

UNIT 2 Planning Theory

The objectives of Unit 2 are: 1) to define planning in a broad context and to provide a justification for it; 2) to introduce the “big ideas,” or dominant theories, of planning that inform the practice of natural resource recreation planning; 3) to articulate an “ideal” theory of planning—transactive planning—as a conceptual basis for practicing natural resource recreation planning; and 4) to make a case for the integration of meaningful public participation in natural resource recreation planning projects.

What is Planning?

In Comprehensive Planning for the 21st Century (1998), Melville Branch suggests that since the earliest days of humankind, planning has been inherent in personal and societal activities, and recognized as essential to the conduct of government, business, and war. But as universal as planning is in human affairs, he recognizes that rarely is it discussed in terms of theory and principles. Branch, a professor of urban and regional planning, goes on to write:

“Because it is inconspicuous by its universal presence, the process of planning is seldom specifically identified and considered. Illustrations of different applications and results of planning are almost without limit. And there are multitudinous studies and research reports concerning knowledge and conditions affecting planning. But the planning process itself is rarely treated. Because it is complicated, not easily understood, and often misunderstood, there is need for theoretical exposition and an initial formulation of general principles.”

To start off this unit on theory, we will define planning very simply and broadly as “foresight in formulating and implementing programs and policies.” In a more specific sense, natural resource recreation planning can be defined as “a process that systematically allocates resources (e.g., land, facilities, staff) to specific recreational uses in advance of the public’s need to use those resources.” Inherent in most definitions of planning are the following concepts:

1. Systematic—the planning process can be repeated and the steps have a specific reason for being, as well as a rationale for their sequence.
2. Continuous—planning is continuous in the sense that monitoring implementation provides feedback as to what works and why and what doesn’t work and why.
3. Allocation—meaning setting aside for a specific use, which is differentiated from management which means maintaining a specific use. Allocation can concern biophysical resources, facilities, and financial and human resources.
4. The Future—planning is directed toward identifying and preventing problems that may occur in the future. This brings up the issue of what futures exist, which ones are desirable, how we identify them, and how we get there. Planning also is

- focused on the past in the sense of correcting problems from past planning efforts or situations where no planning occurred.
5. Objectives—objectives (or goals) describe the desired future. We cannot allocate resources unless we have a well-defined conception of the desired future.

The planning process generally is comprised of the following components, which will be discussed in a more applied context in units 3 and 4:

- a. Expression of a need (this may originate from within an agency or with users or with legislators or with a combination of these and other stakeholders)
- b. Inventory and assessment of relevant resources/conditions
- c. Establishment of objectives/goals/desired future
- d. Evaluation of alternative courses of action to attain objectives/goals/future
- e. Adoption of a plan of program of action
- f. Program implementation
- g. Monitoring of program implementation

Not all natural resource recreation planning projects incorporate each of these components, or they may call the components different things. Again, in units 3 and 4 you will see linkages between the components briefly described above and their actual application to the field of natural resource recreation planning.

Other important characteristics of plans and planning processes are:

1. Coordination—in the case of recreation, people's behavior generally ignores institutional or jurisdictional boundaries. In many cases, people really don't care whether they are in a national park or forest. Demand for recreation may emanate in one jurisdiction, but the supply may be found in another. Different agencies have different roles in meeting these demands. Thus, many planning tasks require the involvement of more than one agency, often including agencies at different levels of government.
2. Flexibility—plans must be responsive to changing conditions. Humans have a poor record of predicting the future. Plans always assume some future context for their projects. This future context is likely to be different when we arrive there from what we projected it to be. A critical test of any plan is its ability to maintain options and be responsive to changing conditions and needs.
3. Ownership—people affected by plans are ultimately responsible for implementing them through the provision of legislative and financial resources. If these people do not have a sense of ownership, they are unlikely to provide these.

Why Agencies Plan

There are four basic reasons why planning occurs. Understanding these reasons is important when agencies and stakeholders undertake a planning project.

1. Agencies plan because they are told to do so. Often, there are laws, such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act and the National Forest Management Act, or specific administrative directives, that require agencies to plan.
2. Agencies plan in order to solve a problem. Often a manager or planner will see a problem occurring and act to resolve the problem through some type of planning process. Many of these problems may have developed over time, and thus the manager or planner is responding to situations that have originated in the past under conditions that may be similar to or radically different than what may occur in the future.
3. Agencies plan in order to change the future. The most fundamental reason for planning is to change the future. Under conditions of social change, there are many possible futures, some of which may not be desirable. Planners work collaboratively with stakeholders to identify potential and desired futures.
4. Increasingly, agencies understand that effective planning can provide a learning and enriching experience for stakeholders, which may have positive social, administrative and political implications.

Dominant Theories of Planning

A variety of planning theories were developed (or evolved) in the 20th century, primarily in the disciplines of urban and regional planning, military planning, and public administration. These theories comprise the fertile ground from which a wide variety of planning approaches and methodologies grew. For example, the two natural resource recreation planning approaches focused on in this course (the comprehensive and protected area approaches) are grounded in the synoptic and transactive planning theories described below. Each theory has its particular strengths and weaknesses and each, in turn, has been subjected to extensive criticism. Based on the Hudson (1979) reading, these theoretical perspectives are summarized below.

Synoptic or rational-comprehensive planning is the dominant planning theory/paradigm today. Synoptic planning is characterized as a rational, means-end analysis with formalized goal-setting, identification of alternatives, evaluation of alternatives, implementation of a preferred alternative, and monitoring of implementation. Synoptic planning uses quantitative models of resource use and allocation where available, and consequently requires a considerable amount of data that must be quantified in the form required by the model. Synoptic-oriented planners tend to be highly trained specialists working either for the government or as consultants to government agencies. Their training places emphasis on the technical aspects of their specialization knowledge of their subject. Because of their specialization and the narrow focus of their expertise, they tend to be less aware of the social and political context of the planning projects in which they are engaged. Synoptic planning tends to be centralized within the agency, where decisions are made at high levels of the organization, rather than at the point of impact. For this reason, synoptic planning is viewed as a “top-down” paradigm.

Incremental planning is a process of making decisions that can be implemented; thus, most decisions depart only marginally or incrementally from the current situation. Incremental planning is oriented toward immediate problems and solutions. This process views planning as the “science of muddling through,” where an agency gets by on a day-to-day decision-making framework. Incremental planning does not deal with long range or overall goals or objectives. Thus, you may end up at a destination that was never considered or intended.

Transactive planning is discussed more fully in the next section of the unit. It is one of several theoretical perspectives that was developed as a response to concerns about synoptic planning. Transactive planning views planning as a process to solve socially important problems. Problems can be effectively resolved only through consensus and decisions that include those affected. Transactive planning is based upon a model of Dialogue→Mutual Learning→Societal Action. In transactive planning, the planner is more of a facilitator than a technician. The planner is not insulated from the social and political context, but recognizes it and operates within it.

Advocacy planning was developed during the “Great Society” era of the 1960s. Like transactive planning, it was a response to the overly rational, apolitical problems associated with synoptic planning. In particular, the advocacy planning perspective pointed out that frequently the people who were adversely affected by plans were not involved in decision making or their concerns were neither represented nor considered in the process. These groups, primarily low income and disadvantaged populations, had little, if any, political power to influence the planning process. This perspective was strongly associated with issues of urban social policy, including income distribution and equity, access to affordable housing, access to mass transportation, and others. In advocacy planning, the planner represents the position of the disenfranchised against the position of the powerful, and takes on the role of the adversary to plans developed by synoptic processes. This perspective of planning was most strongly articulated during the 1960s and 1970s and was considered highly dependent on federal funding to urban areas to demonstrate its efficacy.

Radical planning views resource allocation issues as emanating from fundamental structural problems with society. Radical planning generally views issues and problems as a function of class conflict. Radical planners are aware of the influence of ideology on people’s lives—and most disagree with capitalism as an appropriate ideology. Radical planners would encourage direct citizen participation in decision-making, and would argue for fundamental governmental reforms as a solution to planning problems. In contrast to incremental planning, radical planners would view solutions in revolutionary terms. The idea of radical planning was at its height in the 1960s and early 1970s in the U.S., although it has never been a mainstream planning perspective.

It is important to remember that these are broad planning theories, not specific planning methodologies or approaches. In units 3 and 4 we will examine two specific approaches to natural resource recreation planning—the comprehensive approach and the protected

area approach. Again both of these approaches have been influenced by the synoptic and transactive theories previously discussed.

Transactive Planning as an Ideal

Contemporary natural resource recreation planning has been heavily influenced by synoptic planning concepts. However, in the past two decades there has been a shift toward planning that is more collaborative and involves a multiplicity of stakeholders. These are the hallmarks of transactive planning, which was first described by John Friedmann in his book Retracking America (1973). Transactive planning, as described in the Hudson (1979) and Friedmann (1993) readings and elsewhere, is responsive to the deficiencies and problems associated with synoptic planning.

Friedmann believes that alternatives to solving social problems by centralized decision making must be developed, and that such alternatives should involve the perspectives of those affected by plans/decisions. He suggests that small working groups of citizens form the basis of a transactive planning process. Such working groups, because of their relatively small size, encourage face-to-face communication and dialogue, and provide a setting where participants can acquire and use technical knowledge.

In these working groups, participants share their intimate knowledge and experiences with the planner, who shares the technical planning models and systematic ways of data manipulation with citizens. The dialogue which develops leads to mutual learning, a learning which accumulates to both the citizen and the planner. Through the dialogue and learning processes, decision situations are eventually confronted. The working group, using its accumulated knowledge, makes an informed decision about a course of action. This planning perspective depends more on social interaction among the people affected by decisions and less on the field surveys and data analyses common to other planning paradigms.

There are fundamental structural differences between citizen involvement in synoptic planning and how it is used in transactive planning. In transactive planning, the citizen participant/stakeholder is viewed not only as having expertise about the subject matter, but also as an individual who has the capacity to act rationally within the context of a working group. In a sense, the planner and stakeholder work as partners in developing actions to solve problems. In many ways, stakeholder involvement in synoptic planning situations has been superficial and adversarial. Stakeholders are asked only to respond to plans created by planners working in relatively isolated environments. Complete understanding of the problem is less likely because of the minimal role citizens play in plan development. Because many agencies ask stakeholders to review plans only, an adversarial role is intrinsic in the planning process. This leads to agency-citizen tension and dissatisfaction with the plan. Transactive planning addresses these problems.

The McAvoy, et al. (1991) reading on transactive planning in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness provides a good case study of how the transactive planning paradigm can be applied to a natural resource recreation planning setting.

Successful Public Participation Strategies

Having advocated transactive planning, it is important to now discuss its practical application, namely how to meaningfully involve stakeholders in the planning process. The McCoy, et al. reading on the principles and practices of public participation provides an excellent guide for natural resource recreation planners. Their paper outlines ten critical public involvement principles that should be included in any resource planning process. These principles are built on a solid theoretical framework which emphasizes transactive planning and social learning.

The McCool and Guthrie (1999) reading provides a candid look at how key stakeholders (including resource managers, scientists, the public) involved in natural resource planning characterize successful public participation. Dialogue from interviews with stakeholders is included in the form of direct quotes in the paper. These help the reader understand the practical difficulties associated with natural resource recreation planning and illustrate how turbulent and contentious the planning process can be.

Discussion Questions

Identify a current (but not new) or recently completed natural resource planning project within your agency or an agency of your choice. It may include a project in which you are currently involved or in which you are simply interested. Study the planning process that is being followed, its level of public/stakeholder participation, and the general history of the project. Then, address the following:

1. Describe the planning project's history, key actors, public/stakeholder participation, and other relevant aspects.
2. What planning theory/theories most closely approximates the project you are studying? Give examples to justify your answer.
3. Consider the "Key Principles in Building a Successful Public Involvement Program" in the McCoy, et al reading. Evaluate the success of the project's public/stakeholder involvement program in terms of these principles. In addition, make suggestions to improve the program.
4. Glean information from the Internet. What information can you find about the publics/stakeholders identified in the project? Search the Internet to find information relevant to the project. Consider using some of the following key words and subjects: visitor attitudes, preferences, outdoor recreation, demographics, carrying capacity, recreation research, crowding, recreation management, planning. Go to the Natural Resource Recreation Planner's Connection (<http://dlp.gmu.edu/nrrpc>), click on "Add -a- Link" and post the URL (Internet address) of a site you consider valuable and informative. Help on searching the Internet can be found on the Resources page.