

**Risk, Rationality, and Regional Governance**

**by**

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## Abstract

What are the preferences of local elected officials toward joint land use planning, a type of interlocal cooperation and form of regional governance? And how do we explain these preferences? The literature on interlocal cooperation depicts public officials as rational opportunists whose preferences and behaviors can be reliably predicted by institutional attributes of the municipal, intermunicipal, and political context in which they serve—i.e., where material benefits to the municipality or to the local official outweigh costs, cooperation will arise and endure. I propose that in policy areas where local benefits are uncertain and local autonomy is at risk, thought processes are significantly affected by individually held cultural values. I specify a *cultural cognition of governance* hypothesis, in which variation in individuals' preferences toward interlocal cooperation is a result of variation in measurable dispositions toward solidarity (versus individualism) and equality (versus differentiation). I test the hypothesis using data on 538 local elected officials representing 262 Michigan municipalities in the Detroit and Grand Rapids metropolitan areas. The dependent variables are measures of preferences toward four types of agreement made under the state's Joint Municipal Planning Act of 2003 ("JMPA"). The JMPA is flexible, allowing agreements that cover from a few parcels of land to entire municipalities, and from a merely advisory planning commission to a complete merger with dissolution of existing local planning and zoning functions. The legislation, therefore, presents a unique opportunity for probing local elected officials' preferences toward land use cooperation under multiple adoption and implementation scenarios. Independent variables are constructed from survey data on local elected officials' cultural dispositions, political perceptions, and

individual level controls, and from municipal level census and fiscal data. Based on analysis with hierarchical linear modeling, findings provide strong support for the cultural cognition of governance hypothesis. The findings speak to the prospects for regional governance and the understanding of collaboration and social learning in planning processes.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

*“[L]ocal zoning and comprehensive planning are introspective in nature, operating within ‘our’ community for the benefit of ‘our’ citizens....[But] questions are now being asked about how neighboring localities can protect ‘our’ watershed or stimulate ‘our’ economic future.”—John R. Nolon (1999: 1017-18)*

This study is about a question local government officials regularly face: should they look beyond jurisdictional boundaries and work with officials in other local governments to provide services and plan for the future? The decision is common because of the need to meet a long list of service demands with limited revenue, a problem of resource scarcity heightened by continuing devolution, the foreclosure crisis, and economic recession (Lutz, Molloy, and Shan 2011; Skidmore and Scorsone 2011). But it is also common because municipalities exist in a state of interdependence: conditions in neighboring municipalities and in the broader region affect local economic, fiscal, and even social outcomes. This dynamic is especially apparent in metropolitan areas, which tend to be highly fragmented throughout the United States (Miller and Lee 2011; Brenner 2002). For example, the 1.2 million people living in Oakland County—the second most populous county in the Detroit metropolitan area and part of the study area for this research—are spread among more than 60 cities, townships, and villages with more than 400 elected officials—about one elected official for every 3,000 people. The decision to cooperate is often borne of fiscal necessity and—as with most forms of supra-local governance—targets systems maintenance services such as wastewater treatment or garbage collection where political controversy is minimal and implementation relies on the work of administrative officials such as city managers (Williams 1971; Agranoff and McGuire 2003; Frederickson 1999).

But the true test of cooperation, and one identified frequently by those advocating regional reform, is in policy areas where the clarity of efficiency and bureaucratic effectiveness is replaced by the complexity of equity considerations, tension between the local good and the regional good, and the potential for highly politicized decision making (Norris 2001). Local governments have the ability to cooperate not just over systems maintenance functions, but also in economic development, affordable housing, transportation, and land use planning and zoning. However, cooperation in these latter policy areas remains relatively rare when the choice is left a purely voluntary one with easy exit by participants. This reality has for decades motivated an often highly normative and formal debate, reviewed shortly, between public choice localists who see an advantage to fragmented and polycentric metropolitan areas, and reform regionalists who view centralization as necessary for dealing with large scale problems.

If interlocal cooperation is going to be a viable governance approach for confronting metropolitan dilemmas, then understanding how local governmental officials *think* about cooperation in the policy areas driving these dilemmas is essential. Are preferences based on objective appraisal of potential municipal level costs and benefits? Are they a function of furthering personal career ambitions? Are they shaped by bias or ideology? The answers to these questions inform us about the hurdles that must be overcome in making interlocal cooperation more feasible, or—if these hurdles prove insurmountable—the limits of interlocal cooperation where top-down structural reforms or state-level incentives and penalties become necessary.

I answer these questions by developing a model in which the preferences of local elected officials about joint land use planning and zoning are a function of considerations that are transactional (i.e., relating to municipal level costs and benefits), political, and cultural. The core argument is that transactional and political considerations, the institutional signals typically used

in extant scholarship to explain interlocal cooperation, are often vague or ambiguous outside systems maintenance functions (Williams 1970). With regard to land use planning and zoning, local elected officials have few clear signals about whether cooperation will be optimal for the municipality, or for themselves in the form of gaining re-election or other political capital with constituents. In this context, local elected officials are more likely to draw on cultural cues—specifically, deeply held affinities toward solidarity and equality. The links between the choice of governance form (cooperating versus not cooperating) and these affinities form a *cultural cognition of governance* mechanism.

In the dissertation, the existence of a cultural cognition mechanism is tested alongside institutional explanations in the municipalities within metropolitan Detroit and Grand Rapids, Michigan. The study location offers two advantages. First, the state passed a Joint Municipal Planning Act in 2003, which explicitly allows flexible and voluntary interlocal land use cooperation. Local elected officials—those statutorily charged with adopting a joint agreement and who also can have seats on the resulting joint planning commission—can be asked, therefore, to express preferences in response to scenarios grounded in the real world. Second, local governments in Michigan have a strong home rule tradition while also facing a climate of crisis, a situation experienced by many local governments nationwide.

In the next section, I define interlocal cooperation and describe the debates to which the study of it contributes. The chapter then shifts into a vignette about joint land use planning among a group of five small municipalities in Michigan. I use that story to illustrate the limits of existing institutional explanations when studying forms of cooperation that pass through local elected officials and target traditionally difficult policy areas.



## *What is interlocal cooperation?*

The term *interlocal cooperation* does not have a uniform definition. I define it as *discretionary, purposive action among the officials of two or more units of local government to address an issue that could not be addressed as well (in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, equity, or another criterion of importance to local actors) without coordination of resources*. Interlocal collective action, despite its name, does not have to be a solution solely to the class of dilemmas that are genuine problems of collective action, also termed one shot Prisoners' Dilemma games, common pool resource problems, or public good dilemmas. These are situations in which individual payoffs (here, *individual* referring to single municipalities) lead to an outcome in which everyone is worse off than if they worked together (Ostrom 1998). *Local government* refers to counties, cities, townships, villages, and other units below the level of the state. *Interlocal* is not synonymous with *intergovernmental*, which typically means between federal and state governments; the term also does not cover cross-sectoral arrangements between public and private entities. I consider public-private interactions only to the extent they have motivated theoretical development.

*Discretionary* means that exit and entry are through the voluntary action of local executive, legislative, or administrative action. The state and federal governments may offer incentives or impose penalties to influence this decision, but these do not create a *de facto* or *de jure* legal requirement. Interlocal agreements are typically established within a state statutory framework authorizing their creation, but not mandating it (Taylor and Bassett 2007).

*Discretionary* also means that local residents may have strong opinions about the arrangement, but they do not control its ratification or repeal through a referendum, as might be the case with consolidation or other centralizing forms of regionalism.

*Specialized* means that while two local governments may have a variety of arrangements, some formal and others handshake deals, these are all discrete. The failure of one link might lead to the failure of another, or of the entire interlocal relationship, but this is not functionally inevitable. This piecemeal development is logical, since each agreement would be among a particular set of local officials dealing with specific circumstances, relationships, and interests (Thurmaier and Wood 2002).

Interlocal cooperation is both an umbrella term for the myriad ways in which two municipalities can relate and part of the universe of different ways in which a metropolitan area can be structured. It is a term connoting both interlocal and metropolitan governance. Several definitions of *governance* are available (cf. Meier and O'Toole 2006; Marks and Hooghe 2004). In this study governance is simply "the process by which human beings regulate their interdependencies in the context of shared environments" (Oakerson (2004: 19). *Governance*, therefore, can be much broader than *government*. Metropolitan governance, by extension, is the process of interdependency regulation in metropolitan areas. The term *metropolitan* is open to many definitions but is perhaps easiest to define, particularly for research purposes, using the statistical approach of the federal government (Stephens and Wikstrom 1999: 14-17).

Interlocal cooperation is not the prevailing behavior by local governments. Internal, direct production and provision remain dominant for service delivery (Brown and Potoski 2003: 455-456; Warner and Hebdon 2001). Still, the scope and variety of cooperation continue to expand. Many types of interlocal cooperation exist, including mutual-aid agreements, memoranda of understanding, intergovernmental fee-for-service arrangements, joint service agreements, equipment and facilities sharing, joint planning agreements, intergovernmental

service transfers, and boundary agreements to share the costs and revenue of development and negotiate or coordinate other issues.

Interlocal cooperation is unique among forms of governance because it retains local boundaries and is, legally, a voluntary endeavor with the possibility of exit. Many modes of regional governance do not respect local boundaries, whether functionally, geographically, or formally. Full consolidation combines the local government with the county in which it sits (Carr and Feiock 2004; Leland and Cannon 1997; Lyons and Lowery 1989). Merger, a less common variation that occurs among two horizontally aligned local units, reduces the number of governments. Annexation, whether consensual or involuntary depending on state level rules, also redefines local boundaries (Fleischmann 1986; Galloway and Landis 1986; Liner and McGregor 1996). Interlocal cooperation is also unique because it can target policies—in areas like land use, affordable housing, and public transit—that bear directly on regional dilemmas. The formation of special districts as a method of governance has exploded in popularity, and can create occasionally powerful units with their own unique authority. However, these are typically used for gap filling in service provision rather than regional problem solving (Foster 1997; Hawkins 1976; Bollens 1986).

### *Positioning interlocal cooperation in broader debates*

The distinction between the two basic classes of governance—voluntary, interlocal, and autonomy-respecting versus enforced, extra-local, and autonomy-infringing—tracks the debate about how to address extra-municipal problems in the fragmented metropolitan area. Some writers view such problems as inextricably tied to the intermunicipal competition that arises from fragmentation (e.g., Rusk 1993; Peirce, Johnson, and Hall 1993; Orfield 1997, 2002; Downs

2004a; 2004b). Others view fragmentation as a source of beneficial differentiation (allowing mobile residents to “vote” through their location choice for a preferred package of goods, services, and associational benefits at a certain tax price) and flexibility (allowing policy makers to choose through cooperation or competition the optimal scale at which to implement various policies) (Tiebout 1956; Ostrom, Tiebout, and Warren 1961; Hamilton 1975; Oates 1981). The debate is often waged on normative, formal grounds. Those who see fragmentation as inherently problematic advocate various types of *regional reform*, in which the scale of government is adjusted through various means (consolidation, annexation, et cetera) to better match the scale at which problems manifest. Those who view fragmentation more positively suggest encouraging (or at least not discouraging) *interlocal cooperation*. Because so many metropolitan problems are tied to issues of inequity reinforced by local jurisdictional boundaries, the debate reduces to a single question: can local governments, through cooperation, voluntarily change the patterns which historically they have abetted? Jimenez and Hendrick (2010: 266), in a comprehensive review of the metropolitan governance literature, noted “the emphasis of localists on governance (which focuses on voluntary, self-regulating, and cooperative action)... to address metropolitan-wide issues needs further empirical testing.... Assuming voluntary, cooperative action is possible,... will it be limited to solving easy problems with fewer conflicting interests and outcomes?”

The rivalry about reform and choice is one manifestation of a deeper debate about how to solve social problems and manage the uncertainty and volatility of the future. Interlocal cooperation in land use planning and zoning is not just a governance decision. It is also a planning process. One of the central questions in planning is whether planners should focus on the desired objects of their efforts—their images of the “good city” or region—or whether they

should concern themselves primarily with the process by which planning decisions are made and assume a “good process” will result in a good outcome (Fainstein and Campbell 2012). A reliance on metropolitan reform hearkens to the idea that planning is best exercised through the top down vision of instrumentally rational governing agents and bureaucrats. Conversely, the advocacy of public choice accords better with faith in the ability of local government officials to design a process among themselves that will somehow yield positive results—ones not only efficient or effective, but equitable. Where the field of planning has outpaced public administration is in its acknowledgement that values imbue our attempts at managing the world around us (Davidoff 1965; Rittel and Webber 1973), even the supposedly rational, objective, and value-free work of public officials. Healey notes the branch of planning concerned with policy analysis and choice has taken an argumentative, participatory, and communicative turn, and is now seeking “to incorporate greater understanding of how people come to have the ways of thinking and ways of valuing that they do” (2012: 229).

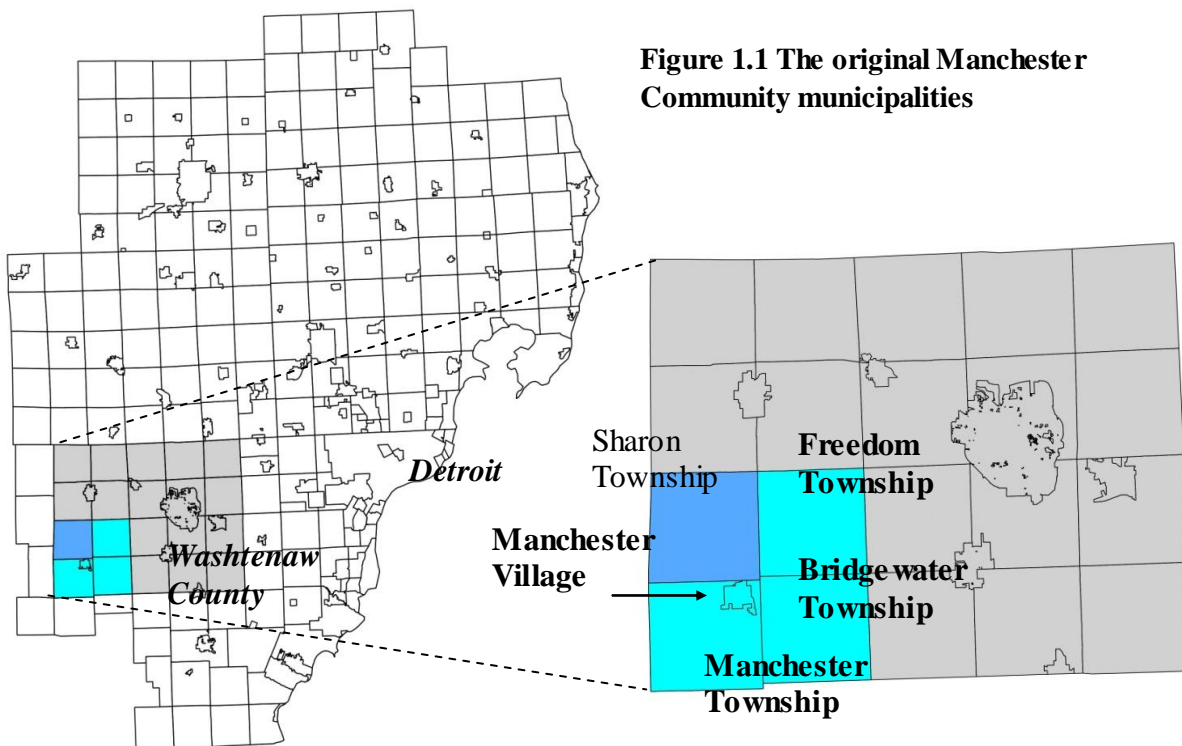
The present study, by focusing on cooperative land use planning, answers the need Jimenez and Hendrick (2010) identified of empirically testing the limits of voluntary cooperation as a tool for addressing difficult metropolitan problems. And it speaks to the turn in the field of planning toward further recognition of how people in policy processes think by directly probing preference formation and the cognitive processes behind interlocal cooperation. The study not only brings the dynamic of cultural argumentation into planning and policy processes, it also contributes empirical evidence that quantifies the relationships between governance preferences, political impulses, and cultural dispositions.

These higher level contributions to the field will be revisited in later chapters. At this early stage, a detailed example of interlocal land use cooperation will help orient the reader to

how it works in the real world. The example was a key motivation for this research, and illustrates well the contribution cultural cognition can make to the theoretical framework about interlocal cooperation.

*story about interlocal land use cooperation*

As one travels west by highway from Detroit, Michigan, a suburban mix of commerce and small lot single family residences yields to a pattern of farms and loosely scattered homes punctuated by smaller cities. About an hour from Detroit, though still within the metropolitan area, one reaches the downtown of Manchester Village. If one could see the lines of local government boundaries while driving, one would notice the transition from town to country happens roughly where the Village ends and—on all sides—Manchester Township begins. The



Village is tucked in the northeast corner of the Township, and is close to the borders of three other townships: Sharon, Freedom, and Bridgewater Townships. If one were to walk straight north from the Village's Main Street, within a mile or two one would have stepped on land planned and zoned by three different local governments. The same would be true if one headed due west or northwest (Figure 1.1).

Even though growth in the area is moderate (see Table 1.1), the westward march of sprawl from Detroit and Ann Arbor has been a concern. Recognizing the potential threat to their rural character, Manchester and three adjacent townships—Manchester, Bridgewater, and Freedom Townships, but not Sharon Township—entered into a joint planning agreement to create a regional master plan and the Manchester Community Joint Planning Commission (MCJPC) in 2007. The regional plan and joint planning commission would be legally toothless and purely advisory: the townships and village would retain autonomy in the decisions of their planning commissions and zoning boards of appeal. The agreement required ratification by each participating municipality, and was made pursuant to Michigan's Joint Municipal Planning Act (2003), the key legislative outcome from recommendations of the bipartisan Michigan Land Use Leadership Commission. Like other JMPA agreements, the one underlying the Manchester Community was facilitated by a preexisting regional body (the Southwest Washtenaw Council of Governments, SWWCOG) and assistance from an outside entity (the Land Information Access Association, LIAA). Prior cooperation through SWWCOG, well before involvement from LIAA, included an attempted joint plan in 2003 just before the JMPA's passage<sup>1</sup> as well as cooperation in some public works and public safety service delivery.

Table 1.1 shows key demographic and fiscal characteristics of the communities from the years around when the decisions about joint land use adoption (and later repeal, for some

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<sup>1</sup> Because the JMPA had not passed, the attempted joint plan had no legal effect.

communities) were being made. The townships exhibit remarkable homogeneity (especially relative to the variation exhibited statewide), and in the period before and after joint planning was under consideration—roughly 2007 to 2012—little if anything changed in the basic *comparative relationships* the municipalities had with one another on fiscal, demographic, and institutional dimensions.

**Table 1.1 Fiscal and demographic comparison of Manchester Community townships, 2000-2010**

	Sharon Township		Freedom Township		Bridgewater Township		Manchester Township	
JMPA outcome	never adopted		repeal		repeal		adopted	
COG member	yes		yes		yes		yes	
Demographic/ fiscal measures	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010
population	1,678	1,737	1,580	1,330	1,646	1,674	4,102	4,569
% pop. ≥62	11.5	20.0	11.8	18.6	11.9	19.5	14.0	18.4
% White	96.7	98.0	93.1	97.8	99.1	98.8	98.1	97.4
unemp. rate	1.2	4.2	2.6	5.5	1.9	3.7	2.3	4.5
mean hh. inc. (\$)	75,622	84,708	68,315	89,605	73,939	89,712	67,878	73,709
% hh owner-occupied	97.4	93.5	91.7	91.1	97.2	93.3	94.1	90.1
% units single family detached	96.0	99.6	89.3	92.8	93.0	99.5	75.0	79.8
med. housing value (\$)	170,900	248,500	203,600	266,900	158,800	240,400	147,600	195,400
% structures built, last 10 yrs	25.2	10.2	14.4	6.8	24.5	15.9	26.4	12.1
% hh moved in over last 10 yrs	50.5	19.8	47.9	33.6	55.1	35.1	57.5	50.9
Fiscal measures	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009
gen. fund revenue (\$)	267,134	264,095	251,887	278,959	490,118	463,747	623,766	660,527
gen. fund expenditures (\$)	---	248,435	307,222	250,858	436,793	428,252	537,140	671,009
taxable value (\$1,000)	92,418	90,892	93,995	93,910	86,602	87,178	196,581	190,688

From the perspective of an interlocal cooperation scholar, the Manchester Community had multiple key theoretical advantages.<sup>2</sup> It was being built on a pre-existing intermunicipal network capable of placing regional land use planning on the policy agenda. An objective third party actor was providing start-up assistance, both financial and administrative. All the municipalities were within the same county, and therefore faced the same legal framework. The

<sup>2</sup> I review the theoretical foundations of interlocal cooperation scholarship at length in Chapters 2 and 3.



four townships were all general law townships, with the same ability to generate tax revenue through property taxes, and the same allocation of taxes from the county coffers. The fiscal and demographic similarity, already mentioned, should have been a major advantage. Homogeneity both dampens the class and race cleavages that often stoke fears of redistribution or negative externalities from attempted cooperation, and increases the likelihood of successful negotiation because all cooperating parties should have similar goals.

Despite these advantages, joint land use planning for the Manchester Community proved difficult. Officials in Sharon Township, contrary to their municipality's participation in SWWCOG and cooperation in other service areas with neighboring communities, did not even vote on joining the MCJPC (Rudolph 2007). Citing an interest in retaining independence, the township supervisor noted that it was obvious which way a board vote would have gone (*Ibid.*). Another primarily agricultural and low density residential community, Bridgewater Township, formally adopted the joint planning agreement. But due to several concerns—a perceived loss of local autonomy, and the planned direction of future growth primarily to Manchester Village and Township—the Bridgewater Township supervisor moved for immediate withdrawal from the MCJPC in March of 2011 (Veselnak 2011).<sup>3</sup> Per withdrawal requirements under the joint agreement, Bridgewater Township held a public hearing at which residents also expressed mixed opinions about joint planning.<sup>4</sup> Some echoed the concerns of the opposing board members. Others noted the potential cost savings of regional planning. Eventually, the board voted four to one to adopt an ordinance rescinding its MCJPC membership.<sup>5</sup> Less than a year later, Freedom Township also left. While SWWCOG still covers five jurisdictions spanning 150 square miles,

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<sup>3</sup> Bridgewater Township Board of Trustees meeting minutes, Thursday, February 3, 2011., available at [https://twp-bridgewater.washtenaw.org/boards\\_commissions/board\\_of\\_trustees/minutes/2011/020311%20board%20minutes.pdf](https://twp-bridgewater.washtenaw.org/boards_commissions/board_of_trustees/minutes/2011/020311%20board%20minutes.pdf) (last accessed November 4, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

the Manchester Community—the extension of SWWCOG into land use planning—was by 2012 a single village and township covering about forty square miles.

While those studying interlocal cooperation regularly conceptualize and analyze it—logically—as an intermunicipal activity, municipalities are not unitary actors. The story of the Manchester Community highlights this reality. The municipal and intermunicipal variation in demographic, fiscal, interorganizational, and other institutional conditions usually put forward as explanations for variation in the adoption and repeal of cooperation simply did not exist in southwest Washtenaw County.

What the Manchester Community story *does* suggest, and what Table 1.2 further supports, is that a strong, individual narrative exists behind the variation in interlocal cooperation adoption and endurance. The repeal by Bridgewater Township happened after an election in which a majority of the legislative body changed, not due to electoral contests or partisan shifts but because three board members opted not to seek re-election. Two of the departing board members had voted to participate in the MCJPC in 2007. Following the 2008 election, the two township trustees who were eligible to be MCJPC representatives did not want to serve due to the three-two split in support for continued participation in regional planning among the township board.<sup>6</sup> Of those board members who had attended joint planning commission meetings during the past three years, two opposed remaining in the regional body while one was in favor of continued participation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Bridgewater Township Board of Trustees meeting minutes, Thursday, March 3, 2011, available at [https://twp-bridgewater.washtenaw.org/boards\\_commissions/board\\_of\\_trustees/minutes/2011/030311%20board%20minutes.pdf](https://twp-bridgewater.washtenaw.org/boards_commissions/board_of_trustees/minutes/2011/030311%20board%20minutes.pdf) (last accessed November 4, 2014).

**Table 1.2 Electoral change in Manchester Community townships, 2004-2008**

JMPA outcome	Sharon Township		Freedom Township		Bridgewater Township		Manchester Township	
	never adopted		repeal		repeal		adopted	
Elections	2004	2008	2004	2008	2004	2008	2004	2008
# <i>primary contests</i>	0/5	2/5	1/5	1/5	1/5	2/5	0/7	0/7
# <i>general elec. contests</i>	1/5	1/5	0/5	1/5	1/5	0/5	0/5	0/7
<b><i>uncontested turnover</i></b>	1/5	<b>2/5</b>	2/5	<b>2/5</b>	4/5	<b>3/5</b>	2/5*	<b>0/7</b>

Moreover, this individual narrative appears to have had limited political dimension to it. The change in leadership was not from one political party to another, and cooperation does not have an inherently partisan quality. One could advance sound conservative, liberal, and libertarian philosophical reasons for supporting or opposing interlocal cooperation in land use planning. In the five Manchester Community municipalities, no evidence exists showing a pattern of election or non-election based on elected officials’ votes for or against cooperation of any kind. The advisory structure of the MCJPC meant interference with local autonomy was limited, so any fear of “outsiders” making local decisions would be unfounded. In short, the usual mechanisms linking political turnover to policy change were absent.

The rise and fall of cooperation in the Manchester Community seems to have been less about fiscal, demographic, organizational, and political variation—the usual explanatory suspects—and more about variation in the mental processes through which each local elected official perceived interlocal land use cooperation.

*The current theoretical framework*

The prevailing framework for explaining cooperation or its absence is institutional collective action (ICA), and it would struggle to make sense of the outcomes in the Manchester Community. The motivating insight of the ICA framework is that ideas about collective action

among individuals extend readily to organizations, including local governments (Feiock 2004). The word *institutional* is not simply a synonym for organizational. It acknowledges, too, that the underlying logic of the framework is grounded in *rational choice institutionalism*. In rational choice institutionalism,<sup>8</sup> scholars model and predict the behavior of individuals by looking at the structure of institutions. Once one understands enough about a situation, one can choose a model of the rational individual actor, and then figure out how events will unfold based on the constraints imposed by and strategies suggested by institutions. Studies of interlocal cooperation tend to regard local officials as rational actors whose interests align with those of the municipality because they function as its representatives—as agents of the local public interest embodied in the preferences of residents who function as principals. When the institutional context varies, one expects the choices of the rational individual to vary with it. The repeal in Bridgewater Township in 2011, for example, should have tracked a change in the township’s institutional position compared either to the other municipalities or to its own history.

Consider the multiple mechanisms that must function properly for individual-institutional alignment to occur. One possibility is that a local elected official is something of a technocrat who defines serving the public interest as maintaining the municipality’s fiscal and economic well being. Such an actor would have to be remarkably well informed about the municipality’s fiscal and economic changes to recognize when a change in governance is leading to a negative outcome, or is likely to do so. Another possibility, probably more likely, is that a local elected official functions as a political animal who regards re-election as a high-powered incentive. An electoral mechanism requires first that residents be able to discern a clear difference in outcomes between cooperation and the status quo, and recognize these differences as imposing some net benefit or cost to their households. These residents must also be able to signal their approval or

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<sup>8</sup> A fuller treatment of rational choice theories and some of the models based on them is reserved for Chapter 2.

disapproval, either through voice (e.g., voting) or exit (e.g., moving away). The elected official must receive this signal clearly, and be able to sort it from competing signals. The preference of the median voter (or some variation on it) must be clear and unambiguous.<sup>9</sup> Under either the technocratic or political scenario, the local elected official must reconcile any conflict between the public interest (whether municipal well being or perceived voter will) and his own personal ideology in favor of the former.

Part of why the mechanisms underlying individual-institutional alignment have not been subject to empirical testing—at least not for interlocal cooperation decisions—is that their *conceptual* strength is very high for cooperative provision of systems maintenance functions such as public works and public safety, which are also the typical target of interlocal cooperation. The usual goal of such cooperation is greater efficiency, and this efficiency is reflected in lower taxes or fees. An individual household, one can safely assume, approves of paying less money for the same level of service. And the public as a whole gets on the efficiency bandwagon so long as it does not carry any costly unintended consequences. A single administrative actor such as a city manager—not an elected official—is involved in the day-to-day maintenance and evaluation of the joint contract. While some uncertainty still exists because the actions of a partner producer or provider are not fully predictable and because changeable conditions may require future renegotiation, much of this can be dealt with through the language of a formal contract or the normative pressures of past and future dealing. At the very least, one can soundly reason that an elected official being asked to ratify a joint contract for service delivery would have remarkable clarity about the costs and benefits of that agreement.

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<sup>9</sup> The electoral mechanism described is similar to that suggested by Fischel's well known "homevoter hypothesis" (2005), which I discuss more in Chapter 3.

Now recall the Manchester story and consider how different land use planning is from service delivery. No single, apolitical criterion like efficiency exists by which to judge whether cooperative land use planning is having positive or negative effects. It is a policy area rife with trade-offs. Even if one were to simply depend, for example, on property value as a guiding star one is likely to find intramunicipal variation in the effects of development decisions. Moreover, tracing positive outcomes to cooperation may not always be clear, especially in the short term. Public officials frequently disagree about land use policy, as do residents. And where efficient service delivery is something expected in any municipality as one facet of government effectiveness, land use goes to the very heart of what it means to have local autonomy. The divided votes about adoption and repeal in the municipalities in the Manchester Community, and the mix of opinions among residents in public meetings, demonstrate the potential for ideological division. The same would be true of any of the policies—affordable housing, transportation accessibility, or tax redistribution come to mind—that have proved difficult to target through regional governance. Whenever uncertainty about the costs and benefits of cooperation proliferates and ideology enters the picture, assuming public officials are rational actors whose interests align with the institutional context is at best conceptually inadequate. Getting inside the mind of the local official becomes essential.

### *The process of cultural cognition applied to governance decisions*

The positive argument in this study, then, is that variation in the mental processes of individuals is critical for understanding interlocal cooperation as an approach to meaningful regional governance. Mental processes are not a replacement for institutional processes. Both are

necessary for explaining outcomes, and it would be reasonable to view them as complementary based on the discussion so far. The institutional context informs which mental processes are likely to provide sound behavioral responses. In a highly structured environment where the institutional context provides certainty and minimizes risk, or can at least be marshaled for such purposes, rational economic opportunism can flourish. But where the institutional context is weak, uncertainty and risk allow bias and value to more readily dominate mental processes.

Among the many theoretical possibilities for injecting mental processes into the study of interlocal cooperation, cultural cognition—the mechanism advanced in this study—is ideal because it is about how actors deal with uncertainty and risk (Kahan and Braman 2006), which I view as central to regional governance through interlocal cooperation. Though the appearance of cultural cognition as a term is fairly recent, the mechanism draws on well known sociological and psychometric perspectives. Through a cultural cognition mechanism, individuals attend to those risks that are more threatening to their core *disposition* (also known as a cultural way of life), which reflects preferences about *social relations* and *values*. All of these elements—social relations, values, the overall disposition—align and cohere. Psychometry provides a way to measure cultural disposition via survey to ascertain how strongly someone is disposed toward *solidarity* and *equality* (Slovic 1992). Those who value solidarity are termed *high group (communitarians)*; those who do not are *low group (individualists)*. Those who value equality are termed *low grid (egalitarians)*; their counterparts are *high grid (hierarchs)*. This typological breakdown reflects a version of *grid-group cultural theory*, a theory which suggests that individuals are culturally *rational*, meaning that they seek preservation of their core values in their social relations (Douglas and Wildavsky 1983). Through a process of cultural cognition, actors amplify and diminish risks based on which are, respectively, more and less threatening to

their cultural alignment. People are not simply risk-averse or risk-tolerant, nor are they rational or irrational. Rather, they are culturally tolerant of non-threatening risks.

Applied to local elected officials considering interlocal cooperation in land use, one could conceptualize the alternative methods of governance—cooperation or autonomy, with some variations existing between these two options—as each presenting uncertainty that translates into a menu of negative risks. The theoretical characterizations and empirical measurement of the grid and group dimensions allow us to infer which cultural types will amplify the risks associated with cooperation over land use, and which types will diminish these risks. The same logic can be applied to autonomy (the lack of cooperation). I refer to this process of amplifying and diminishing the risks of governance as the *cultural cognition of governance*, and I develop hypotheses based on this process in Chapter 3. This study, then, is an early test of the cultural cognition of governance through the description and modeling of the preferences of local elected officials toward interlocal cooperation in land use planning.

## *Conclusion*

Interlocal cooperation is pervasive in the United States. It exists alongside top down and voluntary regional entities in many metropolitan areas, and is an activity of most municipalities in one or more policy areas. Some scholars have been able to diagram elaborate networks of cooperation, particularly in public works and public safety services. Such *ad hoc* cooperation is the backbone of metropolitan governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While interlocal cooperation has a much lower profile in studies of regionalism, particularly compared to the handful of consolidated and centralized forms of regional government that exist, it is likely to be pivotal in the continuing attempts to solve regional problems in the midst of enduring local autonomy and



fragmentation, and in the wake of a foreclosure crisis and Great Recession that left many local governments reeling.

Interlocal cooperation informs two well known theoretical traditions. The first is the debate between metropolitan reformers and public choice advocates. The second is the transition from comprehensive, synoptic rational planning to pluralist processes of participation, dialog, and argumentation. Studying the limits of interlocal collective action speaks to how well metropolitan regions can manage the uncertainty of the future by relying on communicative, ground-up processes rather than top-down impositions.

The success of such processes relies heavily on the relationships among and perceptions of individuals, and in Chapter 2 the discussion turns to how studies of interlocal cooperation have traditionally modeled individual actors and why this approach is likely not adequate for all contexts and policy areas, including land use planning. In Chapter 3, I develop the cultural cognition of governance hypothesis. Atop this theoretical foundation, in the second half of the dissertation I design a study for examining the mechanism of cultural cognition alongside other institutional and external factors, and present findings.

## Chapter 2. Rationality in Studies of Interlocal Cooperation

*“Nothing is more fundamental in setting our research agenda and informing our research methods than our view of the nature of the human beings whose behavior we are studying.”*—Herbert Simon (1985: 303)

*“Social scientists have to match their initial assumptions about the orientations of participants to the situation they are trying to understand and explain.”*—Elinor Ostrom (2005: 119)

### *Introduction*

In Chapter 1, I described how interlocal cooperation is unique among the many ways that local governments fulfill their responsibilities, and also unique among the diverse ways in which metropolitan problems are governed. Because it is one choice among many, the goal of interlocal cooperation studies has been figuring out *why* that choice is made—why in some contexts it is more likely to occur than the many other available options. As I noted in Chapter 1, the prevailing interpretation of that question has been *under what institutional circumstances does the outcome of cooperation occur?*, and the answer has required studying variation in characteristics measured at the municipal and intermunicipal level. But underneath the institutional question is another one: *under what circumstances do individuals who represent municipalities—and function within varying institutional circumstances—prefer cooperation?*

In this chapter I explain in more detail why this latter question is important to studies of interlocal cooperation. I begin by exploring what it means to be rational and engage in rational action. Theories of rationality are central to the social sciences. If one wants to generalize about

the individuals studied in one situation to those in other contexts or in the future, then one must be clear about how one is modeling those individuals. What are the assumptions made about how individuals think and behave? I connect this discussion to the notion of rational choice institutionalism mentioned in Chapter 1, in particular to two expressions of that tradition mentioned in studies of interlocal cooperation: the institutional analysis and development (IAD) framework and the actor-centered institutionalism (ACI) framework.

I then turn to the idea of transaction cost economizing, a type of institutional rationality that has motivated the development of hypotheses in most studies of interlocal cooperation. I argue the logic of transaction cost economics has earned at best mixed support in extant empirical work, and—more problematically—is difficult to conceptually reconcile with the reality of interlocal cooperation.

### *Theories of rationality*

*Rational action* is selection by actors among alternative courses of action in accordance with assumptions about rationality that depend on situational attributes. When I use the term *actor* in this section, I am referring solely to individual human beings, not to aggregate, corporate, or collective actors, as these units are incapable of engaging in actual choice. The first major tenet of rational choice theory is based on the principle of *optimizing*.<sup>10</sup> In optimizing theory, the basic or unconstrained model is one in which actors are certain of the consequences of all *possible* actions. If one were to characterize the chance of a consequence following an action, the probability would always be one ( $p = 1$ ). All actors have perfect (or complete) information about these action-consequence links. Actors also have a consistent cardinal utility

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<sup>10</sup> Many accounts of optimizing theory are available; I refer the reader to Harsanyi (1977) and Dixit and Skeath (1999) for highly detailed descriptions.

function in which utility is defined by material self-interest. The invariability of preferences—that they always orient to material self-interest and are unchanging—is not strictly necessary for rational choice, but it is a simplifying assumption adopted nearly universally. Choices are the result of calculative optimization of material, self-interested utility.

The evolution of rational choice models away from the unconstrained, basic model was an attempt to bring the abstract rational actor closer to that existing in the real world through a series of relaxations of unrealistically strict assumptions. For example, most situations of choice are marked by risk or uncertainty rather than complete certainty (Harsanyi 1977: Chapter 2). Risk, in rational choice discussions, is when probabilities of consequences are known but less than one ( $p < 1$ ). Uncertainty is when these probabilities are unknown or unknowable ( $p = ?$ ). This adaptation resulted in models with *expected* utility.

Another relaxation was in the area of optimization itself. Facing objections that the calculations necessary for true rational choice were prohibitive in light of the limited capacity of most decision makers in real world settings, Friedman and others advanced an “as if” hypothesis: individuals do not make rational choice optimizing calculations in most cases, but behave as if they are doing so. This was the foundation of the Chicago (or American) school (Friedman and Savage 1948; Friedman 1953). Others promoted models of constrained optimization (e.g., (Stigler 1961; Anderson and Milson 1989), in which actors do not look at the universe of all possible action but stop searching for information about alternatives once the benefits of continued search outweigh costs. It is worth noting that even in the original unconstrained model the external environment plays at least a theoretical role: it structures the decision situation and places limits on which actions are possible. However, the interpretation of possibility could still be wildly complex, since rules can be broken, convention contravened, and facts ignored. In

other words, much of the external environment—particularly its institutional features—is not immutable.

While optimizing rational choice theory has changed in some ways, it has remained quite consistent in its treatment of preferences, which are either unobservable, irrelevant, or both. However, utility, in its original Benthamite conceptualization, *was* a psychic reality: that which brought utility to one actor did not necessarily bring it to another. If one were to chart the process of taking an action, one would start within the mind and then finally arrive at the selection of an alternative as an expressed behavioral outcome. The process moves from preference formation to choice. The optimizing models describe the logic of choice—they work at the terminal end of the process. For Friedman, individuals who failed to act as if they were optimizers would be excluded, in a natural selection-like process, from the market. Whatever happened within the mind was only relevant in that it distinguished those who were rational from those who were irrational.

The major turn from optimizing models and the Chicago school began with Allais, who used an experimental approach to directly observe preferences that violated the assumptions of strategic expected utility. One response to these findings was adjustment of the utility function (see Hey (1991) for a summary of studies), which one can regard as yet another relaxation of the basic model. The shift continued in the work of Simon (e.g., Cyert, Simon, and Trow 1956) and Tversky and Kahnemann (1974; 1981), who explicitly included mental processes in their research. They used experimental methods to further test—and find questionable—the assumptions of strategic expected utility (for a summary, see Camerer (2003)).

The problem with optimization theory, in the view of this scholarship, was that it “finesse[d] completely the origins of the values that enter into the utility function...[and]

finesse[d] just as completely the processes for ascertaining the facts of the present and future states of the world” (Simon 1990: 14). The alternative was a behavioral model of rationality as a mental process. The analytical focus, accordingly, shifted from the *logic of choice* to the *psychology of valuation* of the bounded processes of search and selection.

Under bounded rationality, one assumes that individuals do not attempt to optimize or are not necessarily consistent across all situations and over time; even the actors within a single situation are not necessarily following the same model of rational choice (Simon 1991). Simon’s vision of bounded rationality has at its core two limitations: those of the human mind (cognitive), and those of the surrounding environment (ecological) (Simon 1990). Regarding the first, people are serial processors limited in their time, energy, knowledge, capacity to learn, and the like; regarding the second, situations can be ill-defined, information can be imperfect, and links between actions and consequences can be vague. Actors, therefore, cannot optimize but “must use approximate methods” (Simon 1990: 6). These methods can be generally thought of as heuristics, of which *satisficing* (setting a well defined aspiration, and taking actions to achieve it) is the most well known and most often associated with bounded rationality (Simon 1990). Other “rules of thumb” are possible. Cognitive and ecological limitations are related: heuristics tend to be adopted that have performed well in past iterations of the same situation or in similar situations. One can identify heuristics and understand why they work (or not) only with awareness of the attributes of the external environment.

For Simon, and for others following the logic of bounded rationality, the psychology of choice is inherently social: the values with which individuals focus attention, the alternatives of which they are aware, and their understanding of the links between actions and consequences “derive from [their] interaction with the social environment” (*Ibid.* at 75). It is this social

environment that prevents bounded rationality from sliding into unbridled subjectivity and idiosyncratic explanations. Institutions are a key source of regularity and stability in the social environment. The definition of institutions by North (1992: 4) describes how I use the term: “the humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic, and social interactions. They are composed of both formal rules (statute law, common law, regulations), informal constraints (conventions, norms of behavior, and self-imposed rules of behavior); and the enforcement characteristics of both.” Institutions are durable, even after the circumstances that gave rise to them no longer exist. Ostrom breaks down institutions, similarly, into *norms* and *rules* (1998, 2005), many of which attach to the role an actor holds in an organization. Even the market or quasi-market setting in which optimization occurs “takes place within an intricate environment of institutions” (Simon 1983: 78). Rather than look to the assumptions of classic rational choice models as a way to reduce variation, the investigator can instead look to institutions for this task (Scharpf 1997). If the rules and norms are well known enough to shape an actor’s choice calculus, then they should leave evidence an outsider can observe.

For each model of rational choice, one must specify three assumptions. According to Ostrom, one must decide (1) “the way that participants acquire, process, represent, retain, and use *information*”; (2) “the *valuation* that participants assign to actions and outcomes”; and (3) “the processes (maximizing, satisficing, or using [other] diverse heuristics) that participants use for *selecting* particular actions or strategic chains of actions in light of their resources” (2005: 103). Any theory of the actor requires an *information-valuation-selection* specification. These models need not be mutually exclusive within the actors or organizations in a single area of inquiry (Cyert, Simon, and Trow 1956: 238):

“Decisions in organizations vary widely with respect to the extent to which the decision-making process is programmed. At one extreme we have repetitive, well defined problems... involving tangible considerations, to which the economic models that call for finding the best among a set of pre-established alternatives can be applied rather literally. In contrast to these highly programmed and usually rather detailed decisions are problems of a non-repetitive sort, often involving basic long-range questions about the whole strategy of the firm or some part of it, arising initially in a highly unstructured form and requiring [other] search processes.”

Ostrom (2005: 102-104), similarly, notes the heterogeneity of situations, and that different assumptions will be necessary: “which assumption (or assumptions) one changes and the particular assumptions made depend on the situation to be explained.”

### *Revisiting rational choice institutionalism*

Studies of interlocal cooperation draw insights from the actor-centered institutionalism (ACI) and institutional analysis and development (IAD) frameworks (Feiock and Scholz 2009; Feiock 2007, 2009; Andersen and Pierre 2010). The IAD framework is most fully articulated in Ostrom’s *Understanding Institutional Diversity* (2005). A much earlier article co-written with Larry Kiser is also instructive (Kiser and Ostrom 1982). In the review of rational choice theory, I already noted that Ostrom did not specify a rational choice model, but noted three mechanisms the investigator would have to specify in order to “animate an institutional analysis”: information, valuation, and selection (2005: 103). She acknowledged that situations can have incomplete or partial information, that the distribution of information may be asymmetric, that the extent of repetition may vary, that individuals may cycle in and out, and that one may need to examine “how individuals view risk, uncertainty, and information asymmetries and how they react to the actions and perceived attributes of other participants” (2009: 102). The bulk of the



IAD framework, however, is about the world external to actors; actors are simply one component (called *participants*) in it (Ostrom 2005: 13, 15).

Much of the scholarship working from an IAD framework focuses, not surprisingly, on institutions. It would be easy to interpret the IAD framework as structuralist, but the appeal of the framework is that it gives attention to the institutional (and broader external) environment as it is experienced by individuals. Kiser and Ostrom (1982: 180-181) offer clarity on this point:

[The] framework focuses on the scholarly work in political science and economics that uses a micro-institutional approach to the analysis of political phenomena. The microinstitutional approach is “micro” because it starts from the individual as a *basic unit of analysis* to explain and predict individual behavior and resulting aggregated outcomes. It is an “institutional” approach because major explanatory variables include the set of institutional arrangements that individuals use to affect the incentive systems of a social order and the impact of incentive systems on human behavior.

Ostrom is clear that institutions matter, but that they are far from fully explanatory: “[t]he focus on the components of institutions... should not be interpreted to mean that... institutions are the *only* factor affecting outcomes in all action situations” (2005: 29).

Though the quote from Kiser and Ostrom above uses the word individual, the participants in an action situation can be individual or corporate. The investigator can treat corporate participants as if they were individuals—as if the organization and individual were intrinsically linked and those linkages did not require investigation—but this is not always appropriate. “[F]or some purposes, one may ignore the linked situations—especially, when the interests of the organization, and thus the strategy it will follow, are very clear and unlikely to change.... Alternatively, one may self-consciously examine the linked structure” (Ostrom 2005: 38). Part of this linked structure is the attributes of individual participants, who “bring a diversity of ascribed or acquired characteristics to any situation. These characteristics may not influence

their actions in some situations, while having a major impact on others” (2005: 40). Some characteristics may affect the processing of information, such as “feedback from the world and the shared culture or belief system in which an individual is embedded” that shape an individual’s “mental model” (*Ibid.* 105). Others may affect valuation, include emotions and norms, and “little empirical support exists for an assumption that *all* individuals value *only* the material outcomes that flow only to them” (*Ibid.* 110). The unpacking of the nature of the individual actors within a corporate “actor” follows the reasoning of Simon, who remarked in a discussion of the role of rationality in organizations “that it is *sometimes* possible to say a great deal about aggregate components without specifying the details of the phenomena going on within these components” (1991: 126). Other times, however, this is not possible.

Actor centered institutionalism arose in Europe and is slightly different in its specification and terminology, but it presents a similar view of individuals, organizations and institutions (Scharpf 1997). Ostrom cites Scharpf several times in her tome on the IAD framework (2005), and Scharpf, likewise, notes that Ostrom and others also worked with awareness of “the need to combine actor-centered and institutional-centered approaches in an integrated framework” and draw together “action-theoretic or rational-choice and institutionalist or structuralist paradigms, which, in the confrontation between ‘economic’ and ‘sociological’ theories, are conventionally treated as being mutually exclusive” (Scharpf 1997: 36).

Scharpf confronts divergent “actor orientations” directly: “[i]t is not in the real world but in the actor’s mental image of the world that the attribution of causes and expected effects must be located; and actions are motivated not by actors’ objective interests but by their subjective preferences” (*Ibid.* 60). He treats at length the circumstances when one may adopt the assumption that a plurality of individuals can be treated as an actor (*Ibid.* 51-60). For a

composite unit to have the capacity for “strategic action” one must find “preexisting convergence...of (policy-relevant) perceptions and preferences among the (policy-relevant) members...[and] capacity for conflict resolution (*Ibid.* 59). Knowing the role of an individual actor can allow inferences about the rules and norms that actor would follow, but one “must remain alert to the possibility that individual self-interest, or the idiosyncratic orientations of individuals (which are never quite absent in any case), may in fact become so important in the case at hand that our explanations will fail if we do not take them into account.” (*Ibid.* 62).

Institutions receive a treatment similar to that in the IAD framework: they provide stability and regularity, and much of what one would need to know to explain outcomes can be found in institutions. But the constraints are not absolute. “Even binding rules may be violated by actors who are willing to pay the price of sanctions being applied or who subjectively discount their incidence. More generally, the influence of institutions on perceptions and preferences, and hence on intentions, can never be complete” (*Ibid.* at 42). Cognitive orientations, preferences, identity, and norms all play a role. Echoing a key point by Ostrom and Simon, quoted above, about individuals responding to different cues in different situations, Scharpf remarks “there will be choice situations for which neither self-interest nor generally held normative expectations will provide clear-cut guidelines” and actors “may selectively emphasize certain aspects of self-interest as well as certain rules and normative purposes from among those that generally apply to...their type” (*Ibid.* 65).

The takeaway message of the two frameworks, as is the case in any employing rational choice institutionalism as a perspective, is that the investigator must be aware that institutional context will go a long way toward explaining individual level outcomes, but not all the way. One sees a clear awareness in both the IAD and ACI frameworks of meaningful variation in the

mental processes of the individual. The frameworks approach the treatment of this variation with flexibility. The information-valuation-selection mechanisms can be assumed or studied directly, and the corporate or composite actor can be treated as an actor or not. But these choices must be made with care. I return to this point later in the chapter.

### *Rational choice in studies of interlocal collective action*

The preceding discussion provided a basic outline of the three components necessary for a rational actor model, and an appreciation of the flexibility found in two expressions of rational choice institutionalism—the IAD and ACI frameworks. It also demonstrated that the universe of what is *rational* continues to expand with improved understanding of the mental processes and real world choices of actors. The boundary is not a Friedman-esque distinction between the rational and the irrational, but rather between different forms of rationality adjusted to best describe the actors in a situation. With this foundation in place, I now turn to the rational actor model most common in studies of interlocal cooperation to discern whether it is a good fit for elected officials in local government and, most important for this study, for local elected officials considering land use cooperation. The discussion draws mainly on studies and edited volumes working within the institutional collective action (ICA) framework, but also touches on other important work that does not explicitly use ICA terminology (or predated that term). This literature can be thought of as expressing a theme with variations: it almost universally relies on a basic conceptual sketch of how local actors think and act, and then uses myriad variables, measurements, study areas, and units of analysis to complete the portrait.

In the next sections, I review how interlocal cooperation scholars conceptualize rational choice among local governments as a transaction among firms. I review the transaction cost

theory integral to this understanding. Then, I summarize the core propositions about how an actor behaves, and the way in which these are tested in empirical research. Finally, I evaluate the empirical and conceptual support for the current framework and consider its ability to extend to interlocal cooperation in land use. This all serves as a prelude to Chapter 3, in which I present an alternative approach to understanding the interlocal cooperation decision.

### *Interlocal cooperation as a transaction*

The dominant approach in studies of interlocal cooperation is to analogize the local government to a firm considering the decision whether to deliver a service on its own (self production and/or provision) or contract with another marketplace participant (a municipality or private firm) for delivery. Feiock (2007: 48) developed “a rational choice explanation for interlocal cooperation... in which agreements occur where net benefits exceed the transaction costs of bargaining.” In a later paper he remarks that “the governance preference of local government actors will depend on the nature of the problem as well as transaction costs they face” (2009: 366). *Transaction cost* is something of an umbrella concept: the “characteristics of goods, the geographic, social, and demographic position of communities, the structure of local government political institutions, and the structure of the policy networks determine the scope of... transaction cost problems and the ability of local leaders to overcome them” (Feiock 2007: 53). These structural attributes are often grouped according to which type of transaction cost they are thought to affect, including information or coordination costs, negotiation or division costs, enforcement or monitoring costs, and agency costs (Feiock 2007; Inman and Rubinfeld 2000). Other attributes describe the benefits—whether collective or selective—against which costs are weighed. Many authors concur with these ideas. For example, Andrew, in describing his use of

the ICA framework, notes it is a “perspective on the formation of contractual ties according to the transaction risks associated with specific kinds of goods and services” (2008: 2). An earlier article on local government service production decisions, and one that continues to serve as a touchstone for studies of interlocal cooperation across many policy areas, states that “[a]lthough the transaction costs approach has traditionally been applied to private firms’ decisions about internal production and outsourcing, it can also help explain governments’ service production decisions” (Brown and Potoski 2003: 443). Social network ties, too, are woven into the transaction cost framework. Feiock (2007) develops transaction cost propositions about bridging and bonding ties, and LeRoux et al. state the ICA framework “posits that the transaction costs of cooperation can be mitigated by networks and networking among local government actors” (2010: 270). Carr et al. (2009: 404) remark “networks of local government officials play an important role in reducing transaction costs.... Moreover, some types of network participation may help offset risks created by service transactions with highly specific assets and measurement difficulty.”

While not every study of interlocal cooperation uses the terminology of transaction cost economics, it is nearly ubiquitous. The frequency of reference to it suggests the approach has been widely accepted. To better understand the analogy of the local government in a metropolitan area to a firm in a market setting, it is necessary first to understand the object of comparison. What is the logic of transaction cost economics or transaction cost theory?

### *Transaction cost economics*

Transaction cost economics began development in the 1970s as part of a New Institutional Economics program (e.g., Coase 1937, 1960; Davis et al. 1971; North et al. 1981; Williamson 1996; Riordan and Williamson 1985), which adopted the theory of the firm as an

organizational governance structure in place of the theory of the firm as a production function. Transaction cost economics is part of the tradition of rational choice institutionalism (Shepsle 1989). It is an approach that applies to any issue capable of formulation as a contracting problem. Williamson describes transaction cost economics as favoring bounded rationality (being intendedly rational but only limitedly so, per Simon), because “all complex contracts are unavoidably incomplete” (1999: 1089). Individuals are not myopic but have foresight, and are not simply self-interested but are strategically opportunistic. The *transaction* is the unit of analysis, as one would expect, and costs arise due to *frequency*, *uncertainty*, and *asset specificity* (*Ibid.*).

The *method of governing the transaction* (hierarchy, hybrid, or market) is the outcome of interest (Williamson 1985: 1). Market governance occurs where there is no relationship of dependency outside the contract and the identity of the parties does not matter; the buyer and seller can each be replaced by others in the marketplace. Hybrid governance occurs when some degree of bilateral dependence is present, and identity matters because replacement with another buyer or seller would be costly. Hierarchy occurs with vertical integration, when governance is brought in-house within the firm. If following a transaction cost analysis, one is attentive not to the actual buyer and seller but rather to the *relationship* between them with regard to a specific good or service. Therefore, one could not say *ex ante* that a transaction had high costs simply by knowing the characteristics of the buyer and seller, or the nature of the good or service.

While Simon argues individuals exist in a pervasively organizational economy where failures are dealt with by resort to the market (Simon 1991), Williamson takes the prevailing view of organizations as a response to market failures, and sees opportunistic attitudes and behaviors as the driving failure. “[O]ne productive way to think about economic organization is

as a means by which to economize on bounded rationality and mitigate the hazards that accrue to opportunism” (1999: 1090). The transaction cost approach regards the firm (the non-market) solution as a last resort. When investments made in a market transaction are asset specific (i.e., they cannot be redeployed to alternative uses or users) or infrequent or uncertain, this creates risks in the absence of security features provided by rules in the play of the game (Williamson 1998: 27-28).

Williamson regarded asset specificity, how specific an invested asset is to a particular transaction, as the most important of three characteristics of goods. Uncertainty and frequency matter, but they matter *only if* asset specificity is not low. Asset specificity is about redeployability: can the investment (which can be physical, human, and even social capital) be invested *as efficiently* in another transaction on the market? It is not about how capital intensive an investment is. A small, non-intensive investment can be highly asset specific, while a large, intensive investment can have low asset specificity. Asset specificity is essential to the distinction of the transaction cost approach from a (neo)classical one.

The features of goods are viewed in combination with transaction costs. For example, one would only begin to look at the costs of negotiation and bargaining in the case of high asset specificity. If asset specificity is low, the investments in the transaction can be redeployed readily to another exchange relationship. If asset specificity is high, redeployment is foreclosed and the parties will incur the many costs of contract hazard to maintain the bilateral exchange relationship. But this will occur only up to the point when these costs—the transaction costs—are greater than the likely costs of moving the transaction in-house.

Thus, vertical integration within the firm is a solution, but *only if* the bureaucratic transaction costs of this mode (relative to the arm’s length contract transaction costs of markets



or hybrid options) do not outweigh the benefits of risk reduction from no longer interacting on the market. The selection of governance is efficient if no feasible alternative can be implemented with expected net gains (benefits less costs). This core proposition is known as the *discriminating alignment hypothesis* (Williamson 1991: 277): whichever governance type minimizes transaction costs is the preferred option.

To summarize transaction cost theory, one can think about how the different pieces—the three characteristics of a good, the costs of maintaining a contractual exchange relationship, and the costs of producing a good through hierarchy (in-house)—interact to yield predictions about the selection of market, hybrid, or firm. David and Han (2004: 41) provide a succinct list which I paraphrase here. First, as investments become more *specific* to a transaction, the risk of incurring contractual costs (renegotiation, legal recourse, etc.) necessary to maintain that relationship becomes higher, and eventually surpasses the risk of incurring bureaucratic costs (human resources, supervision, etc.) from in-house production (i.e., as asset specificity increases, transaction costs of the market option increase, and hierarchy becomes the best option). Second, when specific investments have been made in a transaction, *uncertainty* at high levels will make in-house production preferable (i.e., if asset specificity exists, then increasing uncertainty will lead to preference for hierarchy). Third, when specific investments have been made in a transaction, increasing *frequency* of the transaction will require constant monitoring and eventually make market costs higher than in-house production costs. Note that uncertainty and frequency do not matter with low asset specificity because the failure of a market contract is not costly in that situation—even a highly uncertain and frequent one will still be less costly than the costs of producing in-house.

This may seem like a long sojourn into the mechanics of transaction cost economics, but it is because scholarship on interlocal cooperation is bound up intricately with this theory. Hopefully, the reader now has a clearer sense of how the rational choice model in transaction cost economics—and by extension in studies of interlocal cooperation—differs from those presented earlier. In the next sections, I summarize the basic propositions about interlocal cooperation that flow from this approach. There is no clear structure in the literature for how these different propositions are grouped, and so I impose my own. I first look at municipal level economic considerations and then move to individual level social and political benefits.

### *The municipal calculus: economic considerations*

In what I term the municipal calculus, benefits and costs are appraised at the municipal or intermunicipal level, and are always economic. In this subsection I describe first the joint benefits that must be available for cooperation to even be considered. I then discuss two transaction characteristics of the services targeted for cooperation—asset specificity and measurability. Finally, I detail how various intermunicipal and intramunicipal characteristics are thought to affect transaction costs.

### *Collective benefits / joint gains*

A general proposition is that *the larger the municipal gains from resolving a problem, the greater the likelihood of cooperation* (Feiock 2007: 49). Gains include improving efficiency, accessing economies of scale, capturing positive spillovers, and avoiding negative ones. Feiock, Steinacker, and Park (2009) refer to the possibility for joint gains, and reason that the larger the relative benefits from interlocal cooperation, the more likely it is compared to other options.

Other authors speak simply of economic and fiscal gains, an approach consistent with the notion of collective benefits (e.g., LeRoux and Carr 2009: 347).

To figure out whether interlocal cooperation over systems maintenance functions is more likely in a community based on collective benefits, the most common approach is to consider fiscal distress. Municipalities with low capacity or high distress are thought to have more to gain from cooperation, typically because of cost savings from scale economies. Andrew notes “[a] longstanding presumption among scholars is that adoption of [interlocal cooperation] is often motivated by fiscal stress in local government” (2006: 136-137). Studying joint ventures in economic development, which is the closest policy area to land use found in the literature that uses the collective benefits logic, Feiock, Steinacker, and Park (2009) measured distress by whether a city is predominantly residential and has access to sales tax, and through three survey measures (perceived level of economic growth, self-rated emphasis on economic development, and targeting of large businesses). It is unclear how these measures capture the idea of a collective benefit, since nothing about working together is inherently an improvement over the status quo. Indeed, a municipality that cares about economic development (as these variables generally measure) might do better by working alone and retaining a competitive advantage. Other examples of variables capturing some dimension of fiscal stress are: income per capita and the share of expenditures devoted to public works (LeRoux and Carr 2007); per capita own-source revenue and per capita intergovernmental grants (Shrestha and Feiock 2011a); and population growth and level of tax revenues (Carr, LeRoux, and Shrestha 2009). The explanatory power of these fiscal distress measures is mixed, as it is for those from earlier studies (Bartle and Swayze 1997; Morgan and Hirlinger 1991).

The presence of a collective benefit is a threshold requirement. As Feiock, et al. (2009: 258) note, “[t]he necessary condition for any cooperative agreement is an increase in benefits, and the larger that gain, the more likely it will outweigh the transaction costs necessary to achieve it.” The characteristics of services and the municipal context are the source of many of the costs thought to balance the municipal level benefits.

### *Characteristics of services*

Two characteristics of goods are considered important to how local government officials use transaction cost reasoning. The first is asset specificity; the second, measurability or meterability. These correspond, roughly, to asset specificity and uncertainty as described in the section on transaction cost economics. Brown and Potoski (2003) were influential in drawing service characteristics into studies of interlocal cooperation. In their work, they described asset specificity as the “degree of specialized investments...that apply to the production of one service but are very difficult to adapt for the production of other services” such that “if a government decides to contract for such a service, it is more likely that only the selected vendor will be available in future rounds of contracting” (*Ibid.* 466). A service was easily measurable if it was “straightforward to monitor the activities required to deliver the service and to identify performance measures that accurately represent the quantity and quality of the service” (*Ibid.*). Based on surveys from 36 city managers and mayors, the authors calculated the average asset specificity and measurability “score” for 64 services. The most asset specific services were “disposal of hazardous materials” and “operation of airports” while the least were “secretarial services” and “buildings and grounds maintenance.” The most easily measured were “tax bill processing” and “payroll” while the most difficult were “drug and alcohol treatment” and

“operation of mental health programs.” They then used multinomial logistic models to estimate the probability of engaging in five different types of service production across variation in this score, controlling for other municipal attributes.

Brown and Potoski’s findings “do not support the basic transaction costs hypothesis that *increases* in asset specificity increase internal production” but suggest that high asset specificity services (which, due to the authors’ definition, equate to high fixed cost services) lead to more contracting with other governments relative to other options (2003: 464). This is more reflective of the logic of economies of scale than it is of asset specificity. The findings for measurability are not much stronger: the decision to engage in internal production increased only from 58 percent to 62 percent when shifting from the least measurable services to the most measurable. Nevertheless, the authors conclude that empirical analysis supports “that transaction costs risks play a key role in how governments decide to organize to produce services.” (*Ibid.*).

Where asset specificity and uncertainty are variables in other studies of interlocal cooperation, the approach of Brown and Potoski has been adopted whole cloth. For example, Shrestha and Feiock (2011) hypothesize a transition from the private market option, to interlocal cooperation, then to joint contracting, and finally to direct provision as asset specificity and measurability difficulty increase (if one were to look at only the likelihood of interlocal cooperation against asset specificity, the function would be an inverted “U”). Despite studying only cities in Georgia, the authors use the survey based measures from the 36 nationally sampled city managers and mayors in Brown and Potoski’s study (2003).

Carr, LeRoux, and Shrestha (2009) use the same approach for 43 city services in Michigan, but with different control variables. The findings on both asset specificity and measurability are consistent with those from the study by Shrestha et al. (2009) (though not in

magnitude), but not with those of Brown and Potoski (2003) or, most importantly, the general reasoning of Williamson. In a footnote, the authors acknowledge “the practical difficulty in developing measures of asset specificity that are able to distinguish this concept from production characteristics,” and further note that the distinction matters and that conflating the two contradicts Williamson’s theory (2009: 424). However, the authors conclude that in most instances high fixed cost services will also be high in asset specificity, and vice versa. One is left to wonder, however, why the neoclassical logic of scale economies is not simply employed instead of transaction costs theory.

Andrew (2008) attempts to merge a social network perspective with service characteristics by asking whether contractual ties can mitigate the risks of asset specificity and measurability problems. Specifically, he reasons, first, that measurement difficulties will promote the development of “a highly dense network structure...to mitigate the problems of shirking” (2008: 6) and, second, that activities with high asset specificity will generate a “sparse network...dominated by a few highly centralized actors...to reduce the costs of crafting and monitoring multiple agreements with other localities independently (*Ibid.* at 7-8). The measurement of asset specificity and measurability relies, once again, on the prior work of Brown and Potoski (2003), rather than on investigation of the transactions under study, and the results are mixed.

### *Intermunicipal characteristics*

I have described how collective benefits and characteristics of the service targeted for cooperation are thought to affect interlocal cooperation. What about contracting costs? These come in several forms. Feiock et al. (2009) looked to the classic categories outlined by Coase

and focused on agency, information, and division of gains. However, most other authors do not follow this typology in discussing the many demographic and economic factors thought to affect cooperation. I use a simpler breakdown between three attributes of the intermunicipal context: *homophily*, *network ties*, and the *density of governments*.

Homophily, in most cases socioeconomic similarity, was present as a mechanism promoting interlocal cooperation even in early studies and this continued into recent work. Feiock et al. (2009: 259) remark in their discussion of the costs of division of gains that “economic and demographic homogeneity across cities... indicates common interests and service preferences, narrowing the range of acceptable outcomes and making cooperative agreements more probable...[and] tends to equalize bargaining power” (see also Feiock 2007). Examples of variables used to test this kind of homophily include: categorical population size (as an indicator of asymmetric bargaining power) and differences between metropolitan statistical area indicators and those of a municipality (Feiock et al. 2009: 263); and dyadic ties among local governments rather than higher level governments (Andrew 2008: 14). Gerber, Henry, and Lubell (2013) test for political homophily, finding that regional planning networks are more likely to arise among local governments with politically similar constituents.

Another aspect of the intermunicipal context is the presence or quality of network ties among local governments or local government officials, though these two levels are typically conflated (i.e., government ties proxy individual relationships). The two most used hypotheses are about bonding and bridging, which correspond roughly to the importance of strong and weak ties. Examples of strong tie variables include the frequency of interlocal contact as measured with a survey item and centrality as measured by number of mentions of a target city by other cities with regard to policy interaction (Feiock et al. 2009: 264). Weak ties are sometimes

interpreted as membership in a common organization, such as a Council of Government (COG) (Carr et al. 2009: 416) or other regional organization (LeRoux 2008; Feiock et al. 2009: 264).

Another way to incorporate the logic of network ties is to consider the role of professionalization. For example, because city managers have an administratively conjoined network (Frederickson 1999), this is thought to reduce information costs. Studies frequently use a dichotomous measure of whether a municipality has adopted the council-manager form or not (e.g., Shrestha and Feiock 2011). Using similar reasoning, Carr et al. (2009: 413-414) propose positive effects on cooperation from city managers' professional networks, and include dichotomous variables for whether the form of government is council-manager and whether the city manager has a public administration professional degree and is a member of the major professional organization for city managers.

Lastly, the pool of potential partners could conceivably affect information gathering, bargaining over the division of gains, and monitoring or enforcing behavior. Confusingly, having more available partners has been viewed as both an aid and challenge to interlocal cooperation. Shrestha and Feiock (2010) view it as negative because of the potential for greater conflict of interests, and measured it as the number of general purpose local governments divided by land area in the county in which a municipality was located. Feiock et al. (2009: 264) view having many neighbors as a positive because “[a] city is likely to have more and better information about its neighboring communities, increasing trust among them and enhancing reputational effects.” As with the other dimensions of the intermunicipal context, findings are mixed.

### *Intramunicipal demographic heterogeneity*

While the relationships among communities matter, heterogeneity within a community can also be important as a source of transaction costs. The reasoning here is drawn from



principal-agent theory. If local elected and administrative officials are attuned to the interests of constituents, then they will better be able to aggregate the preferences of the many residents they serve. Consider an extreme example: every household in a community is exactly the same, with the same income, home value, service usage, and tax payments. Finding the median voter or discerning the public interest is simple, and since all interests are the same there is also no risk of special interest capture that may shift in subsequent bargaining. When representatives of this community come to the bargaining table, other parties will know those representatives are true agents. Thus, homogeneity “reduces agency costs for officials negotiating interlocal agreements on behalf of citizens. Interests are less likely to be less uniform and it is more difficult to aggregate preferences and hold agents accountable in heterogeneous communities... [where] communication costs will also be higher” (Feiock 2007: 55).

Racial differences and heterogeneity are a common variable, often measured through a dissimilarity index (e. g., Shrestha and Feiock 2011) or share of population that is non-White (Feiock et al. 2009), though it is unclear why decisions about service provision would relate to race. Economic heterogeneity is more conceptually sound and has been measured by the ratio of mean household income to median household income, such that higher value indicates a more skewed distribution (*Ibid.*). Those authors also used a direct survey measure about the degree to which economic development issues—the policy area under study—were controversial, and a land dissimilarity index to proxy for conflict between business and residential interests. Viewing the literature as a whole shows little consistency in measures or in findings about intramunicipal heterogeneity.

### *The individual calculus: political and social considerations*

Compared to the municipal level calculus, the individual calculus receives much less attention. The general proposition is that *selective benefits* matter, consistent with a loose reading of Olson (1965): the larger the political incentives and career incentives from favoring cooperation, the greater the likelihood of cooperation (Feiock 2007: 50). Feiock and Carr (2001: 382-83) list as selective benefits for public elected officials the interest in “political power and reelection” and for public employees “job protection and greater autonomy.” They argue that selective costs and benefits that accrue to individuals and groups are more likely than collective costs and benefits (such as efficiency or scale economies) to explain institutional collective action. This discussion of selective and collective benefit is similar to the distinction between particular interests and public interests by Bish (1971), who suggested the former was likely necessary for policy reform. Feiock also distinguished between benefits that are public (accruing to the local unit through “efficiencies and economies of scale in the provision and production of services”) and private (accruing to the economic or political interests of an individual actor) (2008: 49). An individual cannot simply anticipate a collective or public good from interlocal cooperation for it to seem attractive, but must also have something personally to gain.

The calculation of individual actors about selective benefits and costs sometimes appears in the discussion of agency costs, which were already mentioned in the intramunicipal heterogeneity discussion. For example, Feiock et al. (2009: 263-264) reason that the short time horizon of mayors and their need to create visible positive impacts leads them to take more risks in negotiation, leading to the mayor-council form of government generating more cooperation. The composition of the city council may also matter: a higher share of seats elected by district may lead to more parochial interests resistant to the loss of influence that can happen under

cooperation. The mechanism behind both propositions is re-election (*Ibid.* 259). This dynamic is similar to the manifestation of more local targeted behaviors by metropolitan planning organizations with a higher share of elected versus administrative local officials comprising their governing board (Gerber and Gibson 2009).

Beyond political calculations, social dynamics can also be important. However, a gap exists between why these matter theoretically and how they are measured empirically. For example, Shrestha and Feiock (2010) discuss the importance of mutuality and reciprocity, and the trust that evolves from this, referencing classic work by Granovetter (1985: 576) who notes “[r]eciprocity helps minimize opportunism and foster cooperation through predictability and repeated exchanges.” Although the dynamic of trust is interpersonal (actors do not breach trust because of “reputational damage” and fear of community sanction), the authors employ a binary variable based on the presence of interlocal expenditures and interlocal revenues (Shrestha and Feiock 2010: 577). However, the measure tells us nothing *directly* about trust or reputation, and this is a common problem in the literature.

Overall, the empirical literature places far less emphasis on selective benefits. This is especially true of the local elected official. Andrew remarks in passing that “[e]ver since Frederickson (1999) described interlocal cooperation as primarily an administrative activity, scholars have largely ignored the role of local elected officials” (2009: 138).

### *Summary: the rational actor in interlocal cooperation*

To this point the review of the literature on interlocal cooperation has been about emphasizing the common use of transaction cost logic and inferring from this the model of the rational actor. Inference is necessary because of the infrequent direct treatment of the individual

rational actor in studies of cooperation. However, the literature does offer direct commentary on this point in a few places. Shrestha and Feiock (2010: 584) state:

Self-interested behavior together with limited rationality and the inherently incomplete nature of agreements make exchange risky. Actors, therefore, look for a governing mechanism that minimizes the transaction risks. Exchanges are also embedded in relationships. Relational structures such as mutual trust and mutual sanctions facilitate exchange by minimizing *ex ante* and *ex post* opportunism.

While the rational processes of information acquisition and selection are barely treated except to give a throwaway mention of “limited” rationality, the operation of valuation is fairly clear.

Interlocal cooperation scholars “assume that institutional actors select the available strategy that most enhances their (generally short-term) interests, in the absence of mitigating institutions” (Feiock 2009: 358). The actor is self-interested, boundedly rational, and opportunistic, and this makes the use of another government or firm for service provision or production a risky proposition. The many attributes of municipalities, their neighbors, and the services they target for cooperation (plus a handful of quasi-individual attributes still measured at the municipal or network level) described in the last section shape the governance choices of the rational opportunist (Feiock 2007; Shrestha and Feiock 2011; Andrew 2008; Feiock et al. 2009; Andrew and Carr 2012). Despite rationality for these actors being described as *bounded*, the interpretation of that term is prospective. It is not about the present cognitive limitations of serial processing, but about the inability to forecast the future and deal with this uncertainty in a contract. In other words, the meaning aligns with the work of Williamson rather than Simon. In the present, the actor still is presumed to be able to know a rather large volume of objective information that enables choosing efficiently among difference forms of governance.

Part of why the individual actor seems to get so little attention is perhaps because the unifying idea of studies of interlocal cooperation is that the logic of collective action can be

extended from the individual to the institutional level, not only in the sense of studying action among composite actors (such as municipalities) but in the sense of embracing rational choice institutionalism. As noted earlier, this goal is consistent with working in the spirit of the IAD and ACI frameworks and appreciating institutions—rules and norms—as significant in explaining outcomes. However, in the careful framework building of Ostrom (2005) and Scharpf (1997) while “actor” or “participant” typically meant an organization, the links between individual actor and organizational actor were carefully drawn. Both authors noted as necessary considerations the method of aggregation from individual to organization and the degree of alignment between individual interests and organizational interests. The literature on interlocal cooperation only mentions the question of shifting from individual to organization twice. Feiock (2009: 357, citing Ostrom 2005) states:

Only individuals are capable of action, yet individuals often act in the name of a group or organization. Thus, it is meaningful to investigate collective action among composite actors defined by position, authority, and aggregation rules. ... These rules solve the problem of matching empirically observable individual behavior with the institutionally defined unit of reference on whose behalf action is taken. ... ICA implies capability for intentional action above the level of individuals. This requires us to focus on interactions between and within institutional units.

A similar discussion can be found in the preface to an edited volume with John Scholz (2009). The literature neither theoretically nor empirically attempts to consider how variation in position, authority, and aggregation rules affects interlocal cooperation. More importantly, when explaining the link between context and outcomes the variables are always municipal even when the underlying mechanisms are supposed to be individual. Whether such inference is justifiable is never treated. Stated most simply, the brushing over of the *micro-macro* links—those connecting individual to organization—has allowed insight into the *circumstances* in which

cooperation arises and endures. This is valuable information, but it obscures the individuals within these settings who make policy decisions.

### *Transaction cost theory, interlocal reality*

In the last several pages, I have taken the reader quite far into the minutiae of how most studies of interlocal cooperation depict the actor. The approach is highly structural and instrumental. Individuals, whose interests align with those of the organization (the municipality), make decisions by looking at the attributes of the context around them and deciding how beneficial and costly a course of action will be, where costs are amplified by the nature of the services considered for cooperation. The provision alternative (usually a decision between direct provision and some form of cooperative alternative) in theory should be that which offers the best benefit to cost ratio. Studies have overwhelmingly targeted city managers and systems maintenance functions. The review of transaction cost economics and its extensive application within studies of interlocal cooperation encourages reconsideration of the analogy of interlocal cooperation to transactions among firms in a marketplace. Does the logic of transaction cost economics work empirically? Does it work conceptually?

At this point in the development of the literature, it is hard to judge whether the transaction cost approach has been successful. Empirically, the evidence is mixed. Part of the problem is the diversity of approaches to testing the core propositions outlined earlier. Some variables appear as evidence for multiple propositions. For example, the presence of a city manager (measured as having council-manager form of government) was deemed beneficial either because those actors are trained to care about efficiency, or because they are part of administrative conjunctions, or because they have a longer time horizon. Some propositions are

inconsistent. For example, both council-manager and mayor-council forms of local government have been proposed in different studies as more likely than the other to increase the possibility of cooperation. While that may be possible, the individual mechanisms underlying each (respectively, desire for career advancement and reelection) were not tested. The data on interlocal cooperation come from a handful of states, and most use a single state or single metropolitan area (or even single county) as a study area. The inconsistencies in model specification and more general features of research design mean the work cannot be assessed holistically. Lastly, at least one troubling habit has been the willingness to adopt a typological approach to the risk profiles of local government services based on the work of Brown and Potoski (2003). Some services are, in all times and all places, deemed highly asset specific or difficult to measure, while others are not. These dichotomies may not hold up over time or geography, and are likely to vary with institutional setting and even across transactions among different local pairs in the same metropolitan area.

The literature also faces the problem of evidence that suggests the narrative about the local actor may be incomplete. A few studies point directly to the possibility that strict cost-benefit valuation and opportunism may not be fully descriptive of interlocal cooperation. Thurmaier and Wood (2002: 587), studying interlocal agreements as social exchange networks by interviewing chief administrative officers and chief financial officers in a case study of local governments in the Kansas City metropolitan area, found that “economizing value is not the predominant rationale for ILA participation.” The authors continue: “[a]lthough there is surely a definable set of ILAs that have developed from desires for direct economizing activities, with few exceptions, cost reduction was seldom the primary reason for ILAs. The overwhelming lack of evidence that economizing is a continuing aspect of ILAs... suggests to us there are one or

more alternative values that better explain the existence and continued propagation of interlocal agreements....” (*Ibid.* 593-594). Alternative values included, for example, “help[ing smaller neighboring jurisdictions,]” or needing a program to run more effectively even if it meant no cost savings (*Ibid.* 594). In later work with Chen, this time using data from a decade-long statewide survey of local officials in Iowa municipalities, Thurmaier reinforced his earlier findings. Careful interview work by Zeemering (2008) leads to similar conclusions. LeRoux and Carr (2007: 355) find that “despite the expected cost advantages of collaborating on public works services, many local governments do not collaborate.” This finding underscores one of Simon’s (1991) points: the distribution of organizational forms does not mimic what we would expect under a transaction cost mechanism that is well functioning.

Even if one allows the empirical jury to remain out, a narrow transaction costs approach faces some major conceptual difficulties. Granted, some appeal exists in the use of transaction cost theory: the rigor of an economic approach explicitly about the selection of different governance forms, and an analogy of market-hybrid-hierarchy to private-interlocal-direct provision that aligns well with the tradition of viewing the metropolitan area as a marketplace of local governments. But the application of transaction costs logic is strained for a few reasons. One difficulty is that the market is not the dominant, default condition in the interlocal context. Most local governments have certain responsibilities, and begin in the position of hierarchy in the market-hybrid-hierarchy typology. Vertical integration within the firm (hierarchy) is, therefore, not a last resort. There are many services a government will have to provide, even if it does not have another government or a private partner with which to contract. Firms might very well resort to in-house production only after failing to find an economically satisfactory exchange relationship on the market or within a hybrid arrangement, as transaction cost theory



predicts. But local governments resort to a hybrid structure only after failing to be able to provide an acceptable level of service under their current revenue structure.

Second, while public-private partnerships may be characterized by market-like qualities—a large number of buyers and sellers and high information—for interlocal arrangements the number of potential partners is limited. For many services adjacency is required to make interlocal delivery even remotely efficient and allow access to scale economies. And private service providers may simply not be available, or not at the scale necessary to make an exchange worthwhile. A related difficulty is that local governments are arguably never in a market-like relationship with each other. Rather, their interdependencies place them in the position of being in a constant condition of interdependent, hybrid governance.

Finally, some goods and services are fundamentally different when provided locally versus cooperatively. A single government cannot provide regional land use planning, or protect a natural resource that spans municipal boundaries, or create a regional transportation system. Williamson's firms might find an exchange relationship adds value, but the good being produced on the market and the one produced in house are substitutes. The transaction cost approach might work well for the decision whether to engage in a public-private transaction over wastewater treatment because the service is the same regardless of the scale—the quality might improve slightly or the cost might decrease, but there is no substantive difference in the nature of locally versus cooperatively provided treatment. But it works poorly outside systems maintenance functions.

Once one begins to more carefully consider the differences between market, hybrid, and hierarchy, and the nature of the goods produced and invested in Williamson's work, it is quite evident the transaction cost approach is an awkward fit for local governments. One might object

the transaction cost approach is meant to simply impart insights about the dynamics of interlocal cooperation. But throughout the interlocal cooperation literature one observes struggles to make variables fit within the unified transactional logic, stretching Williamson's concepts almost beyond recognition. If the search is for insights, then much better sources seem to exist for describing local governments and the actors in them.

Whatever conceptual or empirical weaknesses the transaction cost approach currently has for explaining local government behavior, these problems are least likely to be an issue when explaining behaviors toward systems maintenance functions largely within the purview of administrative actors such as city managers. Where scale economies are at play, it would be hard to imagine the local actor (or the local resident, or future employer) who would not look favorably on more efficient service provision (or improvements in quality for a lower cost than possible with direct provision), especially if it were possible with a partner with whom a transaction would be relatively low risk and for a service where contracts can be well specified and clearly interpreted. It would also be hard to imagine the local actor—particularly one charged with professional administration of an activity—who would not know enough about the rough cost and benefit profiles of alternative provision options to make a well informed decision. In some interlocal transactions, reasoning that local actors engage in market-like behavior, particularly in repetition over time, may be sound. Sometimes, measures of structural attributes and municipal level behaviors *should* correspond to the mental processes of the individual local actor and rational choice institutionalism is defensible, even if empirical evidence has not quite caught up to justifying it.

But local governments are not simply managers of systems maintenance services, and cooperation decisions are not always negotiated and monitored primarily by dyads of

professionally trained administrators. More importantly, scholars of interlocal cooperation have never limited the frameworks they use and propositions they develop to only certain types of cooperation. The promise of interlocal cooperation has never been just about service provision efficiency and government effectiveness, and has always been touted for its potential to confront truly regional dilemmas.

This returns the discussion to the point made in Chapter 1 that some of the policy areas in which the true metropolitan dilemmas arise and persist—areas marked by interlocal inequities and tensions between local interests and regional interests—are also ones in which an institutional, instrumental approach to empirical research breaks down. These are policy areas in which municipal level adoption is relatively rare (allowing limited behavioral observation) and in which ratification and implementation may be more contentious or unstable. They are also policy areas in which the process of cost-benefit calculation may yield to mental processes that form preferences on other bases. In the next chapter, I argue that interlocal cooperation in land use planning and zoning is rife with uncertainty and risk, and suggest a model of cultural cognition to augment the current understanding of what it means to be a rational local elected official in the face of a governance decision.

### Chapter 3. The Cultural Cognition of Governance

*As a laboratory for finding everyday people grappling with the great questions of social life in circumstances with direct impact on the participants, a hearing at the local land use commission is hard to beat. ... By joining together under the banner of government, individuals can extend their control beyond their private world.*”—Dennis J. Coyle (1993: 5-6)

#### *Introduction*

The last two chapters demonstrated through an empirical anecdote and a detailed theoretical discussion the limitations of treating preferences about interlocal cooperation as purely a function of *structural* cues arising from institutional and ecological attributes (rules, norms, and municipal and intermunicipal attributes) as part of a transaction cost framework. In this chapter, I detail how *cultural* cues have a bearing on the selection of governance, where that selection is limited to the choice between interlocal *cooperation* and its absence, which I call *autonomy*. These terms, of course, are shorthand and are not fully descriptive of how local governments actually relate. Cooperation can be used as a way to secure competitive advantage, and autonomy can be highly coordinated through informal coordination and yardstick competition. The terms refer, rather, to the formal mechanism by which land use policy is adopted and implemented in two (or more) municipalities. As described briefly in Chapter 1, cultural cues function by telling people in a world of competing risks which risks—those attached to cooperation or autonomy as governance modes—are more and less compatible with their ideal vision for the social world in which they live.

The application of the cultural cognition mechanism in the present study is to the governance of land use planning and zoning. As the chapter's opening quote suggests, the use of land in one's municipality and in neighboring ones can be thought of as a public expression of one's private attachment to a desired set of social relations expressive of deeply held core values—how one defines the physical, social, and procedural character of the ideal community. Through the cultural cognition of land use governance, a local elected official forms preferences about cooperation reflective of whether it poses a risk of loss to that official's vision of the ideal community (and deserves opposition) or reinforces it (and deserves support).

In this chapter, I first describe the *cultural cognition* hypothesis. I then build links between the process of cultural cognition and the decision about whether to favor or oppose interlocal cooperation.

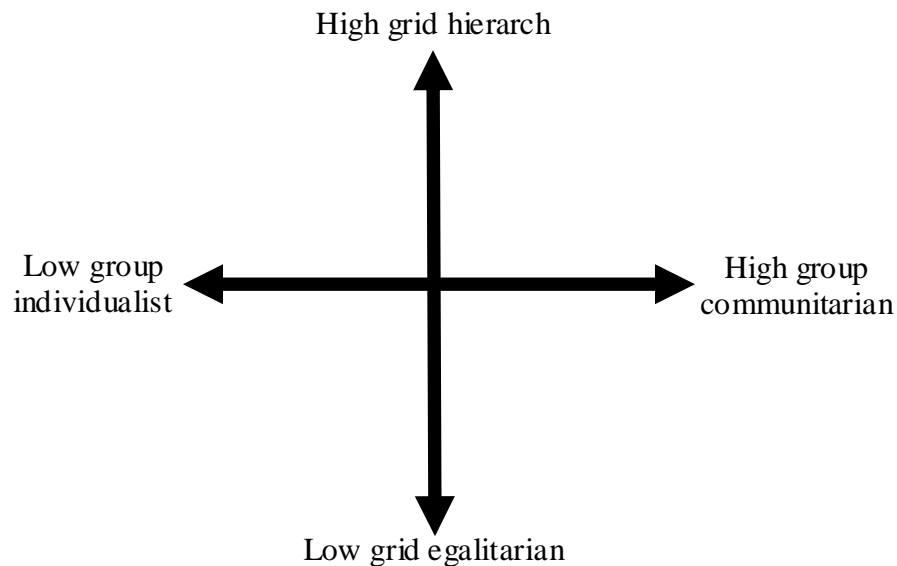
### *Cultural cognition: grid, group, and risk*

The terms grid and group are drawn from the work of Mary Douglas, whose anthropological investigations formed the basis of the grid-group typology central to the last four decades of this particular strand of cultural theory (Douglas and Wildavsky 1983; Douglas 2003). Grid and group do not have specific, consistent definitions. Rayner's (1992: 87) description of the poles of the grid and group dimensions provides some of the clearest elucidation of the concepts.

Weak-group individuals fend for themselves and therefore tend to be competitive. ... Strong group people depend on each other, which promotes values of solidarity rather than the competitiveness of weak group. ... Low grid indicates an egalitarian state of affairs in which no one is prevented from participating in any social role because he or she is the wrong sex, or is too old, or does not have the right family connections. A high-grid state of affairs is one where access to all social activities depends on one or another of these kinds of discriminations.

Rayner elsewhere describes an increase in group and grid as, respectively, increases in the “demands of incorporation and regulation” (*Ibid.* at 88). The figure below summarizes the two dimensions.

**Figure 3.1 Grid and group dispositions and the four cultural types**



At the heart of the grid-group version of cultural theory is a mechanism of sociocultural viability in which *cultural biases* (shared values and beliefs) interact with *social relations* (patterns of interpersonal relations) to sustain a *way of life*. Thompson et al. (1990: 2) state:

The viability of a way of life...depends upon a mutually supportive relationship between a particular pattern of social relations [and a bias]. These biases and relations cannot be mixed and matched. ... Shared values and beliefs are thus not free to come together in any which way; they are always closely tied to the social relations they help legitimate.

While empirical observation may not always be able to perfectly tease out these three components—biases or values, social relations, and way of life—in general an investigator would expect to see coherence among the three components, including in situations where an actor must interpret and choose among policy options. Thus, preferences and perceptions—an

outward expression of values and beliefs—should cohere with the types of social relations in which one engages, and vice versa. And a way of life will, if it is socioculturally viable, cohere with both. In this study, the focus is on the coherence of governance preferences as an organization-level expression of individual social relations and measurable indicators of values and beliefs expressive of a way of life.

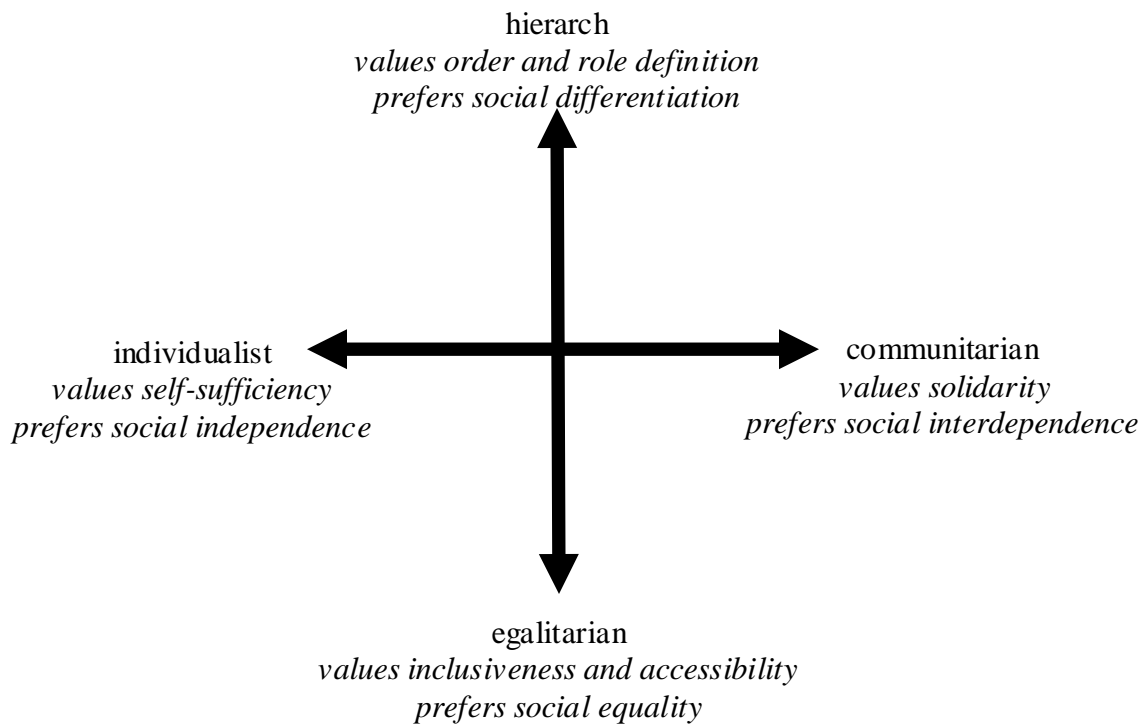
This process of coherence is closely bound to the process of risk appraisal. I use the word *risk* to describe “the possibility that an undesirable state of reality (adverse effects) may occur as a result of natural events or human activities” (Renn 1992: 56). The subjective quality of risk is essential to my use of that term. Slovic (1992: 119-120) states

Risk does not exist “out there,” independent of our minds and cultures, waiting to be measured. Human beings have invented the concept “risk” to help them understand and cope with the dangers and uncertainties of life. There is no such thing as “real risk” or “objective risk.” ... [We assume] risk is subjectively defined by individuals who may be influenced by a wide array of psychological, social, institutional, and cultural factors.

The link between culture and risk was developed early by Douglas and Wildavsky (1983). Concisely, people have selective attention spans and can only worry about so many risks at any one time. People will tend to give attention to the risks that threaten the cultural way of life—and the attendant social relations and values and beliefs—to which they subscribe. In Figure 3.2, I re-label the poles from Figure 3.1 with the values and preferred social relations for the cultural dispositions. These values and relations are what individuals risk losing under different courses of action. An individualist, then, would amplify risks to independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency, trying to avoid or manage those courses of action he associates with such risks. And one could make similar statements for the other three cultural types. When risks enter into

cognitive processes for evaluation, then, it is through cultural filters that amplify the risks most adverse to preferred values and social relations.

**Figure 3.2 The values and preferred social relations of the four cultural types**



Because culture is at the heart of a person's identity, evaluating risks through a cultural filter is known as *identity-protective risk appraisal*. Kahan and Braman build on this idea when they define the *cultural cognition of public policy* as "the psychological disposition of persons to conform their factual beliefs about the instrumental efficacy (or perversity) of law to their cultural evaluations of the activities subject to regulation" (2006: 149). To elaborate, members of the public disagree, often strongly, about what policies will achieve material well being as an empirical matter, but this disagreement is neither randomly distributed nor correlated with education. The factual disagreement is not simply a product of lack of knowledge or information.



Rather, conflict can exist even within various social groups that we would expect to have similar views and experiences of a policy, and even among experts in a policy area. The authors suggest that individuals' cultural ways of life act "as a kind of heuristic in the rational processing of information" (*Ibid.*).

### *Revisiting rationality*

Cultural theory, and by extension cultural cognition, is impactful in the social sciences because of the challenge it poses to traditional conceptions of rational choice. As outlined in Chapter 2, one relaxation of classic rational choice theory was the idea of bounded rationality in the appraisal of information. Just as the individual for Simon has cognitive limits that require serial attention to alternatives, so too the individual for Douglas and other grid-group cultural theorists possesses a limited capacity to appraise risks through standard rational choice mechanisms. Rational choice theorists typically struggled to explain *why* some individuals are, for example, seemingly altruistic or other-regarding even in the absence of repeat play, and would either label the behavior as irrational or expand the definition of what counts as a material benefit to make altruism somehow appear materially self-interested.

What cultural theory provides is a rational mechanism that explicitly accounts for information, valuation, and selection processes that seem contrary to what is conventionally understood as self-interest. When individuals search for information, they focus attention where risks to their cultural ways of life exist, value more highly those alternatives that help secure (or threaten least) their cultural way of life (with its corresponding values and social relations), and tend to select the alternatives that are most likely to be protective of this identity .

Beyond the question of rationality and irrationality, cultural cognition may simply be more accessible than a utilitarian cost-benefit analysis. For land use cooperation, forecasting benefits and costs is a much less certain endeavor than ascertaining the effect of systems maintenance cooperation on municipal revenue and expenditures. The ability to be expert for a local elected official may be limited, mirroring the problem a layperson may face when assessing risks. Slovic (1992: 150) remarks “whereas experts define risk in a narrow, technical way, the public has a richer, more complex view that incorporates value-laden considerations such as equity, catastrophic potential, and controllability. The issue is not whether these are legitimate, rational considerations, but how to integrate them into risk analyses and policy decisions.”

In the next section, I outline how uncertainty and risk are present in *both* cooperation and autonomy, and then explain how cultural cognition would lead some actors to amplify some risks while diminishing others, and other actors to behave systematically differently.

### *The uncertainty of planning the municipal future*

Local governments are typically seen, or perhaps their officials regard them, as self-determining of municipal character. Many scholars hypothesize that land use policy behavior can be predicted by municipal fiscal and demographic characteristics because zoning is an inherently fiscal and exclusionary process. Research into the determinants of land use regulation shows that many such characteristics do play a significant role (Davis 1963; Mills and Oates 1975; Rose-Ackerman 1983; Rolleston 1987; McMillen and McDonald 1990; Bogart 1993; Pogodzinski and Sass 1994; Bates and Santerre 1994; Glaeser and Ward 2009). Ample evidence suggests intermunicipal stratification by both income and race (Briggs 2005; Swanstrom, Dreier, and Mollenkopf 2002; Logan, Stults, and Farley 2004; Logan and Schneider 1984; Purcell 2001), and

exclusionary zoning is commonly found in higher status municipalities (Gyourko, Saiz, and Summers 2008; Massey, Rothwell, and Domina 2009; Rothwell and Massey 2010; Schneider 1989). In the midst of a foreclosure crisis and recession, with a vicious cycle of vacancy, out-migration, declining property values, and decreasing revenue, the ability to differentiate may mean the difference between fiscal health and distress.

Less clear is whether the desire to zone to improve fiscal futures or exclude actually works. Consider the firm location decision, often stylized as the result of the total bundle of goods available in a community or region plus the subsidies offered by the local government. The evidence is mixed about whether such offers make a difference in firms' decisions (Logan, Whaley, and Crowder 1997; Bartik 1991, 1992; Fisher and Peters 1998; Peters and Fisher 2004; Feiock 1991), and even measuring success (or failure) can be difficult (Reese and Fasenfest 1996). One of the risks of not cooperating is that competition through economic development policies may distort location-based decisions. A local government may lose out on new investment it would otherwise gain while other governments make concessions that diminish the revenue a development may have generated. This competition may also distort the relationship between firms and local governments, amplifying costs and muting benefits to the public sector, even as a firm may end up in roughly the same location within a metropolitan area that it would have otherwise occupied.

A similar problem arises in the location decisions of households. Peterson (1981) asserted that local governments are inherently competitive, have an incentive to avoid redistributive policies, and are uniformly oriented toward economic growth. And Tiebout-style sorting is a well known model of responsive household migration that has motivated municipal reasoning for half a century. But it is unclear whether this competition does any good, especially when controlling

for the larger scale social and economic forces that drive household moves (Besley and Case 1992; Sharp 1984; Schneider 1989; Lowery and Lyons 1989; Percy, Hawkins, and Maier 1995).

Land use, of course, is not an isolated policy area. Feiock refers to land use as a *functional collective action problem*, in that externalities can occur not only among governmental units but across policy areas (2009: 358). What local governments decide about their land will, in the aggregate, affect the metropolitan area. This is evident in the research on jobs-housing imbalance or spatial mismatch (Cervero 1989; Holzer 1991; Horner 2004; Ihlanfeldt and Sjoquist 1998); the spread of property devaluation during the foreclosure crisis (Wassmer 2011; Li and Morrow-Jones 2010; Immergluck 2011; Mallach 2009); the potential dependence between suburbs and central cities (regardless of which direction this runs) (Savitch et al. 1993; Blair and Zhang 1994; Hill, Wolman, and Ford 1995; Voith 1992; Post and Stein 2000); the problems of race and class segregation (Briggs and Wilson 2005; Jargowsky 1997; Marcuse 1997); and the more general notion of regional resilience in response to crisis (Swanstrom, Chapple, and Immergluck 2009).

A local elected official should have a fairly good idea of the recent history and current state of the municipality, its position among neighbors, and its position in the region. This sense may not be exact but it need not be for understanding uncertainty and risk. He may not have immediate recall of the numbers in the municipal budget, or the median property value, or the demographic features of the residents overall in the current year or recent years. He may be much less well informed about adjacent communities. But he probably knows if the municipality is, in general, doing worse—if revenue relative to expenditures is declining, if people and businesses are leaving, if vacancies are becoming more common, and if the tax base is shrinking with it. He would see the physical reality of these changes every day. If the municipality were

doing better, he would witness signs of that, too. And the position of his municipality relative to others is probably fairly clear, at least in the most basic sense. One could say, in short, that a local elected official has a decent appreciation for which cities, townships, and villages are winners and which are losers—and which are stable for the time being—in the fiscal and economic sense, and in which camp his municipality currently rests.

But the future of this pattern is not certain, and as the preceding discussion suggests land use planning and zoning can only do so much to secure it or improve it. The location decisions of neighbor municipalities (for example, the placement of a polluting industrial firm that brings new employment, the popular but highly trafficked commercial center, the new affordable housing complex, or the new single family development) can lead to positive and negative spillovers. Their policies might lead them to become the newly desirable location for residents or businesses—to shift into the “winner” camp—and this may be a boon for bordering municipalities or a bust. And the welfare of all the municipalities may be at risk if an industry collapses, or another incident of regional impact occurs.

What does this have to do with interlocal land use cooperation? From a transaction cost perspective, one could reason that cooperation will afford net benefits compared to all other alternatives only for those municipalities that are faring poorly under the status quo. The common hypothesis that fiscal distress engenders cooperation is a reflection of this thinking. Conversely, cooperation has the least to offer those municipalities that have been doing well with autonomy. But an alternative to this narrative exists. Cooperation might be a way for communities that are doing well to exercise influence on those around them, or may be a way for a group of high performing municipalities to guard their current success. Autonomy might be seen as the safest way for a struggling municipality to get ahead. Even if times are tough now, at

least the municipality will have relatively more control over what happens. Because the benefits of cooperation cannot be easily contained or measured or divided, little assurance exists that the time and energy devoted to cooperation will not simply result in developers, firms, and residents following the same patterns they have for years or decades.

Both cooperation and autonomy present municipal level risk and uncertainty. But what about the other major source of uncertainty for the local *elected* official—what do constituents, the voters in future elections and the providers of other political support, want?

### *The uncertainty of a local elected official's political future*

In the preceding discussion, the mobility of firms and households—both intrametropolitan and intermetropolitan—created an environment of uncertainty for local elected officials. An alternative view is that exit is costly and local political factors have a greater impact on how policies are decided (Epple and Zelenitz 1981). This is in line with Oakerson's (2004) view that the entry and exit of residents imposes only a weak constraint on the possibility of cooperation. In this section, I describe the uncertainties a local elected official faces in her political life when considering whether to cooperate or not, apart from or perhaps despite the mechanism of exit.

Because interlocal land use cooperation is a relatively untested policy tool, it is hard to gauge *how* residents would respond to the cooperative act itself. Knowing what the median voter wants may be unclear. Even in the limited archival data on public meetings to address JMPA adoption, views among constituents about cooperation were diverse. Most elected officials are not part of a professional organization that can impart norms, and public meeting attendance is often low except for the most contentious of issue. Land use, of course, may be one of those

issues and scholarship acknowledges this (e.g., Fleischmann 1989; Marcuse 1976; Forester 1993; Campbell 1996; Teske and Schneider 1994; Svara 1999). Residents often care about land use at a very small scale, as is evident in the literature on “not in my backyard” attitudes (Dear 1992; Tighe 2010). And they care about it at a broader scale, such as the county or state. This is evident in the longstanding political contentiousness of attempts at metropolitan reforms such as city-county consolidation or centralization (Brenner 2002; Norris 2001; Lineberry 1969). While attitudes about newer forms of growth management and regional planning at the metropolitan and state level have been studied by many scholars, Wassmer and Lascher (2006: 623) highlight the “lack of consensus about findings” in their review of this literature.

Greater insight may be available by considering what is known about local elected officials more generally. The interest in re-election is one Frant (1996) refers to as a high-powered public sector incentive, analogous to the professional interests ascribed to city managers and other administrative officials. While few local elected officials are career politicians, many have long tenures and are often from small communities where incurring the wrath of even a few voters may be enough to lose their position on a city council or township board, or simply make their social interactions in the community less pleasant. This social mechanism may even make up for the lack of monetary compensation and low electoral turnout. Oakerson quips that “when there is no sharp boundary between government and civil society, serving as an elected municipal official is little different from holding office in a civic association or local church” (2004: 35).

If, on average, the local elected official is persuaded of the importance of working in the public interest, how does he define it? The homevoter hypothesis suggests local actors are motivated by the interest of resident homeowners in maximizing property values (Fischel 1987;

2009). Direct tests of the full hypothesis are rare (for two exceptions from the United States, see Hilber and Robert-Nicoud (2009a, 2009b) and Dehring, et al. (2008)), but the components are well supported and the logic is intuitively appealing. Because municipal characteristics and amenities are so efficiently capitalized into the values of homes (Oates 1969; Hamilton 1975; Yinger 1982; Farber 1998; Fischel 2005), homeowners are driven to participate politically, including and especially in land use decisions, to protect the value of their largest asset (Lake 1993; Pendall 1999; Fischel 2001; Nguyen 2005; Schively 2007). Municipal land use officials respond to this pressure, perhaps because they are elected and desire political reward from homevoters or because they believe following the wishes of the polity is what it means to serve the public or general interest (Klosterman 1980; Levine and Forrence 1990; Howe 1992). They are also, of course, resident homeowners interested in the value of their asset and any limitations on their use and enjoyment of it.

Another possibility is that policies might be decided according to partisanship—that local elected officials will choose the alternative most in line with what they think is the prevailing political ideology of constituents. In recent work, Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2014) found that variation in city policies tend to align with the variation in policy conservatism among residents of the cities. The finding informs a lengthy debate about whether the policies of municipal governments are responsive to what residents want based on political identity (*Ibid.* at 606; see also Gerber and Hopkins (2011)). The evidence in this area, however, tends to draw on relatively large cities, and is generally mixed especially compared to the strong policy-partisan linkages at the state and federal levels. For the purposes of this study, it is worth noting that the partisan dimension of *land use cooperation* is unknown. Is it more Republican to guard local autonomy and more Democratic to seek cooperation? If Republicans are uniformly in favor of small



government and view cooperation as opposing that philosophy, then an affirmative answer makes sense. Form might matter less than outcome, however, since both parties have shown a propensity to support “more government” to meet desirable ends. It would be easy to construct scenarios in which cooperation has outcomes that are generally seen as modernly conservative (for example, the use of joint planning to retain the current physical manifestation of local self-determination, such as in the distribution of affordable housing) while autonomy could be viewed as liberal (perhaps by promoting equitable participation in land use decisions by keeping the institution of land use nearer the people). More fundamentally, autonomy is not inherently more efficient or *laissez-faire*, and cooperation is not inherently more equitable and market-corrective. It is possible that cooperation aligns with a certain political ideology, but this is not an intrinsic connection that every local elected official would make.

The decision to cooperate over land use may be difficult not because of trouble discerning residents’ interests or due to partisan ideological conflict but, more fundamentally, because it requires voluntarily yielding some of the limited control and authority over local affairs for which elected officials may have originally entered office. Gerber and Gibson (2009: 635) highlight the tension faced by a local actor:

when contemplating a regional approach to policy, decision makers must consider the expected regional benefits and costs of the policy, the expected local benefits and costs, and how these net benefits compare to the likely political costs associated with delegating power to the region. ... [B]enefits may come at the cost of less control and greater uncertainty over policy outcomes.

Even when regional benefits from cooperation do occur, they may not allow for credit claiming, the mechanism that leads elected officials to prefer projects that have visible benefits directed at the short term interests of their general constituency or a specific interest group (Feiock, Jeong, and Kim 2003; Feiock and Clingermayer 1986; Mayhew 1974). This may be especially true with

growth management, which has been a common motivation for JMPA agreements. Calavita (1992) notes the political benefits of slowing or managing growth may be diffuse, while “the benefits of economic development are often highly visible and provide politicians opportunities to claim credit and reward specific constituents or supporters that provide instrumental political resources” (Feiock 2002: 131). Long term maintenance of the status quo—the preservation of a community’s character—may or may not be enough to garner electoral reward. If locally undesirable projects are being kept out of the locality and also not siting in neighboring communities where constituents may also work and live, then highly politicized NIMBY responses may create a positive feedback loop between cooperation and re-election. But many of the JMPA benefits may be longer term, relatively invisible, and spread across a large number of constituents. When narrowly targeted growth and economic development is instead the goal, as it was in the Grand Traverse Commons joint planning effort, then high visibility is clearly not a problem, and short term benefits may have a high ratio to costs. If the project is seen by enough constituents as improving local quality of life, then local elected officials may see some reward.

There is a flipside to the narrative about balancing loss in local power with gain in localized benefit. First, interlocal land use cooperation may actually provide a meaningful increase in local power. Regional cooperation and a formal mechanism with which to exercise it can increase the geographic scope over which the officials in a municipality have influence. This may be especially important in land use, where the parcels that are adjacent to or near a municipality’s borders can be quite important in shaping property values and quality of life. Such a benefit would accrue to those local elected officials who have both regional and local ambitions (Bickers and Stein 2004). Indeed, the motivations behind having regional influence

may be quite parochial in nature. This point has been made a few times: cooperation can actually be about *increasing* local control rather than diluting it.

Second, benefits that are physically localized in one community may have positive electoral spillovers in another. The life of residents in municipality B may be strongly defined by what happens in municipality A, whether it relates to employment, schools, recreation, shopping, or some other amenity. This is not the same as a regional resilience or a positive economic spillover dynamic. Rather, it is about the reality of individuals defining community in ways that are often irrespective of municipal boundaries—boundaries which are often unclear to residents. Absent a multi-community or regional government to reward or penalize through voting, the local elected official may often bear the political responsibility for what is happening elsewhere.

### *Linking risks to cultural dispositions*

What the last two sections showed is that cooperation and autonomy present risks for the local elected official—risks to the municipality she represents, and to her political future. These are present regardless of municipal circumstances. Note the distinction from most interlocal cooperation studies, which regard the municipal context as imparting certainty among local decision makers about the link between benefits and costs on one hand and municipal and service characteristics on the other (i.e., some types of municipality will benefit more from cooperation, some targets of cooperation are more risky, transactions with some partners are more costly, et cetera). Uncertainty arises due to opportunism, and aversion to this risk means cooperation only manifests when the calculus yields a positive result compared to other options.

In the present account, mere risk aversion is replaced by either risk attention and amplification or risk inattention and diminution, and the selection of governance is culturally

informed. Coyle (1993: 31), extends the idea of cultural theory to the practice of land use planning and zoning, noting that those who are high group (communitarian) desire “broad participation in decision making, as in regulatory procedure” and those who are low grid (egalitarian) want “greater substantive equality of resources.”<sup>11</sup> By contrast, those who occupy a low group position promote individuated control of land use. And those who are high grid would be fine with a system of land use that allowed for inequality. Again, the themes of solidarity versus self-determination on one hand, and equality versus differentiation on the other, are clear. Coyle further remarks, “[w]e are likely to stress the problems with land use and be receptive to solutions that are compatible with our basic cultural orientation” (*Ibid.* 38). The question, then, is which of the cultural types will be wary of the risks of autonomy and receptive to the solution of interlocal cooperation, and which will be wary of the risks of cooperation and receptive to the continuation of the status quo?

If local elected officials, like everyone, are engaged in identity-protective cultural cognition (and there is no reason to suspect they are not) then some alignments become readily apparent. Consider an example. Suppose we send a thousand strangers to an island already developed into 1,000 parcels, and that each arrives with whatever wealth she has at the time. We assume that some outside force is present to maintain the rule of law and prevent a descent into anarchy. Two options are possible for how to govern land and deal with conflicts about it. In one, everyone is allowed to go about choosing a parcel on the first day, and then these parcels are divided into sets of 50, yielding twenty such collections. From that point on, those within each group must appoint leaders who plan the use of land and adjudicate conflicts. In the other option, the same process occurs but with 200 parcels in each set, resulting in five total. In the island

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<sup>11</sup> Coyle uses the traditional intersectional terminology of grid-group, such that those who are low grid and high group are egalitarians, those who are high grid and high group are hierarchs, and those who are low group and low grid are libertarians. The final quadrant (low group and high grid) is ignored, as is often the case.

example, as people are choosing which parcels to secure they are likely sorting based on who they want to live next to as neighbors. The social science literature has well established the tendency of people to want to live with others who are like them or seem like them on the surface, a tendency that persists even among individuals who are not inherently racist or classist by other measures of attitude and preferences. Pursuant to this inherent clannishness, we would expect that each person on the island would try to settle down around as many similar individuals as possible. Because this must be judged superficially, the judgment would have to be made on the basis of appearance. Sorting might also arise simply because some places on the island are more desirable, and wealthy individuals could outbid for these. Some interaction of these mechanisms might occur: the most desirable locations could only be settled by the wealthiest, and so this provides a signal to other wealthy islanders who might want to live among those of a similar class. People would have multiple ways, in short, to settle among similar neighbors.

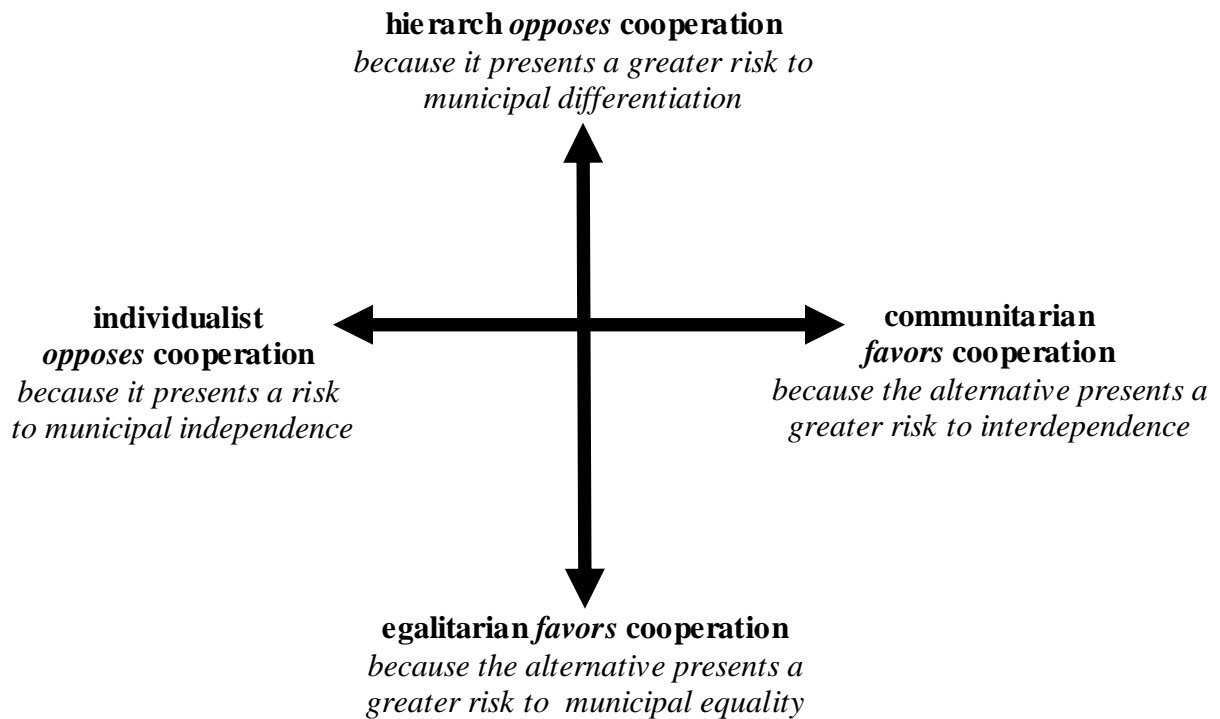
Now consider the two options and the likelihood of each being chosen by people according to their grid and group dimensions. The group dimension is about the relationship of the individual to government, where “government” is being used in the abstract sense. The basic balance is between freedom of action from government interference (individualism), and government intervention to address the problems of individual decisions (communitarianism, or solidarism). Which of the options outlined above is most likely to be chosen by someone who is a low group individualist? Arguably, it is the first option, which reflects the greatest degree of freedom from interference and self-determination, values that are cherished by the individualist. The high group communitarian would see the potential for more trouble under option one as the divided sets of parcels can get into more conflict, and with no definition of community at a scale able to address these issues. This stylized example reflects a basic truth about the group

dimension: all else being equal, as one moves lower in the scale of government, one is getting closer to a purely individualist arrangement, and as one moves higher in scale, one gets closer to pure communitarianism in which more and more people can participate, at least through the mechanism of representation. The process of sorting is integral to this truth. In a smaller arrangement of people, a person can know how homogeneous the other members are, and how likely it is that someone else shares his views about a number of issues and the best ways to address them. A low group individualist can be more secure in such a context that the public interest aligns well with his preferred mode of dealing with the world. The problems of moral hazard and adverse selection are much lower at a small scale. Increase the scale, and the situation becomes more and more uncertain—the individualist faces a much greater risk of having his individual autonomy fettered. For a communitarian, the heterogeneity and messiness of agreement in a larger community is acceptable because it reflects the awareness of interdependence—of being “in it together.”

Sorting, of course, is a process of differentiation, and one can—with similar reasoning—conclude that option one described above would be more desirable to the high grid hierarchs. These individuals heartily approve of differentiation, as it accords with values favoring stability and order, and social relations that depend on roles and positions. One of the major positions that people occupy in society attaches to where they live. The well known discussions of the geography of opportunity, for example, refers to the reality that individuals of a certain position (mostly in terms of class and race) occupy well defined places often defined by municipal boundaries. In the island example, the smaller groups of 50 would have a much better ability to enforce this differentiation. As the groups get larger, it would be harder to maintain a common identity and prevent the mixing in of “others.” In the island society, knowing that someone is

from Group A has much more meaning when the group has only a few people, and this type of social meaning would be valuable to someone with a high grid disposition but anathema to an egalitarian. The alignments between grid and group and views toward interlocal land use cooperation are shown in Figure 3.3.

**Figure 3.3 Cultural dispositions and preferences about interlocal land use cooperation**



Returning to the real world, a summary of the links between the risks of cooperation (or autonomy) and cultural dispositions is useful. First, *risks of loss* include the familiar mechanisms of exit and voice (Hirschman 1970). Residents and firms can leave the municipality or the region, or they can remain and express disapproval through voting and other political tools. These are not risks that have a knowable probability, but are rather are the possibility of loss arising as a product of uncertainty. Second, *risks can attach to both cooperation and autonomy*. In terms of exit, neither option can guarantee specific action or inaction on the part of

developers, residents, or firms necessary to improve municipal fiscal and economic well being, or coerce beneficial and non-opportunistic behavior by other municipalities. Whatever behaviors have led to the pattern of municipal success and decline, or stability and instability, can continue to function under either form of governance. In terms of voice, neither governance option usually has the imprimatur of *ex ante* residential approval, or a clear partisan signal to assist the local elected official. Third, *risks are present both for high-performing and low-performing municipalities*, and neither form of governance is inherently capable of removing these risks for a specific type of municipality.

In short, the local elected official exists in a condition in which risks of loss—whether municipal or individual or both, since the two may be hard to separate—are pervasive. What cultural theory supplies is a heuristic with which local elected officials can appraise these risks and make a decision that coheres with her preferred way of life. If a high group communitarian, she will see only an upside to cooperation because it promotes everyone working together and is an outward expression of interdependence and solidarity. Even if she recognizes the *possibility* for cooperation to be used in a negative way, this possibility will be diminished, and this diminution will persist whether she is in a high performing municipality or low performing municipality. The vice of parochialism, however, will be persistently amplified. A low grid *egalitarian* will have a similar preference but for a different reason. For him, the values of redistribution and fairness are most likely to be supported with a blurring of municipal boundaries that create artificial social divisions. In his preferred social relations, where a person is from should not be a defining social or economic feature. The egalitarian runs the risk that cooperative processes will simply reify existing race and class divisions, but the chance of this happening will seem small. The cultural heuristics will always be at work, but will function most



aggressively in the process of preference formation where no countervailing political signals or other institutional signals are present. One could construct similar narratives for the high grid and low group individuals, but in the opposite direction.

What I have laid out, in a long but necessary treatment, is the *cultural cognition of governance* hypothesis. Among two similarly situated local elected officials, even two occupying the same position in the same community, the one with a *higher group*, more communitarian disposition or a *lower grid*, more egalitarian disposition will be more likely to prefer a form of governance that is more cooperative, and that vests more authority in government at a larger scale. This choice of governance is most likely to promote an ordering of interlocal relations more reflective of the values these types of individuals have, and their preferred forms of social relation. By contrast, those with a *higher grid*, more hierarchical disposition or a *lower group*, more individualistic disposition will prefer a form of governance that preserves a relatively higher degree of local autonomy.

### *Conclusion*

Rayner (1992: 90) has said “[t]he fundamental purpose of grid/group analysis is to provide a framework within which a cultural analyst may consistently relate differences in organizational structures to the strength of arguments that sustain them.” In this chapter, I have explained how uncertainty and risk of loss are inherent in local land use, whether it is organized under a cooperative structure (like a joint municipal planning agreement) or remains mostly autonomous. Using the decision about the arrangement of interlocal versus local land use governance in a metropolitan area, I developed a cultural cognition of governance hypothesis to

explain why those with a high group *or* low grid disposition are likely to prefer cooperation, and those with a low group *or* high grid disposition are likely to prefer not cooperating.

The cultural cognition of governance hypothesis may seem to have little to do with the transaction cost approach typical of interlocal cooperation studies (see Chapter 2). However, quite a lot of compatibility is present. Most pointedly, “it is important to note that unlike many other cultural theories, [the cultural theory of Douglas and Wildavsky] is highly complementary of rational choice and institutional theories” (Swedlow 2011: 703). Culture and institutions are not warring claims on an actor’s mental processes (Chai 1997; Grendstad and Selle 1995). Both the transaction cost approach of Williamson and the cultural theory account of the world can be used to explain how actors decide among different modes of organizing. Hierarchy and market—the polar modes of organizing activity in Williamson’s transactional economy—can be regarded as aligning with the low-grid/low-group and high-grid/high group ways of life (Thompson et al. 1990: 13-14). What cultural theory offers is an account in which individuals are not simply adopting these ways of organizing, and others, because of their short-term, economic interests. Rather, even in the absence of clarity about such interests, individuals will sort into these different organizational structures because such structures promote desirable social relations and tend to cohere with personal values and beliefs. This cultural sorting through the mechanism of identity-protective cognition will be a more consistent explanation for rational preferences toward organizational selection, persisting even where material self-interest and opportunism would promote a different organizational selection. In Table 3.1, I summarize the general hypotheses that reflect the logic developed in Chapter 2 and this chapter. Each hypothesis presents *ceteris paribus* reasoning. If the cultural factors are in later analysis significant in the direction expected, it is while controlling for political perceptions, interlocal ties, and various

municipal and intermunicipal characteristics (as well as several individual controls, including political party affiliation, years in office, and the like). If the intermunicipal variables are significant, it is while controlling for cultural cognition and other factors that may affect a local elected official's preference formation.

**Table 3.1 General hypotheses based on different types of cognition**

Type of cognition	Mechanism at work	General hypothesis about local elected officials' perceptions toward interlocal land use cooperation (versus autonomy)
Cultural	Group	<i>Support for cooperation will be higher among those with a higher group, more communitarian disposition. Support for autonomy will be higher among those with a lower group, more individualist disposition.</i>
	Grid	<i>Support for cooperation will be higher among those with a lower grid, more egalitarian disposition. Support for autonomy will be higher among those with a higher grid, more hierarchical disposition.</i>
Political	Alignment	<i>Support for cooperation will in general be lower, and for autonomy be higher, among those who attach more importance to doing what residents want with regard to land use policies.</i>
	Discretion	<i>Support for cooperation will in general be higher, and for autonomy be lower, among those who perceive greater ability to make decisions about land use policies that contravene what residents want if it serves the best interests of the municipality.</i>
	Support	<i>Support for cooperation will in general be higher, and for autonomy be lower, among those who perceive more support for land use cooperation among residents.</i>
Municipal	Fiscal distress	<i>Support for cooperation will in general be higher, and for autonomy be lower, among those who perceive greater fiscal distress in the community.</i>
	Socioeconomic distress	<i>Support for cooperation will in general be higher, and for autonomy be lower, among those who perceive greater socioeconomic distress in the community.</i>
	Homeowner lobby	<i>Support for cooperation will in general be higher, and for autonomy be lower, among those who from communities with a higher share of homeowners.</i>
Inter-municipal	Interlocal ties	<i>Support for cooperation will be higher, and for autonomy be lower, among those from municipalities connected through membership in voluntary regional associations, prior cooperative agreements affecting land use, and an existing JMPA agreement, as well as those from municipalities with a lower number of neighbors, those from "island" municipalities, and those from council-manager cities.</i>
	Fiscal homophily	<i>Support for cooperation will in general be higher, and for autonomy be lower, among those from communities that are much worse off than neighboring communities in terms of fiscal performance (and vice versa)</i>
	Socioeconomic homophily	<i>Support for cooperation will in general be higher, and for autonomy be lower, among those from communities that are much better or much worse off than neighboring communities in terms of socioeconomic performance (and vice versa)</i>

## **Chapter 4. From Conceptual Model to Empirical Model**

### *Introduction*

In the first three chapters, I introduced the theoretical foundations for the cultural cognition of governance as an alternative explanation to the existing transaction cost framework. Through this mechanism, local elected officials amplify or diminish the municipal and political risks of land use cooperation and land use autonomy in accordance with dispositions toward solidarity (group) and equality (grid). This amplification is possible because individuals are rationally identity-protective: they care most about risks to their preferred way of life and the social relations and values that cohere with it. Cooperation tends to secure values and social interactions that align with high group or low grid dispositions, while autonomy tends to secure values and social interactions that align with low group or high grid dispositions. The process of cultural cognition is one of culturally rational risk appraisal.

Testing a cultural cognition of governance hypothesis requires (1) a large sample of local elected officials in heterogeneous contexts from whom one can generalize to the population of local elected officials, (2) data about their cultural dispositions and preferences toward interlocal land use cooperation, the associational link of greatest interest in this study, and (3) data about the municipal and intermunicipal fiscal, demographic, and political context with which to control for alternative explanations. The consolidated metropolitan areas of Detroit and Grand Rapids, Michigan, provide all three, and it was in the municipalities within these seventeen metropolitan

counties that I conducted this study. In this chapter, I justify the study area selection and describe the data collection process. I then develop dependent variables (four different measures of preferences about interlocal land use cooperation, used in separate models), key explanatory variables (measures of grid and group dispositions), vectors of municipal and intermunicipal characteristics meant to control for traditional transaction cost explanations (demographic and fiscal measures, and proxies for interlocal network relationships), and a vector of individual level control variables.

### *The study area*

Michigan is a paradigmatic example of a state with relatively strong local governments that have access to many avenues for cooperation. If asked to express a preference about interlocal land use cooperation, local elected officials are likely to have appreciation of the tensions between working together and working apart. In the following paragraphs, I describe the framework of local government form, interlocal cooperation, and local land use in the state, and also briefly summarize the nature of regional government in the Detroit and Grand Rapids areas.

Six types of local government exist in Michigan: mayor-council (sometimes known as “strong mayor”) cities, council-manager (“weak mayor”) cities, general law villages, home rule villages, general law townships, and charter townships. Unlike the townships in many states, Michigan townships are corporate entities and have all the powers expressly granted or fairly implied by the law. Geographically, every square mile of the state is covered by some form of more or less powerful local government. Therefore, no city, township, or village is without a municipal neighbor of some kind. The liberal constitutional construction of township powers means that they function very similarly to cities and villages. The key difference between home

rule and general law units is that the latter have limited ability to generate own source revenue from taxes. With regard to land use, all local government types have the same statutory grant of land use planning and zoning power under the state enabling acts (2006, MCL 125.3203(1)). The major statutory limitation on local land use regulations and decisions is a prohibition on exclusionary zoning (2006, MCL 125.3207).<sup>1</sup> Neighboring jurisdictions can comment on each other's comprehensive land use plans, but the commentary has no binding effect on policy decisions. The legal framework for planning and zoning in Michigan is similar to that found in many other states (Stephens and Wikstrom 1999).

Michigan has a strong home rule tradition, and residents and local government officials value the ability to control their municipality's unique "community character" (Zeemering 2007). Despite this, most municipalities in Michigan—like those across the country—engage in interlocal collective action to provide at least one service, and often to provide many (Citizens Research Council 2005; LeRoux 2006).

Municipalities in Michigan have endured a long-term, state-wide recession, declines in state revenue sharing programs, limits on increases in property tax rates, and increases in the cost of providing local goods and services. If a local government does not want to reduce services or try to generate more revenue through an expanded or increased fee schedule, both of which may place it at a competitive disadvantage for attracting new firms and households, then interlocal arrangements become a critical way to address resource scarcity (Carr, Gerber, and Luper 2009).

Above this panoply of local governments, Michigan has several regional structures. I focus on those present in the Grand Rapids and Detroit metropolitan areas. The state is divided into fourteen federal and state designated regional councils. Four overlap with the Detroit and

Grand Rapids metropolitan areas. The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Council (WMSRDC) is a federal and state designated regional planning and development agency, and the planning agency for the MPO program for Muskegon and northern Ottawa counties. The West Michigan Regional Planning Commission (WMRPC) serves seven counties including five in the Grand Rapids metro area. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) serves Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, Wayne, and Washtenaw counties. Genesee and Lapeer counties, with Shiawassee county, are in the Region 5 Planning and Development Commission. In 2013, Governor Snyder established ten “prosperity regions” across Michigan. Region 6, the East Michigan Prosperity Region, includes Genesee, Lapeer, St. Clair, and four other counties. The Detroit Region, number 10, includes Detroit, Oakland, and Wayne counties. Washtenaw, Livingston, and Monroe counties, with three others, are part of the Southeast Michigan Prosperity Region. Seven of the eight metro counties around Grand Rapids are in the West Michigan Prosperity Region (Region 4b) while Newaygo County and five others are in the West Central Prosperity Region (Region 4a).

Contrasting the top down councils of government, metropolitan planning commissions, and regional planning and development commissions (and now prosperity regions), a few voluntary associations of local governments also exist in Michigan. The Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC) was formed under Michigan’s Metropolitan Councils Act (Act 292 of 1989) (for a detailed history, see Visser (2004)). Thirty four municipalities are members; only Kent County and Ottawa County are formal members of the GVMC, although a few municipalities in the other metropolitan counties are members. Community conferences have also formed in a few areas in Wayne County, like the Downriver Community Conference and the Conference of Western Wayne. And smaller councils of government, like SWWCOG as

described in Chapter 1, can work more closely with local governments than their larger counterparts.

The substantial autonomy Michigan municipalities enjoy over land use decision making through state planning and enabling acts is matched by a similar degree of autonomy over voluntary cooperation. This autonomy comes through several pieces of state legislation. In 1945, the Regional Planning Act allowed for the creation and funding of regional planning commissions among two or more municipalities to govern part or all of the land within their jurisdictional boundaries (Act 281 of 1945). In 1951, the Intergovernmental Contracts Between Municipalities Act (Act 35 of 1951) authorized a municipality to contract with others “for the ownership, operation, or performance, jointly, or by any one or more on behalf of all, of any property, facility or service which each would have the power to own, operate or perform separately.” More plainly, if a municipality could legally engage in a certain activity, then it could also contract to do so on behalf of one or more other municipalities. The 1967 session saw two key pieces of legislation passed: the Urban Cooperation Act (Act 7 of 1967) and the Intergovernmental Transfers of Functions and Responsibilities Act (Act 8 of 1967). The former authorizes Michigan public agencies (which includes any local unit of government, extending to municipalities of all type, special districts, and authorities) to enter into intergovernmental agreements with any other public agencies in Michigan, other states, and Canada. The latter act authorizes cities, villages, and other political subdivisions to enter into contracts transferring functions or responsibilities to one another.

While these Acts provide a legal foundation for cooperation that has resulted in myriad intermunicipal agreements and partnerships over the last half century, land use remained an untouched policy domain. Despite efforts to introduce more coordinated planning and zoning in



Michigan, the most recently passed planning and zoning enabling acts of 2008 (which replace previous acts that separately treated cities/villages, townships, and counties) simply allow for comment on plans and proposed changes by the county, adjacent communities, and regional planning bodies.

### *The Joint Municipal Planning Act*

In 2003, the Michigan State Legislature passed the Joint Municipal Planning Act (MCL 125.135 et seq., hereafter “JMPA”). The JMPA was the major legislative outcome from a push in the direction of growth management during Governor Granholm’s first year in office. The Michigan Land Use Leadership Council (MLULC), a bipartisan committee created by the Governor, had prepared a lengthy report on the state of land use in Michigan, including a detailed chapter on improvements to the legal framework for land use planning and zoning (“Michigan’s Land, Michigan’s Future”). The MLULC report in pertinent part notes that “Michigan’s local governments are not required to coordinate plans, zoning, or infrastructure with adjoining units of local government or with the county, region, or state” and that “[t]here is no state statutory authority for joint planning or joint zoning for those cities, villages, and townships that wish to do so cooperatively” (*Ibid.* at 53-54). The report recommends ensuring in the future that “[i]ncentives and tools (including existing tools and the creation of new ones) are available, and disincentives are eliminated to allow local governments to make better land use decisions and to improve intergovernmental coordination and planning.” The report also speaks extensively about the competition encouraged among municipalities due to the combination of Home Rule authority, an overreliance on property taxes, and the negative effects of horizontal and vertical fragmentation (*Ibid.* in Chapter 6, generally).

JMPA agreements are entered into by the legislative bodies of participating municipalities. Agreements exist (as of December 2014) in Fremont, Dayton Township, and Sheridan Charter Township (Newaygo County); Suttons Bay and Suttons Bay Township (Leelanau County); Bellevue and Bellevue Township (Eaton County); Bear Lake, Bear Lake Township, and Pleasanton Township (Manistee County); Manchester and Manchester Township (Washtenaw County); Marshall and Marshall Township (Calhoun County); Quincy and Quincy Township (Branch County); Homestead and Inland townships (Benzie County); Thompsonville, Colfax Township, and Weldon Township (Benzie County); Traverse City and Garfield Township (Grand Traverse County); Hastings, Hastings Township, Rutland Charter Township, and Carlton Township (Barry County); and Norway and Norway Township (Dickinson County).

The JMPA does not require abolition of constituent planning commissions and zoning bodies, though an amendment in 2008 allowed for the phased transfer of power from the municipal planning commissions to the joint planning commission. Most of the JMPA agreements listed above retain municipal autonomy and use the joint planning commission as an advisory body; only in one (the Fremont Community) have local planning and zoning bodies and regulations been dissolved and replaced completely by their joint counterparts. The JMPA also does not have to be coincident with existing jurisdictional boundaries. For example, the Traverse City and Garfield Township agreement only applies to the Grand Traverse Commons Redevelopment Plan, which targets the expansive grounds of the old state mental hospital that straddle the city-township boundary. The Marshall and Marshall Township agreement covers the area where two interstates intersect and development pressure has been high. However, the more typical use of a JMPA agreement is to manage growth among a city and townships, and this usually means the jointly planned area fully covers participating municipalities' lands.

A key benefit of JMPA cooperation is that it provides a potential shield against exclusionary zoning legal challenges. Michigan law requires that a municipality with planning and zoning authority accommodate all land uses in its plans. By using a JMPA agreement, the applicable legal planning area can bridge municipalities that may have very different characters. For example, a JMPA agreement could ensure that higher density housing and commercial uses are targeted to a city, while township lands are preserved for rural uses and open space. Even though regionalism through cooperation is often thought of as a shift away from the status quo, the JMPA could actually be used to reinforce existing patterns of development.

The selection of Michigan as a study area also contributes to a well developed body of literature on the process of interlocal cooperation within the state. Andrew (2009: 135) notes that “what is known about current patterns of [interlocal cooperation] mostly comes from comprehensive studies of agreements in just three states: Michigan, Iowa, and Florida.” Work by several scholars has described and tried to explain this cooperation, both in the state as a whole and in southeast Michigan (Citizens Research Council 2005; LeRoux and Carr 2007; Carr, LeRoux, and Shrestha 2009; Carr, Gerber, and Luper 2009; David 2008, 2015).

### *A survey of local elected officials*

To gather data on local elected officials’ preferences, perceptions, cultural dispositions, and other personal characteristics, I developed and administered a survey in 2013 and 2014 targeting all elected officials who serve on legislative bodies in Michigan cities, townships, and villages located within the seventeen metropolitan counties around Detroit and Grand Rapids. I developed my own contact list by checking the municipal websites of the 508 municipalities in the two metropolitan areas—288 in the Detroit area and 220 in the Grand Rapids area. The

contact list included mayors, city council members, township board members, and village board members, as well as staff planners.<sup>12</sup> Where municipal websites were outdated, non-existent, or lacked contact information, I expanded my search to county level sources. In the early development of the contact list for the Detroit region I attempted further supplementation through telephone calls to local clerks and other officials, but in many of the municipalities in which emails were not originally available telephone calls were not successful due to non-response or privacy concerns.

In total, the contact list included 3,036 local elected officials—1,799 in Detroit and 1,237 in Grand Rapids. The final contact list had only 92 staff planners, reflecting the common use of outside consulting firms. Only about 60 percent of the officials on the contact list had email addresses available: 1,219 in Detroit and 621 in Grand Rapids. This disparity reflects the presence of more semi-rural and rural areas within the eight Grand Rapids counties. These counties had a lower email availability rate and most had lower response rates. One can also see that the municipalities represented in the study are higher in population and taxable value (the two tend to travel together) and slightly higher in median home value. I discuss in the analysis whether the slight underrepresentation of rural, smaller, and less wealthy municipalities introduced meaningful bias into the findings. A comparison of the samples with the population is found in Tables 4.1 and 4.3 for Detroit and Tables 4.2 and 4.4 for Grand Rapids. Overall, the response rate was about 27 percent.

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<sup>12</sup> The titles of officials can vary slightly depending on the community. The findings regarding staff planners are outside the scope of this study.

**Table 4.1 Detroit region, institutional representativeness of sample of local elected officials by government type and county**

	<b>All elected officials</b> percent (frequency)	<b>Sample</b> percent (frequency)
Government form (response rate, %)	100% (1,785*)	100% (349)
Township (29.7)	49.7 (888)	51.6 (180)
<i>General law</i> (29.5)	32.6 (582)	45.8 (160)
<i>Charter</i> (31.7)	17.1 (306)	5.7 (20)
City (28.4)	39.9 (712)	41.3 (144)
<i>Council-mgr</i> (29.4)	32.0 (571)	33.8 (118)
<i>Mayor-council</i> (24.5)	7.9 (141)	7.4 (26)
Village (25.0)	11.0 (196)	7.2 (25)
Counties (response rate, %**)		
Wayne (25.3)	17.2 (307)	16.0 (56)
Oakland (28.4)	22.2 (396)	27.8 (97)
Macomb (29.9)	9.2 (165)	12.3 (43)
Livingston (35.6)	7.2 (128)	10.3 (36)
Lapeer (17.8)	8.2 (147)	2.3 (8)
St. Clair (35.5)	9.1 (162)	6.3 (22)
Genesee (30.4)	9.7 (173)	8.9 (31)
Monroe (21.3)	7.5 (133)	4.6 (16)
Washtenaw (36.1)	10.4 (185)	11.5 (40)
*: The total population is a list of all officials available from public websites, such as those maintained by municipalities, counties, and other organizations.		
**: Sample/sampling frame. The sampling frame was limited to those local elected officials with available email addresses, regardless of whether those addresses were functional.		

**Table 4.2 Grand Rapids region, institutional representativeness of sample of local elected officials by government type and county**

	<b>All elected officials</b> percent (frequency)	<b>Sample</b> percent (frequency)
Government form (response rate, %)	100% (1,237)	100% (189)
Township (31.9)	64.8 (802)	65.6 (124)
<i>General law</i> (30.7)	56.3 (697)	53.4 (101)
<i>Charter</i> (38.3)	8.5 (105)	12.2 (23)
City (31.5)	21.7 (269)	32.8 (62)
<i>Council-mgr</i> (30.1)	19.2 (238)	26.5 (50)
<i>Mayor-counc</i> (38.7)	2.5 (31)	6.3 (12)
Village (8.9)	13.4 (166)	1.2 (3)
Counties (response rate, %**)		
Kent (32.3)	17.5 (217)	25.9 (49)
Ottawa (40.9)	11.7 (145)	24.9 (47)
Barry (17.6)	9.0 (111)	4.8 (9)
Montcalm (22.7)	13.3 (165)	5.3 (10)
Ionia (33.3)	7.5 (93)	3.7 (7)
Newaygo (30.8)	12.5 (155)	8.5 (16)
Muskegon (30.8)	12.9 (159)	10.6 (20)
Allegan (25.6)	15.5 (192)	16.4 (31)
<p>*: The total population is a list of all officials available from public websites, such as those maintained by municipalities, counties, and other organizations.            **: Sample/sampling frame. The sampling frame was limited to those local elected officials with available email addresses, regardless of whether those addresses were functional.</p>		

**Table 4.3 Detroit area, demographic and fiscal representativeness of municipalities represented by elected officials in sample**

Demographic/fiscal characteristic	Mean	
	all munis (288)	sample (166)
<b>Average population (2009-2012)</b>	<b>16,619</b>	<b>28,239</b>
Average % of pop. identifying as white (2009-2012)	90.2	87.7
Average % of properties vacant (2009-2012)	9.2	8.6
Average % of housing units owner-occupied (2009-2012)	80.8	78.7
Average % of housing units that are single-family detached (2009-2012)	77.6	72.8
% of built structures built since 2000 (2012)	12.6	13.0
% of households moved in since 2000 (2012)	51.7	55.3
Average median household income (2009-2012)	\$61,595	\$66,522
<b>Average med. owner-occ. house value (2009-2012)</b>	<b>\$178,700</b>	<b>\$200,883</b>
Average level of operations funding <sup>1</sup> (2008-2012)	1.9	2.7
Average expenditures burden <sup>2</sup> (2008-2012)	1.3	1.4
<b>Average taxable value (2008-2012)</b>	<b>\$566 million</b>	<b>\$1.1 billion</b>
1: operations funding = (general fund revenues – general fund expenditures) / general fund revenues. Above zero is a surplus; below zero is a deficit.		
2: expenditures burden = general fund expenditures / taxable value.		

**Table 4.4 Grand Rapids area, demographic and fiscal representativeness of municipalities represented by elected officials in sample**

Demographic/fiscal characteristic	Mean	
	all munis (220)	sample (96)
<b>Average population (2009-2012)</b>	<b>6,408</b>	<b>12,677</b>
Average % of pop. identifying as white (2009-2012)	93.4	91.7
Average % of properties vacant (2009-2012)	13.4	12.0
Average % of housing units owner-occupied (2009-2012)	82.2	80.8
Average % of housing units that are single-family detached (2009-2012)	76.5	74.1
% of built structures built since 2000 (2012)	13.2	15.4
% of households moved in since 2000 (2012)	52.1	56.1
Average median household income (2009-2012)	\$49,371	\$54,750
<b>Average med. owner-occ. house value (2009-2012)</b>	<b>\$133,800</b>	<b>\$156,106</b>
Average level of operations funding <sup>1</sup> (2008-2012)	-0.05	2.5
Average expenditures burden <sup>2</sup> (2008-2012)	0.90	0.97
<b>Average taxable value (2008-2012)</b>	<b>\$214 million</b>	<b>\$441 billion</b>
1: operations funding = (general fund revenues – general fund expenditures) / general fund revenues. Above zero is a surplus; below zero is a deficit. 2: expenditures burden = general fund expenditures / taxable value.		



The survey had 31 items, and is available in Appendix A. The order of the items was intentional so that personal or controversial items were reserved for the end. Internet administration through Qualtrics allowed respondents to begin and resume the survey as needed, so long as they completed it within two weeks. Reminder emails were sent after one week and again two days before the close of the survey. Questions appeared on-screen mostly one at a time, and going back to change a prior response was not allowed to prevent intentional alignment of responses across the items. On average, the survey took about twelve minutes to complete. Respondents were not allowed to go back and change answers. I used a pop-up caution box to verify whether they wanted to leave a question blank. Tables 4.1 and 4.2, above, also provide the response rates by government type and by county.

### *Linking the survey data to municipal level data*

To connect the survey data to characteristics of the municipality, I first made a database of all the municipalities in the study area. I also included several dozen municipalities that touched the borders of these counties to allow later construction of intermunicipal characteristics that were not artificially limited by county boundaries. This database included municipal name, government type, county, metropolitan area, and—most importantly—a Federal Information Processing Standards code (FIPS). The FIPS code is used by the U.S. Census of Housing and Population, including the American Community Survey five-year estimates for 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 used in this study. The variables pulled from these estimates are described later in this chapter, along with their manipulation into intermunicipal variables. An advantage of this approach was the ability to have averages and change-in measures for a period that is very contemporaneous for the local elected officials I surveyed in 2013 and 2014. It would be unlikely

that the trends or conditions observed in this period would change dramatically enough for a large enough subset of well over 500 municipalities for a one to two years time gap to be meaningful. For fiscal conditions, I used the data available from the Munetrix Corporation public listings online, which allow a user to look up several key measures of fiscal health for each municipality every year beginning for most in 2008 and, at the time of data collection, running through 2012. Only the largest municipalities had 2013 estimates. I entered 20 different fiscal measures in my own database and joined these through municipality name to the census data. This same municipal name was then used to link all the municipal data—from both ACS estimates and Munetrix data—to each survey respondent (who was listed with municipal name in the original contact list). Thus, for Ann Arbor City, as an example, eight respondents completed the survey, and for all eight the municipal level variables would be the same while the individual level responses would, on most survey items, vary.

In the next sections, I describe in more detail the dependent and independent variables. I also refer the reader to the survey items in Appendix A. In Chapter 5, I present descriptive statistics for each item.

### *Preferences toward alternative uses of the joint municipal planning act*

As described already, the JMPA is a flexible tool. I wanted to incorporate this flexibility into the dependent variables because it is conceptually unique and theoretically valuable. The ability to constrain cooperation geographically is unusual, as the endeavor is typically “all or nothing” or aspatial. In theory, such a process has less risk of loss attached, and may exhibit less evidence of being part of any calculus—whether based on economic, political, or cultural consideration. And the ability to choose between advisory and authoritative structures speaks

directly to the willingness of an individual to choose an alternative that should seem riskier. Knowing which factors play a positive and significant role in promoting an authoritative preference is a useful piece of information for both theory and practice.

The dependent variables are in survey items 4 through 7. The first two deal with the scenario in which partial JMPA coverage is used to cooperatively plan in a specific area that is smaller than the entire municipality. Corridor development, highway interchanges, rivers, waterfronts, and other man-made and natural features that disregard municipal boundaries can be targeted through this use of an agreement. The second two survey items deal with full coverage, which is self-explanatory.

### *Cultural indicators*

The short form cultural cognition items used in the work of Kahan are useful in this study for several reasons (Kahan 2012; see survey items 19 through 30, Appendix A). First, they do not invoke cooperation directly—they do not use words like “cooperation” or “regional,” which might lead to an inevitable positive correlation between dispositions and preferences. For example, a respondent who agrees “working as part of a team is valuable” should be more likely also to favor joint municipal land use planning. One would learn very little from this positive association except that people who prefer group work generally also prefer it specifically. Second, the questions—despite often addressing “hot button” political topics—are not ones for which a culturally sanctioned response is expected. Americans are far from uniform in their opinions about the role of government and issues of equality. Third, the questions measure different valences of cultural dispositions. Half the grid questions positively measure a hierarchical disposition if evaluated with “strongly agree” while the other half positively measure

an egalitarian disposition. A respondent giving the same answer repeatedly would have a neutral value on an additive index. A true “strong egalitarian” would have to strongly agree with three items and strongly disagree with the other three. The same would be true for a strong hierarchy, strong communitarian, or strong individualist.

It is possible these questions are not the best items drawn from the original longer survey in the work of Kahan. The original factor analysis used data from a large scale national survey of the general population, and the latent cultural dispositions of local elected officials may not load well on the twelve items in the short form survey. For this reason, I used exploratory factor analysis to test whether grid and group are indeed measuring different dimensions, and whether all the questions used for each dimension are worth including. To ensure parsimony in the multivariate models used to estimate the *ceteris paribus* associations between dispositions and preferences, I applied a factor analysis using polychoric correlations (which is appropriate when variables are ordinal) with varimax rotation to achieve orthogonal factors. A sample size of at least 300 with at least 10 observations per variable is a rule of thumb for “good” factor analysis, and my dataset exceeds both thresholds easily (Comrey and Lee 1992). The analysis, in plain terms, reveals that most of the variation across the twelve items—about 81 percent—loads onto a single factor, and that the six group items are the principal components in this factor. Another roughly thirteen percent of the latent variation loads onto a second factor, and two of the grid items—the first and third items of the three with a hierarchical valence—are the principal components in that factor. In the final analyses (see Chapter 6), I ran models including both full indices (reflecting answers to all six questions for each disposition) and an alternative index for grid which summed only the two items that performed best in factor analysis.

## *Cultural indicators and political party affiliation*

Given the wording of the statements used to measure cultural dispositions, a logical question is whether the items are simply a reflection of political party affiliation. As later results show, the answer to this question is affirmative. However, this is not problematic for the use of cultural cognition as a mechanism, or for the use of the survey items. Swedlow (2011: 704) notes that cultural theory “goes beyond the liberal-conservative continuum in American politics to specify the ideological and institutional sources of conflict and coalition in two dimensions of social and political relations, and consequently cultural theory provides a more accurate basis for characterizing ideological and institutional sources of partisanship.” Beyond enhanced accuracy, it is important to note the mutability of party affiliation, both over time and across space (Wildavsky 1987). For example, a Republican currently might align well with the values that suggest a weak role for the government in individual behavior and clearly defined social roles based on easily recognized personal characteristics. A Libertarian might also fit squarely within the individualist affiliation, though the balance between hierarchy and egalitarianism might be trickier to predict. A Democrat would probably fit well with the communitarian’s preference for a strong role for government and lack of defined social roles. Indeed, a lack of any alignment between party affiliation and cultural disposition should lead one to be suspicious of the items used to measure grid and group.

The relationship between party affiliation and cultural dispositions does not mean one should favor the former (because the information is more readily available) or the latter (because it allows for a richer variation than possible with the standard divisions of political party), and discard the other. Rather, the two are complementary: both are measures of identity. For example, if one is a hierarch and an individualist, then choosing to represent the Republican

Party is protective of one's identity. This does not mean that friction will not exist. In my sample, about ten percent of those who are hierarchs and individualists (the classic Republican quadrant) are Democrats, i.e., about fifteen percent of all Democrats in the sample. I show this graphically in Chapter 6. About fifteen percent of those in the opposing quadrant, the domain of the paradigmatic Democrat, are Republicans—about nine percent of all Republicans in the sample. I find it valuable in this study, an early consideration of cultural cognition, to focus on the grid and group dimensions and comment in later analysis, as necessary, on how party affiliation performs as an indicator in the place of cultural dispositions. Notably, all the findings presented later include political party affiliation as a control.

### *The relationship between residents and local elected officials*

The relationship between residents and local elected officials is reflected in three variables, which I term alignment, discretion, and support. These can be seen in survey items 9, 10, and 11, respectively. All are with regard to land use planning and zoning and cooperation specifically. It would be less informative to ask how an elected official *generally* perceives these dynamics, since they are likely to be quite different across policy areas.

These survey items are meant to capture how respondents interpret their role as representatives of residents and/or the public interest (the two may not be identically defined). The literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 about the necessary individual benefits of collective action and the political considerations of local elected officials supports gathering empirical data on public interest perceptions. While theoretical arguments and empirical evidence suggest alignment between city policies and resident political views (or between legislators and constituents in general) (e.g., Fischel 2005; Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014; Kalt and Zupan

1984), it remains unclear how persistent the connection is for local elected officials. This is particularly true for officials from communities with populations under 25,000, which are understudied given their prevalence in the United States.

The three survey items measure the extent to which responsiveness is to residents or to the municipality, a distinction which matters when one thinks about policy interventions that might spur cooperation. Framing cooperation as having electoral benefits because of its appeal to residents is a much different task than framing it as being beneficial to the municipal corporation as an institution, where projections about fiscal health and growth might have more play.

The support, alignment, and discretion items are also included as more direct measures of the notion that interlocal cooperation is a function of rational transaction cost economizing. Local elected officials may not be attuned to the relationship between the governance of land use and measures of fiscal distress, for example, but this does not mean they do not perceive value in following the public interest—however that might be defined.

One concern with the residential support item is that respondents would simply align their perceptions of resident preferences with their own preferences, such that any significance of residential support as an explanatory variable would be suspect. Strong alignment should be present between local elected officials' preferences about interlocal land use cooperation and their perceptions of residential support. However, the measure of support does not simply parrot the preference measures. Correlations between these items are, respectively, about 0.40 and 0.36 for the preferences about partial area and full coverage adoption, and are about 0.19 and 0.15 for preferences about advisory versus authoritative forms of cooperation after adoption. This difference makes sense: from the viewpoint of an elected official, residents are likely to be more engaged with the adoption decision and have less input on implementation. Of course, the ideal

measure of residential support would be a survey of residents about cooperation or some external measure of support such as a public referendum. But for purposes of the present study, I am comfortable enough with the perceptual measure of residential support to include it.

### *Interlocal ties*

Several studies on network effects in interlocal cooperation suggest that ties in one policy or membership in regional bodies can lead to cooperation in other areas. Although the research is often associational rather than over time (for an exception in the area of public safety services, see Andrew 2008), the reasoning is that the links among the municipalities create relationships of trust and a positive norm of reciprocity among the elected and administrative officials working in those municipalities. When scholars discuss metropolitan governance as a manifestation of administrative conjunction, it is this type of relational effect to which they are referring.

I am not confident in the notion that cooperation in other areas begets land use cooperation. Cooperation in public works or public safety and other systems maintenance functions is generally not part of how a community differentiates itself from others, or maintains a specific community character. In Chapter 1, I noted that cooperation in several public services among Manchester Village and the townships was present. These connections still persisted, even after joint land use planning and zoning was declined. In general, across the state of Michigan one finds thousands of interlocal agreements targeting systems maintenance, but few about land use or other lifestyle services. Elected officials are typically not a part of the networks that create or maintain interlocal cooperation in systems maintenance. Most interlocal agreements do not require legislative oversight or participation in implementation after adoption.



Even in the JMPA agreements, usually only one elected official attends the meetings of the joint planning commission.

In general, municipal membership in an agreement or a regional body does not mean that a respondent elected official was involved in adopting an agreement or approving membership, or is part of ongoing maintenance, or is attending regional meetings. These activities would be the mechanisms through which trust among the elected officials of neighboring municipalities might generate, paving the way for more supportive preferences toward joint land use planning. From a data collection and analysis perspective, having a binary variable reflecting the presence of any interlocal agreements would not yield enough variation (nearly all municipalities have at least one). A count variable would not perform much better, since from the perspective of the local elected official the difference between having two local agreements and having five might simply reflect the areas in which a community has needed outside help. The only linkage that should really matter is the cooperation that happens in areas affecting land use decisions. Regional bodies have more regular meetings and one could view them as creating a regional consciousness beyond that arising from linkages through mutual aid agreements and memoranda of understanding, or service contracts. Elected officials might have a general awareness of being part of a broader “community” because of this, and I would expect this to be truer if the association was voluntary.

Based on the above reasoning, in the final database I included dichotomous perceptual measures of whether a community already had a JMPA agreement, whether it had another cooperative interlocal agreement that affected land use planning and zoning decisions, and whether it was a member of a voluntary regional association, including the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, Downriver Community Conference, and Conference of Western Wayne. I

also included a dichotomous measure of SEMCOG and other COG membership, though I did not expect it to be significant and it was, indeed, not.

### *Measures of municipal and intermunicipal conditions*

The perception of the local elected official about the municipal fiscal and demographic context requires some consideration. In earlier studies of interlocal cooperation, variable specification suffered from two conceptual flaws. First, most variables were about the municipality only, even though theory suggests comparative performance is critical to how an official might appraise potential costs and benefits. Looking at only the municipality has limits because cooperation is relational. A measure of median home value likely means little beyond serving as one indicator, perhaps, of fiscal distress if the figure is quite low or falling. One would also want to know how a municipality's median home value compares to those of its neighbors. This is the idea of homophily discussed in the transaction cost framework detailed in Chapter 3: cooperation is easier among similarly situated municipalities, for several reasons. A few studies included a comparison of the municipality to the average for the county or metropolitan statistical area on one or more dimensions, but this is not a pertinent comparison. A municipality might be on par with the average county or MSA municipality, but performing much better (or much worse) than its immediate neighbors. It is these neighbors who matter most in every interlocal cooperation policy area. While cooperation might extend beyond these immediate neighbors, it is hard to imagine a community looking for mutual aid or service provision assistance two municipalities away. For land use, contiguity is quite important—one cannot effectively plan to protect a watershed or connect recreational uses or assemble a site without sharing common borders. Thus, when local elected officials think about how their municipality

compares to others, the “others” which matter most are adjacent, not some imagined average other.

Having all the data linked through federal information processing standards (FIPS) codes within a geographic information system allowed me to overcome this first problem. Using the Python interface in Quantum GIS (QGIS), I created a code that would sum a given dimension for all the municipalities touching a target municipality (i.e., all its neighbors). I would then divide by the number of neighbors to get the average. The technique, clearly, is imperfect because it weights all communities the same. However, knowing how a local elected official might privilege one community over another in considering interlocal land use cooperation was simply unknowable with the information available. Using weights reflecting population or area, for example, might have yielded a result that made one neighboring municipality seem much more important than it would be in the local official’s thought process.

Consider median home value as an example. In Livonia, a suburban city in northeastern Wayne County, the average median home value for the years 2009 through 2012 was \$107,900 (eighth lowest of the 41 municipalities in Wayne County; Detroit ranks third). In the three county urban area (Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties), the average value for the same time period was \$200,362, and in Wayne County alone it was \$159,426. But using the GIS analysis technique described above, one finds that the average median home value in the ten municipalities bordering Livonia is \$173,015, and this has the advantage of allowing comparison of Livonia to the municipalities in both Wayne County and in Oakland County that it borders. For those communities on the border of the metropolitan area, I included all municipalities adjacent to the study area in making these calculations to ensure accuracy. For the purposes of ascertaining heterogeneity, a municipality versus metro area comparison would measure Livonia

as 46 percent below average, overstating its relative weakness on this dimension. A municipality to county comparison would yield a negative 32 percent measure. The comparison to those neighboring municipalities with which the municipality actually shares contiguous land—the most likely candidates for land use cooperation—gives a figure near negative 38 percent.

Measuring heterogeneity against nearest neighbors solves, as practically as possible, the problem of using conceptually sound comparative measures. A second problem is that measures are usually taken without reference to the timing of the adoption of cooperation. For example, if considering a measure of fiscal distress as a signal of greater interest in cooperation, the measure should correspond to the timing of adoption. Having a decade-old interlocal agreement made in a time of fiscal distress and then still having the agreement at the time of the study when the condition of distress has passed would cause an investigator to miss the relationship. The opposite could also happen, which would lead to an association between the measure of distress and the presence of cooperation, when the two had no relationship at the time of adoption. Circumstances change in local governments, sometimes quite rapidly from year to year. Trying to use contemporaneous measures, which reflect municipal and intermunicipal conditions of which a local actor could be aware for making a calculus of cost and benefit, is essential. The second problem was addressed by using fiscal and census data for 2008 to 2012 and 2009 to 2012, respectively, with the survey conducted mostly in late 2013 and early 2014.

For fiscal measures, I use four variables to reflect municipal conditions. Average operations funding for 2008 to 2012 measures how well a municipality is covering its general fund expenditures with general fund revenue. If the variable is negative, then this means the municipality has a deficit. If positive, the municipality is running a surplus. The shift from positive to negative values is likely more important than any other in the range of values for this

variable, and I reason a local elected official is likely to know if a deficit or surplus is being run. I use a dummy variable as an alternative measure of operations funding. The other fiscal measure is average annual change in taxable value from 2008 to 2012. This should be a stronger indicator of fiscal health than median home value, since taxable value includes non-residential property which may be substantial in some municipalities. Relative or intermunicipal fiscal measures should also be significant. I included a measure of heterogeneity for both operating deficit and change in taxable value.

For municipal housing and population variables, I used average annual change in population, average annual change in median home value, the average share of housing units occupied by owners, and the share of structures built since the year 2000. All measures used data from 2009 through 2012. Intermunicipal or relative measures included average annual change in population, average annual change in median home value, average median home value, and the share of structures built since the year 2000, plus the average share of population that identifies as White. These numbers were all calculated in the same way as the relative fiscal dimensions—by comparing the target municipality to the average figure for immediate neighbors.

Because a local elected official is likely to simply have a rough sense of how her municipality is performing compared to others, I also broke the heterogeneity measures for fiscal, population, and housing variables into quartiles. Using median home value as an example, those municipalities in the top 25 percent of all municipalities on the measure of median home value heterogeneity—those strongly outperforming their neighbors—are deemed high relative median home value communities. A dummy variable codes which municipalities are in this group. Examples in Wayne County include Canton Charter Township and Grosse Pointe Park City. The same is done for the bottom quartile, producing a dummy variable for low relative

median home value. Livonia and Detroit are both in this low group, with values of about negative 37 percent and negative 54 percent, respectively. About three quarters of the municipalities in both the high and low quartiles are from the Detroit region, reflecting the well known narrative of extreme class segregation in that metropolitan area. If continuous measures are not significant as a reflection of heterogeneity, a municipality's position as an extreme "winner" or "loser" on a dimension may have a stronger explanatory role.

Even though municipal and intermunicipal fiscal and demographic variables are not behind the key explanatory mechanisms in my model, truly controlling for context requires thoughtful specification of these variables. If preferences regarding interlocal land use can be explained by municipal and intermunicipal cues, then supportive evidence should be found in these measures.

### *Summary of hypotheses*

As outlined in this chapter, the measures in this study reflect: (1) cultural dispositions (group and grid indices); (2) the principal-agent relationship with residents (perceptions of alignment and discretion, and perception of residential support); (3) interlocal relationships (membership in voluntary regional associations, prior cooperative agreements affecting land use, prior JMPA agreement, number of neighbors, whether a municipality is an "island" municipality, and having a council-manager form of government); (4) several measures of municipal and intermunicipal socioeconomic and fiscal conditions (population change and population density; share of population identifying as White; median home value and median home value change; share of units owner occupied; share of structures built since 2000; share of households moved in since 2000; taxable value per capita and taxable value change; and operations funding); (5)

individual level and other controls (years in office, level of educational attainment, et cetera).

The variables reflect both the cultural cognition mechanism I advance through this study and the standard transactional cost-benefit perspective dominating the current interlocal cooperation literature. In Table 4.5, I use these measures to make more specific the general hypotheses presented at the end of Chapter 3 (see Table 3.1). In the right column, I present hypothesized odds ratios because I later use ordinal logistic regression. To the extent the value of these odds ratios in later regression analysis in Chapter 6 are significant and match the relationship to 1.0 listed below, the reader can interpret the finding as evidence supporting the relevant hypothesis.

**Table 4.5 Hypotheses based on measures and estimation techniques used in the current study**

Mechanism	Hypotheses about perceptions toward interlocal land use cooperation as indicated by preferences toward JMPA adoption (favor/oppose) and structure (advisory/ authoritative)	Odds ratio*
<i>Group</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents with a higher group index score.</i>	> 1.0
<i>Grid</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents with a lower grid index score.</i>	< 1.0
<i>Alignment</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents who perceive a lower importance of aligning land use actions with what residents want.</i>	< 1.0
<i>Discretion</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents with perceive a greater ability to contravene in land use policies what residents want in favor of the best interests of the municipality.</i>	> 1.0
<i>Residential support</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents with a higher perception of residential support for joint land use.</i>	> 1.0
<i>Fiscal distress</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents from municipalities experiencing greater fiscal distress as measured by the extent of average operating fund deficit and a decline in taxable value.</i>	> 1.0
<i>Socioecon. distress</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents from municipalities experiencing greater socioeconomic distress as measured by the extent of population decline and decline in median home value.</i>	> 1.0
<i>Growth</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents from municipalities experiencing lower recent growth as measured by the extent of population increase, share of structures built since the year 2000, and share of population moved in since 2000.</i>	< 1.0
<i>Homeowner lobby</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents from municipalities with a lower share of households that are owners as opposed to renters.</i>	< 1.0
<i>Interlocal ties</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents from municipalities connected through membership in voluntary regional associations, municipalities with prior cooperative agreements affecting land use, and municipalities with an existing JMPA agreement, as well as respondents from municipalities with a lower number of neighbors, those from “island” municipalities, and those from council-manager cities.</i>	> 1.0
<i>Fiscal homophily</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents from municipalities experiencing <b>relatively</b> greater fiscal distress, as measured by the percent difference in average operating fund deficit and a decline in taxable value between the home municipality and the average value in adjacent municipalities.</i>	< 1.0
<i>Socioecon. homophily</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents from municipalities experiencing <b>relatively</b> greater socioeconomic distress, as measured by the percent difference in population decline, median home value, and share of population identifying as White between the home municipality and the average value in adjacent municipalities.</i>	< 1.0
<i>Growth homophily</i>	<i>A more favorable response toward adoption and an authoritative structure will be more likely for respondents from municipalities experiencing <b>relatively</b> lower recent growth, as measured by the percent difference in extent of population increase, share of structures built since the year 2000, and share of population moved in since 2000.</i>	< 1.0



## Chapter 5. Characteristics of Local Elected Officials

### *Introduction*

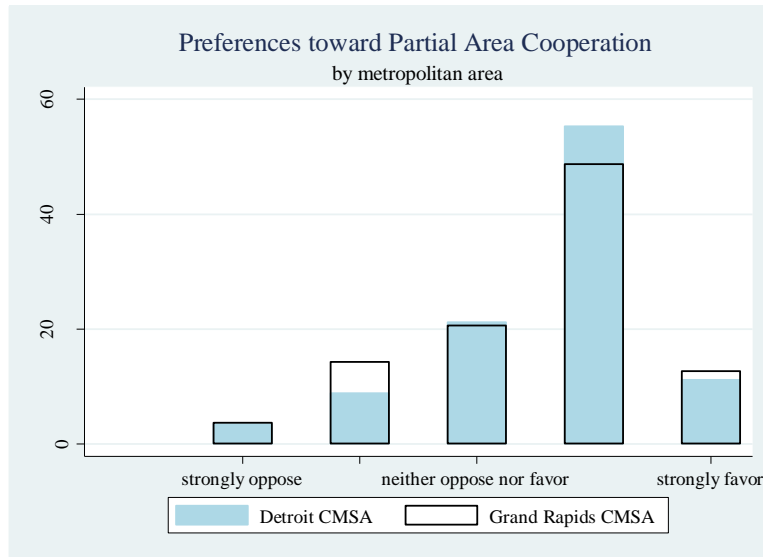
In this chapter I present the descriptive statistics for the many variables included in this study. In each section, I lead with descriptive statistics for all respondents. I then compare local elected officials in different types of municipality (referring to both government form and demographic attributes) to the extent the findings are interesting. The survey questions underlying these descriptive statistics were reviewed in detail in the last chapter, and I only briefly reiterate them here. Before proceeding, a caveat: while the patterns of responses by different individual and municipal characteristics suggest some interesting associations, the figures in this chapter are only descriptive. Chapter 6 allows estimation of relationships by controlling for other factors in a multivariate model specification. Thus, while it is interesting to see how Democrats compare to Republicans, or how those from municipalities with high population density or expenditures respond differently, the significance of these relationships is only tested in the next chapter.

### *Preferences toward partial area interlocal land use cooperation*

Respondents expressed preferences toward interlocal land use cooperation that would only cover a partial area of the municipality—something less than the area within the jurisdictional boundaries. Measurement was with a five-point, non-forced choice, Likert-type

scale ranging from strongly oppose to strongly favor. In figure 5.1 I show the breakdown in preferences by metropolitan area.

**Figure 5.1 Preferences toward partial area cooperation by metropolitan area**



Overall, local elected officials were supportive of this use of a joint municipal planning agreement. Of the 538 respondents who answered this survey item, 285 (more than half) favored cooperation and another 63 (nearly twelve percent) strongly favored it. 113 respondents (about one fifth) neither favored nor opposed the agreement. Only 77 respondents expressed opposition (less than fifteen percent), and only nineteen of these were strongly opposed. About five of every six respondents had a supportive or neutral preference, suggesting elected officials are fairly receptive to this type of cooperation.

Since partial area cooperation is arguably the weakest use of the JMPA (because it infringes the least on local autonomy), one might wonder about the characteristics and contexts of those who expressed strong opposition. These individuals are about as diverse as those holding other opinions about partial area cooperation. They come from all municipal types (both

in terms of form and fiscal and demographic characteristics), places with few neighbors and many neighbors, in both metropolitan areas and most counties. Their perceptions of alignment and discretion mirror those of the broader population, as do their time in office, age, and other individual characteristics. As one might expect, nearly all are also opposed to full coverage cooperation and prefer an advisory JMP agreement if one must be adopted. And, perhaps most interestingly, all but one have a low or very low group disposition (i.e., they are individualists, and many are strong individualists), and all but four have a high grid disposition (i.e., they are hierarchs).

How do local elected officials from different circumstances feel about partial area cooperation? Looking at favorable and strongly favorable views together, about 13 percent more city and village elected officials were supportive than were those from townships. Within the city-village/township dichotomy, council-manager cities and charter townships had more respondents express strong support. Most of the respondents from mayor-council and council-manager cities were council members (respectively, 34 of 38 and 135 of 168), meaning the comparison is not skewed by responses from mayors who have very different roles in each type of community. Townships overall had a higher frequency of neutral responses, with about a quarter of respondents choosing this option (versus 10 to 16 percent in the cities)

Mayors were very supportive of partial area cooperation. Of the 37 mayors in the sample, 33 favored or strongly favored it; the other four were neutral. This may be due to increased electoral pressure. However, only four of the 37 were from mayor-council cities, where the mayor is independently elected. Still, the position of mayor may still be highly visible in council-manager cities, with a stronger link to constituents than other council members. For the other positions, preferences lined up fairly well with those for the overall population. This is logical,

since differences in responsibilities between, say, a township supervisor and treasurer or trustee should not matter in land use cooperation decisions.

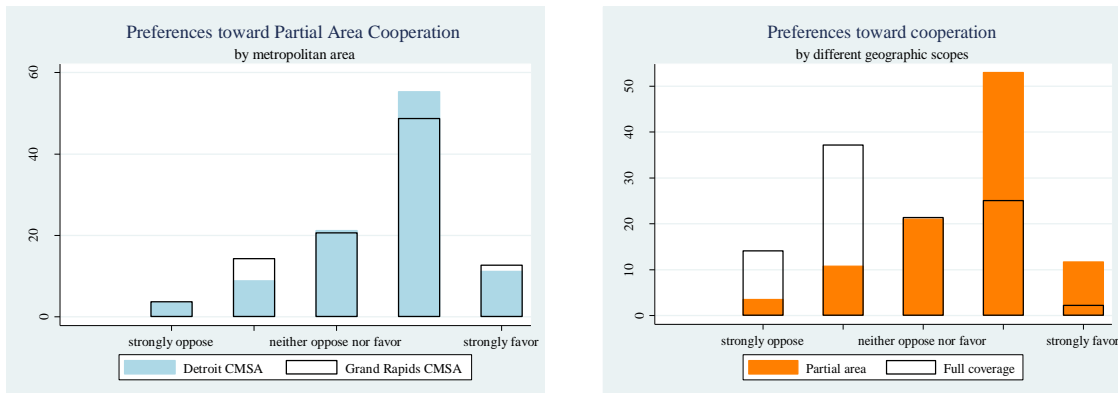
Support for partial area cooperation was much higher in more densely populated municipalities, perhaps because of the higher demand for services. In the bottom quartile of municipalities, those with a population density roughly less than four persons per acre, half the respondents favored cooperation, and about one fifth opposed it. In municipalities with a population density exceeding about 40 persons per acre, the top quartile, more than 70 percent of the respondents were supportive, and less than ten percent were not. Breaking down municipalities into quartiles by their four-year average expenditures and expenditures burden (expenditures relative to taxable value) showed a similar shift in preferences as one moved from low to high general fund outlays.

Among Democrat respondents ( $n = 140$ ), about 71 percent were supportive and 7 percent opposed; among Republicans ( $n = 221$ ), about 65 percent to 11 percent. Third party and independent respondents ( $n = 168$ ) were the least supportive: about 58 percent favored, and about 23 percent opposed. Respondents who held a graduate or professional degree showed scant opposition to partial area cooperation (about 80 percent were supportive, and another fourteen percent were neutral). Also, neutral responses were more common for those with lower educational attainment (for example, more than a third of those with a high school diploma or GED, versus less than 15 percent in categories at or above a bachelor degree). The other individual level attributes such as tenure, age, and gender did not exhibit any interesting preference patterns.

### *Preferences toward full coverage interlocal land use cooperation*

As with the partial area survey item, full coverage preferences were measured using a five-point, non-forced choice, Likert-type scale ranging from strongly oppose to strongly favor. I expected that when the scope of a JMP agreement increased (from partial area to full coverage), support for cooperation would likely decrease because of the declining amount of land over which municipal leaders would have complete autonomy. Also, respondents may have found it easier to imagine partial area scenarios that made sense: the coordinated development of a shared corridor, natural resource, or industrial site, for example. The distribution of preferences supports this reasoning. Of the 538 respondents for this question, 147 favored an agreement (only 12 of these strongly favored it), while 276 opposed it (76 expressing strong opposition). The numbers of respondents who neither favored nor opposed a joint planning agreement were nearly identical between full coverage and partial area cooperation. The figure below shows the preferences for full coverage adoption by each metropolitan area (left) and compared to the partial area preferences (right):

**Figure 5.2 Preferences toward full coverage cooperation by metro area and geographic scope**



Municipalities with more heterogeneous land uses might be less receptive toward full coverage cooperation because it would require agreement across a broader range of use categories. Agreeing on a common vision about a natural resource or a commercial development, for example, might be easier than negotiating how to coordinate the planning of commercial, residential, and agricultural land. I do not have a measure of land use heterogeneity for municipalities because of data collection challenges. The share of residential units that are single family detached dwellings may provide a rough indicator of heterogeneity. Generally, municipalities with more multi-family and attached dwellings also have more commercial development. However, the breakdown of preferences among municipalities along this dimension showed little variation. The same was true for population density, which might be another rough indicator of heterogeneity of land uses. But respondents from the densest municipalities were fairly similar to those from the least dense ones. Respondents from municipalities in the bottom quartile for general fund expenditures and expenditures relative to taxable value had a rate of opposition more than ten percent above their counterparts in the top quartile. This was a similar result to what happened with preferences for partial area cooperation.

Support was lowest in townships, especially charter townships in which only eighteen percent of respondents were supportive while more than 58 percent were not. The numbers were similar in general law townships. Respondents in mayor-council cities expressed favorable views at a rate of almost 45 percent, but a nearly equal number expressed opposition; neutrality was much less common in this form of government.

Republicans differed from Democrats. The rate of support was lower for Republicans by about ten percent (about 21 percent versus 31 percent), and the rate of opposition was more than ten percent higher (about 55 percent versus 44 percent). Third party and independent respondents

expressed neutrality less often; a little more than half opposed full coverage cooperation and roughly a third favored it. Looking at the swing away from support (either a “favor” or “strongly favor” response becoming a “neutral,” “oppose,” or “strongly oppose” response) with a change in geographic coverage, Democrat respondents were supportive at a rate 40 percent lower; Republican respondents, about 44 percent lower; third party and independent respondents, about 27 percent lower.

Favorable responses decreased as respondents moved from having some college to having a graduate or professional degree. Those in the latter category were actually most similar to those with only a high school diploma or GED in the breakdown of preferences. Comparing results across geographic coverage, the shift among respondents in the highest education category was the most extreme. While only about six percent opposed the partial area agreement, 46 percent opposed the full coverage agreement; the number of those expressing a “neutral” response more than doubled, and the rate of support dropped by 60 points.

The breakdown in preferences for full coverage cooperation by tenure suggests that being in office longer may make local elected officials more receptive to cooperation. Those in the top quartile with at least 14 years in office favored cooperation at a rate of about 44 percent; about 41 percent opposed it. For those with three years or fewer in office (the bottom quartile), the corresponding figures were about 21 percent and 55 percent. The other individual level attributes showed no clear patterns.

Considering the two coverage scenarios together, I expected those who opposed partial area cooperation would not switch their preference and favor full coverage cooperation. While favoring a partial area agreement but opposing a full coverage agreement seems quite plausible (and logical under a risk-based calculation), and favoring both or opposing both would also make

sense, it would seem counterintuitive for a local elected official to oppose partial area cooperation but then support full coverage cooperation. The results bear this out. Respondents who favor or strongly favor partial area cooperation ( $n = 348$ ) are split in their preferences about full coverage cooperation: 128 (37 percent) favor it while 143 (41 percent) oppose it. Thus, a large number are uniformly pro-cooperation, but for a similarly large number expanding the geographic coverage of land use cooperation makes a difference in their support. Of the 77 local elected officials who oppose or strongly oppose partial area cooperation, 57 also oppose full coverage cooperation while only five support it. Less than one percent of all elected officials, then, had a pair of preferences that on the surface seem incompatible.<sup>13</sup>

### *Preferences toward an advisory versus authoritative structure*

The two other dependent variable items in the survey measured local elected officials' preferences toward a more advisory or more authoritative structure. The advisory structure was described as having two features: an advisory joint planning commission, and a non-binding land use plan. The authoritative structure, by contrast, had a joint planning commission and joint zoning board of appeals, and the dissolution of municipal (local) level planning and zoning. I expected that local elected officials would prefer an advisory structure, and that this would persist regardless of individual or municipal attributes simply because of the higher political risk of ceding all local autonomy to a joint body. I also expected strong preferences for the advisory form across partial area and full coverage interlocal cooperation scope, though wariness about an authoritative structure would be slightly higher for the full coverage option.

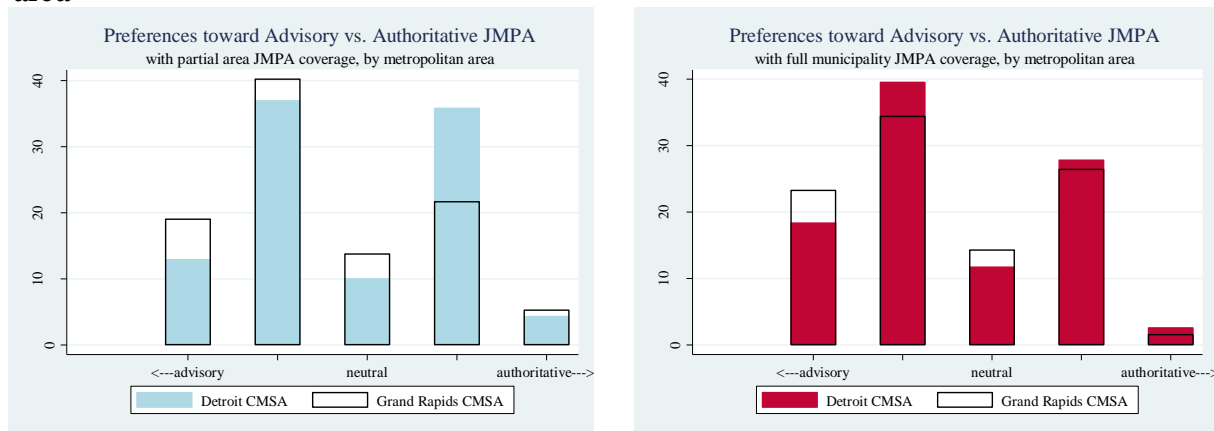
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<sup>13</sup> I considered the possibility that the five officials may have all had experience with a JMPA or other joint land use agreement and recognized a practical problem with cooperation in a defined area, leading to the unusual result of opposing partial area cooperation and favoring full coverage cooperation. However, this was not the case.

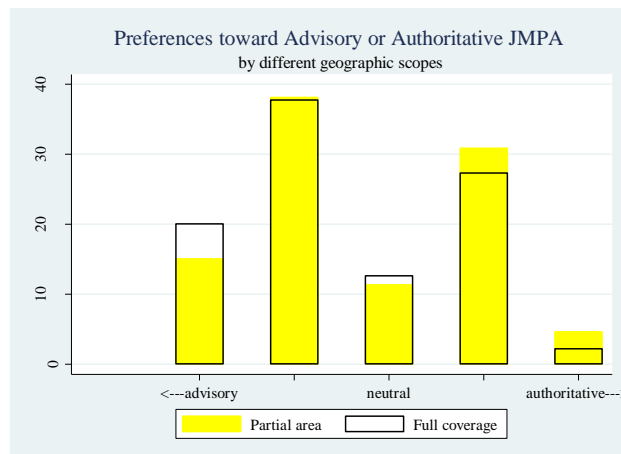


In the figures below, I show the preferences for advisory versus authoritative structure under partial coverage (left) and full coverage (right) by metropolitan area, and then comparing the two coverage types for the full sample (below):

**Figure 5.3 Preferences toward advisory versus authoritative JMPA by geographic scope and metro area**



**Figure 5.4 Preferences toward advisory or authoritative JMPA by geographic scope**



The findings supported my expectations somewhat. Among the 538 officials, 205 (38 percent) preferred the advisory option, and another 81 (fifteen percent) strongly preferred it, when considering the governance of a partial area. 166 preferred the authoritative structure (31 percent) and another 25 (5 percent) strongly preferred it. While more than half of respondents

preferred the advisory structure, what is surprising is that more than a third preferred the authoritative alternative. Those 191 local elected officials tended to be Democrats. Support for the authoritative structure versus the advisory structure was more common among Democrats (48 percent versus 42 percent) than among Republicans (29 percent versus 57 percent) or third party and independent elected officials (33 percent versus 57 percent). Otherwise, the descriptive statistics on individual and municipal attributes were highly similar for those preferring authoritative versus advisory structures.

For full coverage cooperation, the distribution in preferences aligned with that for partial area cooperation, even though full coverage cooperation had received much more opposition. Most respondents—203 of 538 (38 percent)—preferred an advisory structure, and another 108 (20 percent) strongly preferred it. For an authoritative structure, the corresponding figures were 147 (about 27 percent) and 12 (about 2 percent).

The phrasing of the questions may explain the similarity. For the two questions about JMPA structure, local elected officials were asked to assume the decision to adopt an agreement had been made. With the question of *will we cooperate?* off the table, the question of *how will we cooperate?* is likely tied less to geographic scope. Of course, in the real world the negotiation about adoption and structure selection would be intertwined. The correlation in responses between the two questions is 0.563. Nearly half the respondents (240 of 538, about 45 percent) have a preference for the advisory structure across both survey items, and another fifth (118 of 538, about 22 percent) have a uniform preference for the authoritative structure. However, there are still 92 respondents (about seventeen percent) with unmatched preferences—choosing an advisory structure under partial area cooperation and an authoritative structure under full coverage cooperation, or vice versa.

### *Summary on interlocal cooperation preferences*

Local elected officials mostly favor interlocal land use cooperation when it covers only a select area of their municipality, perhaps corresponding to a shared corridor, business development area, or natural resource. Opposition is more common when cooperation implicates the entire municipality, but close to half the respondents still had a favorable or neutral response even with this scenario. As noted in Chapter 4, this distinction about coverage may be theoretically meaningful as a way to test how rational preference formation differs when the cooperation is more benign. Practically, the difference is important because the ability of land use cooperation to address some regional problems may depend on it being comprehensive in its scope. Preferences about how to structure the interlocal agreement—as authoritative or advisory—were fairly aligned, with more than half preferring the advisory option and about a third favoring the authoritative option.

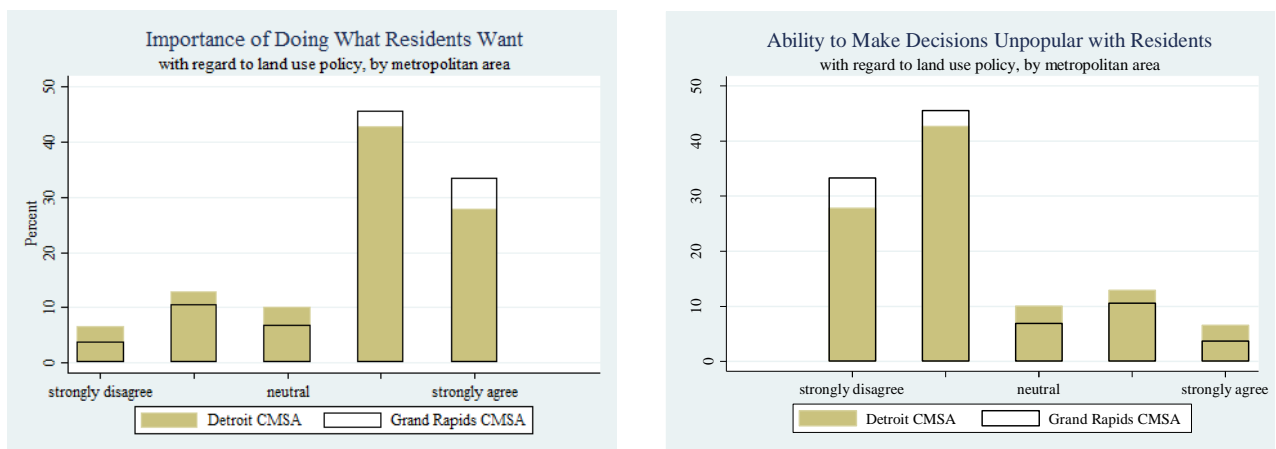
Some logical alignment was present among the four interlocal land use cooperation items. Specifically, local elected officials who opposed partial area cooperation but favored full coverage cooperation were exceptional: less than one percent (five of 538) had this pattern of responses. And those who preferred an advisory structure under partial area cooperation but supported an authoritative structure under full coverage cooperation were also rare: less than six percent of all respondents (30 of 538). These findings support the survey items used to measure preferences, suggesting that respondents were able to make internally coherent distinctions. The fairly low rates of neutral responses, such as “neither favor nor oppose” or “indifferent,” is also an encouraging sign. While nearly half the respondents ( $n = 248$ ) gave at least one neutral response, only twelve respondents (about two percent) gave neutral responses on all four cooperation preference items. Neutral responses were about twice as frequent for the coverage

items (the partial area and full coverage scenarios) than for the structure items (advisory versus authoritative). The coverage questions came first, however, suggesting that survey fatigue or disinterest was not the issue. Local elected officials may have simply been more undecided about whether to cooperate than about the form it should take.

*The local elected official and the interpretation of the public interest*

In this section I discuss perceptions of alignment, discretion, and residential support, and their interplay. The alignment item read “It is important that the decisions I make about planning and zoning reflect what the residents in my municipality want.” This was reverse coded, since strong agreement would suggest limited ability, perhaps, to prefer cooperation. The discretion item read “I am free to make planning and zoning decisions that I think are in the best interest of the municipality, even if those decisions are not popular among residents.” Perceptions were measured with a five-point, non-forced choice, Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The distribution of preferences is seen in the figures below.

**Figure 5.5 Perceptions about alignment and discretion by metropolitan area**



I expected that elected officials would exhibit high alignment and low discretion overall, because of the conventional wisdom that elected officials are attuned to the desires of their electorate. Responses, however, showed perceptions of *both* high alignment and high discretion.

The distribution of perceptions of alignment deserves some additional consideration. Of the 538 respondents, 235 (about 44 percent) strongly agreed that it is important to do what residents want, and another 160 strongly agreed (about 30 percent). However, this figure was actually lower than I expected: nearly a fifth of local elected officials disagreed or strongly disagreed with the importance of doing what residents want. What are the characteristics of this group of individuals ( $n = 95$ )? For the individual attributes (tenure, age, gender, educational attainment, party affiliation, and position), this group has nearly identical attributes to those in the high alignment group. Municipal attributes reveal those with low alignment are from municipalities that are slightly more populous and more densely populated with a higher tax base, but otherwise the two groups come from municipalities with very similar characteristics. Those from villages (which were slightly under-sampled, with only 28 respondents) exhibited low alignment: 20 of them disagreed or strongly disagreed about the importance of doing what residents want. Overall, no stark distinctions exist between the officials who perceive high alignment and those who do not.

Contrary to expectations, respondents perceived high discretion. Most agreed (231 of 538, about 43 percent) or strongly agreed (another 35, about seven percent) with the second “slack” survey item, about the ability to do what is best even if it is unpopular with residents. Roughly one quarter of respondents disagreed and another six percent strongly disagreed. About one fifth of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

As with the alignment measure, we can compare the individual and municipal characteristics of the high discretion (agree or strongly agree) and low discretion (disagree or strongly disagree) respondents. Apart from some discrepancy in gender (the male/female split was 68/32 for high discretion respondents and 58/42 for low discretion respondents), local elected officials expressing both types of discretion were very similar in individual attributes like tenure, political affiliation, age, educational attainment, and position. The high discretion individuals were similar to the low alignment discretion in that both types represented municipalities that were more populous and more densely populated with higher expenditures and expenditure burden than their low discretion and high alignment counterparts. On other municipal attributes, the groups were similar.

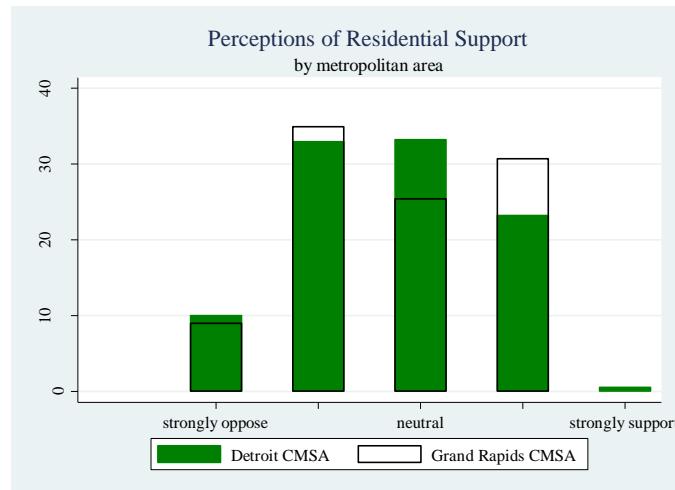
I expected the responses to be consistent across the alignment and discretion measures: if a local elected official believes in the importance of following what residents want (high alignment), then it is reasonable to expect she would be less comfortable making decisions that are not popular among residents (low discretion). And, conversely, if a respondent perceives low alignment, then she should also perceive high discretion. This was not the case. Considering the two items together, 192 of the 538 respondents (36 percent) were in categories in which they exhibited high discretion at the same time as high alignment. The correlation between discretion and alignment responses was minimal (0.071). While both items were meant to measure slack, it is clear the items measured very different dimensions of the relationship between local elected officials and residents. These findings suggest, counterintuitively, that many elected officials can regard doing what residents want as important, while also feeling they have the ability to contravene resident interests.

### *Perception of support for interlocal cooperation*

The residential support item was a fill-in-the-blank multiple choice question that read “In general, residents would \_\_\_\_\_ a JMPA agreement.” The measurement scale was similar to those described already: five-point, non-forced choice, and Likert-type, ranging from “strongly oppose” to “strongly support.” Studies often use proxy measures of residential support based on municipal demographic characteristics. Measurement through a perceptual survey item is direct. Because we have data on municipal characteristics, we can also consider how well those match perceived residential support—i.e., we can gain insight into how well the proxy approach works.

A third of respondents (181 of 538) thought residents would be opposed to interlocal cooperation, and another ten percent (52 of 538) perceived strong opposition. A quarter, however, thought residents would be supportive (139 of 538); only two anticipated strong support. Many respondents (164 of 538, about 30 percent) indicated residents would neither support nor oppose interlocal cooperation. Even though land use implicates local autonomy, the mix of perceived support and opposition and the high rate of “neutral” responses suggest local elected officials do not, in the aggregate, receive a clear signal about what residents want in this policy area. This is one support for the premise, outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, that interlocal cooperation in land use delivers weak institutional cues.

**Figure 5.6 Perceptions of residential support by metropolitan area**



The literatures on interlocal cooperation and land use are unclear about which types of residents support land use cooperation. Homeowners, particularly those who are long time residents or have high value homes in which considerable wealth is stored, are often viewed as more protective of land use autonomy and are the typical face of NIMBY and related sentiments. We might expect to see a higher rate of perception of opposition among local elected officials from municipalities with a high share of owner-occupied homes, high median value homes and median household income, and a low share of residents moved in recently.

Preference aggregation (the ability to discern the median voter with whom to align one's interests) is seen as being more difficult in communities that are more heterogeneous. A low share of homeownership, low share of population that identifies as White, a low share of single-family detached homes, and high taxable value per capita (usually indicating a greater degree of commercial and industrial land use and potentially more active business sector) can be used as signals of heterogeneity. Local elected officials from such municipalities should have a higher rate of "neutral" responses (perceiving neither support nor opposition).



A very rough analysis, comparing local elected officials from municipalities that are in the top and bottom quartiles on these dimensions, provides some preliminary insights. Officials from the top quartile versus bottom quartile jurisdictions had little difference in their perception of opposition (residents will strongly oppose or oppose) when looking at median home value (41 percent versus 38 percent), median household income (41 percent versus 36 percent), or share of residents moved in since the year 2000 (49 percent versus 44 percent). The split was more pronounced when considering the share of owner-occupied homes (49 versus 40 percent).

Regarding aggregation of resident preferences, officials from the most heterogeneous municipalities (bottom quartile) did have higher rates of neutral perceptions about resident support than those from the least heterogeneous municipalities when looking at share of owner-occupied homes (about 41 percent versus 22 percent), the share of single-family detached homes (35 percent versus 25 percent), and share of population identifying as White (38 percent versus 24 percent). Taxable value per capita did not show much of a split (35 percent versus 31 percent).

Overall, these cursory findings do not seem to point to a strong alignment between perceptions of residential support and several salient municipal attributes.

### *Prior knowledge or use of a joint planning agreement*

The first survey items asked whether local elected officials were aware of the JMPA, whether their municipality had a JMPA agreement, and whether their municipality had some other interlocal agreement that affected land use decisions.

Respondents were split in their awareness of the JMPA: 246 were aware of it (about 46 percent) while 292 were not. However, 238 respondents (44 percent) did not know if their

municipality was part of such an agreement. About one fifth (98) said their municipality was, even though only nine municipalities in the study area are currently members of a JMPA agreements based on my own secondary research and only six local elected officials from these municipalities responded to the survey.<sup>14</sup> This shows a considerable disconnect: while many respondents are aware of the JMPA, many do not know if their community has one, and may be confusing a JMPA agreement with some other coordinating activity.

More than a quarter of respondents (150 of 538) said their municipality had some other type of cooperative agreement that affects land use planning and zoning decisions. Such arrangements could come in a variety of forms, and it is difficult to accurately count how many exist with secondary research. About a fifth did not know if their municipality had such an arrangement (115 of 538). Whether a local elected official believed his municipality was involved in land use cooperation (through the JMPA or another type of agreement) had seemingly no connection to the demographic or fiscal characteristics of the municipality.

What type of characteristics lead to not being aware of the JMPA, or not knowing about land use cooperation in one's own municipality? I expect that tenure will matter here, and it does. Those with awareness of the JMPA have been in office about two and a half years longer (about eleven years versus eight and a half, with an interquartile range from five to sixteen years versus two to twelve years). Respondents who did not know whether their municipality had an agreement had been in office, on average, about four years less (about eleven and a half years versus seven and a half years). For knowledge of other types of land use-relevant cooperation, the gap was closer to five years (nearly eleven years in office versus about seven). Local elected terms in office in Michigan range from two years to four years. Among respondents the mean is

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<sup>14</sup> One official from Sheridan Charter Township, three from Hastings Charter Township, one from Hastings City, and one from Rutland Charter Township.

about ten years with a standard deviation around eight years. The breakdown in JMPA awareness among different municipal types was nearly the same as for the overall population. When asked about the agreements their municipalities had, local elected officials from cities (either council-manager or mayor-council) and more densely populated municipalities were more likely to give an “I don’t know” response than a “yes” or “no” than their peers in townships and villages, perhaps because elected officials in such contexts rely more on various administrative actors to maintain such knowledge and activity.

Overall, cooperation in the area of land use is not a well known option or frequently used governance arrangement. These findings—together with those on residential support, discretion, and alignment—build further support for the premise that land use cooperation sends weak institutional cues.

### *Cultural dispositions: indicators of “grid” and “group”*

We now have a clearer understanding of local elected officials: their preferences about interlocal land use cooperation, their knowledge of such activity, and their relationship with residents in that policy area. We can now shift to thinking about local elected officials as cultural actors.

As seen in Appendix A, twelve survey items (numbers 19 through 30) were used to measure grid and group disposition—six questions for each dimension. Each question measured dispositions with a six-point, forced choice, Likert-type scale. Although prior research by others using these questions on the general population has demonstrated that the latent variation in a much longer questionnaire load most heavily onto these twelve items, factor analysis was used on the full set of twelve questions to narrow how the items would be used in analysis. This was

described in more detail in Chapter 4. All the group items loaded very strongly on one factor, while a second factor corresponding to two grid items<sup>15</sup> explained much of the remaining latent variation.

In this section I discuss each cultural item, and then the grid and group indices. Three items had a valence toward individualism (i.e., agreement would suggest the local elected official has a low group disposition). For the item “*The government interferes far too much in our everyday lives*” about 60 percent of respondents agreed while 40 percent disagreed ( $n = 535$ ). The split was almost exactly 50:50 for the item “*It’s not the government’s business to try to protect people from themselves*” ( $n = 531$ ). For the third item, “*The government should stop telling people how to live their lives*”, the ratio of agreement to disagreement was about 70:30 ( $n = 530$ ).

The other three group dimension items had a communitarian valence (i.e., a “high group” local elected official would find them easy to agree with). Nearly three quarters of respondents agreed that “*Sometimes government needs to make laws that keep people from hurting themselves*” (387 of 536). However, only a quarter agreed that “*The government should do more to advance society’s goals, even if that means limiting the freedom and choices of individuals*” (127 of 529). And even fewer agreed that “*Government should put limits on the choices individuals can make so they don’t get in the way of what’s good for society*” (about 22 percent; 117 of 525).

The six group questions are suggestive of a “small government” or “big government” mindset, so it would be reasonable to expect some alignment, respectively, with Republican and Democrat party affiliation. To an extent, the findings support this. On the first individualist

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<sup>15</sup> The items were “We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country” and “Society as a whole has become too soft and feminine.”

question, for example, of the 318 local elected officials expressing some level of agreement, only 37 were Democrats ( $n = 138$ ; about 27 percent of that group) while 178 were Republicans ( $n = 221$ ; about 81 percent). But the divide was not as stark on other questions. Of the 270 local elected officials agreeing with the second individualist item, 130 were Republican ( $n = 217$ ; about 60 percent), while 47 were Democrat ( $n = 137$ ; about 34 percent). And for the second communitarian question, 149 of 221 Republican respondents agreed (about 67 percent), as did 109 of the 140 Democrats (about 78 percent).

Therefore, while some survey items on the group disposition display a clear party split, simply using political affiliation—for which data are readily available—as a substitute for cultural disposition does not capture the rich variation found through even a short set of six-point survey items. This does not even account for the large number of third party and independent local elected officials in the study, who outnumber Democrats and are heterogeneous in their cultural dispositions.

For ascertaining grid disposition, the survey had three items with a hierarchical valence (those with which a high grid person should agree) and three with an egalitarian valence (those with which a high group person should agree). The first hierarchical item was “*We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country,*” and 335 of 536 respondents expressed some level of disagreement (about 62 percent). The 528 local elected officials who responded to the statement “*It seems like blacks, women, homosexuals and other groups don’t want equal rights, they want special rights just for them*” were almost exactly divided between agreement and disagreement. The third hierarchical item—“*Society as a whole has become too soft and feminine*”—received support from only about a third of respondents (159 of 503) and was the most skipped of the grid-group survey items.

The three items with an egalitarian valence provoked fairly divided responses. About 58 percent of respondents (313 of 536) agreed “*Our society would be better off if the distribution of wealth was more equal*”. Fifty three percent (287 of 533) agreed “*We need to dramatically reduce inequalities between the rich and the poor, whites and people of color, and men and women.*” And 46 percent (247 of 533) felt “*Discrimination against minorities is still a very serious problem in our society.*”

While the party line split may be less clear on the grid questions, Republicans tend to be socially conservative and would likely tend to support the hierarchical items, while Democrats should be more supportive of the egalitarian statements. Democrats tended to be consistently low grid in their orientation: only about 21 percent to 27 percent gave high grid responses. Republicans were more mixed in their responses. Only 35 percent were high grid for the question about society being *too soft and feminine*, and 45 percent were high grid for the *too far pushing equal rights* question. But only ten percent agreed our society would be better off with a *more equal wealth distribution* (i.e., 90 percent were high grid). The third party and independent local elected officials were quite mixed in their responses on these items. As was the case for the group disposition items, the pattern of responses suggests using party affiliation as a proxy would be unwise, even with survey items about the role of government and social equality.<sup>16</sup>

For the group and grid indices, I used two alternative approaches for the grid index and only one for the group index.<sup>17</sup> The most basic index construction is additive: a simple sum of the six group items for the group index, and the six grid items to generate the grid index. Both indices range from negative to positive fifteen (-15 to +15). At the negative extreme for the group index, for example, a respondent would have answered “strongly agree” for all the

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<sup>16</sup> A discussion of the distribution in responses to the twelve items by individual and municipal attributes may reveal interesting patterns, but it is outside the scope of this dissertation.

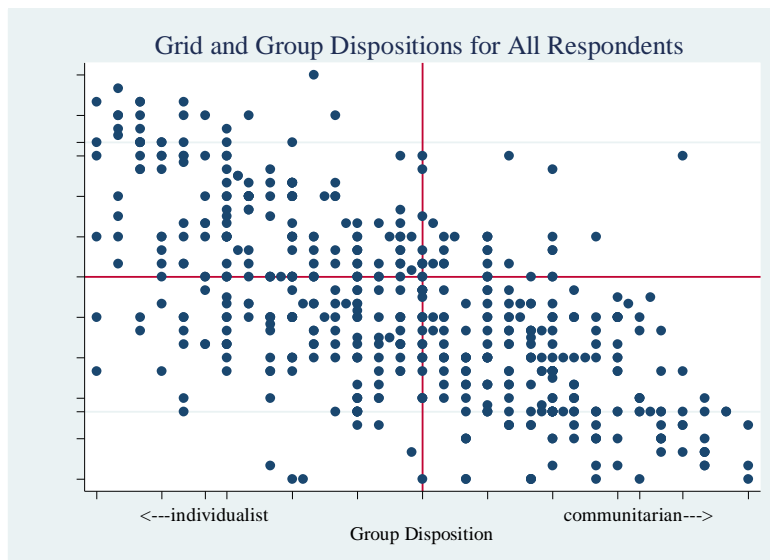
<sup>17</sup> As I described in Chapter \_\_\_\_, many options for construction of the index were available.

individualist items and “strongly disagree” for all the communitarian items. At the zero value, a respondent would have had responses that cancelled out because the component questions had no zero values. This might be due to someone having uncertainty about his views on the statements presented. However, a local elected official answering with the same response, such as all “strongly agree,” on all six items would have a zero response, and this would be a potential signal of repetitive answering without item comprehension. Only 29 respondents had a zero response for the grid index, and only 34 had a zero response for the group index (a rate of about five percent).

The group index values occupied the full range, with a mean of -2.57, mode of -3, and standard deviation of 6.62. The interquartile range is from an index value of -7 to 2. The histogram below shows the distribution of the grid index. The grid index also ranges from -15 to +15. It has a mean of -0.85, mode of -1, and standard deviation of 7.19, with an interquartile range from -6 to 5. In research using the grid and group dimensions, a common approach is to intersect the two and divide respondents into four types based on this. Much of that research finds that the more common pairings are high group with low grid and low group with high grid. If someone is a communitarian, then she is more typically an egalitarian; if an individualist, then more typically a hierarch. This pattern somewhat persists among local elected officials in this study. The correlation between grid and group is -0.64. Only 21 of 538 respondents (about four percent) are hierarchical communitarians (high grid and high group), making this the rarest combination by far. About one fifth (113 of 538) are egalitarian individualists (low grid and low group). About one quarter of local elected officials (136) are egalitarian communitarian. Lastly, 207 (about 39 percent) are hierarchical individualists (high grid and low group). Only two individuals were at the “center” with a value of zero on both group and grid indices.

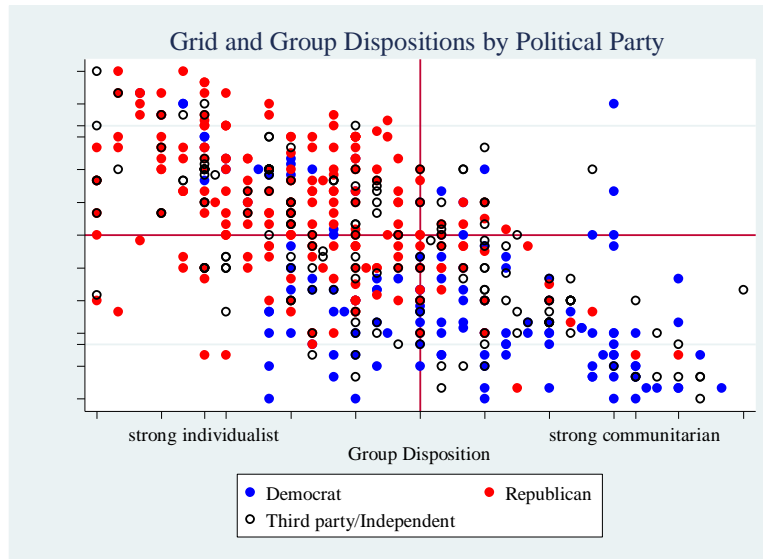
In the figures below, I show several versions of the cultural “map”—the scatterplot of group and grid. The distribution reveals the importance of considering the dimensions separately. If we were to simply categorize a local elected official as a hierarchical individualist, for example, this would treat the person with a paired grid/group score of 15/-15 the same as one with a score of 7/-7, or 15/-1, or 1/-1. A large amount of valuable information would be lost in this approach. We would also have to consider how to treat the few individuals falling on the axis separating two categories, most of whom were still within the coordinate space for the other dimension. Besides the basic map, I include a political party cultural map, and one by metropolitan area. We can see that Democrats tend to be egalitarian communitarians while Republicans are more often hierarchical individualists. However, many do not match this general typology, and the third party and independent candidates are all over the map. We can see the metropolitan areas each represent a similarly culturally diverse group of local elected officials.

**Figure 5.7 Cultural map for all respondents**

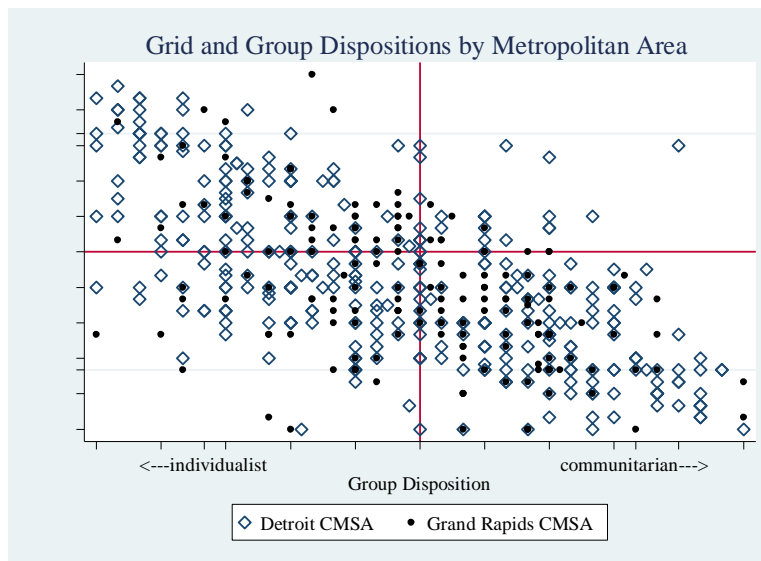




**Figure 5.8 Distribution of cultural dispositions by political affiliation**



**Figure 5.9 Distribution of cultural dispositions by metropolitan area**



## **Chapter 6. Explaining interlocal land use cooperation preferences**

### *Introduction*

We can now consider models of the relationships between the explanatory variables described in the last chapter and the dependent variables. The quantitative testing of the hypotheses across a large sample of local elected officials from seventeen metropolitan counties, including respondents from a wide range of municipal types on many dimensions, should provide sound evidence about the preference formation of the local elected official.

To offer a quick preview and frame the rest of the chapter, what the analysis reveals is that cultural cues are consistently strongly significant and in the predicted direction. The relationship persisted across multiple model specifications and data manipulations that attempted to “break” the link between cultural dispositions, with the inclusion of political party variables, and when cultural dimensions were treated as intersectional or separate. The political variables on alignment, discretion, and residential support performed as expected and were significant in several specifications. Residential support was the most consistently influential and strongest in magnitude of the variables, though the group dimension rivaled it in explanatory power. Some municipal and intermunicipal variables were significant in some models, but the story is far from consistent: not only are different model specifications necessary across the dependent variables and metropolitan regions with regard to these variables, but their magnitudes and significance levels vary widely. The story on the individual level controls is similar in providing no consistent

interpretation. Interestingly, all models used both grid-group measures and political party affiliation, and the latter was almost universally insignificant or lower in magnitude.

A note before proceeding about the interpretation of coefficients: for ease of understanding, I report odds ratios. Unlike the coefficients in a standard ordinary least squares linear regression, odds ratios in a logistic regression are interpreted differently. A parameter estimate with a value of one (1) is a non-effect: the independent variable neither increases nor decreases the odds of being in one response category compared to another. When greater than one, the effect is positive: a unit increase in the independent variable increases the odds of a respondent being in a higher category (compared to all lower categories). When less than one, the effect is negative: a unit increase decreases the odds. The odds ratios are multiplicative rather than additive. For example, if the estimated coefficient on tenure is 1.05 for a model of full coverage cooperation preferences, this means that being in office one more year increases the odds of being in a higher category (one that is more favorable toward cooperation) by five percent. The standard deviation is about eight years, so perhaps knowing how much a half deviation increase increases the odds would be useful. For four units of tenure change, we take 1.05 to the power of four, which equals 1.22—a twenty two percent increase in the odds of being in a higher category.

In choosing the final model specifications for the variables, I used the Akaike's and Bayesian Information Criteria. In general, these penalized-likelihood fit criteria help assess the trade-off between robustness and efficiency as variables are added. I would begin with the unconditional or null model with no covariates, then run several full models with different specifications of the municipal and intermunicipal measures, and then continue to monitor the performance of AIC and BIC as I dropped non-significant variables. A lower score on these

criteria can be considered as closer to some unknown “true” model. BIC penalizes complexity more heavily, meaning that relying on AIC could result in too complex a model, while BIC may be lowest for too small a model. In general the two criteria can be used in combination as a valuable heuristic, but the numbers themselves have little interpretive value for our purposes. I also ran likelihood ratio tests to compare model specifications

### *Estimation technique*

In the study, data exist at multiple levels: survey data about individuals, measuring their preferences, perceptions, dispositions, and various control attributes; demographic and fiscal data about municipalities; and transformations of this demographic and fiscal data to reflect how a municipality compares to its immediate neighbors. The municipalities are also nested within counties, about which we do not have data beyond identity. Still, the county identity may matter, particularly if it matters to how local elected officials think about land use cooperation in a way that was not captured by municipal variables. The municipalities are also within metropolitan areas. These latter two attributes—county and MSA location—can be easily accommodated through the inclusion of dummy variables, or the inclusion of pertinent attributes.

Still, we are left with a situation in which we have individuals within each municipality. The data, in statistical terms, are *nested* or *multi-level*. This feature violates the assumption of independence necessary for standard ordinary least squares regression models. The clustering of individuals within municipalities would lead to correlated error terms (and a higher incidence of Type 1 errors, i.e. false positives), biased estimates of parameter standard errors, and errors in interpreting the importance of independent variables. Multi-level modeling allows for the possibility that higher levels (in the case of this study, municipalities) have an effect on the

intercepts and coefficients at the lower level (individual local actors). Given the established instrumental and structural approach in the literature on cooperation, we would expect this possibility to be high.

One of the useful features of multi-level modeling is the ability to calculate the components of variance: for each observation, the variance from the grand mean (the mean of all the observations) can be partitioned into that share arising from the municipal level and the individual level. An unconditional or null model contains no covariates, and allows us to partition the variance in the dependent variable. In Table 6.1, the first column gives the municipal level variance for each of the dependent variables under an unconditional model. For three of the dependent variables, the variance ranges from 20 to 30 percent. For the preference regarding how to govern a partial area agreement, the figure is near zero, reflecting at least in this data a lack of influence from municipal level attributes—whatever those might be—on that preference. These variance numbers make intuitive sense. When we run models including a set of demographic and fiscal variables that we would expect to have some effect on preferences, we see that the amount of variance explained at the municipal level drops (see column 2).

A difficulty with my data is that many of the municipalities—99 of 262—have only one individual. While this is not detrimental to the estimation of models using a multi-level approach, it does make the interpretation of variance more difficult. Whatever variance exists is being read only in those municipalities with at least two individuals. To get a better idea of the functioning of the structuralist approach, it would be helpful to see how the variance numbers change when one is dealing only with municipalities in the sample that have a larger number of individuals. Since most local governments only have five to seven elected officials, having three respondents

is actually quite a healthy response. If we restrict our unconditional model to only those 85 municipalities with at least three respondents, we should get a stronger sense of the true variance attributable to the municipal level. The variance under this restriction is reported in column three of Table 6.1. We see little effect on the variance attributable to the municipal level.

**Table 6.1 Share of variance attributable to municipal level in multi-level ordinal logistic models**

Preference for:	Unconditional model <i>n</i> = 538	Municipal model (fiscal, demographic variables) <i>n</i> = 538	Unconditional model for high sample munis (at least three respondents) <i>n</i> = 292
Partial area	29.05	9.03	32.09
Full coverage	27.06	9.08	34.11
Governance- partial area	~0.00	~0.00	~0.00
Governance- full coverage	20.47	10.07	20.55

I also estimated these models, because of the lack of level-2 (municipal) variance, as ordinal logistic models without a multi-level specification. When working with ordinal dependent variables, the slopes of the fit lines for each response category for a predictor are not allowed to vary; only the intercepts vary, and we assume parallel slopes. This is known as the parallel slopes or *proportional odds* assumption. Tests to determine if this assumption is correct are more easily used after an ordinal logistic estimation. I ran Brant tests on all the estimations reported in this chapter, and all supported the proportional odds assumption. The ordinal logistic models also allowed calculation of pseudo  $R^2$  indicators of fit, which must be interpreted with caution but can give a rough idea of how well the model is capturing the variance in an ordinal logistic regression. I report these fit indicators with the parameter estimates.

## *Preferences toward partial area cooperation*

In these models, the dependent variable was the preference, ranging from strongly oppose to strongly favor with a neutral option, toward interlocal land use cooperation over an area covering some portion of at least two municipalities. A stylized accompanying diagram showed an area covering parts of three municipalities.

**Table 6.2 Preferences for partial area land use cooperation, for all respondents**

Variables	Final model <sup>1</sup> (n = 495) odds ratios
<i>Cultural and political</i> (2013-2014)	
group disposition	1.066***
grid disposition	0.982
perception of discretion	1.233*
perception of residential support	2.120***
<i>Municipal and intermunicipal</i> (2008/9-2012)	
very low share of recently built structures relative to neighbors	0.650*
<i>Individual</i> (2013-2014)	
aware of Joint Municipal Planning Act	1.608**
Republican party (self identification)	1.711*
Fit statistics/criteria <sup>2</sup>	
<i>Akaike's information criterion (AIC)</i> (unconditional model: 1378.233)	1124.479
<i>Bayesian information criterion (BIC)</i> (unconditional model: 1399.672)	1191.622
<i>Cox-Snell R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.231
<i>McKelvey &amp; Zavoina's R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.265
<i>Craig-Uhler R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.251
***: $p < .001$ ; **: $p < .01$ ; *: $p < .05$ <sup>1</sup> Besides grid and group disposition, which as the key explanatory variables are always included for comparison across models, the figures reported here are only those that are significant. All of the final models had between nine and twelve covariates. <sup>2</sup> Note: Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup> tests conducted on ordinal logistic regression estimation (removal of multi-level structure did not change parameter estimates or level of significance. AIC and BIC figures are based on corresponding multi-level modeling, with municipalities as level-2 clusters.	

Results for all respondents (a pooled analysis of both Detroit and Grand Rapids metropolitan areas) are shown in Table 6.2. Three of the cultural and political variables are significant. Group disposition is strongly significant and positive, as hypothesized. We can

interpret the odds ratio as meaning that a one unit increase on the group dimension (moving toward being communitarian and away from being an individualist), corresponds to nearly a seven percent increase in the odds of being in a higher dependent variable response category (for example, the odds of being neutral versus opposing, or favoring versus being neutral). A more useful change to consider is a six unit change, which would be the difference between a two respondents who were a full response category apart on all six group items. This type of shift—the difference, say, between a strong communitarian and a communitarian—would lead to a 47 percent increase in the odds of a more favorable response.

Grid disposition, which measures the disposition toward social equality or differentiation, was slightly below one as expected, but was not significant in this model. There were also no interactive effects between the grid and group measures. The only intersection that had a strong and positive effect (a value of roughly 1.96) was egalitarian (low grid) and communitarian (high group); a respondent having both dispositions was about twice as likely to favor cooperation as those in the other three cultural quadrants.

Perception of discretion was positive and significant. Local elected officials who perceived more ability to make decisions in the best interest of the municipality even if those decisions were unpopular with residents were more likely to favor partial area cooperation. A one unit increase in this measure corresponds to movement from agreeing that one has discretion to strongly agreeing (or from strongly disagreeing to just disagreeing). The result suggests moving beyond the elected versus administrative dichotomy is useful: even elected officials can perceive some insulation from resident wishes, and this may be significant in forming their policy preferences. A similar variable, perception of alignment (the importance of doing what residents want) was not significant in any model specification.



Perception of residential support, not surprisingly, was highly significant and strong in magnitude. A one unit increase in the perception of residential support for land use cooperation (on a five point scale) corresponds to more than a doubling in a local elected official's odds of being more favorable. Earlier I noted that the alignment between support perception and cooperation preferences was not as perfect as one might expect (a correlation of about 0.40 and more than a fifth of respondents had categorical misalignment (a popular response pair was supporting partial area cooperation despite perceiving residential opposition). However, in a controlled analysis the relationship is quite powerful.

We can now consider the other variables. No municipal variables are significant in any specification. Only one intermunicipal variable is: local elected officials from communities that are in the bottom quartile in the relative share of structures built since the year 2000 are much more likely to oppose cooperation. An example of a municipality in this group is Ann Arbor Charter Township, which has about thirteen percent less of its structures built since 2000 compared to the eleven municipalities touching its borders—about five percent versus about eighteen percent on average in its neighbors, which include many townships that have developed quickly in the last decade. The finding speaks most clearly to physical heterogeneity, corresponding in most cases to a built out, usually more established community surrounded by ones that are growing, but sometimes to places that are simply attracting less development. Reaching agreement about a common vision for land use might be perceived as tricky. However, there was not a consistent pattern in the preferences of local elected officials from municipalities that had much more recent development than their neighbors, such as Canton Charter Township (the home of a recently developed major regional shopping hub). The lack of significance in any other indicators of heterogeneity that have to do with socioeconomic characteristics suggests the

stronger relationship, at least across the full sample of respondents, is between preferences and relative features of the built environment.

None of the variables corresponding to the presence of interlocal ties—membership in a voluntary regional association such as the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council or Downriver Community Conference,<sup>18</sup> having a JMPA agreement, or believing one’s municipality has a JMPA or other cooperative agreement affecting land use—was significant. This lack of a significant finding on any of these measures may suggest that interlocal agreements are not a reliable way to look at the issues of trust and reciprocity norms these links are thought to represent. Rather, measures of positive and negative interpersonal relationships may be necessary, despite increased difficulty in gathering such data.

Preferences about partial area cooperation were also a function of two individual level variables. A local elected official with awareness of the Joint Municipal Planning Act was more than 60 percent more likely to be in a more favorable response category, which should be encouraging for third party organizations like the Land Information Access Association that spread the word about land use cooperation. Identifying as Republican, even when controlling for cultural dispositions which overlap somewhat with political ideology, had a very strong, positive association with being more favorable toward partial area land use cooperation. This may seem counterintuitive at first, but this is the variation in cooperation most amenable to accessing some joint benefits while retaining autonomy.

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<sup>18</sup> I also included dummies for membership in councils of government, like SWWCOG and SEMCOG, and these were not significant.

### *Preferences toward partial area cooperation: metropolitan differences*

How are municipalities in the Detroit and Grand Rapids metropolitan areas different from each other? Cultural dispositions play a slightly stronger role in the latter region. The group index parameter has a larger magnitude, and the grid index parameter is significant and below one, as expected. Perception of residential support is strongly positive and highly significant in both regions. The variable measuring discretion is also positive and significant in the Grand Rapids area while it is not significant in the Detroit area.

I refer the reader to Table 6.3. The municipal and intermunicipal variables tell very different stories when we split the sample by metropolitan region. In Detroit, the effect of having a very high share of owner occupied housing is significant and sharply increases the likelihood of a local elected officials being in a less favorable response category (by about 75 percent). These are places like Bloomfield Hills and many of the townships in the metropolitan area, all of which have upwards of ninety percent of their housing units occupied by owners (by contrast, those municipalities in the low category have no more than 70 percent). Note this does not mean that the municipalities have *relatively* more owner occupied housing. The measure does not reflect heterogeneity, but more likely reflects the importance of a strong homeowner lobby in shaping behavior. This might also explain the high magnitude for residential support in the Detroit metro and the lack of a significant finding for the discretion measure. At least for the adoption of partial area cooperation, a high rate of homeownership may have more of a bearing on the preference formation of the local elected official in a municipality in the Detroit area.

The narrative in the Grand Rapids metro area includes a curious finding about the role of race and fiscal distress. Elected officials from communities with a relatively low share of residents identifying as White compared to neighboring communities are overwhelmingly more

likely to have a *more* favorable response to cooperation—more than three times more likely. But those elected officials from municipalities under considerable fiscal distress compared to neighbors, as measured by relative change in taxable value, are also more than three times as likely to be in a *less* favorable response category. The results suggest that local elected officials in those places with *only* relatively low White population (but not a high decline in taxable value) are more likely to favor partial area land use cooperation. However, the opposite situation is likely to yield opposition to cooperation. These results, of course, are *ceteris paribus* outcomes, and a careful inspection of the data reveals that the estimation is attempting to predict an association from a handful of data points. Studying preference formation more closely among the local officials in some of the communities with a more racially heterogeneous population but no fiscal distress (like the city of Grand Rapids or charter township of Allendale, a college town)—or the opposite situation, in a small farming community like Coopersville—may be enlightening at least on the west side of the state. Another municipal finding for the Grand Rapids area is that an elected official from a community with more secure operations funding (i.e., more of a surplus) than neighboring communities has a *less* favorable attitude toward cooperation. Being a half standard deviation higher would correspond to about seven percentage points, corresponding to a roughly 37 percent increase in having a less favorable cooperation preference. The finding is consistent with the idea of heterogeneity being detrimental to cooperation.

Lastly, in the Detroit area local elected officials who were aware of the JMPA were about twice as likely to have a favorable attitude toward it, while in Grand Rapids this variable was not significant. If we found two similarly situated local elected officials in the Detroit area, knowing whether one is aware of the JMPA would give us a good clue that she is likely to be more supportive of partial area land use cooperation. This would not be true in the Grand Rapids area.

Where the regional models and estimations differ, constructing coherent competing narratives for the results from each metro is difficult. However, the consistency in the role of group disposition and perception of residential support is encouraging. I return near the end of this chapter to the topic of reconciling the cultural and political findings with the other findings.

**Table 6.3 Preferences for partial area land use cooperation by metropolitan area**

	Detroit metro (n = 315)	Grand Rapids metro (n = 196)
Variables	odds ratios	odds ratios
<i>Cultural and political</i> (2013-2014)		
group disposition	1.062**	1.133***
grid disposition	1.024	0.886*
perception of discretion		1.691**
perception of residential support	2.301***	2.150***
<i>Municipal and intermunicipal</i> (2008/9-2012)		
very high share of owner occupied housing units	0.573*	
operations funding relative to neighbors		0.956***
very high decline in taxable value relative to neighbors		0.286**
very low share of population identifying as White relative to neighbors		3.287**
<i>Individual</i> (2013-2014)		
aware of Joint Municipal Planning Act	1.985**	
Fit statistics/criteria <sup>2</sup>		
<i>Akaike's information criterion (AIC)</i> (unconditional model)	708.6922 (868.137)	403.309 (508.371)
<i>Bayesian information criterion (BIC)</i> (unconditional model)	772.4859 (883.558)	454.037 (524.580)
<i>Cox-Snell R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.244	0.398
<i>McKelvey &amp; Zavoina's R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.280	0.438
<i>Craig-Uhler R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.268	0.430
***: $p < .001$ ; **: $p < .01$ ; *: $p < .05$		
<sup>1</sup> Besides grid and group disposition, which as the key explanatory variables are always included for comparison across models, the figures reported here are only those that are significant. All of the final models had between nine and twelve covariates.		
<sup>2</sup> Note: Pseudo- $R^2$ tests conducted on ordinal logistic regression estimation (removal of multi-level structure did not change parameter estimates or level of significance. AIC and BIC figures are based on corresponding multi-level modeling, with municipalities as level-2 clusters.		

### *Preferences toward full coverage cooperation*

In these models, the dependent variable was the preference, ranging from strongly oppose to strongly favor with a neutral option, toward interlocal land use cooperation over an area covering some portion of at least two municipalities. A stylized accompanying diagram showed an area covering three municipalities, as described more in the previous chapter. Preferences about full coverage cooperation should be more divided. Rather than cooperating over land use in part of the municipality, under a full coverage agreement a common vision with one's partners must be reached regarding the planning of all the municipal land—not just commercial or industrial site assembly, or open space coordination, but multiple types of residential use and agricultural use. Such cooperation involves current residents and their properties much more directly, and the risk calculus is likely to be much different under a full coverage scenario.

Results from the final model for the full population are presented in Table 6.4. As we can see, the cultural political variables once again perform well and in line with expectations. A local elected official who is one unit higher on the grid disposition is eight percent more likely to be in a more favorable response category; and the difference between dispositional categories (for example, between a communitarian and a strong communitarian) is about 57 percent). Conversely, a local elected official who is a strong individualist versus a weak individualist is about 56 percent more likely to be in a less favorable category. The two dispositions are mirrors of each other, and this makes sense with the reasoning behind the cultural cognition of governance mechanism.

**Table 6.4 Preferences for full coverage land use cooperation for all respondents**

Variables	Final model <sup>1</sup> (n = 495) odds ratios
<i>Cultural and political (2013-2014)</i>	
group disposition	1.078***
grid disposition	0.929*
perception of alignment	0.817**
perception of discretion	1.198*
perception of residential support	1.871***
<i>Municipal and intermunicipal (2008/9-2012)</i>	
very high average annual population decline	1.615*
very high population decline relative to neighbors	0.590*
<i>Individual (2013-2014)</i>	
number of years in office	1.025*
level of educational attainment	0.906*
Fit statistics/criteria <sup>2</sup>	
<i>Akaike's information criterion (AIC)</i> (unconditional model: 1520.264)	1272.702
<i>Bayesian information criterion (BIC)</i> (unconditional model: 1541.703)	1331.538
<i>Cox-Snell R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.242
<i>McKelvey &amp; Zavoina's R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.251
<i>Craig-Uhler R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.258
***: $p < .001$ ; **: $p < .01$ ; *: $p < .05$	
<sup>1</sup> Besides grid and group disposition, which as the key explanatory variables are always included for comparison across models, the figures reported here are only those that are significant. All of the final models had between nine and twelve covariates.	
<sup>2</sup> Note: Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup> tests conducted on ordinal logistic regression estimation (removal of multi-level structure did not change parameter estimates or level of significance. AIC and BIC figures are based on corresponding multi-level modeling, with municipalities as level-2 clusters.	

The three political variables were also significant and consistent with expectations. The *alignment* variable is the extent to which a local elected official perceives it is important to do what residents want with regard to land use policy. A one unit increase in the perception of the importance of alignment (on a five point scale) is associated with a roughly 20 percent decrease in the odds being in a more favorable response category. By contrast, the discretion variable (the ability to make decisions that are unpopular with residents) corresponds with a roughly 20 percent increase in these odds. Perception of residential support for land use cooperation is strongly positive and highly significant, as it had been as a predictor for partial area cooperation. These results are all consistent with a large number of respondents believing residents are not

supportive of land use cooperation, which we already know is true: more than 40 percent of respondents in each metropolitan area perceive some level of opposition, and adding in neutral responses pushes the figures above 70 percent for both. Those officials who perceive residential support in their municipality or believe they can contravene what residents want should be more likely to support cooperation. Those who believe alignment with resident interests is important should be more likely to oppose it.

Population decline was the one structural attribute that played a role, and it did so in two ways which when viewed together yield an interesting result. A local elected official from a municipality with a very high decline in population had much higher odds of being in a more favorable response category regarding full coverage cooperation. But a local elected from a municipality with very high *relative* decline in population compared to its neighbors had much lower odds. Being in a high decline community in a stable or growing region decreased the odds of a more favorable preference, while being in a high decline community surrounded by more similar communities had the opposite result. The heterogeneity hypothesis is well supported by this finding, at least for this one dimension.

Two individual level controls were significant and merit discussion. An extra year in office slightly increased the chances of being more favorable toward cooperation—a full four years (the longest term possible in local government) would increase the odds by more than ten percent. An increase in education level, meanwhile, was associated with an increase in being in a more opposing response category, also by about ten percent.



### *Preferences toward full coverage cooperation: metropolitan differences*

As was the case with partial area cooperation preferences, the stories in each metropolitan area with regard to the factors that shape these preferences are quite different (see Table 6.5). In the Detroit metro area, a local elected official in a municipality that has had high development in the last fifteen years in a region that is also stable or developing, having a high median home value, and having a more racially heterogeneous population are all associated with increased odds in being more favorable toward full coverage land use cooperation. The finding for structures built recently suggests the appeal of interlocal land use cooperation as a growth management device. The second finding (and to an extent, the first) contradicts the standard hypothesis that economic distress lead to more cooperation. The latter finding about race is discordant with the prevailing view about heterogeneity impeding cooperation. The parameter estimate for having a high share of structures built *relative* to neighbors is well below one, which supports the notion that heterogeneity is more important than demographic heterogeneity for land use cooperation purposes. The only significant structural variable for the Grand Rapids metro area was that elected officials from municipalities with a *relatively* high general fund surplus have much higher odds of being in a more opposing preference category.

The variables that do remain consistent across metropolitan areas are those representing cultural dispositions and the measures of how the local elected official perceives support for cooperation among residents. The group disposition is greater than one and significant in both metropolitan areas, suggesting that moving toward communitarianism and away from individualism corresponds to increased odds in favoring full coverage cooperation. The grid disposition is less than one and significant, suggesting decreasing odds of favoring cooperation with the move toward communitarianism. And local elected officials who perceive greater

residential support are more than twice as likely to be in a more favorable response category, all else being equal.

**Table 6.5 Preferences for full coverage land use cooperation by metropolitan area**

	Detroit metro (n = 315)	Grand Rapids metro (n = 176)
Variables	odds ratios	odds ratios
<i>Cultural and political (2013-2014)</i>		
group disposition	1.060**	1.123***
grid disposition	0.905*	0.882*
perception of alignment	0.826*	
perception of residential support	2.010***	2.149***
<i>Municipal and intermunicipal (2008/9-2012)</i>		
very high median home value	1.623*	
very high share of structures built since the year 2000	1.970*	
very high share of structures built since the year 2000 relative to neighbors	0.484*	
very high operations funding (i.e., surplus) relative to neighbors		0.472*
very low share of population identifying as White relative to neighbors	1.776*	
<i>Individual (2013-2014)</i>		
years in office	1.035**	
level of educational attainment	0.837**	
Fit statistics/criteria <sup>2</sup>		
<i>Akaike's information criterion (AIC) (unconditional model)</i>	803.302 (972.783)	450.751 (554.743)
<i>Bayesian information criterion (BIC) (unconditional model)</i>	867.096 (992.059)	491.967 (570.951)
<i>Cox-Snell R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.259	0.300
<i>McKelvey &amp; Zavoina's R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.272	0.340
<i>Craig-Uhler R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.276	0.324
***: p < .001; **: p < .01; *: p < .05		
<sup>1</sup> Besides grid and group disposition, which as the key explanatory variables are always included for comparison across models, the figures reported here are only those that are significant. All of the final models had between nine and twelve covariates.		
<sup>2</sup> Note: Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup> tests conducted on ordinal logistic regression estimation (removal of multi-level structure did not change parameter estimates or level of significance. AIC and BIC figures are based on corresponding multi-level modeling, with municipalities as level-2 clusters.		

### *Preferences toward advisory versus authoritative structures*

In this subsection I address the last two dependent variables simultaneously, since both survey items for these were the same but referenced different geographic scope scenarios: one with partial area cooperation, and one with full coverage cooperation. It is useful to see how the model specifications and parameter estimates differ.

Table 6.6 reveals some familiar themes: the consistency in grid and group dispositions and residential support variable, with parameter estimates in line with expectations, but no consistency elsewhere. The perception of how important it is to do what residents want when making land use decisions is below 1.0 for the preferences about governance structure under partial area cooperation, but above 1.0 for the same preferences about full coverage cooperation. The other covariates which provide the strongest overall model performance for each dependent variable are not common across the two preference models. What we can glean from these results considered together is that cultural cues (and residential support) dominate regardless of the underlying geography, but beyond this the scope of agreement matters in how preferences form.

For preferences about the structure under a partial area scenario, having a relatively high surplus is associated with more favorable attitudes toward an authoritative structure. While initially seeming to oppose the hypothesis about heterogeneity being problematic, the finding might simply mean that officials from such communities perceive a competitively advantageous position compared to neighbors. An authoritative structure might be seen as a way to help them secure this position through strategic use of land use cooperation in certain areas. The models for the partial area governance structure dependent variable were the only ones in which a

metropolitan effect occurred. Local elected officials from municipalities in the Detroit CMSA had higher odds of favoring an authoritative structure, all else being equal.

For preferences about the structure under a full coverage scenario, having a high share of homeowners greatly decreases the odds of having a response more favorable toward an authoritative structure. We would expect this result, especially since most respondents perceive residential opposition or neutrality. A strong homeowner lobby is generally thought to be anathema to cooperation, and this proxy measure provides some evidence in favor of that notion.

**Table 6.6 Preferences for authoritative versus advisory structure, by metro area**

	Grand Rapids CMSA <sup>1</sup> (n = 176)		Detroit CMSA <sup>1</sup> (n = 315)
Variables	odds ratios	Variables	odds ratios
<i>Cultural and political</i> (2013-2014)		<i>Cultural and political</i> (2013-2014)	
group disposition	1.063***	group disposition	1.044**
grid disposition	0.887***	grid disposition	0.865***
perception of alignment	0.840*	perception of alignment	0.859*
perception of residential support	1.446***	perception of residential support	1.328**
<i>Municipal and intermunicipal</i> (2008/9-2012)		<i>Municipal and intermunicipal</i> (2008/9-2012)	
very high operations funding (i.e., surplus) relative to neighbors	1.496*	very high share of housing units occupied by owners	0.614*
location in Detroit CMSA	1.417*		
<i>Individual</i> (2013-2014)			
number of years in office	0.979*		
Fit statistics/criteria <sup>2</sup>		Fit statistics/criteria <sup>2</sup>	
<i>Akaike's information criterion (AIC)</i> (unconditional model: 1519.751)	1327.755	<i>Akaike's information criterion (AIC)</i> (unconditional model: 1505.603)	1312.900
<i>Bayesian information criterion (BIC)</i> (unconditional model: 1536.902)	1390.793	<i>Bayesian information criterion (BIC)</i> (unconditional model: 1526.063)	1375.847
<i>Cox-Snell R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.154	<i>Cox-Snell R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.136
<i>McKelvey &amp; Zavoina's R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.163	<i>McKelvey &amp; Zavoina's R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.141
<i>Craig-Uhler R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.164	<i>Craig-Uhler R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.145
***: p < .001; **: p < .01; *: p < .05			
<sup>1</sup> Besides grid and group disposition, which as the key explanatory variables are always included for comparison across models, the figures reported here are only those that are significant. All of the final models had between nine and twelve covariates.			
<sup>2</sup> Note: Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup> tests conducted on ordinal logistic regression estimation (removal of multi-level structure did not change parameter estimates or level of significance. AIC and BIC figures are based on corresponding multi-level modeling, with municipalities as level-2 clusters.			

### *Preferences toward advisory versus authoritative structures: metropolitan differences*

Lastly, we can consider the differences across regions. Because of the similarity in the survey items, in the table I present the items together by metropolitan area first. In the Grand Rapids metro area, the models for governance structure preferences are quite similar in the list of covariates and the magnitude and significance of parameters. Having a very low median home value relative to neighbors was associated with a much stronger likelihood of favoring an authoritative structure, and—curiously—increases in racial heterogeneity also were associated with greater odds of favoring an authoritative structure. Heterogeneity in this situation may have the curious effect of making a local elected official more accepting of the idea of needing a way to monitor and enforce agreement. A high share of homeowners, also counterintuitively, led to more support for an authoritative approach under full coverage. Also having a similar effect on structural choice under either partial area or full coverage scenarios was the number of neighbors. Having more was associated with a greater likelihood of favoring an authoritative structure. This may be the same dynamic at play as with heterogeneity. More voices at the planning table, and more different voices especially, may spur more willingness to have a strong form of governance. Two noticeable differences are in the cultural and political variables. The grid disposition only matters to the choice of full coverage structure, and alignment only matters in the partial area structure. Making sense of this difference is difficult.

In the Detroit CMSA, we see for the first time among any models a non-significant value for the measure of group disposition. However, the  $p$  value was 0.06, and under some specifications veered into the arbitrary threshold for significance. Grid and residential support again performed well, but beyond this we see divergence in the measures that explained

structural preferences. Under a partial area JMPA scenario, a low share of homeowners was correlated with higher odds of preferences for an authoritative structure, while being much more racially homogeneous than neighboring municipalities had the opposite association, and quite strongly. For the full coverage scenario, the odds of favoring an advisory structure were better for elected officials from municipalities growing much faster but also declining in taxable value much more quickly than their neighbors.

**Table 6.7 Preferences for authoritative versus advisory structure by geographic scope**

Variables	Grand Rapids CMSA (n = 176)		Variables	Detroit CMSA (n = 315)	
	Partial area odds ratios	Full coverage odds ratios		Partial area odds ratios	Full coverage odds ratios
<i>Cultural and political</i> (2013-2014)			<i>Cultural and political</i> (2013-2014)		
group disposition	1.094***	1.060*	group disposition	1.040*	1.030
grid disposition	0.950	0.889*	grid disposition	0.842***	0.854***
perception of alignment	0.691*	---	perception of alignment	---	0.806*
perception of resid. support	---	---	perception of resid. support	1.541***	1.326*
<i>Municipal and intemunicipal</i> (2008/9-2012)			<i>Municipal and intemunicipal</i> (2008/9-2012)		
difference in the avg. share of population identifying as White	1.065**	1.071**	very low share of housing units occupied by owners	1.867*	
very low share of housing units occupied by owners		3.502**	very high share of pop. White relative to neighbors	0.572*	
very low median home value relative to neighbors	4.683**	3.255**	very high incr. in pop. relative to neighbors		0.561*
			very high decline in tax. value relative to neighbors		0.578*
<i>Interlocal ties</i>			<i>Interlocal ties</i>		
number of neighbors (adjacency)	1.231**	1.328***	number of neighbors (adjacency)		
<b>Fit statistics/criteria<sup>2</sup></b>			<b>Fit statistics/criteria<sup>2</sup></b>		
<i>Akaike's information criterion (AIC) (unconditional model)</i>	495.149 (553.120)	484.569 (558.243)	<i>Akaike's information criterion (AIC) (unconditional model)</i>	805.463 (961.215)	831.887 (972.791)
<i>Bayesian information criterion (BIC) (unconditional model)</i>	539.535 (566.077)	522.614 (554.452)	<i>Bayesian information criterion (BIC) (unconditional model)</i>	857.999 (976.635)	888.176 (992.066)
<i>Cox-Snell R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.212	0.167	<i>Cox-Snell R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.195	0.169
<i>McKelvey &amp; Zavoina's R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.222	0.167	<i>McKelvey &amp; Zavoina's R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.215	0.180
<i>Craig-Uhler R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.224	0.178	<i>Craig-Uhler R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.210	0.180
***: p < .001; **: p < .01; *: p < .05					
<sup>1</sup> Besides grid and group disposition, which as the key explanatory variables are always included for comparison across models, the figures reported here are only those that are significant. All of the final models had between nine and twelve covariates.					
<sup>2</sup> Note: Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup> tests conducted on ordinal logistic regression estimation (removal of multi-level structure did not change parameter estimates or level of significance. AIC and BIC figures are based on corresponding multi-level modeling, with municipalities as level-2 clusters.					

## *Summary*

Getting lost in the forest of all these numbers is easy, and so it is wise to gain some altitude and consider what all this means for our hypotheses. What can we say in general about how the different forms of cognition work in the preference formation processes of the local elected official? In Table 6.8, I provide a summary of all the results at a glance across the dependent variables and all hypotheses. Rather than use odds ratios, I switch to using positive and negative symbols for ease of clarity (such that positive means “an odds ratio greater than 1.0” and negative means “an odds ratio less than 1.0”). What we can see is a very clear general pattern. The most consistent performer—across all model specifications and broken down by metropolitan area, is the measure of group disposition. Consider the power of that finding. Even when controlling for a wide array of municipal and intermunicipal considerations (each given multiple specifications), political perceptions, and various individual level controls—all summarized in the table—the measure of group was significant and greater than 1.0. More plainly, being more of a communitarian was associated with preferring not only the adoption of cooperation, but a more authoritative structure. This is not simply a case of attitudes predicting attitudes, an obvious concern since I have just used terms like “communitarian” and “cooperation” which seem quite synonymous. The measure of the group disposition was based on six items, none of which used the word “cooperation” or “regional” or anything of the sort. While they did refer to individuals and government, there is no *inherent* link between a more individualistic society and one with more autonomous local land use, or a more communitarian society and one with more cooperative land use. Indeed, the use of government to proscribe individual behavior could be more fully realized with many more local governments, while an individual might feel free to do as he likes without government supervision in a much larger

group. What the hypothesized relationship was based on was coherence between the values of the high group way of life, the ideal social relations that arise in it, and the tendency of cooperation to advance both.

Grid disposition also worked quite well as a measure, attaining significance in all but one full model, one for Grand Rapids, and one for Detroit. The values were always below 1.0 when significant, suggesting a higher grid, more hierarchical individual will be more likely to oppose cooperation and an authoritative form of it. Interestingly, when the preferences had to do with full coverage adoption and structure, the grid measure was *always* significant, suggesting that such preferences cohered more closely with concerns of differentiation and equality.

The one other variable that performed well across nearly every model specification was the perception of residential support. Earlier I cautioned about the limitations of this variable. While not highly correlated or well explained by the various preferences, there may still be enough of an effect from survey respondents intentionally aligning this response with their own (since it came closely after the JMPA preference scenarios) that the magnitude—if not the significance—may be overstated.

The findings for the rest of the variables are a true mixed bag. One notable feature perhaps not readily apparent in this visual review is that many of the variables for municipal and intermunicipal had two or three measures that could have been significant. For example, the four indicators of municipal cognition had seven associated variables, and the eight intermunicipal categories had twenty associated variables. These variables were tested with multiple transformations in myriad model specifications, all in attempts to make them perform in line



**Table 6.8 Support of the hypotheses**

(sign indicates significance at $p < 0.05$ ; sign by hypothesis indicates expectation; [brackets] around a sign indicate a significant result in the direction opposite expectations; multiple cell entries may occur because some hypotheses had several measures)												
Hypothesis	Partial area JMPA adoption.			Full coverage JMPA adoption			JMPA structure (following partial area adoption)			JMPA structure (following full coverage adoption)		
	Full	Detroit	Grand Rapids	Full	Detroit	Grand Rapids	Full	Detroit	Grand Rapids	Full	Detroit	Grand Rapids
<b>Cultural cognition</b>												
<i>Group (+)</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+
<i>Grid (-)</i>			-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	-
<b>Political cognition</b>												
<i>Alignment (-)</i>				-	-		-		-	-	-	
<i>Discretion (+)</i>	+		+	+								
<i>Residential support (+)</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	
<b>Municipal cognition</b>												
<i>Fiscal distress (+)</i>												
<i>Socioecon. distress (+)</i>				+	+							
<i>Growth (-)</i>	-				[+]							
<i>Homeowner lobby (-)</i>		-						-		-		-
<b>Inter municipal cognition</b>												
<i>Interlocal ties (+)</i>									+	*		+
<i>Relative fiscal distress (+)</i>			[-]								[-]	
<i>Relative fiscal health (-)</i>			-			-	[+]					
<i>Relative socioecon. distress (+)</i>				[-]					+			+
<i>Relative socioecon. health (-)</i>											-	
<i>Relative high growth (-)</i>						-						
<i>Relative low growth (+)</i>												
<i>Racial heterog. (-)</i>			[+]		[+]			-	[+]			[+]
<b>Other</b>												
<i>JMPA awareness</i>	+	+										
<i>Republican</i>	+											
<i>Democrat</i>												
<i>Tenure</i>				+	+		-					
<i>Education</i>				-	-							

\*: This was for the variable *number of neighbors* only.

with hypotheses. When we consider this broader picture, we can state that *on only seven occasions of a possible 84 opportunities* across all the models presented here (the best models in terms of the information criteria and pseudo fit measures) did the municipal variables behave as expected and significantly. And for intermunicipal variables, the ratio is only *9 of 224*. This is hardly a ringing endorsement of the transaction cost approach to understanding local actor preferences for cooperation, at least in this study area, for land use, and among local elected officials.

One other general observation is worth mentioning. The results suggest that using measures of municipal performance that are not continuous variables and that use a comparison-to-neighbors measure of municipal performance may be wise, particularly where elected officials are in play and one is not studying systems maintenance functions. The current approach in most studies of interlocal cooperation is to use municipal variables that are continuous and/or that compare a municipality to an entire county or metropolitan area. Though not shown in the results in this chapter, these measures never had a significant association with preferences.

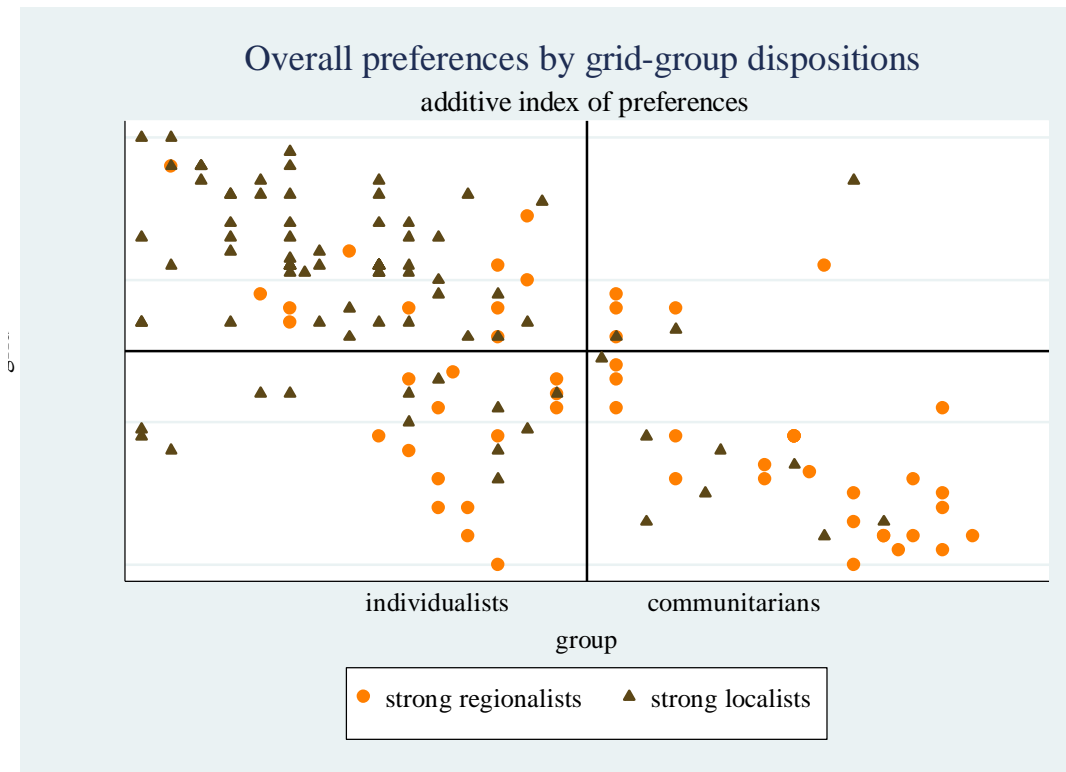
Conceptually, this makes sense: it would seem rare to find a local elected official whose preferences are finely tuned to small changes in municipal performance, or to how her municipality compares to some non-existent “average” regional performer. Even though only a relatively small number of the municipal and intermunicipal variables attained significance, the *only* ones that did either used a measure of heterogeneity that compared a municipality with its neighbors (rather than the county, or the MSA or CMSA), or used very high / very low dichotomous representations of municipal performance, or both (being relatively very high compared to neighbors, for example). The expectation that a local actor will have precise cost and benefit calculations about his own community seems unrealistic. And reasoning that an

actor's preference formation or decision calculus is not heavily affected by the qualities of those municipalities who are truly neighbors, and is instead solely inward looking or broadly comparative with a very large geographic area, also seems to strain sensibility. Further research with these types of measures may prove valuable.

### *Some final "tests" and commentary on the cultural cognition hypothesis*

For those readers still not convinced of the value of the cultural cognition hypothesis, I offer some additional evidence. This is admittedly some preemptive action to head off criticisms of cultural cognition that have been faced by others using the approach in different fields, and I hope it will be of some value. First, in response to the critique that the correlation between cultural dispositions and preferences is inevitable, I offer Figure 6.1. In this version of the cultural map, we see the distribution of strong regionalists and strong localists. Strong regionalists are those individuals who strongly favor or favor JMPA adoption under both partial area and full coverage scenarios, and who prefer authoritative structures. Conversely, strong localists are those who strongly oppose or oppose JMPA adoption under both geographic scopes, and prefer advisory structures. This sorts the population into two groups, excluding anyone who was neutral on any measure. If the correspondence between cultural disposition and preferences were inevitable, then we would expect to see all or at least most strong regionalists below the grid line and/or to the right of the group line. And we would expect to see all or at least most strong localists above the grid line and/or to the left of the group line. Clearly, we see some tendencies but not constancy, confirming the cultural cognition hypothesis is falsifiable.

**Figure 6.1 Cultural map of strong regionalists and strong localists**



For another test, we might also think about the earlier cultural maps and the one just presented and realize that most individuals are either high grid and low group, or low grid and high group. A large number are also low grid and low group, while only a few fall in the upper quadrant. This suggests we might consider the intersectionality of grid-group (its traditional treatment) and our earlier hypotheses. If a local elected official is *both* low grid and high group (an egalitarian communitarian) then this should lead to a very strong likelihood of being in favor of cooperation because it satisfies two of the dispositional cues; cooperation would be a doubly affirming activity. A high group and low grid individual would have the opposite experience of cooperation. At the low grid-low group intersection, we would expect no significant effect. Indeed, this is what we find. I looked at preferences for full coverage adoption and full coverage

structural preference, which both elicited the stronger divisions in preferences, and found that being an egalitarian-communitarian and hierarchical-individualist were highly significant and strong in magnitude in the direction expected, as seen in Table 6.9. The magnitude was much closer to 1.0 for the egalitarian individualists, and not significant. This result makes sense: local elected officials in this quadrant should be conflicted about whether cooperation coheres with their overall cultural cues.

**Table 6.9 Use of intersectional cultural variables**

	Full coverage adoption	Full coverage authoritative structure
Variables (expected odds ratio)	odds ratios	odds ratios
<i>Cultural cognition by quadrant</i>		
high grid-low group (< 1.0) <i>n</i> = 118	0.530*	0.426***
low grid-high group (> 1.0) <i>n</i> = 118	1.925*	1.723*
low grid-low group (?) <i>n</i> = 164	(0.925)	(1.278)
Pseudo-fit statistics		
<i>Cox-Snell R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.220	0.127
<i>McKelvey &amp; Zavoina's R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.227	0.133
<i>Craig-Uhler R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.234	0.135

## Chapter 7. Conclusion

### *Introduction*

In the previous chapters, I summarized the answers to the two narrow research questions I asked: what are the preferences toward joint land use planning scenarios, a form of interlocal cooperation and a type of regionalism? And what factors affect the preferences of local elected officials toward joint land use planning? With regard to the second question, the many hypotheses about preference formation could be reduced to two straightforward narratives. In one, the local official rationally examines the institutional context, appraises the selective and collective transactional costs and benefits of alternative courses of action, and prefers or chooses the alternative which optimizes personal and municipal utility. In the other, an individual has a deeply rooted cultural way of life, values, beliefs, and forms of social relation either support or undercut this way of life, and the optimal alternative is that which provides—in a cultural sense—the most support (or risks the least damage). The theoretical tension is between rational choice institutionalism and cultural rationality, but the goal of this study is not to ease this tension. Rather, the study demonstrates the limitations of institutional rationality as a paradigm in the context of local-regional policy resolution, suggests conceptually how the uncertainty and risk of managing the future enters into such policy making processes, and offers a quantitative method and findings that simultaneously consider *both* institutional and cultural narratives about local officials. As the title suggests, the study is about risk, rationality, and regional governance.

But two other questions remain which were previewed briefly in the opening chapter, and I devote this final chapter to answering them: What does this study teach us about the prospects for regionalism through interlocal cooperation? And what is the contribution to the field of urban and regional planning? The answer to both questions requires, first, attention to a more fundamental inquiry: If we know planning and policy making processes can be inhabited by individuals with competing cultural dispositions and, correspondingly competing values, beliefs, and preferred form of social relations, what does this mean for how we structure these processes? More simply, what are the policy implications of being aware of potentially plural preferences tied to cultural dispositions?

### *Dealing with cultural pluralism*

Scholars developing grid-group cultural theory over the last thirty years have spent very little time considering the policy implications of their findings, devoting attention instead to generating empirical evidence that will support the theoretical perspective as accurately descriptive of the real world. Much of the difficulty is in the necessary conceptualization of cultural dispositions as foundational and nearly immutable. These are deep or core aspects of one's self developed and reinforced through the power of socialization. Absent this cultural anchorage, the theory is unable to work across diverse settings, loses much of its theoretical explanatory power, and offers little as an alternative to rationality grounded in institutional settings. If cultural dispositions exist, then the logical conclusion is that we will continue to deal with polarization and tension, and that our efforts at negotiation and compromise will address only superficial issues. Not only does culture frame many problems as deeply ideological, but it

seems to force a begrudging acceptance of the intransigence of these problems because of their underlying cultural affiliation.

Kahan and his colleagues in the cultural cognition project, whose work was described at length in Chapter 3, have made two contributions beyond the theoretically important drawing together of cultural theory and the psychometric theories of risk. First, they provided a more rigorous and conceptually clear approach to measuring grid and group cultural dispositions. Second, they had a willingness to directly consider policy recommendations. While the cultural cognition project was directed at understanding ideological polarization among members of the lay public regarding technological and environmental risks, the implications Kahan and others consider can be adapted to policy makers engaged in policy processes.

These implications are grounded in the psychological and social mechanisms by which cultural cues translate new information, lead to preference formation, and, ultimately, generate behavior. The mechanisms Kahan has proposed include identity-protective cognition, identity affirmation, biased assimilation, credibility, and availability (2012:739). The notion of *identity-protective cognition* depends on an almost tribal image of people with similar cultural dispositions sorting into groups that can provide material and non-material benefits. Those with the strongest stake in this group membership—those who enjoy the most benefits from such association—will resist risks to their identity. Kahan gives the example of hierarchs who oppose gun control but do so most strongly when they are also white and male, because gun ownership is disproportionately beneficial to those hierarchs with such racial and gender characteristics. In other words, gun control is perceived as risky by any hierarch, but it is especially risky to the hierarchical identity of those who culturally attach gun ownership and freedom of use to that identity (Kahan 2012: 741-742). *Cultural identity affirmation* suggests a self-affirming stimulus



can neutralize information that would otherwise be threatening to cultural worldview, making it valuable to “communicate information about risk in a way that affirms rather than threatens their cultural worldview” (*Ibid.* at 753). Affirmation can also occur in the design of policy. For example, registering guns by providing a tax rebate would be a path to registration that affirms ownership with a positive stimulus. Identity affirmation is the positive side of identity protection, allowing acceptance of a risk that would otherwise be unacceptable.

*Culturally biased assimilation* occurs when an individual “selectively attend[s] to evidence and arguments, crediting those that reinforce their beliefs and dismissing as non-credible those that contravene them” (*Ibid.* at 742). This occurs both when individuals have prior, culturally grounded beliefs (creating a reinforcing, filtering effect toward future information) and when they are starting from a blank slate. In the latter case, even an initial presentation with balanced information does not prevent biased assimilation. Where assimilation is about information intake, *cultural availability* is about information recall: those risks most at odds with one’s cultural disposition will be remembered as having greater significance, and therefore remembered more readily (*Ibid.* at 747). *Cultural credibility* is the functioning of cultural cues but with regard to individuals: we favor and recall information from those who signal they share our cultural world views (*Ibid.* at 749-750).

All these mechanisms create or reinforce cultural bias. Providing simply *more* information is not enough, and is likely to lead to polarization in attitudes and behaviors. Rather, the information about a policy must be packaged and presented in a way that will make it affirming of any cultural world view, or at least of the cultural world views held by participants in a decision process. A few examples illustrate how issues can be framed to be broadly acceptable across multiple cultural world views.

First, to address the credibility mechanism, one can attempt to create what Kahan calls a purposely *pluralistic advocacy condition* (*Ibid.* at 752). Kahan et al. (2010) studied public risk perceptions about the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, and found—in pertinent part—that subjects receiving an argument they were culturally predisposed to reject from an expert whose values they shared significantly decreased polarization in risk perception. The opposite was true as well. By having information about the vaccine delivered by sources who seem culturally credible to people of multiple worldviews—a condition of culturally pluralistic advocacy—a broader base of public support for a particular viewpoint might be built.

The second example focuses on the content of information rather than the person delivering it. In an unpublished 2007 study, subjects read a newspaper account in which a study by a panel of scientists from major universities found definitive evidence of anthropogenic climate change (*Ibid.* at 753-754). Such information would normally be threatening to the cultural identity of hierarchs and individualists and affirming only to egalitarians and communitarians. One version of the newspaper article stated the study proposed removing restrictions on nuclear energy as a policy solution, while the other reported a recommendation of strengthened pollution controls. The former is affirming to hierarchs and individualists, while the latter is threatening. A control group received no article. When perceptions about anthropogenic climate change were later measured, the individualists and hierarchs in the study who received the version of the article recommending pollution controls were actually more skeptical than those in the control group. Information, in other words, can actually do more harm than good. Experiments are useful for developing theory, but what about putting this logic into practice?

Consider two similar examples drawn from the real world (Kahan and Braman 2006: 168-169). One is from France, where conflict about abortion decreased after a policy was

enacted in which the procedure required an unreviewable certification of personal distress. Kahan and Braman suggest this policy was popular and quelled polarization because requiring certification was appealing to hierarchs and communitarians (the typical profile of religious traditionalists) while making it unreviewable was appealing to egalitarians and individualists (the typical profile of those supporting a woman's bodily autonomy). The second is about the consensus surrounding tradable emissions permits as an acceptable form of pollution regulation in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The authors argue this occurred because improving air quality (a goal appealing to communitarians) would be achieved using a market mechanism (a means appealing to individualists) and the symbolic empowerment of large firms (a message appealing to hierarchs).

A more contemporaneous account comes from Southeast Florida (Kahan 2014: 36-39). There, four county commissioners—both Republicans and Democrats—took the lead in ratifying a detailed, five-year joint climate action plan as members of the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact. The action was necessary in the wake of a mandate that all municipal subdivisions update their comprehensive plans to address the threat of rising sea levels and coastal flooding. The plan and the public processes used to create it were able to succeed despite a population that is politically diverse and which has similarly diverse views about the causes and dangers of climate change. Kahan argues success has been possible because the question before participants was about what they knew about dealing with a decades-old regional problem, rather than about “who they are, whose side they are on” (*Ibid.* at 38). By focusing on the concrete symptoms of a well known problem rather than the cause of the problem, the polarization that existed about anthropogenic climate change was diminished and the need for local government effectiveness—an agreeable, culturally neutral position—was emphasized.

The process at work in all these examples is cultural “debiasing”: the management of potentially threatening information so that it enters cognitive processes through a positive cultural filter, allowing a more open-minded appraisal of competing facts and opinions. Kahan and Braman (2006: 151) note, “[t]he key to debiasing... is to frame empirical information in terms that make assent to it compatible with, rather than antagonistic to, the commitments of individuals of diverse cultural persuasions.” Debiasing has not yet been tested. No evidence exists yet that we should credit to debiasing the success French abortion reform, or tradable emission permits, or Southeast Florida climate change action planning. However, it does at least suggest ways to deal with cultural pluralism beyond a mere shrug of the shoulders in the face of deep conflicts. How might we translate the logic of debiasing to the context of governance choice among local officials confronting regional dilemmas? And is debiasing the only method through which we might address cultural pluralism in policy processes?

### *Cultural pluralism in the context of planning and policy processes*

Let us presume for the sake of generating prescriptions that interlocal cooperation is good by some external measures and that we are policy makers with an interest in spurring its adoption and endurance. Cultural cognition of governance suggests merely explaining the inherent goodness of cooperation is not enough. In many of my conversations with planning academics and practitioners, this logic would be readily accepted. But among many others, including many of the survey respondents, it would not be. The mechanisms through which cultural bias operates would simply lead to retrenchment.

Debiasing as described above requires culturally affirmative framing. Based on the findings in this study, we already have evidence that those with high group (communitarian) and

low grid (egalitarian) cultural dispositions tend to favor joint land use planning, even when that mode of land use governance is not attached to any substantive end (whether social justice, economic development, or something else). The trick, then, is to make it appealing to individualists and hierarchs who value, respectively, autonomy and differentiation.

One way might be to appeal to hierarchs specifically by characterizing joint land use as a differentiating mechanism. The possibility of using a JMP agreement as a guard against exclusionary zoning challenges—as a way to preserve the unique character of the cooperating communities—would be affirming to the hierarch’s view of local government. If this characteristic were included explicitly in the authorizing statute rather than discussed as a legal possibility, hierarchs might view cooperation more favorably. Cooperation can also give the region a competitive advantage over other regions in attracting firms and residents, and this possibility would be affirming to hierarchs. Organizations interested in promoting land use cooperation could emphasize this in their messaging about the benefits of a JMP agreement. For individualists, the flexibility in the JMP structure with regard to local autonomy (that it need not lead to dissolution of the local planning bodies and regulations) should be appealing. Cooperation that is merely advisory in form is more protective of an identity that values autonomy. However, finding a culturally affirming way to sell a stronger form of voluntary cooperation to an individualist—who values self-sufficiency and prefers social independence—may be an impossibility.

The creation of a pluralistic advocacy condition, as described above, may be one option. The correlation between political party affiliation and cultural identity suggests advocacy for interlocal cooperation should come from politically diverse individuals and organizations—Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, and others. An organization such as the Land Information

Access Association (LIAA), which acted as a third party managing and supporting the processes leading to joint land use planning implementation, could help create such a condition. If hierarchs and individualists hear about the benefits of joint land use planning from culturally credible people, they may be receptive not only to advisory cooperation but even to that which reduces land use autonomy.

Because the present study addresses cultural cognition among elected officials expressing preferences about governance, we must think about how cultural pluralism interfaces with politics. As shown in Chapter 6, respondents who perceived residential support for joint land use planning were much more likely to prefer adopting both partial *and* full coverage versions and were more likely to favor an authoritative structure. Local elected officials were not strictly partisan political creatures (i.e., a respondent's Democrat or Republican identity had only an occasional relationship to preferences), but were rather responsive to their appraisal of the sentiment among residents in their community. Recall, too, that most respondents felt serving resident interests was important but still felt the ability to contravene these interests to serve their own idea of the public interest (in the terminology I adopted, they perceived a condition that both required "high alignment" while also allowing "high discretion"). By making the adoption and repeal of a joint land use planning agreement an activity for local elected officials, the JMPA by design adds another potential layer of cultural pluralism: that existing among constituents. To the extent hierarchs and individualists have electoral power in a community—whether from speaking as the majority voice or having other influence—debiasing must also target them.

Kahan's account of climate change action planning in Florida may provide a clue to how this could be done. There, the success of the policy process was credited to its consistent framing as a response to concerns about flooding, rather than as a debate on participants' views toward

anthropogenic climate change. For joint land use planning to garner culturally widespread public support, it may need to be framed as an effective local government response to a well known and longstanding concern—such as sprawl, fiscal crisis, or natural resource degradation—rather than as a verdict about the benefits of localism versus regionalism. Indeed, the municipalities where joint land use planning was adopted tended to be those where it was an essential tool for dealing with a fairly well defined problem. The near complete absence of joint land use planning in metropolitan areas may be due to how potent the local versus regional dynamic can be there, as often seen in the conflicts between suburbs and central city or between an affluent community and its distressed neighbors.

Scholarship on interlocal cooperation has long emphasized the necessity of joint gains or collective benefits, as I discussed in Chapter 2. While this seems intuitive from a rational economic perspective, the success of projects with clear joint gains may also be due to their ability to appeal across cultural divisions and neutralize bias. The hypotheses about fiscal and demographic characteristics may have had little supportive evidence in this study because a general condition of necessity does not equate to a clear cultural frame. The survey scenarios were purposefully generic. However, local public officials—and their constituents—may require a narrative link between a respondent's unique municipal problems and cooperation as a specific solution. Simply knowing one's community is in distress may not lead one to see cooperation as a path toward a better future, particularly given the uncertainty and risk attached to cooperation in land use that I outlined in Chapter 3.

Even if debiasing among local officials and the public can secure support for and adoption of joint land use planning, this does not guarantee continued support. In the story in Chapter 1 about the Manchester Community, the turnover in elected leadership in Bridgewater

Township seemed to play some role in the eventual repeal of membership. The views of residents can change too, particularly in quickly growing communities. To avoid these possibilities, it may be necessary to consider *depoliticizing* joint land use planning. Why introduce political difficulties by requiring a vote of local *elected* officials? While dissolution of local planning and zoning would still require a vote of representatives or a public referendum, advisory forms might be successfully made the subject of administrative oversight. If land use cooperation could somehow be made purely a part of the work of planning staff and appointed commissioners, or made more durable against electoral turnover by requiring supermajority repeal votes or setting up other roadblocks, the political calculus about cooperation might be successfully bypassed.

### *The prospects for regional governance through voluntary interlocal cooperation*

The findings in this study suggest debiasing may be an important step to engendering supportive preferences across cultural groups. While communitarians and egalitarians were quite consistent in their support for cooperation, support that exists among hierarchs and individualists was much more common under partial area coverage or an advisory structure. Weaker forms of interlocal cooperation—those that preserve more local autonomy either territorially or structurally—are more culturally affirming and, therefore, acceptable to hierarchs and individualists.

However, these findings are not without some major limitations. Most importantly, we know nothing of behaviors. All one can say about cultural cognition is that it adds *some* additional explanatory power to understanding *preferences* about interlocal cooperation, and even then it only improved the pseudo-fit measures of the ordinal logistic regression models by



about four to eight percent in most models. This is hardly a ringing endorsement of the cultural cognition of governance as *the* mechanism driving rational thought processes about cooperation.

But this is not the role it has to play to be of theoretical and practical value. Bear in mind that what prior studies have taught us is that cooperation arises as a behavior in some municipal contexts. This provides no room for policy intervention because we have no understanding of the people within those municipal contexts and why they engaged in cooperation. If cooperation only arose among similar communities and never dealt with redistribution, for example, then the justifiable conclusion of critics of interlocal cooperation would be that it could never do the heavy lifting possible under involuntary, centralizing forms of regionalism.

This study animates the formal debate about decentralized and centralized regionalism—the government versus governance approaches of, respectively, the reform and public choice advocates—with evidence about how interlocal cooperation is perceived by local elected officials. When interlocal cooperation is not adopted or does not endure over time, we now have some clues about the possible political and cultural causes of the failure. The significance of group and grid dispositions in this study should be interpreted as simply a first step in a new direction. To truly speak to the limitations of interlocal cooperation, we need to now embark on research that applies the conceptual model in this study—one incorporating the views of local elected officials as economically, politically, *and* culturally rational—to individual level behaviors. And we need to do so comparatively across multiple states to incorporate variation in different legal frameworks for cooperation into our explanations.

By moving scholarship in this direction, we can begin to understand, too, the deeper meaning behind shifts in how we think and talk about regionalism, its successes, and its failures. A cultural lens provides us another way to look at all three. The New Regionalism, for example,

often emphasizes the opportunities for economic competitive advantage and resilience, where the regionalism beginning in the 1960s and progressing through the work of Myron Orfield focused on social equity and the need to remedy the unequal relationship between suburban enclave and central city ghetto. If the failure of regionalism is a cultural problem, then the New Regionalism messaging may be an effective way of debiasing and making cooperation appealing to hierarchs and individualists. If the failure of regionalism is a problem of political and social cleavage, then top down reform whose passage depends on building politically expedient coalitions (such as those between inner suburbs and central cities found in many Rust Belt metropolitan areas) may be necessary. These are not mutually exclusive explanations, of course, but they do reflect very different mindsets about the appropriate policy solutions. And when we see regionalism work, at least more than in most places, in metropolitan areas like Portland or the Twin Cities or Indianapolis, the explanation may be rooted in successful debiasing and depoliticization among public officials and residents. Certainly such a framework provides an intriguing and pragmatic alternative to the centralization/decentralization debate.

### *Cultural cognition in planning*

While this study speaks most directly in its empirical findings to interlocal cooperation as a form of regional governance, it is still rooted in the practice of planning as a profession. In this final section, I briefly consider what cultural cognition can contribute to how we think about the role of the planner in society.

The two major conceptualizations of the planner in the last seventy years are, first, as a technocratic participant in administrative processes and, second, as a participant in and manager

of discursive, highly public political processes. We can view each of these roles as a different way of dealing with the problem, if it is one, of cultural pluralism.

The technocratic, comprehensive planner was not only a reflection of the dominance of classical rationality but was complementary of the broader movement toward progressive reform that brought with it council-manager forms of local government and the professionalization of government activity. If we take political ideology as one expression of a deeper cultural identity, then the planner who is used for the rational, scientific management of social problems, removed from and even superior to the messiness of politics, represents a depoliticizing reaction to cultural pluralism. When I earlier mentioned the possible need to remove cooperation from the domain of city councils and township boards and place it in the planning department, the recommendation very much embraced this view of the planner as wise bureaucrat.

When the planner or analyst is described as part of communicative, discursive, and consensual processes—an increasingly popular description expressed well in the work of Forester, Healey, Innes and Booher, and Rein and Schon—it is a nod to the processes of debiasing. However, for as much attention as this perspective gives to framing, dialog, and rhetorical persuasion, and as frequently as it talks about the values underlying these mechanisms, no attempts have been made to quantify and empirically study the substance of these values. We know processes should be open to diverse stakeholders, but that diversity is usually expressed in terms of race, class, political identity, or role within the process (such as developer versus community organization). We do not think of the cultural diversity that cuts across and may even unite people who are superficially different, nor do we consider how our language within these processes might be threatening or affirming to those of different cultural values.

The practice of planning in either form, then, can be seen as simply as a justifiable response to cultural pluralism, rather than as an attempt to run away from politics (the critique of rational planning in both its comprehensive and incremental forms) or to become an inherently political creature who risks capture by capitalist elites while never fully engaging in equitable advocacy (the critique of communicative action and related paradigms). By bringing cultural cognition into planning, we can begin to develop empirically testable narratives about what planners have done and should do in response to the pluralistic world with which they engage.

## Appendix A. Annotated survey instrument

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### Consent.

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*This is a survey of local elected officials and staff planners in Michigan, including members of city and village councils and township boards. It is part of a study being conducted at the University of Michigan Department of Urban and Regional Planning. Your participation is voluntary. Your identity will remain confidential at all times, including in any written or oral publication of the findings of this research. The survey takes on average about 10 minutes to complete, and we thank you in advance for your time. Please click "Yes" if you would like to continue to the survey. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_No*

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### Questions about the Joint Municipal Planning Act

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*Throughout this survey, the general term "municipality" is used to refer to cities, villages, charter townships, and townships. In questions and graphics, words such as "city", "township", and "village" can be read interchangeably.*

**1.** In 2003, Michigan passed the Joint Municipal Planning Act (JMPA). Under the JMPA, cities, villages, and townships can use an intermunicipal agreement to plan and zone jointly with other municipalities. Before taking this survey, had you ever heard of the JMPA?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_No

**2.** Does your municipality currently have a JMPA agreement with one or more other municipalities?

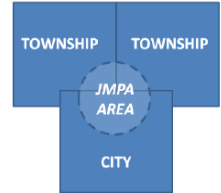
\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_No \_\_\_ I don't know

**3.** Does your municipality currently have any other agreements with one or more other municipalities that affect decisions about land use planning and zoning?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_No \_\_\_ I don't know

*Municipalities can structure a JMPA agreement in a variety of ways. In the next section we'll present you with four scenarios about how a municipality might use a JMPA agreement. The scenarios may or may not seem applicable to the municipality in which you currently live, but we ask that you simply react to the general scenario to the best of your ability.*

**4.** Local officials are considering using the JMPA to govern land use policy in an area shared among neighboring municipalities. The agreement would *not* affect land use decisions outside that area (see graphic). How do you feel about such an agreement?

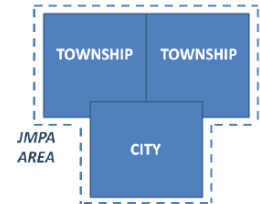


\_\_\_ Strongly oppose \_\_\_ Oppose \_\_\_ Indifferent \_\_\_ Favor \_\_\_ Strongly favor

**5.** Local officials enter the agreement and are trying to decide how to structure it. They have two options for how to govern *only the land within the JMPA area*. Option 1: Advisory Joint Planning Commission for the JMPA area with a non-binding land use plan; Option 2: Joint Planning Commission and Joint Zoning Board of Appeals for the JMPA area with dissolution of municipal planning and zoning for the JMPA area. Which option do you prefer? (graphic from question 4 was displayed again)

\_\_\_ Strongly prefer option 1 \_\_\_ Prefer option 1 \_\_\_ Indifferent  
\_\_\_ Prefer option 2 \_\_\_ Strongly prefer option 2

**6.** Local officials are considering using the JMPA to govern land use policy for *all* the land in two or more participating municipalities (see graphic). How do you feel about such an agreement?



\_\_\_ Strongly oppose \_\_\_ Oppose \_\_\_ Indifferent \_\_\_ Favor \_\_\_ Strongly favor

**7.** Local officials enter the agreement and are trying to decide how to structure it. They have two options for how to govern *all* the land within their municipal boundaries. Option 1: Advisory Joint Planning Commission for the JMPA area with a non-binding land use plan; Option 2: Joint Planning Commission and Joint Zoning Board of Appeals for the JMPA area with dissolution of municipal planning and zoning for the JMPA area. Which option do you prefer? (graphic from question 6 was displayed again)

\_\_\_ Strongly prefer option 1 \_\_\_ Prefer option 1 \_\_\_ Indifferent  
\_\_\_ Prefer option 2 \_\_\_ Strongly prefer option 2

**8.** Do you have any questions or comments about the Joint Municipal Planning Act or the scenarios presented above? Please share them in the space below: \_\_\_\_\_

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Questions about the perceived relationship to residents

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*The next two statements are about the planning and zoning process. Please give your reaction.*

**9.** "It is important that decisions about planning and zoning reflect what the residents in my municipality want."

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree

**10.** "I am free to make decisions about planning and zoning that I think are in the best interest of the municipality, even if those decisions are not popular among residents."

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree

**11.** Earlier you answered questions about the Joint Municipal Planning Act. Complete the following statement: "In general, residents in my municipality would \_\_\_\_\_ a JMPA agreement with another municipality."

strongly oppose  oppose  be neutral about  support  strongly support

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Individual level controls

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**12.** About how many years have you served in local government in your current municipality (including both elected and appointed positions)? Please round to the nearest number of years. If six months or less, enter 0. \_\_\_\_\_.

**13.** What year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_.

**14.** What is your gender? (optional)  Male  Female

**15.** What is your race? (optional) (eight choice drop down menu)

**16.** Are you of Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin? (optional)  Yes  No

**17.** With which political party do you identify? (six choice drop down menu)

**18.** What is the highest level of education you've attained? (diploma or GED; some college; associate degree; bachelor degree; some graduate school; professional or graduate degree)

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Cultural disposition questions

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*In this final section we will ask for your personal reaction to twelve statements about government and society. These statements have been used extensively in other social research. We appreciate your time and honesty in completing this part of the survey. As with all your responses, your answers will remain confidential and are analyzed with hundreds of other responses. First, here are six statements about the relationship between individuals and government.*

**19.** "The government interferes far too much in our everyday lives." (individualist valence item 1, reverse coded)

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree

**20.** "Sometimes government needs to make laws that keep people from hurting themselves." (communitarian valence item 1, straight coded)

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree

**21.** "It's not the government's business to try to protect people from themselves." (individualist valence item 2, reverse coded)

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree

**22.** "The government should stop telling people how to live their lives." (individualist valence item 3, reverse coded)

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree

**23.** "The government should do more to advance society's goals, even if that means limiting the freedom and choices of individuals." (communitarian valence item 2, straight coded)

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree

**24.** "Government should put limits on the choices individuals can make so they don't get in the way of what's good for society." (communitarian valence item 3, straight coded)

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree

*Next, here are six statements about issues relating to society.*

**25.** "We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country." (hierarchical valence item 1, straight coded)

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree

**26.** "Our society would be better off if the distribution of wealth was more equal." (egalitarian valence item 1, reverse coded)

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree

**27.** "We need to dramatically reduce inequalities between the rich and the poor, whites and people of color, and men and women." (egalitarian valence item 2, reverse coded)

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree



**28.** "Discrimination against minorities is still a very serious problem in our society." (egalitarian valence item 3, reverse coded)

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree

**29.** "It seems like blacks, women, homosexuals and other groups don't want equal rights, they want special rights just for them." (hierarchical valence item 2, straight coded)

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree

**30.** "Society as a whole has become too soft and feminine." (hierarchical valence item 3, straight coded)

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neither agree nor disagree  Agree  Strongly agree



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