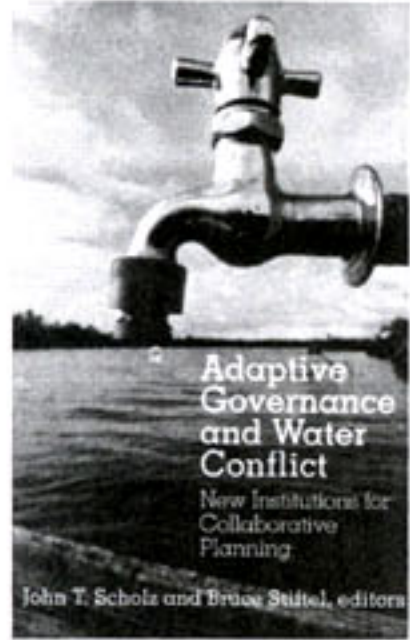


## Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources



### *Adaptive Governance and Water Conflict: New Institutions for Collaborative Planning*

John T. Scholz and Bruce Stiftel, editors. Resources for the Future Press, Washington, DC, 2005. 273 pages. \$29.95 (paperback).

Political scientist Scholz and planning professor Stiftel begin with the premise that existing institutions for regional water planning and regulation in the United States have been unable to cope with ever-increasing demands for urban growth, agricultural production, and environmental quality. They then assemble a stellar team of leading practitioners and scholars to explore whether the concept of adaptive governance might offer a viable path forward. Focusing on eight case studies of water conflict in Florida, and 12 subsequent analyses, the book is written for an educated general audience including the student, scholar, and professional.

According to the editors, adaptive governance “involves the evolution of new governance institutions capable of generating long-term, sustainable policy solutions to wicked problems through coordinated efforts involving previously independent systems of users, knowledge, authorities, and organized interests” (p.5). Like other dominant paradigms that have shaped natural resource planning in recent decades (e.g., ecosystem management, sustainable development, smart growth), adaptive governance appears to be a complex idea that does not lend itself to pithy or precise definitions. In practice, however, adaptive governance entails bringing “the critical users, experts, authorities and organized interests together into specialized negotiating frameworks designed to elicit mutually advantageous agreements” (p.5).

One of the most unusual strengths of this highly readable symposium is how well the chapters are integrated. Twelve practitioners and researchers take turns analyzing the set of cases as a whole, consistently referring to a five-point framework identifying central challenges that adaptive governance must overcome:

1. Representation. Who should be involved?
2. The decision process. How do authorities and stakeholders reach agreements?
3. Scientific learning. How do participants learn about, and reach consensus on, relevant factual issues?
4. Public learning. How can the public come to accept the legitimacy of collaborative planning processes?
5. Problem responsiveness. How well do the resulting plans and policies achieve social equity, economic efficiency, and ecological sustainability?

While planners will encounter a wealth of insights in this volume to inform their professional practice, the book is not intended

as a how-to guide. In fact, most of the authors seem to doubt that enough is currently known about adaptive governance to justify such a handbook. With the exception of two enthusiastic chapters by collaborative planning luminaries Susskind and Forester, the decks are stacked mainly with collaboration skeptics, each identifying a distinct set of obstacles.

For example, Jones notes the prevalent but obsolete styles of technocratic leadership that obstruct consensus building. Quirk observes that each individual negotiator is accountable to broader constituencies who frequently hold unrealistic expectations about what negotiations can achieve. Ozawa discusses how unrealistic expectations about the role of science can unnerve policy makers who are unaccustomed to resting their decisions on hypotheses subject to revision pending new evidence. Sabatier identifies cognitive and psychological barriers that prevent stakeholders from learning from others outside their typically narrow coalitions of trusted advisors. Lubell explains how free-rider problems can thwart efforts to promote collective action through institutional reform. Rothenberg laments the incremental progress attained through multi-party, consensus-building processes, especially compared to the seeming efficiency of market-oriented approaches that seek agreements two parties at a time.

Oddly, the book’s skepticism is one of its most refreshing aspects, especially for readers jaded by the often-utopian accounts of deliberative democracy theorists. Also refreshing is the constructive tone each author strikes, consistently following his or her critiques with suggestions for how to make the most of adaptive governance in light of the obstacles.

The skepticism seems all the more appropriate considering that none of the eight case studies is a stellar success. In Susskind’s view, the reason the cases sometimes fall short is no fault of adaptive governance itself, but because none of the water disputes in Florida satisfy all four conditions he believes are necessary: “involvement of self-selected stakeholder representatives, adequate technical support provided to all parties, neutral facilitation, and explicit experimentation and joint fact-finding” (p. 143).

If you could read just one book about the new, collaborative approaches to planning, this would be a solid choice, particularly for the exposure it provides to several of the leading thinkers and practitioners in the field. The tough love the authors show for their subject is exactly what adaptive governance needs at this stage to develop to its full potential. I hope this team can reunite perhaps five years hence to showcase a few exemplary cases that satisfy each analyst’s design principles and that fulfill the promise of adaptive governance.

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