

HOW CAN SPECIAL DISTRICTS SURVIVE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT?

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Regionalization, in simple terms, may be described as seeking to establish a balance between the activities of man and the environment in a prescribed bioregion through holistic planning. Problems such as air or water pollution, disposal of solid waste, or depletion of natural resources would be remediated within the region without damage to the environment. A tall order!

To answer the question posed by the title, I might be somewhat introspective to start. In our present socio-political climate, there are two compelling forces in my work life: The need for our mosquito control efforts to be effective in spite of growing concern about the environment and the need to accomplish the job in spite of an enormous fiscal crisis.

At the Conference on Economics in December, I heard a number of speakers present information to then President-Elect Clinton and Vice President-Elect Gore that indicated a growing vision that it is essential to strike a balance between man and the environment. Lilia Clement, one of the speakers, captured the vision well when she implored:

"The future of America is people, machines and the environment working together without doing each other harm."

The second force that is acting on me is the state budget crisis. This is a particularly difficult problem since the state has taken the approach that they will simply shift the financial burden to local government rather than make structural or systemic changes to fix the problem. It leads me to three questions:

1. Why are they not fixing the budget problems?

2. Why are they diverting our attention to regionalization?
3. Are the two issues connected in some deep way?

EXPLORING OUR CRISES BY WAY OF QUESTIONS

In the form of questions, I would like to take a fast journey through our world of non-regionalized urban sprawl. The questions are not to be answered here but are to be seen as a way to explore the problem.

Why in our high-technology world do we have to work harder and harder, usually both family members, to just maintain our standard of living?

Why do our children have to work even harder than we to educate themselves; and, yet, they will probably not reach our standard of living?

Why does greater and greater effort against illegal drugs seem to have no effect?

Why, in spite of decades of social aid, has poverty persisted and grown in our nation?

Why, in a society with economic, educational and individual freedoms, do we fill the prisons to overflowing with our citizens?

How is it that the great freeways in Los Angeles create traffic flows averaging 35 miles per hour.

Why is greater and greater effort in schools producing less competent employees?

Why do so many workers hate their job?

Why do so many students hate school?

Why is the worst day fishing better than the best day working?

Why do most of the workers in our society feel under-employed?

Why do we have to watch 5½ hours of TV a day?

Do we really need mint flavored dental floss?

Do we really need virtual reality skiing?

Why doesn't your doctor listen to you?

Why doesn't your check-out clerk at the supermarket listen to you?

Why doesn't your son, daughter, wife or husband listen to you?

Why don't your employees or students listen to you?

Have you listened to your own internal dialogue lately?

Do those questions tend to make you think something might be wrong? The first few questions pointed out problems that will not go away; anomalies of our system. The other questions explore a kind of fragmentation and sense of meaninglessness in our lives.

Take for instance the problem of poverty. We might listen to an economist and he might say, "Stoke the economic fires. Create demand. Jobs will follow." And what if they don't? We might listen to a sociologist and he might say, "Help the unemployed and poor". But perhaps the approach would build in disincentives to work and thereby create helplessness and paralysis. We seem to attack the problems with a limited view.

I catch myself trying to be blind to poverty on the streets. Lawrence Kasdan in the movie "Grand Canyon" has Actress Mary McDonnell speak about

this issue in her role as a housewife in Los Angeles:

"The world doesn't make any sense to me any more. There are babies lying around in the streets. There are people living in boxes. There are people ready to shoot you if you look at them. And we are getting use to it. The world is nuts. It makes me wonder about all the choices we make."

A question from the audience: How did we get in this mess?

I believe Fritjof Capra, author of the "Turning Point" which became the basis for the movie "Mind Walk", can help us answer that. He says we are in a crisis of perception. The unique perceptions of a community of humans are acquired in parallel with language. Jared Diamond found an aboriginal tribe in New Guinea who were able to identify a phenomenal number of birds in their environment. You can bet it was linked with their survival. Our cognitive processes have been fashioned over the hundreds of thousands of years as hunter-gathers to acquire skilled perceptions for survival in a particular environment. The perceptions of western man, according to Capra, have been fashioned by the Cartesian/Newtonian view. These powerful thinkers of the 17th Century created a lens through which the western world still views their world. It creates the metaphor of the machine to represent nature and the universe. It is a reductionistic, analytic method that seeks to isolate to understand. It has been extremely powerful; resulting in industrialization and tremendous scientific and technical achievements. But, it also creates fragmented thought and fragmented actions, both in things and in our relationships.

PARADIGM WARS

Let me give you an example of the fragmentation that the Cartesian view creates. Figure 1 shows how the disciplines of medical entomology and wildlife biology have separated under the influence of our Cartesian view. The result is that we are over-specialized. We break up a holistic system (a wetland) and divide the responsibility of mosquito control and wildlife management to scientific communities with narrow perspectives. The result is "paradigm wars" that reduce the likelihood of creative, holistic solutions to wetland problems.

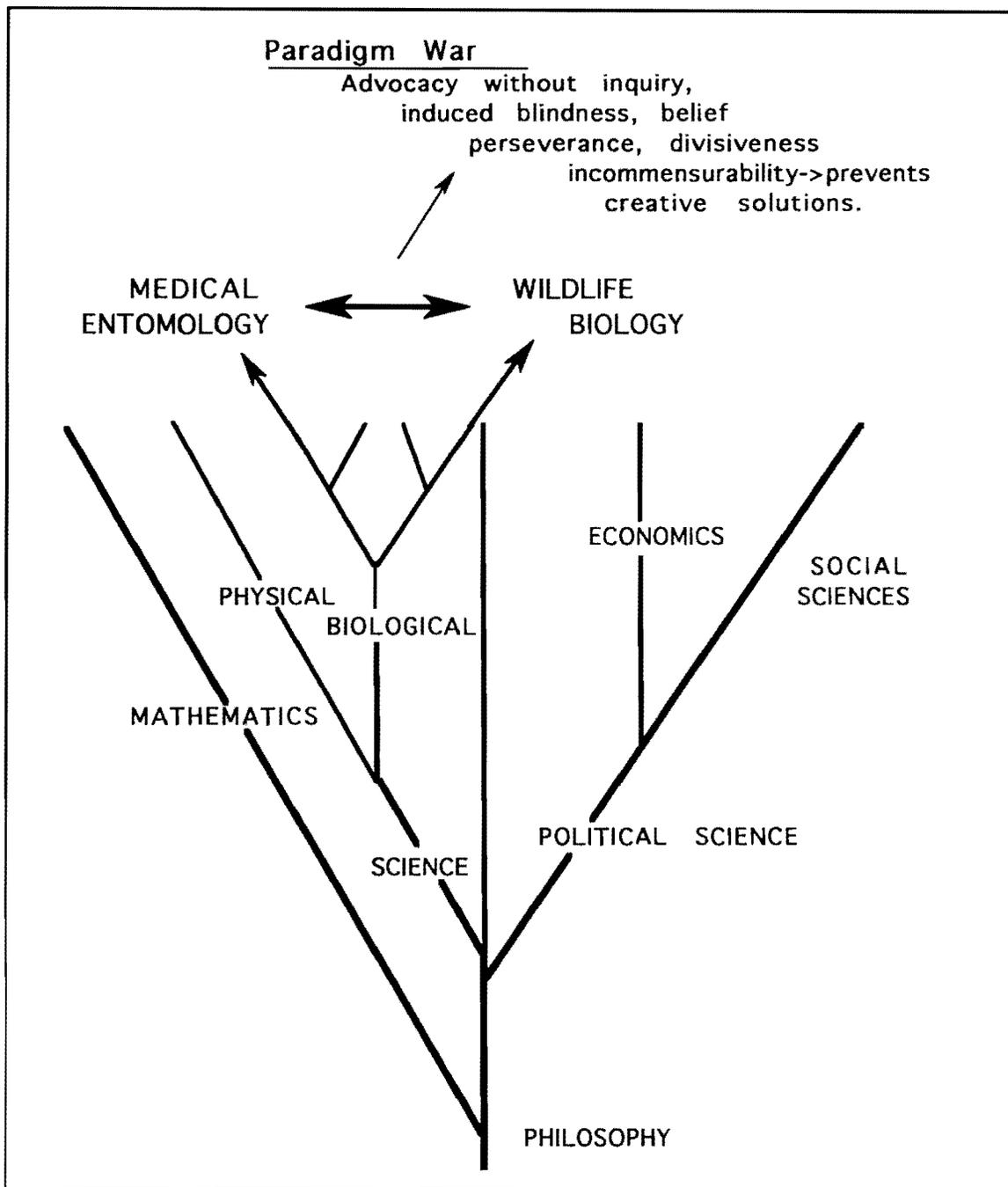


Figure 1. The branching of disciplines illustrating the roots of Paradigm Wars (branching is illustrative only).

These kind of inefficiencies are played out in our socio-economic system a thousand times and create a tremendous burden of cost to the citizens.

Another question from the audience: How do we behave in this fragmented system that reinforces the problem?

There are probably many ways. I can only take a narrow slice, but one serious problem is the way we foster fragmentation through our interpersonal communications. I want to show you a depiction of how we might have acted prior to the time of Descartes and Newton. This is a video of the movie "Dances With Wolves". This scene is where

members of the Indian tribe are in dialogue. Note that all of the males in the tribe were able to surface their ideas to be heard by all before a serious decision was made. They were strategizing and learning together through dialogue. The individuals were connected.

Today, in our fragmented world, it is much different. This scene is from a Lawrence Kasdan's movie called "Grand Canyon". It depicts a person who takes unilateral control of a situation and maintains control through his behavior strategies. This behavior is described by Chris Argyris (1985) as Model I behavior. It is operated in the service of gaining control. In our hierarchical society it is rampant. The action strategies are to seek to be in unilateral control; win, don't lose; and avoid creating negative feelings.

This kind of behavior limits individual and organizational learning as well as creating an array of individual and organizational defenses that are designed to combat it. As a result, the feelings of individuals being disconnected are reinforced in our organizations and society.

Another question from the audience: How can we change it?

Behavioral change that is common in a socio-economic system is difficult to change. It may require a two-pronged attack. Kasdan helps us understand change. His movies "The Big Chill" and "Grand Canyon" both provide wonderful insights into change. The "Big Chill" is a reunion of college friends who find they have mostly bought-in to the system. A sell-out they would not have believed of themselves when they were in college. In "Grand Canyon" a producer of violent movies is shot in the leg; transforms in the morning dawn into a new person to make responsible films, returns to the system and a few weeks later he is making violent films again. In real life we have Jerry Rubin, free speech radical, who upon entering our socio-economic system becomes the consummate "yuppie" and a new, soft Mike Ditka after his heart attack, who within months back in the NFL system reverts to the garrulous Mike Ditka we all love to hate.

A system structure reinforces some behaviors and punishes others. It pulls you toward a way of thinking and acting. The first principle of individual change may be:

**YOU CANNOT BE A SNOWFLAKE IN
A BOWL OF RICE KRISPIES**

Therefore, to create change, Kasdan may be saying we need to change the structure of the system. We can call this top-down change or outside-in change.

We also may need to take individual action to change the way we think. Everything we see around us in this room, except our flesh and blood, is the product of thinking; and, of course, it feeds back on us to reinforce our thinking. The way we think really makes a difference. If we are capable of another way of learning and thinking, we could take a more holistic view. We need to learn across the disciplines (Fig. 2). This is called integrative or transparadigm learning. I know of at least one of us, Chuck Taylor at UCLA, who is a transparadigm learner. This kind of approach could be called bottom-up or inside-out change because it starts with the individual rather than the system. As we learn across the disciplines, I believe we will not only be reconnecting our world, we will be reconnecting ourselves to the world and to each other.

A somewhat frustrated question from the audience: What does this have to do with regionalization?

The movement of the state legislature toward regionalization gives us both an opportunity to make a change in the structure of government, a system structure, and a very rare opportunity to reinforce our thinking in a holistic way. This is both top-down and bottom-up change. I see regionalization as a very rare opportunity for real change that could move us toward the vision expressed by Lilia Clemente. It is also, at least as it was proposed last year, aimed directly at a good number of the anomalies of our Cartesian view. In regionalization, we have a chance to make a real difference in the world.

Another question from the audience: Tell me what is meant by regionalization today?

A few years ago the Inner Agency Natural Areas Coordinating Committee divided the state into nine bioregions. The committee found that the main acceptable criteria to draw the regional boundaries were watershed and commute distance.

The regions, according to the staff of the commission, are not set in stone. This work may

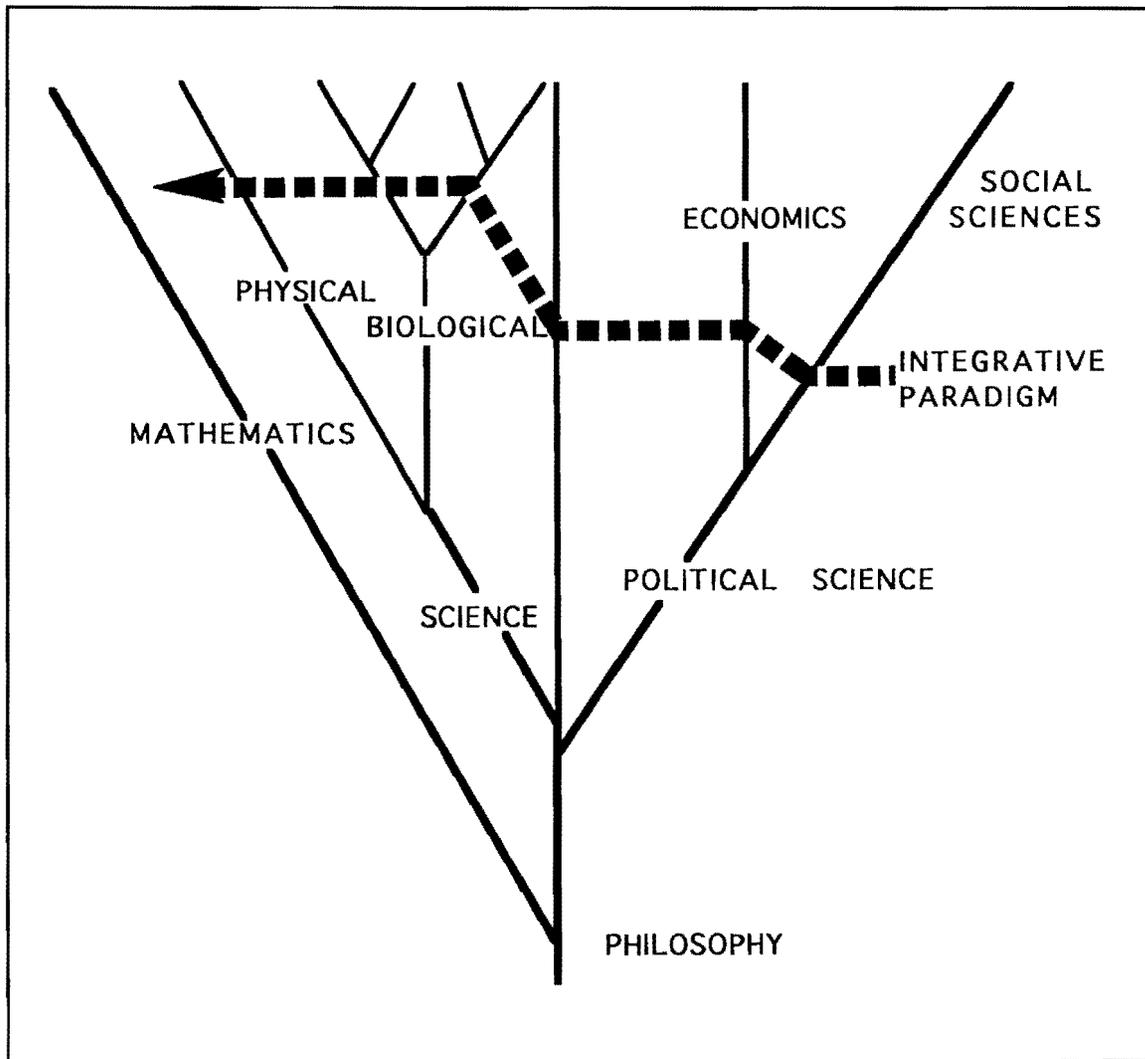


Figure 2. Learning path of integrative paradigm emphasizing connections and interrelationships. Learning path of traditional reductionistic paradigm emphasizes isolation of phenomena.

provide the starting point for much of the thinking of legislators that wish to provide legal mechanisms for regionalization.

Becky Morgan, State Senator in San Mateo, was to introduce another bill this year to regionalize the Bay Area. It is not directed at wholesale consolidations of special districts as was the regionalization movement of the 1970's reported by Marv Kramer (1971, 1973). It would consolidate air quality, transportation, and housing. Housing Association of Bay Area Governments, South Bay Air Quality Management District, and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission would be the only forced consolidations. The state would simply require environmental standards and leave it up to local

government to find a way. It should streamline legislation to allow local agencies to consolidate if it is appropriate.

Ms. Morgan also indicated that legislators Presley, Brown, and Farr are also expected to introduce another bill this year that would include the Los Angeles Basin. She feels their approach would not be much different.

Last year's report of the Bay Vision 2020 Commission can help us understand why regionalization is currently being considered in the San Francisco Bay Area. It specifies the following as some of their objectives for regionalization:

1. To preserve the special qualities of the

Bay Area that are being lost to unmanaged growth.

2. To better coordinate government at a regional level.
3. To recognize that the Bay Area is a region with respect to the environment, the economy and government.
4. To minimize the impact of increased population growth.
5. To encourage high-density housing and more open space.
6. To manage housing to reduce commute travel.

The likelihood that these bills will pass is high. The Governor, according to Senator Morgan's staff, is only lukewarm because of the fiscal crisis.

CONCLUSIONS

I believe Mosquito control agencies should seriously look at consolidation with other mosquito or vector control agencies if it will provide enough of the following benefits:

1. Economies of scale.
2. Financial stability associated with being "regional".
3. More effective voice in the planning and regulatory arena.
4. Control over cross-border mosquito problems.

I do not believe merging with larger multi-purpose government will work. It can destroy the flexibility and rapid response that is so necessary in

vector control. We have data that abounds to prove this if anyone is skeptical.

Beyond just our agencies, however, I support regionalization vigorously. I believe it is a step in the direction of holistic thinking that can help us resolve the many problems that simply won't go away: the anomalies of the Cartesian view. It can be a force to begin to re-connect the fragments in our world. The forces of regionalization give us an opportunity to make deep changes. Changes in both the way we think and in the system that reinforces our thinking.

I also tend to believe that there is a connection between regionalization and the budget crisis. I believe that non-coordinated regional action has depleted fisheries, depleted timber, degraded the natural environment, created urban sprawl, and condemned people to long, costly commutes. In our business of mosquito control, it contributes to inefficiencies by fragmenting government in artificial ways and fostering "paradigm wars". This and other costs not listed has surely been a significant drag on the economy of the state, contributing to the fiscal crisis. Regionalization and the state budget crisis may well be connected in a deep way. We may not be able to escape the fiscal crisis unless we correct the problems of fragmented government.

President Clement asked me to discuss the question: Can we survive Regionalization? My answer is in the form of another question: Can we survive without it?

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