Study Methodology

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved conducting an inventory of retail establishments in Northeast Ohio. For the purposes of this project, Northeast Ohio was defined as Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, and Medina Counties and the northern portion of Summit County. Students were divided into twelve teams and assigned to inventory retail establishments in specific geographic areas of the larger study area. The second phase of the study focused on analyzing the impacts of retail development.

Phase I: Retail Inventory

The retail inventory conducted for the 2000 study served as the basis for the current inventory. From the original database of retail establishments, each team extracted the records that pertained to their geographic area. Because of time and resource limitations, teams were asked to update information for only those retail establishments 5,000 square feet or greater that provide shopping or convenience goods.[1] This excluded many uses that were identified in the 2000 study, including auto dealers, auto parts stores, auto repair and service stations, social halls, hotels, funeral homes, enclosed amusements, animal hospitals, and training schools.

Teams documented changes in use (from retail to non-retail), type of retail, store names, and occupancy/vacancy status, and noted any demolitions. Each team also attempted to record any new retail establishments more than 5,000 square feet that appeared since the last study was conducted. This information was gathered via the windshield surveys and by contacting local officials, developers, or other parties who might have the relevant data. These individuals, along with secondary data sources, also provided information on proposed retail projects in each geographic area.

The final task in Phase I required each team to conduct a trade area analysis for their specific geographic area. The trade area analysis identifies whether there is a surplus or deficit of retail in a particular area based on the amount of existing space and buying power of households within that area. The analysis identifies whether there is a total retail surplus or deficit in each area as well as a surplus or deficit in either shopping or convenient goods.

Phase II: Impact Analyses

The impact of retail development was analyzed in terms of impact on riparian systems, transportations systems, buildings, municipal finances, and economic development. These were referred to as "policy areas." Again, students were divided into teams to address each of the five policy areas.

The team that focused on the impact of retail development on riparian systems assessed the effect on watersheds in the region. The transportation systems team examined the impact on local and regional transportation infrastructure, land use, and air quality. The buildings team focused on sustainable building and design practices. The municipal finance team analyzed the financial costs and benefits of retail development. The economic development team assessed the implications of new retail development for job creation, the effect it has on existing retail, and the impact of location decisions. The teams attempted to quantify the impacts of retail development whenever possible. They also used specific shopping centers in Northeast Ohio to illustrate the various impacts.

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[1] In the case of shopping centers, data was collected in the format available. In some cases, shopping centers may have been recorded as one establishment with the total square footage listed. In other cases, only individual spaces over 5,000 square feet were included in the updated database.

Each team was also asked to consider the relationship between their policy area and sustainable development. Finally, they were asked to identify best practices and make policy recommendations that maximize positive impacts while minimizing negative impacts of retail development.

Study Limitations

It is important to take caution when comparing the data presented in this study to the 2000 study prepared by the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission. The retail inventory conducted for this study focused on a limited number of retail establishments (those 5,000 square feet or greater providing shopping or convenience goods), while the original study included a comprehensive inventory of retail space. In addition, the time constraints associated with a 16-week class project also placed some limits on the amount of information that could be gathered on new and proposed retail development in the region. Students collected as much information as possible within the allowable time frame.

The value of this study lies in its ability to document emerging trends in retail development. Much has changed since the original study was completed in 2000 (much of the data collection occurred in the late 1990s). This study provides an opportunity to see what changes are occurring in the region and explores the implications of these changes. It also offers a fresh look at best practices and policy prescriptions for sustainable retail development.