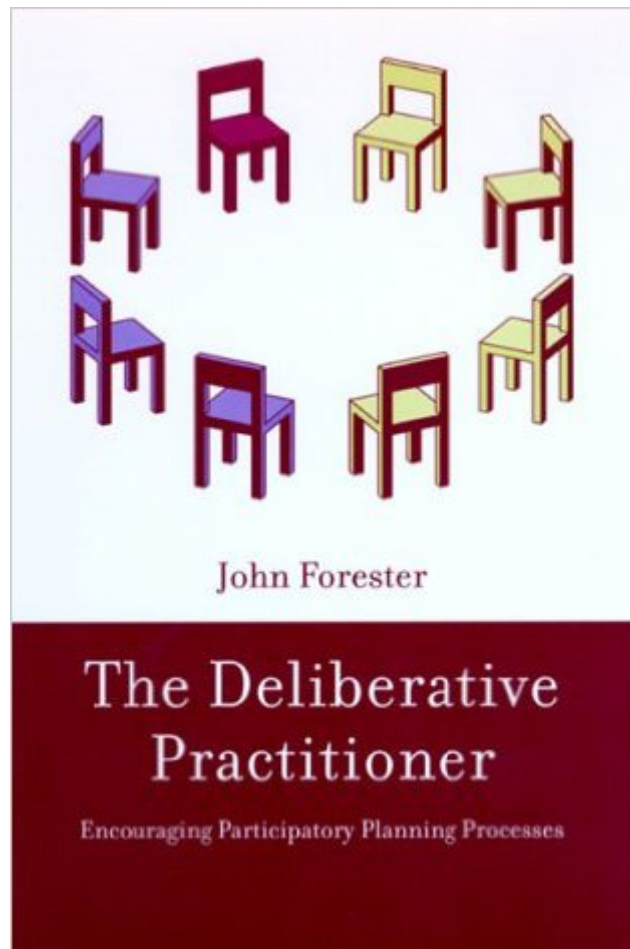


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The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes



Synopsis

Citizen participation in such complex issues as the quality of the environment, neighborhood housing, urban design, and economic development often brings with it suspicion of government, anger between stakeholders, and power plays by many -- as well as appeals to rational argument. Deliberative planning practice in these contexts takes political vision and pragmatic skill. Working from the accounts of practitioners in urban and rural settings, North and South, John Forester shows how skillful deliberative practices can facilitate practical and timely participatory planning processes. In so doing, he provides a window onto the wider world of democratic governance, participation, and practical decision-making. Integrating interpretation and theoretical insight with diverse accounts of practice, Forester draws on political science, law, philosophy, literature, and planning to explore the challenges and possibilities of deliberative practice.

Book Information

Series: MIT Press

Paperback: 321 pages

Publisher: The MIT Press (October 29, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0262561220

ISBN-13: 978-0262561228

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (4 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

John Forester's latest book entitled "The Deliberative Practitioner encouraging Participatory Planning Process", (MIT press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1999) develops the key ideas of his earlier writings on participatory planning processes by examining the challenges and difficulties of planning in the midst of contested power relationships. Forester perceives planning as the effort to build consensus towards commonly perceived goals. Since the context of the planning is always fraught with differences, conflicts and inequalities, a planning process

necessarily shapes opinion, creates value, transforms not just material conditions but human relationships. The emphasis on democracy and participation is central to Forester's search for effective planning practices. Keenly sensitive to a world 'riddled with racial violence and discrimination with vast differences in levels of political organization and mobilization', Forester highlights the significance of public deliberations that give space to plural voices and strengthen democratic practices. Adversarial situations are not predetermining. They can be negotiated towards collaborative action. Deliberative planning is seen as a process of learning together to craft strategies towards greater community good. Forester's concern with planning focuses on the issues of rationality, emotional sensitivity and moral vision. Forester defines rationality as an interactive and argumentative process of marshalling evidence and giving reasons. By ethics, Forester understands not a system of fixed codes and predetermined standards, but the continuous allocation and recognition of value inherent in every pragmatic choice assessable by its quality of action and consequences.

As Forester explains in his Introduction makes, the title of his book is an intentional reference to Don Schön's path breaking *The Reflective Practitioner*. To use a trite cliché, that his book begins where Schön's book left off. There is, on the one hand, a remarkable similarity between the way Schön frames the situation the planner faces on the one hand, and Forester's description of the planner's world and his concept of deliberation on the other. The difference is in Forester's upfront, no-illusion understanding of the conflict-ridden nature of the world of planners and policy makers. Where Schön's reflection-in-action can, perhaps somewhat unfairly, be read as an improvement of the received view of professional knowledge as the sage expert who solves complex problems for clients in need, Forester has no illusions anymore about the moral and instrumental bankruptcy of the expert model. This becomes nowhere as clear as when we look at the examples each author uses. Where Schön uses one-on-one encounters between a psychotherapist and his supervisee, or an architect and his student, Forester examples include a bitter, entrenched fight over urban development in the Oslo harbour, a black home buyer counsellor in the overtly racist environment of a low income white settlement house, or housing improvement among poor campesinos in rural Venezuela. Between Schön's and Forester's book lie almost twenty years of massive social, economic and political change, and, in its wake, almost twenty years of disenchantment, if not disillusion, with the role of politicians, administrators, and experts in the public domain.

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