WHITHER RESILIENT REGIONS? EQUITY, GROWTH AND COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT: A growing body of research has been suggesting that social equity may contribute to economic growth and resilience at a metropolitan scale, but there is limited research on the underlying mechanisms that make for this potentially happy coincidence of economic vitality, resilience and inclusion. This article helps address this gap through an in-depth exploration of three case studies of regions that have been able to either sustain growth and equity over time, and/or that responded to external shocks in a way that suggests resilience: Salt Lake City, Oklahoma City, and San Antonio. We argue that there are different pathways in each case but that all of them can be characterized as having relatively strong and diverse regional knowledge arenas where data are shared and common understandings have developed across diverse constituencies. While the sample is limited, the role of a diverse and dynamic epistemic community does seem to be exactly the sort of mechanism that might keep fates common and regions resilient.

Since the early 1990s, a growing body of research has been suggesting that there may be important links between social equity and economic growth at a metropolitan scale (Eberts, Erickcek, & Kleinhenz, 2006; Pastor, 2006; Pastor & Benner, 2008). At first glance, the notion of a linkage may seem unsurprising: after all, it has long been thought that prosperity makes inclusion more likely since splitting gains is much easier than sharing burdens. But what is novel in the emerging work is not simply the idea that equity and growth could go together but rather the suggestion that inclusion itself may be generative of economic growth.

A new round of research has gone further and suggested that reducing inequality may be important for sustained growth or what might be thought of as regional resilience. As with much of the earlier work on the link between equity and metropolitan growth, the first studies were done in the developing country context, with researchers at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) finding that a high Gini coefficient was the single most significant and important factor curtailing growth spells (Berg, Ostry, & Zettelmeyer, 2012). Parallel research on U.S. metro regions has suggested that not just inequality but also social and political fragmentation are key factors that made a region less able to sustain growth over time, and thus less sustainable or resilient (Benner & Pastor, 2014).

Unfortunately, the reasons why equity might help growth or regional resilience are frequently underspecified and little understood. Explanations range from structural factors (perhaps more equitable distributions of income are consistent with more investment in basic human capital and less exclusion of the poor from financial systems) to what might be termed political economy factors (perhaps more equity leads to less conflict over slices of the pie and more willingness to focus on strategies to increase the size of the pie or to share burdens as needed when times are tough).
the structural explanations can be captured, albeit imperfectly, in statistical analysis, the political economy factors are more elusive, and charting their paths of causation requires case studies that can uncover the actual mechanisms of decision making, burden sharing, and regional collaboration.

This article seeks to get at those mechanisms through an analysis of three regional case studies that either experienced relatively strong equity and growth over time or demonstrated their ability to bounce back to relatively more equitable growth after a shock (or perceived shock). We suggest that one factor behind such regional resilience may be the presence of institutions, organizations, and civic culture groups that connect different actors, help them see their common fate, and steer them in the direction of more collaborative strategies. In our book, Just Growth: Inclusion and Prosperity in America’s Metropolitan Communities (Benner & Pastor, 2012), we labeled what emerges from these constellations of institutions diverse epistemic communities, arguing that equity, growth, and sustainability were better linked when knowledge arenas were present in which data were shared and common understandings developed across diverse constituencies. Sometimes these communities are more or less coerced into being, and subsequently enforced by jurisdictional authority—such as a central city’s power to annex suburbs—but sometimes they come about because of a particularly effective and visionary metropolitan planning agency (such as the Mid-America Regional Council in Kansas City) or though effective leadership programs (as in Jacksonville or Nashville).

In this article, we draw on ongoing research that seeks to couple data-driven case selection and qualitative investigations of 11 metropolitan regions that have either fared well or poorly on building resiliency. Our focus here is on three cases that have done either relatively well over the past thirty years and/or responded well to a shock that could have thrown them off balance; any of these outcomes might be considered resilient.

In each case, we find an unusual set of coalitions based on a culture of, or specific interventions to support, regional collaboration among diverse constituencies. At the same time, there is no single path to success. In Salt Lake City, for example, a looming threat of rapid population growth led to the creation of a voluntaristic planning process to build a common understanding of the regional future. In Oklahoma City, economic crisis triggered a recognition that changing the status quo would require leadership from multiple stakeholders, even on initiatives that would challenge long-held ideological beliefs about the role of government and the burden of taxes. In San Antonio, the initial shock was more internal: the rise in power of previously disenfranchised groups led to a series of accommodations that now make the region a sort of poster child for intersectoral collaboration.

The San Antonio story is particularly important since it illustrates that our notion of epistemic communities does not eschew the possibility of conflict; indeed, conflict can be constitutive of community. As Lester and Reckhow (2013) note, sometimes issues of equity and inclusion only get put on the table through struggle and skirmish (even though inclusion may wind up helping the overall economy). The key is whether such conflicts end up being productive rather than divisive in (eventually) generating regional collaborations that can help a region respond to economic challenges and develop and sustain broadly shared prosperity; this ability to change is part of the reason why we focus here on what we call diverse and dynamic epistemic communities.

The rest of the article lays out the argument and our findings. We begin with a brief review of the existing literature on the equity-growth-resilience connection, suggesting that the statistical work is somewhat consistent about positive linkage but that it also generally fails to chart causality or context. We discuss how an alternative set of economic micro-foundations, including the idea of diverse and dynamic epistemic communities, might better flesh out the picture, setting the stage for qualitative work. The rest of the article offers up that work, after first explaining how we generated case selection for the broader project: we focused on those regions that met the criteria of generating continued growth and progress on inclusion but also met decent benchmarks at the end of the period in question (since progress from abysmal standards that leaves one just above the abyss at the end is not that impressive). We also decided to supplement that selection by looking at cases that had done well but had slipped more recently, and other cases that had done poorly, but somehow managed to turn their fortunes around (and one of the latter—Oklahoma City—made it into this article).

In this article, we focus on three case studies (out of a total of 11 that we conducted): Salt Lake City, Oklahoma City, and San Antonio. Each of these cases offers a different and interesting trajectory. Salt
Lake City, perhaps to the surprise of some, has been successful in sustaining improvements in both social equity and economic growth throughout the past three decades (even as its share of minority residents has been increasing dramatically); some of the reason, we argue, is the combination of Mormon networks that link growth and equity constituencies with a deliberate regional visioning process that directly fits our notion of building a diverse and dynamic epistemic community across multiple challenges and constituencies. Oklahoma City represents a turnaround: it experienced economic and social crisis in the 1980s and early 1990s but has had a recovery since then, partly because of a remarkable collective response involving a renewed business and civic commitment to improving quality of life. As suggested earlier, San Antonio is a particularly interesting case of resilience. In the 1970s, it was characterized by substantial social conflict and major inequities, most starkly between a dominant white elite and the large and growing poor Latino (predominantly U.S. born) population. Yet through the abilities of particular individuals to bridge social divides, and the bonding influence of faith communities, these conflicts evolve into collaborative efforts to develop “high-road”, long-term, economic development strategies, perhaps best exemplified by the 2013 vote for a citywide tax to support the expansion of pre-K educational opportunities for disadvantaged youth as a long-term economic development investment.

We conclude the article by returning to the theoretical implications of this work. With the case studies now as a backdrop, we specify in more detail how our notion of diverse and dynamic epistemic communities differs from the traditional concepts of an epistemic community, emphasizing the importance of regional knowledge and processes for developing cross-constituency communication. Finally, we suggest some specific mechanisms of how the development of these knowledge communities might actually shape regional processes and regional resilience, and point to additional research needed in the future.

**EQUITY AND GROWTH: CAN COMMUNITY MATTER?**

One of the most dearly held notions in economics is that there is a trade-off between equity and efficiency, between fairness and economic growth. There are good theoretical grounds for thinking this is the case: in a world of atomistic individuals and perfectly functioning markets, we should nearly always be at a production possibilities frontier in which any shifting of income or opportunity to someone who is poorer must be taking it away from someone who is more skilled and more of a contributor. In such a world of makers and takers, redistribution is definitely a killer of jobs and GDP.

Interestingly, a growing body of work has challenged this vision on the empirical front, with early studies focused on the experience of the developing world (see Aghion, Caroli, & García-Peñalosa, 1999 for an early review). To understand why equity might be good for growth, some researchers have argued that directly targeting poverty and inequality in the developing world may contribute to GDP by increasing the productive nature of the poor (Birdsall, Ross, & Sabot, 1995; Deninger & Squire, 1996), while others have suggested that inequality leads to social tension and political instability, thus lowering certainty, investment, and economic growth (Alesina & Perotti, 1996; Rodrik, 1999). Most recently, econometric results by IMF staff economists have suggested that reducing inequality is key to *sustaining* growth, defined as longer spells of growth that encourage long-term investor confidence (Berg, Ostry, & Zettelmeyer, 2012).

The equity–growth relationship has also been investigated for U.S. metropolitan regions, with a series of articles and reports that conclude that income inequality, geographic concentrations of the poor, city–suburb disparities, and residential segregation by race may be associated negatively with economic growth (Eberts et al., 2006; Pastor, 2006; Pastor & Benner, 2008; Voith, 1998). Hill et al. (2012) have found that regions with large income gaps between high-income and low-income households are more susceptible to downturns in employment. Meanwhile, Benner and Pastor (2014) have directly mimicked the IMF researchers and found, like them, that the level of inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, is the single most significant and important predictor of shortening a growth spell.\(^1\)
Why would inequality matter for growth? Answering the question involves case studies, to be sure, but ones rooted in a different micro-foundational understanding of economic behavior. After all, if actors are driven just by utility maximization in an atomistic setting, it is hard to see how a lack of fairness or a sense of income-related social distance can shipwreck a national or regional economy. One possible alternative has been developed by George Akerlof and Rachel Kranton, who suggest individuals be modeled as seeking to construct identities (as well as to maximize utility); because of this, they adhere to norms consistent with those identities. Thus, fairness and connections with others can count and factor into behavior (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010). Akerlof and Kranton specifically suggest that organizations where identity matters can utilize a flatter wage structure because some of the motivation is internal rather than extrinsic; it is also the case that a flatter structure (i.e., more equal distribution of income) both reflects this and may also reinforce it. Economist Samuel Bowles has also suggested that inequality (and fragmentation) gets in the way of solving coordination problems that could maximize output and efficiency (Bowles, 2012).

Even if identity formation may help individuals adopt social norms and find common ground, why examine that process at a metropolitan level? Partly, it is because that’s where social distance may be overcome by economic proximity: economic geographers have stressed that industries cluster regionally, creating a set of interdependencies between actors that can help to forge a sense of common fate (Crang, 1997; Storper, 1997). Based on this insight, a substantial body of literature points to the ways in which identity is created, norms achieved, and collaboration secured at the metropolitan or regional level (Pastor, Benner, & Matsuoka, 2009; Peirce, Johnson, & Hall, 1993; Scott, 1998). And this is where the notion of a regional or metropolitan diverse and dynamic epistemic community comes in—it both fits the scale that geographers suggest and it lifts up the idea that place identity can alter preferences and policies in ways that can generate more inclusive and sustainable growth.

What is a diverse and dynamic epistemic community? Our use of the term epistemic community is slightly different than what has existed heretofore in the literature (not only because we preface it with “diverse and dynamic”). Haas (1992), for example, describes an epistemic community as a group of people, usually professionals, that have shared norms, causal beliefs, and validity tests as well as a common policy enterprise—and that such communities are formed through processes of collective knowledge acquisition and understanding of each other’s choices, and are then institutionalized via repeated interactions.

Our extensions of the concept are as follows. We think scale and place matter, and thus we focus on regional knowledge-sharing networks; we contend that the epistemic community need not be limited to just policy makers and other professionals; and we argue that the diversity and flexibility or dynamism of such epistemic communities is important for regional outcomes. Under the guise of regionalism (and often through formal visioning processes or other such mechanisms), key actors recognize a common fate, develop mechanisms to share facts and communicate concerns, and create new ways to share concerns and priorities. The communicative processes themselves alter identity—one increasingly sees oneself as a member of the region—and the welfare of others in the region becomes more intertwined with one’s own.

Of course, members of epistemic communities do not necessarily wind up agreeing on inclusion as a standard element of their policy enterprise. Indeed, as Lester and Reckhow (2013) have convincingly argued, positive outcomes for regional equity may emerge more from skirmishes between competing actors than from pure collaboration, a point we highlight in our review of San Antonio below. At the same time, diverse epistemic communities can overcome individuals’ tendency to atomistic, self-interested behavior that fails to realize the benefits of collaboration. They can overcome social distance by overcoming epistemic distance, often through very different pathways. This ability to change relations between key actors is partly what we mean by dynamic (another aspect of dynamism is simply the ability to form and reform necessary coalitions as times change). And it is to a qualitative examination of the role of diverse and dynamic knowledge communities in linking the concerns of equity, growth and resilience that we now turn.
DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS: ALTERNATIVE REGIONAL TRAJECTORIES

To look at how regional integration, social connectedness, and processes for managing conflict can contribute to sustaining growth, we first sought to select case studies for qualitative research based largely on quantitative criteria. To do this, we considered the 30-year period from 1980 to 2010, and tried to focus on metropolitan regions that met two distinct criteria: (1) economic growth and shifts in social equity that were above the average over that full 30-year time frame (since income distribution was generally worsening in the United States, this allowed for cases that were “less bad” to make the cut); and (2) ending points that placed the region in the top tiers of regions across the country.

To measure the change over the 30-year time period, we examined the change in economic growth and social equity in four time periods: 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and the entire 30-year period (1980–2010). The indicators we used to measure economic growth were change in employment and in earnings per job, while the indicators we used to measure equity were the change in the percent living below poverty and change in the ratio of household income for those at the 80th percentile of the distribution relative to those at the 20th percentile. To measure where the region stood at the end-point of our time frame, we used median household income, and to measure equity we used the Gini coefficient.3

For the larger project of which this is a part, we wound up selecting 11 metropolitan areas, some with exemplary performance on our metrics and some with problematic performance, with the aim being to see the extent to which the performance was linked to collective interpretation and knowledge generation over extended interactions between multiple constituencies. In each region, we interviewed a wide array of actors, with our questions to informants focused on their experiences in collaborating within the region, both within their broad societal sector (business, government, labor, community, philanthropy) and across sectors. We specifically probed for how people dealt with conflict, trying to understand major stakeholders in regional conflicts, the values and priorities held by those different actors, how tensions between different constituencies were handled, and the extent to which diverse perspectives were incorporated (deliberately or informally) into formal governance structures and processes.4 We also reviewed a wide range of secondary material on each region, including academic work, reports, and media coverage.

For this article, we focus in on three of the case study regions: Salt Lake City, Oklahoma City, and San Antonio. The reasons for choosing these three case studies in this article include the fact that these three are relatively comparable in size (the first two have roughly a million residents and the third double that) and they have not been well studied in the past (which suggested, in contrast to one more study of Portland, that value could be added to the field). But the more important reason is that each show some degree of regional resilience. Katherine Foster (2012) and Pendall, Foster, and Cowell (2009) define regional resilience as the capacity of a metropolitan area to absorb a shock and return to a sustainable path of development. While a bit fuzzy as a metaphor, this neatly fits the cases at hand: Salt Lake City faced the stress of rapid (projected) growth, Oklahoma City the pain of a major economic downturn, and San Antonio the challenge by a disenfranchised group seeking political change. Interestingly, Pendall et al. (2009, p. 83) explicitly call for future research to “identify the ways in which intervention by social actors can make regions more or less resilient in the face of many stresses and strains”; this work exactly fits that bill.

Salt Lake City

To some who think that equity, growth, and sustainability must be the province of politically progressive locations, the Salt Lake City metro might seem like an odd choice (although the central city has long had Democratic mayors, some with remarkably leftist politics). However, it fits neatly into our considerations for two reasons. First, since the 1980s Salt Lake City has maintained levels of inequality and poverty that remain substantially below national averages, while also creating an economic growth trajectory that is remarkable not only in its consistent and sustained growth over a
long period, but also the relatively evenly distributed nature of that growth. This trajectory has been sustained even in the most recent decade, as the historically relatively homogenous Salt Lake City region has experienced a dramatic growth in its non-white population, a fact that puts it on a path to become a “majority-minority” region a few years before the country as a whole.

The second reason is that Salt Lake City has experienced the “shock” of rapid population growth. After growing 17% in population in the 1980s, just above the average growth rate of 15% for the top 192 metro areas in the 1980s, the Salt Lake City metro area grew by 26% in the 1990s, a full ten percentage points above the average in the 1990s. While this was not uncommon for other Western metros (and population growth slowed back down to just 4 percentage points above the average in the 2000s), what was uncommon was the Salt Lake City response: the construction of an organization that seems to essentially epitomize an epistemic community called Envision Utah. Envision Utah has tried to bring together different sectors to figure out where growth in the region should occur and it has helped to build a consensus for compact development, a light rail line, and other unexpected outcomes. Of course, it’s not just one organization: we suggest that this is partly rooted in the broader institutional and cultural influence of the Mormon Church, and specifically the way this facilitates connections between communities of prosperity and poverty.

**Sustained and Shared Prosperity**

Salt Lake City’s record of sustained prosperity and inclusion over the last three decades places it at or near the top of all metropolitan areas in the country on most of the relevant indicators. Between 1980 and 2010, employment in the metropolitan area grew by 123%, compared to an average of 64% for the top 192 metros and 90% for those among them also falling in the western United States. Average earnings per job grew by 20% in real terms, roughly comparable to the 19% average for all top 192 metros and 21% for those in the west. What is remarkable, however, is how the wage gains were distributed across all levels of the labor market. Between 1990 and 2010, for instance, average real earnings in the top third of highest paying 2-digit North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) industries grew by 23%, while earnings grew by 24% in the middle third, and 28% in the lowest third; most U.S. metro regions experienced earnings growth only at the top and often declining earnings in the lower tiers of the labor market. Salt Lake City also experienced almost equal growth in low, medium, and high-paying industries over this time, while most metro regions either experienced an expansion in low-wage industries or a polarization of employment, with growth in low-paying and high-paying industries, but not in middle-income industries.

This stronger performance in the middle of the labor market is reflected in more traditional equity measures. Poverty did increase from 8.6% in 1980 to 13.1% in 2010 in the Salt Lake City metro, but this still remained substantially below the 15.6% average for the top 192 metro areas. Inequality, as measured by the 80/20 household income ratio, increased by 8.5% over the three decades (from 3.7 to 4.0), substantially less than the 12.0% average increase across the top 192 metros. The Gini coefficient of household income inequality in Salt Lake City in 1980 was .37, compared to .40 for the United States as a whole. Though inequality worsened in subsequent decades, the Gini coefficient of household income inequality in Salt Lake City remained among the lowest of the top 192 metros (23rd lowest) and substantially below national averages.

The region’s record in sustaining growth is also exemplary. The single longest unbroken growth spell of any metropolitan region between 1990 and 2011—a period of 69 quarters (more than 17 years) of unbroken annualized growth in employment—occurred in Ogden, Utah, just north of Salt Lake City; while this is formally a different metropolitan area, the entire Wasatch Front urbanized area from Ogden in the north to Provo in the south is considered by residents as the more accurate functional metropolitan area and is the scale of regional planning addressed by Envision Utah. Both Salt Lake City and Provo experienced short employment downturns in the 2000 recession, but with each boasting unbroken growth spells of 10 ½ years they still rank in the top 20% of metropolitan areas in the country in the maximum length of sustained growth.

It is impossible to talk about development in Salt Lake City without acknowledging the profound influence of the Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS). Though the percentage of Utah’s population that
is Mormon has declined as the population has increased, statewide there was still an estimated 62% of the population that was Mormon in 2012, while in Salt Lake County (the core of the MSA), it was just over 51% (Canham, 2012). Of course the influence of the LDS Church goes beyond simply a percentage of the population, given that it plays a substantial role in shaping the economics, politics, and culture of the region.

One of the important influences of the Church has to do with its role in addressing poverty in the region. While Mormons are generally quite conservative and have a strong suspicion of centralized government programs, the Church has developed a quite substantial internal welfare structure that was first established in the 1930s. Mormons are encouraged to fast one day a month, and to donate at least the money that was saved on two missed meals, if not more, to the local Church’s welfare fund. One hundred percent of these fast offerings are used to provide assistance to those in need (administrative costs associated with these programs are privately provided by the Church through other channels). The Church owns hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland and dairy operations. Food, including processed food products largely manufactured by the LDS-owned Deseret Industries and Deseret Manufacturing, are sent to the over 140 storehouses that the LDS church operates. All told, some 10,000 volunteers a year work in these enterprises and a range of related humanitarian assistance efforts, and the total amount of humanitarian assistance provided between 1985 and 2011 was estimated at $1.4 billion.6

The bishop of the local ward or congregation is responsible for identifying those in need, and for providing assistance to help people get back on their feet. This involves not simply allocating access to food and financial support, but also advice and referrals to a range of support services provided by the LDS Church, including employment services, English as a second language (ESL) assistance, social services, clothing distribution, and other support. Here, another feature of the LDS Church structure becomes particularly important. Significantly, the LDS Church essentially has a lay clergy structure at the local level. Bishops are called to service from among the members of a local congregation, and serve without pay for a temporary period, typically from three to seven years. Men who are called to be bishops are frequently among the more prominent and successful leaders in the community, including major business leaders.7 Thus, as we were told by a number of our key informants in the region, many business executives and CEOs in the region have direct experience for an extended period of time working essentially as social workers, assisting not just Mormons but many non-Mormons as well.

The LDS church has also contributed to a different tone around immigrant integration. This is partly because the church has such a significant international presence but also because missionaries, who are mostly between the ages of 18 and 25, serve 18–24 months abroad and acquire a knowledge of what it means to be a stranger. Whatever the factors, the results have been remarkable for what is clearly a conservative state: in 1999, immigrants were allowed to obtain driver licenses using a tax number rather than a social security number, and since 2002 undocumented high school graduates have been allowed to pay in-state tuition at state institutions of higher education, a provision consistent with the DREAM Act (Garlick, 2006; Stewart & Jameson, 2011). In 2010, a broad coalition of business leaders, religious groups, and politicians developed the Utah Compact, a statement of principles about immigration designed to blunt a growing anti-immigrant sentiment that was seeping from Arizona into Utah politics. The Compact included statements celebrating the importance of immigrants to Utah’s economy, recognizing the integration of immigrants into communities across the state, and opposing policies that unnecessarily separate families.8 The development of the pact was led by the Salt Lake City Chamber of Commerce, in close collaboration with, among others, the Catholic Diocese, and the conservative Sutherland Institute, reflecting a surprising diversity of interests committed to immigrant integration.

The Salt Lake City region has also been home to one of the most impressive collaborative, consensus-based, regional planning initiatives in the country, Envision Utah. The origins of Envision Utah lay in the creation in 1988 of the Coalition for Utah’s Future (CUF), a group of political, business, and civic leaders who came together at the time because of a concern about losing population, particularly younger populations, to more prosperous states. The economic troubles facing Salt Lake City at the time ended up being quite short-lived, and by the 1990s the primary concerns were around
a different sort of shock: quality of life issues because of a growing air pollution crisis and rapidly expanding sprawl that was eating up farmlands and threatening neighboring canyons and mountain land.

Thus, in 1995, the CUF launched the Envision Utah project in an effort to address the challenges of this growth along the entire Wasatch Front. It was clear from the beginning that for the initiative to have any impact, it couldn’t be predicated on the influence of government zoning or regulatory authority, but rather had to be deeply rooted in the values of hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals throughout the region. Thus, the process began with the creation of a 100-person steering committee representing a wide range of influential business leaders, philanthropists, community leaders, and politicians, and the commissioning of a study of community values related to quality of life. This study ended up identifying two critical values that underpinned future efforts: the importance of Utah’s scenic beauty and recreational opportunities; and the deep commitment to being a valued place for raising children and strengthening families (Envision Utah, n.d.; Scheer, 2012).

Subsequent efforts included the development of alternative scenarios for long-range development in the region, and a broad public consultation process about the possible different future scenarios that included more than 2,000 people in 50 public workshops and some 17,500 responses over the Internet and to a mail-in newspaper survey (Envision Utah, n.d., p. 38). The resulting “Quality Growth Strategy” was not a detailed land use plan for the region, but rather a summary of the preferred direction of growth as reflected in response to the different scenarios, and a set of principles articulated as seven clear goals for future development in the region: improving air quality, promoting housing options, creating transportation choices, encouraging water conservation, preserving critical lands, supporting efficient infrastructure, and exploring community development. These principles then became the basis for the development of more detailed implementation plans through local jurisdictions throughout the region and by the regional planning bodies that have extended through to today. By 2012, the Dean of the University of Utah’s School of Architecture and Planning described the impact of the initiative’s “remarkable” success in this way:

The Salt Lake metro region has an extensive and rapidly expanding light rail and commuter rail system that is the envy of much more populous regions. The Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded a Salt Lake regional consortium the largest of its highly competitive Sustainable Communities Grants. The two metropolitan planning organizations of the region have cooperated to prepare a long-range transportation plan based on land use aspirations that include higher density. One of the largest “smart growth” planned developments in the U.S. is taking shape on 95,000 acres on Salt Lake’s west side. Cities all over the region are developing plans for transit-oriented development and dense town centers, along with the policy and zoning changes needed to support them. City planners from eleven jurisdictions in Salt Lake County have come together to share data, maps, and forecasting information, with the expectation of assembling a coordinated county plan . . . . Most intriguing, data suggest that Salt Lake County is growing with more compact development and a pronounced tendency for denser housing and new jobs to locate near transit throughout the region. (Scheer, 2012, pp. 2–3)

In our site visit, our informants stressed that there were a number of keys to the success of these regional planning efforts. First was the ability to tap into values of a high quality of life and concern about the legacy being left to children, which was critical for helping people see the importance of long-range planning rather than simply market driven development. Second, the attention to long-range visions of the future of the region helped overcome divisions that would be exacerbated in discussions of specific projects, while helping to build a sense of common destiny within the region. Finally, that it was important that this regional planning process was not driven by government in the highly conservative and generally anti-government region, but that the collaborative, diverse, and consensus-driven process was critical in shaping people’s understanding of complex regional processes and building long-term buy-in to the outcomes—almost the very definition of a diverse epistemic community.
Oklahoma City

While Salt Lake City represents a community coming together to deal with growth, Oklahoma City’s regional collaboration emerged from decline. In the mid to late 1980s, Oklahoma City was mired in an extended economic recession, the result of a decline in the region’s core energy businesses, and the fallout of the savings and loan meltdown on the region’s banking and real estate sectors. The region’s downtown area was especially hard hit, because an earlier period of classic urban renewal policy had accelerated the hollowing out of the urban core. By 1988, Oklahoma City Councilman I. G. Purser could declare, “downtown is dead and we helped kill it. There is no major retail, no major attraction and no place to eat” (Lackmeyer & Money, 2006, p. i)

Since the early 1990s, however, Oklahoma City has experienced a remarkable turnaround. By 2005, The Wall Street Journal described it like this:

Today 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 tail-winds of an energy boom in the 2000s are an important part of the story, the path forward has been led by a strong public-private consensus on the importance of expanded taxes to support major public expenditure on a range of 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 led 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 that consistently votes overwhelmingly Republican. Oklahoma City’s experience suggests how a comprehensive and inclusive commitment to place can help leaders move past ideology and steer their regions off a track of negative growth towards a more sustainable and shared growth trajectory.

Collaboration and Crisis

During the 1980s, the Oklahoma City region experienced a dramatic increase in poverty, rising from 10.7% of the population in 1980 to 14.0% in 1990. Employment growth for the decade, a total of 10%, was barely more than a third as fast as the average top 192 metro areas, and the average earnings per job actually declined by 6% in real terms over the decade.

In facing this crisis, Oklahoma City had the advantage of a relatively centralized and integrated regional governance structure. Oklahoma City is a classic example of an elastic city (Rusk, 1993), which 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. This conference led to a coordinated effort over the next 15 years to rapidly annex land, in a preemptive effort to prevent other cities in the region from expanding, motivated by a desire to ensure adequate financial resources and control over utilities, water, and transportation infrastructure for the growing urbanized area. By 1962 the city had reached more than 600 square miles, nearly a six-fold increase in land area from just a decade earlier. 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 which even included expansion beyond the county boundaries.

It is significant that the Chamber of Commerce was a major leader in the push for this rapid annexation. While the term public-private partnership began to appear in discourse in urban development in the 1960s, and really took off in the 1980s with the growing emphasis on market-oriented solutions to urban problems (Amdurksy, 1968; Brooks, Liebman, & Schelling, n.d.), Oklahoma City has experienced public-private partnerships perhaps since its very origins. The city was essentially
established in a single day, when 10,000 people settled in Oklahoma City on April 22, 1889, as part of the Oklahoma Land Rush when two million acres of public land in central Oklahoma were made available for settlement under the Homestead Act (Hoig, 1984). The Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, then known as the Board of Trade, was established just 3 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 operation of multiple airports in the region, road building, and literally acting as the contracted economic development agency of the city government.

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 main ways they have done this is through expanding the capacity of their research department. The Chamber claims to have such detailed parcel level data related to companies in the ten-county region that after the 2013 tornado that tore through the neighboring town of Moore, the Chamber had 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 within the central Oklahoma region, they also have detailed comparison statistics for all major competitor regions. They make this information readily available to all chambers in the region, but only if those chambers agree to be part of their network for collaborative economic development and marketing. Information and knowledge have become pieces of glue that hold business leaders throughout the region together, rather than devolving into destructive competitive bidding for outside investment—exactly the sort of epistemic community we suggested above.

The importance of this homegrown regional approach to economic development was reinforced in the early 1990s. United Airlines was considering Oklahoma City as a potential site for a major maintenance hub. The deal was partly contingent upon voter approval for a series of infrastructure improvements designed to lure the airline to the city. Even though the voters approved, United chose Indianapolis despite a superior financial package being offered by Oklahoma City. The apocryphal story repeated by nearly every civic leader in the region (thus, a story with salience even if its elements may now have acquired the gauziness of myth) is that United executives quietly slipped into the region one weekend with their spouses and simply decided that the location was not livable. With that “ouch!,” civic leaders realized the need for a major regional development effort. The result was the development of the Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS) plan. The Chamber of Commerce took the lead in advocating for a new 5-year, one-cent sales tax devoted to funding nine major projects to improve quality of life in Oklahoma City, which voters approved with a 54% majority vote in December of 1993 (and extended briefly in 1998 with a 68% majority vote). A critical feature of the initiative was that it included a range of projects designed to benefit different constituencies in the region, but all were part of a unified vision for improving quality of life and renovating the urban core. 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 for Oklahoma City’s first professional sports team, the Oklahoma City Thunder; a 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; a new public library; a trolley transit system; construction of the Bricktown Canal, which has become a major restaurant and entertainment attraction; and transformation of a 7-mile stretch of the North Canadian River—which used to be derisively referred to as the river that needed mowing due to it being choked by grass 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 attraction for kayaks, canoes, and scull rowing, and led it to become the first river to receive official designation by the U.S. Olympic Committee as an Olympic and Paralympic training site. As interesting as the funding and as beautiful as the projects was the forward-looking nature of the campaign and the inclusive nature of the investments: in lobbying for levies that would serve the symphony as well as sports, the mayor argued to tax-adverse seniors that “you may not like it. You
may not even be around for it. But aren’t your grandkids?” (Lackmeyer & Money, 2006, p. 127).

The appeal to a sense of place and a long-term commitment to the future was evident again in 2001 when voters subsequently passed a second round of sales tax increases (by a 61% 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% of the sales tax funds were designated for the Oklahoma City Public School District, there are actually 23 other public school districts that overlap part of the land area of Oklahoma City itself that received 30% of the funds, totaling $153 million by the end of the program. The overlap of the central city and suburban school districts provides 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 how tax revenues were being shared with disadvantaged communities in the region (Garn, 2005).

The success of the original MAPS and the MAPS for Kids program paved the way for the passage of a third round of temporary sales tax increases, this time in 2008 (with a 54% majority vote) for the MAPS 3 initiative. Projects planned under the 10-year MAPS 3 initiative include a new downtown convention center; a new downtown public park; a new streetcar system; improvements to the Oklahoma River and Oklahoma State Fairgrounds projects; the construction of four 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 order 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 promote a higher quality of life and attract new populations back to the urban core, there are a number of features of Oklahoma’s experience that 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, and when voters approved the additional taxes for these initiatives the specific projects were included on the ballot and voters had to vote for all or none of the projects. 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. As the second-largest big city in the continental United States by land area (behind Jacksonville, FL), initiatives in the City immediately have a regional significance. But more importantly, the inclusion of suburban school districts in the MAPS for Kids initiative provides a further integration of a regional approach, while using a sales tax (rather than, for instance, property tax) ensures that some substantial portion of proceeds are actually paid by suburban residents who shop in Oklahoma City. 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 voted for by a majority of the predominantly Republican residents of the region.

This level of collaboration and commitment is partly because of long-standing structural features, particularly the power of annexation. However, 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 the recognition of the need for some coordinated response. Common identity and purpose were also forged by the 1995 bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building in which 168 lives were lost and 324 buildings within a sixteen-block radius were destroyed or suffered major damage. Meanwhile, coordination across jurisdictions
is regularly reinforced by another set of crises: natural disasters that arise given Oklahoma City’s location in the heart of “tornado alley.”

Despite our emphasis on collaboration, it is clear that Oklahoma City still faces significant challenges around diversity and inclusion. The poverty rate in 2010 was more than a full percentage point above the national average and inequality was growing, as earnings in the region’s energy sector rose dramatically alongside a rapid growth in low-wage service sector industries. Much of the growth in these low-wage industries—including accommodation, food services, arts, entertainment, and recreation—is actually a result of aspects of the MAPS initiative, underscoring the region’s need to diversify its economic base of decent-paying industries. The minority African American population remain junior partners at best in decision-making processes, and the growing Latino population (12% of the region’s population in 2010) has yet to achieve meaningful political representation in regional governance. African Americans and Latinos continue to have substantially higher unemployment rates and lower educational attainment and income levels than non-Hispanic whites in the region. Nonetheless, the growth and equity results in the past decade have been favorable relative to the rest of the South, and part of the reason is the way regional knowledge communities have forged both a common understanding of the region’s challenges and a commitment to place that often trumps ideology.

San Antonio

San Antonio has been called one of the most charming cities in Texas (often by San Antonians, to be sure—but they do have reason). On any given Saturday afternoon, the downtown River Walk, for which it is famous, hums with locals and tourists looking for food, music, or a gondola ride. Beyond the charm, San Antonio’s increasingly multifaceted economy is now anchored not only in tourism, but also the military, medical, energy, and manufacturing sectors. It has also been the home of innovative and inclusive policies, including a 2012 vote to increase taxes for expanded pre-kindergarten education in disadvantaged communities, which has underscored its reputation as an inclusive and dynamic metro area.

If you talk to civic leaders, they attribute many of the region’s current positive attributes to diverse collaboration amongst government, business, universities, and community. Collaboration and knowledge-sharing is commonplace and ubiquitous; those leaders we interviewed essentially assumed collaboration as a principle underlying the region’s “get-along” spirit. However, the now celebrated culture of collaboration belies the past: three decades ago, San Antonio was the site of sharp struggles led by disadvantaged residents fighting to have their voices heard. Indeed, over the past four decades, San Antonio not only moved from conflict to collaboration, but also from stark racism and poverty to incorporation and income mobility.

An early catalyst for this change was the emergence of faith-rooted social movements that secured new and more equitable investments in infrastructure and workforce developments. These movements were amplified and connected to a broader and more diverse audience, including the business community, through key bridge-building figures who helped convene and craft a common agenda. The resulting nascent collaborative efforts secured key victories for the region and deepened their reach through the institutionalization of collaboration in education and workforce programs.

Faith-Rooted Direct Action

Over the past 30 years, San Antonio’s trajectories for both economic growth and equity have shown substantial improvement relative to other metro regions in the West and nation, particularly in the area of improving equity. From 1980 to 2010, jobs in the San Antonio region increased by 112% and average earnings increased by 23% in inflation-adjusted dollars, both outperforming the averages for the top 192 metros. Jobs and earnings growth over this time period have come from a number of sources. Energy, particularly oil, is an important part of the region’s economy. San Antonio is the headquarters of Tesoro and Valero, both Fortune 500 oil companies, and a range of oil-related firms
has grown particularly in recent years from the fracking-related boom (though total oil output in Texas remains below its early 1970s peak). Additionally, San Antonio has seen employment growth across a range of industries, including bioscience and healthcare, financial services, call centers, tourism, and automobile-related manufacturing. Despite a decline in military base employment with the closing of two of four Air Force bases in the region, military spending is still closely linked to the region’s substantial IT/cybersecurity and aerospace clusters (Hernandez, 2011; Thomas, 2013).

In terms of poverty, San Antonio started in 1980 with a higher overall poverty level than most metro regions and poverty worsened throughout the 1980s. But in the most recent two decades, trends in poverty reduction in San Antonio have actually outperformed other metro regions, reducing by nearly a quarter in the 1990s. The increase in poverty in the 2000s was only 8% (from 15.1% to 16.3% of population), whereas the average increase for the top 192 metros was 30% over the same period (from 12.0% to 15.6% of population). Similarly, the region saw growing inequality in the 1980s, as the 80–20 household income ratio increased by 5.4% (from 4.2 to 4.4), compared to an average 1% decline for the top 192 metros (from 4.2 to 4.1). However, between 1990 and 2010 the rise in that inequality measure was half of the average increase for the top 192 metros, a striking performance given the starting point.

Today, the San Antonio region’s population is nearly two-thirds people of color, but the region’s demographic shift was already well under way in the 1970s. San Antonio was one of the nation’s first majority-minority cities (Miller, 2011), and by 1980 Latinos alone represented 44% of the population. Despite popular perception, Latino growth was mainly homegrown; even today, the share of foreign-born in San Antonio is actually lower than it is in the United States as a whole. However, these U.S.-born second- and third-generation citizens were living on the city’s poorer west and south sides and their interests were largely ignored by long-standing Anglo elites. The region was known for its ranches and its military bases and also for its torrential rainstorms (Rosales, 2000). The resulting flooding affected all the neighborhoods, to be certain, but the downpours impacted the poor and working-class Latino neighborhoods of West San Antonio hardest. Inadequate drainage systems sent water and debris flowing into the streets, ruining homes and impacting public safety. When it came to infrastructure, the schools were not so hot either—literally. Many west side schools lacked heat and proper insulation, and parents fretted about sending their kids off to a cold classroom in winter (Rogers, 1990).

These conditions in the mid-1970s provided a base for a remarkable change over the next two decades, as a combination of broad-based community organizing and shifting electoral politics helped transform the city’s fortunes. And it was two neighborhood kids from the west side that were particularly prominent in this shifting politics: Ernesto Cortes and Henry Cisneros.

Ernie Cortes, who would become one of the country’s preeminent organizers, returned home to San Antonio in the early 1970s, after gaining experience organizing with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in the Midwest. Cortes began organizing in San Antonio’s West Side parishes, and then founded Communities Organized for Public Services (COPS) in 1974, an IAF affiliate organization comprised of faith-based leaders and their members. COPS ultimately became probably the strongest community-based organization in the IAF network, and the core of a network of 17 affiliates working throughout the southwest region. COPS worked especially closely with a sister organization, Metro Alliance, which worked throughout the San Antonio metro area, and Cortes and other COPS leaders helped launch a Texas statewide network, the first IAF statewide network, which had its founding convention in 1990 with over 10,000 people attending (M. R. Warren, 1998).

In addition to an institution-led, values-based approach, the IAF was well known for its creative tactics and direct action strategies. COPS personified this approach. One of its early campaigns, for example, involved trying to get the City Council to pass a budget proposal that included $100 million investment in infrastructure and increased services in poor, predominantly Latino neighborhoods. As part of the campaign, COPS activists worked to disrupt normal operations of prominent businesses in the city, urging the business leaders to support their campaign. At Frost National Bank, a leading local institution, for example, COPS members halted the normal banking activities by exchanging dollars for pennies (and then pennies for dollars) all day long. Similarly, at Joske’s Department store, the women of COPS disrupted business by trying on clothes, all day long, en masse. In both cases,
their message was the same: we will continue to throw a wrench into your day-to-day activities until our communities’ basic needs are addressed.

This disruptive and confrontational approach ultimately resulted in significant resources being directed towards COPS neighborhoods, including $86 million in Community Development Block Grants between 1974 and 1981 (Marquez, 1990, p. 360). Indeed, over its first 25 years, COPS reportedly directed over $1 billion in resources to its neighborhoods (M. R. Warren, 1998, p. 80). The Alinsky-inspired organizing was responsible not only for shifting significant resources within the city, but also for changing the overall economic development strategy of the region. In the early 1980s, the San Antonio Economic Development Foundation’s (EDF) primary strategy was attracting outside business and investment by promoting the city’s low wages and unorganized labor force (Marquez, 1990). Because of a major COPS-led protest of these policies, the EDF moderated its approach and worked with the city to identify other economic development strategies.

This confrontational approach gave way over time to more collaborative efforts around specific development initiatives in the region. A key figure in helping to build bridges between the disparate worlds of San Antonio’s power elite and poor Latino residents was another West Side neighborhood native son, Henry Cisneros. With a strong family commitment to education, Cisneros received a Catholic school education, then garnered degrees from Texas A&M, Harvard, and eventually a Doctor of Public Administration from George Washington University in 1976, with doctoral research at MIT along the way. Returning to San Antonio in 1974, Cisneros was soon elected to the City Council, the youngest city councilman in the city’s history, at the age of 27. In 1981 he was elected mayor, only the second Latino mayor of a large city in the country, and was eventually reelected another 3 times, serving as mayor until 1989.

Charismatic and articulate, Cisneros was comfortable straddling multiple worlds, and appealed to both an Anglo old guard and the vibrant, young, and idealistic growing Latino population. His bridging role is perhaps most exemplified by the fact that he was initially elected as part of the (perhaps ironically titled) Good Government League slate supported by San Antonio’s business elite. Partly because the elections were at large, a system that allowed a unified city interest like business to better exercise power, the Good Government League always made sure to have at least one Latino and one African American on the slate, and Cisneros took one of those spots. This was nonetheless severe underrepresentation of the demographics and, under pressure from the U.S. Justice Department, the council moved from at large to council districts in 1977. District governments secured additional seats for Latinos, partially dismantling the structures supporting the city’s Anglo power elite and paving the way for a broadening of policies, ideas, and investments.

Cisneros continued to thrive under the new system and essentially served as a transitional and transformational figure linking pro-growth business interests and the underrepresented Mexican American community. An early supporter of COPS, Cisneros further elevated the organization’s work while in office, paying attention to the neglected west side community where he grew up (and still lives). Eventually, many members of the regional business community who initially saw COPS as an obstructionist organization came to view it as a valued partner in the region’s economic development ecosystem. Most emblematic: after encountering COPS in their disruptive activities at his bank, Frost Bank CEO Tom Frost bought a case of Saul Alinsky’s book Rules for Radicals, and distributed them to the power elite in San Antonio to help them be more prepared to deal with their adversaries (M. Warren, DeFilippis, & Saegert, 2008). As he learned more about the organization, and as COPS moved out of doing only direct action organizing to more collaborative workforce development, the relationship deepened to the point that Front ultimately became chair of a major COPS-initiated workforce development organization called Project Quest.

**Institutionalizing Collaboration and Navigating Economic Restructuring**

As conflict gave way to a growing cohesion and collaboration among once seemingly disparate groups, San Antonio’s continued economic challenges amidst a rapidly changing economy provided a base for the further institutionalization of collaborations. Project QUEST may be most emblematic of the shift from conflict to collaboration.17
The sudden closure of San Antonio’s Levi Strauss factory in 1990, a place that had employed 1,000 workers, mostly Latina women, made clear the need to couple economic development with workforce (re)training. The sense of need was exacerbated by looming defense cuts that threatened military jobs, and a growing skills gap in health care. As a response to this closure, a diverse group came together to form Project QUEST (Quality Employment through Skills Training), an innovative workforce development program. Begun in 1993, the program was spearheaded by COPS and Metro Alliance, whose membership included many workers displaced from manufacturing. Importantly, QUEST brought together a diverse group: from workers to business/employers, the regional Private Industry Council, the governor, and the Texas Employment Commission.

Project QUEST was designed to upgrade and reskill disadvantaged workers for good jobs in high-demand occupations. It does so by targeting a cluster of in-demand occupations—well-paying, growing occupations—and works with the community college system to develop degree and certificate programs suited to them. Different from many workforce development programs, Project QUEST participants must demonstrate economic need, defined as earning less than 50% of the area’s median household income.

Many of those initially skeptical of COPS were won over by the success of QUEST. Going beyond a social service model, the organization links low-income individuals to training, but also links employers to the training’s graduates. By emphasizing well-paying careers and building up community college programming, QUEST has also helped shape the wage and occupational structure of the local economy. During the past 21 years, Project QUEST’s successes are numerous: more than 80% of its entrants graduate from the program and 86% of those which graduate are placed into higher paying occupations. Graduates enter with annual earnings hovering around $10,000 and after graduation earn $39,300 per year on average. In 2012, graduates earned an hourly wage of $19.65 (Racemacher, Bear, & Conway, 2001).

Perhaps most telling of San Antonio’s collaborative progress has been a recent successful effort to pass a sales tax increase to fund pre-K education in San Antonio’s underserved communities. In addition to support from the usual sources—the school district, city of San Antonio, and nonprofit groups—the sales tax increase was not only supported by the Chamber of Commerce but championed by the Chamber as an investment in preparing a local workforce for the future economy. While the alliance of seemingly odd bedfellows was striking, just as moving was the fact that the results of pre-K programming will be revealed 20 years from now and the investments being made today are explicitly oriented to low-income kids whose parents are not likely to pay the bulk of the expenses. To cultivate a long-term view and an embrance of the “other” was striking. The increase passed with 54% of the vote.

The region is also committed to crafting a shared vision of future regional prosperity. San Antonio 2020 (SA2020) is a regional visioning exercise and plan created with strong public participation. The visioning process was led by the Jacksonville Community Council—a nonprofit group that works on developing vision and indicators documents for several regions including Jacksonville and Nashville (which, not coincidentally, were profiled as strong performers on growth and equity in Benner & Pastor, 2012). This process was widely supported by the public. The city spearheaded this initiative, but foundations, business, and nonprofits have adopted the principles. Out of this long public process, the city decided to focus on several areas: education, employment, environment, and health. To track progress toward their goals, a series of indicators were also developed by a group of subject experts, citizens, and others. To help bolster SA2020’s efforts, the city’s planning department is orienting their redevelopment plans around some of its key goals.

This is not meant to paint too rosy a picture of the San Antonio situation. For example, the business community is especially proud that the region attracted a Toyota manufacturing facility in the mid-2000s, something that reinvigorated the regional economy and was located in an area relatively proximate to lower income neighborhoods. Although heralded as an example of collaboration between the public and private sector, some have criticized the significant tax abatements and fee waivers as well as the relatively secretive nature of the negotiations with the company (Morton, 2013). However, this was a case in which cards were held close to the chest (perhaps an appropriate
metaphor for a Texas deal), and respondents in our interviews, including those intimately involved in the Toyota negotiations, acknowledge that a different approach might be taken today.

In any case, we see, as in the Salt Lake City case, a sort of exemplar of a diverse and dynamic epistemic community, including the creation of a shared data framework and a new set of intersectoral conversations. And there are two features we believe to be most striking about the San Antonio case. The first is that collaboration is now so embedded that for many young leaders and organizations it is “just how we do things here.” The second, and more important, is that this new embrace of collaboration actually emerged from strong challenges to the status quo mounted by organizers primarily interested in addressing social equity. Along the way, these organizers and their allies contributed to making the region not only more inclusive but also more economically resilient.

KNOWING TOGETHER, GROWING TOGETHER

In recent decades, researchers have suggested that there may be compatibilities as well as trade-offs between equity and growth. The intersection of this work with the emerging concept of regional resilience has helped to lift up a further consideration: whether a more inclusive approach to economic policy can lead to more sustainability over time as well as enhanced capacity to weather “shocks.” In this article, we have examined whether a shared knowledge of place fate might, in turn, influence the interconnection of equity, growth, and regional resilience. Although any study based on a small number of cases can hardly be conclusive, we find that in Salt Lake City, deeply rooted cultures linking inclusion and prosperity and a deliberate consensus-oriented regional planning process seem to have been important contributors to a remarkably long and sustained record of both above average employment growth and improvement in social equity. In Oklahoma City, a highly centralized and regionally coordinated response to economic crisis, rooted in strong public-private partnerships and a willingness of conservative regional leaders and voters to embrace increased public taxes and investment, helped lead to a remarkable turnaround. In San Antonio, an initially conflict-ridden relationship between equity advocates and the city’s elite leadership was essential in first increasing the visibility of poverty in the region, then shifting dominant economic development strategies from low-road to high-road competitive strategies, to eventually more collaborative institutions and policies that have been critical in strengthening long-term investments in the region’s inclusive growth trajectory.

In each case, there are broad structural factors that contribute to explaining the regional trajectories, but we think the existence of intentional efforts to build knowledge communities across social and economic boundaries also played a role. Recall that this differs from the conventional concept of an epistemic community, denoting a relatively homogenous network of people with similar values and interests, a shared understanding of facts and causal relationships, and a common policy enterprise (Adler & Haas, 1992; Haas, 1992). Within the diverse regional epistemic communities we examine, in contrast, there is no single policy enterprise; rather people share a terrain of both policy and practice in the processes of governance, rather than formal government, thus shaping key regional development trajectories, particularly around economic growth and job creation, housing and land use practices, transportation systems, formal education systems and broader processes of learning, and the structures (both government and nongovernmental) of social welfare.

Within such diverse and dynamic epistemic communities, people seem to be united not by a shared set of values or interests, as in an epistemic community, but rather by a sense of a shared future destiny within the region. This does not mean the end of tensions or “skirmishes” at a regional level (Lester & Reckhow, 2013); indeed, part of the dynamism is exactly those skirmishes that elevate certain concerns and bring broader change. But the creation of epistemic communities does mean that conflicts are attenuated by a recognition of a common future in the region, and so tension can become an important learning opportunity. Such knowledge communities, in short, provide exactly the norms, standards and (place) identity that are the micro-foundations for linking equity and growth: because there is genuine care for the other, partly because of the communicative processes inherent in such communities, economic and social actors look for “win-win” opportunities rather than Darwinian competitive destruction.
This does not mean that equity and growth will be achieved, only that those results may be more likely. The actual mechanisms linking regional knowledge networks and regional growth and equity trajectories are still murky, and specific policies can play a more or less productive role. But the three case study sketches suggest that more research might be fruitful, particularly examinations of the specifics of important regional processes, such as agenda setting, issue framing, leadership development, conflict management, and the actual development and implementation of policy. Future efforts in this arena should not be limited to merely analyses from afar: if closing epistemic distance through regional collaboration actually opens up the space to improve growth and equity outcomes, cataloging the best practices in that arena may be crucial in a country increasingly wracked by economic shortfalls, distribution distress, and social disconnection.

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ENDNOTES

1 The result holds in a multivariate setting, with details available in Benner and Pastor (2014). To be clear, this pattern of results should be couched with numerous caveats, including the possibility that the relationship is U-shaped—that is, that too much equality would indeed kill economic incentives but we in the United States have gotten so skewed in our income distribution that the dampening impacts of inequality are trumping whatever incentives might once have stirred savings, investment, and growth.

2 These theoretical insights are reinforced by Benner and Pastor’s (2014) finding that a variety of measures of social distance, including regional political fragmentation and residential segregation, are also strongly related to a region’s ability to sustain economic growth, with more fragmented and segregated region’s experiencing shorter periods of sustained growth.

3 Data sources and sample: For all of our analysis we focused on the 192 most populous metro areas in 2000 (the “top 192” metros) and considered a metro area’s growth and equity performance relative to its broader region of the United States (i.e., West, Midwest, Northeast, and South). For our longitudinal analysis we drew the economic growth variables (change in employment and earnings) from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis Personal Income Accounts Tables, and we drew the equity variables from the 1980, 1990, and 2000 decennial censuses and the 2010 American Community Survey (ACS). For our 2010 analysis—the snapshot of the economic and social well-being of metros—we used data from the 2010 ACS as well. Because the income measures drawn from the decennial censuses were technically for 1979, 1989, and 1999, we also drew the jobs and earnings data points from those years. To simplify the discussion of data, however, we consistently refer to the decadal years (e.g. those ending in zero) even when the actual data are sometimes from one year prior.

4 In San Antonio, we conducted a total of 13 interviews in July of 2013. In Salt Lake City, we conducted a total of 23 interviews in May of 2013. In Oklahoma City, we conducted a total of 17 interviews in June of 2013. Each interview lasted for approximately an hour, and was a semistructured interview guided by a common protocol. Madeline Wander and Mirabai Auer of the staff at the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at the University of Southern California were absolutely invaluable partners in scheduling and participating in all interviews and helping with the interview analysis.

5 Nearly all the metropolitan data cited in this article come from a database assembled for the Building Resilient Regions network that contains economic, civic, social, housing, geographic, and demographic measures for several decades for all 934 Core-Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs) in the United States. One special feature of the data is that CBSA boundaries have been made consistent to compare measures across the 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000 censuses and recent versions of the American Community Survey (ACS). Unless otherwise noted, all averages reported are simple unweighted averages.

As of 2013, only men are allowed to be ordained as Bishops in the LDS Church, though there is a growing movement for more gender equality in the Church. See http://ordainwomen.org

See www.utahcompact.com


We have been unable to find a study documenting what proportion of sales tax revenue in Oklahoma City comes from nonresidents, but in our interviews multiple people said 25%-30% was a good rule of thumb.

We define the San Antonio region using the U.S. Census CBSA December 2003 definition, which includes Atascosa, Bexar, Bandera, Comal, Guadalupe, Medina, Kendall, and Wilson Counties.


Another key effort is San Antonio Education Partnership (SAEP), formed in 1988 in a citywide effort led by then Mayor Henry Cisneros, along with the leading Chambers of Commerce, universities, COPS and Metro Alliance, and local schools and school districts. The partnership’s goal is to help students graduate from high school, enroll in college, and graduate with a certificate or degree—and it is still going strong 25 year later.


REFERENCES


### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Chris Benner** is a Professor of Community and Regional Development at the University of California, Davis. His research focuses on the relationships between technological change, regional development, and the structures of labor markets and economic opportunity. Dr. Benner’s recent book, co-authored with Manuel Pastor, *Just Growth: Inclusion and Prosperity in America’s Metropolitan Regions* (2012), helps uncover the subtle and detailed processes, policies, and institutional arrangements that help explain how certain regions around the country have been able to consistently link prosperity and inclusion. He received his PhD in City and Regional Planning from the University of California, Berkeley.

**Manuel Pastor** is a Professor of Sociology and American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California, where he also directs USC’s Program for Environmental and Regional Equity and co-directs the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration. Recent books (along with *Just Growth*, co-authored with Chris Benner) include *Uncommon Common Ground: Race and America’s Future* (2010, co-authored with Angela Glover Blackwell and Stewart Kwoh), and *This Could Be the Start of Something Big: How Social Movements for Regional Equity are Transforming Metropolitan America* (2009, co-authored with Chris Benner and Martha Matsuoka).