

The New Look of Leadership

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The Big Idea

The San Diego, California region, which has benefited from its natural beauty and exceptional climate to secure continued economic growth and quality of life, is in the process of “reinventing” itself. This reinvention process has been necessitated by the challenges resulting from:

- the post cold war policies of the federal government in a community which for decades relied on defense contracting for high wage jobs and co-investment in essential components of infrastructure;
- its growing participation in the global knowledge economy based on the foundation of basic research and industry R & D spawned by the post World War II national security/defense related investments in the region; and
- the dramatic demographic and economic implications of being located on the most urban and dynamic United States international border with Tijuana, Mexico.

Understanding the “meaning” and concrete implications of these forces and developing the civic capacity and political will to shape them and manage them in ways which can benefit a large and diverse population is the fundamental regional challenge of the moment. An innovative regional collaborative, The San Diego Dialogue, is attempting to do just that.

The core idea behind The San Diego Dialogue can be understood in both “tongue-in-

cheek” terms and in deeper sociological terms. It is, as Dr. William McGill, one of its co-founders, often articulated, that the only thing worse than the “old boy” network influencing civic affairs is *no* network influencing civic affairs. The fragmented, deteriorating or, in many regions, complete absence of “social networks of concern and influence on regional affairs and the civic good” gives rise to a kind of “drift” in regional policy making and lack of consensus on regional futures which can have profoundly negative effects on the long-term prosperity and quality of life of regions such as San Diego. With the rapid shift in national and global socio-economic forces impacting regions such as San Diego, has come the decline of many of the traditional centers of economic power. In San Diego, the declining significance of military, defense contracting, real estate development, and finance has led to the disappearance of the “old” social networks of influence and community leadership which shaped the regional agenda.

What regions like San Diego require in order to refocus attention on “our” future, not just “my” future, is the creation and nurturance of new networks which think about and seek to influence regional development. These new networks, like those in the “old economy:”

- need to be anchored in the community (not government);
- need to be based on trust which comes from frequent interaction and an understanding of shared interests; and

- require access to information and resources in order to “take action” based on “informed judgments.”

These new networks, unlike the “old” ones also must be inclusive, permeable, and flexible in order to accommodate the diverse, ever-changing and uncertain forces shaping regional futures in the new global economy. The San Diego Dialogue is an example of a new kind of regional collaborative which represents an alternative to the old boy networks of yesteryear which nonetheless provides the *esprit de corps*, sense of shared interests, and mutual trust among influential citizens so necessary to moving a civic agenda forward.

What Is The San Diego Dialogue?

Founded by a small group of university, community, and media influentials in 1991 as a seminar to focus on regional issues and “reimagining” regional alternatives, The San Diego Dialogue has grown into a network of approximately 120 thoughtful citizens representing the full spectrum of interests and issues shaping the four-million population, cross-border San Diego/Tijuana region. Combined, this region represents the sixth or seventh largest economic zone in North America. The Dialogue includes no elected officials, is supported exclusively by private and foundation funds, and is administered by the University of California. Its agenda has grown out of conversations and briefings in which citizens, academics, journalists, and corporate leaders have participated as equals. They have identified priorities for further analysis, discussion, or action which staff then pursue on their behalf. This year, for example, the Dialogue, with a budget of approximately \$ 800,000, will engage in the following activities.

Plenaries

San Diego Dialogue members meet on a quarterly basis to discuss important issues affecting San Diego and the San Diego/Tijuana binational region. Past topics include airport options, the region’s Asia connection, water supply, K-12 education, law enforcement in the binational region, and the defense industry.

Planning for Prosperity Fund

The Fund was created to serve as a cross-border forum for business, academia, and government; to provide cross-border economic research to assist the public and private sectors in regional business planning, investment, and development; and to promote new cross-border institutions capable of planning and financing regional infrastructure development. More than 25 San Diego and Tijuana firms have invested \$10,000 to \$20,000 each in order to support the costs of this needed research.

Studies/Research (including Irvine, Weingart & Rockefeller Foundation-supported Projects):

- The Challenge of Welfare-to-Work in San Diego County
- Community Health Workers/Promotora Study
- Parental Involvement in Elementary Education
- Assessing the Cross-Border Region’s Ties to Asia
- The Administrative Geography of the U.S./Mexican Border
- Household Characteristics and Consumer Behavior in Metropolitan Tijuana

Forum Fronterizo

The San Diego Dialogue’s Forum *Fronterizo* is the California/Baja California region’s premier binational issues forum. The quarterly luncheon series plays a ma-

major role in bringing elected officials and business leaders from the U.S. and Mexico to address shared challenges and opportunities. It provides a neutral setting in which critical issues can be defined and discussed in a frank and sensitive manner. Some of the guest speakers at the previous luncheons have been: Janet Reno, US attorney general; Jose Angel Gurria, secretary, Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores de Mexico; and Ungsuh K. Park, president of Samsung (Korea) Economic Research Institute.

Economic Review

The Review is the premier source of information about the cross-border economies of the greater San Diego/Tijuana and Imperial County/Mexicali regions, which include San Diego, Tijuana, Tecate, Rosarito, Mexicali, and Imperial County. The Review tracks and analyzes basic measures of the regional economies and their relationship to economic development. The Review includes data on employment by sector, *maquiladoras*, new building permits, retail sales, border crossings, commercial border crossings, prices, and more. In addition, the Review has a section of special studies, in which cross-border issues are addressed, and a section of data sources and methodology, that assists readers in understanding the different sources and methodologies of different data providers. The Review was started by funds from the Planning for Prosperity Fund.

Friends of the Dialogue

Friends of the Dialogue is a program to build a larger interactive network of people concerned about the region's future and improved policy discussions. The program is designed to mix professional networking opportunities with up-to-date insider news on the binational region's latest trends, events, and personalities. One of the ben-

efits of being a Friend is a monthly digest, *San Diego Dialogue Report*, analyzing the latest trends and activities affecting the San Diego/Tijuana region.

Summing Up

In the span of only six years, The San Diego Dialogue has emerged as a powerful new "network of influence" on regional issues. This is because:

- it has captured the interest and involvement of a reputable and credible cross section of San Diego/Tijuana citizens;
- it has achieved visibility and credibility among elected officials and decision makers because its deliberative process has stimulated important research and analytical studies which fill significant knowledge gaps about regional trends and characteristics;
- it is a catalyst for civic education on regional issues because of its many forums, publications and outreach efforts; and
- it has become a place to which individuals and organizations turn when they have regional issues needing attention.

The ability to recreate social networks which are broadly representative and capable of focusing on the "common good," broadly defined, is demonstrated by the cross-border regional collaborative San Diego has built from the "bottom up." Using the university as a convener; relying on informal social interactions initially to bring together people from disparate locations and interests; beginning to build a shared vision through seminars and conversations; and eventually expanding into research, policy analyses, and a variety of region-building reports, events, and community forums represent steps in a process which can be replicated in communities across the nation. Region building in the new economy clearly

requires professional expertise, fiscal resources, and important policy initiatives. But, it also requires community support and the political will to adapt old ways and integrate new ones. The San Diego Dialogue represents an example of how to reinvent the social infrastructure (the social glue if you will), critical to effective regional collaboratives which can reenergize and refocus citizen engagement. ■

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