HANDBOOK OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, Edited by B. GUY PETERS AND JON PIERRE

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Handbook of Public Administration. B. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre, eds., London, Sage, 2003, 656 pages

The production of the handbook is a major intellectual and logistical achievement. A broad range of topics, country cases, intellectual traditions, and debates are included. As well as the two overall editors, fourteen section editors and about fifty other contributors were involved in the enterprise, coming from institutions in many countries and displaying a range of departmental affiliations including public administration, political science, social work, law, and business. In addition, an international advisory team was consulted during design and production of the book.

So, what has been produced from all this hard work? Reasonable criteria for evaluating a handbook are whether, for its target audience, it is comprehensive in scope and authoritative, constituting an easy-to-navigate guide to the subject that identifies key themes, cleavages, and avenues for obtaining further knowledge. A further feature of handbooks is that they are usually intended to be of relevance for a considerable period, and subject to revision including updating. For editors to undertake these tasks successfully, it is necessary for the community to comment on ways in which handbooks could be improved. In this sense, disciplines or fields of study get the handbooks they deserve.

The handbook describes its target audience as public administration students, researchers, and practitioners. While I think it will be most useful as a reference book for teachers, researchers, and more advanced students, those working in public organizations will, no doubt, be able to find several topics of interest and, with signposting from a tutor, introductory students should also benefit. It is certainly a book that I anticipate using for our MA and Ph.D. programs in public administration and public policy and in our undergraduate politics program.

The handbook opens with an introduction written by the two overall editors, followed by fourteen sections containing between three and five chapters each, with forty-nine chapters in total. Each section has an introduction written by a section editor which introduces the chapters and provides an overview of the section topic. Limitations of space preclude a detailed review of all the chapters or sections, so I will concentrate on general observations and reserve more detailed comment for key sections. The quality of contributions is generally high and the handbook contains some very interesting material. The coverage of topics is broad,

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although the confines of a single volume obviously mean that breadth is achieved, in part, at the expense of depth. However, extensive references provide a valuable guide to further reading.

Overall, the handbook is a valuable complement to existing titles that, while dealing with similar material, have different overarching themes. In contrast to the many existing public administration texts that are heavily focused on the U.S. or another single country case (e.g., Stillman's Public Administration: Concepts and Cases [1996]) the handbook surveys developments in many nations and regions, containing sections on comparative and international public administration as well as public administration in developing and transitional societies. The coverage is both empirical and theoretical, in contrast to more theoretical surveys (e.g., Frederickson and Smith's *Public Administration Theory Primer* [2003]) or surveys relating the history of ideas and practice (e.g., Hood's *The Art of the State* [2000]). The theoretical focus is broader than disciplinary titles in organization theory, sociology politics, law, public management, or economics/rational choice (e.g., Mueller's *Public Choice III* [2003]), with sections on public management—old and new, organization theory and public administration, law and administration, politics and administration, and administration and society. The perspective adopted by the handbook is both contemporary and historical, in contrast to books surveying contemporary reforms (e.g., Pollitt and Bouckaert's *Public Management* Reform [1999]), with sections on administrative history and administrative reform. While there are books surveying the literatures on particular issues in public administration (e.g., Myers' Handbook of Government Budgeting [1998]), the Handbook of Public Administration covers a range of topics, with sections on budgeting and finance, resource management, implementation, accountability, and intergovernmental relations and public administration. There are other books that cover some of the material in the handbook, perhaps one of the best known being Lynn and Wildavsky's Public Administration: The State of the Discipline (1990), although the handbook entries, in aggregate, cover a broader range of topics.

Different readers are likely to have their own views on omissions, errors of commission, or the balance of coverage. However, most of the areas conventionally associated with the title of public administration are included. Cases could perhaps be made for including a specific section on professionals (a topic which is partially addressed in the section on accountability), for a more extensive discussion of decision making and policy formulation (which is partly addressed in the chapters on strategic planning and policy design and implementation), and for more extensive coverage of rational choice models of public organization (although the chapter on formal models is good and there is some material elsewhere in the handbook). Greater discussion of the rationale for the framework of sections adopted in the handbook would also be desirable. The section headings are a mixture disciplinary perspectives, broad topics, and more specific subtopics. More explicit signposting of different pathways through the book at the start, for example reflecting interest according to discipline or topic, might make the handbook a bit more user friendly.

A clearer rationale for the framework might flow from a more extensive discussion of the nature of public administration and how it has changed over time. The thorny issues of whether public administration is a discipline or a topic area, whether it is in crisis or not (or perhaps undergoing a renaissance), and its

relationship with public management, politics, public policy, economics, organization theory, law, history, and sociology merit more attention. While the handbook makes a very good start to addressing some of these issues in the introduction and the first section (in particular, discussing the relationship between public administration and public management), the discussion could be further developed. A couple of more minor points that might be followed up in future editions are that consolidating the references would reduce their current fragmentation (and cut down on duplication across chapters), and an author index would assist searching, particularly for the classic studies. However, a few teething troubles are only to be expected in a project of this ambition. Overall, the handbook is very valuable in bringing together a wide range of interesting material in one place, and it should have a broad audience.

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