

# Multifunctionality: a concept for problem solving?

discussant comments at Multiagri seminar

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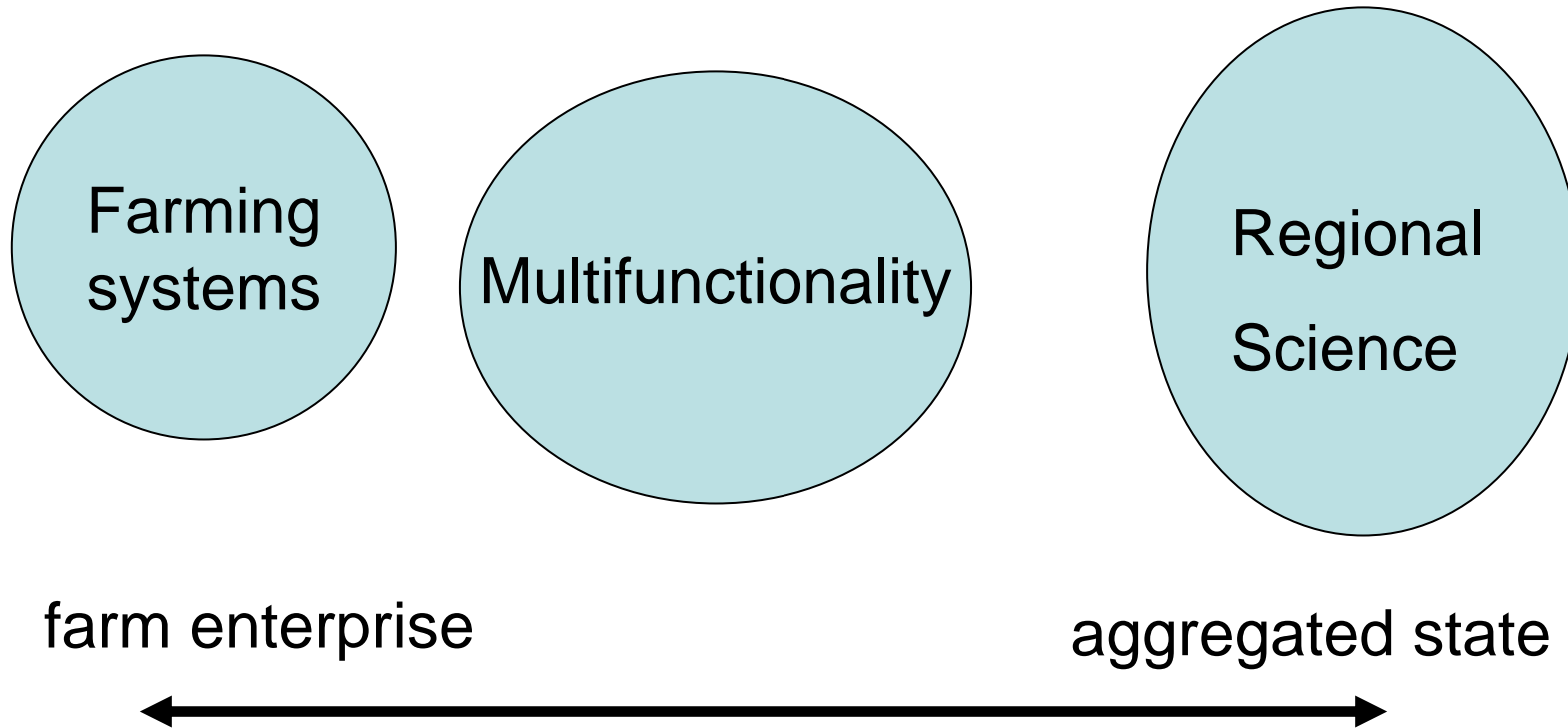
# Central Policy Question

- What does a predominantly urban/suburban electorate want from agriculture?
  - Cheap, but high quality safe food
  - High quality environment
  - Preservation of national heritage/culture
  - Visual amenities
- Mainly a domestic agenda

# Parallel organizing or analytical concepts that also focus on linkages

- **Regional Science** - multi-disciplinary approach that tries to integrate ideas appropriate to a specific geographic space (1950s).
- **Farming Systems** - holistic approach to farm management that examines the farm in a larger eco-system and social community (1970s).

# Policy continuum



# Potential problems

- Ideas tend to become either too simple (lowest common denominator), or too complex (elaborate meta-theories).
- No commonly accepted organizing theories - limited conceptual progress beyond initial breakthrough.
- Hard to generalize - every application is specific, so difficult to design national public policy.
- Result - Regional Science and Farming Systems have largely become peripheral approaches. Will multifunctionality have the same fate?

# Where does multifunctionality fit best?

- Domestic focus - real policy concerns.
- Especially powerful at the local level - can deal with “place based” problems (local public goods, local externalities, local markets).
- For broader policy questions, it can be a coherent organizing concept for applied analysis of large complex problems - applicable to some farms in some places.

# Sustainability link

- May further confuse the issue - what does sustainable mean?
- Static sustainability - ability to stay as you are, OR Dynamic sustainability - ability to adapt?
- Multifunctionality currently seems more oriented to preservation than evolution.