



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**Sandra Lina Rodegher**

Will defend her dissertation

**Scenario Planning for Sustainability:  
Understanding and Enhancing Participation in Group  
Deliberations**

**Abstract**

Scenario planning originally garnered attention within the corporate sector as a tool to manage energy transitions, but it has gained traction within the field of sustainability. It is a process for exploring potential futures and thinking critically about complex decisions that involve high degrees of uncertainty. It is also effective in shifting mental models, engaging diverse stakeholders, and enhancing organizational learning, making it ideal for the complex problems that sustainability seeks to address. The resulting insights from scenario planning are typically used in strategic planning, which further aligns it with sustainability's commitments to action-oriented solutions.

As a highly participative process, its success hinges on inclusive and just engagement of participants. This dissertation employed a multimethod approach to address the question, "What impacts do social dynamics have on participation in scenario planning for sustainability?" First, I conducted an ethical exploration of participation, looking to the systemic societal factors that might function as barriers to authentic participation. Next, I conducted an ethnographic study of a scenario planning workshop to identify ways in which social influence and authority impact participation in the process. Finally, I piloted a psychology study that explored the impact of explicit acknowledgement of status differential and the use of pre-event brainstorming on participation in a small group task that parallels scenario planning interactions.

In doing so, this dissertation presents a conceptual framework from which to understand the role of participation in scenario planning for sustainability and coins the term "strawman participation," drawing attention to the role and function of social

influence in participatory processes. If “token participation” arises from participants not being granted decision-making power, strawman participation develops from social/structural barriers, then “authentic participation” allows for both decision-making power and social capacity for participation. Though my findings suggest that scenario planning utilizes methods to equalize participation and engage diverse participants, factors such as status differentials and gender dynamics impact authentic participation. Results of the pilot study point to the utility of status concealment and individual-level brainstorming to bolster participation. Ultimately, this work contributes to a more nuanced understanding of participation in service of more robust, pluralistic sustainability decision making.

Friday, May 8, 2015  
10:30 am  
Wrigley Hall, Room 481

Faculty, students, and the general public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:  
Cynthia Selin (Chair)  
Joan McGregor  
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