concerted effort to move away from the traditional economic development approaches of the past and towards a series of strategies that instead target agriculture/agribusiness; logistics/distribution; back office/call centers/professional services; advanced manufacturing; life sciences; and regional/cultural tourism. The CEDS explicitly acknowledges this shift, noting that “these common themes are notably different from the area’s economic development strategies of the 1970s – 1990s” (ECIDA 2010, viii). A long-serving county official echoed this change in approach.

> *“I absolutely think there has been a change in how we are thinking about economic development in the region. Rather than trying to attract or retain old industries - the ones that we have long been known for – it’s more about education, healthcare, and building upon some of our other strengths. That’s not to say that we don’t still offer incentives to steel and auto manufacturers but those deals now play a much smaller role than they did in the past.”*

One of the economic sectors that has been specifically targeted in these diversification efforts is biosciences. Buffalo has long been home to America’s first cancer center, Roswell Park Cancer Institute, founded in 1898. Located in an underutilized but steadily growing area of the downtown, Roswell is part of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), a consortium of the region’s leaders in health care, life sciences research, and medical education institutions. An important partner in this and many other downtown developments has been the State University of New York at Buffalo (SUNY Buffalo). As the region’s largest university, SUNY Buffalo has made strong moves to diversify both in terms of its offerings, by better aligning with 21st century workforce needs, and in terms of its regional footprint, by bolstering development on three campuses within Buffalo. The university’s strategic plan prioritizes educational initiatives in key areas, including health and wellness across the lifespan, information and computing technology, integrated nanostructured systems, and bioinformatics, among others (University at Buffalo 2013). The plan also emphasizes the importance of a new Downtown Campus as part of the emerging biosciences economy in Buffalo.

Health and Life Sciences is also one of the eight priority sectors identified by the regional economic development body — the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council — in its ‘Strategy for Prosperity.’[4] Their plan emphasizes the importance of boosting exports to fast-growing global markets and focuses on other growing sectors including: advanced manufacturing, agriculture, bi-national logistics, energy, higher education, professional services, and tourism. It also identifies entrepreneurship, workforce development, and physical revitalization as key enablers to this process. Many of the WNYREDC’s priorities were identified in a 2011 event called, Accelerate Upstate, where 300 collaborators convened to develop the Accelerate Upstate Action Agenda, which was a precursor to the more recent plan (Oberst 2011).

As diversification efforts are being planned, Buffalo leaders have also begun to recognize that the health of a regional economy tracks closely with the health of the broader region, At a regional scale, and complementing the aforementioned economic development efforts of WNYREDC, is One Region Forward, a more recent effort focused on the promotion of more sustainable forms of development in the region. Though still in production, the end result will be a federally recognized regional plan for sustainable development that will ideally “serve as a practical roadmap for improving mobility, promoting more efficient land use patterns, strengthening our basic infrastructure,

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[4] The WNYREDC is a public-private partnership that includes leaders from academia, business, local government, and non-governmental organizations. In 2011, the first year of the Governor’s competitive program, the WNYREDC received an award from the Governor’s office and $100.3 million for the implementation of its plan, “A Strategy for Prosperity in Western New York.”

growing a 21st century economy, ensuring broad access to healthy food, protecting housing and neighborhoods, and mounting our region's response to the challenge of global climate change" (ORF 2013). As a collaborative effort, the ORF endeavor includes many of the aforementioned institutions and leaders, as well as the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC), Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA), Local Initiatives Support Corporation Buffalo (LISC), The John R. Oishei Foundation, and Empire State Development.

Even with forward-looking development plans and diversification strategies from the University at Buffalo, WNYREDC, and ORF, regional leaders have not entirely abandoned more traditional economic development strategies like waterfront and stadium development, or efforts to lure a few marquis firms with massive subsidies. The most recent development, taken from a page right out of a classic economic development playbook, is a $127 million dollar hockey-themed HARBORCenter complex within the slowly revitalizing waterfront district. Sabres owner Terry Pegula is bankrolling much of the project, with unspecified public subsidies to support it.

Diversification efforts have undoubtedly come to the fore in Orlando as well. A major concern of the Orlando region that existed before the recession but was given even greater urgency in the face of the recession is the dependence of the local economy on tourism. In addition to Walt Disney, Universal Studios, and Seaworld are among the areas top employers (Florida and Metro Forecast: 2011-2014). Buddy Dyer, the mayor of Orlando since 2003, made clear his economic diversity vision for the region in a July 2012 column in the Huffington Post, entitled "From the Magic Kingdom to a Medical City: How a Culture of Collaboration is Fueling a New Orlando." As the title of the post suggests, in the Orlando region diversification means increasing areas of high skill employment, in contrast to low-skill service sector jobs associated with the tourism industry. In particular, the region has pinpointed biotechnology and health sciences as a key sector for the future (Holt & Colburn 2011; see also http://www.orlandoedc.com/Industry-Strengths/Life-Sciences/).

The most notable effort in terms of promoting biotechnology and health sciences is the creation of a life sciences, healthcare and medical research cluster—the Medical City at Lake Nona. This is billed as building on the existing strengths of the Orlando area in health services with two of the largest regional employers being Orlando Health and Florida Hospital. The Medical City at Lake Nona area is located at the southern edge of Orange County next to the Orlando airport and the Osceola County line, approximately 17 miles via roadways to the center of the city. The cluster includes: the University of Central Florida College of Medicine, the UCF Burnett School of Biomedical Sciences, the Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute, the MD Anderson Orlando Cancer Research Institute, the Nemours Children's Hospital, University of Florida Research Center, and a new VA Medical Center scheduled to open in Summer 2013. Once all the facilities are fully operational, the Medical City is expected to have about 4000 employees (Orlando Sentinel 1/2012).

In addition to the Medical City at Lake Nona, the importance of the health sciences to the region's vision of its future is also clear in the way in which Florida Hospital and Orlando Health are part of the City of Orlando's vision for how SunRail, a 31-mile commuter rail line now under construction, would benefit the region. Each of these major employers has a nearby SunRail station, and the city is hopeful that proximity to such a large employment base will encourage significant transit-oriented development at the station sites [interview7/8/09]. In addition, the city wants to encourage more development around Orlando Health more generally. "We've tried to promote economic development around Orlando Health by doing the south downtown vision plan…and looked at a five hundred acre area, and identified where we would allow a greater mixture of uses, higher densities, higher intensities, and promote medical-related growth on property not owned by the hospitals. And we've had quite good buy-in on that" [interview 7/8/09].

While the Medical City at Lake Nona is within the City of Orlando, its proximity to unincorporated areas of Orange County, as well as to areas in neighboring Osceola County, mean that it also figures into economic diversification ambitions for those two governments as well. Orange County has designated an area known as Innovation Way, "envisioned as an economic development corridor that promotes high tech business and job growth along with quality housing, new schools, parks, trails and natural spaces" (https://www.ocfl.net/PlanningDevelopment/InnovationWayEconomicDevelopmentCorridor.aspx). The corridor would connect to the University of Central Florida, the Orlando Airport, and the Medical City at Lake Nona.

A major component of Osceola County's planning vision is smart growth development up near the Orange County line that would connect to the medical city/innovation way area in that county. Interestingly, Jones, the smart growth coordinator for the county, linked these plans to what happened in the aftermath of Disney's arrival:

> … we had a cluster locate essentially on our doorstep in 1970 which was Disney and the tourism industry cluster on the other side of our county. And the response to that from Osceola County was to kind of put "For Sale" signs out on some property and hope for the best…and the best didn't happen.… So, it's 30 or 40 years later and we have another economic cluster located at our doorstep and this one happens to be…not service industries, but high value, high wage jobs. But, it's the same thing in the sense of now how's Osceola County respond to that opportunity? This is our response…to do something on a fairly landscape scale that would allow us to be a major participant in the growth of this cluster.

Another area that the city of Orlando has been highlighting as a potential innovation cluster is digital media. The city entered into a public-private partnership to redevelop "the former site of the Amway Arena in Downtown Orlando into a 68-acre mixed-use, transit oriented, urban infill neighborhood that will be home to leading higher education providers; high-tech, digital media and creative companies; and a diverse mix of students, employees and residents" (http://www.creativevillagedevelopment.com/vision/). As in Buffalo, the city is also still pursuing some traditional tourist-centered development strategies. Under Mayor Buddy Dyer, the city has built a new performing arts center and a new sports arena.

In an effort to perhaps corral so many of these disparate strategies, the Orlando region has also recently engaged in regional visioning exercises. There an offshoot of the Chamber of Commerce, MyRegion.org, spearheaded the regional visioning process. The exercise brought many regional stakeholders together around developing a vision of more walkable and transit-oriented communities. MyRegion.org was described by its director as "a place to determine priorities and come to consensus….It helps stakeholders develop strategies, but others take action" [interview 7/8/09]. However, MyRegion.org was very actively involved in promoting approval of SunRail, the Orlando commuter rail system that required state approval to move forward, and the organization even received funds from FDOT to support a public relations campaign. Another effort of MyRegion.org is to build a regional cooperation among elected officials via the Congress of Regional Leadership, which brings together elected officials from cities, counties and school boards. The Central Florida Partnership, a business advocacy group that works on specific legislation and is housed in the Chamber of Commerce, is another important player in the regional visioning process.

Regional governance capacity

If Buffalo and Orlando have much in common in terms of strategy and regional vision, they have comparatively less in common when it comes to the actors involved in the shaping and execution of that strategy and vision. In Buffalo, multiple government agencies and civic partnerships influence decision-making. Though formal economic development decisions at the city level are made through the Office of Strategic Planning's Economic Development Division, Mayor Byron Brown and First Deputy Mayor Steve Casey generally orchestrate most key decisions.[5] At the county levels, economic development planning occurs within the Erie County Industrial Development Authority (ECIDA) or the Niagara County Industrial Development Authority (NCIDA), which largely adhere to the traditional IDA model. Other, smaller but still powerful IDAs also exist within the region, including the Amherst IDA in one of Buffalo's most affluent suburbs. The Buffalo Niagara Partnership (BNP), a privately funded economic development organization and the regional chamber of commerce, is also an important voice within the region. Its 54-member Board of Directors includes executives and leaders from the region's largest corporations, foundations, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and utility companies. The region's universities also have a voice in most development decisions, especially the University at Buffalo, which has played a key role in revitalization plans for the downtown core.

Regional efforts have recently gained momentum, especially in light of Governor Cuomo's 2011 move to regionalize state economic development dollars. In Buffalo, the creation of the public-private regional economic body (WNYREDC) has incentivized regional leaders to develop a long-term strategic plan for economic growth. Other key regional efforts include the aforementioned collaborative movement to create a regional plan for sustainable development by One Region Forward (ORF). Key civic leaders from government, private, and non-governmental institutions form the cores of the ECIDA, WNYREDC, and ORF initiatives. Among the more powerful voices across many of these efforts include Howard Zemsky, a progressive private developer who was appointed co-chair of the WNYREDC by Governor Cuomo; Robert G. Wilmers, Chairman and CEO of M&T Bank since 1983; Robert Rich, Jr. Chairman of Rich Products; billionaire natural gas tycoon and Buffalo Sabres owner, Terry Pegula; and longtime Buffalo Bills owner, Ralph Wilson, who recently negotiated a 10-year, $271 million lease agreement for the rehabilitation of county-owned Ralph Wilson Stadium in suburban Buffalo.

In many ways, this group seems like a typical growth coalition. Their actions, however, have increasingly been tempered by the growing strength of neighborhood-based

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[5] Since 2003, the city remains under the control of a state-appointed panel, whose formal name is the Buffalo Fiscal Stability Authority but is more commonly referred to as the control board. Due to substantial progress over the last decade, the panel recently voted to move from a hard oversight to a soft, or advisory, status.

economic development efforts that have gained ground in Buffalo in recent years, largely because of a growing grassroots movement within the region. Among the more visible grassroots leaders is Aaron Bartley, co-founder of People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH Buffalo). Bartley and PUSH Buffalo have led the efforts to create Buffalo's Green Development Zone and to scale their efforts to the state level to create Green Jobs - Green New York, to create living-wage jobs for local residents and to help homeowners reduce their energy bills. Though he has earned a formal spot at the WNYREDC board, Bartley still represents a small but growing grassroots movement within the region.

In Orlando, regional governance has commonalities and important differences. The mayors of Orlando and Orange County are uniformly seen as key actors in the region. Buddy Dyer has been Mayor of Orlando since 2003 and wields considerable influence. The power of the Orange County mayor has grown overtime with the increase in population in the unincorporated areas of the county, as well as charter reform in 2004 that meant the mayor is now elected county-wide. Outside elected officials, business leaders in general and developers in particular are seen as the most influential actors in the region. One example of this influence is that Orange County significantly reduced impact fees for developers in the wake of the recession. Some Central Floridians have expressed frustration about the influence of developers, most recently through the Hometown Democracy movement, which began in St. Petersburg and ended with a statewide ballot initiative that would have required voter approval of all changes to comprehensive plans. Although the ballot initiative ultimately failed, it was widely seen as a direct response to increasing developer influence over planning decisions.

Overall, regional governance in Orlando is notable for the lack of involvement of representatives of low-income populations and racial and ethnic minorities. In most accounts of local and regional decision-making, these groups are absent. When asked specifically to identify organized voices representing these groups, respondents in the region were usually unable to do so. We were able to interview two leaders among ethnic minority groups, but the groups have a limited civic or regional profile. The most often cited key actors outside government and business were the League of Women Voters and leaders of area education institutions like the University of Central Florida and the Valencia Community College system. These groups, however, play a comparatively smaller role than other civic leaders.

Discussion and Implications

Overall, we observed three somewhat surprising similarities in Buffalo and Orlando, despite their divergent histories and differing experiences during the Great Recession (see Table 2). The first similarity is that, in spite of their differing experiences leading up to and during the Great Recession, leaders in both Buffalo and Orlando cited the need for economic diversification as a strategy for moving forward. The second observed similarity is that, with only minor variations, both regions appear to be seeking diversification through similar sectors — namely, biotech and knowledge sectors. In both places, however, actors narrate the turn to biotech and knowledge sectors as adapted to their particular context. The third observed similarity are their recent regional visioning exercises, both of which have an emphasis on enhancing walkability and livability.

One of the main differences, however, is the composition of actors involved in the shaping and execution of these strategies and visions in both regions. In the case of Buffalo, much of the regional visioning and policy recommendations have come from the university and public sector leadership, some from traditional growth coalition members, and some from not-so-traditional grassroots organizers. In contrast, in Orlando, the actors most involved in regional visioning and planning are mainly the traditional pro-growth actors. Below we discuss the implications of these findings and how they might relate to regional resilience. We do so by raising two main areas for policy consideration: equity implications and likelihood of regions enhancing their resilience through widespread adoption on a similar model of diversification.

First, our initial research suggests that the likelihood of achieving equitable outcomes differs in the two locations, in large part because of different levels of advocacy participation. We assert that if downtown development in the 1990s was focused on "building the city for the visitor class," the new paradigm we have identified suggests that in the 2010s, regional economic development may be focused on "building employment for the professional class." What's disconcerting is that this 'build the economy and they will come strategy' appears to be taking shape without much thought to the needs of a city's current workforce. As discussed above, we expect that economic diversification strategies, however similar they sound across disparate regions, will be translated in particular ways through the nature and composition of the actors involved in implementation. In Buffalo, grassroots groups (e.g. People United for Sustainable Housing) are involved in articulating the vision for the region. Consequently, we expect that there may be more attention to issues of equity as they intersect with the biomedical and knowledge sector strategies in this region than in a region like Orlando with a deficit of organized voices advocating on behalf of the low-income workers or communities of color. Divergent ideas about equity and advocacy participation appear to be unfolding in both region's recent visioning exercises as well (One Region Forward and MyRegion.Org). While both plans call for more transit-friendly walkable communities, a comparison of the groups spearheading these efforts in each region underscores significant variation in the civic realm. In Buffalo, the effort is being led by existing regional planning entities (the MPO and others) and includes social service and housing. In Orlando, the regional chamber of commerce spearheads the effort with significant participation from the state department of transportation. The regional vision in Buffalo includes frequent mention of the needs of low-income communities, including a working group on "food access and justice." In contrast, Orlando's "How Shall We Grow" vision statement has relatively little to say about the needs of low-income communities, other than a mention of "obtainable" housing choices.

Second, our research identifies an emerging concern – homogenized diversity – and ponders how this approach relates to adaptive resilience. We assert that there are several reasons policymakers should be concerned by this trend towards homogenized economic diversification. Namely, such plans may not be sensitive to existing regional morphologies, to the nuances of a region's built environment, or to existing regional capital. In Buffalo, widespread vacancies and abandonment have left many neighborhoods with diminished capacity, including several in the areas that surround the medical corridor and university's strategic investment areas. For Orlando, existing land use patterns mean that even if they are able to realize their vision of a "medical city" that includes significant biomedical industry as well as housing built on new urbanism principles, the "medical city" itself will be disconnected from other parts of the region. Moreover, both regions' focus on attracting high skilled workers for the biomedical and life sciences sector basically ignores the fact that the current or recent workforce is composed in significant part by low-skill laborers working in manufacturing (Buffalo) or service workers in the tourism industry (Orlando). Neither existing employment base suggests an easy or natural transition to the knowledge and biomedical economies that both aspire to. Much of the existing workforce in these regions will likely require concentrated training and re-tooling efforts in order to be employed within these sectors.

In the end, the fact that two very different narratives would foster the same strategies suggests the emergence of a new paradigm. We are wise to proceed with caution because it is not yet known whether such a paradigm will set up some places for failure due to oversaturation of some sectors at the national scale. Not everybody can have a biomedical cluster strong enough to anchor the local economy, but if each place talks about how it is well situated to do this then it is hard to distinguish when it is and is not a good idea. In both Buffalo and Orlando, it is often said that each region is not only well suited to pursue biomedical but that is also one of only a few places pursuing it. Our analysis suggests that neither one of these claims is necessarily true and both require further analysis. Before Buffalo, Orlando, or any other regions pursues such an expensive and risky approach, regional leaders would be wise to consider all of the alternatives and identify what other regions are pursuing as part of their own economic development strategies.

Table 2: Regional Summaries

	Concepts	**Interventions**	**Tie to recession**	**Civic capacity**
Buffalo	Bi-national logistics, Life sciences, Advanced manufacturing, Smart Growth/green retrofitting	WNY Regional Economic Development Council, Buffalo Billion Investment Plan, UB2020	Focus on: young adults, improving reg's 'battered image', coord./ collab. plng, biz climate	Biz. and univ-led, Regl ED council, grassroots comm. groups
Orlando	Medical City, capitalize on livability to attract knowledge workers; "Little Manhattan", corridor to connect Medical City to UCF (Innovation Corridor); downtown digital arts areas	SunRail Rail connectors Recruitment/development of mixed-use innovation corridor MyRegion.ORG	Population growth will return; concern with "brain drain"	Business lead, with strong ties to state legislature Few grassroots or low income groups

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