The Evolution of Planning Thought

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My undergraduate education was in English literature at Harvard, where I learned to write and tell stories. At MIT in the late 1960s I learned practical skills and delved into social policy during Lyndon Johnson's Great Society urban poverty program, finally developing my intellectual project of understanding how and why information could actually influence decisions. My dissertation on social indicators for public policy looked historically at the processes that produced information that changed policy. That dissertation provided the foundation for my later work on collaboration, dialogue and governance. After part-time teaching and publishing a book, Social Indicators and Public Policy: Interactive Processes of Design and Use, in 1976 I landed in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of California Berkeley, where I taught until retirement in 2011. My career path was very much framed by the expectations of the university, while I pursued my goal of finding a new model for practice. After a 10-year stint as Director of Berkeley's Institute of Urban and Regional Development and 20 years of research on collaborative planning and consensus building, I teamed up with practitioner and long-time writing collaborator, David Booher, to write Planning with Complexity: An Introduction to Collaborative Rationality for Public Policy (2010), which outlines our model of practice for complex and controversial problems.