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An Analysis of Regional Government and Reforms

By:
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With this latest monograph from the Institute for Public Policy & Economic Analysis, I welcome you to Eastern Washington University. I hope this research will inform your knowledge of the Inland Northwest. Efforts like this Institute monograph series are manifestations of this University's commitment to serve the region. I applaud the initiative of Eastern's Board of Trustees to launch this Institute.

Teaching remains our core mission at Eastern Washington University. Increasingly, teaching and research are interwoven. Our faculty members stay professionally current when publishing in peer-reviewed journals. These achievements, in turn, allow them to better convey the evolving knowledge base of our academic disciplines.

Our students receive an enhanced education if their classroom experience is informed by the content and enthusiasm of their professor's research. Increasingly, we ask students to conduct research projects of their own. Whether conducting their own projects or assisting professors, our students acquire a richer learning experience through research.

Research for academic journals is not the only area our faculty members target, however. Our University also asks its faculty to engage the communities and region from which we draw our students. This research provides a greater sense of place and a commitment by our faculty to it. It also translates academic methods and findings into a broader, and ultimately more relevant, arena: the lives of the residents of the Inland Northwest.

The overarching goal of the Institute for Public Policy & Economic Analysis is to serve the region by translating knowledge. It does this through a variety of activities, including this series, annual economic forecasts, contract research and the Community Indicators Initiative. I invite you to explore its web site (www.ewu.edu/policyinstitute) to learn more.

I have tremendous optimism that by collaborating with EWU's faculty, staff and partners, I will continue to ensure our institution will be anchored into the daily course of life throughout the Inland Northwest. During these difficult economic times, our collective future depends on an educated and informed citizenry. Helping our region reach higher levels of knowledge is something this University can and will do.

My office and that of the Institute director welcome all comments on how we might better serve.

Rodolfo Arévalo, PhD
President

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Executive Summary

In the United States of America there is ample opportunity for innovation and changes to local government and solutions to regional issues. Since almost the inception of the nation, people have been innovating the structure their governments. Among the most common ways of doing this are to consolidate city and county governments, create ad hoc solutions, such as interlocal agreements or special districts, or, by to create another layer of government which focuses on regional issues. This study is a review of the literature that assesses these approaches.

City and county consolidations are often considered a typical response to issues of regionalism; however, consolidations are rare occurrences in the United States, with only 34 successful attempts at consolidation out of 163 attempts since 1900. Many of these consolidations have occurred in the South, particularly in the State of Georgia. Regardless of where in the nation the consolidation occurs, most successful consolidations follow a three stage process.

First, a crisis, or a perceived crisis, emerges which the current government structure is not capable of addressing. This could be a financial crisis, a shock to the community's primary industry, a scandal in government, or a change in the population in the community. Next, a "power deflator" occurs when the public comes to believe that the government is either unwilling or incapable of addressing the problem. This power deflator and the inability for the government to respond to it create an environment which is ripe for changing the governmental structure in a community. During this time, the mass media and community leaders tend to rally around the idea that a consolidated city-county government would solve the problems of which occurred in the first stage. Finally, an event occurs which accelerates the process, causing the public to believe the problem must be addressed immediately, with a change of governmental structure as part of the fix to the problem. This third stage then confirms what the public has believed to occur in the first two stages – that there is a problem occurring in the community, that the government is unwilling to address the problem, and that this problem has real repercussions to the region.

These consolidations tend to not be all encompassing events where all of the municipalities are folded into a single government. Rather, on many occasions, previously incorporated municipalities are allowed to remain independent of the consolidated government, although they may continue to use county services such as the court system, sanitation systems, and ministerial functions. Despite the differences in the structure of the combined city-county government, there are some traits which most consolidated governments tend to possess.

Most of these consolidated governments tend to be relatively small geographically, densely populated, and, as a result, mostly urban communities. For example, the consolidated Marion County, Indiana has about 880,000 people living in the county with a population density of 2,172 people per square mile. Consolidated Louisville-Jefferson County, Kentucky, has 714,000 people in the county and a density of 1,800 people per square mile. Other, less populated areas which have consolidated also tend to be compact areas which are relatively densely populated. This

includes Athens-Clarke County, Georgia which has a population density of 840 people per square mile and Augusta – Richmond County, Georgia which has a population density of 616 people per square mile.

Yet, the advantages to the community from city-county consolidation are debatable. Some studies of consolidation in Jacksonville, Florida showed that voter turnout declined after consolidation, socioeconomic issues remained, and political power continued to reside in the urban fringe at the expense of the urban core. Other studies, however, found that consolidated government in Jacksonville was more responsive to the needs of the community compared to the pre-consolidated governments.

These mixed findings are relatively consistent with studies from other communities, with some examinations finding people were more satisfied with services in pre-consolidated governments, while other studies finding the community was not less dissatisfied with services provided by consolidated governments. For example, study of consolidated Athens/Clarke County, Georgia found consolidation did not relieve the tension between developers and neighborhood groups, a primary reason for consolidation; however, it did allow for the creation of some programs and services, such as a Department of Human and Economic Development. Simply put, one researcher stated: "Taken as a whole, this body of research does not lead to strong conclusions regarding the value of city-county consolidation." (During 1995 p 275).

Another form of regionalism is to take an ad hoc approach, encouraging various cities and the county to enter into either formal or informal agreements (interlocal) to share services or provide services to one another. This might include contracting out public safety services, sharing facilities, group purchasing, other activities. Beyond interlocal agreements, governments can cede power to a special purpose district which could extend beyond traditional municipal boundaries and would then be the sole provider of these services to the residents of the community. These special purpose districts tend to be created to provide relatively non-controversial services to residents and are intended to be governed by specialists in the field who can handle the technical difficulties of these services.

Examples around the nation include agreements in North Carolina between the city of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. There, a series of interlocal agreements allows the city and the county to share and trade services. The county controls the parks and recreation, building inspection, election and tax administration, while the city provides police services, solid waste, transit, animal control, planning and zoning and a few other services. Another example is found in the Kansas City region where communities have come together to share the responsibility of plowing roads, purchase vehicles as a group for lower costs, and share a computer system for bidding and purchasing.

The literature also examines the difference between *governance* and government and *informal* agreements. While government focuses on the institutions which are responsible for creating and enforcing public policy, governance focuses more on the elected officials and how they interact with one another. In this regard, how government actors interact with one another is seen as important

as the institutions which are created; consequently, some regional issues could be solved through creating a trusting relationship between elected officials from different communities. From a political standpoint, these are more likely to be enacted than something more dramatic, such as city-county consolidation; however, because they tend to be legal contracts, which do not need public debate or approval, there is a chance these agreements could not reflect what the public wants.

Finally, although a rare form, a few metropolitan areas have created another layer of government which overlaps counties and city governments. These regional governments are tasked focusing on issues which cross city and county boundaries such as transportation, planning, and environmental issues while the cities and towns focus on more local issues. Forms of this government exist in the Oregon portion of metropolitan Portland and in the Twin Cities or Minnesota.

2. Introduction

One of the founding principles of the United States' government is the idea of federalism – the concept that people are citizens of different governments, each of which has different roles and responsibilities. In the United States, the national government is charged with certain tasks such as regulating interstate commerce, providing for the common defense, creating a national currency and a whole host of other issues, while the states take on many other powers. However, it has always been understood that the state governments – or perhaps, more correctly, a centralized government which could be some distance away from population centers – could not provide for all of the services and protections people need at the local level.

Because of this understanding, county governments, which provide state government services on the local level, and city governments have always been an integral part of the American political structure. The U.S. Constitution, however, states nothing about the role of local governments and since the 1840s, the federal courts have accepted that local governments are a function of the states. Further, states have control over how these local governments can be structured and the powers that they may wield. On occasion, Congress does pass legislation which encourages municipal governments to take on certain projects or create certain partnerships if they want to compete for financial assistance.

Yet, there is a large degree of variance in how local governments are structured throughout the fifty states of the union. Each state has created its own laws governing what roles local governments may be have, how they may be organized, and what their structure looks like. This diversity of structures provides an excellent example to explore alternative ways to organize local governments, the rationale to these alternatives, and the potential ramifications of these institutional structures. The remainder of this study will explore the assessment in the political science literature of local government restructuring and what issues have, in the past, caused people to reexamine how local governments are ordered. It will then take up a few of the available alternatives to the current structure in Spokane County. This will include attempts at city-county consolidation, ad hoc intergovernmental agreements, creating a regional government, and, finally, an exploration of the role that leadership plays in local intergovernmental affairs.

3. The History of Local Government Issues in the United States

The idea of recreating local government in the United States has been around since the founding of the nation. Throughout the 1800s, there were periods where consolidation of the county and city (or of multiple cities) was considered advantageous. In some instances consolidation was perceived either as a benefit for the local economy, a way to gain a political advantage in regional politics, or a means of local boosterism. Starting with the consolidation of the Parish of New Orleans with the city of New Orleans in 1805, there was a movement towards consolidation throughout the 1800s, where all six attempts to consolidate government succeeded (National Association of Counties 2008). Arguably, the culmination of this 19th century consolidation movement occurred in 1874, when the five counties which made up greater New York unified into New York City (National Association of Counties 2008).

Since the end of World War II, there have been three movements in reforming local government in the United States. In each case, there was a different set of issues creating the need to tackle local government reform and in each time different solutions were explored. Almost immediately after the end of the Second World War, society changed as people began to leave urban and settle in suburban areas. As more moved from dense urban areas to less populated suburban areas, this transformed the American community, making wholesale changes in the basic way Americans lived, and created challenges of transportation, infrastructure and education.

One of the results of this transformation was the number of new governments which emerged in this era as these less densely populated areas outside the city center began to incorporate. In 1942 there were 16,220 municipal governments in the United States and 221 municipal governments in the state of Washington; in 2010 there were 19,492 in the nation and 281 municipal governments in Washington State (Bureau of the Census 1945; Bureau of the Census 2010). Population growth contributed to this trend. During this time to population in the United States increased from approximately 131 million people to 310 million people and from 1.7 million people in Washington State to 6.6 million people.

The next wave of interest in the relationship between municipal governments occurred in the 1970s. During this time, a concern that many of the United States' major cities – especially the cities of the upper Midwest and Northeast – were in a state of decline became prevalent in many communities. Much of the emphasis in academic research at this time focused on how a flight of individuals, resources, and jobs from the city center to suburbs caused the cities to lack the resources needed to address their infrastructure, public safety, education, housing, and other needs (Harris, 1975). Because of these trends, much of the focus on regionalism centered on how (and if) the resource inequality between the wealthier suburbs and the poorer city center could be rectified.

A third era of research occurred during the 1990s and tended to focus more on quality of life issues. As suburbs began to increase in

absolute number, population, and political strength, issues about life in urban and suburban areas changed; for example, many people began to face increased commute times as the transportation infrastructure could not keep up with population growth. In addition, more people became concerned about the environmental impact of large numbers of people spending increased amount of time in their cars. People also express concerns about the possibility of substandard housing in the central city, environmental problems associated with sprawl, and in many areas, dramatic variations in the quality of education which was directly related to the quality of the housing stock in that city (Downs, 1994).

In this period, many of the problems facing metropolitan areas were recognized as multijurisdictional in nature. For instance, pollution does not stay in the city where it started and commuters might travel through many cities to get to their destination. In addition, unlike previous eras, the nature of the modern American metropolitan area began to change. No longer did people live in a suburb and commute into the city center for their work, entertainment, and cultural outings; they now began to commute between suburbs and find economic and cultural activities in the suburbs. Simply, suburbs in many American metropolitan areas are no longer just places to live; they compete with the central city for economic activity.

Scholars and others noted, however, that the municipal governments were not working in a collaborative manner on issues such as transportation or environmental problems. In many instances, the central city might work with some suburbs, yet it was common for suburban governments to not engage other suburban governments at all. But because the suburban regions were gaining in economic and political power, solutions based on bilateral dialogue between central cities and individual suburbs night not be adequate. Rather, a regional focus of suburbs working with other suburbs might be necessary.

During all three of these eras, municipal areas have created solutions to problems facing local governments around the United States. This could include options which are relatively easy to implement, such as informal agreements between governments or formal contracts between the two or more governments, to more challenging options such as consolidation creating multipurpose districts (Parr et al, 2006). The rest of the study will focus on a few of the potential solutions to issues facing municipal regions – including the consolidation of county and city governments, the creation of ad hoc agreements, a two-tiered government., and a focus on governance – and the experiences of some communities which have attempted to change the structure of their local governments.

4. A Review of City-County Consolidation

After success in the 19th century, consolidation became dramatically less successful in the 20th century. Since 1900, there have been 163 attempts at consolidation of city and county governments in the United States, and of those 34, or 21 percent, have been successful (National Association of Counties, 2008). The idea of city-county consolidation is more of a regional phenomena rather than a national movement. Of the 163 attempts at consolidation since 1900, 113 have occurred in the South – or 70 percent of all consolidation attempts; 33 attempts at consolidation have occurred in Georgia alone (National Association of Counties, 2008; Fleischmann, 2000). In addition, successful attempts have occurred in communities with less than 60,000 inhabitants (Maradano, 1979). This could be because counties in the South tend to be geographically smaller than in some other parts of the nation, and in these smaller communities citizens feel a closer connection to the government therefore less of a concern that a consolidated city and county government would become an unapproachable, ungovernable institution.

The state of Montana has also seen a larger interest in consolidation than would be expected for a state with its population. This is largely attributed to its constitution which makes it easier for consolidation. Montana has had two successful consolidations, in Butte-Silver Bow County, and Anaconda-Deer Lodge County, as well as five other attempts since 1900.

Despite the remote chances for any one consolidation attempt to come to fruition, there is some utility to examining the debate around consolidation. Regardless of the outcome, consolidation attempts engage members of the community about the issues facing the regional governments. These attempts also foster a debate in the community about what the future of the area should be and can increase political participation among the electorate (Marando, 1979).

4.1 What Consolidation Looks Like

Consolidation of city and county governments is most commonly thought of as merging all of the governing bodies in a county into one unified government; however, this is frequently not the case. In many cases, consolidation creates a government composed of the major city and the unincorporated areas of the county, while other municipal governments in the county continue to operate as they did before the consolidation.

One example of a consolidated city-county government which has other metropolitan governments is found in Indianapolis and Marion County, Indiana. In this consolidated government, called Unigov, four independent cities, which have all of the powers traditionally found in a municipality, still exist. There also are other cities in the county which have some autonomy on issues such as zoning, police services, and taxation; however, these cities may not make laws which conflict with the county government or provide regulations that

have a lower standard than the unified government.

Oftentimes, these municipal governments retain their independence as a matter of political expediency during the process of consolidation. In suburbs which might be resistant to consolidation, an agreement was made that the consolidation will not directly affect their city in an attempt to win their support. Of the approximately 890,000 people who live in the combined city-county, about 90,000 live in the independent cities, called "excluded" cities. The excluded cities of Marion County provide police and fire services, their own parks and recreation department and street maintenance, and other services such as water and waste water treatment (League of Women Voters of Indianapolis, 2001). However, because all residents of the county must pay county property taxes and receive other services from the county, residents of these excluded cities also may vote for the mayor of Indianapolis and a member of the city council.

Structurally, the combined city-county government in Indianapolis looks in some regards like a traditional city and county. The chief executive for the entire county is the mayor; he or she and others who serve in the office of the mayor and are responsible for directing the agencies and departments as well as creating a city budget (League of Women Voters of Indianapolis, 2001). These branches include the city parks, police services for the geographic region of the old city of Indianapolis, fire services, as well as the traditional public services in the city such as waste water treatment and sanitation, and other services.

In addition, the Indiana constitution requires there be several county offices which also serve Marion County and Indianapolis, including the sheriff's office. This office is responsible for police services in most parts of the county which are not part of the old city of Indianapolis, as well as running the jail and providing services for the courts. Other county offices include the assessor who determines property values, the auditor who keeps records for the county, and the treasurer. Legislatively, the city-county is governed by a city-county council composed of 29 members, representing 25 districts and 4 at-large members. This council is responsible for enacting ordinances, raising taxes, and investigating issues (League of Women Voters of Indianapolis, 2001).

While other consolidated city-county governments are differ in certain regards, depending on local issues and state constitutional mandates, the Indianapolis-Marion County structure is representative of most consolidated governments. Common features include the ability for other member municipalities to opt-out of the government, a large regional council that enacts ordinances and budgets, and a county-wide mayor which enforces the laws. In Washington State, the constitution requires counties to provide a county assessor, a county auditor, a county clerk, a county coroner, three county commissioners, a county prosecuting attorney, a county sheriff and a county treasurer. It allows, however, the residents of the proposed city-county combination to determine which county offices should remain in the combined city-county government during the drafting of its charter[i]. Washington State also has mechanisms in place to create new counties, or provide a host of other options, including

creating more special purpose districts or creating interlocal agreements.

There are some traits which most consolidated governments tend to possess. Most of these consolidated governments tend to be relatively small geographically, densely populated, and, as a result, mostly urban communities. For example, the consolidated Marion County, Indiana has about 880,000 people living in the county with a population density of 2,172 people per square mile, Louisville-Jefferson County, Kentucky, has 714,000 people in the county and a density of 1,800 people per square mile. Other, less populated areas which have consolidated also tend to be compact areas which are relatively densely populated. This includes Athens-Clarke County, Georgia which has a population density of 840 people per square mile and Augusta – Richmond County, Georgia which has a population density of 616 people per square mile.[ii]

This relative compactness tends to allow for a community to be relatively homogeneous in regard to shared experiences. This is not to say that all residents have similar political viewpoints or expectations of government services, but that they might share common experiences or common problems. A less densely populated area might have urban and rural areas each with different experiences and problems. Yet, there are some communities with very low population densities which have successfully consolidated the city and county governments. Both Butte-Silver Bow and Anaconda-Deer Lodge in Montana, largely rural counties, have consolidated their governments. On inspection, however, in both of these regions a large percentage of the populations live in the central area creating a close network of people.

While a structure similar to Unigov is common among most consolidated city-county governments, there are alternative ways to structure a consolidated government found in the academic literature. One possible way to allow the central city to annex all of the unincorporated land in the county, thereby greatly expanding the city's boundaries to match the county's and creating a de facto consolidation. This is similar to the experience of Charlotte, North Carolina which experienced dramatic growth through annexation of wealthier suburban areas. Between 1970 and 2000, Charlotte had 85 annexations which added 207,000 people to the city's population and almost 168 square miles to the city's size; this included 42 annexations in the 1990s alone, with almost 67 square miles and about 75,000 people (Mead, 2000).

Proponents of this approach contend that most of the problems associated with urban areas occur because the central city is penned in by suburbs and is not able to grow. Because of this, the city's tax base remains fixed while the number of problems and the costs associated with those problems increase over time (Rusk, 1995). Further, if the city center begins to decline, the suburbs become increasingly attractive to new residents and businesses, further eroding the city's resources. If central cities are hemmed in, or have no elasticity, then the city, and the entire metropolitan region could begin to decline (Brierly, 2004).

In addition to allowing the central city to control the development and growth throughout the metropolitan region, there might be other benefits to consolidation through annexation, according to supporters. Dramatic, large-scale annexation can create

national exposure to the city as it increases its size and population. Cities which were once medium sized metropolitan areas can become one of the larger metro areas in the nation. This might allow the city to market itself as a "major metropolitan area" and try to capture the economic, social, and other intangible benefits which come with being a major city.

In almost direct contradiction to the notion of consolidation through annexation is the possibility of creating yet more governments in a region. By creating new counties in the area, or further dividing the region into other governments, more competition could occur as various governments seek to attract residents and businesses by providing services at a reasonable tax levels. In this argument, governments are treated as other entities in market economies; the more providers of services there are, the more likely those services will be delivered efficiently (Savitch & Vogel, 2000).

These two cases, one arguing that one government which annexes all of the county's land, the other arguing that more, smaller governments would be best at delivering services for a community, show the fundamental tension in research on regional governments. There is, in fact, no one school of thought about structuring regional governments, while there is a wide-ranging debate about the structure of local governments.

4.2 Why Consolidation Happens

Successful attempts at consolidation of the city and county governments also tend to follow the same path in which three separate events occur creating an environment conducive to consolidation (Leland & Thurmaier 2004). First, a crisis emerges which the current government structure is not capable of handling. This could be a financial crisis among the governments' budgets or a larger economic downturn in the community. Other crises could be a loss of population or a change in the demographics of a community, a shock to industry, increases in crime, change in the demands or delivery in government services, or an environmental problem. The second event is a "power deflator," which creates the perception that the government is incapable or unwilling to find solutions to the problems. The power deflator and the inability for the government to respond to it create an environment which is ripe for changing the governmental structure in a community. During this time, the mass media and community leaders tend to rally around the idea that a consolidated city-county government would solve the problems of which occurred in the first stage (Leland & Thurmaier 2004; Johnson; 2004).

Finally, some event occurs which speeds up the community's desire to find a solution to the problem. Called an "accelerator event," this could be a scandal or an emergency causing the community to believe there is little time for debating the issue and that consolidation must take place immediately. This third stage then confirms what the public has believed to occur in the first two stages – that there is a problem occurring in the community, that the government is unwilling to address the problem, and that this problem has real repercussions to the region (Leland & Thurmaier 2004).

Supporters of consolidation have put forth four major points why consolidation would be beneficial to a community. First, they propose

that combining the two governments would lead to economic efficiencies (Leland & Johnson 2004). In this argument, the supporters claim that combining the governments would create an opportunity to reduce redundancies in services provided by the two or more jurisdictions and provide benefits to taxpayers throughout the region.[iii]

In addition to economic efficiencies, many supporters of consolidation contend combining governments would provide equal services and a shared burden on residents among a variety of communities in the county (Leland and Johnson, 2004; Downs, 1994). Throughout much of the United States' history following World War II, there has been an exodus of wealthy and middle class individuals from the urban core, and its perceived problems, toward the suburbs. As these people left the city in search of better schools and quality of life, they also took their wealth and a significant portion of the city's tax base with them (Harris, 1975). This created a situation where the central cities were left trying to solve many problems concerning education, health care, and housing with less revenue and more people in need of services (Downs, 1994). Yet, many of these suburban dwellers still took advantage of the city's amenities such as sports complexes, cultural activities, and transportation hubs, without paying for the costs (Rusk, 1995). Consequently, supporters of consolidated government believe that by combining the region into one unified tax base resources could be distributed between the suburban periphery and the urban center creating better schools, infrastructure, and housing in the central city (Downs, 1994).

Third, many supporters of consolidation argue that combining governments will lead to a "better" government, one more responsive to the people. From some of the earliest attempts at the consolidation, proponents have contended that too many governments in a region can increase the number of conflicts between the governments and decrease the quality of services in the community. More governments can lead to more actors who might not have incentives to cooperate with one another, causing a lack of coordination between governments, conflicting policy in the same region, and other issues. With a consolidated government, there would be no issues of coordination, and while conflict and disagreements in the political arena are inevitable, these disagreements would be handled by *one* government which would act in a coordinated manner (Savitch & Vogel, 2000).

In a related point, supporters also have argued that consolidated government could end perceived corruption among some governments. This was historically a very strong argument during the beginning of the 20th century when the governments of many major cities were seen as filled with graft, corruption, and were instruments of political parties. Because these government machines were often seen as untouchable at the ballot box, many people argued that the party machines could best be defeated by ending the reign of the city governments (Savitch & Vogel, 2000). Similarly, arguments were, and are, made that consolidating the city and county governments could be beneficial by destroying the power that special interest groups maintain over some governments (Fleischmann, 2000).

Finally, consolidation supporters have argued that combining the city and county governments will allow regional issues to be solved in a more coherent manner. In a

modern region, there might be dozens, or possibly hundreds of different government structures each with their own authority and responsibility over various issues. Because of this, a region might not have a plan to contend with issues such as pollution, transportation, housing, providing infrastructure, or other regional problems. Rather, each government can create policies which are narrowly tailored to their own community's interest regardless of the effects it has on the rest of the region (Leland & Thurmaier, 2004). By creating a unified government, these problems can be solved at the regional level, leading to a solution to all of these issues which applies across the area (Frug, 2002).

4.3 Who Tends To Support Consolidation

During the three stages which occur during the consolidation process, there are certain groups whose support for consolidation is a necessary, however not sufficient, component of the consolidation processes succeeding. First, some governmental institutions are essential in the support of changing the structure of the regional government. This, however, can be a strategically difficult position for elected officials. They must acknowledge there is a problem they are not equipped to solve, that they do not have the solutions, and thereby ask the public's support in changing the structure of the government. This can be, at best, a politically risky undertaking for an elected official; some political officials, especially those who might lose their positions, could oppose the consolidation (Sparrow, 2004).

In fact, it is not uncommon for many current elected officials to come out against consolidation, as they see it as an indictment of

their work. However, it can be possible to win the support of some local elected officials during the consolidation process by creating a new government which they might believe they can serve in. In some consolidation plans, new governments are structured with many council seats or other elected positions as a way of creating plenty of opportunities for elected officials to find positions in the new government (Fleischman, 2000).

Support is often needed at the state level in creating a consolidated city-county government. In situations where some local governments are not supportive of consolidation, or where many local elected officials are putting up resistance, supporters have gone to the state government to ensure that consolidation occurred. In the restructuring of Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky, the state legislature was an active participant in the consolidation effort, including creating legislation which authorized a referendum to create the new government (Savitch & Vogel, 2004). However, the legislative act was not specific on the details of the charter, and the referendum which was passed was also limited in details about the scope of power of the consolidated government. This allowed locals to determine the final structure of the government (Savitch & Vogel, 2004). Similarly, the consolidation of Marion County and Indianapolis occurred through the state legislature.

Even if the state government does not take an active role in creating the consolidated government, it may play an important role through changing the state's constitution or its general laws to assist in consolidation. Montana is often held up as an example of a state where the consolidation attempts are

relatively frequent (at least, outside of the South) and are relatively successful. Other examples of this include the State of Colorado, whose voters amended the state's constitution to create the City and County of Broomfield (State of Colorado, 2010). This consolidation was unlike many of the other consolidations in the United States. Traditionally, consolidations take place when a city located in a county merges governments with the county government. However, the city of Broomfield was located on the confluence of four counties, creating logistical problems for both residents of the city and the city government itself. Because of this, the city of Broomfield was turned into its own consolidated city and county[iv].

There are other actors whose support tends to be necessary, but not sufficient, for the city and county governments to consolidate. Traditionally, members of the businesses community and, specifically, the chambers of commerce are important supporters of successful city-county consolidations (Maradano 1979; Johnson, 2004; Johnson & Carr, 2004). This was seen in the reorganization of Louisville, Kentucky, where many of the business elite argued that a consolidated city would create a larger metropolis which would allow more visibility on the national stage, and, therefore, economic growth (Savitch and Vogel, 2000). The strength of the business elite's ability to influence the debate on consolidation can be greatly increased if there is one dominating industry in the community which supports consolidation (Rusk, 1999).

However, other studies have shown that, generally, support for city-county consolidation is not universal across all businesses. While the chambers of commerce and businesses which are located in the central city are often in support of consolidation, those businesses located in the periphery and in suburbs are often opposed to consolidation because of perceived harmful effects to their business (Johnson, 2004). In some consolidation attempts studied in the South, part of the political debate broke down around the perceived benefits and drawbacks which each business community would obtain in the event of consolidation (Fleishmann, 2000).

The mass media, especially major daily newspapers, are further important actors in determining the success of a consolidation attempt (Johnson, 2004; Savitch & Vogel, 2004, Sparrow, 2004). First, as businesses in their own right, these organizations tend to have long-standing ties in the community; because of their standing, they tend to be influential members of business organizations such as the chamber of commerce. Therefore, their support can be critical in rallying the business community to support such efforts if they deem them to be appropriate.

In addition, newspapers are the source of information for the majority of the citizens. Because of this, it may be difficult for voters to learn about the events that constitute the three factors necessary for consolidation to occur. That is, people will only learn about a crisis in the community, the governments' inability to solve this problem, and any potential scandals or other accelerators only if the media informs them. Finally, because the mass media have a measure of trust with the general public, their reporting on these issues can influence the public if a vote does occur (Johnson, 2004). In some instances, the media has acted as a force for "good government," and taken the mantle of consolidation, along with groups like the

League of Women Voters, to argue that consolidation would be beneficial to the community (Mead, 1994; Sparrow, 2004).

Besides government, the business community and the media, there are other actors who are important in successful consolidations. In many of the consolidation attempts which have occurred in the South, the support of the African-American community has been considered important in winning any consolidation votes (Fleishmann, 2000; Johnson, 2004). Much like the business community, it appears racial and ethnic groups will give their support when there are perceived benefits to consolidation; it is withheld when it appears that there will be no benefits (During, 2004).

Consequently, issues of organization of consolidated government – how many seats on the city government, and how the boundaries of the districts will be drawn, the breadth of services the government will provide, and how the taxing system will be structured are critical to determining the support of both groups (Fleishmann, 2000). Finally, there are other groups which tend to be important actors in the consolidation process. These might include environmentalists, groups such as the League of Women Voters, and local professional groups, could be critical to influencing citizens to support consolidation (Fleishchmann, 2000; Johnson, 2004; Feiock, 2004).

4.4 The Results of Consolidation

While there is some certain degree of agreement in the conditions and actors necessary to have a possible consolidation, the studies on the results of consolidation are decidedly mixed on the outcomes. In Jacksonville, Florida, research has found that, among other things "socioeconomic equity remained relatively constant, favoring the residents on the urban fringe, often at the expense of those in the inner city, certainly those in the 'pocket of poverty'," (Swanson, 2004 p 42). In addition, Jacksonville also experienced a decline in voter turnout, as opposed to an expected increase (Swanson, 2004). In another article, Swanson argued there are four major lessons from the Jacksonville consolidation: 1) consolidation might "harm minorities, enhance the power of corporate elites, and result from political manipulation;" 2) it might also reveal the balance of power between corporate and governmental interests; 3) consolidation can overwhelm other issues in the region; and 4) it may be achieved by avoiding controversy about the shape of the future government through vagueness about the issues (Swanson, 2000). Other studies, however, found the consolidated government in Jacksonville proved to be more responsive after consolidation than before (Carver, 1978).

These mixed findings appear in other communities as well. Studies in Nashville, Tennessee show that people were happier with the services provided before consolidation and that people in similar, non-consolidated communities were more satisfied with their services than in consolidated communities (Rogers and Lipsey, 1974). Other studies have shown that people have a harder time accessing the government and its services in a consolidated Nashville (Grant, 1969). Yet, further comparative studies in Kentucky have found that people in non-consolidated governments are not more satisfied with their governments' services, more involved in the

political process, or more informed about their governments' taxing and spending policies, thereby implying similarities in consolidated and non-consolidated locations concerning these issues (Lyons & Lowery, 1989) .

In Athens/ Clarke County, Georgia, there remain some post-consolidation conflicts about growth and development between neighborhood groups and developers, even though a central argument in favor of consolidation lay in the benefits it would provide for this issue. There also was a degree of disapproval among government employees about the consolidation and the process by which occurred, although this appeared to abate somewhat after about a decade (Durning et al, 2000). There appears, however, to have been some benefits, including the implementation of many programs and services which would probably not have been created without the consolidation, such as a department of Human and Economic Development and many regional partnerships (Durning et al, 2004).

When exploring the effects of consolidated government, Durning et al might have summed up the academic literature best when they stated: "Taken as a whole, this body of research does not lead to strong conclusions regarding the value of city-county consolidation. It is especially conducive in regard to smaller (under 250,000 populations) and non-metropolitan areas that are considering consolidation, because little of the research seems generalizable to governments of that size" (During 1995, p 275).

5. The Brief Literature on Two-tiered Government

In addition to consolidating the city and county governments, there are other solutions to dealing with regional issues. Since the late 1970s, the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area has had another layer of government, in addition to the city and county governments, called Portland Metro, which focuses on addressing regional issues. Placed on top of Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties and 25 cities in the Portland area, this government entity serves over 1.5 million residents. When created, the purpose of Metro was to have the exclusive authority to deal with issues which affected the entire metropolitan region (or, at least, the Oregon side of the Portland metropolitan region). In searching for a way to handle regional issues which were effecting all of the communities in area, Portland's Metro's leaders at the time were tasked with operating the Washington Park Zoo (now the Oregon Zoo), creating Portland's urban growth boundary, and handling solid waste planning.

Over the next few decades, Metro became the governing body responsible for building the Oregon Convention Center, the light-rail line, as well as other transportation programs in the area, as well as the region's parks. Currently, Metro is responsible for planning issues in the region, solid waste and waste water treatment, the zoo and other parks, some public facilities such as the convention center and the Portland Center for the Performing Arts (Oregon Metro, 2010a). In addition, Metro has the authority to issue bonds and raise revenue, primarily through a property tax and an excise tax, for its programs.

In many regards, this form of regional government is radically different from the city-county consolidation. In city-county consolidation, the city and, traditionally, the unincorporated parts of the county are merged into one government which is responsible for all of the services required in the community. However, in Portland's Metro government, all of the governments – both city and county – remained intact with the formation of the news government. Rather, these governments ceded their authority over the specific functions mentioned above to this new government, creating a system where local issues are solved locally, regional issues are solved regionally, and statewide issues are solved at the state level.

There are, however, some similarities between Metro and consolidated city-county governments. In both systems, a legislative council creates laws for the region. Metro has a six member council who represents unique districts throughout the region and generally represents people who reside in more than one city, in an attempt to bring a more regional view to the council rather than having the representatives' focus on the interests of one particular community (Oregon Metro, 2010b). Metro also has a council president who is elected by the entire region and is tasked with setting the agenda for the council meetings, presides over the meetings, and selects members of the boards and commissions.

An additional similarity between city-county consolidation and Portland's Metro is the amount of support each government had from the state government at its inception in order to succeed. As the only popularly elected regional government in the nation, Metro was first created by the state legislature and approved of

by the voters in the region in the 1970s. Later, the state amended the Oregon constitution to provide for the ability of regional governments to establish home rule charters. As Metro is the only one, this was an amendment designed to strengthen the powers of the government (Oregon Metro, 2010a).

Somewhat similar to Portland's Metro is the Metropolitan Council composed of Minneapolis/St. Paul and the surrounding communities in Minnesota. Created by the Minnesota legislature in 1967, the role of the Council is to "to plan for the orderly, economical development of the seven-county area and coordinate the delivery of certain services that couldn't be provided by any one city or county" (Metropolitan Council, 2010). Like the Portland Metro, Minnesota's Metropolitan Council is focused on regional issues including public transportation, regional parks, wastewater, and assisting communities in economic development and managing population growth. In addition, the Council also has the ability to borrow money and levy taxes.

The major difference between the regional governments in Oregon and Minnesota is the manner in which the officials are chosen to serve. While the Oregon regional government has six members representing districts elected by the people, the Minnesota government has 16 council members who represent distinct districts. These council members are chosen by the governor and confirmed by the state Senate, which does not allow for completely popular representation in the regional government (Frug, 2002). Despite their unique form of government (or, perhaps, because of the uniqueness of the government), very little research has been done on these regional governments and a systematic study of these

governments appears to have never been undertaken. Some scholars have argued that while regional government may hold promise, both of these governments have problems – in the case of Portland, there might be other issues which Metro should cover, while the Twin Cities government is not democratic (Frug, 2002). Others researchers have stated that while Portland's Metro is an interesting experiment, it is too new to know if it will be successful (Siegel, 1999).

6. Ad Hoc Government Agreements

While both city-county consolidation and the creation of a regional government require the community to create entirely new political institutions, there are other, less dramatic ways in which regional services can be provided. It is possible for the governments already in existence in the county to band together to provide services or to establish intergovernmental agreements between various governments or to create special purpose districts to provide services across jurisdictional lines. This is titled ad hoc because there is no formal, set way for this to occur; rather, various governments create agreements or find other solutions other than consolidation or regional governments in manners which suit them best.

These interlocal agreements occur more frequently than consolidation or other reforms because they are less drastic: governments and elected officials remain in place, people do not have to vote on these issues, and they are oftentimes seen as innocuous administrative functions rather than political actions (Thurmaier & Wood, 2004). Moreover, because many of the issues confronting governments tend to be regional in nature, these interlocal agreements allow governments to provide solutions to issues which stretch across jurisdictions. These agreements occur so frequently that one study determined that almost 60 percent of all communities which have fewer than 25,000 residents have engaged in some interlocal agreement (Thurmaier & Wood, 2004).

Intergovernmental agreements are more likely to occur in cities with city managers and in more urban areas, and they remain popular among both wealthier and less wealthy jurisdictions. They are less likely to occur, however, when elected officials believe they are going to lose their power or if state law limits these agreements (Thurmaier & Wood, 2004). Other studies have proposed that local governments provide two types of services: *competitive services*, where each government provides the same services, and *complementar*y, where governments provide unique services in the region (Park, 1994). In this case, competitive services could be provided by one government through interlocal agreements where other governments contract to get a service, while complementary services could be granted to residents of other jurisdictions through these agreements.

This occurred in the Louisville, Kentucky area before consolidation with the creation of the Louisville-Jefferson County Compact in the 1980s. Far reaching in both its depth and breath, the compact shifted some government services exclusively to the city government while other services fell under the purview of the county. The city gained control of the zoo and museum of science and emergency services, while the county provided control over air pollution, the health department, planning and others (Savitch & Vogel, 2000b). In addition, the library, public transit, parks, and the sewer district were run by joint agreement between the city and the county executives (Savitch & Vogel, 2000b). The Compact also altered the tax base in the county, and created a system of transferring tax revenue from the county to the city to provide a more equal level of services throughout the county (Savitch & Vogel, 2000b).

Savitch argued that, although there were problems and concerns from the county about the amount of payments made to the city from tax revenues, the Compact generally worked well. Although during the time of the compact, 1970-1990, the poverty rate increased. There were improvements in Louisville during this time: the amount of overcrowding in residences, unemployment, and percent of residents without a college degree all declined in Louisville (Savitch & Vogel, 2000b). In addition, business profits, business payrolls, and property values all increased (Savitch & Vogel, 2000b). However, the perceived inability of the county and city to work together, and a failure to win support from the state legislature for the Compact caused its end and a movement towards consolidation (Savitch & Vogel, 2004).

Other cities and counties also have created agreements where regional governments make agreements to share service delivery. A similar arrangement as Louisville's Compact is found in Charlotte, North Carolina, where the city and county have created a functional consolidation. In this community, the city and county have agreed to share services in which each has exclusive control over certain services through a series of interlocal agreements. Mecklenburg County controls the parks and recreation, building inspection, elections, and tax administration, while the city controls planning and zoning, police, solid waste, transit, utilities, animal, and a few other services. They share responsibility of computer services and licensing, storm water, communications, and a shared government center (Mead, 2000).

In the Kansas City region, which encompasses communities in both Missouri and Kansas, there have been many interlocal agreements which have allowed the local governments to work together. Some examples of this include sharing the responsibility of plowing roads which run through multiple communities, group purchasing of vehicles to get lower costs, and sharing a computerized purchasing and bidding system for their purchases (Thurmaier & Wood, 2004). Many of the communities also use the services which are only provided in Kansas City, Missouri, including the use of their crime lab and police academy. Most communities in Jackson County, Missouri rely on the county to provide tax administration for their municipalities (Thurmaier & Wood, 2004). In Spokane County, interlocal agreements are used to manage seven issues – wastewater, animal control, law enforcement and the jail, solid waste, fire districts, and homelessness (M. Jackson, Personal Communication 2010).

These compacts can be criticized because they might give people less control over their governments than should be expected in a representative government. Because these agreements tend to last longer than the term of office of those who enter into these agreements, if the compact is not desirable or the people of a community do not approve of an agreement, citizens may have the ability to vote a person out of office but not to change the compact. Simply put, a democratic government requires that people have some influence of policy by controlling who gets elected to office. These agreements, by necessity, tend to be longer term than a single elected official's term of office.

Consequently, if an agreement is not beneficial to a community, the public could vote an official who negotiated the agreement out of office, but it might be difficult or impossible to end the agreement. Moreover, future elected officials might use an unpopular agreement as an

excuse for their leadership failings, thereby misplacing blame on the previous administration when it could lie with them. Either way, this could prove problematic for a democratic society.

In addition to sharing services or transferring control of services to one distinct government, *special service districts* can also be created to provide services for the community. In Spokane County, not including the school districts, the most common special purpose districts in the nation, there are 52 special purpose districts. These include: six cemetery districts, 12 water districts, 11 irrigation districts, three library districts, a health authority, a housing authority, a flood control district, a conservation district, an air pollution control authority, and other fire protection districts and water-sewer districts (MRSC, 2010). Traditionally, special purpose governments were created to handle a unique issue which was designed to be more technical and less politically contentious than other services (McCabe, 2004). Because they take on technically challenging issues, these governments have been seen as beneficial, because they allowed these important issues to be solved by those with the expertise without the political pressures of a general purpose government (Donovan et al, 2008).

Many special purpose governments provide services such as water, sewage treatment, and cemeteries; however, they have also become increasingly used for other services such as stadiums and transit. Since they tend to focus on relatively less controversial issues, special purpose districts tend to be more politically palatable with the general public than city-county consolidation. They are seen as adding to the existing political system, rather than

destroying a system people understand (McCabe, 2004). Because of this, the number of special purpose governments in the United States increased dramatically from 11,000 in 1952 to 31,555 in 1992 (Foster, 1997).

There may be some potential drawbacks with the creation of special purpose districts. Often voters do not know about the special purpose governments and might pay little attention to the governance of these governments. Because of this, there is the potential for these governments to be captured by special interests which then use the governments to benefit their own interests rather than the community as a whole (Donovan et al., 2008).

7. A Note on Governance

In addition to consolidating the city-county government, creating a metropolitan government, or developing ad hoc solutions, there is yet another way to contend with regional issues in government. This final section does not deal with existing institutions or the creation of new ones. Rather, instead of focusing on government, one can think about regionalism as a focus on *governance*. In a discussion of governance, the central point is not institutions, rules, or structures of a government; it is how the people who run government act. Simply put, government focuses on the creation or reorganization of political institutions, while governance focuses on the cooperation among these institutions. This could be through agreements which are fluid and voluntary, creation of public-private partnerships, or use of non-profits to assist in providing public services (Savitch & Vogel, 2002). Much of the focus on the way government works and cooperation between governments comes from an understanding that changing the institutions is extraordinarily difficult, and governance represents a pragmatic approach to change (Parks & Oakerson, 2000).

Governance, in the context of regional government, may consist of regularly scheduled meetings of elected officials from different jurisdictions at which standing issues are discussed. These meetings, however, can also provide another important function for regionalism. By creating an informal venue where government officials can convene, these events create an opportunity for people to build relationships over time. By fostering trust between these elected officials, it is more likely

that many of these agreements, or informal understandings between two governments, to occur and succeed. Other ways this communication between governments could occur is through the creation of a council of governments. These organizations are non-governmental organizations which are created by the governments of a specific region to help the area plan for and develop solutions for regional issues.

Many of the agreements which occurred in the Kansas City metropolitan area found their genesis in meetings between elected officials throughout the area. In that region, there are some formally set meetings between certain city council members and county commissioners; however, there are many other informal opportunities for elected leaders and other government officials to meet and discuss issues (Thurmaier & Wood, 2004). This includes monthly luncheons and meetings of managers and other governmental officials from across the region where people may discuss their problems and could, possibly, come to a solution which might benefit the region (Thurmaier & Wood, 2004).

Similar meetings occur in Spokane County through the Spokane County Council of Governments. This began around 2006 to provide an opportunity for elected officials from around the region to strengthen their relationships and work together to find regional solutions to some problems. These meetings tend to occur either quarterly or biannually and are designed to be informal with presentations of issues followed by a discussion. To date, the Spokane area Council of Governments has helped foster collaborative action on animal

control, solid waste, wastewater treatment, and mental health issues (personal communication, M. Richard). The Council of Governments also allows elected officials to discuss shared legislative priorities and work on regional issues such as transportation funding and public safety issues.

8. Conclusions

There are no set patterns for regionalism in the United States, nor are there any universal solutions for regional issues in the United States. Because of this pluralism of ideas, there remains some debate in the political science literature on several dimensions of regionalism. The first major debate concerns how to measure success in regional governance: is success based on total increased economic activity, decreased levels of poverty, increased political participation, increased educational attainment, or some other factor? Simply, if there is disagreement about what constitutes a benefit to the community, it is difficult to determine whether a change in the forms of government could be considered successful.

In addition, debates remain about whether some forms of regionalism are always appropriate. For example, is it appropriate if interlocal agreements or special purpose districts are created and the larger public is not aware of the creation of the agreement? This could create problems if citizens might not know who to assign responsibility when these forms of regionalism occur. If the public is generally unaware of these arrangements, they might not be able to evaluate if they are succeeding. That said, there does appear to be consensus in the literature about one major aspect of regionalism. Discussing regionalism, of any type, can create a public dialogue among the community which can engage the public and foster a debate and participation in the community, which, regardless of the outcome, is healthy for the community.

Many of the debates in the academic community stem from some limitations in the literature and the field of study of local government. First, most of the studies of regionalism in the United States tend to focus on the consolidation of cities and counties at the expense of other forms of regionalism. That is not to say that there is not research and writings on interlocal agreements or special purpose districts; however, these are not as studied as extensively as city and county consolidation. In addition, very little research has been completed on two-tiered governments, such as Portland, Oregon's, and the potential advantages and drawbacks of this unique system of government. Even within the area of city and county consolidation, there is a tendency in the literature to focus on the political aspects of creating a consolidated city and county government – how a government is created, the political environments which are conducive for consolidation, the forces which tend to support or oppose consolidation, and the structure of a consolidated government. Much less research has been done on the effects of consolidation.

Another limitation of the literature regarding regionalism in the United States is the fact that in a federal system, there are no uniform solutions which are applicable to all parts of the nation. Because each state operates under a different state constitution and different state laws, there are different options and opportunities for different communities. Despite these limitations in the academic literature, there remains a good deal of information about the different types of solutions to regional issues and solid, informative case studies of the experiences of other communities around the United States.

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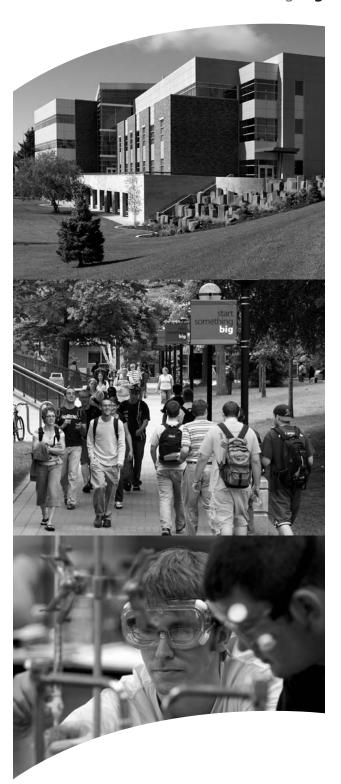
Endnotes

[i] Washington State Constitution Article XI Sect. 5 , R.C.W. 36.16.030, and Washington State Constitution Article XI Sect. 16

[ii] For comparison, Spokane County has a population of 462,700 people and a density of 267 people per square mile.

[iii] This issue is addressed in detail by Professor Grant Forsyth in his companion monograph to this one, *Municipal Economies of Scale & Scope and Post-Consolidation Economic Performance: A Literature Review.*

[iv] It is important to note that creation of new counties is possible in the State of Washington, by collecting the signatures of at least half of the eligible voters in the proposed new county. These signatures are transmitted to the state legislature who may then create the new county its members chose to. For more on this see Cedar County Committee, et al v. Ralph Munro and Freedom County v. Snohomish County.

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