

Marvin E. Olsen: *Participatory Pluralism. Political Participation in the United States and Sweden*. Nelson-Hall, Chicago 1982, 318 p.

This book presents and tests two well-known theories in political science, participatory pluralism and pluralist theory, and it offers a synthesis of the two, which is called participatory pluralism.

The theory of participatory democracy is developed from the ideas put forward by, among others, Carole Pateman and Peter Bachrach. It is defined thus: "In a participatory democracy, collective decision making is highly decentralized throughout all sectors of society, so that all individuals learn participatory skills and can effectively participate in various ways in the making of all decisions that affect them" (p. 26).

The empirical study of political participation is based on an interview survey which was carried out in Indianapolis during 1968. Six dimensions of political participation were identified. *A priori* assumptions and not statistical techniques specified these six dimensions. The six dimensions are: cognitive participation (knowledge and extent of opinion formation on issues); expressive participation (discussion of politics); electoral participation (holding a party preference, being registered and actual voting); organizational participation (membership and activity within political but non-partisan organizations or non-political special interest organizations); partisan participation (wearing a campaign button, contributing money, doing volunteer work for a political party or serving on a party committee); and government participation (e.g. writing letter to a public official or holding elective office).

These dimensions are treated as six separate dependent variables and are entered into a series of multiple regression analyses. The author arrives at the conclusion that the decision to treat the six dimensions in separate analyses was justified because: "each dimension (is) influenced by a unique set of causal factors" (p. 123). The six dimensions are, however, more or less strongly intercorrelated and a background factor such as education has a clear impact on all six forms of participation.

Special emphasis is given to "the social mobilization thesis" as a central tenet in participatory theory. The thesis holds that "the more extensively and intensively a person becomes involved in all aspects of his or her social environment ... the more likely one is to participate in political affairs" (p. 54). The empirical test "has produced considerable empirical evidence in support of the social mobilization thesis" (p. 123). However, a closer look makes the evidence appear rather dubious. One important aspect of social mobilization, job influence, is shown to be irrelevant for one's political participation. Not unexpectedly, mass media exposure correlates with political

Marvin E. Olsen: *Participatory Pluralism. Political Participation in the United States and Sweden*. Nelson-Hall, Chicago 1982, 318 p.

This book presents and tests two well-known theories in political science, participatory pluralism and pluralist theory, and it offers a synthesis of the two, which is called participatory pluralism.

The theory of participatory democracy is developed from the ideas put forward by, among others, Carole Pateman and Peter Bachrach. It is defined thus: "In a participatory democracy, collective decision making is highly decentralized throughout all sectors of society, so that all individuals learn participatory skills and can effectively participate in various ways in the making of all decisions that affect them" (p. 26).

The empirical study of political participation is based on an interview survey which was carried out in Indianapolis during 1968. Six dimensions of political participation were identified. *A priori* assumptions and not statistical techniques specified these six dimensions. The six dimensions are: cognitive participation (knowledge and extent of opinion formation on issues); expressive participation (discussion of politics); electoral participation (holding a party preference, being registered and actual voting); organizational participation (membership and activity within political but non-partisan organizations or non-political special interest organizations); partisan participation (wearing a campaign button, contributing money, doing volunteer work for a political party or serving on a party committee); and government participation (e.g. writing letter to a public official or holding elective office).

These dimensions are treated as six separate dependent variables and are entered into a series of multiple regression analyses. The author arrives at the conclusion that the decision to treat the six dimensions in separate analyses was justified because: "each dimension (is) influenced by a unique set of causal factors" (p. 123). The six dimensions are, however, more or less strongly intercorrelated and a background factor such as education has a clear impact on all six forms of participation.

Special emphasis is given to "the social mobilization thesis" as a central tenet in participatory theory. The thesis holds that "the more extensively and intensively a person becomes involved in all aspects of his or her social environment ... the more likely one is to participate in political affairs" (p. 54). The empirical test "has produced considerable empirical evidence in support of the social mobilization thesis" (p. 123). However, a closer look makes the evidence appear rather dubious. One important aspect of social mobilization, job influence, is shown to be irrelevant for one's political participation. Not unexpectedly, mass media exposure correlates with political

participation. To treat this variable as an indicator of social mobilization can, however, be questioned. The assumption of a simple one-way causal relation between mass media exposure and other aspects of political involvement is also doubtful. When using community attachment as a predictor of political participation, the results are no less ambiguous. Length of residence primarily influences voting turnout. Informal interaction with relatives, neighbors and friends is only weakly related to the different measures of political participation.

When it comes to membership and involvement in voluntary associations, the American data are compared with the results obtained from a survey carried out in the Swedish city of Gävle in 1972. The particular reason for choosing Indianapolis and Gävle is not given. Neither is their degree of comparability discussed. Nevertheless, data from the two studies are presented alongside each other. The data sets are obviously not identical since the six elaborate dimensions utilized so far in the book are now reduced to four simple aspects of political participation (political discussion, voting turnout, partisan activities and government contacts). The comparison between the two cities only covers a dozen pages and the results are meager: Swedes in Gävle are slightly more likely than Americans in Indianapolis to belong to and attend interest associations; the membership rates in labor unions are much higher in Gävle; membership in interest associations is related to political participation; and membership is as important as attendance, especially in the case of Indianapolis.

After the examination of the survey data and the alleged support for the social mobilization thesis, the level of analysis is shifted from individuals to organizations. The theoretical emphasis is the mediation version of pluralist theory: "From this perspective, the primary function of voluntary interest associations for political democracy is to act as influence channels between citizens and the government" (p. 181). The empirical data used to test whether this theory "provides a viable model" were obtained through personal interviews with fifty top Swedish organizational and governmental leaders in 1972 (thus, no comparison with the United States is made here).

The initially positive image of the Swedish model of "sociopolitical pluralism in practice" is, toward the end of the analysis, somewhat tarnished. The evaluation given by the Swedish elite does not fit the preconceptions. In a book published in 1982, one would expect the current lamentations over the corporatist state and that private interest organizations colonize the state. But the 1972 data offer a completely different picture. The organizations are not too strong, but too weak: "In a few words, we have found that the Swedish system of formal influence procedures is seen as essentially inadequate as a means by which interest organizations can exert influence on the government, and that whatever political influence organizations have at

the present time is wielded primarily through personal contacts and public opinion rather than through any of the formal procedures. At the same time, however, many of these procedures are used quite effectively by the government to manipulate or control the interest organizations for its own purposes” (p. 262).

Both participatory democracy and sociopolitical pluralism have, consequently, been found defective. The final chapter outlines a synthesis which purports to compensate for the weaknesses of these two theoretical components. The new hybrid, participatory pluralism, has five principal characteristics: power decentralization, functional organization, governmental constriction, participatory involvement and societal activism.

An obvious criticism of this book is that its data are outmoded. But in hindsight, it is equally evident that the data have a historically intrinsic value. For a study of political participation, 1968 is not a bad year. A study of Sweden in 1972 allows us to view a political system which, on the one hand, was ruled by the Social Democrats for nearly four decades and, on the other hand, had not yet experienced economic crisis.

However, it is much more difficult to find an excuse for the fact that the theoretical discussion is equally dated. Few works published during the last ten years have been quoted. Books printed in the mid-60's are referred to as examples of “recent studies”. The European debate on corporatist interest intermediation is not mentioned. Nor are relevant studies in the Nordic countries, such as the Norwegian political power project, the Århus study of different roads into Danish politics, the Finnish RESPO and DETA projects, and Swedish local democracy research, taken up. (Norway and Denmark are, by the way, dismissed in a footnote: the influence procedures in both countries “were largely patterned after practices that were first developed in Sweden”.) And most sensational of all, this book must be one of the very few in the field which does not quote Stein Rokkan's seminal article on “votes count but resources decide” from 1966. This omission must either be due to utmost sophistication or sheer neglect.

*Olof Petersson, University of Uppsala.*