

Environmental issues examined through cohesive efforts

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Solving crucial environmental issues such as global warming and water supply involves managing competing interests, uncertainty and risk, and this is best done through meaningful collaboration in a neutral environment.

Arizona State University Barrett Honors College Lecturer John N. Parker discussed the ways in which scientists, stakeholders and policy makers can communicate effectively by coming together through boundary organizations at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Chicago.

Boundary organizations are designed to facilitate collaboration and information-flow between the research and public policy communities by defining roles and working in mutually cohesive environments to cross hurdles in order to address natural resource challenges.

Parker's talk, "On Being All Things to All People: Boundary Organizations and Scientists," was part of the AAAS "Decision-Making in the Public Domain: Boundary Processes as Catalysts for Innovation" symposium held on Feb. 17. The session featured researchers and non-academic representatives who work with scientists, policy makers and the public to devise environmental solutions.

Parker discussed how addressing pressing problems such as water availability, emerging energy technologies like fracking, and species decline and extinction requires integrating knowledge and perspectives

from varied communities who come together and work for a positive solution through ad hoc working groups and boundary organizations that offer incentives and accountability in a politically neutral arena.

"The scale of the issues are critical at this time in history since the future of humans depends on the ability to manage complex problems that cross scales and involve many different groups who at times cooperate and at other times are in conflict with one another," Parker said.

Boundary processes link science to public policy and better inform environmental decisions through science. This process can be difficult when stakeholders and policy makers work under different reward systems, such as scientists striving for grants and conducting research that make take months compared to a policymaker or stakeholder who may need information immediately to answer to the public and constituents.

Democratic processes that involve scientists, [policy makers](#), the public and ecosystem and resource system managers who come together in productive ways lead to the application of collective knowledge to address problems, he added.

Parker's research in this area was detailed in the article, "On being all things to all people: Boundary Organizations and the Contemporary Research University" that was published in the March 2012 edition of the *Social Studies of Science* journal with Beatrice Crona of the Stockholm Resilience Centre.

Provided by Arizona State University

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