

RESEÑA BIBLIOGRÁFICA

Frameworks for Policy Analysis: Merging Text and Context, Raul P. Lejano, New York, Routledge, 2006.

*Erualdo Romero González**

Frameworks for Policy Analysis: Merging Text and Context, by Raul P. Lejano, provides theoretical and methodological directions in policy analysis that go beyond the mythological. The book's main argument is that policy analysts should re-examine their work from strict positivistic prescriptions and conduct analyses that yield a better accounting of context, experience, and complexity. According to the author, such an approach opens our analysis to encompass real world situations, such as uncertainty, incommensurability, social considerations, moral principles, and history, which are not accounted for in widely used models. The author's message is that this approach is imperative if policy analysts truly seek to fulfill the essence of policy analysis, which is to achieve collective purposes that result from constant relationship building and coordinated behavior.

The book is organized into three sections. The first section deals with the way

in which analysis is customarily approached and discusses the limits of this strategy. The second section demonstrates the need for an approach to analysis that respects the complexity of policy situations. The book's third section offers new frameworks for policy analysis. This review will discuss each of these sections in turn.

The first section, "The Positivist Foundations to Policy Analysis," covers the traditional preoccupation of policy analyses with math, argues why we should improve the dimensionality and contextuality of these analyses, and provides some recommendations for accomplishing the task.

The section presents a brief overview of the philosophical and theoretical background to central assumptions that are influential in policy analysis today. Lejano traces key figures from the Enlightenment period, from the rational thinkers Descartes, Kant, and Bentham, to empiricists like Locke and Hume. The author points out unique contributions of these thinkers to

*Assistant Professor, Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies; California State University, Fullerton. E-mail: egonzalez@fullerton.edu.

modern institutional models (e.g., cost benefit analysis, multi-attribute utility, and social choice) based on the assumption of the atomistic, self-directed, personal utility-maximizing individual. This chapter is a good intellectual exercise for outlining the limitations of philosophical rationality that are embedded in popular policy analysis. It also provides readers with a foundation for understanding the ensuing chapters that detail traditional approaches and limitations of policy analysis.

The book next covers the assumptions, contradictions, and limitations of policy formulation as decision making. Lejano does a good job of organizing and explaining concepts of decision theory, including comparability, commensurability, utility, expected utility, and optimization and satisficing. The author points out four general, but related, failings of these models: *a)* The models border on the mythological and help create institutions that are utilitarian and monolithic; *b)* The models incorrectly assume the capacity to act as the locus of decisions for the diverse motivations of individuals, and, by extension, large scale regions; *c)* The models are heavily contingent on comparisons among otherwise distinct alternatives and assume that an individual can consider these alternatives on the same field of comparison, and that such alternatives can be measured along a scale of utility; and *d)* The models are fundamentally a cognitive exercise presumably able to capture a situation from an epistemological distance, and they suffer from a deficiency of context and experience. Perhaps more importantly, the author points out that while these models

are popular, they are not used to make decisions, but instead they are used to legitimize decisions or to respond to criticisms that are made about policies. This limits the value of policy analysis. Lejano's message is aimed at the popular assumptions, inherent contradictions, and limitations of policy formulation as decision making. He argues that there is a need to expose, in greater detail and with examples, the ways that conventional policy making is done.

Next, Lejano discusses the application of social judgment theory alongside the theory of games. Lejano discusses non-cooperative *n*-person games and cooperative *n*-person games and provides three examples of the failings of policy modeled after game theory. For example, he argues that the greatest influence and limitation of the rational-utilitarian model is in the arena of legitimation of policy arguments. He cites globalization as the prime example of such policy, because it reduces all social phenomena to the logic of market transactions, which are modeled according to exchanges of utility. Another problem with the utilitarian model is the loss of dimensionality, whereby policy analysis merges features and meanings of a policy situation into a single platform of utility; this, he laments, makes it quite easy to work out solutions to problems, and henceforth, to make the rational model quite popular. Lejano notes a third limitation to the model: it is not used to make decisions, but to justify policy formulation post-hoc. He does a good job of discussing these limitations using simple and interesting planning-related examples.

Perhaps more importantly, he provides useful recommendations to increase the dimensionality and contextuality—and hence the relevance—of the rational model.

Part Two consists of four chapters that deal with the contributions of the post-positivist paradigm and its drawbacks for policy analysis. This section of the book argues that while the post-positivist tradition implies a greater desire than the positivist paradigm to consider subjective and interpretive issues, it too has limitations similar to those of the positivist tradition. Specifically, Lejano contends that policy analysts need to move beyond post-positivist analysis frameworks because they fail to consider dimensionality and context.

Lejano introduces topics such as constructionist, intersubjective communication, knowledge, power, experts, deliberative governance, phenomenology, and learning in action. He does an excellent job in treating these topics by discussing seminal thinkers who dispute the classical idea that policy language (and policy) exist as models of fixed realities.

The bulk of Part Two addresses the analysis and interpretation of text (i.e., words on a page) and provides frameworks and case studies for uncovering inconsistencies and fallacies between post-positivist text and context. The author's use of case studies provides a good basis for his argument that policy formulation must be mindful of other modes of analysis in order to bridge the gap between text and context. These modes include the moral mode, whereby the focus of policy analysis is not on general-

ization (e.g., participation is good) and utilitarianism (e.g., participation is an end goal) but on local actors pursuing policy analysis on normative grounds that are compatible with the needs of a local place. Lejano argues, quite convincingly, that the focus of policy formulation should be on working with local actors and agencies to develop agreed-upon normative principles that they can pursue and not strictly on the end results (i.e., consequentialist ideals). Thus, he cites the limitation of the post-positivist paradigm as being inherently text, not of any particular “place,” and lacking meaningful attention to mechanisms that an agency can follow to ensure action based on shared principles. This lack of attention helps to perpetuate the failings of context-deficient policy making. In sum, Lejano presents interesting discussions, such as the need to widen our thinking beyond post-positivist analysis and to search for additional ways to bridge the chasm between policy ideals and real world situations.

The most innovative section of the book is the third section, “The Postconstructionist Sentiment.” It builds on the previous sections by offering frameworks that introduce context, experience, and complexity to the formulation of policy-making.

The section begins with an argument that policy analysts should not seek for a theory of truth, but aspire to a theory of meaning. This requires abandoning rigid analyses of the positivist and/or post-positivist types and incorporating a criterion of what the author calls “authenticity”—examining how the true interpretation

(i.e., text) of a policy situation is compared with the real experience (i.e., context) of policy actors.

The crux of this section provides the frameworks for policy analysis that helps achieve authentic policy making—policy making that merges text and context. Lejano provides three directions for policy analysis. First, he describes how to integrate “experience” in policymaking, with four rules for structuring a process of analysis and co-discovery, four community-based methodologies, and five analytical strategies to integrate and obtain an analysis that captures complex phenomena. Next, he provides a framework to help analysts examine coherence and differentiation. He stresses that this is necessary because policy design is not capable of molding different institutions toward isomorphism, and we should abandon this romantic ideal. Instead, policy analysts should be concerned with understanding the extent to which policy designs may be coherent in particular institutions and the nature of differentiation from place to place. Third, Lejano offers a new mode of theorizing which he calls “topology.” According to Lejano, this type of theorizing considers multiple dimensions of experience and understanding, wherein “individuals and institutions are understood as unbounded sets that can span multiple dimensions and overlap each other in a complex collection of sets” (p.228). The essence of this framework is twofold: to expand the idea of reasoning, from the atomistic self, for example, and include multiple ways of knowing; and to understand institutions beyond the

formal and move to a model of structures of care that “characterize institutions by describing active relationships between policy actors” (p. 235). An important aspect of topological theorizing, argues Lejano, is not so much to present complete models of analysis, but to propose frameworks by which analysts can construct models and processes. Lejano applies selective elements of these frameworks in a number of diverse case studies, both national and international in focus (e.g., a project to investigate environmental health problems in Southeast Los Angeles and various community based coastal management programs in the Philippines). The case studies are invaluable, because they help make the author's conceptual arguments and methodological recommendations transparent.

Lejano has done an excellent job covering the prevailing paradigms and models of policy analysis, exposing their imperfections, and offering new trajectories for policy thought and action. A strength of this book is the use of urban planning case studies that help the reader understand why it is important for analysts to be aware of different forms of knowing and find ways to integrate them. Despite this strength, a reader with minimal background to philosophical and theoretical paradigms of policy analysis may find it challenging to apply the plethora of concepts to the examples provided. As a whole, the book could improve with better organization in the introduction of the chapters, since some contain lengthy and noteworthy content and examples that are better suited for the main content

areas. This book is highly recommended for students in advanced courses in public policy, planning theory, planning ethics, and community health, and for practitioners immersed in these fields. Both audiences will discover an appre-

ciation and critical need for expanding conventional thinking and research skills to include post-constructionist policy frameworks that, after all, may bring us closer to fulfilling the goal of policy analysis in the first place.