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Social and Policy Contexts for Environmental Modeling

Courtland L. Smith, Department of Anthropology, Oregon State University, USA

Abstract: Modeling techniques and software can be an important part of the planning and policy processes associated with environmental decision making. Involving users, stakeholders, and clients is important for understanding and incorporating the social context associated with these decisions. Model developers have to understand the interaction of modeling with other social activities and agendas. Users, stakeholders, and clients are important for both generating information and building knowledge. The information and knowledge of users, stakeholders, and clients tends to be more local and specific. Models that broaden user perspectives can have important information generating and knowledge informing roles as well. Models can be used to conduct and evaluate social experiments and analyzing alternatives that are not possible with actual social systems. Involving users, stakeholders, and clients, however, heightens social and modeling tradeoffs about system completeness, expands the discussion of the complexity and realism to include in a model, and affects the allocation of project resources.

Keywords: environmental modeling, social context; human dimensions; policy processes