

SHARING POWER IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

– Elery Hamilton-Smith *

INTRODUCTION

Governance of public land and of public environmental policy is shaped by a range of assumptions, one centrally important group of which are those to do with the nature and locus of power. This discussion arises out of my personal experience over some years as a member of several organizational units within the overall aegis of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. However, the views and opinions expressed arise from my personal experience and judgment and do not represent any formal policy or other representation of the IUCN.

One of the early expressions of policy in governance of public lands arose with the development of the United States National Parks Service. The National Parks were entirely managed by the United States Army from the initial establishment in 1872 until the development of a separate National Parks Service in 1916. But the concepts of parks management and governance saw very little change. The ranger training centre remained as it had been. When I visited there in the 1970s, the course in visitor management focused almost entirely on law enforcement, including the proper use of the pistols carried by every ranger.

So, although now undergoing immense changes (e.g., Martin 2008), the assumptions which prevailed for most of the organization's history assumed what is now called the 'Command and Control' strategy – a centralized organisation exercising all powers within the system. That strategy was widely publicised by the Park Service and held up as an ideal to the international training and other programs which it offered. These programs certainly shaped the postwar revival of protected area management in Australia.

PRESSURES FOR CHANGE

However, a diversity of pressures upon government for sharing of power gradually emerged and accumulated.

One of the widely known challenges emerged from the equally well publicised and idealised War on Poverty with its flagship slogan of 'maximum feasible participation'. Regrettably, the naivety and incompetence which marked the program ensued that it became an un-winnable war.

Moynihan's 1969 review of the failure was aptly titled *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*. His critique and that of various other policy scientists all provide a warning to those who want to escape from the dominance of the 'Command and Control' strategy.

However, the experience of the new nations which emerged during the 1950-1980 postwar era and old nations which entered into modernism has had a much more significant impact. A number of the new nations had a long history of cultural diversity and pluralism, so found the centralized control strategies to be inappropriate. As a remarkable example, although the outside world often sees China as having an extreme centralist control, this is absolutely false today. The long-standing diversity of the country has been totally embraced in the establishment of new patterns in modern governance.

PATTERNS FOR SHARING POWER

Another valuable product of the war on poverty is the well known Ladder of Citizen Participation from Arnstein (1969):

CITIZEN CONTROL	DEGREES OF CITIZEN POWER
DELEGATED POWER	
PARTNERSHIP	
PLACATION	DEGREES OF TOKENISM
CONSULTATION	
INFORMING	
THERAPY	NON-PARTICIPATION
MANIPULATION	

Elery Hamilton-Smith at
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In one form or another, this is well-known to policy scientists and many community activists. One recent commentator coupled training with informing within to the non-participation category, and non-participation could well also include such common tactics as ignoring and rejecting.

A major landmark publication which aims at increasing opportunities for public involvement is the text produced by the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP) under the title SHARING POWER: Learning by Doing in Co-Management of Natural Resources throughout the World (Borrini-Feyerabend et al 2004). Although many of the old barriers to effective change persist, this text is rich in descriptions of successful projects. In my experience, it provides a very positive encouragement and tool for change.

MOVING AHEAD?

Certainly the very concept of power-sharing is firmly based in respect for other human beings (and perhaps even some of the other species with

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whom we share space on earth). Ideas of civic society and of equity and/or justice are similarly very important. Yet, I find ideological arguments about sharing power to often be not very convincing in practice.

The most important arguments should be to do with effectiveness in governance. Sharing power often leads to genuine sharing of responsibility, greater skills, knowledge and depth of commitment. As a simple example, the growing role of Australian Aboriginal people in both natural resource and human resource management is now accelerating and demonstrating major contributions to land management (See Porteous 2005).

But in fact, the debate about the wider political management of lifestyle in Aboriginal communities and the recent governmental initiatives in this arena are sorry examples of the failure to genuinely share power. They resound with continuing paternalism even when it is abundantly clear that this is self-defeating.

But to return to land management in Australia, most of the diversity of management agencies suffers a range of crippling problems, including

- The long-standing political ideology based in Benthamite concepts of utilitarianism, legalism and positivism (Collins 1985) and the dominance of Cartesian Science (Damasio 1994)
- Maintaining the control and command strategies imported from the US National Park Service
- Operating under regrettably outmoded legislation on control of public land tenure and management
- More recently the adoption of a neo-liberalist paradigm, and
- Gestures of broader public involvement which are largely tokenistic.

Of course, as most public land management is a state responsibility, we find some agencies or specific sectors within them are moving forward to foster citizen involvement in very positive ways. Certainly, it is clear that the new Federal Government intends to make significant changes, but that may or may not flow down to the state level.

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