Lake Effects
Weiner, Ronald R.

Published by The Ohio State University Press

Weiner, Ronald R.
The Ohio State University Press, 2005.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/28363.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/28363

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1151746
ome readers may wonder why a book that appears to be a political history has so little “politics” in it. One could write a very long and mildly entertaining political history about the ignorance, myopia, venality, and stupidity of Cleveland’s politicians past and present. But this book is about policy rather than politics. Policy is what happens after elections are decided. Policy is the long view of political decision making. Politics is short term and is typically about electioneering and partisan combat. Politics distorts long-term reality by focusing on individual elections, personalities, and conflict.

Mayors, city councilmen, school boards, party leaders, and public servants repeatedly failed the citizens of Cleveland. Nonetheless, Cleveland’s political history has typically been written as a story of “good guys vs. bad guys.” Except for Mayor Johnson (and a few others), however, there were hardly any good guys at all. Moreover, no political party was more committed to serving the public interest than any other, and no political party was more effective in serving the public interest than any other. As a result, no amount of careful attention to party platforms, campaign rhetoric, or the changing balance of party control over public offices can explain how Cleveland got to be the way it is.

Indeed, throughout the nineteenth and almost all of the twentieth centuries, the parties and the candidates were virtually interchangeable. In Cuyahoga County, and in Cleveland in particular, affiliation with the two parties crossed economic and social lines, although membership in the county (as opposed to the city) Republican Party skewed toward the affluent. Ideologically, the two parties stood for nothing of substance and nothing that would distinguish one from the other. Both employed a rhetoric of fiscal frugality and low taxes and feigned alarm at the corruption and
incompetence of the other. Campaigns, coming at much too frequent two-year intervals, merely involved charges and counter charges of fiscal irresponsibility, increased taxes, corruption, and incompetence. In the 1980s municipal elections became quadrennial, but they remained mud fights nonetheless.

Urban policy differs. It aims to cultivate, maintain, and defend the local region’s particular geography of production and consumption by the creation of a loose coalition of disparate groups and organizations—the urban regimes discussed below. A policy-making regime may exist for a considerable period of time, as did the four regimes under consideration here. Although they appear stable and unified, urban regimes are in the still longer run unstable because they crumble when the geography of production and consumption changes.

The somewhat labored phrase “geographies of production and consumption” is intended to serve as a code signifying several things. The phrase means, in general, that economic activities, such as production and consumption, are perceptible in urban space. Cleveland’s geography of production, that is, the places in and about the city where goods were actually produced, changed as Cleveland’s economy evolved from agricultural, to commercial, to industrial modes of production. This meant that Cleveland’s production occurred, sequentially, on farms, and in warehouses, steel mills, and factories at shifting locations within the urban region. Markets for goods flowing from Cleveland’s farms, warehouses, mills, and factories may be distant or local, but consumption of goods and services was bound by an existing mode of transportation—horse, wagon, canal boat or steam ship, railroad car, auto, or truck. Geographies of consumption also changed in response to the spending and travel patterns of individuals. When production shifts from farms to warehouses to mills to factories, and consumers move from farms to cities to suburbs, the “where” of individual spending changes as well. Cleveland’s geographical configuration at any given time was that of the agricultural village, the commercial entrepot, or the industrial metropolis. The shorthand phrase that summarizes all of this activity is “geographies of production and consumption.”

ON URBAN REGIMES

Urban regimes are political and institutional adaptations to changing geographies of production and consumption. The participating groups in a regime at any given time possess differing degrees of power, vary in stages of growth or decline, possess distinct value systems, and promote both
comprehensive and parochial policy goals. The inability of all member organizations to adapt to changing external and internal conditions makes urban regimes discontinuous. Each regime adapts to a changing social geography in its own way, sets policies, and aligns priorities among them until spatial conditions again change and a new round of adaptive behavior becomes necessary. Urban regimes come apart because organizations change and because society offers new challenges to which an existing coalition of organizations cannot adapt.

Urban policy in Cleveland, from 1825 until 1929, was set by four discontinuous local regimes. The first of these, the Merchant Regime (1825–1878), was composed of business, governmental, and social organizations created by the city’s original settlers. As legatees of a common value system, they seldom disagreed over policy means and ends, and the policies of the regime transformed the city’s geography of production and consumption. But Merchant Regime organizations failed to adapt to the changed geography of production and consumption that their regime occasioned, and a new regime, the Populist Regime (1878–1895), replaced it.

The Populist Regime was a diverse coalition of organizations striving to cope with the early industrial era geography of production and consumption. Some of these carried over from the preceding regime, while others, such as immigrant churches, mutual aid societies, immigrant clubs, and ward organizations, were entirely new. These diverse Populist Regime organizations coalesced around two contradictory value systems: a universalist professional ideal held by an emerging class of organization men, and a particularized neighborhood-based value system held by newcomers to the city. In its heyday, the Populist Regime reordered policy priorities and charted entirely new policy directions for the city of Cleveland.

The strengths of the Populist Regime were also its weakness. It tried to be all things to all people and in so doing made unpopular policy choices. These choices were aggravated by the conflict in ideals between the regime’s professionals, who sought to bring order and efficiency to city operations, and the residents of working class neighborhoods, who viewed the regime’s leaders as benefactors who would reliably provide material rewards in exchange for political support.

The Corporate Regime rose from the Populist Regime’s inability to manage the industrial era geography of production and consumption. The Corporate Regime overhauled old organizations, built new organizations in the image of the modern industrial business organization, and merged all into a hierarchical policy setting network, which included divisions for each type of policy. The Corporate Regime was composed of entrepreneurs, corporate managers, and professionals alienated from the Populist
Regime. At the outset, the values of entrepreneurs, managers, and professionals appeared to be compatible. In the end, the dramatic ad hoc projects favored by the entrepreneurs could not be reconciled with the long-term institutionalization of policy favored by managers and professionals.

For all its organizational brilliance and policy achievements, the Corporate Regime failed to respond adequately to the challenges of the automobile era geography of production and consumption. Its replacement, the Realty Regime, was composed of new and old organizations staffed by local businessmen not affiliated with the industrial era corporation. These were new people with a more expansive, regional vision of social geography and new, self-interested policy priorities. The Realty Regime did not see policy as a comprehensive whole and instead concentrated on a narrow range of policy objectives. The Realty Regime was, however, attuned to the automobile era geography of production and consumption and implemented its narrow range of policies on the scale of the metropolitan region rather than that of the central city.

**URBAN POLICY DEFINED**

Urban policy is the sum of four elements: economic development, urban growth, service distribution, and wealth redistribution. Regimes define what their goals are in each of the four areas of policy, establish priorities among them, and then work within a specific coalition of organizations toward policy implementation. Policy culminates in the building of physical and social infrastructure necessary to sustain an existing geography of production and consumption.

*Economic Development Policy*

Economic development policy is the deceptively simple activity of adding new work to old work. But where that work is added and how decisions get made to add new work are crucial. The issue of where new work is added is crucial because urban economies are composed of two distinct but related elements: an export sector and a local sector. The export sector is the more critical of the two and is the object of economic development policy because it produces goods and services for sale outside the community. Export sector activity has the desirable outcome of bringing new money into the urban economy, rather than recycling money already in the local economy. Economic development policy, then, is about schemes
which bring new money into the economy by adding new work to old work in the export sector.\textsuperscript{6}

Cleveland began its economic history as an agricultural village, processing locally grown crops (e.g., wheat to flour) for sale outside the community, the city’s initial export sector activity. The new work it added in the mid-nineteenth century to the old work in the agricultural export base was in commerce—transportation services, warehousing, and banking. In its next stage of export sector development, Cleveland added new work in manufacturing to its commercial export sector base, so once again new work was added to old work in the export sector and the new money made from the sale of manufactured goods outside the community continued to flow into Cleveland as the nineteenth century ended. In the early twentieth century, more diverse forms of export sector manufacturing activity were added, continuing the cycle.

It is vital for the reader to note that new work does not get added to old export sector work by accident. These gains are the result of conscious organizational decision making. How and whether each of the four regimes defined economic development policy and what priority status was assigned to it will be important matters for later discussion.

The other half of the urban economy, the local sector, produces goods and services for those living in the locality and is, in most ways, dependent on the export sector. Export sector businesses buy goods and services produced locally, and export sector workers must have food, housing, clothing, medical care, education, and other services. The local sector of the urban economy exists to provide them.

\textit{Urban Growth Policy}

Urban growth policy seeks to sort out and manage the mass of tangled land use issues created by the export and local sectors of the economy. All businesses, export sector and local, have spatial requirements and therefore are competitors for the land required to meet the spatial needs of their businesses. People, obviously, also inhabit the city, and people have housing requirements but also a more modest ability to stand the cost of competing for land and paying for the structures built upon it. Businesses and citizens alike have transportation needs that generate geographies of consumption as businesses move their goods in and about the city and citizens travel to work and to purveyors of goods and services.

Urban growth policy and city structure are braided strands. From their colonial beginnings, American cities evolved through at least three
structural stages, correlating roughly to the changing geographies of production and consumption: (1) the commercial era walking city of the Merchant Regime, (2) the industrial era hub and spoke streetcar city of the Populist and Corporate regimes, and (3) the multiple-nuclei or automobile city of the Realty Regime. Cleveland between 1825 and 1930 progressed through all three stages of urban structure. Urban regimes were adaptations to changing city structure.

**Service Distribution Policy**

Services are deemed “distributive” because everyone in theory benefits from public safety, public health, municipal housekeeping, and public education. Caveats become necessary because increasingly, with passage of time and growing public sophistication, distributive services became matters of qualitative public choice, choices which frequently provoked debates over priority status because services cost taxpayers money and add little to the city’s economic development and contribute only indirectly to its growth.

Policies governing service distribution were (and are) mostly answers to three questions: what services are demanded, how much is the public willing to pay, and “who benefits.” The answers to these questions varied markedly from regime to regime. Services taken for granted in a 1920s suburb would have been considered wildly extravagant by the merchants and populists.

**Wealth Redistribution Policy**

The “who benefits” issue also underlies wealth redistribution policy. Redistribution is a one-way transfer or grant of wealth from one individual or group to another and is tolerated in an exchange economy because it is a reflection of two elemental human traits: benevolence and fear. Benevolent impulses run deep in the American psyche, but the wellspring of benevolence must flow toward clearly defined and deserving beneficiaries, such as the aged, the infirm, widows and orphans, or victims of natural disaster. When ambiguity creeps into the definition of deserving, Americans become wary and insist on accountability and reciprocity. The able-bodied poor, for example, are ambiguous as beneficiaries; they should work or at least show willingness to work in exchange for their one-way grant. As one-way transfers of wealth have become an increasingly common element in
American economic and social relations, they have also become increas-
ingly more controversial.\(^7\)

**THE POLICY PRIORITIES OF THE FOUR REGIMES**

Each of the regimes shaped its own economic development, urban growth, service distribution, and wealth redistribution policies, brought different perspectives to the policies, and ordered them on a descending scale of priorities.

The Merchant Regime established economic development as its pri-
mary policy priority and pursued it with dogged energy and good results. Urban growth issues also ranked high with the merchants, but service dis-
tribution and wealth redistribution cost actual dollars and political capital which the regime was disinclined to spend.

The Populist Regime emerged because of the merchants' failure to sat-
safactorily address service distribution issues. Service distribution became the highest priority of the new regime and the one on which the populists would eventually impale themselves. Economic development was not understood by the regime, but urban growth was. The goal of the regime was to bring spatial growth to a halt. Wealth redistribution and service dis-
tribution in the Populist Regime were yoked issues, and the unpopularity of the latter leached into the former.

The top policy priorities of the Corporate Regime were urban growth and wealth redistribution. But in all policy areas, the corporate leaders would transfer the planning and management efficiencies of modern busi-
ness organization to policy making and policy implementation. The lone policy area where this methodology failed was economic development.

Urban growth was far and away the highest policy priority of the Realty Regime. The realtors' growth policy created suburbia, and each politically independent suburb would chart its own direction in service distribution and wealth redistribution. The Realty Regime not only created the ge-
ographically expansive urban region, but it also created in its politically independent suburbs balkanized urban policy making.

As this is written, local leadership and the media are much vexed by the Cleveland region's economic decline. Initially, this was blamed on “struc-
tural” changes taking place in the economy, that is, the shift in economic activity and employment from a receding manufacturing sector to both high- and low-grade services. To avoid being trapped as low-wage burger flippers in fast food restaurants, locals were advised to reinvent themselves
as skilled high-tech information processors and financial services wizards. More bad news followed. The combination of outsourcing and off-shore production expanded to include not only blue collar manufacturing but most recently back office functions and information processing, the work initially defined as high tech, high wage, highly reliable, and reliably middle class. The local leadership laments the fact that the city’s ability to control its economic destiny is withering.

This study aims to show, among other policy matters, that Cleveland has not controlled its economic destiny for many decades. This is a result not only of shortsighted policy making but also of institutional forces outside the city’s control, the past meeting the present. Past and present also suggest that local leadership has often confused economic development with urban growth policy, mistakenly holding the belief that rearranging the deck chairs in the form of novel land uses, sports stadiums, and convention centers is a substitute for a well-designed economic vessel, one able to follow a safe course through dangerous waters.