

John Fenwick and Janice McMillan (eds.), *Public Management in the Postmodern Era: Challenges and Prospects* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2010)

Jiří J. Šebek

Charles University in Prague

Applying “postmodern” and “public management” in one sentence, albeit one book title, is a challenge that editors John Fenwick and Janice McMillan acknowledge in their introduction (pp. 3-11) and concluding remarks (pp. 192-212) to this neat book which groups nine essays on public management by subject in the theory, application and resolution sections. The anthology collects essays by Wayne Parsons, Paul H.A. Frissen, Mark Evans, Andrew Massey, David Farnham, B. Guy Peters and Henrik P. Bang. Each author takes a distinctly different approach to solving the puzzle set out by the two editors of the book which belongs to the New Horizons in Public Policy series.

The book starts by examining the term “postmodernism”, its implications to public management and gives an overview of the 20th century discourse on managing public institutions (part 1). Then, it delves into the minutiae of particular policy application, interactions of the bureaucrat and his or her role in the current public administrative practice (part 2). In the third part, the authors examine a new mode of public governance and provide the ground for moving beyond the orthodoxy of the “foundationalist” theory and practice in public policy and management which they criticize.

The “postmodernist” edge that the editors and Wayne Parsons adopt is not a one-way direction to the dead end of nihilism. In their understanding, it is not enough to provide a descriptive account without offering a new constructive perspective; they charge the reader to be analytical and the theory to be inspirational. In Parsons’s words, a postmodern analysis of public policy can lead to “a more critical, thicker and richer understanding of what human beings can achieve when they combine rational analysis with their capacities for imagination, intuition, ingenuity [...]” (p. 34).

Each of the authors, in their own way, admits to a common shortcoming in current public policy being the “missing narrative” in current analyses of public policy. Most prominently, Henrik P. Bang in his essay makes an observation regarding Barack Obama’s electoral campaign which had managed to mobilize the young voter who political scientists thought were disinterested in politics. Bang explains that Obama’s campaign managed to engage the voter at the personal level in “micro-personal political activity” (p. 177). This, according to Bang, is an evidence that the political sphere can be a “lived experience” in a “reflexive political community” in which problems can be solved by participation (pp. 179-183). The practical lesson

for public management is, according to the editors, that activism, ethical values and sense-making of actors provides an effective solution to some of the paradoxes of determinist models of public policy theory in that the activism and creativity better interface with the constantly changing issues dealt with by the decentralised post-welfare states.

A narrative approach, praised by the editors, is based on tacit knowledge, understanding and actors' own experience. In this, they seem to diverge from the New Public Management (NPM) philosophy which relies on implementing market principles within the management of public institutions to increase institutional efficiency. In a sense, the editors seem to point to one obvious shortcoming of the NPM philosophy: one can hardly implement market principles in an area where there is no competition by default. That is, the states do not compete with their services to draw citizenry in as much as, in contrast, FMCG producers lure customers to buy a chocolate bar from one or the other. What works perfectly with chocolate (increased efficiency, price competition) cannot work for public services.

Instead, David Farnham notes that the performance of public administrators is increased by regular reviews, appraisals, monetary incentives, career development, promotion and other managerial tools. This new way of working is distinctly more individual than one under the traditional bureaucracy. B. Guy Peters goes further and claims that now the bureaucrats are faced with ambiguity and choices, previously unseen. This allows the public servant to reflect particular needs and policies and to provide nuanced responses. This however requires the public servant to attain new skills and engage in a "new governance". As Andrew Massey notes in his essay, the public servant must aspire to operate ethically, beyond the boundaries of race, ethnicity, religion, culture and politics and to respect individual human rights.

In theory, such an approach when taken to an extreme presupposes a system of governance without a centre, be it a power centre or even central and shared values. In his essay (pp. 39-63), Paul H.A. Frissen describes such a system which is far from the view of public administration as a "problem solving machine". Frissen argues for an "aesthetic view of politics" rather than a system with goals and means handed down from the political representation. Noting that knowledge in social science is often inadequate and always related to concrete social contexts, Frissen seems to claim that an effective public servant needs to adopt a form of moral relativism ("amoral" in Frissen's view) to be able to protect plurality and difference among the citizens. This finding is complemented by Mark Evans who examines policy transfers mainly in Anglo-Saxon countries. For him the key element is successful cross-cultural learning, cultural assimilation, simplicity and regard for indigenous practices which must be compatible, however, with the value system of the recipient organization and built on organizational strengths (p. 91).

The most challenging essay of the collection is Wayne Parsons' (pp. 12-38) since it sets the collection's theoretical tone. Parsons describes the current world as one in which

there is no such thing as objective truth and in which the role of the expert is fiercely contested, grand narratives are dismissed and in which we just bring and show each other our truth, rather than laying claims to anything called 'the truth' or 'the facts' (p. 33).

Parsons seeks a new link between knowledge arrived at by the social sciences and the natural sciences, and he maintains his trust in technology to give humanity the ability to gather knowledge about the world which is too complex to be intentionally directed, steered, planned or controlled.

The notion that holism in public policy is dangerously lacking in perspective permeates through the whole set of essays. This common theme, however, seems to neglect the distinction which Karl Popper made when he observed two kinds of holism in his *Poverty of Historicism*. Popper maintained (when citing Friedrich Hayek) that centralized power could not easily centralize the knowledge of individuals to make wise decisions. The incorrect belief that this can be done is only one kind of holism, and this kind of holism is referred to and rightfully criticized by Parsons, Fenwick and McMillan in the collection. Popper further argued that there was another kind of holism, one which sought to describe relations characteristic to a system made from particular agents; this view allows making prediction and managing some of the system's characteristics. Overtly, neither Parsons nor the rest of the authors seem to make such a distinction. But perhaps the common ambition of these essays is different: charting new waters and introducing challenging observations.

Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried (eds.), *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010)

Oana Elena Brânda
University of Bucharest

Cultural diplomacy is usually limited spatially to the European and American areas and is mostly investigated for the period of the Cold War. What the two editors intend to do is extend both the geographical and temporal limits to African and Asian continents as well as back to the middle of the 19th century, as is the Japanese case. What Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried attempt in this work is to offer a comprehensive view of the term "cultural diplomacy" not only by looking at its multiple aspects, but also by offering throughout time and space various