

**LECTURE 26**

**DEMOCRACY  
FROM BELOW**

**December 11, 2006**

# **I. Three Kinds of Democratic Institutions**

- 1. Representative democracy:* elections to select people who make public decisions for you.**
- 2. Associational Democracy:* Participation of organizations in various kinds of public problem-solving.**
- 3. Direct democracy:* active participation of ordinary citizens in public decision-making.**

## **II. Legislation, Administration and Democracy**

### **II.1 The Problem:**

- **Laws and policies get passed by legislatures, but how do they actually get implemented? How do they get turned into real practices?**
- **Inevitably for most complex policies, a great deal of rule making and practical adaptation has to occur in the translation of laws-on-paper into real policies.**

# **II. Legislation, Administration and Democracy**

## **II.2 An example: The endangered species act**

- **The Act was passed to protect endangered species from extinction**
- **Necessarily the legislation left many details to be worked out by the agency responsible for the policy: what species should be on the list? How should the list be changed? Exactly how were the species on the list to be protected? How do you draw the boundaries of protected habitats?**
- **These are never simply “technical” matters that scientists and experts can decide; there are always conflicts of interests and power struggles over these issues – the famous “spotted owl case” in Oregon.**
- **In practice, the real impact of this law – and many others – depends on how these kinds of details are worked out.**

## **II.3 Command-and-control Bureaucracy**

### **(1) How it works:**

- **At the top of the bureaucracy are political appointees who are responsible to the elected executive of the government**
- **the political head of bureaucracy oversees rule setting and implementation**
- **There may be advisory panels of experts or “special interests”**
- **Below political head are career civil servants who do most of the practical work of implementing these rules: field agents, accountants, researchers, etc.**

## **II.3 Command-and-control Bureaucracy**

### **(2) In what sense is C&C Bureaucracy “democratic”?**

- **The bureaucracy as a whole, and especially the head of the bureaucracy, is accountable to the elected executive**
- **The bureaucracy is itself subject to rules and courts, so you can challenge its practices in court.**
- **Two Problems: (i) often bureaucracies become quite autonomous and insulated from popular pressure and democratic will; (ii) the policy-making centers in bureaucracies are often influenced by well funded lobbyists and sometimes captured by special interests.**

## **II.4 Empowered Participatory Governance**

### **(1). The basic idea:**

- **Decentralize important aspects of implementation to local units**
- **Involve ordinary citizens and civic associations in working out practical details of implementation (and sometimes rule specification) with real power to make decisions.**
- **Retain relatively centralized funding, monitoring and coordination**
- **This is NOT deregulation or privatization; it is participatory democratic decentralization**

## **II.4 Empowered Participatory Governance**

### **(2). Participation & Civil Society**

- **The United States has a very long and vibrant tradition of civic activism: lots of voluntary associations in civil society**
- **There has been some decline in recent decades, but we still have vibrant grass roots associations engaged in the environment, neighborhood revitalization, anti-poverty, civic renewal.**
- **Many associations are mainly involved in protest and pressure; others directly provide services. But some are involved in participatory democratic governance.**

# III. Examples of Grass Roots participatory democracy

## 1. Industrial Areas Foundation community planning

*The problem:* The Federal Government provides block grants to cities. How should the specific projects be decided?

*Traditional solution:* May, city planning departments and city councils decide

*Participatory alternative:* Planning meetings are held in homes, churches, schools in which ordinary residents generate “wish lists” and then deliberate about priorities. This is followed by meetings and discussions at more aggregate levels, which culminates in a plan for the use of the funds.

## 2. Habitat Conservation Planning

*The problem:* sharp conflicts of interests between developers and environmentalists over habitat conservation.

*Traditional solution:* Experts in the Federal agency make the decision after holding hearings and doing scientific research. The typical solution is zero-development within a protected habitat because this is the easiest to monitor.

*Participatory alternative:* Create habitat-specific planning councils in which all “stakeholders” -- environmentalists, developers, landowners, government experts, participate and create the rules for a specific habitat in which “compatible development” is allowed and the monitoring problem is solved by greater trust and local participation.

*Difficulty:* very uneven results. The effectiveness depends heavily on the diligence of local participation and activism.

### 3. Community Policing

*The problem:* effective policing requires a lot of trust between police officers and residents, but in many crime-ridden poor neighborhoods there is little trust.

*Traditional solution:* Police adopt a very defensive attitude, stay in police cars, avoid

*Participatory alternative:* In Chicago an effort has been made to create neighborhood policing councils, “beat councils” in which residents meet regularly with the police to discuss priorities for policing the neighborhood and in which the police report to residents what they have done to response to neighborhood demands.

*Difficulty:* The residents are not really empowered to make the police adopt their priorities.

## 4. Examples from other countries

### (1) Participatory Budgeting in Brazil

*The problem:* how should the city budget be allocated for different kinds of infrastructure development?

*Traditional solution:* The Mayor decides on the budget, submits it to the city council, which modifies it and passes it.

*Participatory alternative:* In Porto Alegre, Brazil, there is an elaborate system of neighborhood assemblies in which any resident in a neighborhood can participate and vote which formulates budgetary plans which are then coordinated in a city-wide budgetary council of representatives from these neighborhood assemblies. Once a city-side consolidated budget is agreed upon in this council, it is submitted to the regular elected city council for ratification.

## **(2) Randomly selected Citizens Assembly in British Columbia**

***The problem:*** British Columbia wanted to change the electoral rules from first-past-the-post to some more democratic system.

***Traditional solution:*** Elected politicians decide on new rules for elections, but when they do so they are likely to protect their own interests.

***Participatory alternative:*** In British Columbia, and now Ontario, a randomly selected “Citizens Assembly” was created to design a new voting system for the province. 160 randomly chosen citizens (half men, half women, geographically representative) met for a year roughly every third weekend, had their expenses paid plus a generous honorarium. They first learned about all of the different possible kinds of rules, and then deliberated for several months to figure out the best new system.

***Extensions:*** Empowered policy juries of randomly selected citizens could decide a range of issues that may be vulnerable to special interest pressures by local officials and politicians (eg zoning rules).