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RESILIENCE AND MIMETIC BEHAVIOR: ECONOMIC VISIONS IN THE GREAT RECESSION

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ABSTRACT: *The Great Recession was a moment of challenge for many regions and required that leaders reflect on their economic development strategies. Given the propensity of regions to adopt ideas and strategy "fads" that then inform policy debate, we seek to understand how two very different regions with different histories framed their responses to the recession. How did they conceptualize the economic challenge in their region? What did they envision as appropriate responses to this challenge? How did these visions relate to mimetic behavior of the past, in which largely uniform visions are adopted across diverse locations? Our findings show that economic development leaders in the Buffalo and Orlando regions advocated similar high-tech/biomedical strategies as a way to diversify their economies and make them more resilient or less vulnerable to future shocks. By conceptualizing economic diversification in such similar ways, despite substantial regional differences, this pursuit of resilience or decreased vulnerabilities through economic diversification appears highly similar to prior mimetic behaviors. We consider the implications of this finding for theories of adaptive resilience in which the focus is on economic diversification as part of resilient processes and behaviors, rather than as a fixed characteristic or end state of regions. As practiced in our case studies, diversification for the purpose of resilient outcomes differs substantially from theoretical arguments explaining adaptive resilience as both behavior and process. We caution that policy and planning visions of resilience may therefore represent yet another fad to be mimicked ad infinitum. Nevertheless, adaptive resilience as defined in the literature may still offer promise as a practical strategy—just not one that we yet observe in practice.*

The Great Recession was a significant blow to the United States economy as a whole. Across the country, however, regions experienced the Great Recession in different ways; it left some regions stumbling and others relatively unscathed. For scholars interested in the concept of resilience, the Great Recession offers a chance to think more about how regions respond to disruptions and challenges. In particular, we can consider the ways in which different regions frame the discussion about how to respond to this economic challenge and provide long-term direction for regional priorities. In doing so, we consider the challenges associated with the theory of resilience and the extent to which the concept provides a useful way to think about how regions react to an economic disruption of this magnitude.

In this study we focus specifically on the regional experiences and responses seen in two distinct regions, the Buffalo-Niagara Falls Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and the

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Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford MSA. The two regions were selected because they vary substantially; they differ in terms of their longer term challenges, their experiences during the most recent Great Recession, and in their historical economic strengths. In Buffalo, deindustrialization has been the main long-term challenge, although the region fared comparatively well during the Great Recession. The Buffalo regional economy has long been focused on manufacturing and commerce. In Orlando, rapid growth has been the main established challenge, but the region has recently struggled to deal with the slowdown from the Great Recession, especially in the tourism industry, which has long been its main economic base. Our study focuses on how these two very different regions framed and envisioned economic development in the wake of the Great Recession. In doing so, we explore two different conceptualizations of resilience: resilience as process or capacity and resilience as outcome. Our goal is not to determine whether economic diversification actually makes regions more resilient, but rather to understand how and why regions conceptualize and plan for diversification strategies and how their decisions to do so relate to resilience.

Our findings show that economic development leaders in the Buffalo and Orlando regions proposed similar, popular high-tech/biomedical strategies as a way to diversify their economies and make them more resilient or less vulnerable to future shocks. However, in their quest to decrease vulnerability, leaders conceptualized economic diversification as an end or fixed state. Thus, as practiced in our case studies, diversification for the purpose of resilient outcomes differs substantially from theoretical arguments explaining adaptive resilience as both capacity and process. We caution that policy and planning visions of resilience may therefore represent yet another "fad" to be mimicked *ad infinitum* and may result in largely uniform visions being adopted in very different contexts. Nevertheless, adaptive resilience as defined in the literature may still offer promise as a practical strategy—just not one that we yet observe in practice.

Our argument is that regional leaders working to decrease vulnerabilities through economic diversity confront many of the very same challenges that exist when researchers apply a resilience framework to understand regional outcomes. That is, both groups are similarly challenged by the often overlooked distinction between adaptive resilience as process and as outcome, a lack of attention to intergovernmental context, and misunderstandings about each region's unique strengths and weaknesses, as well as inattention to the way in which the uneven distribution of power in regional governance can shape policy choices (Pendall et al., 2010). Understanding these challenges and limitations, our research asks to what extent and in what ways the economic development policies developed in these two very different regions consciously addressed the issue of economic diversification and incorporated place-specific strategies reflective of each region's political economy and governance. We investigate how local and regional actors conceptualize economic diversity, what policy interventions they propose, and how they connect these interventions to long-term stresses. In so doing, we also consider the implications of these interventions and explore the potential downsides of mimetic behavior.

The article begins with a discussion of the literature on resilience and economic diversification, which highlights some key critiques of the use of the resilience framework for understanding regions and how these connect to discussions of economic diversification. We then discuss data and methods. The two case studies are introduced, with particular attention to both the striking differences in background and the qualified similarities observed in response to the Great Recession. We conclude with a discussion of our key findings and what they might mean for policymakers and practitioners who face difficult decisions regarding adaptive resilience, economic diversity, and economic development strategies in times of change, as well as for scholars interested in applying a resilience framework to regions.

REGIONS AND ADAPTIVE RESILIENCE

In order to understand how regions respond and adapt in the face of uncertainty, planning and economic development scholars have recently turned towards resilience as a useful framework (Cowell, 2013). The concept of resilience has been utilized by scholars across a variety of disciplines (Pendall et al., 2010; on resilience and public health, see Morton & Lurie, 2013; on resilience and social capital, see Portinga, 2012; on resilience and climate change, see Morecroft, Crick, Duffield, & Macgregor, 2012), but most research frames resilience in one of two ways: ecological resilience, when a perturbation or disruption pushes a system from one equilibrium to another; and engineering resilience, when a system returns to its predisruption steady state (Berkes & Folke, 1998). Yet, in the wake of an economic downturn or long-term restructuring, regional actors probably are not looking to achieve a new equilibrium which is similarly fragile nor are they trying to 'bounce back' to their predisruption state, especially if that state was sub-par to begin with (Dawley, Pike, & Tomaney, 2010).

Regions may be less vulnerable to shocks and thus exist in a fairly resilient state for this outcome-oriented, bounce-back notion of resilience. However, measuring this outcome does not provide insight into the decision-making processes in place in the region and its capacity to respond in an ongoing way. Instead, for regions, resilience capacity has both procedural and outcome-based aspects. To assess a region's ability to adapt to an unpredictable future in a way that considers social and environmental costs may require information about the nature of regional processes, what we see as constituting *adaptive* resilience.

This alternative concept of *adaptive* resilience considers whether a system can adapt in response to stresses and strains, rather than merely return to normalcy or reach previous outcomes (Carpenter, Westley, & Turner, 2005; Cowell, 2014). In other words, *adaptive* resilience is a "dynamic attribute associated with a process of continual development" (Pendall et al., 2010, p. 76). Similarly, Foster suggests "resilience thus manifests as both end-state competency and the process of coping with challenges" (2007, p. 7). In this way, the two types of resilience are not mutually exclusive or necessarily coupled; they may or may not be found within the same region at the same time. A region with limited economic resilience that is vulnerable to economic shocks (lacking resilience as a state) may be in the process of building future adaptive resilience through a robust process and capacity building in its governance arena. On the other hand, a region may have a diverse economic base that makes it resilient to one economic shift but lack tools to change and adapt through governance beyond that challenge.

Though both resilience conceptualizations undoubtedly have their benefits, the ability of a region to continuously adapt to adversity and change, rather than one that has achieved a singular outcome of currently reduced vulnerability, will likely prove more useful to regions in the longer term. Knowing that regional challenges and vulnerabilities come in many forms and over different timeframes, a region would do well to engage in a process of continual adaptation in order to prepare for and respond to challenges of every variety. For the purposes of this study, we therefore conceive of adaptive resilience as an ongoing capacity for and process of adaptation to changing circumstances, not a fixed state in which a region or its economy is more or less able to bounce back at any point in time or to any one particular challenge. Our conceptualization of adaptive resilience capacity aligns closely with the Resilience Alliance's definition of adaptive capacity—that is, "the existence of institutions and networks that learn and store knowledge and experience, create flexibility in problem solving and balance power among interest groups" (Resilience Alliance, n.d.). More specifically, a drop in adaptive resilience capacity is thought to be associated with constrained opportunity, limited options during periods of reorganization and renewal, and an inability to do things differently (Resilience Alliance, n.d.).

When considering adaptive resilience as a process and capacity, it becomes clear that regional resilience is not possible without actors and institutions that respond to change (Boyd & Folke, 2012). In fact, we suggest adaptive resilience is in large part determined by a region's ongoing governance processes. Formal and informal institutions and actors from multiple levels of government, as well as business and civic groups, participate in regional governance (Safford, 2009). Governance is therefore "the pursuit of collective goals through an inclusive strategy of resource mobilization" (Pierre, 2005, p. 449). The concept of governance thereby brings attention to the influence and capacity of actors outside the formal confines of government.

Although the adaptive resilience framework addresses important critiques of the ecological and engineering concepts of resilience applied to regions noted above, concerns remain about the extent to which it acknowledges the broader context within which regions operate and the extent to which it considers the role of power and politics within regions. Regions are not closed systems in terms of governance, nor are they isolated or unique in their attempts to build economic clusters. Regions are constrained in important ways by the intergovernmental system within which they operate (Foster, 1997*)*. Swanstrom (2008) has argued that an emphasis on regional resilience risks ignoring the way in which regions are constrained by state and federal policies. It is also known that regional economies exist within a broader state and national economy. MacKinnon and Driscoll Derickson (2013) warn against focusing on the resilience of spatial places given the workings of the capitalist system. Therefore, any discussion of what economic strategies make sense for a specific region needs to be sensitive to the broader economic context, local workforce and industrial specialties, developing industrial agglomerations elsewhere, and the constraints of the broader political context.

Failing to focus on governance in adaptive resilience could lead to inattention to power dynamics within regional governance processes. Lester and Reckhow (2013) suggest that diffuse regional governance may replicate existing inequities, if the governance structure excludes certain regional voices and privileges others. These governance processes may shape how economic development is understood within a region and may also determine whose concerns and interests are translated into policy.

The way in which governance processes may shape which particular voices and interests are part of regional policy discussions also indicates the need to pay attention to framing and vision, as well as formal policy. Whether in economic development or other policy arenas, the framing of problems and issues shapes the parameters of what solutions are even considered (Schön & Rein, 1994.) Thus, while economic visions are not the same thing as economic policy, they are an important signal of how regional actors understand their current economic challenge and what priorities they will pursue in the future. A number of researchers have made this point in the context of local economic policy. For example, Reese and Sands (2013, p. 34) point out that local policymakers' "conception of how an urban economy works will influence their selection of goals and policies to achieve those goals, as well as the data required for evaluation." Similarly, Lewis and Neiman (2009, p. 106) argue that scholars need to pay attention to the visions of local leaders because "such deliberations about the desired future for the community may set the parameters for local policies in years to come." Framing and vision, in addition to formal policy, should therefore be considered in any study of local economic development and in any discussion of adaptive resilience. Below we uncover how economic diversification in particular has been envisioned in the local economic development arena.

ENVISIONING DIVERSITY

Ideas about the way in which regions are strengthened by economic diversification have been a guiding principle in discussions about economic policy making for some time (Chinitz, 1961). Struggling with the highs and lows of global economic restructuring during the 1980s, ideas about diversification and the continual process of industrial change—linked to Joseph Schumpeter (1939)—resonated with planners and geographers (Markusen, 1985; Marshall, 1987). A series of studies exploring the relationship between industrial structure and economic performance emerged during the 1990s, and many concluded that economic diversity was beneficial to most regions (Glaeser, Kallal, Scheinkman, & Shleifer, 1992; Henderson, Kuncoro, & Turner, 1995).

Economic development policy has, to some extent, paralleled industrial and economic development research. During the 1980s, some regions chose industrial diversification through the attraction of service sector jobs and high-tech firms (Markusen & Carlson, 1988), often focusing on *sunrise industries*, or industrial sectors that were growing quickly and were expected to become even more significant in the postindustrial economy (Thurow, 1985). Though some regions did in fact reap benefits from such an approach, not all have. Many regions struggled during the aftermath of the dotcom era (Knell & Oakley, 2007) and more recently during the Great Recession (Hill et al., 2012). There have also been markedly different effects observed within regions.

Persons employed in *creative class* industries have fared comparatively well on the whole (Florida, 2010), whereas many marginalized and less skilled people have struggled to adjust to ever-changing economic realities (Carnevale et al., 2010). The unevenness of this approach has been well documented in the literature (Peck, 2005), mainly through critiques of the *visitor class* (Wilks-Heeg & North, 2004) and studies of wider macro-institutional architectures (Donald, Getler, & Tyler, 2013).

As these critiques suggest, local economic development policy has at times seemed to follow the latest fad with relatively little attention to how a particular policy fits with a specific time and place (Reese & Sands, 2012). As we consider the relationship between resilience and ideas about economic diversification, we need to consider not only whether these visions incorporate multiple actors and interests but also whether these visions reflect real attention to the particulars of a single region or instead seem to echo the earlier mimetic behavior of localities pursuing the latest economic development fad.

We thus turn to how regional governance visions for economic development incorporate the idea of diversification and related regional resilience. We consider whether diversification represents a return to normalcy, an end economic state with diversification, or instead an ongoing process requiring governance capacity. This will help researchers and policy makers consider whether and how resilience could represent a substantive shift in regional economic policy or instead a new fad.

DATA AND METHODS

We adopted a comparative case study design, which is appropriate for exploring how complex processes occur (Yin, 2003). As noted above, we selected the cases based on their contrasting challenges. Our analysis utilizes a variety of primary and secondary qualitative data. The data come from interviews, published media reports, and in-depth analyses of relevant economic development planning documents. Similar approaches incorporating both content analysis and interviews have been utilized widely in the urban planning literature and have proven useful as a method to explore both the intentions and execution of planning priorities (Berke & Conroy, 2000).

In each region we conducted interviews with past and present planning and economic development officials, local policy makers, and civic leaders. In Orlando, we conducted approximately 40 interviews in 2009 and 2010. In Buffalo, a much smaller region, we conducted approximately 25 interviews in 2010. We identified interviewees through organizational analysis and snowball sampling. Interviews were primarily conducted in person, with several via telephone. When participants consented (as in almost all instances), we recorded and transcribed the interview.

For the plan analysis component of this study, we primarily draw from four recent economic development plans in Buffalo and Orlando. In Buffalo, the most recent economic development plans include the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which was prepared by the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA) in 2010, and *A Strategy for Prosperity in Western New York*, prepared by the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council (WNYREDC) in 2011. In Orlando, we analyzed the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which was prepared by the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council (ECFRPC) in 2012, as well as *East Central Florida 2060 Plan (Strategic Regional Policy Plan)*, also prepared by the ECFRPC and completed in 2010.[1]

While future research efforts may wish to compare cases that have more in common, this study intentionally used two distinct regions. Their differences allow us to consider how economic histories combine with current realities and policy paradigms to shape a region's response in times of challenge. Future studies may also choose to explore how visions and conceptualizations translate into actual investments, but we intentionally focus instead on how economic development is envisioned and how these visions relate to adaptive resilience. We begin first with an overview of the recent challenges in each region and then discuss economic diversity and regional visioning.

TABLE 1

Population and Median Income

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

	Buffalo		**1980**	Orlando	
	City	MSA		City	MSA
Population	357,870	1,242,826		128,291	804,925
Median Income (2009$)[3]	$30,183	$44,917		$34,146	$36,817

[a] *Source:* U.S. Census, 2009.

CASE STUDIES AND ANALYSIS

Regions and the Great Recession

Both Buffalo and Orlando have had long-term struggles that were compounded by the stresses of the Great Recession, which officially began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2013). The Great Recession was catastrophic at the national level; however, it affected regions and localities in surprisingly different ways, both in terms of the quantitative impact on measures like unemployment and foreclosures and in terms of the psychological or perceived impact at the local or regional level. For Buffalo—a region that is accustomed to the challenges of deindustrialization and population decline—the recession was actually less disruptive than in many other parts of the country. In Orlando—a region used to facing challenges associated with fast growth—the recession was a blow to the region's image as a vibrant and growing place, especially when it became the epicenter of the foreclosure crisis gripping the nation.[2] In both regions, the Great Recession (and its ill effects) was an impetus to heighten emphasis on diversity in economic development planning. Despite substantial differences in experience, history, and political economy, these two regions ultimately adopted substantially similar economic development strategies to chart their respective roads to recovery.

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

Given the long-term challenges facing the region, it may have come as a surprise to many that Buffalo, like much of New York State, saw only moderate effects due to the Great Recession. Brookings Institution research found that Buffalo had the ninth best overall performance in the recession and recovery among the largest 100 metropolitan areas in the United States (Friedhoff, Kulkarni, & Berube, 2012). During the Great Recession, the Buffalo region saw sustained job losses (−3.4%) that were similar to New York as a whole but far lower than the national average (−6%) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Similarly, while the nation as a whole saw steep declines in home prices during the recession, the average median home price in the Buffalo region actually appreciated during that time (Friedhoff et al., 2012).

Overall, Buffalo showed strong signs of recovery in 2010 and 2011 with economic productivity growth that was higher than the U.S. economy overall and a lower unemployment rate than the national average. Similar results continued throughout 2012, with modest increases in employment. Education and health services and trade, transportation, and utilities have seen substantial growth in the Buffalo region, together adding more than 7,500 jobs to the local economy during 2012. The manufacturing sector also added jobs during the first half of 2012, but that trend reversed during the second half of the year. Overall, the Buffalo area economy has recovered the jobs it lost during the recession somewhat faster than the nation, though employment is still down about 5000 jobs since the summer of 2008 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

The Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford MSA is a larger region of approximately 2.1 million people across four counties (see Table 1) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). Until recently, the region has experienced strong growth in both population and employment, much of it tied to tourism and education (Institute for Economic Competitiveness, 2013). The late 20th century brought an influx of both people and jobs to the Orlando region, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s with the arrival of Disney and an associated construction boom (Archer & Bezdecny, 2009; Foglesong, 2001). Growth within tourism and education, the latter of which is largely related to the growth of the University of Central Florida, has brought tremendous gains to the region but has also sparked concerns regarding an overly specialized economic base. In addition, heavy dependence on sales and property tax meant both Orlando and the state of Florida are extremely vulnerable to economic downturns.

Given the region's economic base, the Great Recession made Orlando regional leaders grow increasingly concerned about its effects on tourism. Regional employment in tourism saw a short-term drop during the height of the recession (2008–2009) but then began adding jobs again in 2010 (Holt & Colburn, 2011). Both before and after the recession, local actors often cited concerns about the regional reliance on tourism, but the Bureau of Economic and Business Research, housed at the University of Florida, found that "tourism in Orlando remained one of the more stable sources of revenue for the city and state during the recession" (Holt & Colburn, 2011, p. 3).

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

For leaders in Orlando, losing, even briefly, their status as a fast-growth metropolitan area was an adjustment because so much current planning was premised on managing growth. In Orlando, domestic in-migration dropped precipitously during the recession (causing interviewees to laugh when told that Orlando was being studied as a fast-growth metro). Despite a prerecession peak of over 2.5% population growth from domestic in-migration, the Orlando metro area actually lost population at the height of the recession. More recently, the numbers have rebounded and Orlando appears to be regaining its fast growth status with in-migration levels for 2011–2012 more comparable to the period before 2008 (Frey, 2013).

Respondents in the region disagreed about whether the slowdown in growth was positive or negative from a planning perspective. On the one hand, the slowdown gave the region some breathing room to put plans in place and think through development decisions. On the other hand, several respondents suggested that the reaction of developers to the downturn was to become more conservative in the kinds of projects they would build, reducing support for transit-oriented development and New Urbanist style developments.

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

Economic Diversity and Regional Visioning

As in prior recessions, regional responses to the Great Recession have run the gamut. Some regions responded with insular policies to bolster the status quo, while others responded by tightening their belts in order to stop the bleeding. In both Buffalo and Orlando, regional leaders made incremental moves to diversify their economies, with only slight variations in how they proposed to do so.

In Buffalo, the move to diversify the core economic base is most clearly exhibited in Erie County's 2010 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The document openly discusses the challenges that the region has faced in recent decades. The CEDS authors note that significant losses in durable and nondurable goods manufacturing resulted in the loss of more than 18000 manufacturing jobs between 1971 and 1981 (ECIDA, 2010). Though that bleeding would continue for many more years, these early losses may have in fact prepared the Buffalo region for future challenges (Cowell, 2013).

The CEDS authors note that the region has been "to some degree more 'recession proof' than the State of New York or the U.S. as a whole" (ECIDA, 2010, p. iii). This may be in part because the region had "*already shed a lot of the jobs and people before this latest downturn*" (Interview 9/12/10). It may also be due to a concerted effort to move away from the traditional economic development approaches of the past and towards a series of strategies that instead target agriculture and agribusiness, logistics and distribution, back office/call centers/professional services, advanced manufacturing, life sciences, and regional and cultural tourism. The CEDS explicitly links increased economic diversification with resilience in the face of recession. The regional framing document—*A Strategy for Prosperity in Western New York*—also describes diversification as key to Buffalo's ability to ride out the current recession: "As opposed to decades past when WNY's economy was heavily based in manufacturing, today, the economy reflects a diverse and balanced mix of jobs similar to the composition of employment nationwide . . . . This greater balance in the WNY economy has protected the region in the face of periodic downturns in the national and global economy" (Western New York Regional Economic Development Council, 2011, p. 30).[3] A long-serving county official also echoed this change in approach.

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

Biosciences is one of the economic sectors that has been specifically targeted in diversification efforts. Buffalo is home to America's first cancer center, Roswell Park Cancer Institute, founded in 1898. Located in an underutilized but steadily growing area of the downtown, Roswell is part of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), a consortium of the region's leading institutions in health care, life sciences research, and medical education. The State University of New York at Buffalo (SUNY Buffalo) has been an important partner in this and many other downtown developments. As the region's largest university, SUNY Buffalo has made strong moves to better align offerings with 21st-century workforce needs and transform its regional footprint through downtown development. More specifically, the university's strategic plan prioritizes educational initiatives in the areas of health and wellness across the lifespan, information and computing technology, integrated nanostructured systems, and bioinformatics (University at Buffalo, 2013). The plan also emphasizes the importance of a new downtown campus as part of the emerging biosciences economy in Buffalo.

Health and life sciences is also one of the eight priority sectors identified in the more regionally focused *Strategy for Prosperity*. The WNYREDC plan emphasizes the importance of increasing exports to fast-growing global markets and focuses on other growing sectors including advanced manufacturing, agriculture, binational logistics, energy, higher education, professional services, and tourism. It identifies entrepreneurship, workforce development, and physical revitalization as key elements of this process. Many of WNYREDC's priorities were identified in a 2011 event called Accelerate Upstate, where 300 collaborators convened to develop the Accelerate Upstate Action Agenda, a precursor to the more recent plan (Oberst, 2011).

As diversification efforts are being planned, Buffalo leaders have also begun to recognize that the health of a local economy tracks closely with the health of the broader region. Complementing the efforts of WNYREDC, One Region Forward (ORF) is a more recent planning effort focused on the promotion of more sustainable forms of development in the region. Though still in production, the end result will be a regional plan for sustainable development that will ideally "serve as a practical roadmap for improving mobility, promoting more efficient land use patterns, strengthening our basic infrastructure, growing a 21st-century economy, ensuring broad access to healthy food, protecting housing and neighborhoods, and mounting our region's response to the challenge of global climate change" (ORF, 2013). As a collaborative effort, the One Region Forward endeavor includes many of the aforementioned institutions and leaders, as well as the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council, Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, Local Initiatives Support Corporation Buffalo, The John R. Oishei Foundation, and Empire State Development.

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

Despite Orlando's very different history from Buffalo, diversification efforts as a response to recession have come to the fore there as well. Regional concern over the dependence of the local economy on tourism and real estate existed before the recession but took on even greater urgency in the face of the recession. In addition to Walt Disney World, Universal Studios and Seaworld are also among the area's top employers (Institute for Economic Competitiveness, 2011). The region's CEDS argues that "diversification is key to the success of the regional economy. East Central Florida must look beyond the real estate and construction sector to focus on new and emerging technologies, garnering high wage jobs, importing capital and exporting goods and services" (ECFRPC, 2013, p. 70). Similarly, the Strategic Regional Policy Plan explains that "economic development for the ECFRPC region means diversifying the economic base to include more high paying educational, research, professional, medical, industrial, and technical jobs. This will augment the tourism industry, which has been dominant the past 30 years but is now mature and facing more competition than ever before" (ECFRPC 2010, Executive Summary 11).

The list of industries that the Orlando region identified as targets for its diversification strategy bears a striking resemblance to the list that the Buffalo region will explore (see Table 2). In identifying this list of target industry clusters, the regional planning documents focus on both the need for high-wage jobs and the need to attract workers to fill these kinds of jobs. On the one hand, the CEDS argues that "attracting the right industries and companies to the region will enhance the region's economy" (ECFRPC, 2013, p. 44). Invoking the work of Richard Florida and the concept of the *creative class*, the CEDS also then links land use planning and transit to the economic development strategy, suggesting that "urban centers connected by multimodal transportation will allow the region to attract more talent to the region, attracting high wage jobs" (ECFRPC, 2013, p. 44).

In particular, the Orlando region has pinpointed biotechnology and health sciences as an important sector for the future (Holt & Colburn, 2011; see also http://www.orlandoedc.com/Industry-Strengths/Life-Sciences/). The most notable effort in this regard is the creation of a life sciences, healthcare, and medical research cluster—the Medical City at Lake Nona. Buddy Dyer, the mayor of Orlando since 2003, for example, wrote a July 2012 column in the *Huffington Post*, entitled "From the Magic Kingdom to a Medical City: How a Culture of Collaboration is Fueling a New Orlando" (Dyer, 2012). According to local officials in the region, as well as the Metro Orlando Economic

TABLE 2

Target Sectors for Buffalo and Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA)

Target Sectors	Buffalo MSA	Orlando MSA
Agriculture/Agribusiness	√	√
Logistics/Transportation	√	√
Life science	√	√
Regional/Cultural tourism	√	√
Clean tech/Energy	√	√
Professional services	√	√
Higher education	√	
Advanced manufacturing	√	
Digital media		√
Financial services		√
Information technology		√
Aerospace and defense		√

Development Corporation and other stakeholders, the Medical City builds on the existing strengths of the Orlando area in health services, given that two of the largest regional employers are Orlando Health and Florida Hospital. The Medical City at Lake Nona is located at the southern edge of Orange County next to the Orlando airport and the Osceola County line, approximately 17 miles via roadways from the center of the city. The cluster includes the University of Central Florida (UCF) College of Medicine, the UCF Burnett School of Biomedical Sciences, the Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute, the M.D. Anderson Orlando Cancer Research Institute, the Nemours Children's Hospital, the University of Florida Research Center, and a new Veteran's Affairs Medical Center scheduled to open in 2015. Once all the facilities are fully operational, the Medical City is expected to have about 4000 employees (Jameson, 2012).

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

While the Medical City at Lake Nona is within the City of Orlando, its proximity to unincorporated areas of Orange County, as well as to areas in neighboring Osceola County, mean that it also figures into economic diversification ambitions for those two governments. Orange County has designated an area known as Innovation Way, "envisioned as an economic development corridor that promotes high tech business and job growth along with quality housing, new schools, parks, trails and natural spaces" (https://www.ocfl.net/PlanningDevelopment/InnovationWay-EconomicDevelopmentCorridor.aspx). The corridor (auto-oriented and more than 20 miles along current roadways) would encompass the University of Central Florida, the Orlando Airport, and the Medical City at Lake Nona.

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

> We had a cluster locate essentially on our doorstep in 1970 which was Disney and the tourism industry cluster on the other side of our county. . . . So, it's 30 or 40 years later and we have another economic cluster located at our doorstep and this one happens to be . . . not service industries,

> but high-value, high-wage jobs. But it's the same thing in the sense of now how's Osceola County respond to that opportunity? This is our response . . . to do something on a fairly landscape scale that would allow us to be a major participant in the growth of this cluster.

The City of Orlando has also been highlighting digital media as a potential cluster. The city entered into a public-private partnership to redevelop "the former site of the Amway Arena in Downtown Orlando into a 68-acre mixed-use, transit-oriented, urban infill neighborhood that will be home to leading higher education providers; high-tech, digital media and creative companies; and a diverse mix of students, employees and residents" (http://www.creativevillagedevelopment.com/vision/).

As in Buffalo, however, the City of Orlando is also still pursuing traditional tourist-centered development strategies. Under Mayor Buddy Dyer, for example, the city has built a performing arts center and a sports arena. The rhetoric of diversification does not suggest that Orlando will lose its long association with domestic and international tourism, but it does suggest an attention to the idea that the region is better positioned to withstand ups and downs in the tourist economy, if it also has other economic strengths.

In an effort to perhaps corral efforts, the Orlando region has also engaged in regional visioning exercises. An offshoot of the Orlando Chamber of Commerce, myregion.org, spearheaded the regional visioning process. The exercise brought many regional stakeholders together around developing a vision of more walkable and transit-oriented communities. Myregion.org was described by its director as "a place to determine priorities and come to consensus . . . . It helps stakeholders develop strategies, but others take action" (Interview 7/8/09). However, myregion.org was very actively involved in promoting approval of SunRail, the Orlando commuter rail system, and the organization even received funds from the Florida Department of Transportation for the supporting public relations campaign. Another effort of myregion.org is to build regional cooperation via the Congress of Regional Leadership, which brings together elected officials from cities, counties, and school boards. BusinessForce, a political action committee that works on specific legislation and is housed in the chamber of commerce, is another important player in the regional visioning process. Similar to Buffalo, the Orlando regional planning exercise aims to build consensus across the region for a common vision that will inform future planning efforts.

Regional Governance

If Buffalo and Orlando have much in common in terms of strategy and regional vision, they have comparatively less in common when it comes to the actors involved in the shaping and execution of that strategy and vision. If adaptive resilience is understood as a process, not an outcome, then these differences in governance (and by extension differences in the way that economic visions are developed and translated into policy) may be significant. The question becomes not whether each region becomes more resilient by successfully diversifying its economy but whether it conceives of challenges and develops mechanisms for translating those conceptions into policy in ways that are broadly inclusive and attentive to multiple stakeholders.

In Buffalo, multiple government agencies and civic partnerships influence decision making. Though formal economic development decisions at the city level are made through the Office of Strategic Planning's Economic Development Division, Mayor Byron Brown and First Deputy Mayor Steve Casey generally orchestrate critical decisions.[4] At the county levels, economic development planning occurs within the Erie County Industrial Development Authority (ECIDA) or the Niagara County Industrial Development Authority (NCIDA). Both agencies largely adhere to traditional economic development practice, including tax abatements and regional marketing to attract firms. Other smaller but still powerful economic development entities also exist within the region, including the Amherst IDA in one of Buffalo's most affluent suburbs. The Buffalo Niagara Partnership (BNP), a privately funded economic development organization and the regional chamber of commerce, also actively participates in debates on economic development. Its 54-member Board of Directors includes executives and leaders from the region's largest corporations, foundations, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and utility companies. The region's universities participate in most development decisions, especially SUNY Buffalo, which has played a key role in revitalization plans for the downtown core.

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

It may be tempting to label this group as a typical growth coalition; however, their actions have increasingly been tempered by the growing strength of neighborhood-based economic development efforts. Such efforts have gained ground in Buffalo in recent years, largely because of a growing grassroots movement within the region. Among the more visible grassroots leaders is Aaron Bartley, co-founder of People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH Buffalo). Bartley and PUSH Buffalo have led the efforts to create Buffalo's Green Development Zone and to scale their efforts to the state level to create Green Jobs—Green New York, to create living-wage jobs for local residents, and to help homeowners reduce their energy bills. Bartley has secured a formal position on the WNYREDC, but the growing grassroots movement as of yet is still small.

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

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

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overall, we observed two somewhat surprising similarities in Buffalo and Orlando, especially given their divergent histories and experiences during the Great Recession. The first similarity is that, in spite of their differing experiences leading up to and during the Great Recession, leaders in both Buffalo and Orlando cited the importance of economic diversification as a strategy for moving forward. The second observed similarity is that, with only minor variations, both regions appear to be seeking diversification through similar sectors—namely, biotech (life sciences) and knowledge sectors. Both similarities raise questions about how regional leaders interpret their region's strengths as well as their needs. That two regions with such divergent economic bases and histories would identify similar sectors as ripe for investment indicates the need for further research on how leaders identify and prioritize strategies. In both places actors narrate the turn to biotech and knowledge sectors as adapted to their particular context, meaning that both regions are attempting to sell the idea that their efforts are unique and locally specific.

These findings underscore, then, an important emerging concern within economic development planning—namely, mimetic behavior within diversification efforts—which has important implications for adaptive resilience in these two regions. By mimetic behavior, we mean the way in which efforts to diversify regional economies can potentially lead to across-region homogenization and the promulgation of a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development even when couched in the language of diversification. Whether transregional economic development or planning consultants contribute to this homogenization may be a rich area for further research (for further discussion see Clark, 2013).

Our research also reveals that while many regions view diversification as a way to increase regional resilience, they may be doing so in ways that are not attentive to each region's unique strengths, economic conditions, and governance models. The overarching focus on economic diversification, including similar economic sectors being targeted in both regions, suggests the emergence of mimetic behavior. Such an approach should be cause for concern for policy makers in Buffalo and Orlando as well as in dozens of other regions that are likely pursuing this same strategy. If numerous regions with distinct assets and capabilities identify and prioritize the same industry clusters as target sectors in order to diversify their local economy, oversaturation seems highly probable, because the marketplace—the larger shared context—will not support premier life sciences specialization in every region.

Furthermore, the potential difficulty involved in transitioning or converting an existing lower skilled employment base into a more flexible and higher skilled labor market alludes to broader challenges that may modify or prevent such a transition. While it may be the intention of each region to attract highly skilled workers for the biomedical and life sciences sector, the execution and manifestation of such an approach is not guaranteed. While it is beyond the scope of this study to determine whether or not recent regional intentions have begun to or will eventually translate into actual changes in the economic base, future research in this area could assess the extent to which regional visions and intentions actually manifest at the local or regional level.

Discussions about resilience, and especially those focused on *adaptive* resilience as process, must also be attentive to the role of political and civic actors and to the specific systems of regional governance through which these actors translate economic development strategies to reality. We expect that economic diversification strategies, however similar they sound across disparate regions, will be translated in particular ways through the nature and composition of the actors involved in implementation. In Buffalo, grassroots groups (e.g., PUSH) have some capacity to shape the vision for the region. Consequently, we expect that there may be more attention to issues of equity as they intersect with the biomedical and knowledge sector strategies in this region than in a region like Orlando with a deficit of organized voices advocating on behalf of the low-income workers or communities of color.

Despite these qualitative differences in leadership and in grassroots representation, neither region really exhibited explicit pursuit of adaptive resilience as a capacity and process. That Orlando would focus more on outcomes than process is not surprising, especially given the region's growth-oriented elite governance regime. One might expect such actors to be primarily focused on growth outcomes and near-term gains in the development landscape. Alternatively, in Buffalo, where there is a more inclusive governance network and a longer history of pervasive challenges, there was some adaptive resilience capacity building, but more as a byproduct of economic development rather than an explicit resilience goal. While inclusion of equity actors may shift the goals and implementation measures for economic development, it does not necessarily disrupt outcomes-oriented design of economic development policy or the prevalence of mimetic behavior.

Divergent ideas about equity and advocacy participation do appear to be unfolding in each region's recent visioning exercises (One Region Forward and myregion.org). While both plans call for more transit-friendly walkable communities, a comparison of the groups spearheading these efforts in each region underscores significant variation in the civic realm. In Buffalo, the effort is being led by existing regional planning entities (the metropolitan planning organization [MPO] and others) and the planning efforts will include social services and housing. In Orlando, the regional chamber of commerce spearheads the effort with significant participation from the state department of transportation and the MPO. The regional vision in Buffalo includes frequent mention of the needs of low-income communities, including a working group on "food access and justice." In contrast, Orlando's "How Shall We Grow" vision statement has relatively little to say about the needs of low-income communities, other than a mention of "obtainable" housing choices. Furthermore, the Orlando region's CEDS focuses on the way in which compact, walkable communities and transit-oriented development will attract the "creative class," not on how it might increase access to opportunity for low-income, low-skill workers, of which there are many in the region. Potential differences in implementation, then, suggest that process matters for evaluating how regions respond to challenges. At the moment, those process differences do not seem strong enough to counter the power of mimetic behavior when it comes to policy visions and selection, but may matter for understanding variation in how those policy visions are implemented.

Another key difference between the two cases is the state context in which they operate, a context that receives little focus in many discussions of regional resilience. Just as *governance* informs the process by which economic development strategies are conceived and implemented, so too does *government.* Though not our main focus in this study, we uncovered some potential differences in how the States of Florida and New York inform the economic development choices and decisions that occur at the regional level. In Buffalo, much of the funding and the impetus to implement the WNYREDC's *Strategy for Prosperity* comes from Governor Cuomo's office, which has recently adopted the regionalist mantle. In Florida, despite the state designation of regional planning agencies, there is not a strong state mandate or financial incentive for regional economic development planning, and regional visioning exercises look quite different. In fact, Governor Scott has dismantled much of Florida's growth management system. Other state-level initiatives and policies should also be considered in future research. For example, minimum wage laws, distribution of Community Development Block Grants, and various forms of discretionary spending may play a significant role in determining the type and amount of economic development that occurs at the regional scale. Scholars of regional resilience would be wise to consider the role that government, and in particular state government, plays in economic development policies and practice.

CONCLUSIONS

In the end, the fact that two very different places with very different local economies would pursue the same strategies urges us to consider the implications of mimetic behavior in its latest guise. While future research in this area is essential, we assert that if downtown development in the 1990s was focused on "building the city for the visitor class," the mimetic behavior we observed suggests that in the 2010s regional economic development may be focused on "building employment for the professional class," in part through emphasizing the same knowledge-based industries. There are two main concerns related to this "build the economy and they will come" strategy. The first is that pursuing resilience through economic diversification, or at least as currently practiced, does not represent a distinct break from prior economic development fads. Although Buffalo governance processes show some adaptive capacity building by striving for increased opportunity and a more equitable distribution of power among interest groups, like so many economic development fads in the past it shows that leaders have largely envisioned economic diversification as an end state and not an ongoing practice. As a consequence, the focus is on attracting the newly identified desirable industry rather than on building an economic development approach that can respond to unforeseen future shocks in a manner that is sensitive to regional needs and constraints, begins to store knowledge and experience, and increases flexibility in problem solving. We thus argue that even some adaptive resilience capacity may not be enough to override the powerful tendencies towards mimetic behavior even when cloaked as resilience and diversification.

The second concern is that these economic development responses appear to be taking shape without much thought to the needs of a region's current workforce or of each region's distinctive strengths. Although it is not yet known whether such decisions will set some places up for failure due to oversaturation of certain sectors at the national scale, there are certainly reasons for concern. Not every region can have a biomedical cluster strong enough to anchor the local economy, but if leaders in each place talk about how it is well situated to do so then it is hard to distinguish where it is and is not a promising idea. In both Buffalo and Orlando, it is often said that each region is not only well suited to pursue a biomedical cluster but that it is also one of only a few places pursuing it. Our analysis suggests that neither one of these claims is necessarily accurate and both require further analysis. Before Buffalo, Orlando, or any other region pursues such an approach, regional leaders would be wise to consider all of the alternatives and identify what other regions are pursuing it as part of their own economic development strategies.

The observance of mimetic behavior also raises concerns about the application of the concept of resilience to understanding how regions survive and thrive. The idea that economic diversification is a strategy to promote greater resilience as an outcome or end state is present in both the academic literature on economic development and regionalism and among regional policy makers. However, thinking about the link between resilience and diversification must be sensitive to the larger intergovernmental context within which regions operate. Regions do not develop economic strategies in isolation, either from the policies operating at the state and federal level or from the economic choices made by other regions similarly looking to increase their resilience in the face of future uncertainty. Furthermore, the implementation of economic diversification strategies happens within particular regional governance systems that are situated in a global economy. How various interests and constituencies are represented within that governance system will determine how the costs and benefits of diversification are borne and thus require the ongoing processes of adaptive resilience. If the concept of resilience is also to include concerns for equity within regions, as we argue it should, then calls for economic diversification as a resilience strategy need to be mindful of the role of regional actors in developing and defining what constitutes economic diversification and then in translating economic strategy into policy. In other words, it is the process through which regions develop their economic diversification vision and translate it into practice that matters for adaptive resilience, not just the level or nature of economic diversification for which they aim.

ENDNOTES

1 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) are prepared for the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and are required before a region can participate in any of the EDA's programs. The documents are therefore prepared to meet EDA criteria and are not regional visioning documents. At the same time, the CEDS do include information about how each region views its economy and what strengths and challenges it identifies. For this reason, we find a comparison of CEDS in these two regions to be a useful component of our analysis.

2 In the United States, the foreclosure crisis began with a a dramatic increase in foreclosure rates among U.S. homeowners between 2006 and 2007. The subsequent collapse had a direct effect on home values, mortgage markets, home builders, and the real estate industry in general, all of which contributed to the nationwide recession that began in 2008. For more on confluence, mortgage fraud, and spillover in the foreclosure crisis, see Baumer, Arnia, and Wolff, 2013.

3 The WNYREDC is a public-private partnership that includes leaders from academia, business, local government, and nongovernmental organizations. In 2011, the first year of the governor's competitive program, the WNYREDC received an award from the Governor's Office and $100.3 million for the implementation of its plan, *A Strategy for Prosperity in Western New York*.

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

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