

STATEMENT ON RESEARCH/SCHOLARLY INTERESTS

Gene L. Theodori
Department of Sociology
Sam Houston State University

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My research/scholarly interests are rooted in the assertion that research and teaching are vitally and inseparably linked. In *The Academic Ethic* (1984) Edward Shils avowed

Research...is the methodical acquisition of knowledge, hitherto unknown. Knowledge languishes and fades if it is not cultivated by research. Teaching too languishes if it is not sustained by research.

With that said, it is important to note that not all teachers have a passion for engaging in research. I have a passion for both teaching and research. The enthusiasm I hold for scholarly research activities is mirrored in my teaching endeavors, and my teaching endeavors are enhanced by my scholarly research.

Since accepting my first faculty appointment in 1999, I have maintained an active interdisciplinary research agenda. When conducting research, I commonly utilize a mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis. This approach involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative research protocols. My goal as a researcher is to methodically acquire, assess, and transmit robust social scientific knowledge that addresses timely community development issues and natural resource-related problems to academicians, policymakers, practitioners, and members of the general public. In short, my philosophical and applied orientation to research involves: (1) the accumulation and use of sociological knowledge to address current community and natural resource-related problems; (2) the assertion that such knowledge must be obtained by empirical research procedures; and (3) the affirmation that this knowledge should be conveyed to stakeholders and the general public with relevant outreach and continuing education programs and services.

Over the past eleven years, I have been the recipient or co-recipient of approximately \$2.0 million in research/scholarly funding from several entities, including the United States Department of Agriculture, the United States Department of Energy, the Rural Sociological Society, the Southern Rural Development Center, the Southeastern Regional Small Public Water Systems Technical Assistance Center, and the Texas Water Development Board. Findings from the studies funded by these entities have been, and continue to be, disseminated in a variety of venues. Included herein are paper presentations at professional meetings and printed materials such as research reports to the sponsoring agency, Cooperative Extension/outreach education fact-sheets, and peer reviewed journal articles.

I routinely publish my research results in several peer reviewed journals, including the leading publications of three professional associations: *Rural Sociology* (the Rural Sociological Society), *Community Development: Journal of the Community Development Society* (the Community Development Society), and *Society and Natural Resources* (the International Association for Society and Natural Resources). To this point in my career, the majority of my peer reviewed publications have centered around two topical areas: (1) sociology of community and (2) sociology of natural resources.

In addition to peer-reviewed journal articles, my research has led to the development of outreach educational and technical assistance programs/publications that address important issues relating to community and natural resources. One program/publication of which I am most proud is my community-based planning process *Preparing for the Future: A Guide to Community-Based Planning* (published by the Southern Rural Development Center in 2009). The community-based planning process has been used extensively by county extension agents, community leaders, and local elected officials across Texas to develop and implement interlinking, comprehensive and coordinated plans of action at the community level. In 2004, the program was adopted as the official “vision to action” approach utilized by participating community colleges in the second phase of a national demonstration program known as the Rural Community College Initiative. Furthermore, it was embraced in 2005 as a guiding protocol by the Texas Rural Community College Network.

The community-based planning process I developed has the potential to strengthen the engagement of individuals and organizations in the civic life of their communities and to assist communities in developing sound strategies for addressing challenges associated with growth and development. Specifically, it allows for: the promotion of active and representative participation of all community members as they shape their collective future; the engagement of community members in learning about and understanding community issues and the economic, social, environmental, and political impacts associated with alternative courses of action; the incorporation of diverse interests and beliefs in the community development process; the enhancement of the leadership capacity of county extension agents, elected officials, and other community members; the long-term sustainability and well-being of communities; and the establishment of indicators for measuring progress toward community goals.

My community and natural resources research/scholarly interests are embedded in an interactional theoretical approach to social organization. This perspective, which is rooted in the writings of Harold Kaufman and Kenneth Wilkinson, views social interaction as the substantive element of community. Social interaction is the thread that ties together the four common components entrenched in most sociological definitions of community: shared territory, common life, collective actions, and mutual identity. Social interaction (a) delineates an area as shared territory, (b) contributes to the wholeness of local life, (c) gives structure and direction to collective actions, and (d) is the source of mutual identity.

While other theoretical perspectives (e.g., human ecology; social systems) do, in fact, exist and may be considered justifiably worthy, I believe that an interactional approach to community has much to offer. The interactional perspective can provide a theoretical foundation as researchers and practitioners attempt to empirically account for, document, and predict the breadth of factors associated with community and ecological well-being. For example, in my research on natural resource-based communities, the interactional theoretical approach offers a framework for examining the social conditions that contributed to variability in resource availability, utilization, and dependency, as well as environmental policies and natural resource management actions (e.g., watershed management programs, etc.).

My future research/scholarly agenda will build upon my past and present scholarship of discovery. One area of investigation in which I am now working and plan to further pursue can be broadly labeled “the social cost of energy production.” This area of research is timely and applies directly to extensive energy exploration and production activities of natural gas currently occurring in unconventional reservoirs (e.g., the Barnett Shale play located in north Texas, the Eagle Ford Shale located in south Texas, and the Uintah Basin in Utah). Furthermore, I have recently teamed with investigators from the Houston Advanced Research Center, the Department of Petroleum Engineering at Texas A&M University, and the Department of Sociology at Utah State University to coordinate and execute novel multidisciplinary policy-oriented community and natural resource-related research projects. These projects address salient community development and natural resource-related issues such as “the adoption and diffusion of alternative water resources” and “the acceptance and assimilation of environmentally-friendly energy exploration and production practices.”

In summary, I believe my role as an academic to be more than the dispenser of facts. With my interdisciplinary research agenda, I am also a generator of knowledge.