

**DISSERTATION ABSTRACT**  
**Deliberative Citizenship:**  
**Social Change Organizations and Critical Discourse in and beyond the Forum**  
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Citizens often have knowledge of policy problems and their consequences yet face considerable challenges informing policy (Walters et al. 2000). Social change organizations (SCOs) – as one type of civil society organization (Ospina & Foldy 2010) – can support citizens as they develop and promote this knowledge. This dissertation examines how SCOs play this role in deliberative politics. Empirical research on deliberative politics tends to focus on how governments can more effectively create forums so that members of the public may share their perspectives on pressing public issues (Crosby and Bryson 2007, Bingham et al. 2005, Koontz & Johnson 2004, Montpetit et al. 2004, Fung & Wright 2003, Thomas 2001). While this research is vitally important for public administration, it overlooks the unique contributions that civil society organizations can make to deliberative democracy, contributions that I argue are often unrecognized by public administration scholars and practitioners alike to the detriment of deliberative experiments and ultimately to policy making (Smith 2008, Stivers 2002). This dissertation asks how SCOs support citizens’ efforts to “transmit” their local knowledge of policy problems in government sponsored forums and other arenas of policy making to affect policy change.

I examine this question through a comparative, narrative case study of two SCOs in the environmental field (Ospina & Dodge 2005, Stone 1989). The environmental field is highly technological and scientific, and involves complex problems and high political stakes. These features make citizen participation challenging and thus provide an ideal context for examining how SCOs might support the transmission of citizens’ local knowledge in such contexts. Using

theory-based sampling (Miles and Huberman 1994), I selected two very different organizations with past successes transmitting local knowledge to elaborate theory about the role of SCOs in deliberative democracy: the *Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice* and the *Powder River Basin Resource Council*. In each case, I conducted 18 narrative interviews with a range of actors (36 total), collected extensive archival data and did observations. I developed comparative accounts of the organizations' efforts and the responses of government officials and political opponents using a narrative analysis technique called re-transcription (Feldman & Khademian 2005).

I find that each organization developed a set of discursive practices that support what I call *deliberative citizenship*, a process by which citizens critically reflect on and make sense of their experiences to judge and promote its political significance. I further argue that deliberative citizenship drives the transmission process: as members of these organizations make sense of their experiences, they help to create pathways along which local knowledge may be transmitted. My analysis revealed four common dimensions of transmission – *relational, linguistic, temporal* and *spatial* – that interact to shift power dynamics in deliberative politics to make transmission possible. These dimensions suggest that SCOs work hard “at the boundary” between civil society and the state – in deliberative forums and other arenas – to convince public officials to consider their environmental concerns, to design forums to empower affected publics, and to ground responsibility for environmental decisions in “the deliberative system” (Mansbridge 1999). These strategies explain important links between civil society and the state in deliberative politics, and reveal important, yet unrecognized, contributions that social change organizations make to deliberative democracy specifically, and policy making more generally.

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