

Collaborative Democracy Network

Summary of Second Roundtable Discussion

**International Symposium on Society and Resource Management
Thursday, June 3, 12:30-3:00 pm, Starslide Room, Keystone Resort, Dillon, Colorado**

On June 3, 2004, a dozen scholars met to try to bring greater clarity to the theoretical foundations underlying the practice of collaborative planning and policymaking. The premise of the discussion was that the progress and prestige of research in this applied field is being hampered by a real and/or perceived lack of grounding in generalizable theory and testable hypotheses. Similarly, practitioners sometimes suffer from difficulty justifying -- to clients, stakeholders, and peers -- why they employ specific facilitation techniques in specific circumstances. However, the potential for building a coherent theory base is great, and the field is now ripe for a comprehensive self-assessment.

The goal of the roundtable was to identify major theoretical traditions from across the social sciences, where theory is mature and frequently cited, where advances in research and theory are currently taking place, and where future research seems promising.

The focus of the roundtable was a brainstorming exercise in which participants were asked to name one or more relevant theories or frameworks, and for each, to then identify (a) the most pertinent dependent variables that the theory/framework seeks to explain, and (b) one or more related authors who have developed or applied the theory/framework. The participants collectively identified approximately fifty theories/frameworks (and their associated dependent variables and authors), which were later transcribed to the attached spreadsheet. The spreadsheet represents a rough outline of this broad and multidisciplinary field of scholarship.

The spreadsheet ought to be valuable for:

- Designing college courses in collaborative policymaking.
- Outlining a symposium or edited book summarizing the most prominent and promising theories/frameworks.
- Identifying multiple theories/frameworks that share similar dependent variables (which should facilitate research comparing or integrating multiple models)

Several limitations of the exercise were evident. For example:

- Despite identifying a large number of theories/frameworks, the resulting list was undoubtedly incomplete.
- Despite the great diversity of academic backgrounds represented by the roundtable participants (including political science, sociology, planning, public policy, parks and tourism, ecology, marine biology, range management), the list would have certainly turned out somewhat differently had the exercise taken place at a different conference drawing a different cross-section of collaborative policy scholars.
- We had relatively little time to discuss connections among the various theories and frameworks, or to distinguish the most prominent theories and frameworks from those that are lesser known or lesser developed.

Participants in future Network roundtables may wish to pick up where we left off.

Roundtable Participants, June 3, 2004

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