

Reviews

The handbook of environmental policy evaluation by A Crabbé, P Leroy; Earthscan, London, 2008, 192 pages, £49.95 cloth, ISBN 9781844076185

Evaluating public policies has become an increasingly important part of the policy process. A growing number of public policies have therefore been subject to some sort of criteria-based evaluation, whether on an *ex ante*, an *ex post*, or a formative basis. Evaluations provide information to governmental, market, and civil actors about the suitability, quality, or success of policies.

One area where evaluation has come to the fore in recent years is environmental policy. In part, this reflects broader underlying trends towards evaluation, with governments across the globe demonstrating growing interest in scrutinising the needs and performance of public policy. Yet it also reflects the particular characteristics of environmental policy interventions. Hence, a distinctive feature of environmental policy has been widespread proliferation, innovation, and experimentation, which has called for evaluations of new approaches, regulations, and instruments. Allied to these needs is the potential importance of environmental effectiveness, particularly in areas where environmental degradation poses a threat to health, ecosystem stability, or involves irreversible changes. Another important feature which has placed evaluation at the heart of environmental policy processes is economic in nature. With the rising financial burden of environmental protection, governments have faced pressures to ensure that environmental policy goals are met at least cost, such that economic evaluation techniques have come to occupy a prominent role in regulatory decision making.

Against this backdrop Ann Crabbé and Pieter Leroy's book provides a worthwhile and timely contribution. Appropriately titled, *The Handbook of Environmental Policy Evaluation*, the book fills an important gap in the existing market. In it Crabbé and Leroy aim to provide a broad-based introduction to the principles of environmental policy evaluation, the complexities involved, and, most importantly, the available tool kit of evaluation methods and techniques.

The authors begin with an introduction to evaluation, outlining different perspectives on the nature of public policy, and how different perspectives influence the purpose of policy evaluation. They then proceed to explore broad criteria used in policy evaluation, setting them within a tripartite framework of juridical, economic–business, and political–social approaches. The opening chapter is useful, drawing readers' attention to the socially constructed nature of policy evaluation, and how this affects constituent measures of policy success. The second chapter is similarly instructive, highlighting some of the conceptual and practical difficulties involved in evaluation, particularly as they apply to the field of environmental policy. What emerges is not only that environmental policy evaluation is often challenging, but that, in confronting these challenges, evaluators face a whole series of choices with potentially far-reaching implications for the outcomes of evaluation exercises.

Although Crabbé and Leroy set out in the first two chapters the context and principles of environmental policy evaluation, in much of the rest of the book they take a more applied stance. In the third and largest chapter they review different practical methods (or techniques) involved in policy evaluation. These include needs analysis, programme theory evaluation, case study evaluation, experiment and quasi-experiment, formative–developmental evaluation, goal-free evaluation, impact assessment, cost–benefit analysis and cost-effectiveness analysis, logframe analysis, multicriteria analysis, and realistic evaluation. For each technique, the authors provide details about the fundamentals of the methods, the sorts of research and evaluation questions to which the technique can be applied, advantages and disadvantages, and methodological steps.

As a reference guide providing information on a range of available techniques, the chapter is useful. Yet in the chapter the authors arguably sacrifice depth for breadth. Any user considering applying a particular approach in practice will most likely need to consult further texts—especially for more complex techniques such as multicriteria analysis or cost–benefit analysis.

I would have liked to see more details of the leading techniques commonly used in policy evaluation, together with accompanying examples. However, this is a matter of preference, and many readers will surely appreciate the exposure to a number of less commonly applied approaches.

In chapter 4, Crabbé and Leroy broaden the focus further to consider “Approaches for designing evaluation research”. As its name suggests, the authors detail various framework approaches for planning and carrying out evaluations, paying particular attention to the role played by different participants, sources of data and knowledge, and procedures. Again, a wide range of approaches are reviewed, ranging from advocate–adversary evaluation through to deliberate democratic evaluation and responsive evaluation. A standardised format for outlining the relevant features, application contexts, advantages and disadvantages, and methodologies of the respective approaches helps the reader to understand their distinctive features.

Overall, Crabbé and Leroy’s handbook lives up to its description, providing an easy-to-follow guide for environmental policy evaluation. Yet there are some notable absences in the book. Although they introduce evaluative criteria at the outset, these are not followed up in sufficient detail later on. To take one example: the authors do not sufficiently incorporate recent work which has explored various criteria which can be used to evaluate participatory environmental policies. They also miss out by failing to say more about evaluating policies as part of broader policy mixes—something which is of particular importance within a range of environmental policy contexts.

Still, for students or practitioners with an interest in environmental policy evaluation, *The Handbook of Environmental Policy Evaluation* provides a worthwhile reference text. Its major strengths lie in its breadth of coverage, introducing readers to a diversity of perspectives, methods, and techniques. Certainly, I will be ordering a copy for my university library.

Richard Perkins

Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economic and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, England

The ideology of home ownership: homeowner societies and the role of housing by R Ronald; Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hants, 2008, 282 pages, £55.00 cloth, ISBN 9781403989451

Twenty years ago, Peter Saunders’s *A Nation of Home Owners* (1990) sparked a discussion on homeowner societies. Up until the 1980s, housing researchers mostly discussed rental housing. Homeownership received far less attention, and, if it did, only from economists and regional scientists—sociologists, geographers, political scientists, anthropologists, and urban planners had largely ignored homeownership. Homeownership was a given: something that was not problematized. A lot has changed in twenty years and Richard Ronald’s new book synthesizes some of this work as well as adding a new building block to debates on housing tenure and homeownership. Housing studies, a relatively undertheorized field, benefits from Ronald’s successful attempts to expand the conception of tenure as well as to recentre the debates on the ideological character of housing relations and the social significance of tenure.

As the space for this review is limited, I will keep the overview of this book to a minimum and will focus on a critical assessment of its contribution in more detail. In the first four chapters Ronald introduces the book, presents earlier work on homeownership ideology, and discusses the linkages between housing, globalization, and welfare states. Chapter 5 presents three Anglo-Saxon cases (UK, US, and Australia), while chapter 6 presents three East Asian cases (Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore). Chapter 7 first compares in-group differences and regimes in the East Asian and Anglo-Saxon cases, respectively, and then compares these two groups. Chapter 8, inaptly titled “The future of home ownership”, reads like a conclusion.

Ronald starts by distinguishing homeownership ideology from a homeowner society. While the first “implies that tenure practices are not benign but support a particular alignment or interaction of social and power relations”, the latter “suggests that social relations in some societies are specifically orientated towards the tenure and that owner-occupied housing systems play a special role in the development pathways of some countries” (page ix). What Ronald effectively does throughout this book is unpack both the ideology and the concept of homeownership.

By discussing homeownership ideologies in six different countries he also highlights the different meanings of homeownership. As such, he problematizes not only homeownership but also tenure. This is why chapter 7, the comparative chapter, is the key chapter as this is where the theoretical discussion of the first chapters and the empirical contribution of the later chapters are brought together to substantiate the claims of the book. Table 7.3, for example, does a great job in highlighting the differences between the East Asian and the Anglo-Saxon homeownership regimes.

I keep on wondering why the author only compared countries with a high homeownership rate: would it not have been more interesting to compare a number of these countries with countries with a lower homeownership rate? The implicit suggestion is that the high homeownership rates are a result of a strong homeownership ideology, but I think it could be argued that some countries with a relatively low homeownership rate also have a strong homeownership ideology. An explanation of divergent outcomes despite convergent ideologies would have made a great contribution to debates on tenure and ideology.

Although Ronald admits that the book is biased towards a British point of view, this does not take away the problem. He suggests this problem is unavoidable, but is it really? He could have presented the book as one on the UK as a homeowner society in a comparative perspective, but instead he presents the book as one comparing six different countries. In that light, it is a bit odd that the British case is not only by far the longest, but also that the general chapters mostly refer to the British literature. Other literature, as far as it was available in English, is mentioned, but generally speaking the discussion is mostly one within British housing studies. The least the author could have done is contextualize the 'Britishness' of this discussion and highlight the discussed literature that is not British in origin. The author fares well in contextualizing the six country cases, but does not go far enough in doing the same for the general chapters. A question that remains largely unanswered is whether the debate on homeownership ideology is exclusively British or whether in other countries the topic is mostly discussed in their respective languages. A likely answer is that the topic does receive some attention in other countries, but is connected to other debates. Homeownership ideology may be less typical in Anglo-Saxon countries than the conceptual language used in this book.

This is not to say *The Ideology of Home Ownership* is a flawed book. To the contrary, it is a significant contribution to both comparative housing studies and debates on tenure, ideology, and housing politics. This book deserves to be read by anyone interested in these topics; it is, unfortunately, one of the few examples of a book on housing that takes both comparative work *and* theory seriously. In this book Ronald also opens up a new research agenda by discussing a few research questions that his book evokes. I will not repeat these questions here, but would like to add one: the relationship between homeownership ideology and urban form. Other studies have touched upon this subject (for example, Lawson, 2006), but it is one both undertheorized and understudied as a topic in this book. My hypothesis is not only that urban form is shaped by homeownership (or, better, tenure) ideology, but that urban form, in time, can also strengthen or transform homeownership ideology and the reconstruction of tenure. Finally, in the near future, I hope to read Ronald's assessment of homeownership ideology after the housing crisis and the credit crunch.

Manuel Aalbers

Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies, University of Amsterdam, 1018 VZ Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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 Saunders P, 1990 *A Nation of Home Owners* (Unwin Hyman, London)

Books received

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