

**Towards the Formation of a Sustainable South
Florida: An Analysis of Conflict Resolution and
Consensus Building in the South Florida
Ecosystem Restoration Initiative**

by
Arthur Oyola-Yemaiel

ISBN: 1-58112-099-0

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ISBN: 1-58112-099-0

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

TOWARDS THE FORMATION OF A SUSTAINABLE
SOUTH FLORIDA:

AN ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND
CONSENSUS BUILDING IN THE SOUTH FLORIDA
ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION INITIATIVE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

SOCIOLOGY

by

Arthur Oyola-Yemaiel

1999

To: Dean Arthur W. Herriott
College of Arts and Sciences

This dissertation, written by Arthur Oyola-Yemaiel, and entitled Towards the Formation of a Sustainable South Florida: An Analysis of Conflict Resolution and Consensus Building in the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Initiative, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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The dissertation of Arthur Oyola-Yemaiel is approved.

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Dean Richard L. Campbell
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Florida International University, 1999

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. First, my mother, Amelia Lourdes Medina, has demonstrated angelical qualities by showing an incredible amount of patience and love towards me through the years, especially because I have always been independent, a non-conformist, and mobile--characteristics that always gave her a certain degree of unrest. She showed me the virtues and beauty of life. Second, I owe my godfather and second father, Jorge Yemaiel, for his generosity, understanding love, and exemplary behavior. He has shown us the utmost dedication by contributing to the enrichment of our family spirit in all aspects of life. My sister, Monica Oyola-Coeur, and brother-in-law, Ian L. B. Coeur, have given me their friendship and camaraderie. There are no words to express my love and admiration for my wife, Jennifer Lyn Wilson. To my mentor, Dr. Livio Vinardi, to whom I owe a great deal for his guidance and teachings, which have grown even more valuable with time. I especially devote this study to the memory of my father, Arturo Fidel Irineo Oyola, an illustrious unknown, who taught me the principle of acquiring knowledge. I dedicate this work to him and the ones before him who rest in peace, for those who are, and those who will be.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the professors on my committee: Dennis Wiedman, Terry Rice, Walt Peacock, William Vickers, and Stephen Fjellman, all of whom have contributed enormously to my academic achievements. Special thanks must go to Professor Stephen Fjellman who, on one hand, helped me clarify and narrow the scope of this work, encouraged me to do additional research in this area, and guided me through this dissertation. On the other hand, he provided me with the opportunity for personal development within the university system and beyond. His guidance, knowledge, and integrated vision helped me discover the far-reaching possibilities of the field.

My gratitude goes to Dennis Wiedman who helped me integrate my scholarly ideas in the applied anthropological field. He also made the time to share insights on this topic adding many constructive ideas to this study.

I especially wish to thank Professor William Vickers for his encouragement, support, patience, guidance, valuable insights, and tireless contributions to the theoretical analysis of my work throughout my graduate years.

Professor Walter Peacock has my special appreciation for his assistance in the development of the disaster and vulnerability aspects of my career. His encouragement and support will allow me to succeed in my future career.

Thanks go to Dr. Terry Rice who has been in the restoration process from the early stages and who agreed to share his holistic approach to the conflict in South Florida.

My gratitude also goes to Professors Janet Chernela, Betty Morrow, David Bray, Jerry Brown, and Anthony Maingot for sharing their vast knowledge in their fields of expertise.

I would like to thank my friends and colleagues for their camaraderie and support, especially Michelle Lamarre who has always helped me in every possible way.

Thanks go to the personnel of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force and the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida for their invaluable disposition to share their knowledge and technical support. The support from Greg Diehl, Roberto Torres, Bill Hensley, and Web Smith, among others, contributed greatly to my understanding of the environmental and administrative aspects of the institution. I owe special gratitude to Mr. Richard Pettigrew, Chairman of the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida, to Colonel Terrence "Rock" Salt, Executive Director of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, and to Dr. Bonnie Kranzer, Executive Director of the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida. Thanks go to the commissioners, public officials, and stakeholders who contributed to this work by time and time again showing me the various facets of their work, including their understanding and vision of South Florida's natural and social environment. These people include Dr. Ron Jones, Director, Southeastern Environmental Research Program; Ben Starrett, Former Director, Strategic Planning and Policy Coordinator; James Murley, Former Secretary, Florida Department of Community Affairs; Jack Moller, Florida Wildlife Federation; Mr. Roy Rogers, senior Vice President of Arvida, and many others. It would be impossible to include them all.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

TOWARDS THE FORMATION OF A SUSTAINABLE SOUTH FLORIDA:

AN ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND CONSENSUS BUILDING IN THE SOUTH FLORIDA EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION INITIATIVE

by

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Florida International University, 1999

Miami, Florida

Professor Stephen M. Fjellman, Major Professor

This dissertation examines the sociological process of conflict resolution and consensus building in South Florida Everglades Ecosystem Restoration through what I define as a Network Management Coordinative Interstitial Group (NetMIG). The process of conflict resolution can be summarized as the participation of interested and affected parties (stakeholders) in a forum of negotiation. I study the case of the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida (GCSSF) that was established to reduce social conflict. Such conflict originated from environmental disputes about the Everglades and was manifested in the form of gridlock among regulatory (government) agencies, Indian tribes, as well as agricultural, environmental conservationist and urban development interests. The purpose of the participatory forum is to reduce conflicts of interest and to achieve consensus, with the ultimate goal of restoration of the original Everglades ecosystem, while cultivating the economic and cultural bases of the communities in the area. Further, the forum aims to formulate consensus through envisioning a common

sustainable community by providing means to achieve a balance between human and natural systems.

Data were gathered using participant observation and document analysis techniques to conduct a theoretically based analysis of the role of the Network Management Coordinative Interstitial Group (NetMIG). I use conflict resolution theory, environmental conflict theory, stakeholder analysis, systems theory, differentiation and social change theory, and strategic management and planning theory.

The purpose of this study is to substantiate the role of the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida (GCSSF) as a consortium of organizations in an effort to resolve conflict rather than an ethnographic study of this organization. Environmental restoration of the Everglades is a vehicle for recognizing the significance of a Network Management Coordinative Interstitial Group (NetMIG), namely the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida (GCSSF), as a structural mechanism for stakeholder participation in the process of social conflict resolution through the creation of new cultural paradigms for a sustainable community.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the sociological processes of conflict resolution and consensus building through what I call a Network Management Coordinative Interstitial Group (NetMIG) in order to achieve restoration of the Everglades ecosystem. This process of conflict resolution can be summarized as the participation of interested and affected parties in a forum of negotiation in which conflict resolution and consensus building techniques are applied.

The Case

The forum that I study is one of many forums in which negotiations for the Everglades restoration take place. This dissertation considers the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida (GCSSF) that was established in 1994 by Florida's Governor Lawton Chiles in order to reduce social conflict manifested in the form of gridlock among regulatory and utility agencies and citizen stakeholders. The ultimate goal of the participatory forum is to reduce conflicts of interest and to achieve consensus with the ultimate purpose of restoring (as much as possible) the original, natural flow of water to the Everglades ecosystem, while protecting the cultural interests of the communities in the area. Further, the forum was designed to build consensus by envisioning a common sustainable community.

The mission statement of the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida reflects this holistic approach to ecosystem restoration, incorporating social change by means of cultural adaptation.

“There are no other Everglades in the world” (Douglas 1947). All life in southern Florida is influenced by this vast ecosystem. It is the mission of the Governor’s Commission for a Sustainable South Florida, representing diverse interests, to develop recommendations and public support for regaining a healthy Everglades ecosystem with a sustainable economy and quality communities. The Commission will recommend a 5-year action plan containing strategies, actions, and measures of success to the Governor and the South Florida community for achieving positive change that enhances the ecological, economic, and social systems upon which South Florida and its communities depend. Once implemented, these strategies will bolster the regional economy, promote quality communities, secure healthy South Florida ecosystems, and assure today’s progress is not achieved at tomorrow’s expense (GCSSF 1995:12).

The resolution of conflict in this case is anchored in the premise that there are common interests among all parties involved regarding their own social, economic, and political interests in relation to the general well being of the population. It also rests on the axiom that there should be consensus among the parties involved who are to set aside their differences and who must be satisfied with the general development plan. Otherwise, there will be no restoration, and the quality of life will deteriorate proportionately (GCSSF 1995).

Why is Resolution of Conflict Important?

Restoration of the Everglades is fundamentally important for South Florida's communities because they depend upon the well being of this natural system. The quality, quantity, and distribution of water is the "life line" supporting human endeavors from tourism to agriculture to urban development. If the natural flow of water is not restored, there will be a continuing deterioration of the ecosystem, resulting in a diminished quality of life and standard of living from what we enjoy today. Concern has been voiced that South Florida cannot continue on the current path of development--that, as we see it now, South Florida is unsustainable (GCSSF 1995, SFERTF 1998).

Thus the most important factor for achieving ecosystem restoration and the benefits that a healthy natural ecosystem represents, is human interactions interfacing at the negotiation forum. This is to say that the future of South Florida is placed upon participant stakeholders representing the majority of the individual, organization and community interests of the area. If stakeholders fail to reach consensus on how ecosystem restoration is to be achieved, including issues such as who is going to pay for what, what type of restrictions on urban development should apply, what are the implications of water quality standards on agriculture and how this may affect food prices for the consumer, how urban population and migration are related to water availability and distribution, and how water deliveries will affect the Indian tribes and Everglades National Park, there will be no restoration (Chiles 1992).

These are but a few of the issues that pertain to the nature of the negotiations and the balance between the natural and social systems in South Florida. South Florida's Everglades restoration will be possible only through common understanding of its significance and through a consensual approach to community life. Therefore,

restoration should be a comprehensive and holistic problem-solving action in which the resolution of conflict and consensus building are the keys to success.

The Complexity of Reaching Consensus

The full complexity of this case is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It will require experts in all disciplines and a decade or more to identify and analyze all the variables and subsequently use the information to create a synthesis of the findings. The South Florida ecosystem restoration initiative is the largest attempt ever to restore an ecosystem (SFERTF 1998). The initiative encompasses all levels of government including six federal departments (12 agencies), seven state agencies and commissions, two American Indian Tribes, sixteen counties and multiple municipalities, and it includes representatives from agricultural, political, commercial, recreation, citizen, and other special interest sectors (SFERTF 1998:v, WRDA 1992).

As an illustration of the complexity of this endeavor, the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida has been in dispute with the federal government since 1776 when the country was founded, later with the State of Florida, and most recently with the National Park Service since 1943. These disputes have centered on the right of the Miccosukee to inhabit the Everglades, including the right to develop parcels of land for housing and services, as well as the right of self-determination (Lehtinen n.d.). This matter percolates to other federal agencies such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers. It also affects the governments of the state of Florida and several South Florida counties. It also spilled over into the interests of environmentalists who, in short, want to preserve the Everglades as pristinely as possible. Therefore, human intrusion is considered a nuisance to the park service and

conservationists because of possible polluting effects (Lehtinen n.d.).

The agricultural community is mainly situated in the Everglades Agricultural Area and is represented by the sugar, citrus, produce, and dairy interests. These interests have been placed in a controversial relationship with the other parties involved in the South Florida ecosystem restoration initiative, such as the Miccosukee and environmentalists. After all, the Everglades Agricultural Area and the hydrological engineering system were established primarily for the benefit of the agriculture sector that has now become the major polluter of the Everglades. Elimination of point source pollution requires, among other things, the agricultural industries to change their traditional business and land use practices. In consequence, the agricultural sector is under pressure in a hostile environment to the point that their land holdings are at stake.

An additional land use issue comes from the environmental sector, which is applying increasing pressure to convert private lands into conservation areas that act as wildlife habitat sanctuaries for endangered species and eliminate human habitation. Thus land rights and private property concerns are a contentious issue. According to Bryant (1972), ownership of land lies at the heart of the problem of shaping and reshaping our environment. Far too often land problems are simply ignored. In this case, community planning and the Everglades restoration are addressing issues of land use in order to resolve long-term physical and social environmental conflict. For example, the federal and state governments are acting to purchase portions of Everglades Agricultural Area lands for storm water treatment areas and for water storage.

At this point, land use rights and private property rights have become common interests of the agricultural and Indian communities and have attracted the attention of national land rights advocates (O'Brien 1999). But the agricultural and Indian sectors have been in dispute over

water matters for a long time. According to the Miccosukee, the agricultural industry is an upstream polluter of the Everglades that affects Indian cultural traditional land use. The sugar and citrus interests in turn see the Miccosukee Tribe as a major contributor to increased regulation leading to increased costs of production because they have been in the forefront of litigation for Everglades environmental protection. On one hand, the agricultural and Indian groups are allies with respect to the principles of land use rights. On the other hand, they are in contention with respect to point source pollution and water usage.

What becomes evident from this short description is that in some areas such as self-determination and property rights (Zaneski 1999), these two parties are in alliance against other interests. However, in other areas, such as point source pollution and Everglades clean up, they are not. In short, the complexity and concatenation of problems have a spill over effect into other areas of conflict and for other interested parties.

The Scope and Limitations of the Study

The most desirable way to address all points of conflict is comprehensively and holistically. The only possible way to understand the restoration process is by addressing it multi- and inter-disciplinarily. In the present study, for reasons of time and because the character of the dissertation is to study the case from the sociological and anthropological perspectives, I reduce the scope of the analysis. This study does not address the entire scope of the ecological restoration of the Everglades ecosystem, including such complex ecological issues as policies and regulations regarding endangered species and the abiotic components of Everglades hydrology. In this project I do not seek to elaborate upon the nature of the delivery, storage or quality of water for South Florida, as managed through the South Florida Water Management District and thus neither the

Clean Water Act of 1972, nor pertinent EPA regulations are analyzed. Likewise, urban development and all the factors associated with it such as urban-rural planning interfaces, transportation, demographic patterns, community vulnerability, and economic development are not studied here. Further, I do not examine rural and traditional living patterns of groups such as the Miccosukee and Seminole Indian Tribes and the community of the Eight-and-a-Half-Square-Mile Area, which is in conflict with the urban and environmental forces that threaten this type of life.

However, all of these issues are of importance and should be studied independently as well as in relation to each other because they will help the community understand how to unite in formulating a path to sustainability. At that point, restoration of the Everglades will be a straightforward task because there is consensus. In fact, these issues can be of great significance for conflict resolution. For example, the restoration effort is currently at risk on the basis of omission of the Eight-and-a-Half-Square-Mile Area residents as participatory stakeholders in the negotiation forum (Rice 1999).

Although all of the items mentioned above are not specifically examined here, they are an intrinsic part of this work because they are the underlying forces that converge in conflict and require negotiations leading to consensus. This research analyzes the mechanism established by the state Governor's executive order to support, ratify, or challenge other negotiating forums established by the Water Resources and Development Act of 1992 and 1996. This action was taken in order to resolve social conflicts that originated through the interface of the four general interests mentioned above: environmental conservation, urban development, agriculture, and Indian tribes. I use various theories to assess the potential benefits that a coordinative organization can bring to all of these parties via negotiations with the goal of reaching consensus on particular individual as well as shared interests. I analyze how social conflict can be converted into

consensus by bringing together the stakeholders into a negotiation forum, a Network Management Coordinative Interstitial Group, namely the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida, which in turn searches for a common language and a common vision of the future community. This strategic vision, common to all parties, helps orient individual stakeholders to rearrange their independent goals to accommodate the general shared vision. In so doing the stakeholders, rather than competing and colliding with each other by acting on self-interests regardless of community well-being, begin to act in concert and work toward a common future, thus eliminating conflict.

This dissertation focuses on the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida, one of the Network Management Coordinative Interstitial Groups (NetMIG) in charge of pursuing a collaborative restoration process. The Commission is composed of fifty members representing as many stakeholder interests. The governor of Florida appointed the commissioners from among groups that have demonstrated a stake in the restoration process. However, these are not all the stakeholders that could be included. Among those not included are representatives of the Eight-and-a-Half-Square-Mile Area residents who are creating great upheaval and jeopardizing the entire process of restoration by challenging it from the outside.

Yet this study is not an ethnography or a cultural analysis of each independent stakeholder. I do not examine the power relations among them within or outside the forum, nor do I perform a network analysis of these parties. I even refrain from expanding stakeholder analysis to include legitimacy issues combined with environmental justice and do not specifically address the cases of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and the Eight-and-a-Half-Square-Mile Area residents. I merely intend to show the importance of public participation in a negotiating environment where settlement is not coerced but where there is open exploration to envision how the community ought to be.