

**Experts, decision makers and the “deciders” - The role of social sciences  
in democratizing science  
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...there exists a single survey and two interpretations.  
(Flyvbjerg, p. 152)

...most environmental justice activists in urban settings  
face institutional structures committed to economic development even at the costs  
of citizens' health and well-being.  
(Simpson, p. 3)

studying science policymaking on Earth hardly requires shifting one's gaze from  
the laboratory's customary denizens. ...  
on Planet XI many other kinds of people influence science and technology  
policymaking.  
(Sclove)

Earlier in the series, Sareeta Amrute raised “the question of where democratic participation is located, and the rather unsettling spectre that ‘democratic forms’ might be at their strongest for us when we chose to use, buy and re-value things.” (handout). Woody highlighted procedural forms of democratic decision making by deliberators a la Kitcher, and in Woody's narrative modified by Longino's arguments about the “objectivity” of scientific claims. Disinterested experts play a central role in the deliberations outlined by Kitcher. In her public lecture, Moore outlined how scientists involve themselves in social movements that shape knowledge production and distribution, extending their expertise in various forms into the public realm.

The focus of this session will be on experts, decision makers and the “deciders,” and the role of *social sciences* in democratic decision-making, not only through a philosophical reading of social science but through a critique of its practice in 1996. Readings provided:

1. methodological guidelines for phronetic social science (Ch. 9 Flyvbjerg)
2. case study of expert and decider involvement in decision making in urban planning in the city of Aalborg, Denmark (Ch. 10 Flyvbjerg)
3. case study of environmental justice activist involvement in decision making in urban development in the city of Memphis, TN (Simpson)
4. discussion of worker and academic involvement in development of technology and related polity (Sclove)

## **decision making in urban planning in the city of Aalborg**

The Aalborg narrative is told by Flyvbjerg from his point of view as an expert in the process of urban planning. He started as a citizen scholar that accepts “the ideal that democratic decisions should be rational and informed” (p. 143)

Confronted with evidence that the deciders’ interpretation of data trumps citizen’s votes and experts’ interpretations (p. 153), BF decides “to become partisan, to face conflict, and to exercise power.” (p. 155). His strategy is to make his studies public so that they can “become part of the power relations they had uncovered.” (p. 156). His trial balloons lead to dialogue.

## **decision making in urban development in the city of Memphis, TN**

This narrative is told by Simpson from her point of view as a political scientist who grew up in the area under discussion. Simpson focuses on Doris Bradshaw, an environmental justice activist who, unlike Flyvbjerg, is not acknowledged as an expert. Simpson’s narrative about Bradshaw’s efforts has many parallels with Flyvbjerg’s work--from both Bradshaw and Flyvbjerg generating their own data, using dissemination strategies to gain power to both being asked to serve on the citizens’ boards... The outcomes, however, are quite different.

Simpson argues that credibility in framing issues require consistency, empirical credibility, and credible claimsmakers. Claimsmakers, in turn, “need status, knowledge, and legitimizing organization.” (p. 12)

## **methodological guidelines for phronetic social science**

Flyvbjerg argues for the importance of values and power as central to analysis in the social science, and the need for case studies for deep understanding of both structure and process.

### Focusing on values

The point of departure should be “the classic value-rational questions: Where are we going? Is it desirable? What should be done?” (p. 130)

### Placing power at the core of analysis

The classical questions are augmented by a fourth question: “Who gains, and who loses? Through what kinds of power relations? ... Of what kinds of power relations are those asking these questions themselves a part?” (p. 131)

### Getting close to reality

“...the phronetic researcher becomes a part of the phenomenon studied, without necessity “going native” or the project becoming simple action research.” (p. 132)

### Emphasizing little things

Relies on a number of other thinkers to argue for the importance of “thick description” (Geertz, from Ryle), “vast accumulation of source materials” (Foucault, from Nietzsche) (p. 133) to argue that phronetic research starts from local micropractices (p.133-134).

### Looking at practice before discourse

“...focus on the actual daily practices which constitute a given field of interest, ... recorded and described simply as events... The horizon of meaning is that of the individual practice.” (p. 134-135) It is in attempting to make sense of the practice that the focus shifts to other discourses.

### Studying cases and contexts

In earlier chapters BF argued for the importance of context for phronetic social science, here he argues that “Cases exist in context. ... Praxis has always been contingent on context-dependent judgment, on situational ethics.” (p. 136).

### Asking “How? Doing narrative

“How?” is added to “Why?” because both understanding and explanation are needed. (p.136)

### Joining agency and structure

There is a need for the social sciences to study both macrolevel and microlevel AND the relation between, structural analyses and studies of actors in the SAME project. In most social science research that includes both, data is strong in one area and weak (almost theoretical speculation) in the other. (p. 138)

### Dialoguing with a polyphony of voices

“Hence, “objectivity” in phronetic research is not “contemplation without interest” but rather use of many perspectives. (p. 139) because the “practical rationality of *phronesis* is based on a socially conditioned, intersubjective “between-reason.” (dialogue). (p. 140)

## **disciplinary practices in Denmark and The Netherlands not present in STS in 1996**

Are the practices in Planet XI prevalent in STS today in the U.S.? Is his critique about risk taking accurate today? Are the disciplines responding still in ways that diminish the impact of democratizing work?

Flyvbjerg, Bent (2001). *Making social science matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

-Ch 9: Methodological guidelines for a reformed social science, 129-140

-Ch 10: Examples and illustrations: Narratives of value and power, 141-161.

Sclove, Richard (1996). STS on other planets. *EASST Review* (1996, June), 15(2) (European Association for the Study of Science and Technology)

<http://www.easst.net/review/june1996/sclove> [downloaded 11 Jan 2009]

Simpson, Andrea (2002). Who Hears Their Cry? The Case for Environmental Justice in Memphis, Tennessee. Chapter in Adamson, Joni, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein (Eds.). *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.