

Parsons, Wayne.1995. Public Policy: An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc. Cheltenham, U.K., Northampton, MA, USA. XVIII + 652 pp. + index. Paper. Price: US\$35.00

Parsons' book is definitely a compilation of classroom lecture seminar and discussion papers over a number of years that the author has been a professor. It gives the reader a thorough inside look as to how one particular professor approaches the discipline of Public Policy.

First, it must be pointed out that a reader of this book should be a student enrolled in a public policy course who is interested in getting a in depth understanding of policy approaches, policy processes and policy analysis. These rather "dry stuff" is made more comprehensible by the author's painstaking efforts to provide definitions, literature reviews, and examples on the different interpretations of the fragmented terrain of public policy. A student of public policy would find this book useful in many facets of the discourse on the field. Often highlighted throughout the book are the opinions and the critical thinking by giants of the field such as Simon, Lindblom, Mueller, and Appleby. The separation of public sector from private sector is cleverly done and articulated and the spheres whether public or private are clearly delineated.

Particularly interesting to a reader of this book is the discussion on the development of the policy approach. Parsons uncanny way of discussing the idea of policy sciences and the role the policy analyst is riveting and his examination of policy analysis as public therapy is enlightening. Suffice to say that the book in its four parts: Meta Analysis, Meso Analysis Decision Analysis and Delivery Analysis offers its reader an opportunity to examine public policy from any point in the book as his/her frame of reference or departure point in order to study this field of inquiry.

Part one which focuses on Meta Analysis is a discussion on the idea of public policy as encompassing many subfields. The section examines what is understood as "public" – the idea that the public encapsulates the fact that there is an aspect of life which is not truly private or individual. The question of how the evolution of the conceptualization of public and private spheres has manipulated the study of public policy is central in this section.

Part two of the book covers and bridges the gap between (1) the examination of the definition of problem in public policy (2) the agenda setting issues, (3) the decision making apparatus and processes and (4) the implementation endeavor, Parsons covers topics such as social problem approaches, public opinion and public policy, theories of agenda control, typologies of policy issues, pluralism..., Neo-Marxist and critical approaches of globalization and policy making etc.

The third section of this book concentrates on the analysis of the decision-making process and policy analysis for decision making. The allocation of values to a point or series of points in decision-making process defines the energy or premium placed upon the importance of policy(ies) at that particular juncture of time or space. Parsons effort in this section is commendable as he attempts to place the discussion of decision analysis in an international or global context. He argues "the aim of policy analysis is to contextualize approaches, and clarify the values and beliefs which frame a given theory. He examines models of decision making from disciplinary standpoints such as political science, sociology, organizational theory, economics, psychology and management in part three of the book.

There is no doubt that when development projects include those who are to experience the outcomes of the development, the projects are actually better. In other words, when users of implemented projects are included in all phases of development, the solutions to the problems of development are much better and durable. Sustainability is thus ensured through such a process. To make this argument clear to the reader, Parsons' efforts in the fourth part of this book brilliantly covers the following issues/topics: implementation, delivery systems, evaluation, change and continuity, and promise and performance. Top down management approach is examined, outcome of implementation is discussed, unexpected outcomes are explained and more importantly, the importance of problem definition and common concerns of the public are explored in this section.

Although the fragmented nature of the book presents a slight problem for a reader who supposes that books should have well defined and connected chapters, this is a very good book that would serve as a supplemental text for policy students. Some of the book's strengths can also be classified as its weaknesses because it is a compilation of class lectures, discussions, and seminars. I strongly recommend it to students of public policy, public administration, government and planning. The book is reviewed in [JSDA](#) with the hopes that African scholars in the public sector, government and university setting would examine the values developed/industrial/democratic societies consider germane to their successful political process and sustained governance. As African nations become more and more democratized, and the rule of law takes place in many of their societies, it would become pertinent to understand how to administer and organize public institutions and provide a right environment for the private sector to flourish. This book is certainly recommended for public libraries all over the world.

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