

study public management from a decidedly scientific standpoint may find the work to be thin in its coverage and attention to their preferred perspective. Nevertheless, for those interested in a work that provides well-organized (but not always consistent), quality research, useful for teaching oneself or others the basics of ethical research in public administration and public management, this book is worth its length—just like its intellectual predecessor, *Ethics and Public Administration*.

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Revitalizing Democracy? New Avenues for Citizen Participation in the Era of Information Technology

Terry F. Buss, F. Stevens Redburn, and Kristina Guo, eds., *Modernizing Democracy: Innovations in Citizen Participation* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2006). 360 pp., \$34.95 (paper), ISBN: 978-0-7656-1763-7.

Citizen participation is one of the most studied concepts in political science. In their extensive work *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady argue that “citizen participation is at the heart of democracy” and that “democracy is unthinkable without the ability of citizens to participate freely in the governing process” (1995, 1). As Carol Barner-Barry and Robert Rosenwein suggest, “Democratic values are in essence participatory values. At the heart of democratic theory is the notion that people should get involved in the process of governing themselves” (1985, 59). Those who do not participate politically are likely to have a highly undemocratic view of the world (Guyton 1988; Knutson 1972).

Not surprisingly, a large amount of research has been conducted in an attempt to understand the forms and

determinants of political participation and citizen involvement in states, communities, and organizations (Vigoda and Golembiewski 2000). However, only recently have researchers become interested in the practical essence of citizen participation, the forms of involvement in administrative actions, and the process of nation building and policy making or implementation. Though political participation has long been a preoccupation of researchers of modern democracy, investigation into administrative participation is in its early stages of evolution and recognition. In an era of e-government and the search for new forms of effective democratic mechanisms, participation and involvement have regained their central role in our societies.

Modernizing Democracy: Innovations in Citizen Participation is a heterogeneous collection of essays on citizen participation in modern democracy during the age of information and technology. It contains 11 chapters, each of which stands on its own, but all are linked together as progressive steps for exploring the role of the individual or the group in shaping public policy and influencing government plans. Terry F. Buss is involved in seven chapters out of the 11, and his influence can be strongly felt. His colleague,

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F. Stevens Redburn, took part in four more. As a whole, the book represents the contributions of seven individuals.

As the foreword notes, the essays point to the nexus between “those who make and implement public policy and those affected by it.” Chapter 1 suggests an overview of the issues, and the following chapters offer specific discussions of case studies or theories of participation. They cover a wide range of topics. Some of the chapters are theoretical, whereas others are more practical in their orientation. Among the topics, one can find the following: policy agendas for increasing citizen participation; community learning and collaboration; strategies for greater accountability in developing countries; new methods of improving participation, such as focus groups, surveys, workshops, e-governance, and other technology-supported ideas for citizen involvement; and simulation and decision-support technologies for citizen engagement in policy making and policy implementation. Many of the essays are based on case studies, and others refer to generic theory and knowledge.

The mixture of up-to-date theories and experiences in the essays seems useful for a wide range of audiences—academics and students of politics, policy studies, and public administration—as well as for public servants and other practitioners working closely with bureaucrats and the people in a variety of public-oriented projects. Today, all of these players are considered stakeholders who struggle with new demands for the authentic involvement of citizens in forming the institutions that affect their lives and quality of life. The echo of this trend can be heard in many fields, such as environmental projects, transportation, planning and development, welfare policies, health care, crime prevention, and other governmental initiatives that may benefit from input by the public prior to implementation or even planning.

Undoubtedly, the book makes a positive contribution to studies and ideas about the role of the individual and the group in modern democracy and, more importantly, the meaning of being a citizen or a “good citizen” in the era of information technology. One may see it as a weakness that only a small number of contributors participated in such an important book on participatory behavior. Perhaps a more heterogeneous collection of contributors, both academics and practitioners, could have added to the bank of innovative knowledge about citizen involvement in government. Some of the chapters list practical avenues and challenges for both governments (top-down) and individuals (grassroots) to achieve better collaboration among players in the open society. Still, what may be missing in this book (as well as many other recent writings on the topic) is a generic theory to elevate the discussion from a simple collection of experiences

and ideas to a more generalized set of thoughts and a vision for the field. This may be an overly demanding aspiration, but it is my belief that only such an ambitious view can guide us toward better predictions about when new types of citizen participation are likely to achieve their goals in our modern age of high technology overflowing with information and knowledge.

On the critical side, I would also add that too little attention is paid in the book to the role of the modern lifestyle in our societies. Most of the chapters provide useful knowledge about methods of increasing citizen participation based on case studies from North America and elsewhere. (Chapter 5, which deals with developing countries, correctly mentions the Philippines, India, and Brazil, but I was somewhat surprised to find Ireland included in this group.) However, our modern lifestyle hinders many efforts to improve participation. For example, even with highly sophisticated technology, computer-based voting systems, and advanced techniques for involving citizens in policy making, the average individual will still avoid involvement when other more pressing issues exist. Our modern lifestyle urges us to devote more time to such personal matters as providing for our families and, on the other hand, to save time and energy for leisure activities. In a marketplace society in which welfare networks are weakening and solidarity arises only in the face of government’s inability to govern and provide services to the people, why would the average person devote time to saving the government from its own self-defeating decisions? This interesting question should be mentioned, even if it is not answered in the discourse on participation and involvement in modern society.

In many respects, not much has changed in “civic society” over the past 50 years (see, e.g., Almond and Verba 1963). However, enough has changed to conclude that we all have less time to invest in collective efforts targeted at making our lives better. This is an ironic conclusion, but one that is not far from true. Thus, in some respects, the goodwill of active citizenship, by individuals and by government, is frequently diminished in the face of the hectic lifestyle of the 21st century, with or without technology and information (Vigoda and Golembiewski 2001).

Another missing element in this well-recommended book is a final integrative chapter that brings the pieces together. Given the flood of information we are all faced with, such a summary would make this important book more digestible to its audience. The role of a good book is to stimulate our interest in a subject and to encourage our exploration of new avenues for its understanding. I believe the current book, even if not perfect, has such elements, which could have been more specifically outlined in an integrative chapter

illuminating how the participation of citizens is changing our lives and our perceptions of life. As the authors correctly note, the book calls for more questions than answers, but let us put them all together to make the next step easier for future studies.

Finally, the book reassures us that citizen participation in political and administrative dynamics is a cornerstone of democracy, even during times of global change and transformation in management style, technology, and knowledge structures. The authentic contribution of citizens to their states, communities, and fellow citizens will endure in the years to come, even if its form and structure change. Just as democracy is dynamic and changes its face over time, so, too, do the types and methods of participation constantly transform and reinvent themselves. Therefore, people's attitudes and behaviors in a democracy must be studied with the best tools that science can offer.

Using T. H. Marshall's (1950) typology, participation is the less obvious role of citizens in modern democracies. Beyond obedience and loyalty, participation is the active part of citizenship and a major component of good citizenship. Some of the seminal studies in public administration and political science more generally have dealt with innovative mechanisms for bringing the public closer to decision-making processes and encouraging the genuine involvement of individuals in setting the policies and strategies of the state. Despite a few limitations, this book is

part of a chain of fine collections that highlight the central role of citizen involvement and activism as part of rediscovering democracy. After all, being responsible for one's life in a modern society takes many forms that renew themselves over time. This volume is a kaleidoscope of many such trends that affect open societies and neo-democracies worldwide, as well as those that will affect them in the years to come.

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In the Meantime: An Agenda

David Mechanic, The Truth about Health Care: Why Reform Is Not Working in America (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006). 240 pp., \$26.95 (hardbound), ISBN: 0813538874.

In this short book, David Mechanic describes health care in the United States as a fundamentally fragmented nonsystem. Its fragmentation is

both the result and the driver of attempts to reform its structure. He argues that health care in the United States embodies the values of individualism and competition. It devotes substantial resources to pursue cures for high-profile, if not widespread, diseases. At the same time, it diverts resources from the less glamorous areas of group well-being and public health. These implicit values have brought us health care as

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