Whitaker, Mark. 2001. "Bioregional Hellenism: Districting the States of the World for Environmental Sustainability and Democratic Accountability," Bioregional Letter #17, in *Toward a Bioregional State*, http://www.sit.wisc.edu/~mrkdwhit/bioregion17.html.

Toward a Bioregional State:

Bioregional Letter #17

Bioregional Hellenism:

Districting the States of the World for Environmental Sustainability and Democratic Accountability

The issue of overlapping bioregional districting in states and across state borders comes up when discussing bioregionalism as district expression. This short essay discusses the rationales for why creating state-overlapping bioregional districts (that maintain and keep the same integrity of the jurisdiction of the state however) are fine and actually more beneficial than the existing arrangement of the unsustainable states we have.

First, a short discussion of why they are fine, before describing their several added benefits that only bioregional districts can achieve for the sustainable state.

AVOIDING GERRYMANDERED DISTRICTS

Bioregional districts are important because they are tangible, unlike existing gerrymandered districts. They are material inclusions of accurate risk assessment in society, and what a public policy should be based upon: an accurate feedback to state power as to their local geographically bounded interests as a group. Democracy has a geographic and proximate context in order to be representative. Without bioregional districts, how can people understand or translate their common risk to what they are doing to their own human health, their children's health, or environmental health, when it is partisan political parties (instead of the state), which typically design district allotments? When particular parties are allowed to draw the borders of their own districts in the interests of a lack of competition, a lack of voter choice, and in the interests of incumbency, what happens to representation? A bioregional district would be a more ecumenical district arrangement. Present unrepresentative districts are shaped solely on the interests of incumbency maintenance, lack of democratic choice, and reduction of representation. Districts should be based on a bioregional, more ecumenical, social inclusion than based on a political party's social exclusions and concern for its own incumbency. Any districts should be an accurate geographic representation and competitive party based representation framework. Bioregional districts provide for both geographic representation as well as competitive political party context. This is a way to 'make over' the existing interiors of unsustainable states into sustainable states.

DEMOCRATIZING RISK ASSESSMENT OF PARTICULAR CATCHMENT BASINS

Their added benefits, as hinted above, are that they integrate and democratize environmental risk assessment into the political framework, something that nothing else has the ability to do accurately. The sustainable state is based on underlying material bioregional districts, and is an accurate risk assessment framework. Any sustainable state has geographically inclusive and material bioregions, instead of unsustainable, ideologically partisan, gerrymandered incumbencies that reduce voter choice.

BORDER AREAS ARE CROSS-STATE ISSUES

Another benefit of bioregional districts in the sustainable state are that bioregional districts provide feedback from shared border areas that experience the brunt of environmental degradation in states. For instance, between the United States and Mexico, 2000 miles of pollution exists along the borderline,

from the 'maquiladora line' of businesses set up by United States companies 'in Mexico' with the aims of being as close as possible to the United States (as to ship in their manufactures, with lower labor costs, tax structures, and

environmental standards the rationale for the move-though of course the United States has a tariff structure that makes this lucrative.) Borderland peoples are different, for the commonalities they share. They experience the depredations of all the states that divide up their bioregion and have as a group the least say in the matter, even though a large part of the developmentalism of states (whether countries or actual states within countries) occurs in their border areas. As such, they should have a say in these states as a group for what kind of developmentalism they experience.

BORDER AREAS OF UNSUSTAINABLE STATES ARE TYPICALLY DRAWN AND SURVEYED TO BE 'URBAN ATTRACTOR AREAS' ('URBANOPHILIC'), BECAUSE OF THE CONTEXT OF WHERE URBANIZATION AGGLOMERATES IN THE WORLD'S GEOGRAPHY.

THIS LEADS URBANIZATION TO BE SPLIT ACROSS STATES—THOUGH THE URBAN AREAS ARE WITHIN A SINGULAR BIOREGION

In the United States, for instance, there is a statistically significant correlation of where state-border overlapping expressions of urbanization exist and which particular states in the past were surveyed using environmental 'edges' (like mountain passes, lake sides, or riversides), as 'borders.' Of course, these environmental 'edges' are where urbanization tends to agglomerate-on either side of a river for instance, or at the edge of a lakeside, or at a mountain chain, with urbanization at a particularly low pass through them. This surveying technique of the past (and the present) draws urbanization into a mostly a border area context, where it can be particularly prone to sprawl: a context that is split by political divisions and thus unable to create a general planning framework or a general political feedback. The irony is that different states do 'share' the same urbanized area, a context that leave the areas interest's rather politically marginalized and bifurcated. This has the influence of making the area very dangerous in terms of human and environmental health, because the polity of the area that would be concerned about such issues is split across two different formal political feedbacks into two different abstract states. Since environmental 'edges' are and were typically used historically for drawing abstract borders of states, and since these 'edges' are typically at the center of a bioregion since a watershed/bioregion is a catchments basin of the surrounding territory on 'both' sides of a river, for instance, bioregional based districts based on watersheds would enclose themselves around these urbanized areas. This would allow a more sustainable political feedback as their political feedback would cease to be split across different states, and they would be more able to express their border urbanization interests-in both states. The sustainable state solves the borderline urbanization context with bioregional districts and their risk assessment feedback into the state, into both states. The border bioregion context requires representation in both states, because the border is a phenomenon of divisions

instead of a particular state, and because urbanization exists in these particular contexts typically. It would certainly come up that, keeping letter #13 in mind that describes the urbanophilic contexts of many border areas of the world in more detail, that existing borders of the world are based on unsustainable states abutting each other, which marginalizes the political representation of the singular bioregions of the adjoining areas. This splitting of the bioregional representation across different states is part and parcel of why certain states are unsustainable-the state is out of phase with the bioregional voting districts of its population that it impacts.

WHAT ABOUT STATE BORDER JURISDICTION OF THESE STATE-OVERLAPPING BIOREGIONAL DISTRICTS?

Does this make the idea of bioregional districts rather un-germane to political representation, if the present unsustainable states are out of phase with the sustainable state? Actually, what should be tailored to what? The issue is what is a sustainable state looks like, in terms of structure and political process which would endemically provide a sense of checks and balances against the existing unsustainable state frameworks. Bioregional districts that politically integrate the population of border areas as bioregions, instead of splitting these bioregions, would bring a set of voting checks and balances into the unsustainable state that are lacking presently. It is the shared cross-state border area context of much urbanization in these border bioregions, that makes bioregional districts more germane to the sustainable state than ever.

Then, should the jurisdiction of the state be extended as well, or only the voting abilities of these singular border area bioregions be shared as feedback to all the states in question? Actually, a sustainable state by definition would always include any bioregionally contiguous border 'phenomena' of any state(s), because the border areas are part of the state, as they are part of all states that share the border. However, the existing jurisdiction should remain the same instead of overlapping. In other words, the whole bioregion, of which its material interests are certainly concerned, should be voting on every and each state's developmental policies if it is in a border area context where the unsustainable states divide up a particular bioregion. They should be voting on as many states developmental policies that have divided them up into a border context.

Thus the jurisdiction of the artificial border stays the same, and the unsustainable state boundaries stays as a smaller geographic subset of the larger voting framework of the sustainable state. There is nothing problematic with sustainable

bioregional districts of representation, because what is problematic is the more abstractly and unmaterially drawn states and their border urban contexts which are the unsustainable frameworks that are underwriting the expansion of environmental degradation.

In summary, since it is the point of the bioregional state framework, which materially underlies all states, to be responsible for bringing the polity as a whole into phase with sustainability, the bioregional districts should be a framework of check and balance on particular states. Thus, overlapping (rather, shared) districts in the borderlands are a way to politically shift urbanization and infrastructure and contentious frameworks of development out of borderland areas and into contiguous sustainable state frameworks. This is very affirmative for sustainability. With a widened political feedback from border areas of whatever stripe, urbanization and environmental degradation passing of the buck, which is tied to particular frameworks of cross-representation district slippage, will be bounded and can be politically checked, instead of typically throughout human history, jumping boundaries of representation and degrading border areas, and then jumping on further. We are out of jumping room. The hinterland phenomena is over. It is the moment to put away ideas about extensive borderland urbanization and urban expansion, and deal effectively with the border phenomenon, because the environmental contexts that it existed under for 10,000 are over once states have contiguously set up themselves territorially across the world.

By establishing bioregional districts as the basis for representation, we can be assured that a feedback will be generated that is un-co-opted by the leadership of a particular state based society. It will yield a sense of universalism and environmentally at least, a sense that 'we are all in this together.' It will yield a sense of intersociety cooperation of their mutually shared commons borderlands, or more pragmatically, a sense of intersociety 'don't tread on my shared bioregion' that can be felt in the politics of the state in question that is responsible for the environmental damage. It will be backed up with voting numbers of force as a checking mechanism of state based and borderland based environmental degradation.

BIOREGIONAL HELLENISM

These are the universalisms to which we should aspire. These are universalisms as a framework that protect, recognize, and give political voice to innate un-universal differences of context in the organization of sustainable states that require representation in the sustainable state, and their geographic mateial marginalization is the basis of the power frameworks of the unsustainable state and unsustainable state processes. A bioregional based system of districts can

be shared across states as a common bioregional Hellenism, so to speak, even if they have a different political jurisdictional heritage that can be maintained. Frontiers and borderlands are typically violent places of conflict between different groups, and of little representation of the people living in such zones of

intercession. A bioregional framework for borderlands as well as for all states voting frameworks would help to heal such divisions by giving these border

peoples a sense of pragmatic contigruity and contiguity with both states that they share, a sense of contigruity that is materially evident and required to address environmental degradation that is set up by the phenomenon of the border as well. The jurisdiction of the state should stay where it is; the bioregional district framework of voting should be dually shared by the bordering states, to make the border areas representative of these environmentally more sensitive areas of the world, as well as more representative democratically throughout the state itself in its internal territories.

SUMMARY

Bioregoinal based district representation is integrally important for the sustainable state because:

It adddresses how to avoid allowing districting frameworks in unsustainable states that devolve around creating a framework based on uncompetitive incumbency districts, that are connected to a lack of voter choice, and a lack of party competition-in short, a lack of representation.

Bioregional districts address a democratization of environmental risk assessment of particular developmental paths that are unrepresentative to people in a particular bioregion who will experience the risk of particular developmental policies directly.

Bioregional districts addresses the border issues of environmental degradation between states, because border areas are a shared area of abstract unsustainable states.

Bioregional districts, as a Biregional Hellenism, allow for a cross-state universal priniciple framework for democratically integrating feedback into existing unsustainable states worldwide, through institutionalizing localist bioregional variation and its importance in having a voice in sustainability and particular developmental policies of presently unsustainable states.

Overlapping bioregional districts across states are integrally important actually, because it takes into account how many borders of unsustainable states were drawn-as 'urbanophilic' contexts. Bioregional districts allow for a bounding on this urbanized area that enfranchises those interests that are materially concerned with a particular state's developmental policies-whch includes all of a state's

border areas as instrumentally connected to what a state does. Because urbanization as well as most state formation processes are out of phase with the

environment, they exist in a parasitical and self-destructive relationship with the environment. Similar to the gerrymandered political districts of various states which are organized for purposes of incumbency instead of purposes of representation, the state itself and the processes of political representation of the state are out of phase with the environment. A bioregional based district framework can bring urbanization into phase with the environment, provide a check and balance framework for the expression of border area populations (and border urban areas) while keep jurisdictions whole, provide a democratic means for risk assessment throughout unsustainable states through providing a way of drawing districts that represents material human health and environmental concerns, instead of incumbency and unrepresentative, uncompetitive districts that leave little voter choice.

Image One:

Shared Watersheds between the States of Iowa and Wisonsin, in green:

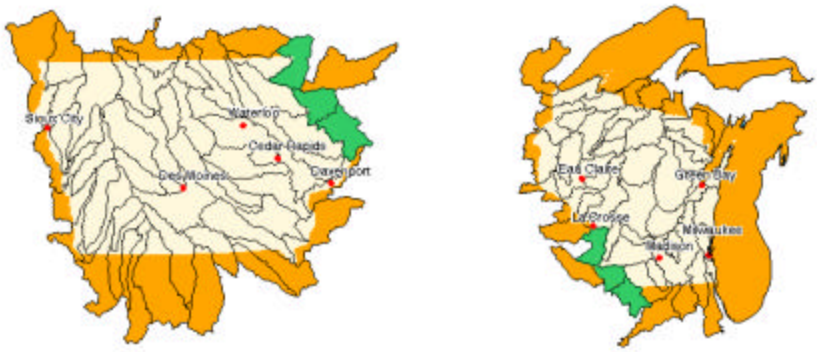
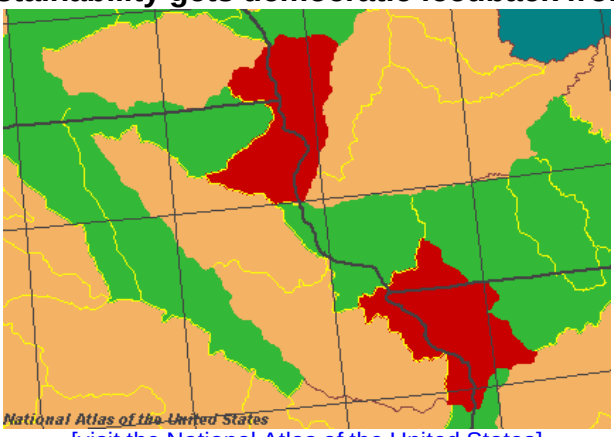


Image Two:

Voters Against Unsustainability,
Democratic Feedback Against Unsustainable Development:
Shared Single Watershed Districts in Two States (in Green);
Shared Single Watershed Districts in Three States (in Red)

(for the red: WI, IA, & MN unsustainability gets democratic feedback from the upper one;
WI, IA, & IL unsustainability gets democratic feedback from the lower one.)



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Work toward sustainability:
bioregional voting districts
that reflect your experience of health and environmental risk