

Innes

Knowledge and Public Policy

The Search for Meaningful Indicators

This book addresses the question of what it takes to develop social indicators that genuinely influence important public decisions. It looks historically at the processes of creating and using three important social indicators in the United States: unemployment rates, standard budgets, and crime rates. It then develops principles for choosing concepts, designing measures, and creating policy processes that institutionalize their use. For this second edition, Innes has provided a major new introductory essay, which reflects on social indicators research and her own and others' continuing work on the role of quantitative and other professionally generated information in policy making. She contends that in practice knowledge is influential as it becomes part of the myths that shape public life, as it empowers some policy actors over others, as it establishes the agendas and frames the problem, as it sets the terms for negotiation and public discourse. For these arguments, she draws on her research on human rights policy, environmental impact assessment, housing policy and local community development. The case studies in the original book have stood the test of time, and remain valid supports for the author's interpretations. The author contends that to understand how knowledge and policy are linked, we need to replace the "scientific" model of explicit knowledge use with a more inclusive, interactive model of knowledge influence. To do this we must rethink both the education and practice of policy professionals. Innes sees indicators as lenses on the world that help define problems and point the way to solutions. It is not surprising that the case studies show that the most influential indicators are developed jointly with policy and theories about the problem. As she says, "there are no facts without theories and the only way a statistician can keep out of politics is to collect only irrelevant data." This new edition will be of immense interest to those interested in the sociology of ideas, policy studies, and the emerging field of knowledge transfer. Judith Innes is a professor in the city and regional planning department of the University of California, Berkeley.

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