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REGIONAL TAX BASE SHARING

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

ASHLEY BELLANT

Michigan State University

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Regional Tax Base Sharing:

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INTRODUCTION

The sustained population loss and economic contraction of urban cores in our nation's Rust Belt, the area of the northern United States surrounding the Great Lakes once dominated by industrial manufacturing, has been well documented. These once booming centers of industry experienced heavy job loss in post-WWII deindustrialization followed by steep selective migration away from city centers. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the City of Detroit whose peak population of 1.8 million in 1950 has since rapidly dropped, losing an average of 17,300 residents per year.

Population loss and disinvestment leave urban centers with a greatly diminished capacity to raise revenue, leading to a cycle of decline. As a city's tax-base dwindles, it must raise tax rates or cut costs – in the form of municipal services – to remain fiscally solvent. Higher tax rates and lower quality of services lead residents and businesses to locate elsewhere, furthering the municipality's predicament (Kleine & Schulz, 2017). Played out over decades, this cycle greatly burdens communities throughout our Legacy Cities, galvanizing inequities in education, recreation, housing, safety, and economic opportunity.

Indeed, Michigan has more cities under state supervision than any other state. According to the Michigan State University (MSU) Extension Center for Local Government Finance and Policy (2017), 32 Michigan cities do not have, or are on the verge of not having, the resources to provide an adequate level of public services. Creative measures must be implemented to avoid complete service insolvency or Chapter 9 bankruptcy, such as recently granted in Detroit.

Regional tax-base sharing is a taxation model proven to address fiscal disparities created and exacerbated by the forces discussed above. This Co-Learning Plan focuses on Resiliency Planning and Financial Resiliency and will:

1) Examine the history of Michigan's shrinking urban cores;
2) Introduce regional tax base sharing;
3) Present two case studies;
4) Explore hypothetical fiscal disparities calculations;
5) Provide talking points for proponents, and;
6) Outline Michigan's unique obstacles and opportunities in adopting tax-base sharing.

This Co-Learning Plan aims to inform and stimulate discussion among residents, advocates, and policymakers around new ideas meant to address inequities.

MICHIGAN'S SHRINKING URBAN CORES

Michigan's post-industrial urban centers have been shrinking since the 1950s. Populations skyrocketed during the American Industrial Revolution in cities located near producers of raw materials such as iron ore in Appalachia and the port cities of the Great Lakes. Millions flocked to these new manufacturing centers. However, deindustrialization following WWII halted urban manufacturing jobs. A nationwide housing shortage spurred the construction of suburbs and those legally and financially able and with the financial means moved. No longer needing to be based near an industrial port, businesses moved to these newly constructed outlying communities as well. This left behind city centers with non-operational manufacturing plants, few jobs, and an impoverished population facing legal discrimination. This unsustainable pattern continues today and creates a vicious cycle of decline for our urban cores.

The American Industrial Revolution

In the decades following the Civil War, the United States became a leader of industry. An abundance of raw materials, increased efficiency in manufacturing, and a significantly expanded railroad system created millions of jobs in northern port cities. Individuals and families with few economic prospects at home, including new U.S. immigrants and Black southerners escaping the poor conditions of the Jim Crow South, migrated north (Figure 1).

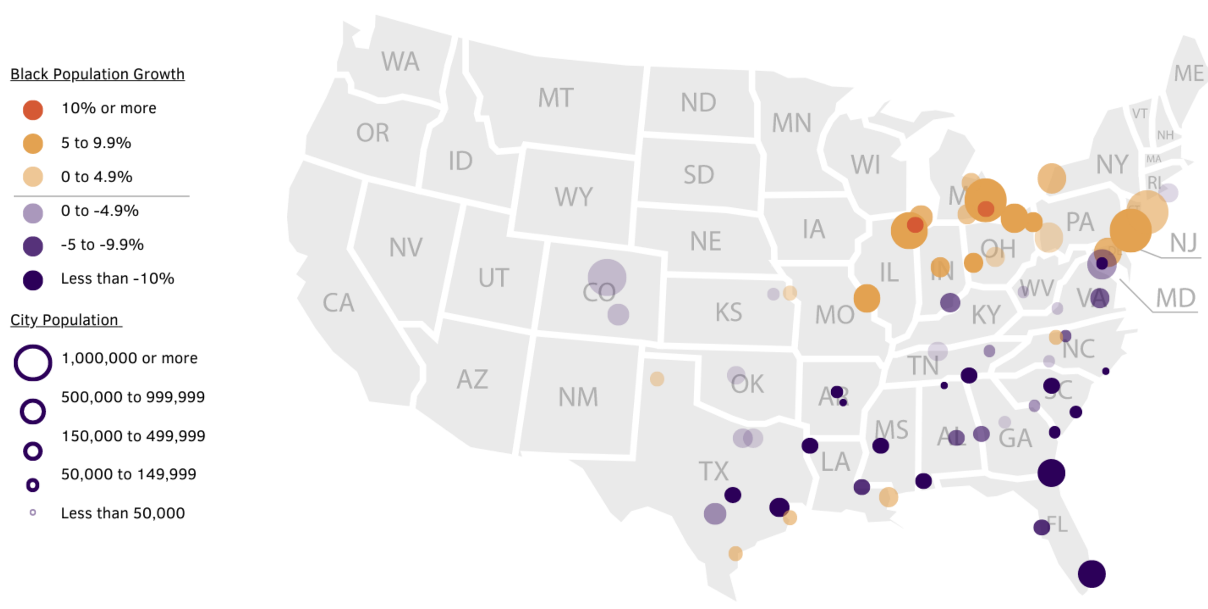


Figure 1. Black Population Migration, 1910-1940
U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Censuses, 1910-1940

Cities like Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia experienced unprecedented population growth as well as substantial changes in racial composition (Figure 2). Detroit gained approximately one million residents from 1900 to 1930 in part due to stable employment opportunities in the automobile manufacturing industry located in the city of Detroit. World War II efforts saw assembly lines retooled to produce tanks, ships, planes, and other wartime necessities, keeping industry booming during the 1940s.

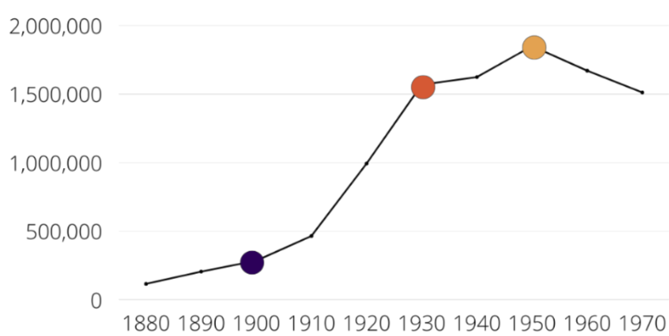


Figure 2. Population of Detroit, 1880-1970

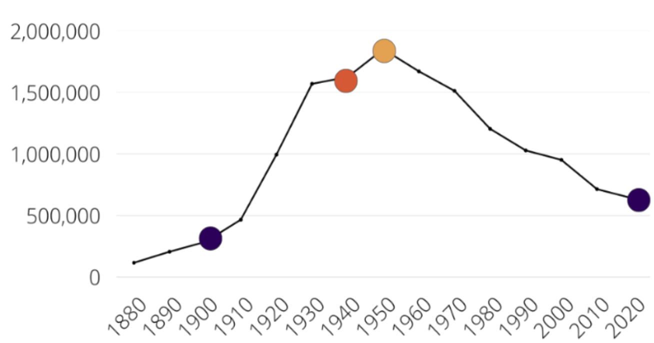


Figure 3. Population of Detroit, 1880-2020

Post-WWII Decline

Post-war deindustrialization halted manufacturing opportunities in city centers. This job loss combined with a housing shortage dating back to the Great Depression spurred the federal government to act. Using innovative manufacturing methods pioneered in cities like Detroit, the government quickly erected communities of single-family homes outside of city centers across the region we now know as the Rust Belt. The passage of the GI Bill, substantial increase in the use of FHA loans, and the eventual subsidization of suburban infrastructure, namely the creation of the U.S. interstate highway system, allowed families and businesses to move to these new communities and away from city centers.

Not all shared this opportunity for a new way of life. Racial exclusions placed on federal GI Bills and FHA loans, upheld by social and local and state government exclusion, trapped minorities and those with little financial means in declining urban centers.

Cycle of Decline

As industry and white families alike moved away from urban cores, this left cities with a dwindling tax base from which to finance municipal operations (Figure 3). Cities were forced to cut costs in the form of services like sanitation, water, police, fire, trash, and road maintenance to remain fiscally solvent. Cities either had to cut costs or raise taxes to keep their books afloat. Many cities in Michigan are forced to do both – further driving families and businesses away from these urban centers. Illustrated by the Michigan State University Extension Center for Local Government Finance and Policy (2020) through the context of the City of Flint:

> Poverty and population loss reinforce local government fiscal insolvency. Service quality, public safety and residential quality of life worsen. The city's continuing loss in revenues year after year has degraded city-provided services to the point of service insolvency. The necessary tax revenue the remaining Flint residents would need to locally generate in order to invest in dilapidated infrastructure and suboptimal police services is not achievable. The residents who remain are older, poorer, less educated with fewer opportunities and less mobile. These residents are, in a word, stuck. (p. 4)

This same pattern can be observed throughout most Legacy Cities, multiple of which are located in Michigan. Indeed, in the state of Michigan, more cities are under state supervision than any other state.

REGIONAL TAX-BASE SHARING

Regional tax-base sharing is a taxation model under which municipalities within a region agree to contribute a portion of growth in their local tax base to a regional pool to be redistributed based on some criteria other than original contributions (Institute for Local Self-Reliance, 2022). Regional tax-base sharing encourages a regional approach to development as all municipalities benefit from one's growth and are harmed by one's decline. Regional tax-base sharing allows for cooperative planning and the smartest use of land. Communities that may be best suited for developments that do little for the tax base, like parks, public land, affordable housing, or environmental sanctuaries, may be directly compensated or less resistant to these uses, knowing they will benefit from growth elsewhere in the region. Under this taxation model, intra-region competition for commercial-industrial development is minimized, reducing the number of tax concessions granted that fiscally weaken communities. Lastly, and largely why regional tax-base sharing is of particular interest to Michigan's urban cores, tax-base sharing redistributes fiscal resources so that municipalities with little tax-base can address their cycle of decline (Table 1).

Table 1. *Goals of Regional Tax Base Sharing*

Support a Regional Approach to Development	Tax-base sharing spreads the fiscal benefit of business development spawned by regional facilities, such as shopping centers, airports, freeway interchanges, and sports stadiums. It also may make communities more willing to accept low-tax-yield regional facilities, such as parks.
Equalize the Distribution of Fiscal Resources	Communities with low tax bases must impose higher tax rates to deliver the same services as communities with higher tax bases. These high tax rates make tax-base poor communities less attractive places for businesses to locate or expand in, exacerbating the problem. Sharing C/I tax base can reduce this effect.
Reduce Competition for Commercial-Industrial Development	Communities generally believe that some kinds of C/I properties pay more in taxes than it costs to provide services to them. This encourages communities to compete for these properties by providing tax concessions which can weaken their fiscal condition. Tax-base sharing reduces the incentive for this competition, thereby discouraging urban sprawl and reducing the cost of providing regional services such as sewage and transportation.

Swanson, Minnesota House Research Department, 2020

Regional tax-base sharing is a powerful tool for equity. In the fifty years since its implementation in the twin-city metropolitan region of St. Paul-Minneapolis, it has reduced the tax wealth disparity between the richest and poorest communities by 75 percent (Metropolitan Council, 2022). An innovative fiscal tool, it allows for regional cooperation while maintaining local decision-making.

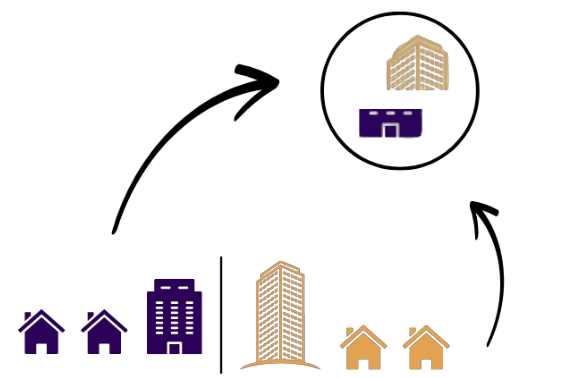
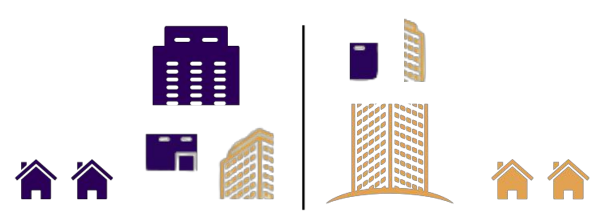
Regional Tax-Base Sharing: How It Works

As stated above, regional tax-base sharing is a taxation model under which municipalities within a region agree to contribute a portion of growth in their local tax base to a regional pool to be redistributed based on some criteria other than original contributions (Institute for Local Self-Reliance, 2022). The formula used to disburse the pool can be relatively neutral, redistributive, or targeted; all will reduce fiscal disparities within a region (Orfield & Luce, 2016).

To explain the mechanics, this paper explores the Twin Cities Fiscal Disparities Program, which is quite redistributive, as the model explored in this paper. Each year, municipalities in the Twin

Cities metro area contribute 40 percent of growth in commercial-industrial taxable property value to a pool. That pool is then redistributed to municipalities based on an index of relative fiscal capacity. After the pool is disbursed, each taxing jurisdiction determines its needed levies and calculates local tax rates based on their new total tax-base. Taxes are then collected through existing systems. The Minnesota Fiscal Disparities model is redistributive in that if a municipality's fiscal capacity is above the metro average, its per capita share of the pool will be smaller, and if the municipality's fiscal capacity is below the metro average, its per capita share will be larger (Table 2).

Table 2. *Regional Tax-Base Sharing: MN Fiscal Disparities Model*

Contribution Local taxing jurisdictions contribute 40% of growth in commercial, industrial, and public utility property tax value into an areawide shared pool.	
Redistribution That pool is then redistributed to municipalities based on an index of relative fiscal capacity.	
Taxes Levied Each municipality now taxes this newly determined base at its own local rates. All taxing jurisdictions whose boundaries encompass the municipality (counties, school districts, special taxing districts, etc.) tax the municipality's new base.	

Swanson & Hinze, Minnesota House Research Department, 2020

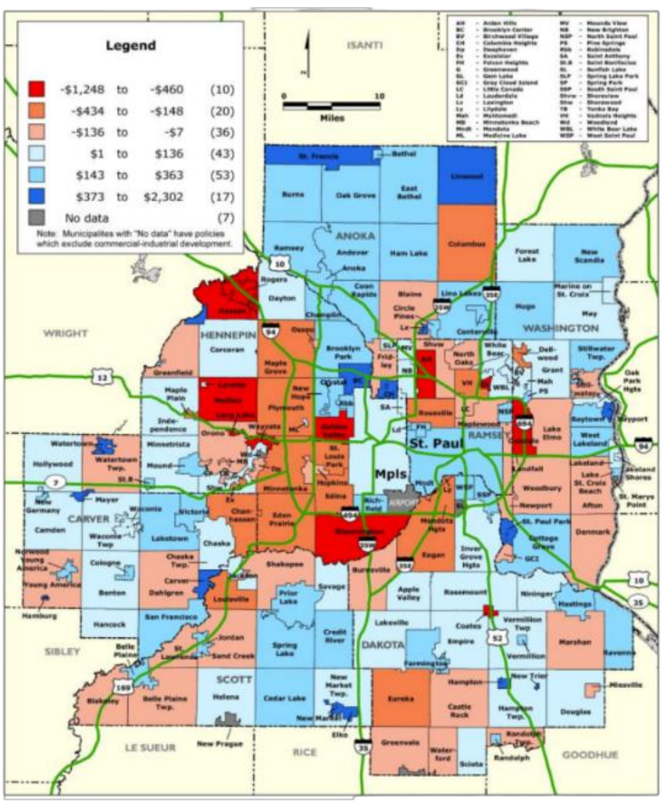
CASE STUDIES

The Twin Cities Fiscal Disparities Program is the only full-scale regional tax-base sharing model currently in use in the U.S. A few smaller scale examples exist in Ohio, New Jersey, and other regions of Minnesota. The idea has been proposed a number of times in a number of states since the 1950s but never adopted.

<u>Case Study 1: *Twin Cities Fiscal Disparities Program*</u>

Referred to as the "Minnesota Miracle of 1971" the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area has operated under a model of regional tax-base sharing for more than 50 years. The Twin Cities Fiscal Disparities Program covers the seven core counties of the metro area and includes 192 municipalities, 50 school districts, and more than 100 special districts. Each year municipalities contribute 40 percent of growth in the value of commercial-industrial taxable property to a regional pool to be redistributed based on an index of relative fiscal capacity; this encourages regional planning and closing the tax-base gap between the richest and poorest communities.

Figure 4. *Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Region*
Net change in tax capacity per household, 2012



Orfield & Luce, 2016.
Data source: MN House Research; Property Tax Division, MN Department of Revenue.

The Twin Cities Fiscal Disparities Program is credited with reducing the per-capita tax wealth disparity between its richest and poorest communities by 75 percent (Metropolitan Council, 2022). The map to the left shows the net change in tax capacity per household after redistribution by municipality in 2012 (Figure 4). Most municipalities, shown in blue, gain net tax capacity per household, while some, shaded in red, lose.

The Minnesota Fiscal Disparities Act was passed during an era of other significant regional initiatives, including the creation of a Metropolitan Council, a regional parks system, and the passing of the Metropolitan Land Planning Act (Minnesota Department of Revenue, 2012). Popular during an era of regional cooperation, this model remains popular as most municipalities benefit fiscally and the municipalities that do not still experience accelerated commercial-industrial growth due to regional cooperation. All communities benefit from improved land-use planning and have an insurance policy against future stagnation. By far, the most dramatic impact of regional tax-base sharing is the breathing room it provides municipalities stuck in the fiscal-service solvency conundrum. The ability to provide adequate services without having to drastically increase taxes allows municipalities to begin attracting new residents and businesses, slowly reversing the trend.

Twin Cities Fiscal Disparities Program Figures

Figure 5.

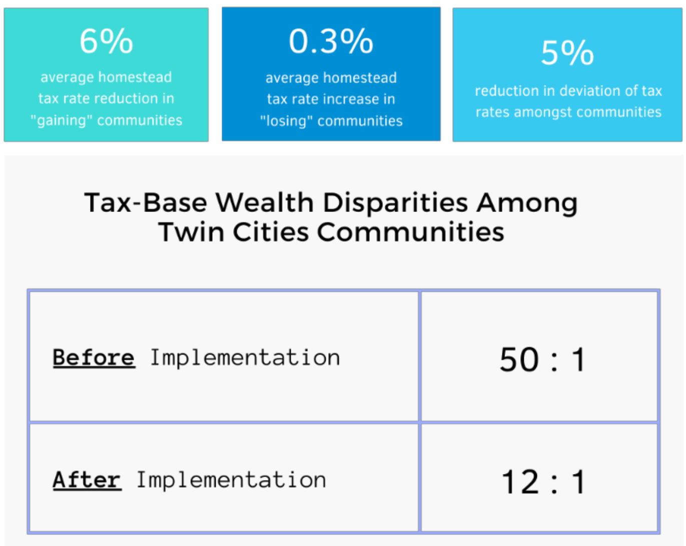
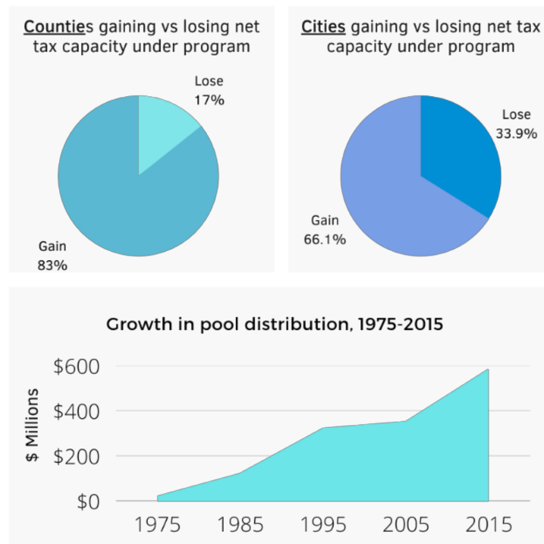


Figure 6.



Swanson & Hinze, Minnesota House Research Department, 2020

Regional tax-base sharing does not add a tax or raise new revenues. It does not address the fiscal-service conundrum that tax-poor communities find themselves in by infusing any sort of funds. Instead, by redistributing tax-base, it modifies the burden taxpayers assume when local jurisdictions levy taxes. On average, municipalities that gain net tax capacity under Minnesota's model see their homestead tax rates drop by six percent. Since the program's adoption, the deviation of tax rates across the region has decreased by five percent (Figure 5).

While the municipalities that gain and lose net tax capacity differ each year, typically 66 percent gain. And some communities that lose tax capacity at the local level, gain on the county level, 83 percent on average (Figure 6).

By far, the most dramatic impact of the Twin Cities Fiscal Disparities program is expressed within its name – the reduction in tax-base wealth disparities among communities. On the extreme end, disparity is reduced by 75 percent, and on average, reduced still by 65 percent.

Case Study 2: State of New Jersey Meadowlands Reclamation and Development Program

New Jersey's use of regional tax-base sharing is not an attempt to minimize fiscal disparities, but to reduce the fiscal impacts of land use regulation. The State of New Jersey, responding to environmental crises in the 1970s in its meadowlands region, decided to take over local planning and development. Unchecked, uncoordinated, and highly toxic development had been allowed to boom in the environmentally sensitive area for decades. As the state rezoned certain tracts of land for commercial-industrial use and others for protection, the legislature saw a need to mitigate the negative fiscal impact on communities rezoned for nontaxable uses.

The New Jersey program redistributes a share of *tax revenue* – as opposed to the Twin Cities program which redistributes *tax-base*. Under this model, municipalities send revenue from a three percent hotel room tax to the state which then redistributes it based on how much of the municipality falls within the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission zone that is off limits to builders and developers.

Figure 7. *New Jersey Meadowlands Commission Regional Location Map*

Two counties and 14 municipalities fall within the protected New Jersey Meadowlands Commission zone. The region is determined by natural factors and does not fall neatly along municipal boundaries. Distribution of the regional pool is determined by the percentage of a community's land that falls within the zone.

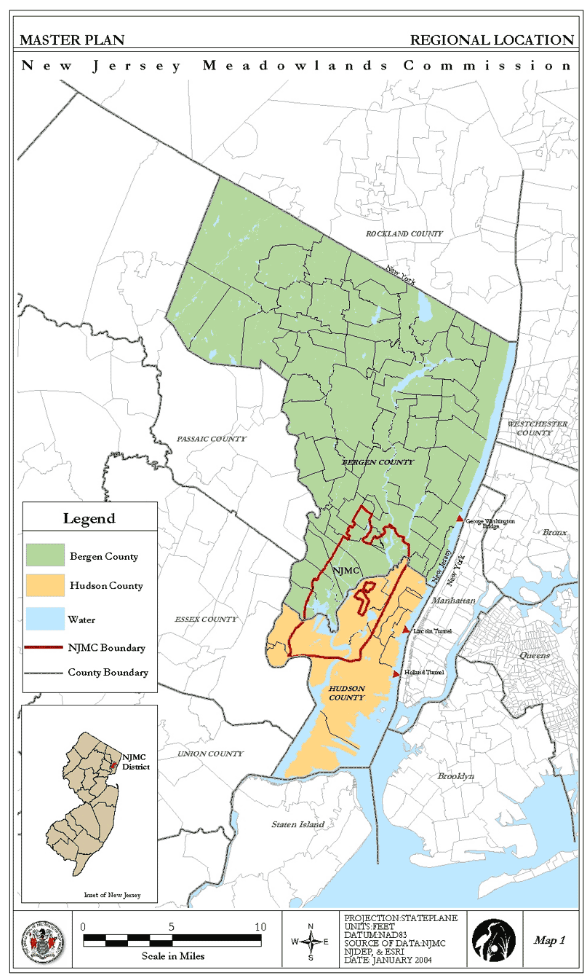


Table 3. *Percentage of Community Land within the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission Zone*

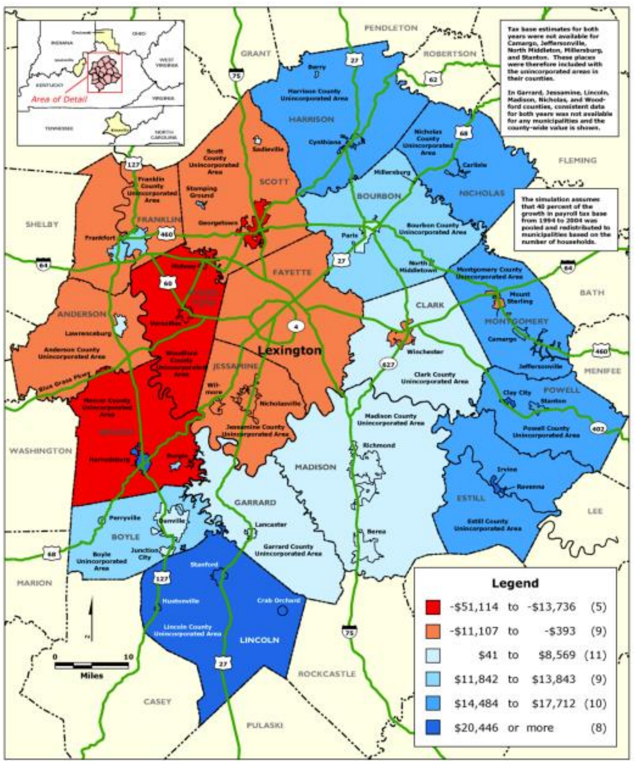
Bergen County		Rutherford	31%
Carlstadt	83%	South Hackensack	17%
East Rutherford	75%	Teterboro	67%
Little Ferry	41%	**Hudson County**	
Lyndhurst	59%	Jersey City	7%
Moonachie	80%	Kearny	53%
North Arlington	31%	North Bergen	37%
Ridgefield	54%	Secaucus	89%

New Jersey Meadowlands Commission, 2002

HYPOTHETICAL REGIONAL TAX-BASE SHARING

Using actual data and hypothetical tax-base sharing formulas, regional tax-base sharing can be simulated in any area. Simulations conducted for the 25 largest metropolitan regions in the U.S. show that programs similar in design and scale to the Twin Cities Fiscal Disparities model would be more efficient in reducing inequities than existing state equalization grants. These 25 simulations reduced tax-base per capita disparities by an average of 20 percent (Orfield & Luce, 2016).

Figure 8. Kentucky's Bluegrass Region
Simulated net change in tax capacity per household, 1994-2004



Orfield & Luce, 2016.
Data source: KY Department of Revenue; County Property Value Administrators; U.S. Census Bureau.

<u>Kentucky's Bluegrass Region Simulation</u>

Regional tax-base sharing simulated over ten years in the Bluegrass region of Kentucky, the state's most populous metropolitan area, increased the taxable base in 73 percent of municipalities and unincorporated areas (Figure 8). Perhaps more urgent, tax-base sharing would incentivize cooperative regional planning. The population of Lexington has nearly doubled in the last ten years. A lack of developable land and high prices have driven rapid suburbanization in surrounding counties, all of which take vastly different approaches to planning and zoning. This lack of coordination has led to the loss of more than 80,000 acres of iconic, unique to this region, Bluegrass landscape, landing the region on the World Monument Fund's List of 100 Most Endangered Sites. Not only an important American habitat, Bluegrass and the horses raised on it are the region's largest economic driver and employ 80,000 to 100,000 people across the state.

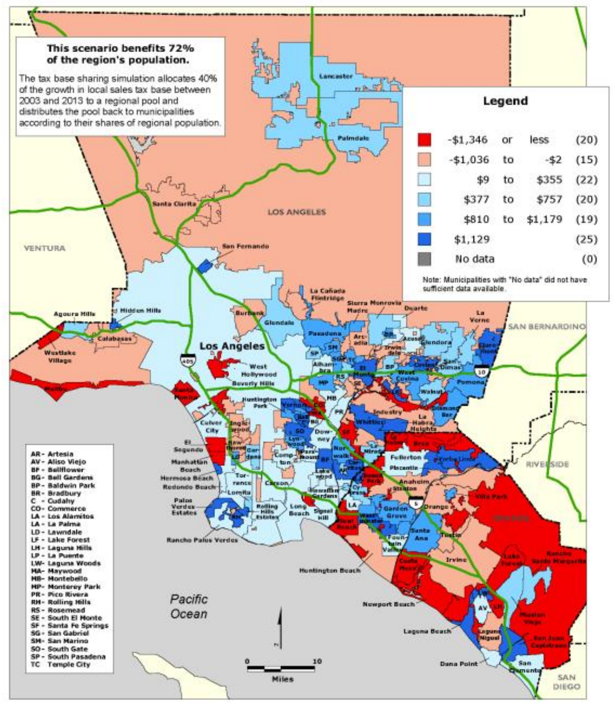
Regional tax-base sharing does not discourage growth. It encourages more efficient, more equitable growth that considers what is best for the region as a whole. "What happens in Fayette has an impact on Jessamine, Washington, Montgomery, and the other surrounding counties," Rachel Kennedy of the Kentucky Heritage Council explained. "When we're not thinking about that, we're not adequately addressing the question." (World Monument Fund, 2017, p. 21)

Los Angeles Simulation

Simulations conducted for the Los Angeles metropolitan area used local sales tax as the base to share, redistributing it by the relatively neutral measure of population per municipality. Even using this distribution formula, communities serving 72 percent of the region's population gained net tax capacity (Figure 9).

Regional tax-base sharing simulations show that regardless of the taxing instrument – local sales, property, or income tax – or geography – portions of a metropolitan area, the entire area, or multiple metropolitan areas linked together – regional tax-base sharing directly benefits large majorities of the population and dramatically reduces fiscal disparities (Orfield & Luce, 2016).

Figure 9. Los Angeles Region
Simulated net change in tax capacity per household, 2003-2013



Orfield & Luce, 2016.
Data source: California State Controller's Office.

IMPLICATIONS

Michigan has long recognized tying school funding to local tax revenue as an inequitable practice.

Proponents of tax-base sharing will presumably already have large majorities on their side as typically 60 to 70 percent of municipalities gain net tax capacity under a regional tax-base sharing model regardless of the tax instrument or geography. But regional tax-base sharing does more than reduce fiscal disparities, it is a cooperative regional model proven to provide:

- A solution to fiscal vs. service solvency conundrum.
- Property tax relief.
- Tax rate equalization.
- A proven powerful tool for equity.
- Maintenance of local decision-making while providing access to regional resources.
- An insurance policy against future stagnation or decline in growth.
- Incentives for cooperative regional planning and disincentives for intra-region competition.

ADOPTION IN MICHIGAN

Minnesota State Representative Myron Orfield, who served during the state's adoption of the fiscal disparities program, said this on potential support for the model elsewhere:

> There is a broadly shared belief that tax-base sharing came out of some cosmic consensualism in progressive Minnesota that cannot be duplicated elsewhere in the nation. This is not true.
>
> First, tax-base sharing in Minnesota has always been controversial. Many suburban governments at first feared loss of taxable property value and local control. But some local leaders realized the high degree to which property wealth was concentrated and developed computer runs that showed the projected amount of new taxable property value that cities would actually gain. Most of the inner and developing middle-class suburbs were potential recipients of money under the proposed tax-base sharing system. When these suburbs realized that tax-base sharing was likely to substantially increase their tax revenue and stabilize their future fiscal situation, they became supporters. As one legislator put it, 'Before the runs, tax-base sharing was communism, afterwards it was 'pretty good policy'(Orfield, 1998, p.48).

While the idea may seem infeasible at first, with redistribution being a highly charged political buzzword and historic animosity existing between city centers and suburbs, the majority of districts will gain tax base under this model, and once that is understood, will support it.

Popular and political support would not be the only obstacles to adoption in Michigan. Michigan's Headlee Amendment, adopted in 1978, limits annual growth in taxable value of a property to either 5 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is less. While this constitutional amendment aims to protect taxpayers from runaway millages, it also severely limits the growth that regional tax-base sharing relies on to function.

Another obstacle is Michigan's widespread use of the very tax concessions that regional-tax base sharing discourages. Some current state and local exemptions include:

- Commercial Rehabilitation Exemptions
- Neighborhood Enterprise Zones
- Industrial Facilities Exemptions
- Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act
- Commercial Facilities Exemption
- Brownfield Redevelopment Authorities
- Michigan Renaissance Zones
- Downtown Development Authorities
- Tax Increment Financing Authorities
- Corridor Improvement Authorities

Tax incentives meant to stimulate growth are not inherently bad. When used properly they can be a useful tool – but used by communities that already find themselves in a service-fiscal conundrum, they are adding to the service as well as the fiscal stress that new development brings, for the hopes of a return 15, 20, or 30 years later. People living in these both rural and inner-city communities with little economic opportunity, poor or no services, and high taxes need relief now.

Tax concessions are typically made with the promise of further private investment and jobs in return. Michigan's Renaissance Zones, signed into law in 1996, have abated more than $820 million in taxes while only delivering one-third and one-fifth of promised private investments and jobs (Citizens Research Council of Michigan). The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy (2018) suggests that these types of tax concessions do not stimulate new growth; they just move growth–that would've occurred anyway–around.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, regional tax-base sharing is a tool uniquely suited to address the urban sprawl that so many Rust Belt cities face and the disparities that come with it. While unlikely to be adopted in its current form in Michigan under the Headlee Amendment, the lessons from this model can be applied now. Recommendations for further study include:

- Conduct tax-base sharing simulations for the Detroit, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Saginaw, Lansing, Jackson, and Traverse City metro areas.
- The use and return on investment of all tax incentives, including tax increment financing, used in Michigan on the local and state level.
- The effectiveness and level of authority given to Michigan's current regional planning and development authorities and recommendations to strengthen them.

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