Book Reviews

_Book Reviews_

DOI: 10.1017/S0143814X03213052

Harold Wilensky has had an extraordinarily long and productive career as a scholar. The first of his publications in the bibliography is dated 1954. Since then he has published on an impressively wide range of topics, including industrial relations and labour markets, the professions and policy making and in recent decades on comparative studies of the Welf are State. This massive book pulls together his interests. It is remarkable both for its ambitions – nothing less than a study of modern society, as represented by 19 rich countries – and the scale of its achievements. Inevitably, given the complexity of the analysis, some conclusions will be challenged. But the intellectual boldness of the enterprise commands admiration.

The achievement is all the more remarkable given that, just as the project was nearing completion in 1991, a fire at Professor Wilensky’s home destroyed his library, files and interview notes and he was forced to start all over again. The fire has left some traces. The book’s strength lies in its comprehensive mastery of the literature and interviews dealing with the period up to the end of the 1980s. Most of the material, and some of the statistics, have been updated, taking on board various developments in the 1990s. Possibly, the book might have been even more convincing if it had been published a decade earlier, as planned.

In his analysis, Wilensky counterpoints two themes. The first is the extent to which convergence theory explains the characteristics of 19 societies. All have become richer over the decades. All have moved from agriculture to being industry or service-based and the centre of gravity has moved from the country to cities. All spend a large proportion, increasing over time, of their national income on welfare policies. But if the direction of change is the same, large variations remain. Enter Wilensky’s second theme: to explain variations from what might have been expected if the characteristics of modern societies could simply be “read off” the level of their national income or the structure of their economy. Types of political economy matter.

In exploring this theme, Wilensky’s analytic tin-opener is corporatism, as developed in his work in the 1970s. As expounded by Wilensky, the notion of corporatism is both wider and more finely shaded than is usually the case. The key definitional characteristic of a corporatist polity in his scheme of things is centralisation, i.e. the institutionalisation of machinery which brings together government, employers and labour in order to hammer out a national policy consensus on economic and social policies. Within the corporatist world, he further distinguishes between Social Democratic models (the Nordic
countries) and Catholic models (Germany and Austria). So far, no problem. However, he also includes a further category of “corporatism without labour” (France and Japan) which seems to stretch the concept. Further, in his category of “fragmented” polities, he includes not only the US but all the Anglophone countries. This risks blurring some important differences within this group; the UK, a highly centralised polity in contrast to the US, might be better described as a failed corporatist country, as attempts to create consensus machinery foundered in the 1960s and 1970s.

Whatever the reservations about the way in which Wilensky develops the concept of corporatism, it is a discriminating analytical tool. Whether looking at mass society and the role of the media or examining different types of welfare regime, mayhem and risk, regulation and the environment, different types of corporatism (or their absence) turn out to be associated with different types of outcome. The Nordic group emerge as the winners. The same conclusion follows when Wilensky turns to assessing different aspects of societal performance, notably health outcomes and economic achievement. Whether some of these conclusions would still hold if the analysis were brought up to date is another matter. For example, the economic performance of Germany has taken a sharp dip, a warning that models-to-be-imitated may be highly contingent on specific, temporal factors. The global landscape is littered with discarded models, Japan and Germany among them.

The interest of the book is not dependent on the robustness of all the conclusions drawn. It is methodologically innovative: Wilensky is a dab hand at constructing ingenious (sometimes too ingenious) indices of performance. There is also Wilensky’s intolerance of fashionable cant. Notions like globalization and social stratification are ruthlessly dissected. If nothing else, the book can be read as an exemplar of rigorous analysis, intolerant of fuzziness and imprecision. And Wilensky—whose social democratic sympathies are not concealed—is particularly good at critically analysing American exceptionalism as represented by its “welfare mess”. The temptation to put this heavy tome unread on the library shelf as a monument to a distinguished scholar should be resisted. It may be dauntingly difficult to read as a whole, but it can be used selectively as a source of insights and stimulus.

Rudolf Klein

Visiting Professor, London School of Economics


DOI: 10.1017/S0143814X03223059

Since the role of religion in politics returned to the mainstream social science agenda in the 1980s, scholars have devoted great energy to understanding the interaction between sacred and secular in public life. This energy has produced an outpouring of journal articles, books and conference proceedings that explore the significance of religion in political culture, mass political behavior, jurisprudence, and political philosophy. When I review that literature periodically, I find that the area of public policy remains strikingly undeveloped compared to the scholarly progress evinced by research on other domains where religion plays a role. We know much less about how religious traditions and communities develop positions on policy debates, how the
positions are transmitted and communicated both within and outside the community where they originate, and what role they play in determining state action.

Thus I welcomed Paula D. Nesbitt’s edited volume, Religion and Social Policy, a book that might illuminate developments that had been hidden under a bushel. According to the editor, the goal was to assemble essays that emphasized “the diversity of religion’s involvement in social policy” and, lay the groundwork for “constructing social policy that will remain coherent and just when applied in multicultural and global context” (p. xii).

This edited volume suffers even more severely than most from a lack of clear direction or focus. The book presents an uneasy mixture of two quite distinct types of social research. The first, epitomized by the essays of James Richardson, Helen Rose Ebaugh et al., James Beckford, Nancy Nason-Clark and Katherine Meyer et al., are tightly drawn empirical studies that could easily fit in journals such as Sociology of Religion, Review of Religious Research, or Journal of the Social Scientific Study of Religion. These studies coexist with a number of advocacy pieces, passionately written critiques of the manner in which various imperialistic faith traditions or state policies demonstrate insensitivity to oppressed groups or perspectives. The targets include globalization (Otto Maduro), American Indian policy (Tink Tinker), and Korean Protestant Evangelicalism (Yvonne Young-ja Lee). Not all the chapters fit neatly into these categories, but the majority can be placed firmly in one or the other camp. The essays are not strongly linked by editorial comments nor, apart from some invocations of Jose Casanova’s theory of deprivatization, by a common theoretical framework.

The lack of a common thread may well be due to the absence of any definition of the book’s ostensible dependent variable – “social policy”. Perhaps because virtually all the contributors are trained in academic sociology, they may subscribe to a common understanding about the meaning of that term and, hence, the subject of the volume. But I could not discern any such common meaning from the essays. Rather in the manner of Lewis Carroll, whom the editor invokes in her substantive chapter, social policy seems to be whatever interests the authors of the individual contributions. To take the most egregious example, Brenda Brasher writes about the manner in which the “Heaven’s Gate” movement partook of both classic millennialism and post-modernism. [Apart from oblique references to the Internet as a means of increasing the diffusion of millennial messages, I could not understand what this chapter had to do with social policy.]

If the book itself does not hang together, many of the essays were excellent. Tinker’s fascinating chapter about US policy toward Native Americans contains the interesting suggestion that public authorities cease to define Indians by blood relations and instead use a measure of “cultural competence” for identifying community members entitled to state benefits. Nason-Clark’s study of spousal and partner abuse in Canada emphasized the perceptual gulf that separates the diagnoses of the problem offered by secular and religious authorities and their estrangement from one another. In her study of recent Lambeth Conferences, the editor writes of the peculiar coalitions that emerged as bishops dealt with questions about gender and sexual orientation. She illuminates the odd coalition between Third World bishops and their
conservative counterparts in the West who traded votes to reaffirm Anglican opposition to same-sex relationships and support for debt relief to developing countries. Alan Myatt provides an interesting account of the way in which the black power movement in Brazilian Catholicism has utilized liturgy, the Afro-Brazilian mass, to assert the legitimacy of black claims in the church.

The appearance of this volume is a welcome sign that some sociologists are taking religion seriously as a global force influencing public policy. That being said, one hopes that future work in the genre will attempt better to integrate research on specific cases with some enduring theoretical questions in the discipline from the contribution of sociology to classic theories of religion.

Kenneth D. Wald

University of Florida


DOI: 10.1017/S0143814X03233055

This important collection of essays, most first presented at meetings of the European Urban Research Association, addresses one of the ‘wicked issues’ facing both students of urban politics and practitioners in local government – how do localities adapt in the face of globalisation, and what is the impact of globalisation on the political dimension of people’s lives?

After an introduction by the editors, the book is organized in three parts. The first, on the general theme of globalisation, has essays by Hank Savitch on the globalisation process generally, Susan Clarke presenting a North American perspective, Francois Ascher on urban homogenization and diversification in Western Europe, and Terry Nichols Clark on globalisation and transformations in political cultures. The second part, on cities at risk and the challenges and opportunities they face, has essays by Margaret Reid on transformations in post-socialist cities, by Scott Bollens on managing urban conflict, and by Robert Kloosterman and Dennis Broeders on Dutch urban policy. The final section on innovations in urban governance, has a piece by Robin Hambleton on the ‘new’ city management; by Chris Collinge and Alan Srbljanin on networking and urban governance, a contribution from Bernard Jouve and Christian Lefevre on metropolitan governance, and on cross-border cooperation within the European Union by Andrew Church and Peter Reid.

Like all such collections it has strengths and weaknesses. Most chapters are summary pieces drawing on work undertaken by the authors. Most do not directly address the question of local democracy or address a theme in a collected and well organised fashion. Sometimes the arguments are by assertion and allusion rather than evidence based, yet all the contributions address important questions raised by the globalisation process.

Globalisation, largely an economic process, effects cities and localities everywhere in different ways. At one level it results in a hollowing out of both the national and local state, as Susan Clarke notes in her essay. Nationally, economic and political power moves upwards to supranational institutions, outwards to transnational networks of cities and downwards to cities and regions. At the local level the same process can be seen – cities and rural municipalities lose power upwards to regions or to new voluntary cooperative groupings, and increasingly devolve power downwards to neighbourhoods and
communities, and find themselves working in partnerships with business elites and not-for-profit groups. These developments are echoed in the contributions by Hambleton, with his stress on governance, new public management and charging approaches to citizen involvement, and by Jouve and Lefevre with their discussion of new forms of metropolitan governance in France, Italy, the Netherlands and Germany. Additionally Collinge and Sjbljanin, in one of the few contributions reporting some new research, examine the networking arrangements of municipalities in the West Midlands and Bavaria, whilst Church and Reid review cross-border cooperation, with a special emphasis on the Transmanche region of Kent and Nord Pas de Calais. Significantly both contributions conclude by suggesting that networking and cross-border cooperation is neither as pervasive nor as successful as some commentators suggest.

A second feature of globalisation is its impact on communications. At the local level it speeds up decision-making, requiring local political leaders to respond rapidly to changing local conditions and works with actors from other sectors. Ascher in particular draws attention to this development, whilst also highlighting how diversity remains a feature of the urban landscape. Globalisation also facilitates policy learning and policy transfer across localities, as Hambleton, Church and Reid note.

Globalisation has a differential impact on cities. Weak local institutions and poor democratic practice pose real problems for many cities in central and east Europe attempting to adapt to globalisation. In divided cities, ethnic or religious diversity make agreement on urban strategies difficult. Different national policy initiatives taken in response to global change also have differential local impacts. One wonders how far Clark's new political culture and new political leadership have an impact and whether the kind of brokering and networking role such leaders play is really a determining factor in helping cities adapt to globalisation.

Altogether this book begins to provide some answers about how globalisation affects different localities and citizens. Although less focused than one might wish, the collection nevertheless contains sufficient stimulating material to cause the reader to think further about the wicked issues it addresses.

Mike Goldsmith

University of Salford