

## **Cross-border dialogue takes on renewed life**

### **Action-oriented center to benefit the Californias**

**By Diane Lindquist**

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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San Diego Dialogue, a public-policy institute at UCSD, marked its re-emergence at a reception last night with the release of a report that quantifies high-value economic linkages in the cross-border region and recommends the creation of a center to spur mutual development.

The nonprofit Dialogue organization, founded in 1991 by then-UC San Diego Chancellor Richard Atkinson and UCSD Extension Dean Mary Walshok, has been relatively quiet since the 2003 death of its executive director, Charles Nathanson.

Under Nathanson's leadership, San Diego Dialogue initiated a study that revealed that most people using the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa ports of entry are frequent legal crossers. The study spurred creation of the fast-pass SENTRI system now used along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Nathanson also organized a series of forums among area leaders that focused on educational and border issues.

Last night's release of a "Borderless Innovation" report at the San Diego Marriott Hotel and Marina marks a new phase in the organization's development, Walshok said in an interview.

"It's a rebirth and a refocusing," she said.

In the past, the organization "opened people's eyes that the region is more interrelated and complex than anybody realized," Walshok said. "Now we're making a strong case that California's competitiveness depends on the border region."

Among the report's recommendations, made in collaboration with Tijuana's CENTRIS economic development organization and Ensenada's CICESE science and technology research center, are the creation of a "Crossborder Innovation & Competitiveness Center."

The center would provide ongoing research and analytical reports on cross-border economic clusters, foster scientific and technological relationships and promote private investor networks in the Californias.

It would combine existing institutions and organizations, Walshok said, functioning much like the UCSD's Connect, which has served to give birth to numerous biotech and biomedical companies in San Diego County.

"Dialogue was more of a think tank," she said. "Now the agenda will be set by more action-oriented organizations."

The report reveals that San Diego and Baja California have more than 100,000 jobs in related clusters of high-value economic development, said Kenn Morris, who led the research and writing of the report.

"One of the surprises was the size of the cross-border biomedical cluster," Morris said. "If you combine the operations in San Diego, Baja California and Orange County, it would be one of the largest in the world."

Despite a general belief that maquiladora manufacturing operations south of the border function independently of San Diego companies, he said, the report identifies 60 to 70 biomedical device companies in the cross-border region. Thirteen of those operating in Baja California have headquarters or significant business activities in San Diego.

"That doesn't even look at the suppliers," Morris said, noting that identification of such operations is next on the agenda.

Efforts to produce the data, believed to be the first to identify and quantify economic linkages across the San Diego-Baja California border, have been under way for two years, said José Larroque, a Tijuana lawyer who has been a longtime member of San Diego Dialogue.

"We were at a crossroads with the Dialogue and where it was headed," Larroque said. "Now we've regrouped and are saying: This is an area where we can achieve something."

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■Diane Lindquist: (619) 293-1812; [diane.lindquist@uniontrib.com](mailto:diane.lindquist@uniontrib.com)

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