



consistent and structured exposition so typical of scientific writing. It is definitely not science, rather *The Hidden Handshake* is an outward expression of deeply held and felt anxieties concerning how one should try and find their place in the world around them. It is poetry in prose and, as such, a relaxing read that invites each of its readers to look deep inside themselves to discover what Debeljak has already discovered for himself.

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Methods for Development Work and Research: A New Guide for Practitioners

Britha Mikkelsen

Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, 376pp.

ISBN: 0-7619-3328-X

Journal of International Relations and Development (2007) **10**, 84–87.

doi:10.1057/palgrave.jird.1800101

In recent decades, development researchers have learned many lessons from the failures of development policies to reduce poverty in the world. It is now generally accepted in development studies that approaches with underlying modernization, dependency or neoliberal theories have suffered from a top-down approach inherent in the social sciences. ‘Development is not a technical fix’ (p. 27), says Britha Mikkelsen in the second, recently updated, edition of *Methods for Development Work and Research*, which was first published in 1995. The guide advocates a paradigmatic shift to a participatory bottom-up approach and presents a large array of methods to help local populations get involved in development planning and implementation.

Despite its innovative tone, Mikkelsen’s position is not unrealistic. She does not dismiss the mainstream development discourse based on objective-oriented project cycle management and the Millennium Development Goals. Further, since the first edition of the book participation has been — at least in theory — included in countries’ Poverty Reduction Strategies as promoted by the World Bank, policies formerly ignored the interests of the poor. It would be more accurate, then, to consider the author’s contribution an attempt at synthesizing the traditional top-down approach to development favoured by donors with the new bottom-up participatory approach.

The guide describes the actual methods already proven in practice, mostly by Scandinavian bilateral aid agencies, and lists their *pros* and *cons*. Causal diagrams, social maps, timelines and well-being matrixes, to cite only a few of the tools, help assess local resources, knowledge and the *perception* of poverty by the poor. These tools are often more graphical than textual to meet the needs of illiterate people. The methods are closely related to qualitative data, which are increasingly used in development. For instance, poverty measured by the type of housing *observed* in a specific region may reflect social realities better than costly and often unavailable economic indicators.



Some methods are ready to use without further reference and will be welcomed by all development workers.

This particularly applies to interviews as the most important source of information. The book provides comprehensive guidance as to their preparation, conducting and data extraction, with an emphasis on the discourse analysis. The advice goes into useful details such as note taking during interviews. However, the methods used at the *meso* and *macro* levels, for instance, for participatory budgeting or advocacy, are only briefly outlined. Hopefully, the next edition of the guide will close this gap.

A similar deficiency at the macro-level is in the enlarged chapter on monitoring and evaluation. These used to be the only accounting tools at the service of donor agencies, but their benefits for primary stakeholders have now been acknowledged. Among the trends identified, Mikkelsen mentions the shift from one-time evaluation studies to a continuous information stream. Participation allows local people to take corrective action, yet the pressure and alienation induced by monitoring and evaluation do not vanish. The scale of the methods presented through the cases is wide, but shallow and fragmented. They range from quantitative or qualitative, impact or process-oriented to sector-wide or micro-based evaluation methods. The author admits that it is very challenging to find a good mixture and that further research needs to be done here. Nevertheless, she should suggest how to create the frameworks to support horizontal learning from specific cases.

However, the advantages of the guide would be limited if reduced to merely practical methods for developmental fieldwork. Britha Mikkelsen has a laudably critical, field-supported voice, which she uses to discuss value-laden concepts such as participation, empowerment and development itself. She argues that all stakeholders affecting and affected by a development intervention must be involved. As poverty reduction cannot be delivered as a service, the 'new' researcher instead plays the role of a mediator. He or she identifies inequity among the population and assists local people in changing their living conditions.

The author pays special attention to selected issues of growing importance for development; the Rights-based Approach, for instance, is gradually replacing the conventional needs-oriented approach. Considering socio-economic development as one facet of human rights, the Rights-based Approach seeks to achieve more equity by empowering rights-holders (citizens) and strengthening duty-bearers (states, the international community). Numerous gender analytical frameworks, tools and indicators are far better elaborated; however, there is no consensus on whether women's participation should be a goal in itself, or just an efficient anti-poverty tool. Doubts about any real merger of human rights and development agendas in the future also stand out.

Whatever the answer, gender aspects are present throughout the book and confirm that the role of women in development is being mainstreamed, at least by donors. Among other innovations, Appreciative Inquiry promotes people's empowerment with a focus on positive visions of the future rather than on current problems. Geomatics or Geographical Information Systems on Global Positioning System (GPS)-enabled laptops or Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) help use fragmented indigenous knowledge. These examples attest that the current development research and intervention can come together.

In reality, the level of participation varies from authentic self-mobilization through to passive participation. As some authors suggest, participation can even become a 'new



tyranny' when it raises unfeasible expectations or overestimates non-governmental organizations. 'Participation is not the panacea many assume because there are limits to what participation (even if interactive) can achieve in terms of equity and efficiency, given pre-existing socio-economic inequalities and relations of power' (p. 71). Given the fatigue produced by the continuous pressure from deadlines and reporting, the right not to participate must be respected. The panorama of critical views is well balanced and documented by case studies, making this chapter of the book the most valuable.

Moreover, Mikkelsen assumes that it is vital for any development practitioner to *reflect* on the methodological approaches they use in order to strengthen the validity of a research plan. Another chapter explores their types, possibilities and pitfalls. As development studies deal with world inequality, critical realism and constructionism predominate. Nevertheless, methodological pluralism remains the main characteristic of development studies: social reality requires a true cross-disciplinary approach based on a triangulation combining qualitative and quantitative methods. How can this be achieved? The book brings only narrow standards of good practice — the reflection on the methodology should be pushed further especially where participatory methods in development might reciprocally influence the methodology of development studies and thus contribute to the other social sciences.

From a description of the practical tools through to meta-scientific thoughts, the guide tackles all aspects of participation. Paradoxically, only in the last chapter of the book does the author examine whether it is ethical to intervene in a community at all. This part of the book should be considered its genuine introduction. Indeed, the researcher's right to intervene in a community without its explicit consent is disputable. For example, a simple interview is an intervention in its own right. Sometimes it is impossible to explain the interest of academic research to those interviewed. Britha Mikkelsen is perfectly aware of the insurmountable paradoxes of development intervention based on the Western scientific discourse. Development researchers and workers, she concludes, 'do not like to be compared with missionaries of former times or the Faust-like "developers", but the reflection is imperative' (p. 345). In spite of several ethical codes, the core questions of cultural distance and domination remains unanswered: most development work is still done by researchers from the North 'exploiting' people in the South for 'raw information'.

Although development practitioners can choose any chapter of the book according to their specific needs, the 'holistic' character of the participatory approach might elude them. Thus the book, primarily intended for use in the field, gives an accurate picture of the cross-disciplinary and ever-changing, hence often uncertain, character of development studies, corresponding to the disparity of the world aid industry. On the other hand, academic researchers in development studies and neighbouring disciplines can become acquainted with the opportunities and failures the participation of the local population in the South brings to a policy-oriented science, its methodology and methods. Finally, students can comprehensively deepen their knowledge of recent development trends.

To conclude, *Methods for Development Work and Research* cannot be reduced to the simple box of practical tools as its title might suggest. On the contrary, the author literally *guides* the reader through the methods, field experience and background of the participatory approach, insisting on the researcher's self-reflection in both the



methodology and ethics. Robert Chambers, one of the spiritual fathers of the relatively young but influential participatory approach would be probably delighted.

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Painful Choices: A Theory of Foreign Policy Change

David A. Welch

Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2005, 312pp.

ISBN: 0-691-12340-3

Journal of International Relations and Development (2007) **10**, 87–89.

doi:10.1057/palgrave.jird.1800102

What leads states to radically change their foreign policies and is it possible to anticipate these changes? It is exactly with these questions that David Welch starts his book *Painful Choices*, in which he seeks to develop a theory of foreign policy change. Looking at current international relations (IR) theories, he comes to the conclusion that these concepts describe and explain current or past behaviour of states more or less well, yet they fail when it comes to anticipating how states will behave in the future. This is why Welch tries to find a theory that would rectify this failure. However, he argues it is probably impossible to predict specific foreign political behaviour and that it might not even be necessary. It would suffice to specify the circumstances and conditions that might lead to a radical change in foreign policy and then pursue them up to the point when the red lights start flashing and alert us that the time of change may be imminent.

According to Welch, this is sufficient because he presumes that foreign policy tends to be stable and radical changes only occur rarely. Thus, it is more sensible to focus on the prospects of change rather than on concrete state behaviour. Welch elaborates his case over six chapters. In the first section, he analyses the weaknesses of current IR theories concerning the anticipating of states' behaviour and defends the need for a new theory. This theory is developed in the second chapter including the presumptions, hypotheses and its operationalization.

In the following three sections, he attempts to test-drive his theory using four examples of foreign policy change and one example of a foreign policy avoiding change. The former include the deliberations of the Argentine junta on the upsides and downsides of invading the Falkland Islands; the reasons that led United States' (US) President Lyndon B. Johnson to start the war in Vietnam and the thoughts that shaped Richard Nixon's mind when he decided America should have left Vietnam; and the evolution of Canadian trade policy towards the US until the Canadian government finally decided to conclude an agreement on free trade with the US. The last example is the dovish Japanese approach to Russia concerning the long-running dispute over the Southern Kuriles. In the final section, Welch summarizes these cases and gives recommendations for how to use his theory in practice.