

# Clusters and Listening Local Economic Development in Place

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Presented to the annual conference of  
the Association of American  
Geographers, Washington, D.C., April  
14-18, 2010





# Clusters & Listening

## Outlined

- Clusters Defined
- Listening Defined
- Listening: From Theory Driven to Stakeholder Driven
- Case Study
  - Who, What, & Where
  - Listening Strategies Deployed
  - Outcomes & Insights



# Clusters & Listening

## Clusters Defined

- Classic Porter (1998) Definition

*“...geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field . . . they include, for example, suppliers of specialized inputs such as components, machinery, and services, and providers of specialized infrastructure . . . [and] include governmental and other institutions...that provide specialized training, education, information, research, and technical support”. (Porter, p. 78)*

- Definition may be problematic though as shared geography does not “explain” any observed phenomena per se and the concept’s generic application is problematic (Martin and Sunley 2003)



# Clusters & Listening

## Listening Defined

- A method that facilitates the development of “bottom-up” social networks
- Common in clinical fields, public policy, and community development (Koch et al. 1994; Murray et al. 2001; Wallerstein 1999)
- Informs and situates knowledge and action (Stivers 1994; McLaughlin 2005)
- Effective approach to empower and mobilize “marginalized” groups (Rappaport 2006)



# Clusters & Listening

## From Theory to Stakeholders

- Place-based
- Situates knowledge and theory
- Beyond simple identification and ambiguous policy strategies
  - Use County Business Patterns to identify “clusters” and encourage strategic investments



# Clusters & Listening

## Case of NW Ohio Greenhouse Industry

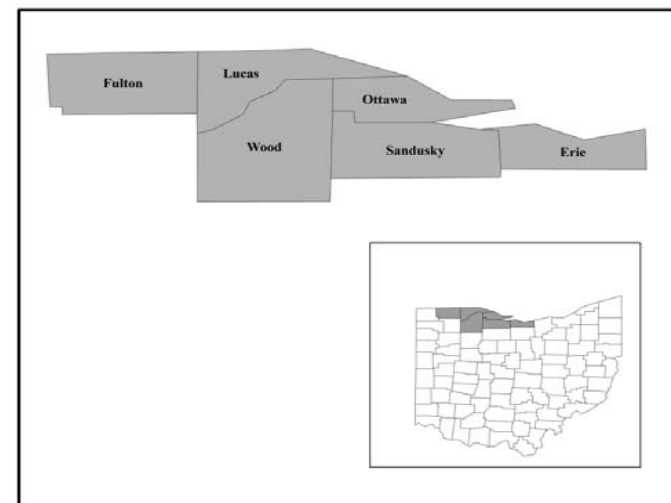
- Began in 2004 in an attempt to improve the competitiveness of specialized agriculture across NW Ohio
  - Congresswoman Kaptur & USDA
- Multi-institution partnership
  - UT, BGSU, OSU, & ISU
- Continues to evolve
  - From greenhouse to local food systems



# Clusters & Listening

## Who, What, & Where?

- NW Ohio Greenhouse Growers
  - Project began in FY2004
  - Funded by USDA
- Project sponsored by Representative Kaptur
  - Desire to reinvigorate agriculture across NW Ohio





# Clusters & Listening

## Listening Activities

- Creating Grower's Network
- Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Oral Histories
- Social Network Analysis



# Clusters & Listening

## Grower's Network

- A grassroots organization of growers
  - Includes growers, extension agents, researchers, and other cluster actors such as the Toledo Botanical Gardens
  - Regular meetings of the full group and executive board
    - Eventually formalized as the Maumee Valley Growers Association, a non-profit organization
- Used as a sounding board and a primary vehicle for setting project priorities



# Clusters & Listening

## Surveys

- 2003-2004
  - 74 question survey of NW Ohio growers
- 2004-2005
  - Statewide survey based on 2003-2004 survey
- 2005-2006
  - Follow up of 2004-2005
- Spring 2009
  - A customer survey



# Clusters & Listening

## Focus Groups & Interviews

- 2006-2007
  - Conceptualized as a way to clarify unclear and sometimes contradictory results of surveys
    - Ex: Growth of the industry was perceived as a negative impact on local growers
      - Big Boxes
- Summer 2008
  - Interviews at the annual Ohio Floriculture Association conference
    - Focused on merchandising and perceptions of and/or relationships with “Big Boxes”

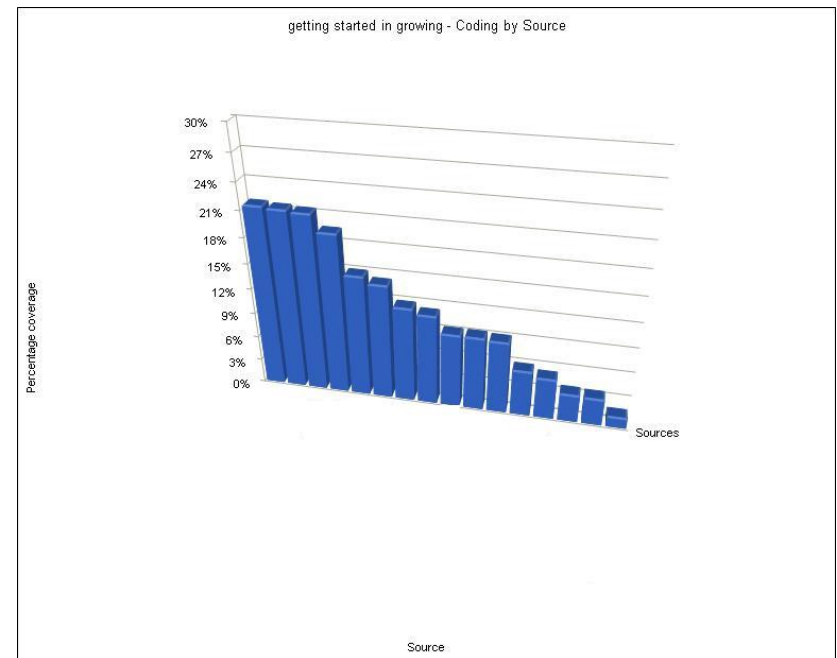




# Clusters & Listening

## Oral Histories

- Summer 2009
- Data summarized in a FA09 report
- FY11
  - Data to be analyzed in NVIVO

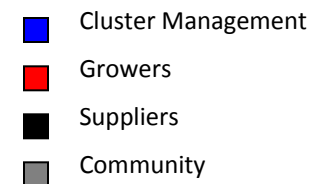
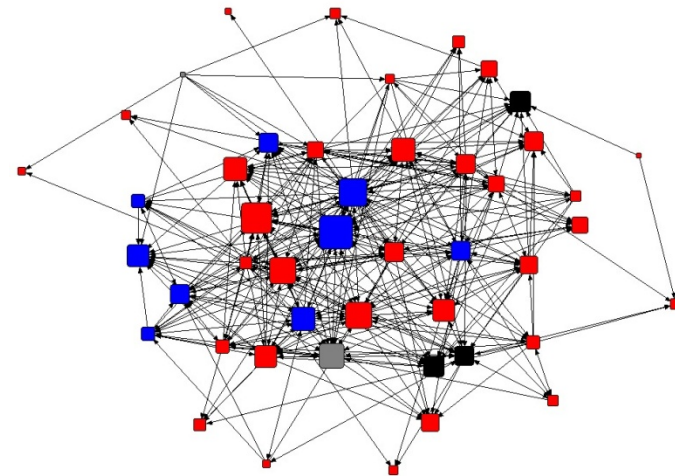




# Clusters & Listening

## Social Network Analysis

- SNA enables the team to understand key social relationships and interactions that promote the sustainability of the cluster





# Clusters & Listening

## Outcomes

- MVG
- Collaborative Marketing
- Energy Collaborative





# Clusters & Listening

## Insights

- Enables researchers to inform theory
  - Policy rooted in the priorities of the stakeholders, not merely the theory
- Creates a context for public policy to succeed and for change to be sustainable



# Clusters & Listening

## Final Thought

*No man ever listened himself out of a job.*

*Calvin "Silent Cal" Coolidge*