

STRATEGIES AND GAME PLANS

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Introduction and Update

How do we move from research results to effective action as applied anthropologists?

The answer lies in becoming engaged with decision makers in the public policy arena.

To become advocates for solutions we believe in, we need both implementation strategies and game plans to reach and influence power centers. The following piece, published under the title above, first appeared in *Human Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 1, Spring, 1999, pp. 105-107. It was intended to focus the attention of SfAA members on the need to propose and promote policies intended to generate directed culture change.

SfAA's Public Policy Committee believes that it should appear with an appropriate update on this website, with some recognition of gains taking place during the three years intervening. A significant advance is the contribution of this committee to a volatile debate with the World Bank over the terms for the inclusion of indigenous peoples and their cultural products in Bank loan agreements.

The parallel Committee on Public Policy within AAA has also reported on its recent activities in the April 2002 issue of *Anthropology News*. The instrument advanced for this and similar concerns is the Public Policy Forum, which addressed four topics during 2001—the most recent of which was aspects of globalization.

Acting independently, the Culture and Agriculture and Anthropology and Environment Sections of AAA have convened a conference titled “Environment, Resources and Sustainability: Policy Issues for the 21st Century.” It was held in Athens, Georgia, September 7-8, 2002. The call for papers, issued in March, proclaims that, “an important component of this effort will be to articulate a process through which prioritized issues can be promoted...”

That, indeed, is the name of the game—or game plan if you prefer.

Because we see applied anthropology as a national and international discipline, we have frequently sought to address our policy concerns to agencies that operate at that level—USAID, UNDP, World Bank and IMF, and appropriate committees of the U.S. Congress. I have recently documented an important example.

In an essay appearing in *HO*, Vol. 61, No.3, 2002, pp. 288-298, I have addressed “Closing the Gap Between Anthropology and Public Policy: The Route Through Cultural Heritage Development”. This essay builds upon Michael Cernea’s study of UNESCO’s cultural heritage site restoration in Morocco. Simultaneous economic development, through World Bank financing of spin-off activities in the bazaar economy of Fez-Medina, has generated a commercial boom.

But the intent to promote policy making at the highest “level of integration,” in Julian Steward’s terms, most often through resolutions at annual meetings, may greatly exceed our capacity to mobilize resources and exert political influence. In fact, as the role of central governments tends to diminish in a more globalized world, the attempt itself may reflect a mind set better suited to a bygone era.

As anthropologists are presently more aware than many others, we have entered the era of “participatory decision making,” and almost by definition including members of affected populations in the process reduces the level of integration at which many decisions take place: they become less global and more local as the town meeting becomes a vehicle, perhaps unrealistically idealized, for procedure.

Within the development community this tendency has been both legitimized and enthusiastically promoted under two labels which tap deeply ingrained value themes in Western society: democratization and decentralization. In operational terms, both imply the need for a more “inclusionary” set of procedures for establishing policy.

For anthropologists, this tendency or trend should carry the reminder that policy-making takes place at all levels of integration—neighborhood, school district, community, county, and state. A neglected vehicle for inventing an “engaged anthropology,” in Rappaport’s welcome terms, may be our Local Practitioner Organizations. Without much encouragement and even less support, they have displayed remarkable sustainability.

To expand and improve policy intervention efforts at all levels, innovative strategies and game plans are solicited by your Public Policy Committee.