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Institutional Choice and Change in Regional Partnerships for County Economic Development*

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Abstract

Local governments have made regional partnership for promoting economic condition in the larger institutional environments in which they are embedded. With 500 respondents of the survey for statistical analyses, in 2009, about 80% of county governments joined in partnerships through the regional organizations in U.S. The analysis indicates that a reformed form of government, and a closer inter-local network are positively related with participating in the regional partnerships. Also, a specific interest (pro-development Interest) and a reformed form of government have made the county governments affiliate with the regional organizations for economic development between 1999 and 2009.

Key words: County Government, Regional Organization, Economic Development Partnership

Ⅰ. Introduction

How do communities organize themselves to promote economic development? The answer to this question has obvious importance for development priorities, policies, and success, but we know very little about institutions that promote local growth or how and why they have been chosen and have changed over the past two decades.

Since the fiscal crises in the mid-1970s, local governments have been pressed to foster local economic growth. Economic development, always a central concern for local governments, has become increasingly important as the federal role in this area has been reduced in the last two decades (Clarke

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& Gaile, 1989). Fragmentation among local units creates diseconomies of scale, shared interests, and common resource problems in positive and negative externalities of economic development. This leads local governments to establish new organizational mechanisms as an institution for regional governance (Feiock, 2009). At these points, regional organizations as principal actors of mediators to carry out economic development policies and programs, have obvious importance for development priorities and success. Frequently, local governments have formed corporations and alliances that take a regional approach in building and implementing economic development programs and activities across regions (Olberding, 2002). Regional partnership organizations are a common example of such organizations that have created inter-local cooperation within their regional boundaries and coordination functions for specific policy goals. However, limited research has studied nature of the regional organizations and effectiveness for economic development at the local level. In addition, counties have been neglected in the studies of local economic development, even though they have larger resource bases than municipalities, and stronger local identification. Economic development programs and policies can be facilitated with the larger resource and stronger local identification (Parmmer, 1996). Increasingly, counties will have played major roles in regional economic development, attracting industry cluster and implementing integrated workforce development programs (Benton, 2005).

Why do county governments participate in the regional partnership organizations in their pursuit of economic development? What accounts for the creation of partnerships through the regional organizations among county governments for the last ten years? To answer these questions, this research considers the mechanisms and roles of regional partnership organizations, and then investigates the factors which lead regional collaboration at two time points in 1999 and 2009, using survey data conducted in 2009.

Ⅱ. Local Economic Development and Partnership in Regional Organizations

1. Critical Issues of Local Economic Development in U.S.

The issues of economic development have a long history in U.S. cities and counties. Nevertheless over the last couple of decades, locally-based economic development has introduced not merely new rhetoric but a fundamental shift in the activities related to economic development as well as in the actors involved (Blakely, 1994). Local economic development activity has dramatically intensified since the urban crises of mid-1970s and the economic downturn of the early 1980s (Feiock, 1991). Cochrane (1992) describes the pattern as an enterprise state:

> It is not difficult to see the period since the late 1970s as one in which the links between business and government have begun to be forged rather more effectively than the past, as part of the process of moving toward an “enterprise” state. The language of welfare has been replaced by the language of growth, regeneration, and public/private partnership, particularly in urban areas (p. 415).

Robinson (1989) argues that a central feature of locally based economic development is in the emphasis on endogenous development using the potential of human and physical resources to create new employment opportunities and to stimulate new, locally-based economic activity. Therefore, the public sector is responsible for guiding private investment decisions to generate desired economic development outcomes. Blakely (1994) describes that local economic development as process oriented, which means it is a process involving the formation of new institutions, the development of alternative industries, the improvement of the capacity of existing employers to produce better products, and the nurturing of new firms and enterprises. Practically local policies such as tax breaks location incentives, and financing incentives affect urban growth and development by attracting new industries, facilitating the maintenance, and expansion of existing operations, and encouraging more intensive land use (Feiock, 1991).

Olberding (2002) indicates three waves of local economic development strategies. The first wave which began in the 1930s in response to the Great Depression consisted of strategies designed to lower the cost of tax, land, buildings and labor to attract businesses. The second wave began in the 1970s in response to various circumstances, such as an increase in competition in the market, a decline in the importance of manufacturing in the economy, and a request of markets for goods and services including research that increased doubts about effectiveness of traditional economic development strategies. The third wave swelling for the past decade is characterized not by the policies for economic development but by the type of organization. The main objective in this wave is to create a new institutional and organizational arrangement with responsiveness, a flexible foundation for economic development, and sufficient scope (Clarke & Gaile, 1992; Clarke & Saiz, 1996; Gray & Lowery, 1990).

Currently, community organizations and local government, even the narrow local government in the public sector, are realizing that their actions have a strong impact on private decisions. Similarly, nonprofit and quasi-organizations at the neighborhood level have had dramatic impacts on private investment for economic development (Blakely, 1994). Finally, local economic development means the process in which local governments and community organizations engage to stimulate business activity and strategy. Based on this definition, local governments, community institutions, and private firms have been essential actors in the economic development process.

2. Partnership for County Economic Development in Regional Organizations

Recent researches on economic development in U.S. counties show two major themes. First, county governments pursue regional cooperation for economic development, such as regional partnerships and special districts, to reduce competition among counties within their jurisdictional boundaries and thereby improve their regional competitiveness (Green et al., 2002; Kwon, 2008; Lee, 2009; Olberding, 2002; Reese, 1996). Second, county governments pursue proactive economic development strategies marketing their regions and attracting foreign investment as an outlet for foreign trade (Reese, 1996). Apparently, regional cooperation has become increasingly appropriate corresponding with new strategies of county governments for economic development.

Regional Partnerships are a type of regional institution created to facilitate inter-local cooperation and are usually expected to function for specific policy goals. Olberding (2002) defines regional partnership organizations as "groups of local governmental officials and often business leaders, and other individuals" formed to enhance the economy of a multi-jurisdictional area in one way or another. In general, regional Partnerships are multilateral contractual among diverse actors. Among them, local governments clearly play a key role in regional partnerships, and the regional economic development partnerships have become an increasingly popular approach to regional governance (Feiock, Moon, & Park, 2008). Local governments, particularly in a metropolitan area, have difficulties ensuring coordination among several jurisdictions pursuing similar economic development goals. Competition among local governments for progressive industrial prospects can waste scarce public resources, and duplication of small business assistance programs can cause expensive overlapping of services. In many cases, regional partnership organizations consisting of local governments can play a significant role managing patterns in regional economic development (National Association of Regional Councils, 1987).

For instance, the regional partnership organization, West Coast, presents an interesting organizational solution to multi-jurisdictional competition and duplication. The metropolitan area which surrounds the cities of Eugene and Springfield, Oregon, established two inter-jurisdictional organizations to better strengthen individual efforts. One is the metro partnership organization, a quasi-public joint venture between two cities and their chambers of commerce that seek to attract industries to the metropolitan area that are appropriate to the inherent strengths and weakness of local economy. The other is Business Assistance Network Group (BANG), which coordinates the efforts of the cities' various small business assistance programs as well as the efforts of the state's small business development center. These regional partnership organizations can significantly reduce the cost induced by inter-local competition while increasing the efficiency of development activities by playing a role as "netwrok broker" (Kwon, 2008; Provan & Milward, 2001).

Ⅲ. Theoretical Approach

What accounts for the creation of partnerships through the regional organizations among county governments for the last ten years? Institutional literature suggests various theoretical approaches regarding the reasons why local governments choose certain institutional arrangements for promotion of local economic development. Based on contingency theory, organizational ecology theory, and transaction cost theory, organizations in steady environments performing a stable set of activities will maintain uniformed organizational forms, and structural transformation would follow changes in the environment or in the underlying activities being performed (Donaldson, 2001; Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Nikerson & Zenger, 2002; Williamson, 1991). In political perspectives, interest group theory indicates that the participants in politics are utility maximizers operating under different institutional constraints (Chae & Wilding, 2012; McCormick & Tollison, 1982). Public officials cannot help considering dominant interest groups when setting priorities for their communities, and managing decision making for their interests (Nicholson-Crotty & Nicholson-Crotty, 2004). Resource dependency theory on network approaches suggests a perspective in new structural emergences and configurations. Various institutional configurations and forms are caused by resource scarcities and they are renovated in the aim of acquiring alternative resources (Sherer & Lee, 2002).

1. Characteristics of Community

1) Economic Distress

The main role of local governments in the communities suffer from serious economic declines is to encourage the various business interests, and to drive new capital and development to be more entrepreneurial (Andre, 1994; Reese, 1996). Kwon (2008) argues that needs resulting from economic distress can explain the reason why local governments prefer specific types of organizational arrangements to reduce transaction costs and obtain economics of scales.

In their research, Clingermayer and Feiock (1993, 1990) argues that the indicators of decline in population and economic base more readily translate into demands for economic development than into fiscal measures. Population decline puts local governments under pressure with fewer resources from a shrinking tax base. Also, a higher poverty rate stimulates local governments from public demand. Finally, it is expected that population and economic decline would result in the regional partnership to address these problems.

H1: Counties having higher population decline are more likely to participate in the regional partnership for local economic development.

H2: Counties having higher poverty rate are more likely to participate in the regional partnership for local economic development.

2. Political Factors

1) Interest Groups

Fleishmann (1986), and Gerber and Phillips (2004) point out that economic development groups promote consolidation to foster development by acquiring growth-generating infrastructure from local governments as well as building coalitions with community organizations. Development groups are well-organized to enhance their power to articulate demands of political actors, and the political actors give the groups advantages, such as rewards to accomplish their goals into economic development policies. Development and construction groups are not only resistant to pro-environmental policies, but also push public officials to arrange various institutions to be beneficial for them. Therefore, it is expected that local communities with strong pro-development groups would tend to choose their institutional configuration to be favorable to economic growth. The strength of pro-development groups, as an operational definition, was measured by proportion of constructions industries over total establishments in the local communities.

H3: Counties having a higher proportion of construction industries are more likely to participate in the regional partnership for local economic development.

2) Form of Government

Historically, county governments lacked central control to manage county operations because they originally stemmed from the administrative subdivision of states. The fragmented executive authority made them sometimes inefficient, ineffective and irresponsive. However, governmental reform in counties has been popular in choosing either a commission-administrator/manager or commission-elected executive/mayor form, instead of a traditional single commission type. These reforms are intended to bring centralization and professionalization necessary for successful local economic development (Benton, 2002; Jeong, 2004).

Demand and supply of more intensive and broader services may motivate county governments to effectively promote economic development. Especially, because reformed governments in counties provide higher opportunities to initiate new economic development activities with more centralized authorities, the counties of the commission-administrator/manager or commission-elected executive/mayor form would be expected to choose their organizational configuration to be favorable to economic growth.

H4: Counties with reformed forms of governments(commission-administrator/ manager) are more likely to participate in the regional partnership for local economic development.

3. Inter-governmental Networks

Due to the increased responsibility of local governments for citizens and greater resource dependence among other local organizations, network approaches have been applied to various public management and public policy researches. In a recent article, O'Toole and Meier (2004) state that the "characteristics of networks in public management may influence a combination of agencies of the same government, links among units of different governments, ties between public organizations and for-profit companies, and public or nonprofit connections, as well as more complex arrangements including multiple types of connections in a larger pattern, and organizational patterns for intergovernmental relationship (p. 471)."

Increasing dependence might be related to organizational rebuilding in the communities. Perhaps, in the network settings of local economic development, economic development programs' success will require collaboration and coordination with other local organizations pursuing strategic interdependence (Agranoff & McGuire, 1998). Podolny and Page (1998) stress the advantages produced through increased inter-local networks, which make local governments foster organizational learning, attain legitimacy of organizational action, provide large economic scale, facilitate management of resource dependencies, and restrict opportunistic behavior. Especially, close or strong ties shown in densely-clustered networks among local actors are necessary to overcome collective action problems and to achieve sustainable collective action for local economic development (Coleman, 1988; Feiock, 2007). Probably, the benefits of closed networks motivate local governments to transform their organizational arrangements which are fit for communicating and cooperating easily with various organizations. Inter-local revenue and inter-local expenditure were used for the operational definition of inter-governmental networks

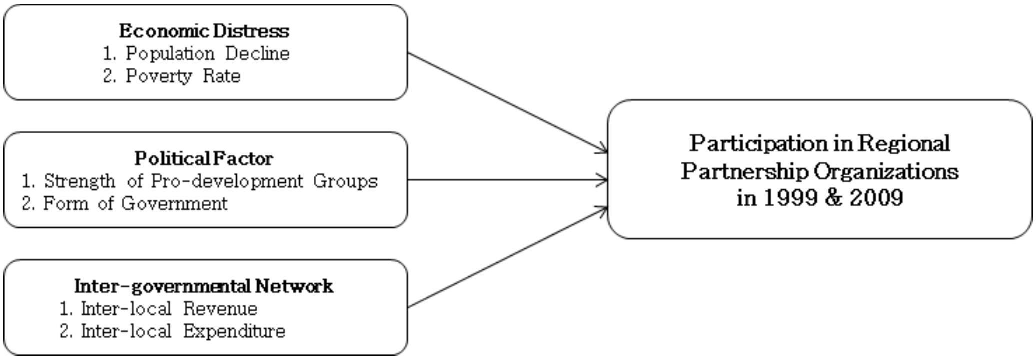
H5: Counties having more inter-local revenue are more likely to participate in the regional partnership for local economic development.
H6: Counties having more inter-local expenditures are more likely to participate in the regional partnership for local economic development.

Ⅳ. Research Design

1. Data Collection and Analytic Method

This research focuses on the partnership for economic development activated in counties. Based on the contact information of a county administrator or manager provided by the National Association of Counties (NACo), three waves of email surveys and twice-mailed surveys were conducted for data collection of key variables in 2009. The surveys asked the respondents to identify the county governments that participate in the regional partnership for economic development in 1999 and 2009 as well as to delineate the forms of county government in the community. After Eliminating incomplete surveys, the final response rate was 48.1% (491/1020).

〈Figure 1〉 Theoretical Framework of Institutional Choice and Change



The effects of economic declines, political factors, and inter-local networks on the regional partnership for local economic development were tested using data from the survey and archival data from the C*ensus of county Business Patterns in 2006, Census of Government Finances* in 2002, and *Census of Population* in 2000, 2007, and 2008.

In addition, this study controls for other characteristics of the community such as income and education level, a strategic plan for county development, regional competition, homogeneity, tax capacity, and county status (metropolitan or non-metropolitan) which can influence the institutional choice and change for county economic development.

〈Table 1〉 Description of Variables Used in the Analysis

Dependent Variable (Measures)	Sources (Year)
1) Participation in Regional Partnership Organizations in 1999 and 2009 - Dummy Variable (yes or no)	Mail Survey (2009)
Independent Variables (Measures)	**Sources (Year)**
1) Population Change (difference between 2000 and 2008)	Census of Population (2000, 2008)
2) Poverty Rate (proportion below poverty rate)	Census of Population (2000)
3) Strength of Pro-developing Groups (number of constructions/total establishments)	County Business Patterns (2003)
4) Form of County Government (council-administrator/council-manager/council-elective executive → reformed government) (commission → unreformed government)	Mail Survey (2009)
5) Inter-governmental Network (inter-local revenue)	Census of Government Finance (2002)
6) Inter-governmental Network (inter-local expenditure)	Census of Government Finance (2002)
Control Variables (Measures)	**Sources (Year)**
1) Strength of Environmental Groups (median income)	Census of Population (2007)
2) Level of Education (proportion of the persons having BA degree or higher)	Census of Population (2000)
3) Strategic Plan - Dummy Variable (yes or no)	Mail Survey (2009)
4) Regional Competition (the number of neighbor counties)	US Census Map
5) Homogeneity (betweenness of 1st race and 2nd race)	Census of Population (2000)
6) Tax Capacity (own resource revenue)	Census of Government Finance (2002)
7) County Status (metropolitan or non-metropolitan county)	Mail Survey (2009)

In statistical technique, binomial logistic analyses are used to estimate the choice and change models. It provides a computationally convenient form to estimate the choice probabilities (Gujarati, 2003).

Extant work almost exclusively focuses on the aggregate level of policy tools, policy adoptions, or instrumental choices in economic growth. Also, this static approach is problematic because it cannot test dynamic explanations of policy changes. Because we are interested in the change of the regional partnership for economic development over 10 years as well as the current choice among county governments, we need to measure the institutional choices at two points in time. For the change model, a panel design based on logistic regression that controls for regional partnerships in the regional organizations ten years earlier is employed to address this design limitation. (Feiock, Jeong, & Kim, 2003; Reese, 1991; Reese & Fasenfest, 1996). This allows estimation of the change in 2009, controlling for past use of the partnerships in 1999.

Ⅴ. Statistical Findings

1. Descriptive Analysis

More and more, regional partnerships have become useful institutions for the success of regional governance.

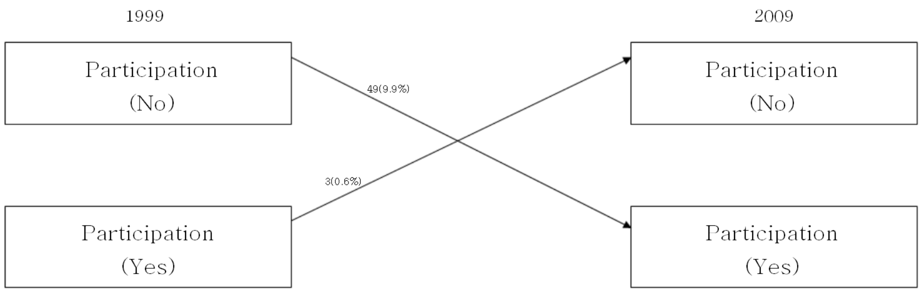
Table 2 reports the number of county governments that participated or not in the regional partnership for economic development in 1999 and 2009. Three hundred forty-three (69.6%) of the 493 county governments joined in regional partnership organizations in 1999, but the other 150 counties (30.4%) did not participate in regional partnership organizations. In 2009, 389 county governments (78.9%) joined in regional partnership organizations, but the remaining 104 county governments (21.1%) did not participate in the organizations.

〈Table 2〉 Participation of Regional Partnership

Regional Partnership Organization	1999	2009
Participation (No)	150 (30.4%)	104 (21.1%)
Participation (Yes)	343 (69.6%)	389 (78.9%)
Total	493 (100%)	

Figure 2 represents the change in participation of the regional partnership for local economic development. Although unlikely in the previous examples the change was almost entirely in one direction. Overall, there were 52 changes (10.5%) among 493 county governments between 1999 and 2009. Also, 49 county governments (9.9%) of the 52 counties that changed participated in the new partnership through regional organizations, while 3 county governments (0.6%) seceded from the regional partnership.

〈Figure 2〉 Patterns of Changes in Participation of Regional Partnership Organization



Finally, about 80% of the 493 county governments have held memberships in regional partnership organizations, and moreover the regional partnerships have spread across counties over time. Through the regional partnership organizations, most county governments are interconnected for economic development within regional boundaries, and coordinate economic development activities with on another.

2. Statistical Analysis

This research analyzes the influence of community, political, and network characteristics on choice and change in partnerships among county governments for economic development.

Model 1 studies affiliation of regional partnerships for county economic development in 2009. As the results show, a reformed government and close network structures have a significant and positive effect when participating in regional partnership organizations for county economic development. Counties having a reformed form of government and more inter-local revenue maintain affiliation with regional partnership organizations in 2009. Consistent with previous works, counties with higher level of education, a strategic plan and higher competition, and counties in a metropolitan area have a positive influence on participation in the regional partnership organizations.

However, as shown in Table 3, there are not any significant relationships between economic decline or pro-developing groups, and the partnership among county governments for economic development.

〈Table 3〉 Logistic Analysis Organizational Choice and Change in Regional Partnership

Variable	Model 1 (Choice)		Model 2 (Change)	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Population Change	-.010	.010	-.028	.019
Poverty Rate	-.062	.044	-.031	.077
Construction Industry	.042	.030	.123**	.061
Reformed Government	.657**	.264	1.166**	.467
Inter-local Revenue	.000*	.000	.000	.000
Inter-local Expenditure	.000	.000	.000	.000
Median Income	.000	.000	000**	.000
Level of Education	.046**	.021	.116***	.041
Strategic Plan	.409*	.252	.225	.444
Number of Neighbor Counties	.180**	.081	.027	.155
Homogeneity	.003	.006	.007	.009
Own Resource Revenue	-.000	.000	.000	.000
Metropolitan County	.788**	.324	1.882**	.561
Regional Partnership in 1999			6.172	.716
Constant	1.516	1.677	-1.094	2.965
Number of Observation	448		448	
LR chi2	54.471		307.48	
Prob > Chi2	.000		.000	
Efron's R2	.18		.50	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

The results of Model 2 reported in Table 3 confirm the importance of pro-development interest, and form of county government on change in the partnership. Stronger pro-development interest, a reformed form of government, education level, and metropolitan status induced the county governments, which did not participate in regional partnerships in 1999, to newly affiliate with the regional organizations in 2009. However, no significance is found that there are positive associations with economic decline, or inter-local networks, and new partnerships among county governments.

Ⅵ. Conclusions and Implications

In recent years there has been tremendous interest in and attention to regional approaches to promoting economic development and the use of regional economic development partnerships. Local governments are key actors in regional organizations and their participation is seen as critical to economic development success (Olberding, 2000). Participation by local governments in regional partnership organizations reduces the costs by inter-local competition through coordination, and increases the efficiency of development activities by sharing resources with other local organizations (Kwon, 2008; Lee, 2009; Olberding, 2002). About 80% of county governments have joined in the partnerships in U.S.

The result strongly supports the hypotheses regarding participation in regional partnerships. The analysis indicates that a reformed form of county government, and close inter-local networks are positively related to participating in regional partnership organizations in 2009. Also, in the change model, the results indicate that stronger pro-development interest and a reformed form of government have made the county governments (not participating in regional partnership organizations) affiliate actively with organizations between 1999 and 2009. The regional partnerships for economic development have become an ordinary approach in U.S. counties. However, different from the expectations, the impacts of economic decline are not statistically significant in the two models. This may mean that counties still have been less innovative than cities, or reflect the attention to service provision which is traditional county roles rather than economic development (Benton, 2005).

This study has potential implications for actors involved in the design of local development programs and institutions. These might include citizens, local officials and higher level government officials. Economic development has become increasingly important as the federal role in this area has been reduced in the last two decades (Clarke & Gaile, 1989). Regional partnership organizations as groups of actors to foster local economic growth have obvious importance because local governments and communities have to create and develop the institutions with responsibility to reflect public demands, and evaluate their performance when economic development programs and policies have been formulated.

In addition, the results suggest practical implications that reformed types of governments and closed networks may facilitate regional partnerships among Korean local governments which have increased interdependence. Such cooperation not only reduces transaction costs such as bargaining cost, agency cost, and monitoring cost, but it can also achieves economy of scale (Feiock, Steinacker, & Park2009). In particular, Korean local governments can consider sharing their tax bases to strengthen local financial interdependency that promotes sustainable economic development. As shown in the recent debate over non-partisan election, a reform should also be implemented to isolate local government from political influences, which can be a viable solution to facilitating local economic development partnership in Korea.

However, this study does not account for the higher-level actors which can constrain the decisions of county governments. Nickerson and Zenger (2002) point out that public administrators or managers often appear to be rather fickle in their choices of organizational structure. Who makes the final decision of institutional choice and change in counties? They are commissioners, mayors, county administrators, or county managers placed in high-level positions. Therefore, their personal characteristics or history can critically influence institutional choice and change for local economic development. Future studies need to control these variables.

Despite these limitations, this study produces the best description and most complete evidence available on county economic development efforts in the U.S. Also, it provides a foundation for future inquiry which can apply to unexplored fields such as maintenance and performance of the partnerships in South Korea.

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국문요약

카운티 경제발전을 위한 지역 간 파트너십의 제도적 선택과 변동

박 종 선
오 영 민

지방정부들은 그들이 속한 환경 속에서 경제발전을 증진시키기 위한 지역 간 다양한 파트너십을 형성해 오고 있다. 2009년 미국의 카운티 정부를 대상으로 실시한 설문조사 결과, 약 80%의 카운티 정부들은 지역 협의체(조직)를 통한 파트너십에 동참하고 있으며, 통계 분석 결과, 개혁된 카운티 정부형태와 타 정부 간 긴밀한 네트워크 구조가 경제발전을 위한 지역 간 파트너십을 형성하는데 긍정적인 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났다. 또한 지역개발론자들의 세력이 강한 카운티와 개혁된 조직형태를 가지는 카운티 정부가 지난 10년간 새롭게 지역 간 파트너십을 형성해 왔음을 보여주었다.

주제어: 카운티 정부, 지역 협의체, 경제개발 파트너십