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Towards a Descriptive, Participatory theory of Environmental Policy Analysis and Project Evaluation: Research

Summary

Harold Glasser Foundation for Deep Ecology HAROLD GLASSER received his Ph. D. from UC Davis, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. He is currently director of the Selected Works of Arne Naess Project at the Foundation for Deep Ecology.

This study examines the philosophical, analytic-methodological, and policyprocedural aspects of the contemporary environmental crisis, within the context of environmental decision-making over the past four millennia. My two primary goals are: (1) to develop the theoretical foundations for expanding the scope of conceptualizing, framing, and evaluating the environmental impacts of alternative projects and policies and (2) to suggest a methodology for integrating incommensurable quantifiable considerations with qualitative, ethical and value-based considerations. I focus on assessment problems where large numbers of alternatives predominate, incompatible assessment criteria exist, and multiple, often conflicting, goals prevail. Rather than attempt to prescribe particular decisions, I offer an alternative, descriptive paradigm for guiding the evaluation of projects and policies. Chapter 1 selectively surveys the history of environmental awareness from Gigamesh to the present. I argue that unresponsiveness to environmental degradation results more from value conflicts and insufficient understanding than simple ignorance. Chapter 2 introduces the class of "wicked," 1 or dilemma laden, problems of which environmental problems are a subset. Building on the concepts of environmental impact statements and technology assessments, I outline ten tenets for approaching "wicked problems", which reflect the bounds and plural nature of rationality as well as the behavioral limitations of information processing. Chapter 3 explores the feasibility of extending benefit-cost analysis to redress "wicked problems" and highlights the limitations of economic methodology. I suggest that the primary role of economic analysis in environmental policy analysis and project evaluation should be limited to cost-effectively choosing economically efficient ways to meet morally justifiable and socially desirable ends. Chapter 4 critically reviews and evaluates the suitability of multi-attribute approaches for addressing "wicked problems", in response to the limitations of economic rationality. Chapter 5 outlines a descriptive theory of environmental policy analysis and project evaluation grounded in multi-attribute analysis and participatory democracy. This theory supports adaptive learning, including dynamic preference formation, via an interactive scenario-based procedure for exploring the effect and sensitivity of trade-off relations under alternative objective weightings (value perspectives). Chapter 6 critically evaluates the efficacy of this theory and considers its applications and extensions.

## Note

1. Rittel, Horst W. and Melvin M. Webber. "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning." Policy Sciences 4 (1973): 155-169

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