

Land Use Policy and Environmental Culture: Case Studies from California

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Abstract

Some counties along California's San Francisco Bay exhibit protective conservation-oriented land use policies. Other counties along the southern coast have growth-oriented policies with less habitat regulation, while inland and rural counties are the least protective. Existing land use theories focus on political, economic, and institutional variables which cannot explain the difference between California's urban coastal counties. I apply the concept of discursive opportunity structures to land use theory to explain the role of local environmental culture. Counties select conservation-oriented policies when the discursive opportunity structure privileges discourse about natural systems, intrinsic ecosystem value, and the normalization of governmental regulation. Counties select growth-oriented policies when the discursive opportunity structure favors private property rights, private responsibility for environmentalism, and practical human-centered environmental concerns. Identifying these cultural structures both solves the puzzle of differential policy regimes and amends land use theory.

Introduction

Places vary to the extent they protect environmental integrity. Contra Costa, Marin and Santa Cruz Counties regulate habitat more extensively than required by federal and state law, protect large amounts of open conservation land, and limit development. Los Angeles, San Diego, and Orange Counties have only minor habitat and regulation, protect some open space, and encourage rapid development. Still others, including Madera and Imperial Counties promote extraction of resources and have minimal open space or habitat regulation. I call these distinct policy regimes conservation environmentalism, pro-growth environmentalism, and laissez-faire land use policy, respectively (See figure 3 in methodology section). How can we explain these differences in environmental land use policies?

Local environmental policy allows exploration of an open question: whether environmental culture matters in land use policy. Environmental culture consists of highly contested beliefs about what we should value, and how much it should be valued (Fourcade, 2011; Hay, 2002). We know that environmental concern varies across places (Hamilton, Colocousis and Duncan, 2010), including across California counties (Press, 2002). It also has evolved over time (Kempton, Boster and Hartley, 1995; Milbrath, 1984). Researchers have not yet connected this cultural variation to disparate local policy regimes.

Land use in cities and counties is often been explained as a result of political economy with little emphasis on values, beliefs and culture. Growth control has been explained as resulting from pressure from individuals or private interest groups (Glickfeld and Levine, 1992; DeLeon, 1992; Frieden, 1979), political institutions (Lubell, Feiock, and Ramirez, 2005; Ramirez De La Cruz 2009), elite actors following rational or personalistic visions (Lewis and Neiman, 2005) or the economy (Warner and Molotch, 1995; Lee, 2009). While values matter to these theories as beliefs that motivate actors, they are exogenous to the models.

However, small-sample qualitative studies that look at local environmental policies in depth suggest that culture matters in some cases. O'Neill, Rudel and McDermott found that when pro-growth forces are weak, municipal environmental policy can come from the unique local "cultural landscape" (O'Neill, Rudel and McDermott, 2011). They describe how residents can develop collective stories about landscapes, their histories and appropriate land uses, creating narratives that produce consensus over environmentalist policies. This is consistent with qualitative case studies of land use struggles that portray actors as engaged in battle over environmental and economic values (Helvarg, 1994; Walker and Fortmann, 2003).

I hypothesize that environmental culture matters as discursive opportunity structures. Counties select strong environmental policies when the local discourse privileges arguments about the value of plant and animal life, the importance of systemic protection, and that government should take steps to limit growth. Counties select weak environmental policies when the local discourse privileges private sovereignty over property, normalizes growth, expects private actors to take responsibility for conservation, and understands land as a productive resource. I argue that this discourse varies systematically and sets locally bounded hegemonic cultural positions in which both environmentalists and pro-growth participants craft arguments with the same discursive tools. This argument advances social science in three ways: by reconciling symbolic power with conflict theories of land use through the concept of discursive opportunity structure, and by bringing showing how environmental culture matters in land use politics.

Literature Review

While my study is novel in focusing on comprehensive environmental land-use policy, growth and development has long been studied. As in other realms of local governance, versions of the power-elite theory and pluralism compete in the theoretical landscape. That is, these two theories share an understanding of local power as controlled by interconnected elites who are relatively insulated from citizens, much as in C. Wright Mills theory. As I will show, neither can fully explain environmental policy.

Long influential in land-use is Harvey Molotch's growth machine theory which posits that cities are driven to grow by ambitious local elites trying to accumulate wealth (Molotch, 1976; Logan and Molotch, 2007, Jonas and Wilson 1999). Business leaders, land investors, developers and utilities all profit from the urban growth and they expect growth even when residents foot the bill for infrastructure and suffer reduced quality of life. Los Angeles in the early 20th century is the go-to growth machine example, as the local economy was fueled by speculation, acquisition and land development that produced a sprawling metropolis beset with social, environmental, and fiscal problems (Logan and Molotch 2007; Fulton, 1997). Since its initial formation, the Growth Machine theory has struggled to explain why some cities reject growth. Some have argued that growth control doesn't significantly slow growth (Logan and Zhou, 1989), or is mostly symbolic, short-term, and sporadically applied (Warner and Molotch, 1995).

Similarly, the urban regime theory posits that cities develop ruling coalitions or "urban regimes" that allow relatively powerless local actors to partner with resource laden non-governmental actors to accomplish changes (Stone, 1989; 1993, 2006). Most often, localities are ruled by elected officials in relatively stable alliances with pro-growth private actors. The political process only matters when it can change the composition of governing coalitions, as

once elected politicians are relatively unaccountable to voters. While regimes are classically pro-growth and dominated by business interests, slow-growth regimes with homeowner and environmental groups at the center are possible. DeLeon applied this concept to leftist cities in the San Francisco Bay area, arguing that progressive interests forged ruling coalitions able to adopt progressive policies, including environmental protections (DeLeon, 1991).

Neither theory has been fruitfully employed in comparative environmental research. The growth machine theory predicts identical structural pressures for growth in any locality, and cannot explain why some places thwart growth through environmental protection. The concept of pro-growth or progressive regimes is can better differentiate, but it is difficult to apply in practice because the clearest measure of regime performance in voting record. If a board of supervisors votes for an environmental policy, then we might have an environmentalist regime, but what if it also approves a new industrial development? Defining regimes based on policy choices is both difficult and logically challenging since policy choices are what we try to explain. Another problem is that neither provides a role for citizens, either through social movements or political participation. The theories cannot account for observed correlation between environmental values and policies.

In response to the limitations of elite theories, researchers have returned to the pluralist tradition established by Dahl in his classic study of New Haven, Connecticut (Dahl, 1961). Dahl focuses on the outcomes of political processes, with politicians beholden to citizen-voters and shielded from undue business pressure. Different policy domains are relatively distinct and regimes or coalitions are unlikely, while citizens have equal participatory potential and are conscious of their own interests (See McFarland, 2007). Armed with these assumptions, some researchers have argued that slowing growth can be a rational response of citizens acting on their own best interests, as when landowners slow growth to protect quality of life and property value (Glickfeld and Levine, 1992). Other research weighs the balance of different pro-growth and slow-growth interest groups and their ability to influence municipal governments (Ramírez de la Cruz, 2009).

Others have argued that city government is more like a “contingent trusteeship” (Lewis and Neiman 2009). Using survey data from California cities, they argue that a cities make choices about pursuing particular types of growth not because of political pressure from business or interest groups, but because of “reasoned response[s from elected officials] to community conditions” (163), often in order to balance the needs of the city, or to achieve a common “vision” for the city. Politicians steer cities toward becoming business development centers, residential enclaves, or tourism and recreation centers. While interest groups and fiscal stress are sometimes involved, Lewis and Neiman argue that they do not work in the ways other theories describe. Interest groups can “influence and set bounds for city growth choices” (168) but pro-growth groups, or high socio-economic status doesn't strongly correlate with pro or anti-growth growth policies as regime theory predicts.

Lewis and Neiman specifically address environmental policies. They argue that city government usually tries to balance the wishes of both pro and anti-growth interests in order to keep the best interests of their city at the fore: “A trusteeship perspective suggests that local government will neither kowtow to development pressures nor seek to evade growth but rather will aim for the long-term advancement of the city, given its particular economic position in the metropolitan area, its land and labor market resources, and its infrastructure capacity and other constraints” (Lewis and Neiman, 2009: 159). As evidence they show that most studies showing

that while some cities have at times slowed growth (Palo Alto and Marin County), very few localities have had long term population stability (156). The massive growth of California has been shared by most cities including those that at times fight against increased residential density or growth.

The most rigorous comparative county-level study of environmental policy is a 2002 open space study by Daniel Press, which also assumes the pluralist perspective. Open space is a compelling measure because while local policy changes over time land trusts are permanent. Combining purchases by cities, counties, special districts, and deals brokered by local governments to give land to the State Park system and land trusts between 1920 and 2000, Press tallied 1.2 million acres of protected land (2002: 15).¹ Excluded from this data are agricultural easements, greenbelts, and other open space protected by zoning. The data shows significant variation between counties in how this land is dispersed. In absolute acreage, Los Angeles, Kern and Humboldt top the list, with most developed coastal counties near the top and a long tail of northern or eastern counties with very little acreage (16). As an index of acreage and population, San Mateo and Marin hold the top spots (17), and the general pattern is that urban and coastal communities have the most protected acreage (59).

To explain this variation Press develops what he calls a policy capacity model (Press, 1998; 2002). He argues that for communities to broker open space land deals requires highly visible land issues, environmental support from the public, commitment to environmental policies from elites, and high technical, administrative and fiscal capacity (Press, 2002: 27-28).² Several combinations of these variables reported in regression models have an R^2 of around 0.75, though the model problematically elides the distinction between land established at the behest of the local conservationists and land protected under the gun of the Federal Endangered Species Act.³

These pluralist arguments are useful for establishing a connection between local environmental beliefs and policy, but they are silent about the influence of industry and pro-growth forces in shaping the very interests of citizens, particularly in counties that rely heavily on extractive industries. They also cannot satisfactorily explain a puzzle in environmental policy outcomes: why do Southern California's counties have pro-growth policy regimes, while San Francisco Bay area counties are oriented towards conservation?

¹Because these land trusts come from such a long time frame, Press accounts for changing context. He identifies three periods, the top-down period from 1900-1960 when elite government actors used funds to create open space; a slow growth era in 1960-1970 where ample funds were available for some communities to protect open space; and the modern period after California's 1978 proposition 13 cut the availability of funds to environmental movements and shifted the balance back toward growth (Press, 2002: 32-53).

²The visibility of land issues is measured by the degree of development, and the amount of hillsides and rivers, which Press assumes are more locally visible. Community support is measured by the citizen ballot-box voting record, two surveys, and a count of the number of local non-profits and non-governmental, which problematically includes the number of individual land trusts in each county. Administrative capacity is measured mostly by the sophistication of the planning department in each county.

³This will be discussed in further detail in the dissertation. One major problem with land trust data is that counties with the most residential sprawl like Los Angeles and San Diego have many land trusts. The Endangered Species Act is triggered by environmental degradation and sprawl, and Federal and State agencies impose open space requirements in response. The multi-species habitat protection plans increasingly popular since the late 1990s are deals between the state and local growth interests where a price is extracted for the right to further develop privately owned property. Another problem is that some counties rely on strict growth management policies which do not require land trusts to effectively preserve open space. For these reasons it is important to consider land trusts as a single component of a broader environmental policy regime.

According to pluralist theories, we would expect Southern California to be less supportive of environmentalism than the San Francisco Bay. To test this, I update and reconstruct the data from the Press study, identifying 33 statewide environmental policy referendums and initiatives presented to California voters between 1990 and 2011. When averaged and grouped into intervals, it shows that the San Francisco Bay area and Coastal Southern California largely supports environmentalist measures and initiatives while northern, inland, and rural counties do not favor environmental regulation. This is consistent with earlier research (Press, 2002: 98). However, it is also clear that while conservation environmentalist counties have slightly higher support for environmental measures, Los Angeles, San Diego and Ventura counties also support statewide environmental measures. See figure 1 for spatial representation.

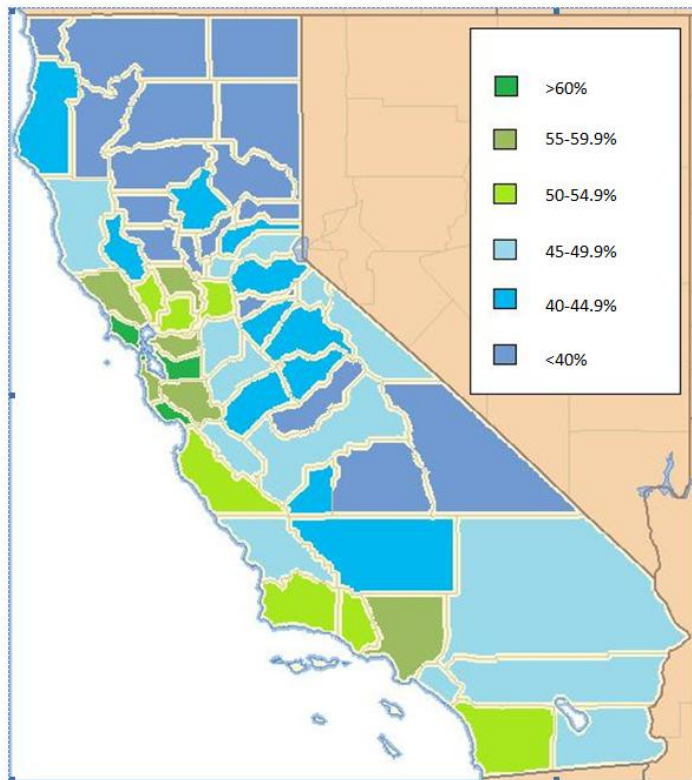


Figure 1: Spatial distribution of average percentage of voters casting pro-environment votes on 33 statewide environmental measures between 1990 and 2011

Instead I propose to look more closely at local environmental culture and what distinguishes the two regions. I retain conflict theorist insight into the importance of local landed elites and their influence on policy outcomes, but theorize that this influence works through unique local culture and discourse.

This avenue of research is supported by growth machine theorists. In a 20-year retrospective, Jonas and Wilson argue, “Molotch’s discussion of discourse and ideology can be seen as superficial insofar as it ignores a much deeper process: the power of machine language to shape everyday social life that enables growth discourses to gain normalcy” (1999: 8). Theorists addressing this deficiency have proposed that cities can have distinct “regimes of representation,” or collective understandings of the city (Short, 1999).

Or in another example, O'Neill, Rudel and McDermott argue that in order to account for municipalities that take truly environmental actions, the growth machine must consider the role of local culture (2011). Some rare cities after all, set up land trust accounts to purchase and transfer land from the private sphere to conservation uses, and this is inconsistent with private interest. To explain this difference they posit that different "cultural landscapes" or community consensus about "the land as used, envisioned, and physically remade by a particular group of people at a particular time" (2011: 113). The authors reconcile their theory with the political economy theories:

"Therefore, for most towns and cities in the United States at present, political economic theories still provide the most parsimonious explanation. We need to know little about the cultural landscapes of such municipalities if we aim to predict the broad outline of their development policies. On the other hand, the cultural landscape concept can help if we aim to explain why people confronting the existing physical features of their locality work to create a particular form of development to yield a particular type of landscape. It can help in analyzing towns where people strongly disagree about which land use policies to enact or towns that change their development policies. And for lower-income towns with few resources to sustain campaigns for growth management –which political economy theories predict will accept or favor growth- we argue that it is only by understanding how residents and officials engage their landscape and envision its past and future that we can understand why they resist the incentives to build."

They do not explain in what circumstances citizens recognize and act on the cultural landscape, or the precise mechanisms through which this cultural landscape is translated into environmental policy.

If this is true, it helps make sense of other detailed studies of county planning that give cultural explanations for local government policy. Studying Nevada County California, Walker and Fortmann (2003) demonstrate how in a time of transition, different environmental conceptions of the natural landscape were responsible for a heated struggle over environmental policy. Residents who had recently moved to the small rural county from larger cities believed that the aesthetic value of the landscape was a crucial resource to protect for drawing in new business, and providing a refuge from the city life (2003: 472). Meanwhile ranchers and farmers descended from miners and foresters still saw the land as a source of production for their livelihood. As the mining and forestry industries declined, subdividing and developing land was a way to carry on using the land for their income. Backed by national resource extraction industry they organized around property rights and the cultural trope of human domination over nature, and eventually defeated the environmentalists in 2003. Thus, Walker and Fortmann see the power to set environmental policy as determined by the interplay of culture and local economics.

Even without overt cultural clashes, discourse can help explain how environmentalism is co-opted by industry. Lee points out that Logan and Molotch recognized that the tendency toward growth could be countered at any specific point by strong coalitions armed with place-based cultural politics (Lee, 2009). She demonstrates how pro-growth developers in South Carolina are also able to co-opt progressive identities by borrowing from the conservation language and creating policies which look green on their surface but fail to enact strict controls. While Lee's sample is small, it illustrates how in some conditions, specific industries invested in

local politics can co-opt grassroots insurgency through discursive tactics that lead to toothless policies.

Together these studies suggest that it can be fruitful to understand how local culture effects land use decision making. They do not provide a mechanism to connect economic structures, culture, and policy outcomes. I remedy this shortcoming through arguing that there is a distinct role for cultural beliefs throughout the political process. Particularly in California, CEQA mandates that local government and citizens openly debate environmental decisions.⁴ In this institutional space, local environmental cultures form in dialog between citizens and entrenched economic interests. This environmentalism is normalized in county institutions and pervades the political process, constraining participants to particular discourses that seem politically palatable.

Here I apply the concept of “discursive opportunity structure” as formulated in the social movement literature (Ferree, 2003). Ferree compares abortion discourse in the United States and Germany between 1970 and 1994 to determine which activist frames are more successful across countries and time by assessing which frames succeed in being reproduced and legitimated in newspaper articles. Understanding how journalists reproduce and evaluate protest framing depends on the concept of resonance. Frames better convince journalists when they resonate more strongly. Resonance depends on how well the interpretive package (frame) fits into the discursive opportunity structure, or the “institutionally anchored ways of thinking that provide a gradient of relative political acceptability to specific packages of ideas (2003: 309). As Ferree describes it,

“All discursive opportunity structures are inherently selective, such that openings for ideas taking certain directions also are obstacles to other ways of thinking about a problem. When movements seek the advantages resonance offers they also accept political costs, particularly in marginalizing alternative frames, the speakers who offer them, and the constituencies whose concerns they express.”

I apply this concept to the arena of local policy making responsible for environmental policy regimes and argue that participants in local decision making also select frames that match “local openings” and accept the political costs of forgoing other arguments.

This follows a tradition of increasingly more rigorous theoretical speculation on what constitutes hegemony that extends from Gramsci’s classic argument that revolution requires a cultural war of position (1978) to Snow and Benford’s explanation of how social movements attempt to select arguments or frames that resonate with citizens and decision-makers (1988). Steinberg argues this discursive focus assumes a symbolic element of power or a “discursive hegemony” in which “ideology is created and structured through ongoing communication” with power-holders able to channel, dominate, or silence some types of discourse (Steinberg, 1999: 745-746). More recently scholars have drawn from this concept to understand policy outcomes, as the discursive influences on welfare policies (Steenland, 2006), or the cultural contexts which allow advocacy groups to craft winning policies (Martin, 2010).

⁴ Institutionally they contribute to decision making in different ways: local government selects policy for debate by setting the agenda of the Board of Supervisors and other state bureaucracies, including at times the County Planning Department and water organizations. Citizens in California can also select policy choices for debate through gaining signatures for local initiatives, disrupting the normal development process and forcing debate, or occasionally through their participation in the planning process.

The discursive opportunity structure makes sense of local policy selections. Planning Commission meetings and Board of Supervisor meetings are highly choreographed public procedures with both political opportunity structures (the institutional features which confer certain advantages to particular participants), and discursive opportunity structures, both which are necessary to understand policy. Since the political opportunity structure and the institutional features of the county-level policy are constant, the discursive mechanism is necessary to explain divergent environmental policies (See figure 2).

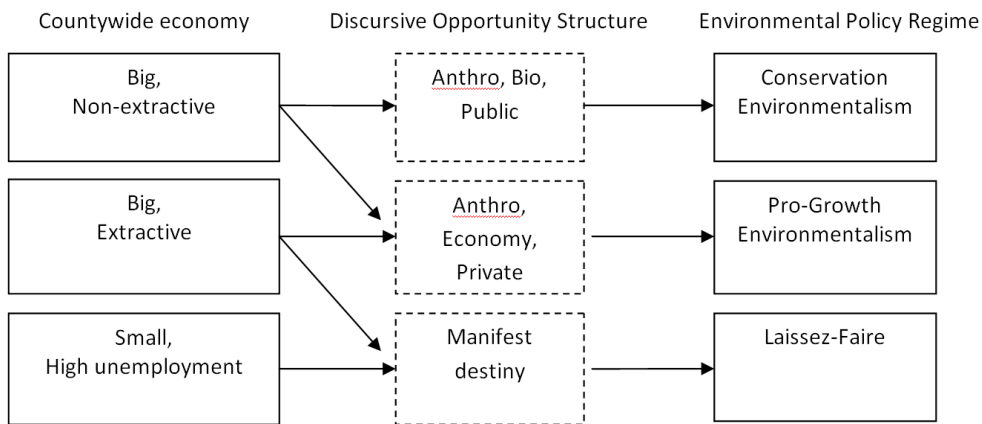


Figure 2: Proposed model for local environmental policy regimes

The model above has three components: the economic profile of the county, the discursive opportunity structure in the political field, and the environmental policy regime. The discursive opportunity structure is expected to depend on conditions set by the local economic structure. Observing jobs data from 2009, I’ve developed three economic profiles that correlate with discourse and outcomes. Economies have been judged “big” if they have more than 100,000 jobs (in nearly all cases these are counties with more than 200,000 residents). They are judged extractive if more than 5% of jobs are in extractive land-based industries such as agriculture, forestry or mining.⁵

Based on this model, having a large economy that is not dependent on extractive industries is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the most environmentally supportive discursive opportunity structure and policy outcomes. Some counties in this category take this path; others have less environmentalist discourse and a pro-growth environmental policy regime. The second type of economy, counties with many jobs and large reliance on extractive industries, is similarly limited to a choice between the two less environmentalist discursive structures and the corresponding pro-growth or laissez-faire policy regimes. When the local economy is small depends on land use, I suspect the discursive opportunities favor economy-oriented decisions

⁵ The relative structure of local industry can be examined through employment and GDP data. The Bureau of Economic Analysis publishes GDP by Metro Area which shows the share of GDP provided by 73 categories of economic activity. While “metro area” sometimes groups counties together into larger regional units, boundaries are delineated by county, making it convenient for this study. A better measure to disaggregate metropolitan area industry, employment data by industry is available at the county level. This can be compared to regional GDP in order to estimate GDP per county. Other data expected to be useful include land value, average income, poverty rate, voter affiliation, campaign finance records, and political forces and leadership. Much of this information is available at the county-level through the California Department of Finance Statistical Abstract.

over environmental ones, leading to the laissez-faire policy regime. In this way the discursive opportunity structure is a mechanism through which the interests of citizens factor into policy choices. Policy decisions are ultimately made by the officials or citizens tasked to the job: the Board of Supervisors, other government agencies, or voters but they are constrained by the logic of the local discourse which can make a policy palatable or understandable even when it is poorly aligned with environmental values.

As an example of a discursive opportunity structure, Marin County has a large economy but very few jobs in extractive industries. As will be shown below, the discursive opportunity structure favors arguments about the importance of environment to humans, the systemic importance of environment, and the value inherent in the natural world. In Planning Commission and Board of Supervisor meetings, participants regularly debate growth projects and employ these arguments. While developers often prefer using the high value property for either large houses or multiple small houses, the commission regularly entertains arguments for reducing the size of the structure based on its impact to the surrounding vegetation and its impact of energy usages. This tactic is regularly employed, and the process can easily yield a reduction of footprint of 50% or more. Even developers take care to respect this taken-for-granted knowledge, explaining in depth the ways their project avoids harming these specimens. The local discursive opportunity structure limits the arguments developers care to present, and reinforces the set of decisions that has produced the conservation environmentalism policy regime.

The purpose of this article is not to prove the causal relationship modeled above, but to describe the discursive opportunity structure through three case studies. Using Marin, San Diego and Sutter Counties, I demonstrate the different types of discourse used in land use decisions, and argue that this reflects a discursive opportunity structure that limits participation and helps determine political outcomes.

Method

My sample consists of California's fifty-eight counties. Counties are a good choice because while land use decisions take place at various jurisdictional levels, counties control nearly all of the significant undeveloped land. Cities are smaller with limited open space and less opportunity to meaningfully protect ecosystems. Once the city has been built and incorporated or annexed, it is often too late. Counties are particularly important because their larger area and low build-out give them greater potential to preserve an environmental hinterland that protects water, soil, air, and wildlife. They play a critical role by determining rural development of private land, resource extraction, and open space.

While I present data from all counties when available, some information is not available or valuable in counties with irregular land patterns. San Francisco, while pro-environmentalist is a built-out city-county which bridges categories and would be more appropriate in comparison to cities. According to Press, open space is not meaningful in counties that are nearly entirely federally owned such as Alpine, Del Norte, Inyo, Mariposa, Modoc, Mono, Plumas, Sierra, Siskiyou, Trinity, and Tuolumne Counties. As Press describes it, these eleven counties "stand outside the 'normal' pattern of preservation by local agencies and organizations" (Press, 2002: 14-15). I follow this lead and eliminate open space from these county policies while still examining growth and development, and conservation.

California is a good state to study because it has been a leader in environmental policies. The environmental requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) are among the strictest in the nation and set the model for a majority of states. The citizens of California also have a reputation for strong environmental values, and therefore if environmental culture matters in land use anywhere, it should matter in California. More practically, many components of environmental policy in California have been well studied and a great deal of data is available to help build my argument.

With data from general plans, EIRs, the municipal code, and local environmental voter initiatives, I develop a more comprehensive measure of county environmental policy related to land use that draws on indicators of development, open space, and conservation.⁶ To control for statewide environmental legislation, policies are excluded when regulated under the California Coastal Commission, the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.⁷ Similarly, this study excludes state and federal programs that are administered locally, because while they are a component of the overall local protection, often with the support of local actors, government does not meaningfully choose these protections. These include wetlands as regulated by the Army Corps of Engineers or water regulation by regional organizations.

Development policy includes zoning density and the permitting process, economic incentives, and the environmental policies that regulate industry. It also includes the county-wide plan to regulate growth either through urban containment boundaries, specialized development zones, utility requirements for development, smart growth, or the absence of these efforts.

The second type of indicator is open space. CEQA requires that all counties and local governments designate in their general plan which areas which will remain open for conservation. Counties vary in their interpretation of this mandate, some creating networks of open habitat land through purchasing development rights and other maneuvers, while others point to limited recreational parkland and adjacent State or Federal parkland as sufficient. To evaluate open space I compare the acreage designated and the circumstances of this designation. Open space comes as public land trusts, private land trusts, conservation easements, multi-species conservation plans and specialized zoning districts. While in general more acreage equals greater environmental protection, it is important to pay attention to what is permitted in the open space, as some types are compatible with recreation, agriculture, timber harvest, and even low density development.

Third is environmental regulation to conserve habitats and ecosystems. These often take the form of development guidelines to preserve affected areas such as wetlands, streams, forests

⁶ CEQA requires that these documents explicitly address environment-related issues including resource conservation, open space, water and air quality and economic growth and development. While the general plan used to be criticized for being ineffective, in the past several decades, state law has increasingly tied communities to these documents (Fulton and Shigley, 2005). Because plans are generally revised every 15-20 years, and often take several years to complete, most plans have undergone revision within the past decade, making the data recent. Municipal planning documents are available in nearly all cases electronically and can be accessed from the County Planning Website and County Government websites. Regional plans are available from the website ca.gov.

⁷ In practice this means counties which adjoin the Pacific coast or the San Francisco Bay have separate zones extending variably from 100 feet to 5 miles along the waterline. These zones contain the most stringent environmental regulation, as they must meet high commission standards. For the purposes of this study, I have excluded policies that relate to the coastal zones and focused on the interior.

and grasslands. They include setbacks, no-net-loss mitigation, permitting for removal of trees or other habitat, slope restrictions, grading, and landscaping requirements. Restrictions are only significant when they exceed State and Federal law.

Using these indicators, preliminary data supports three ideal types of environmental policy regime as described in figure 3:

		Manifest Destiny	Growth-Oriented Environmentalism	Conservationist Environmentalism
Development	-Urban containment boundary	None	None	Yes
	-Development permits issued	High	High	Low
	-Zoning restrictions	None	Low	High
	-Resource Extraction	High	Low	Low
	-Smart Growth Regulation	None	Yes	Yes
Open Space	-Local public land trusts	None	Low	High
	-Private land trusts	None	High	Low
	-MSCP	None	High	Low
	-Conservation easements	None	High	High
	-Restrictive OS zoning	Low	Low	High
Conservation	-No-net-loss mitigation	No	Yes	Yes
	-Development site regulation	Low	Low	High
	-Vegetation permitting	None	Low	High

Figure 3: Environmental Policy Regimes

Several of the Counties surrounding the San Francisco Bay including Marin, Sonoma and Santa Cruz are the best examples of conservationist environmentalism policy regimes. For example, Marin County has strongly protective environmental laws that dramatically limited growth early in the county’s history, and protected significant environmental resources. Counting State and Federal land, in 2000, 48% of the city was declared open space, with a significant 9% held locally, mainly in the form of a 14,822 acre special district administered by the county and 27,510 acres in private land trusts (Press, 2002). There are also significant habitat protection overlay and regulations that pass some costs of protections on to developers. Growth has long been funneled into an urban corridor that covers a small inland portion of the county, and managed through low permits. They permitted just 161 new units in 2007, compared to the statewide county average of 2,337, and lowest of any urban county in California.

The coastal counties in Southern California, including Los Angeles, San Diego and Ventura best illustrate the growth-oriented environmental policy regime. For example, San Diego is a large urban county with a population density of 684 people per square mile, despite 45% of the acreage being designated open space. Much of this open space is state and federal land or agricultural easements. As of 2000, locally held open space is 2.68% of the area, or 77,000 acres, making it one of the larger local holders of open space. The largest amount, 30,000 acres, is held by private landowners. If any of the Multi-Species Conservation Plans proposed for the county are ever passed, this number will dramatically increase but will also stave off Federal endangered species regulators and allow further development. Growth in the county in 2007 was 1.5% with the unincorporated part of the county experiencing a high 2.1% growth. 7,445 new units were permitted, which is, per acre, over eight times the number permitted in Marin.

Finally the inland and rural counties, including Imperial, Lassen and Merced and Sutter Counties share policies from the manifest destiny policy regime. For example, Lassen County has a population density of seven people per square mile, and while it has many acres of public forests, it has less than 2000 acres in land trusts, no substantial development regulation, no biological conservation measures, and a general plan that encourages greater resource extraction.⁸

I selected Marin, San Diego, and Sutter Counties for in-depth study because they are good examples of variation in the dependent variable (conservation environmentalism, pro-growth environmentalism, and laissez faire land use, respectively), and as my theory predicts, have different local economies. Additionally, these counties recently updated their general plans, and have digital video archives of the relevant board of supervisor meetings covering the 12-month period prior to plan approval. Typically this 12-month period involved a dozen board meetings dedicated to the general plan, many of which included extensive public testimony and participation. In the urban counties this totaled approximately 30 hours of footage, while there was much less public discourse in Sutter County. The comparison provides the opportunity for high-quality, comparative data.

In coding discourse based on the reasons for environmental action, my study borrows from the environmental culture literature. The best qualitative research is a mixed-method analysis by Kempton, Boster and Hartley who categorize responses to a series of open ended questions about environment (1996). Part of their sample comes from California, making it particularly relevant. They find that environmental principles given by respondents can be categorized either as religious or spiritual, anthropocentric, or biocentric. Anthropocentric reasons are human-centered, such as the benefits people and their descendents enjoy from a better environment. Biocentric reasons are those that value non-human plant and animal life as having intrinsic value which we should respect and protect, such as arguments about animal rights (for more on this distinction see, Hay 2002; Fourcade, 2011).

My inductive approach captures a different range of reasons but remains consistent with Kempton et al. In the discourse about general plan updates, Californians rarely invoke religious or spiritual values directly, even in places where religiosity is high. While anthropocentric values are often used as discourse in the political field (nearly all arguments are formally anthropocentric in that they are human-centered reasons), biocentric values are used only in the most environmental places and then are rarely articulated clearly. On the other side of the spectrum, I've identified a number of arguments that are used in opposition to environmental regulation, which have not been identified in cultural studies of environmental discourse. In all, I identify three categories of arguments employed in favor of development, and five categories of arguments used in opposition to development (See figure 4).

What I have coded are arguments which offer principled reasons for conducting action. There were some types of arguments which, while occasionally employed, were formalistic or procedural in character. That is, many people argued simply that a property meets the legal requirements for protection or development based on policies in place. Developers often employ this type of argument, perhaps due to the implicit legal threat of litigation. In practice, this means

⁸Data from city planning documents will be supplemented with interviews with at least one urban planner with knowledge of each county. The planner will be selected by contacting each planning department and requesting an appointment with the Planning Director or another planner or staff person with knowledge of environmental policy. Interviews will be conducted by phone or in person when possible (for interview schedule, see Appendix A).

that if someone says, “this property should be developed because it has access to a water pipe, which is a legal prerequisite for development” I did not conclude that this was a principled stance on the appropriate conditions of development. Similarly, I did not include statements from speakers who did not give principled reasons for action, even if the employed other discursive or performative strategies.⁹ Another type of argument which has not been included is the argument that the people support the position of the speaker. This argument is often invoked on both sides of disputes without confirmable evidence and is not considered potentially part of an opportunity structure.

When justifiable, codes have been constructed from implicit meaning. For example, if a member of the public states that “too many people’s life savings are disappearing” as a reason for opposition to a plan, I interpret this within the context of previous speakers as a statement about the ill effects of down-zoning on property revenue. This assumption is valid because this frame is commonly used in general plan discourse, is consistent with the remainder of the speaker’s testimony.

I have categorized these frames by their content into different analytic types. The most basic categorization is whether an argument supports “more development” or “less development.” This distinction was chosen because speakers rarely announce whether their preferred action is “environmental” despite nuanced positions regarding growth. Some environmentalists wanting more growth in some places, and some conservative landowners seek to keep out some kinds of growth. The common thread that consistently divides local discourse is whether the argument is advances in support of more or less development, either generally or for a specific parcel. The second distinction is a categorization of argument types based on secondary literature. A codebook is provided in Appendix A.

Analysis is based on the method used in Ferree, 2003. I calculate the frequency with which particular frames are used, and compare this frequency across counties (See figure 4). Together with contextual evidence from the proceedings, and my analysis of the effectiveness of these arguments in causing changes to the plan, I reconstruct the discursive opportunity structures in each case.

⁹ While it might seem interesting to know the number of speakers who argue without giving reasons for positions, it is impractical to observe and use this data. Speakers fall on a continuum of how related their comments are to land use or even the general plan more broadly, with some speakers using the time to concurrent but unrelated events or topics. The frequency of this diversion seems unrelated to environmentalism or land use.

	Marin	San Diego	Sutter
Pro-Growth Discourse	49	130	19
Best use of land (Total)	32 65%	41 32%	8 42%
Highest Land Use	0 0%	3 2%	0 0%
Balance for Growth	9 18%	6 5%	0 0%
Resources are available	1 2%	5 4%	0 0%
Land not natural or worthy	2 4%	3 2%	0 0%
Growth inevitable or natural	0 0%	4 3%	0 0%
Existing need for growth	5 10%	5 4%	0 0%
No Science/Biased Science	1 2%	2 2%	4 21%
People more vulnerable than Bio	2 4%	2 2%	0 0%
Env threatens Agriculture	12 24%	11 8%	4 21%
Economic (Total)	7 14%	54 42%	1 5%
Growth for the economy	1 2%	12 9%	0 0%
Devp good for Env	3 6%	7 5%	1 5%
D-zone bad for land value/state	3 6%	29 22%	0 0%
Our fair share of growth	0 0%	2 2%	0 0%
Take from us give them	0 0%	4 3%	0 0%
Proper role of Govt (Total)	8 16%	35 27%	10 53%
Private Property	6 12%	17 13%	2 11%
Free market should decide	1 2%	5 4%	2 11%
One size fits all is bad	1 2%	13 10%	6 32%
Less Growth Discourse	175	78	10
Economic (Total)	6 3%	15 19%	4 40%
Env for State costs	0 0%	5 6%	1 10%
Less devp for prop value	0 0%	2 3%	0 0%
Env. for devlp/ business	3 2%	7 9%	2 20%
Env for Economy	3 2%	1 1%	1 10%
Proper role of Govt (Total)	10 6%	6 8%	0 0%
Prop rights: not devpmt rights	0 0%	3 4%	0 0%
Balance for Env	4 2%	3 4%	0 0%
Growth should be limited	6 3%	0 0%	0 0%
Anthropocentric (Total)	57 33%	37 47%	6 60%
To preserve Ag	8 5%	7 9%	3 30%
Natural Hazards	10 6%	12 15%	1 10%
Water Resources	17 10%	8 10%	1 10%
Quality of Life	16 9%	8 10%	1 10%
Env for our Future	6 3%	2 3%	0 0%
Systemic (Total)	41 23%	9 12%	0 0%
Env Systems	8 5%	3 4%	0 0%
Finite Natural Resources	9 5%	3 4%	0 0%
Global Warming /GG	15 9%	2 3%	0 0%
Eco Foot-print	5 3%	0 0%	0 0%
Air Quality	1 1%	2 3%	0 0%
Value in Nature (Total)	61 35%	11 14%	0 0%
Nature is connected	4 2%	0 0%	0 0%
Valuable Habitat	20 11%	5 6%	0 0%
Specific Resource	27 15%	5 6%	0 0%
Metaphor of nature as alive	7 4%	0 0%	0 0%
Devp is forever	3 2%	1 1%	0 0%
Total Discourse	224	208	29

Figure 4: Discourse in general plan updates, from one year of Board of Supervisor meetings. Percentages are given as a proportion of the pro-growth or less growth categories.

Case Study 1: Marin County

Marin County approved its General Plan update in 2007, after a multi-year process. Already one of the best protected counties in the State if not the Country, Marin had more than 85% of the land legally protected, permitting for tree removal, significant environmental overlays restricting growth, and a growth rate consistently less than 1% in the unincorporated county. The general plan update strengthened environmental protections by adding a new “Baylands Corridor” which limited what can be developed along the San Francisco Bay, while further restricting growth to specific communities closest to transportation infrastructure.

Most speakers in Marin supported less development with their comments. Argument supporting less growth accounted for 78% of the total. The majority came from three specific categories of frames: anthropocentric, systemic, and biocentric. Speakers advocating for less development were unlikely to use either economic frames or frames about the proper role of government.

The two most common anthropocentric (human-centered) reasons for less development were the water resources frame and the quality of life frame. In the first, respondents were concerned about the limited water supply and argued that we should not build because that water supply was limited. This accounted for 8% of all arguments. As one speaker put it gravely, “bottom line, if we had a drought like we did 30 years ago we aren’t going to be able to [...] cheat our way out of it. Next time we’ll have a serious problem.” They also were concerned that development would impact the quality of life they enjoy, through overuse of regional roads and traffic issues (7% of arguments).

Systemically, the most common frame was global warming, which also accounted for 7% of arguments. Many speakers in Marin are concerned about the effects of global warming, and consider their county a leader in taking actions to prevent climate change.

The category of biocentric arguments was the most common category in Marin. There are two particular discursive strategies which were extremely common in the county. The first is what I have called the specific resource frame (12% of all frames). In this argument, the respondent mentions a specific biological feature in the natural environment and offers it as evidence for why we must limit development. For example, many public speakers in Marin were concerned about allowing development near streams or creeks. One speaker urged the board to think about the vulnerability of the salmon that spawn in these streams: “They are only about an inch long; they don’t have a lot of choices. If their habitat is jeopardized, they can’t move away. If their safety is jeopardized, they can’t call the deputy! It took these cohos thousands of generations to acclimate to creek. Let’s not let them die out.” The underlying message in this testimony is that the salmon is important and should be protected. The speaker does not elaborate on whether the existence of the salmon is important to replenish our fisheries or as life forms with independent value worthy of protection. The question is left open for interpretation, but from my observations, many speakers in Marin would support a biocentric interpretation of this frame. For this reason it would be inaccurate to say that my category of “value in nature” is an explicit set of biocentric statements. Rather they are a set of frames which implicitly allow for and our strengthened by the possibility of a biocentric worldview.

Another popular frame within this category, and closely related to the previous frame, is the valuable habitat frame (9%). This is a less specific argument which does not point to a particular species, but rather the generalized existence of species and habitat which is valuable.

A particularly telling frame is an argument that is only occasionally heard in Marin (3%), but never heard in the other cases. It is the strategy to talk about nature holistically as something alive and with a consciousness of its own. For example, a member of the planning staff in supporting the development of the new Baylands Conservation Corridor argued that but “the bay is hungry and wants that land back.” That is, he is concerned that global warming causing sea-level rise is in act best understood as the San Francisco Bay reclaiming the natural world that humans have taken away. And it is interesting that the Bay is considered an entity which can be “hungry” not for food but for undeveloped land. Others describe land as a victim, as if it is a sentient but voiceless actor in the proceedings, for example, a speaker states, “undeveloped land is always the victim when we fail to make the policies and create the ordinances that solve many of our housing, transportation and other processes.”

On the other hand, speakers advocating increased development also showed a pattern. They too did not rely heavily on the economic frames, or frames about the proper role of government. While occasionally speakers invoked private property rights, they more often used frames from the best use of land category. The most common was that environmental regulation threatens agriculture (5% of discourse).

Most telling about the discursive opportunity structure in Marin is that many residents hostile to the environmental protections used language that borrowed heavily from the environmental discourse. For example, one speaker in support of a controversial assisted-living facility in the Baylands Corridor urged the board to recognize that “humans are becoming the endangered species.” The speaker knows that it is a local common sense to be concerned about endangered species, and by comparing the plight of humans to these species, attempts to capitalize on this discourse.

The discursive opportunity structure in Marin therefore is built around a series of taken for granted assumptions about environmentalism. The potential harms from water shortages and global warming are recognized publicly in meetings and are not challenged as they are elsewhere. Pro-growth advocates work their arguments around these issues rather than dispute them, because they know they will lose credibility by challenging a widely accepted discursive norm. Furthermore, the values residents seek to protect are split between anthropocentric values, such as quality of life, and biocentric values, such as the many speakers who advocated for salmon, creeks, or open space. Pro-growth speakers didn't challenge these values either, even when it would strengthen their case. Instead they focused on the need to balance human interests with environmental interests, the preexisting human needs, and the ever popular importance of protecting an agricultural way of life.

Case Study 2: San Diego County

The county of San Diego updated its general plan in 2011 after over a decade of work. While the plan was heralded by some as an environmental step forward, it down-zoned only one-fifth of parcels while up-zoning four-fifths. Earlier versions of the plan crafted by county planners had considered down-zoning as much as 60% of parcels, but this was slowly whittled away as public testimony accrued. The board did manage to channel the highest density growth into serviceable corridors, nominally pursuing a smart growth agenda.

Most speakers in San Diego supported more development rather than less, and many supporting less development were reacting to proposals to cite development in communities fearing an influx of low-income workers. Sixty-three percent or 130 pro-growth frames were

employed compared to 38% or 78 less growth frames. The main categories of frames used are the three pro-growth frames (best use of land, economic, and proper role of government) and the anthropocentric category.

Most common was the pro-growth economic category. Speakers relied most heavily on two specific frames. The first is that down-zoning would be bad for land value, by preventing landowners from selling off pieces of land for future growth (14% of all coded discourse). From the proceedings, it seemed possible that the majority of San Diego County landowners purchased land specifically with the intent of capitalizing on future growth. For example, speaker argues that his father, a small farmer, will be unfairly punished by down-zoning: “Farmers and ranchers hold their savings in their property, much as the rest of [us] use stocks and bonds.” The second type was a more general claim that growth was needed for the economy (6%). This often takes the form of a speaker urging to allow expansion of a local business.

In the best use of land category, the most common frame was that environmentalism threatens agriculture (5%). The argument is often used in combination with land value frame. A farmer from Fallbrook speaking in one meeting argued that down-zoning will mean that “property value drops and we have to give up the ranch.” Another speaker asks to exempt farms from regulation because he believes “that farming, in this day and age, has reached a state of no return, and it’s possibly not a viable alternative.” A particularly succinct example a farmer explains, “in the real world, ranchers and farmers need lines of credit for their agricultural operations. Lines of credit are better than outright loans because it loaned at simple interest. [...] I don’t care for banks. When they find your density has been down-zoned, they reduce the amount you can obtain. [...] You can never get the amount of money you need to stay in business. Developers and ag are different. Ag stays on the land.”

In the proper role of government category, private property rights was also a common frame used in San Diego (8%). For example, a board supervisor argued in opposition to down-zoning a large parcel in the back country, that the landowners are “the largest private property owners in the county, and they did not ask for anything special, they just asked to be left alone.” A property owner mirrors the sentiment about being left alone to do as he wishes with his property: “our goal is not to tell everyone what to do with their property, and we hope that they wouldn’t tell us what to do with our property.” Another speaker, a resident of Jamul, argued that he bought his property to sell part to finance his retirement. He claims this is the American Dream, and that “technology will fix the future, my property rights shouldn’t be taken away.”

There are environmentalists in San Diego County, and they were present at meetings. However, unlike Marin County they drew mostly from anthropocentric arguments. In this category, the natural hazards frame was often used against the risk of fire (6%). Speakers were understandably concerned that further development in the rural back country would increase the problem that wildfires present. For example, one speaker emphasized the human consequences of disaster, “What we need is a disaster plan. Everything we build hurts us in the future.”

That the land value and private property rights frames were effective is clear. In the final approval meeting of the plan, Supervisor Horn proceeded to go through nearly 100 special requests from speakers who had argued for an exemption due to the potential loss of land value and their private property rights. Horn, an outspoken proponent of property rights who opposes down-zoning in all cases, was the only supervisor who voted against the plan. The board granted exemptions to nearly every speaker who had presented their case.

One example of how the discursive opportunity structure limited discourse is the way land value and property rights are used counter-intuitively by speakers who oppose smart development in their communities. Instead of arguing about the value of nature or the systemic linkages in the natural world, speakers often opposed growth for its economic costs, or its potential to limit a land owner's personal right to enjoy private property. For example, one young speaker from relatively rural Alpine objected to allowing residential development on the adjacent property. There are a lot of reasons that would make sense for why high density development should be prohibited, but after waiting through countless hours of private property talk, this speaker employed his own right to enjoy his private property as justification for limiting growth. While I coded this argument as a quality of life frame, mentioning private property probably hurt the speaker's testimony. It is telling that the speaker felt that just mentioning private property rights would make the Board and audience more receptive to his message.

This discourse is different from Marin County. San Diego County exhibited more talk about the economic reasons for growth, the role of government in protecting private property and the free market, and only anthropocentric reasons for less development were common. Neither the systemic nor the value in nature categories were as common as in Marin (4% and 5% of total discourse respectively).

Case Study 3: Sutter County

Sutter County California is located just 50 miles from Sacramento, but its economy and politics are decidedly not urban. It has only 42,000 jobs and a low employment numbers. Eleven percent of jobs in the county are from extractive industries, mostly in farming. It has a very low population density at six persons per square acre. The county has the fewest environmental protections and qualifies as the laissez-faire policy regime. It has no habitat overlays, no vegetation permitting, and only 0.01% open space in land trusts (only 3% overall including state and federal land). The general plan update was approved in March of 2011, and its approval was distinct from the urban coastal counties of Marin or San Diego.

The board outsourced creation of the plan update to a private consulting firm, under strict instruction to create a plan which would do the absolute minimum required to satisfy state and federal law. The entire board was openly hostile to any environmental measures. For example, to satisfy California's new AB-32 Global Warming Solution Act consultants suggested hanging signs at loadings bays instructing truckers to turn off their trucks, and to hold seminars for farmers telling them what to feed their cows to reduce methane gasses. The board unanimously rejected this and most other measures on the grounds that they were onerous to business and that government should not make suggestions to business owners who know what is best.

Public discourse in Sutter County can be characterized as largely absent. In the course of six meetings in the year prior to plan approval, only 29 arguments were recorded, and only one public speaker showed up to comment throughout. In the final Planning Commission meeting designated to discuss the plan, not a single member of the public spoke. On the day of the plan's approval, the single speaker stood at the podium and gave this testimony:

“Property rights are the basic foundation of our constitutional government. Property rights are more than just land rights but include all our property. The United Nation's Agenda 21 flies in the face of our constitutional rights, our freedoms and our sovereignty, and as an example, Secretary of the UN Environmental Conference said, ‘Current lifestyles and consumption patterns of the middle class involving high meat intake, use of

fossil fuels, appliances, home and work air conditioning and suburban housing are not sustainable.' [...] Personally I don't want to live the UN suggested lifestyle. However we are already being told what type of car we should drive and what we should eat. The UN's vision of global society cannot succeed without controlling property rights, throughout the world including ours [sic]. In my opinion our general plan is a guide to how we should conduct ourselves and use our resources in the future. ... Have you heard the term UN Agenda 21? If you have read it can you assure the citizens of Sutter County that there are not elements of the plan that will affect our liberties and property rights?"

The speaker need not have worried, because not a single environmentalist showed up to suggest any of the United Nations plan, and the final plan did nothing to restrict property rights.

Because of the lack of discourse, there are too few cases to clearly describe the discourse. I am exploring ways to gather data to remedy this problem. Of the frames used by participants, the most common type was the pro-growth proper role of government frames, particularly the one size fits all is bad frame. This was used most often by supervisors who frequently insisted on assurances from staff and consultants that policies in the general plan were open to amendment at the Board's leisure. Or as one supervisor stated, "There are things in here I disagree with by all means. Sometimes you look at a plan like this and it's not a one size fits all, especially when someone brings a project up to this board."

The property rights frame was also present in discourse, and the Board was careful to protect them. One supervisor stated, "We were very careful not to have binding words, 'shall, will,' even ones that are even less than that. We tried to be very careful not to have them in there. Basically the word 'encourage' is one that we put in there which is much more arbitrary. Or 'promote.' That is a little stronger, but it can be pushed back on." The speaker went on to say, "None of us like our personal rights to be interfered with."

Both planners and supervisors were openly hostile to environmental science, and the no-science/biased science frame was one of the most common frames. For example, one supervisor states, "In some place in here I was reading that there was the 16 point something million of Carbon Monoxide or emission standards. I want you to get it and put it in a box so I can get it on a set of scales and weigh it. How you gonna catch a vapor. How you gonna register how many tons it is? That's a swag to me. A scientific wild *something* guess." While others on the board probably were willing to believe it is possible to scientifically measure carbon emissions, other comments showed that global warming was not widely accepted in the county. For instance, a lead consultant told the board, "We have this narrow focus because that's what the law requires, we don't want to get into this controversy of climate change, and whether it exists or not."

There was some discourse which favored less growth, often from the same supervisors who fully supported unbridled property rights. Predictably, this discourse was about the benefits of environmental action for business (the environment for development/business frame), or its uses to preserve agriculture. In many cases these frames seem to be offered more as a platitude, in defense of laissez-faire development rather than as a case of a serious objection to growth.

The discursive opportunity structure as I have described it consists of the proper role of government category, the best use of land category, and a little of the anthropocentric and economic categories. Even among the less growth discourse used, it is not a successful strategy to provide a serious environmental argument. I offer one example of how the discursive opportunity structure limits even the planners from defending certain choices in front of the Board. Supervisor Whiteaker challenged lead planner Geiger on whether the county should

require “high quality building” for new developers. He argued that the concept of high quality building was too subjective. Just like preference for colors, “you like green, and I like-” he began, but Geiger was quick to interrupt, “No, I don’t like green.” Whiteaker allowed the discussion to turn to mascot colors, but the planner had been scolded and offered no further defense for requiring high quality building, and the clause was eventually removed.

Conclusion

I have partially established that counties have different discursive patterns indicative of a discursive opportunity structure. I have tried to show that not only do speakers prefer locally popular types of arguments, but they are constrained to use these arguments even when other arguments might make more sense. I have also tried to show how speakers with diverse views strive to make their arguments fit the space of acceptable argumentation. Other evidence is from the types of arguments that might be considered extreme in some counties while acceptable in others. For example, in Marin County the metaphor of nature as alive or conscious was occasionally used and never challenged. In Sutter County, even supervisors openly challenged basic science concepts without any reply from other supervisors or planners.

The next substantive chapter in the dissertation will look more broadly across all counties in California and test whether discourse varies systematically in the expected direction; and whether it correlates with the local economic structure, as suggested in the model described above. I expect to find statewide correlation between these three types of discourse and these three types of policy outcomes.

This study suggests that to understand land use we need to understand the political struggle over the cultural values of environmentalism. Reciprocally, to understand what matters about environmental culture we should see how it is put to use when the stakes are high. If these findings can be generalized to all California counties, we would expect it to apply to other local and regional governments, including cities or other states. Since the majority of states have modeled participatory regulatory regimes after CEQA (Fulton and Shigley, 2005), outcome variation might also depend on discursive opportunity structure. Similarly, regional state and federal agencies which make significant land use decisions might also be beholden to discursive opportunity structures, though not from the same landed local participants. These arenas constitute fertile ground to apply the findings of this research to fully specify the relationship of industry to local environmental culture and its role in policy.

This research is also practical for those seeking to change environmental policy at the local level. If policies are indeed selected only when they fit local taken-for-granted assumptions, activists would do well to make those assumptions explicit, and to find ways to use their political participation to challenge the least tenable of these assumptions to wage Gramsci’s war of position in the trenches of local environmental activism.

Appendix A: Codebook

Pro-Growth Discourse: Economic

Up-zone for the Economy: This is the claim that the right action is to increase the allowable density on a parcel for the general benefit of the local economy, which is expected to benefit from the construction on the parcel, increased property value, or the economic purposes on the property.

Development is Good for the Environment: This is the argument that the subdivision and construction of a new project, through its merits in terms of mitigation, open space set-asides, or green construction, will improve the environmental value of the land. Though speakers rarely articulate the logic, it seems that undeveloped land is thought of as a liability, in that the owner could insist on a destructive use, whereas built land locks in a potentially desirable outcome. In this way, the argument assumes the naturalization of growth and the private rights of property owners.

Down-zoning is bad for land value: In this argument down-zoning is presumed to hurt land values, as property owners will not be able to sell land to developers or construct additional units themselves. Sometimes this frame is evoked with reference to landowners who have counted on the potential value of their property, and personally stand to lose if down-zoning occurs.

Pro-Growth Discourse: Proper role of government:

Private property rights: Included is any statement which specifically argues that owning property confers rights to development. Also included are statements that down-zoning is unconstitutional due to the Fifth Amendment, for its protection of private property. Not included are speakers who state they own property and wish to build but do not specifically invoke a principle about the right to do as they please on their property.

Free market should decide: Similar to the private property rights argument, this is a claim that doesn't specifically mention property, instead claiming that the market should determine what uses land is put to, rather than governments engaging in regulation. Implicitly, the market does this through private property rights.

One size fits all is bad: This is the argument that exceptions should be made to the environmental restrictions in on a case-by-case basis. The argument is that each place is unique, usually due to the unique needs of the people living there, and that a single environmental policy is too onerous. Another way speakers refer to this concept is through the term "flexibility" though mentioning this word was not sufficient to qualify – the speaker had to iterate the inappropriateness of universally applied policies. While in theory a similar argument could be employed in environmentally supportive ways, it is used most often in opposition to regulation.

Pro-Growth Discourse: Best use of Land

Highest land use: This argument is often used in farming communities, and it uses the idea that there is a most productive way to use land, and that we ought to do that. For a farmer, growing vegetables is a higher land use than growing grass for feed, as it is more productive and profitable. If a land is capable of being used to grow vegetables, it is appropriate to do so. Sometimes this argument is applied to development; if a land is flat and in a good location, it should be developed.

Balance for growth: Growth is perceived to be natural and must be balanced with other requirements including conservation measures.

Resources are available: This argument is that a natural resource required for growth and thought to be in short supply is actually plentiful. Usually this is an argument that there is plentiful groundwater, or that threatened species are abundant. I have also counted in this category the argument that plenty of open space is already under state and federal ownership, and therefore the remainder of the property should be freely developed.

Land is not natural or worthy: Speakers employing this frame argue that a particular parcel in question is either not in a natural condition (has been leveled, built on, or otherwise altered); or otherwise is of low-quality, and therefore is unsuitable for preservation. The argument assumes that while it might be valid to protect places that are pristine or otherwise valuable, not all land has this potential.

Growth is inevitable or natural: This frame is the argument that growth is coming anyway, and that the community must accommodate it. It reflects the speaker's commitment to the idea that regulation or planning is either destined to fail or inherently wrong-headed. While many speakers do act as if growth is a natural part of land use, arguments were only coded in this category when the speaker explicitly employed such an argument to justify increased development.

Existing need for growth: This argument is that the county has existing needs which must be met by increasing growth. For example, a community could have a lack of commercial opportunities nearby, a lack of jobs, or most often a lack of a certain type of housing. Speakers use this argument to claim that the immediate needs of residents are more important than environmental considerations.

No science, biased science: This argument is a direct critique of environmentalist arguments. It is either a specific claim focused on an area of land under consideration for conservation, in which the speaker claims that the studies conducted by biologists or wildlife experts misrepresent the actual environmental potential; or that a general postulate of environmentalism such as global warming is not supported by fact.

People are more important than environment: This claim urges people to agree that the personal financial or quality of life issues faced by residents are more important than the needs of either plants and animals or ecosystems in general.

Restrictions threaten agriculture: This argument is that environmental restriction threatens the fiscal health and existence of agricultural properties. One version of this argument is that down-zoning does this because people cannot split their farms between their children, who are presumed to collectively carry on the farming.

Less Growth Discourse: Economic

Environment for state costs: This argument is that environmental protection will save the county government money, either through avoiding penalties imposed by the State of California, through saving money spent on infrastructure for sprawl, or through making state services less expensive. It mirrors the pro-growth argument that down-zoning costs the state money through cutting the property tax base.

Less development for property tax value: In this argument, proponents of environmentalism argue that property is more valuable when it remains exclusive and does not allow higher density. Presumably, the less construction is allowed, the more likely one can sell a piece of

property to wealthier residents looking for a secluded place to live. This argument mirrors the pro-growth argument that properties should be up-zoned to increase property tax value.

Environment for development or business: Another claim is that environmental regulation should be imposed for its beneficial effects on developers or businesses. Speakers highlight how they expect certain developers will profit, or how businesses will be on a more level playing field after regulation is imposed. As an example, a speaker might support a requirement for green building by arguing that there are many local businesses which specialize in this type of work and stand to profit.

Environment for the economy: This argument is that environmental regulation will in fact boost the local economy, perhaps by shielding it from punitive state and federal regulation, or by preventing costly pollution or habitat degradation problems.

Less Growth Discourse: Proper role of government

Property rights are not development rights: This argument is generally employed as a response to speakers arguing in support of private property rights for development. It is the claim that the rights of private property do not extend to the right to build on that property as one wishes. Speakers often cite relevant court cases to make the case.

Balance for the environment: Much like the pro-growth “balance for growth” frame, less development speakers often argue that balance should favor the environment. This argument assumes that human activity has already shifted the balance away from environmental protection, and that to restore balance additional protections must be enacted, often to the extent of prohibiting further development.

Growth should be limited: This argument is that the proper role of the government is to limit the growth that occurs. It is the argument that the government has an obligation to limit or prevent growth, without a more explicit justification for why the government should do this.

Less Growth Discourse: Anthropocentric

To preserve agriculture: This argument is that development restrictions should be put in place to protect agriculture in the county. Restricting zoning to disallow agricultural subdivision and development is thought to force farmers to carry on with agricultural activities, even if these are less profitable than selling portions of land for profit. This mirrors that pro-development argument that agriculture will be protected if farmers can sell off or develop land, perhaps with more intuitive appeal.

Natural hazards: This is the claim that land should not be developed because of the potential for natural hazards including earthquakes, floods, and fires. Often a specific parcel is specified and evidence is given for its particular risk.

Water resources: Due to the well-known limitations on water resources, and the importing of water from the rest of the US, many speakers argue against development by pointing out the shortage of water. They either point to the shortage of groundwater in the local water basin or the general shortage of water in the state. Speakers often indicate that water resources are in decline and will be even less plentiful in the future.

Quality of life: An argument claiming that growth will reduce quality of life in some important way is classified as a quality of life argument. Commonly, it is used against proposed increases in density, and is employed both against rural development and against infill Smart Growth development. A greater number of people is thought to negatively impact the community

through crowding local infrastructure (most often as traffic congestion) or through making residents feel the property is too urban for a comfortable life.

Environment for our future: This argument is that the environment should be protected for the future of the county, including for the youth, often described as “our grandchildren.” This is a common environmental argument as has been noted in other studies of environmental culture. Often, it is combined with other frames to explain what particular risks the residents of the future will face.

Less Growth Discourse: Systemic

Environmental systems: In this argument a speaker invokes the systemic properties of the environment, what scientists sometimes call “environmental services.” This can take the form of an argument about the importance of plants in regulating gasses and sequestering carbon; or the importance of bees for pollination of a number of species, or the way flood plains filter groundwater.

Finite natural resources: This claim is that a resource (excluding water which I code separately) is finite and limited, and therefore development is unwise. While this claim is often left unspecified, such as when a speaker says that “we simply do not have enough resources to develop,” at other times speakers refer to a specific resource, such as limited oil and gas or construction materials.

Global warming or greenhouse gasses: This is the argument that global warming is a serious threat and must be dealt with at the local level by limiting development. Because many people confuse carbon emissions with greenhouse gasses, and because these concepts are often mixed together in public testimony, they have been combined here into the same frame.

Ecological footprint: This is an argument that brings up the concept of the ecological footprint and a desire to reduce the local footprint through planning and limitations on growth.

Air Quality: This is a claim that pollutants in the air should limit development, usually because of the increased traffic expected from new development.

Less Growth Discourse: Value in nature

Nature is connected: This argument is that the natural world and the human world is profoundly integrated, and that development threatening one part of the system might affect the rest of world, including human health. For example speakers might refer to the decline in bees for pollinations and suggest that this could affect plants, farmers, and consumers.

Valuable habitat: The category of valuable habitat refers to speakers making a claim that we need to protect a specific type of habitat because of the importance of the plants or animals in that habitat. A common example is that since wetlands are diminishing, a moratorium on development in wetlands is required. While many speakers mention endangered species, it is often in passing reference to legal restrictions from the state, and not an appeal to protect the species intrinsically.

Specific Resource: In this argument, the respondent mentions a specific biological feature in the natural environment and offers it as evidence for why we must limit development. The biological feature – either a wetland, and endangered species or rare species, or another ecosystem, is assumed to be of significant value to warrant limiting relevant development.

Metaphor of nature as alive: This is the argument that the natural world as a whole has a consciousness and should be treated as a being with its own will and needs.

Development is forever: This argument is that the development of land is a permanent act which will irrevocably alter the landscape and destroy biodiversity on the site. I have put this in the value in nature category because speakers use this argument to refer to plants and animals thought to have a value worthy of protection.

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