ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON SPECIAL DISTRICTS IN THE UNITED STATES

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SPECIAL DISTRICTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Project Directors
Cary McDonald, Ph.D.
Robin Hall, M.S.
William McKinney, Ph.D.

Associate Project Director
Michael Mulvaney, Ph.D.

Illinois Association of Park Districts
Ted Flickinger, Ph.D., CPRP, CAE – Executive Director
John Comerio, CPRP – Development Director
Peter Murphy, CAE – General Counsel

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INTRODUCTION

According to the *United States Census Bureau*, special district governments are independent, special purpose government units (other than school districts) that have been primarily established to perform a single function. In 2002, there were approximately 35,356 special districts in the United States (Illinois has 3,145 special districts) (2002 United States Census Bureau). These special districts administer a variety of local services including, fire protection, soil and water conservation, natural resources, health, library, drainage and flood control, and parks and recreation.

The purpose of this report is to update the 1980 annotated bibliography about special districts with an emphasis on recreation areas while extending the bibliography to include information about consolidation of local units of government. This report contains a list of publications on special districts and local government consolidation. The publications were obtained from the University of Illinois library facilities, including the Albert E. Jenner, Jr. Memorial Law Library, City Planning and Landscape Architecture Library, Government Documents Library, College of Applied Health Sciences Library, and Business and Economics Library. In addition, several research databases, such as EBSCO and InfoTrac/LegalTrac, and the interlibrary loan system were utilized to obtain publications.

Several findings emerged from the literature review:

**Finding #1: There has been an increase in the number of special districts in the United States.** In particular, research has found:

- Since 1952, the number of special districts in the United States has almost tripled, from 12,340 to 35,356 (2002 United States Census Bureau).
• Over 90% of the special districts in the U.S. perform a single function (Zimmerman, 1993).

• The number of special districts has increased throughout the United States in response to the increased demand for local governmental services and to meet the reductions in public service delivery by the local government (Foster, 1996).

• The following state policies have also led to an increase in special district creation: 1.) state limits on cities’ and counties’ fiscal authority; 2.) state specifications for which general-purpose government could incur debt, and; 3.) states that limited their cities’ ability to annex lands (McCabe, 2000).

• Although the number of special districts has increased, the increase in taxes has been substantially smaller than the growth in state-level taxes (Downes & Figlio, 1999).

• Despite the increase in special districts, there has not been an increase in political fragmentation (Lewis, 1998).

Finding #2: Several positive benefits have been found to be associated with special district governments. In particular, research has found:

• Special districts create great developmental opportunities for residents to participate in the democratic processes of government and acquire the skills and attitudes to become more informed citizens in processes of state and federal government (Card, 2004).

• Special districts play a significant role in local development and service delivery quality in communities (Carruthers, 2003; Falconer, 1989).

• Special districts provide services on a larger scale and have been found to be more cost-effective than general purpose government units (Currie et al., 1999).
• The quality and quantity of services were found to be higher within special districts compared to general purpose governments (Foster, 1997).

• Higher numbers of special districts in a community were not found to be associated with higher levels of outstanding debt (Nunn & Schoedel, 1997).

• Communities with special districts were found to provide citizens with a wide range of service providers that had a more positive impact on a community’s quality of life compared to communities without special districts (Boyne, 1992).

Finding #3: Local consolidation efforts have re-emerged since 1997. In particular, research has found:

• Successful consolidation from areas such as the Wyandotte County and Kansas City consolidation in 1997 re-ignited an interest in consolidation throughout the United States (Leland & Thurmaier, 2004).

• Financial problems have been found to be the primary factor leading to consolidation campaigns (Halter, 1993).

Finding #4: Results of local consolidation have been mixed. In particular, research has found:

• Research has found a lack of substantial evidence that consolidation increased accountability, efficiency, equity, or effectiveness of local service delivery (Leland & Thurmaier, 2004).
• Consolidation has been found to jeopardize the existing order by simplifying the system of organizations and rules while diminishing the specialized knowledge base within each special district (McCabe, 2004).

• Research has found that consolidation did not lead to reduced tax rates or a reduction of personnel (Porter, 1994).

• Consolidation efforts in the State of Georgia have been largely unsuccessful as Georgia has failed to establish any incentives for consolidation (Fleischmann, 2000).

• The 19 park districts that operated separately before being consolidated into the Chicago Park District in 1934 enabled the Chicago Park District to become one of the top 5 cities in the U.S. that addressed the needs and capabilities of all of their citizens (Harnik & Simms, 2004).

Finding #5: Despite the increased attention, a majority of consolidation efforts have failed.

In particular, research has found:

• Areas with racial heterogeneity tend to have more units of local government and are less likely to support consolidation (Alesina et al, 2004).

• Research suggests that it is difficult to dissolve a special district once it has been established (Babcock & Larsen, 1990).

• Research indicates that special district services could not be effectively delivered by county government (Currie et al., 1999).

• Of the hundreds of campaigns, only 32 city-county consolidation efforts have been successfully implemented since 1805 (Leland & Thurmaier, 2004).
• Consolidation efforts focused on equity or increased efficiency have consistently failed (Leland & Thurmaier, 2005).

• Fear of higher taxes, distrust of downtown business elites, contentment with status quo, and resistance to a more urbanized lifestyle have been the primary reasons consolidation efforts have been resisted by the public (Lyons & Scheb, 1998).

Citing the increase of special districts, the article proposed a model that explained the formation of special districts in local government. Subscribing to an economic model, the author found that special district formation was primarily a non-cooperative game between a city and suburb and this game was largely influenced by state annexation laws. Specifically, a city’s annexation powers influenced special district formation. If state annexation laws required approval by the surrounding communities, the formation of special districts would likely be seen as a viable option for a city when all other options had been exhausted. In contrast, special district formation would be less likely when a city was granted annexation powers. The author based this argument on the city’s desire to push annexation as a more viable option.


This article examined the relationship between the numbers of local jurisdictions and racial heterogeneity in U.S. communities. Based on government statistics and panel interviews, the authors found strong evidence that racial diversity had a positive effect on the number of local jurisdictions. Specifically, areas with racial heterogeneity had more units of government. The data also found that fewer consolidations occurred in counties that were more racially diverse.


This book provided case studies of special districts in several American cities, including Chicago and New York. Each chapter highlighted a different special district and provided an overview of the strategies and techniques that were employed by these special districts. The book concluded with an evaluation of special districts. A couple of the findings were special districts’ permanence (i.e., difficulty removing a special district once it has been created) and ability of special districts to promote the knitting together of various interests in a prideful and positive manner.


The article discussed airports as special purpose government. The authors maintained that airports were uniquely different from other special purpose governmental units based on the distinct qualities of airport administration compared to other special purpose governments. In
subscribing to this view, the authors advocated for airport districts to be considered independent of other special purpose governments, particularly when drawing general conclusions of the financial practices and performance quality of special districts. To support this argument, the article concluded with a list of specific qualities and characteristics of airport districts. Overall, this approach to isolating the unique nature of airport districts was used to distance airport districts from the recent criticisms of special districts.


The article examined local government in the United States and the fragmentation versus consolidation debate. The author adopted a public choice approach in arguing for the benefit and formation of special districts. The author’s view was based on the need for citizens to have a wide range in service providers and taxes offered.


The article discussed the advantages of public library districts. Specifically, public library districts provided an opportunity to work directly with the public in appealing for library funding as opposed to working through the city. The authors also indicated that only 16 states allowed library tax districts.


This article examined special purpose districts and local government participation. First, the article reviewed the Supreme Court’s rulings on the one person, one vote principle and special purpose districts. Overall, the author concluded that the Supreme Court’s decisions in special district cases involving the one person, one vote principle have been inconsistent. The author suggested that the inconsistencies were attributed to the Supreme Court’s failure to make distinctions between the numerous special purpose districts. Next, the article introduced the participatory theory of government as a model for special districts. Specifically, the author reviewed the literature on participatory theory and found strong support for the need of individual participation in local government. Building upon these findings, the author concluded with a discussion of the potential benefits associated with special purpose districts. It was argued that the characteristics of special purpose districts (i.e., limited subject area of authority, small population, and a focus on important issues) created great developmental opportunities for participation by individuals who had limited experience with the democratic process. According to the author, these opportunities provided by special purpose districts allowed citizens to gain
skills and attitudes that would enable them to be a more informed citizen in the democratic processes of state and federal government.


The report reviewed the results of a study on county home rule and special districts. The data indicated that local government’s revenue and expenditure policies influenced the number of special districts in a community. The data also found that local government’s hiring and training policies impacted the number of special districts.


This article investigated the effects of municipal fragmentation and special districts on urban sprawl in U.S. communities. The study found that special districts had a sustained and consistent influence on the growth that occurred in unincorporated areas. The authors attributed this finding to residents’ desire to live outside municipal boundaries. Other factors that were found to contribute to urban sprawl were infrastructure investments and racial segregation.


According to the authors, Minnesota is among the states with above average growth of special districts. This article examined special districts in Minnesota and the possible causes of special district growth by collecting mail survey data from 135 special districts. Based on the findings, soil and water conservation (41%) and economic development (25%) were the two most popular services provided by the special districts. On average, special district budgets were $947,186 with approximately 41% of the budget used for wages, salaries and benefits. Approximately 22% of the general fund budget for special districts in Minnesota was derived from levied property taxes. A majority (53%) of the special districts in Minnesota had one county completely in their district service area, compared to 36% of the special districts statewide, which had no counties completely in their service areas. The authors concluded that this data suggested that special districts in Minnesota provided a service that could not effectively be provided by a county. According to the authors, the primary reason for the development of special districts in Minnesota was the need to provide services on a larger scale than general-purpose government. The respondents indicated that in order to be more cost-effective in the provision of these services, special districts were needed.

The article reviewed the research on local government since Proposition 13 and its impact on service quality. Based upon the literature, the authors concluded that tax and expenditure limits have resulted in long-run reductions in service quality. The authors also suggest that Proposition 13 caused an increase in special districts, user fees, and other local taxes. However, the increase in local taxes had been substantially smaller than the growth of state-level taxes.


This article reviewed the literature on special purpose governments. The author argued that an accurate understanding of the similarities and differences among public authorities, special districts, and government corporations is needed to fully understand and evaluate these forms of local government. To achieve this objective, the article explored the theoretical rationale for the creation and structure of each of these local government units. The rationales are then compared to specific examples of each of the units of local government.


This article examined special districts in Florida. In particular, a discussion on the definition of special districts, the history of special districts in Florida, and formation and dissolution of special districts is provided. The author concluded that special districts have played a significant role in the local development and service delivery while more work was needed to clarify the policies governing the definition, creation, and dissolution of special districts in the State of Florida.


This study examined four Georgia communities. Two of these communities (Athens-Clarke County and Augusta-Richmond County) ratified consolidation referendums while the other two (Brunswick-Glynn County and Macon-Bibb County) rejected consolidation efforts. In the examination of these communities, the author assessed consolidation and its impact on
regionalism within these communities. Data was collected from newspapers, public documents, and interviews with 44 local leaders (15 incumbent officials, 8 current government administrators, 9 former elected officials, 2 former government administrators, and 10 other leaders). Based on the results, the author concluded that consolidation of local government did not specifically address any regional issues. Interview data also suggested that the four consolidation efforts centered on issues about local services, governmental “turf”, taxes, and race. The data also indicated that State of Georgia has failed to establish any incentives for regionalism and consolidation efforts have largely been unsuccessful in Georgia.


Data was collected from more than 300 metropolitan areas in the United States to examine the reasons behind special district formation. The results of the study indicated that the motivations for special district creation included the current local government structure, heterogeneous service demands of residents, legal parameters that encouraged or discouraged districts, and the pro-growth interests of property developers.


The author reviewed the impacts of special districts within metropolitan areas. The author concluded that metropolitan areas that relied heavily on special districts spent more on those services (i.e., sewer, natural resources, health, and hospitals) compared to metropolitan areas with general-purpose governments. However, the quantity and quality of those services were found to be higher within the metropolitan areas with special districts than the services provided by the general-purpose governments.


This article sought to describe the movement towards economies of scale, or administrative efficiency, of local government. Arguing that most of the attention has been directed at city-county consolidation efforts, this article focused on city-city consolidation efforts. Data from the *U.S. Census Bureau’s Boundary and Annexation Survey*, a list of cities that had consolidated between 1979 and 1988, and telephone interviews with local elected officials and administrators was collected to identify the factors that influenced city-city consolidation. The data suggested most consolidation occurred between smaller cities (9,000 or smaller) or between a small city and a much larger one. The data also suggested that cities experiencing population growth or
decline were more likely to consolidate. Finally, “financial problems” was the most frequent response when elected officials and administrators were asked to identify the primary factor leading to consolidation.


The article reviews the location of parks from residents’ homes in the United States. Based on the review, the authors identified the Chicago Park District as one of the five top cities with standards that relate to the needs and capabilities of their citizens. Kathy Dickhut, Assistant Commissioner of Chicago’s Department of Planning and Development, attributed Chicago Park District’s high ranking to the nineteen park districts that operated separately before being consolidated in 1934. Kathy Dickhut indicated that the separate districts were able to focus on different parts of town to ensure that everyone in the city had their own park.


The article provided an overview of library districts in the United States. The possible consolidation of local library districts was discussed. The author indicated that local library districts served about one-third of the population. Illinois was found to have the largest number of special district libraries with almost 300. However, when comparing the percent of libraries that were special districts, Kentucky was higher than Illinois (Kentucky = 90%, Illinois = 48%). The study also found that special district libraries spent approximately 25% more per resident than municipal libraries spent, but the differences were diminished when materials spent and outputs were integrated into the equation. Specifically, special district libraries spent more on materials, but also had more materials than municipal libraries.


The article discussed the economic role of special districts in local government. Special districts as tools for local government to satisfy a specific community need are discussed. The author also provided an overview of the economics of special districts.


The article discusses the history of special districts in the State of Florida. The article provided an overview of the special district debate by identifying the merits and the potential problems
associated with special districts. The Southwest Florida Water Management District is examined to highlight the potential advantages and disadvantages of special districts. The article concluded with a brief discussion of business improvement districts as an upcoming trend in local government.


This resource text provided an overview of all types of special districts in Illinois. Special districts were organized by book chapter and included an overview of the type of special district, statute citation(s), establishment and dissolution procedures, governance, taxing and financing guidelines, and a list of each district in Illinois.


This report provided an annotated bibliography of special districts from the 1950s to 1988. Based upon the literature review, the author concluded that special districts had been promoted as a complimentary form of local government while also being scrutinized for creating a fragmented local government. Despite these mixed views, special districts had been increasing in numbers.


The book provided a review of the current state of city-county consolidation followed by a close look at twelve consolidation efforts across the United States. Eight of the twelve case studies (Jacksonville/Duval County, Florida; Columbus/Muscogee County, Georgia; Athens/Clarke County, Georgia; Lafayette/Lafayette Parish, Louisiana; Branch/North Branch, Minnesota; Augusta/Richmond County, Georgia; Kansas City/Wyandotte County, Kansas, and; Louisville/Jefferson County, Kentucky) described the steps leading to consolidation; four of the twelve (Tallahassee/Leon County, Florida; Sacramento/Sacramento County, California; Des Moines/Polk County, Iowa; Wilmington/New Hanover County, North Carolina, and; Knoxville/Knox County, Tennessee) described how the consolidation referendums failed in their communities. In a summative review of the state of city-county consolidation, the authors stated that despite the hundreds of local government consolidation attempts that have reached the referendum stage, only thirty-two have been successfully implemented since the first in 1805 in New Orleans. According to the authors, consolidation of city and county occurred less than 15 percent of the time with only five successful passages since 1990. The authors suggested that the
reason for this high failure rate is due to the lack of substantial evidence that consolidation increased accountability, efficiency, equity, or effectiveness of local service delivery.


The article proposed a new model of city-county consolidation and examined 12 government consolidation attempts. The examination identified several factors that lead to failed consolidation efforts. Specifically, consolidation efforts focusing on equity that will be gained by redistributing revenues from the suburbs to central cities as well as efforts that focused on increased efficiency were found to lead to failed consolidation efforts. Communities that experienced successful consolidation efforts were those that promoted a new economic vision for the area while convincing the residents that the current government structure could not support or implement the economic vision. According to the authors, successful consolidation efforts also needed to convince voters of the benefits of consolidation for the entire community, not just the elites.


The author evaluated special districts in California. In particular, the evaluation reviewed special districts’ responsiveness to the public. Based upon the review, the author found that the responsiveness of special districts had been consistent since Proposition 13. Despite the increase in the number of special districts since Proposition 13, there had not been an increase in political fragmentation.


The article examined the local government structure within the state of California since Proposition 13. Since Proposition 13, the growth of special districts had been moderate. Specifically, districts that existed to finance the construction of capital facilities has increased in number, but those providing more traditional public services has decreased. Citing previous research, the author warned of the serious problem associated with merely counting units of local government. The research attempted to move beyond the counting method and ratio-based measures (i.e., the number of local governments per 10,000 people per square mile) by developing a political fragmentation index (PFI). The PFI represented the dispersion of local expenditures among the county government, cities, and special districts. Using the PFI, the
research concluded that the political structure in California had not been significantly altered by Proposition 13. Furthermore, areas with larger populations that were developed earlier in the state’s history had a more complex structure of local government and tended to have more special districts. Based on these findings, the author contended that the stability of local government structure was due to local government being more malleable and responsive to change than was previously believed.


The article reviewed the consolidation efforts in Knox County. First, the authors provided a brief overview of the appealing aspects of consolidation and the resistance to consolidation. The authors suggested consolidation was most appealing to upper middle class individuals who were often affiliated with various civic groups such as League of Women Voters, Chamber of Commerce. Other typical supporters of consolidation were members of the business community who believed that consolidated government aided the business community by possibly giving it greater prominence in the restructured government. Resistance to consolidation often came from suburbanized areas where individuals feared lack of representation in the new government. Lower middle class and working class voters also tended to oppose consolidation for similar reasons of under-representation. Next, the article addressed the reasons why county voters outside of the city of Knoxville, TN repeatedly rejected consolidation efforts. Based on opinion surveys and focus group results, the authors found that fear of higher taxes, distrust of downtown business elites, contentment with status quo, and resistance to a more urbanized lifestyle were the primary reasons for the resistance to consolidation.


The article examined the relationships between special districts and local government on spending and debt expansion. Using data from the Census of Government, Statistical Abstract of the United States, and Facts and Figures on Government Finance this study found that fiscal policies (i.e., limitations on taxes, expenditures, and debt) caused an overall increase in expenditures and debt policies of local government. Based upon this finding the author questioned why voters had imposed fiscal rules primarily on local government policies while giving limited attention to fiscal rules within special districts.

This chapter provided an overview of the history of special districts and a discussion of the theoretical perspectives between special district formation and local government consolidation. Using an uncertainty and short-run transaction costs scale, the author suggested that special districts produced lower levels of uncertainty and short-run transaction costs compared to consolidated local government. The lower level of uncertainty and short-run transaction costs were attributed to special districts being removed from the sway of general-purpose governments’ elected officials and the potential turnover between political parties. Consolidated local government, on the other hand, needed to be aware that the benefits conferred upon a favored unit or department could be undone by the next election. According to the author, consolidated government was faced with higher financial costs and reduced service quality during these political transactions. In addition to comparing the transaction costs and uncertainty, the author contended that special districts increased complexity in the local government system compared to consolidated government. However, consolidated government also reduced the perceived value of the units within the organization. The author supported this claim by suggesting that consolidation jeopardized the existing order by simplifying the system of organizations and rules and diminished the specialized knowledge base within each special district. Furthermore, special districts added complexity without transforming the overall institutional system. For this reason, consolidation was more likely to be opposed than the addition of a special district.


This article proposed a framework to explain why special districts or other forms of local government were more likely to arise in some states than in others. The framework hypothesized three primary reasons for the formation of special districts: state grants/restrictions of local powers, public entrepreneurs, and demand for services. The results of the study supported the three reasons. In particular, the results of the study found that special district creation was oftentimes driven by demand for services. A second finding indicated special districts to be more likely to develop in states with growing populations. Third, special district creation also increased with growth in per capita personal income. Fourth, special districts were more likely to arise in urbanized states. Fifth, the study’s findings suggested that state restrictions on general purpose local governments led to the creation of special districts. Specifically, the following state policies led to an increase in special district creation: 1.) state limits on cities’ and counties’ fiscal authority in the form of tax and expenditures limits (TELs) or debt limits; 2.) state specifications for which general-purpose government could incur debt; 3.) states that gave cities, but not their counties income tax power, and; 4.) states that limited their cities’ ability to annex lands. The study’s findings identified the following state policies that led to a decrease in special district creation: 1.) states that mandated referendum approval for city and county debt; 2.) states that authorized their counties but not their cities to raise revenues from either sales or income
tax; 3.) states who gave counties greater tax power relative to cities, and; 4.) states with counties that had home rule.


This article examined the education and skills required for public authority managers. Based upon surveys from 1,243 executive directors, the author found that most of the public authority managers had undergraduate and graduate degrees in business or government. The most important skill required for public managers was “financial analysis and budgeting”, followed by “planning and designing projects” and “writing policy statements and reports”. Looking specifically at parks and recreation authorities, “financial analysis and budgeting”, “planning and designing projects”, and “impact analysis and evaluation” were identified as the most important skills. When comparing the most important skills for public authority managers and city managers, excessive variation occurred. Specifically, city managers viewed “situation and political analysis” (ranked #6 by public authority managers) as the most important and ranked “financial analysis and budgeting” (ranked #1 by public authority managers) as the fourth most important skill.


This book discussed the evolution of local government. In describing this evolution, the author suggested that special purpose governments were being used to meet the reductions in public service delivery by the local government. As the local government reduced its services, an increase was observed in the number of public and private service organizations. The author also suggested that these new service providers, including special districts, focused on one or only a few services.


Drawing from 290 articles published in *Public Budgeting & Finance*, this article reviewed local government budget and finance practices during the past 25 years. Particular attention was given to intergovernmental finance practices, budget reform, and capital budgeting. Financial practices of special districts as a unit of local government were also discussed.

The article examined the metropolitan structure and capital spending patterns of cities and special districts in the United States. The results of the study found that special districts played a significant, but not dominant, role in the capital outlay plans of metropolitan government. In particular, it was found that city government was the major force in capital spending. The study also found that metropolitan regions with higher numbers of special districts had higher income levels. Metropolitan areas with higher numbers of special districts also experienced slightly higher public spending habits. Higher numbers of special districts was not found to be associated with higher levels of outstanding debt.


This study examined whether special district expenditures increased or decreased the expenditures of local government. The study examined 53 metropolitan areas throughout the country. The study found that the number of special districts within a metropolitan area was negatively associated with overall local expenditures. The study also found that the number of county special districts was positively associated with county expenditures while the expenditures of county special districts were negatively associated with county expenditures. The author suggested the findings indicated that counties might incur costs relating to the regulation or control (of special districts) if they had a large number of special districts that served a small number of residents, while counties could limit their expenditures if the county special districts incurred higher expenditures. The author concluded that the results of the study suggested that local policymakers should consider the creation of more special districts while carefully monitoring the special districts’ expenditures. In contrast, county policymakers needed to be more cautious with the creation of special districts. The author suggested that county policymakers might want to raise the minimum size of the geographic area or population needed to create county special districts.


This book focused on independent special districts. Independent special districts were defined as those districts that are not directly controlled by local governments. The book’s chapters provided information on the trends in special districts, types of special districts, purposes of special district, and the financing infrastructure of special districts.

The article provided a theoretical view of special district formation. Specifically, reasons for special districts and potential problems with special districts were discussed. The article concluded with a discussion that refuted the notion that consolidation would reduce the costs associated with local governmental services. The author argued that consolidation would not result in lower tax rates. Rather, if the government services were to be maintained, it would make little difference whether one unit or multiple units imposed the tax rate. Furthermore, the abolition of districts would not lead to reduced tax rates or a reduction of personnel.


This article reviews Indianapolis’s UniGov program and its effect on local governance. UniGov was defined as a multilayered local government system under which authority for economic development, public works, parks, transportation, and some elements of public safety were transferred from the city to the county/regional level. This represented the first layer in the multilayered structure. The second layer included services that were delivered by units of varying size, such as local and county special districts, that existed prior to the passage of UniGov. Within UniGov, the Department of Metropolitan Development supervised the major economic development within the county, but most cities in the county maintained their independent school districts, townships, parks departments, police departments, and fire departments. According to the author, UniGov was initiated for a couple of reasons. First, UniGov was developed in an effort to redefine the size of the city, taking Indianapolis from the 26th largest city in the country in 1960 to the 12th largest city in 1996. Second, UniGov was created to drive downtown revitalization efforts by increasing the total assessed value of property within the city which allowed more debt to be negotiated for redevelopment. Overall, the author provided four lessons learned from Indianapolis’s UniGov city-county consolidation program. First, UniGov was helpful in the downtown revitalization efforts. Second, the author expressed caution toward leaders of other areas who are looking for a different governance structure to enhance development. According to the author, these areas should take greater care to ensure that a new governance system had the necessary financial tools to distribute the burdens and benefits. The article suggested that Indianapolis would be faced with some challenging fiscal issues in the future as a result of the structure of UniGov. The third lesson was that while consolidation could increase the size and scale of a locality, and attract and retain higher skilled people, it was not a crucial component. The author cited the recruitment efforts of private businesses in Indianapolis as the primary force in attracting high income workers to downtown Indianapolis. Fourth, the consolidation efforts enhanced downtown revitalization efforts and slowed urban sprawl compared to other Midwestern cities.

The book took a historical look at consolidation efforts in the United States and identified three elements that prompted successful government consolidation. The first element identified was a crisis climate. Specifically, a local community’s existing government must be faced with problems that have emerged from dramatic changes in the urban environment. The second element was a loss of public confidence in the ability of local government to deal with local problems or changes. The third element was the presence of an emergency-type situation such as a scandal or natural disaster that prompted voters to seek change.


This article highlighted regionalism in the structure and organization of local government. The authors suggested that the increased attention to regionalism has resulted from problems of fiscal disparity, social segregation, environmental problems, and economic expectations. According to the authors, the re-emergence of regionalism has sought to address these issues through controlling urban sprawl through land preservation trusts and the enforcement of growth boundary regulations. In addition, tax sharing is argued as a method to address fiscal disparities while the construction of affordable housing in suburban areas was suggested as a method to address racial segregation. Improved mass transit and pollution bylaws would improve environmental problems. The article follows this discussion of regionalism with a description of four approaches to local government regionalism (consolidationist approach, multitiered approach, linked functions approach, and the complex networks approach). The public choice approach is also discussed as an approach and rationale for fragmented government.


The article discussed the financing of sport stadiums in cities. Based upon city records, the author found that several states and cities had formed stadium districts to help fund these projects. In particular, over $5 billion in taxes have been used for stadium constructions in the United States since 1989.

The report reviewed the more than 3,800 special districts in California. Based upon the review, 5 major findings and recommendations were obtained. First, special districts were found to be invisible to public and policy-makers. To address this issue, the report suggested for legislation that required special districts to make their activities visible to the public, share information with other local governments, and to hold special district elections to be held during other even year elections. The second finding was that other local agencies and commissions had failed to promote the efficient and effective evolution of special districts. The report recommended that the State of California needed to provide local agencies with the resources to assist with the efficient and effective evolution of special districts. The third finding was that policy-makers and community leaders lacked the necessary tools to examine the possible benefits of consolidation. To address this shortcoming, the report suggested that the Governor and legislature establish a resource-based program that would investigate the long-term effects of consolidation and/or reorganization, develop performance measures for special districts, and establish guidelines and protocols for special district consolidation. The fourth finding was the multi-million dollar reserves that were being banked by several special districts. These reserves had not been well publicized and rarely considered in regional and statewide planning. The report recommended that state government enact policies that required special districts to share this information with the public in a specified manner. The final finding was that property tax allocations to some enterprise districts had created inequities among special districts and clouded the true costs of services. The report recommended that policy-makers should be active in the critical evaluation of property tax allocations.


The article presents data from the 2002 *U.S. Census Bureau’s Census of Governments.* Based on the data, county governments had declined slightly from 3,043 in 1997 to 3,034 in 2002. The number of towns and townships also declined from 16,629 in 1995 to 16,504 in 2002. Municipalities increased from 19,372 in 1997 to 19,429 in 2002. Consistent with the past 50 years, school districts decreased from 13,726 in 1997 to 13,506 in 2002. Special districts had increased from 34,683 in 1997 to 35,052 in 2002. Despite this increase, the author suggested a “leveling off” of special district formation. Specifically, there were 12,340 special districts in 1952. The number has increased 184% since 1952, but only increased 1% between 1997 and 2002.

The report provided statistics for local government in the United States. Based upon the data, there were: 19,429 municipal governments; 16,504 town/township governments; 3,034 county governments; 13,506 school districts, and; 35,052 special districts.


Using data from the 1992 *U.S. Census Bureau of Government Units*, this article described the trends of government and special districts in the United States. In 1992, there were 86,743 units of federal, state, and local government. Counties, municipalities and townships totaled 39,005. Special districts totaled 33,131 and school districts totaled 14,556. Ten states (California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Texas, & Washington) had more than 1,000 special districts. The author also indicated that approximately 91% of the special districts in the United States performed a single function.


The article provided an overview of special districts in the United States from 1989 to 1994. During this period, the number of special districts increased 12%. The author attributed this increase to citizens’ demands for improved local government services. Those special districts that experienced the largest increases were solid waste management districts, industrial development and mortgage credit districts, and natural resources and water supply districts.