

Social Justice and Deep Participation

Theory and Practice for the 21st Century

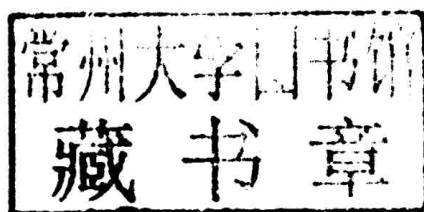
Paula Donnelly Roark



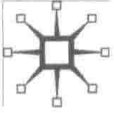
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Paula Donnelly Roark



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Social Justice and Deep Participation

To Phil

*whose support, insight, and sense of humor
made writing this book possible*

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List of Acronyms

ADF	African Development Foundation
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
CAR	Central African Republic
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EA	Environmental Assessment
FEER	Fonds de l'eau et de l'Equipment Rural
IAD	Institutional Analysis and Development
IDS	Institute for Development Studies
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INE	Institute of National Education (French: Institut National de Education)
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
LLI	Local-level institutions
MDGs	Millennium development goals
NGOs	Nongovernmental organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PORP	Participatory Organizations of the Rural Poor
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SAMs	Service-asset management (organizations)
SPA	Special Program of Assistance for Africa
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WPP	Watershed Partnership Project
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Introduction: Turning Points

Crises abound and solutions remain scarce as we begin to make our way through the 21st century. As a result, are social movements making a comeback? In the past several years, citizens around the world watched the protestors of the Arab Spring on one continent, Occupy Wall Street and the 99 percenters on another, and Ukraine on a third; each began as a social protest whose leaders and activists hoped would become a successful social movement. Instead, each has demonstrated the limits of political and economic power and underscored the rapidity with which threat, physical domination, and violence can appear as a response. Underlying all of this has been a worldwide economic downturn featuring increasing inequality and injustice fueling ever-growing anger among citizens of all nations who feel betrayed by both international banking systems and their own national governments. Thus, the intractability and violence of poverty has expanded everyone's insecurity has increased, and the possibilities for social justice have diminished.

But these are not the only problems for which solutions elude us. The effects of climate change are much greater than were predicted even five years ago. Yet the world's governments and environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were not able to come to any substantive agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol at the 2011 international meetings in Durban, South Africa, or at the more recent 2012 meetings in Brazil. More unsettling, 2014 has seen the release of at least three international and national reports that document even more dire consequences of climate change, including rising sea levels, the now-certain loss of the southwest Antarctic ice sheet, decreased food production, and faster spread of disease.¹ Many of us realize that we should be concerned and even frightened by these predictions, but with a slight shrug of the shoulders, most of us say to ourselves, "What can I do?"

So, while social protests may have our sympathy and even our support, we tend to doubt that they will have the same success as earlier social movements.² Indeed, while the general public gives positive points for the courage, fortitude,

and organization of today's social movements—those who stand together and say “No” to entrenched power interests—beyond that initial nod of support, no one—from those in the trenches to those observing from afar—seems to agree on anything else. As a result, many of us believe that we are in a multi-faceted crisis of major proportions: neither our political and economic institutions nor even our social movements can formulate solutions for our very real and complex problems. So we force ourselves, if not to care less, to at least think less.

Social Justice and Deep Participation challenges this economic and political status quo and offers a means to change it as well. As a basis for successful change, the following chapters first demonstrate the imperative to include the often-ignored underlying *social* institutions and their organizing social groups. Only these institutions can provide legitimacy and sustainability to envisioned economic and political change. In other words, social institutions provide the necessary “license to operate” that is too often forgotten in times of prosperity and societal balance.

The volume spells out a well-researched process based within these social institutions that brings about legitimated change. This new process—the *deep participation* of the title—is introduced for the first time in this book. Research and observation of participatory dynamics within diverse communities in the midst of rapid social change identifies something new—the existence of a hard-to-find *social integrative power*—that is strong enough to reorient the current multiple standoffs in a positive direction. Tapped into through the use of deep participation, integrative power allows people and groups to collectively reorganize themselves and their own social institutions within their preferred culture. It is, in turn, these collectively and internally reimaged social organizations and institutions that can offer *stabilizing support* and legitimized social integrative power to new, desired social, economic, and political ideas needed in times of crisis.

Deep participation's six critical working elements, described in detail in the following chapters, create a new and different context for social movements and other participatory activities that, if adopted, will foster much greater solidarity and success as we move through this new century. Current social movements certainly have unity to begin actions, but that initial cohesion begins to wane as the first wave of group defiance starts to recede. This poses particular problems for today's social movements because the issues being confronted are more complex and interconnected than they were in the past, and the right thing to do is not as clear as it was in earlier times.

But deep participation generates an inclusive solidarity that is stabilized and sustaining, resulting in the creation of a social integrative power that can be maintained over long periods. In turn, this allows the time and the collective social energy for diverse groups to arrive at the legitimate and complex solutions necessary for our times. Two critical elements that contribute to the

deep participation processes of stabilization and legitimacy include *inclusion* and *mutual social learning* for new knowledge production and application. The research also suggests that these factors contribute to increasing numbers of group-based *acts of altruism*.

The following chapters introduce the research, theory, and practice of deep participation in depth. Part I reviews current participation analysis and outlines observation of participatory dynamics of multiple communities as they proceeded through times of intense economic, political, and social change. Part II first reviews new, original research and empirical observations that indicate the existence of deep participation, and as a result three research hypotheses are formulated for analysis. Chapter 5 defines and assesses, from theoretical perspectives, the six elements that make up deep participation. As a result, it defines a new and second category of participation that pushes the boundaries of our current understanding concerning the dynamics of social change. Chapters 6 and 7 then define and explore these deep participation patterns in two case study situations reflecting differing problems, geographies, and cultures. In each, against all odds, some level of durable and sustaining positive change is evident. The two case study examples include local-level institutions and poverty reduction in West Africa and environmental stewardship in North America.

Part III explores the dynamics and theory required for development of a participatory social theory given the empirical and case history definition of deep participation presented in Part II. It uses the fast movement-oriented “genesis” and “demise” units of analysis within “historical systems” as a base.³ It offers a theoretical perspective concerning how observed deep participation dynamics actually interact with power, culture, legitimacy, and social knowledge in the context of rapid social change at all levels of society. The concluding chapter outlines and explores several of the key implications for action and theory development in terms of social justice, deep participation, and participatory social theory in the future.

The natural dynamics of deep participation

Knowing what deep participation is—and how it works—can make a critical difference in numerous situations. This is particularly true because the research discussed in the following pages indicates that deep participation is *not* just one more ideology. Rather it gives access to an existing natural dynamic of the world⁴—or *social integrative power*—that is similar to the much better recognized “political threat power” and “economic coercive power”. A major point of our discussion will be how these social integrative power dynamics were first observed and what they mean for durable social change. We will also explore how a *rebalancing* among these social, economic, and political powers—and

their proposed equal recognition—improves the odds for positive, effective action and change.

So, what is deep participation? It is a term that I have adopted to signify a newly identified category of participatory dynamics. In contrast to ordinary participation, this more profound type operates only in the context of rapid social change and instability, and it is available to every society in highly culturally mediated forms. Using existing social organizations by which to access this dynamic, deep participation offers the capacity to reinvent existing societal institutions that are out of sync with today's tangible realities. This reinvention process thus has the capacity to develop positive and sustainable changes in a societal group's functioning institutions. These more profound dynamics—inclusive, complex, and interactive—create a stabilized and sustaining social energy allowing collective social learning and a social integrative power to emerge. Only social institutions however, through their maintenance of human connection and social learning, can offer societal legitimacy and its license to operate.

Equally important, for the first time, deep participation dynamics provide the central core necessary for beginning the formulation of a *participatory social theory*. The deep participation dynamic, with its six elements, explain the collective and social learning processes that use critical thinking and emotional resonance to reinvent out-of-sync institutions. Deep participation's final result is a change-of-type social change characterized by greater altruism, inclusiveness, and social integration. These types of changes can be observed and utilized at both micro- and macrolevels. So, as the limitations of political threat power and economic coercive power become more apparent every year, the addition and use of participatory social theory's unique potential for harmonious social change is vital in today's world.

In light of deep participation's potential, is choosing to use it always the best power choice? No, of course not. The natural power dynamics of the exchange/coercive market and political threat is necessarily always with us—in demand and of use when practiced in their positive forms. However, this newly defined deep participation and social integrative dynamic—never before formally recognized and rarely used—exists as a societal and group potential. When discerned, it gives us an extremely useful complement to these two long-standing and overly utilized mechanisms. As a result, we need to understand that recognition of deep participation and social integrative power is an urgent, pressing need if we are to negotiate the 21st century successfully.

Of course, this social integrative process is currently not as well recognized as political and economic power. Despite this limitation, participatory social theory credibly argues that social integrative, economic, and political powers are the natural dynamics of the world. Each of these natural dynamics represents an existential human need—survival, volition, and connection.

Therefore, all three deserve to be equitably recognized. This more-balanced recognition will increase the possibilities for creating happier and more just societies around the world.

New *cognitive and reflexive institutions* will be needed to sustain this social collective learning over the longer term; and it is within this frame of reference that the term "social justice" is used in the title of this book. Social justice has a long history of diverse use, and certainly inspires controversy among scholars. But I do not use this term with the intent of entering into these controversies. Instead, I suggest it as a statement of *mutual direction*. While social justice and equality inspire me as universal principles, I also understand that these same principles as social construction are favored within Western societies. But can it be also accepted as a universal principle? Yes, but only if there is more mutual honesty and insight on all sides. I strongly agree with the anthropologist, Mary Douglas, who tellingly observes, "This is a society [referring to the West] that uses equality of individuals to justify itself, but in worldwide comparisons of justice its economic ascendancy and its efforts to maintain its unequal advantage become hard to justify by its own principles of legitimation".⁵

So, if social justice is simply a product of societal institutions, does this destine it and other principles to be abridged at any time by total tolerance, as called for within a perspective of moral relativism? The answer is "No". There are ways to judge among social system-preferred principles by using nonsubjective preferences such as assessing assumptions and coherence. This reflexive assessment is difficult—and it cannot be done on an ad hoc basis. Hence, there is the need for new reflexive institutions among diverse societies, which can signal mutual cognitive-based directions. For example, instead of societal preferences, these would include, in addition to coherency, such standards as non-arbitrariness, complexity, and practicality.⁶

Finally, it should be also noted that I use a variety of diverse sources. Certainly, the two consistent sources are my own *practice* background and social theory. However, I do shift from rigorous theoretical work in social theory to the more journalistic approach of some sources and subjects that are of interest. I do realize that this is different from most theoretical presentations, but I believe it assists me in effectively presenting the reality of a particular situation while, at the same time, demonstrating the role of deep participation and its corollary, participatory social theory.

This approach also attempts to ensure that the potential utility of the theory and practice presented is substantial and will be of value in a variety of subjects well beyond the specific purview of this book's inquiry. For example, this book presents two diverse case study situations. The first, in West Africa, describes a reinvented institution that gives people the ability to integrate the real-world necessity of productivity with their own cultural preferences of systemic reciprocity. The second, in North America, describes

various social groups with divisive belief systems concerning the environment, and how they come together to solve difficult and contentious water problems. But other diverse applications are also possible. For example, (1) social movements can initiate deep participation to *reframe* a problem, so that negative, conflictual processes are avoided, and the focus remains on mutually redefined solutions; (2) communities in the midst of war can utilize the early processes of deep participation to begin organizing community-based peace initiatives; (3) national and international debates concerning such diverse issues as climate change or the worldwide health dangers of increasing obesity can benefit from understanding how existing, out-of-sync social institutions continue to formulate our social attitudes and beliefs, and how the situation can change through utilization of deep participation; and (4) cities and small towns have begun initiatives to build long-term cultures of peace that are embedded in everyday structural and organizational formations. All of this activity is present in diverse cultures and geographies. As a result, deep participation potential is substantive if still unrecognized; but definition of participatory social theory is necessary for enhanced understanding and long-term staying power.

So, the intent of this book is to explore what this deep participation is, how it works, and what it means for our local and global goals. I argue for the "competitive plausibility" of this new concept in order to see how it stands up to academic scrutiny. I also seek to further the definition of participatory social theory itself.⁷ With a better understanding of deep participation and its dynamics, an equally important objective is to fashion more effective coalitions and social movements for the constellation of issues that are of greatest importance as we embark on the 21st century. These include (1) poverty; (2) social justice and its expressions; (3) climate change and environmental conservation; and (4) securing peace through building durable cultures of peace in both the local and global arenas.

The intended audiences are those interested in social, political, and economic change for greater social justice in a variety of situations. Perhaps you are involved in university research and academic programs as a professor or pupil. Perhaps you have made some aspect of social change—poverty eradication, human rights, environmental conservation, indigenous institutions, peace work, or all-around activism—your profession or avocation. Maybe you simply have a general, principled interest in fairness and justice and would like to learn to "dream out loud" with greater success. Actually, current status and placement matters little. What counts is the willingness to join in active analysis, learning, and understanding of the real-life implications of deep participation and participatory social theory in general, and more specifically, working with it as it applies to your particular set of circumstances and opportunities.

Bringing theory and practice together

All of this has required that I consider how to present this material to you. Certainly, I don't want this book to be simply considered as one more personal testimonial to the necessity of participation in today's world. We have enough of those, and many have been of value. Nor can it be one more treatise where I hide behind that "mask of impartiality" usually required of rigorous scientific proof.⁸ This book is more than either of those propositions. Let me state that I am convinced that deep participation dynamics can initiate the difficult types of collaborative and collective social changes that will place our local and global communities on a more positive trajectory, and I will present the evidence I have gathered to support that stand. However, I also realize that this is just a start, and a difficult one at that, because deep participation challenges so many of our established views.

Perhaps the most relevant factor in the creation of this book is its basis in both theory *and* practice; there is a little-recognized chasm between the two that demands a mutual base; when that mutual base is accessed, credibility is increased. The theory offered here can be easily assessed by an analysis of the written presentation. But to assess the practice upon which the theory is based, you, the reader, will need to know more about me, the practitioner. Upon reflection, there are four different aspects of my experience as a practitioner that were particularly formative. I should note that the majority of people who become involved with participation over the long term either function as primarily a social analyst and researcher, or they devote themselves solely to participatory practice. In this regard, I was a bit different from the start—I immensely enjoyed the *practice* of participation, but I was also asking myself from an analytical perspective how and why this compelling but seemingly superficial process of participation could sometimes have such an extraordinary and lasting impact.

As I reflect back on my experience, I realize two things. Working in Africa as a participation practitioner and social analyst for more than 30 years, I witnessed a most exciting but difficult period. These were pivotal times of immense social and political upheaval as Africa, its countries and communities, moved out of colonial domination and slowly joined and connected with the world at large as full-fledged members of the international community. As a result, I witnessed the initial euphoria as countries gained their liberties. But I was also there as the balance of powers was reworked in favor of national governments that had the explicit economic backing of their former colonial rulers, which resulted in civil state system deterioration. As a result, I also worked through a time when people had to renegotiate, with themselves and each other, their hopes, dreams, and dawning realities. At this same time, economic development organizations began fast-paced assistance to these new states in forms that enhanced these postcolonial economic ties.