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# The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes (MIT Press)

*John F. Forester*

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**John F. Forester : The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes (MIT Press)**  
before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes (MIT Press):

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Too academic for a real practitionerBy Jason DicemanI purchased

this book hoping it would provide me with further insight in the art and practice of conducting large group deliberations. Unfortunately I found the essays to be rather academic and too removed to be of much value for my purposes. While I am sure this book would serve well for those doing research in the area, the lack of detailed and plain language suggestions did not help guide or inform my work in group facilitation. 16 of 16 people found the following review helpful. "Listen to Stories, Learn in Practice" By Amita Sharma 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. Emotional sensitivity is seen as a source of knowledge and recognition. "Deliberative practitioner" highlights these issues in a 'live' way by using 'stories' as a narrative method because stories deepen our understanding of planning as a human interaction. Stories bring into play our dual roles of actor and critic, crucial to planning. By capturing situations in their complexity, Forester sensitizes our perceptions to the significance of many non-formal processes and the elements of unpredictability and surprise in planning cautioning against a 'rush to interpretation' and simplistic cure-alls. Forester's book makes significant contributions to the discussion on participatory planning. The stories he selects indicate how planners can through their technical inquiry, explicit value inquiry, and learning about social identities succeed in a pragmatic synthesis of rationality, ethical judgements and emotional sensitivities. Forester's book has special relevance to developing contexts, fraught with unevenness, caught between their indigenous cultures and the new cultures that the culture of external development aid brings with it. Development projects in such contexts, under the pressure of measurable, time-bound performance indicators, tend to abandon the process of deliberative planning. Forester's book reminds the planners in contexts of developing economies, of the need for culturally-sensitive planning process if sustainable development has to happen. It underscores the possibility and need of cross-context learning. It also reminds that in a situation of unequal relationship, participatory planning can be said to be successful only if existing relationship have been transformed through greater transfer of power to those who are the subjects of planning. Forester's book creates an effective, innovative way of educating planner, using theory and practice, the general and the particular, to mutually illuminate each other. Finally, and most importantly, it bridges the gap between theory and practice in a way that makes practice insightful and theory relevant, each enriching the other. It restores the practitioner to the centrality of planning discourse, and in doing so, the importance of people in planning. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Searching for theory behind praxis By Stefan Wodicka Once I started reading this book I could not put it aside for long. Perhaps this is because so many of the insights that the author offers on what practitioners of deliberative planning and rural development actually do resonates so much with the work I am involved with in Indonesia and the Philippines. Unlike many other books I have read on planning and development, this book relates stories of planners' real world experiences. It appears that most of the skills practitioners use to deal with the diversity of interests in the face of conflict are rarely taught in universities or textbooks. One wonders where practitioners learn what they do best. While a solid professional background is necessary, planners must also use improvisation to deal with deliberative processes which involve many stakeholders. What I enjoyed most about this book, unlike many others, is that it contrasts rationality with emotional sensitivity, calculation with improvisation, all of which are necessary for good practice. The author also addresses an often overlooked aspect of deliberative processes in the design professions, that is, how to balance pragmatism in contexts where there has been a history of injustice towards particular groups. The book makes use of extensive practical experiences of real-life planners and attempts to draw theory from that praxis. These experiences are just as fascinating to read as the authors' insights into theory. It's like being immersed into a deliberative dialogue.

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.

This book represents the culmination of a decade's work and succeeds. Forester, perhaps the finest planning theorist in the U.S., uses a variety of case studies to show how his ideas about deliberation shape planning practice. He speaks to the problems and worries of practitioners and students of planning in all types of public settings. This book will likely prove popular as a text in planning schools and appeal to professionals in a variety of allied disciplines. (Charles J. Hoch, Professor, Urban Planning and Policy Program, University of Illinois at Chicago) About the Author John Forester is Professor and Chair in the Department of City and Regional Planning at Cornell University. He is the author of *Planning in the Face of Power and Critical Theory, Public Policy, and Planning Practice* and the editor of *Critical Theory and Public Life* (MIT Press, 1985).