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Can Tocqueville Karaoke?

Global Contrasts of Citizen Participation, the Arts and Development

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Book review:

Can Tocqueville Karaoke? Global Contrasts of Citizen Participation, the Arts and Development

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This volume (no. 11) in the series *Research in Urban Policy* is an easily read collection of articles. The book not only wishes to examine and develop a connection between democratic participation and creativity, but also has a vision of contributing to how these themes can transform social arenas by outlining “a new framework for analysis of democratic participation and economic growth” (p. 1). This work fits in the field of sociology and social sciences by addressing a need to discuss non-economistic features of society and possible futures. Especially, the themes of arts and culture shine a refreshingly bright light on new academic fields. This is done through context- and field-specific discussions with well-argued observations.

Terry Nichols Clark is the main author of the book, and has a keen interest and research background in urban development and innovation. Most of the co-authors come from sociological traditions and a few have backgrounds in policy research and public administration. The authors are from a diversity of academic and geographic contexts, which gives relevant insights from a vast array of social fields. The contributors have worked together on different projects for several years, and the articles show the progression in a long line of cooperation and academic discussion.

Several of the articles are interchangeably credited to the same authors and co-authors. For example, Professor Terry Nichols Clark is the author/co-author of 9 of the 13 articles. This may bear an indication of publication tourism, but may on the other hand signify a thorough volume with well-discussed articles.

The volume itself is divided into three sections. The first one deals with the logics of Tocqueville and neo-Tocquevillian ideas, and how they are applied in current discussions on democracy, participation and politics. The two articles in the second section discuss local development and

bring forward the contexts of Spain, Seoul, Tokyo and Chicago. Finally, the last section deals with critical neo-Tocquevillian ideas by discussing legitimacy and contextualized culture.

The book in its overall form seems a bit too ambitious when attempting to combine very diverse articles, as may be seen in the title of the book itself, which contains a vast number of big themes: globality, citizenship, participation, arts and development. This, however, does not lessen the quality of interesting insights in each of the articles. There is additionally an inexplicable fondness of models and statistics that are not always thoroughly explained, and the necessity of these to the overall sociological arguments are often unclear.

The two very blurry concepts of “participation” and “development” are widely discussed in academia, and have often become academic discussions where the meaning of the words themselves is discussed as opposed to how we can actually develop communities through citizen participation. The volume addresses this discussion with examples from actual fields and experiences among citizens. A major question in the discussions, and one which becomes a focal point in the book, is stressing the context when analysing democracy and participation. Without context, there can be no genuine discussion because they will remain purely academic and rhetorical with only little significance to everyday lives of citizens.

The volume expands on thoughts presented by Alexis de Tocqueville and is a response to this tradition by bringing the discussions into a current context. The discussions especially focus on the very current themes of citizen participation and development. Here, the aim of the book is to challenge an interpretation of Tocquevillian points of participation and democracy. These are major points, which, according to the authors, have become too embedded in attempts to measure and quantify participation instead of an aim of learning how to go about implementing democratic values. The authors apply neo-Tocquevillian ways of discussing these overall themes. This means that there is both a subtle and a more direct comment to economic analyses of, for example, Joseph Schumpeter and Robert Putnam, who, according to the authors, largely omit contexts and human values.

Another criticism throughout the volume is the often purely Western-generated backgrounds of how to deal with innovation. Development and innovation is much more complex than the theories put forward by Schumpeter's and Putnam's economic trains of thought. By analysing contexts of especially South Korea (which in the book is called simply “Korea”) and Japan, the volume enters into this discussion of non-Global-North contexts. This discussion might have been more nuanced by applying contexts that, to a lesser degree, resemble traditional Global-North contexts such as Spain and US. The global angle of the volume gives the reader an insight into different contexts of the same discussion, which then becomes relevant to readers from both the Global North and South. This global approach might, however, have been more substantiated if there were more articles from the Global South.

The third and last section of the book mainly discusses arts and culture and how these may be drivers of civic innovation by developing the needs and interests of citizens. This last section may be the most rewarding part of the volume because we enter into how arts and culture can actually contribute to a development of participation. Again, the authors return to the significance of context

and what this means for development. The article wishes to show how arts and culture may in fact have a significant influence on how sustainable and democratic local contexts develop.

I recommend this volume to scholars interested in development, citizen participation and local context. It has a range of new and interesting themes in well-argued articles, together with some much-needed critical views on bombastic Tocqueville/Putnam sociological macro-theories.