

Book Review

The Rise of the Hybrid Domain: Collaborative Governance for Social Innovation by Yuko Aoyama and Balaji Parthasarathy, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 232 pp.

This book is a welcome addition to a rare path taken by authors to honestly question existing mainstream expositions of development causes and consequences but with a focus on the micro individuals confronting or viewing the social circumstances facing the poor and disadvantaged. It is broadly a civil society issue that is largely researched and analysed through a set of geographical lenses. The authors locate social innovation at the intersection of state-market relations, institutional design and technological innovation. Drawing their empirical evidence from India and from experts with related views from abroad, they undertake an ambitious but empirically grounded analysis to argue for the need to develop an alternative theoretical and methodological approach that can address the contradictions and unequal consequences of capitalist development. They refer to it as the hybrid domain. The book presents a well-research account in ten chapters.

The second chapter discusses existing but related concepts critically, and those that are necessary to approach public goods problems by drawing on economists that define them as non-rivalrous and non-excludable with its broadest implications drawing from what Hardin referred to when describing the environment as a global common. The need for polycentric and global network governance, (which are two major concepts that the authors review), can be seen evolving in the attempts made by the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the annual Conference of Parties (COP), which culminated in the landmark Paris Accord deal signed by an overwhelming majority of nations in 2015 to cap temperature rise over the next century by 1.5 degrees Celsius. The focus of this accord is on reducing drastically emission of greenhouse gas through a shift in energy source from fossil to renewable non-fossil fuels. While the discussion here is rich, it may have benefitted from an attempt to differentiate public goods from public utilities, such as piped water supply and healthcare. The latter refers to goods that should reach everyone but are excludable and rivalrous. It is for these reasons Paul Samuelson and William Baumol called for healthcare to be treated differently from normal goods.

Chapters three and four present interesting articulations of critical concepts used in the book. Chapter three offers concrete arguments on why

the attempt to understand the hybrid domain would require a serious shift away from state-market analyses. Their articulation of the hybrid domain is interesting and incisive as it very much blends with the open and appreciative conceptualization of institutions that was advanced by Thorstein Veblen, Richard Nelson and Sydney Winter. However, the latter go a step further by arguing that the institutional formations, the relative influence of particular institutions, and their consequent impact on socioeconomic agents vary with time, location and activity. Using an illuminating definition of social innovation, the authors discuss in chapter four the role of critical agents in addressing social innovation, and make the powerful point about the importance of context. By doing so they enrich geography by connecting proximity, technology and sustainability with the critical agents that generate on the one hand, and deliver on the other hand, social innovation.

Chapters five, six and seven focus on India. Chapter five starts by discussing the contradictory development of the Indian economy. On the one hand, Indian innovation indicators have outperformed its developmental position economically. On the other hand, India has failed to provide essential public goods and utilities to the majority of its citizens. Similar to the works of Amartya Sen, the authors explain the domination of Fabian Socialist policies associated with Jawaharlal Nehru who followed the Mahalanobis (a variant of the Feldman model) framework to focus on science institutes and large capital goods firms for the domestic economy rather than the Gandhian approach of engaging everyone. Indeed, among Indian states, Kerala, (where the Gandhian approach reigned supreme), has the highest standard of healthcare and literacy rates, and lowest income inequality in India despite being classified among the middle states in terms of per capita incomes. Despite the government's emphasis on research grants, including those targeting the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) have increasingly required research to focus on the poor, their impact on the majority poor have been marginal. Chapter six addresses defeating, frugal innovation, bottom-up design, designs to remove constraints, and inter-sector solutions to explain how India has become a major player on such social innovations. The chapter offers a persuasive case on why corporations should increasingly look at the social impact of their innovations. Chapter seven uses a rich set of 14 case studies, often enriched with snowballing research methods, to demonstrate how social innovation has progressed in India. The cases constitute eight social enterprises, four non-governmental organizations and two multi-national enterprises (MNEs). The different approaches and stakeholders and collaborative links lead the authors to establish the flexibility needed to articulate their hybrid domain. Indeed, the state is only indirectly involved in a number of these cases. For example, chairs endowed by MNEs at IITs and Indian Institute

of managements work using federal grants to undertake research targeted at farmers and fishermen. The methodological approach taken by the authors should be considered by other researchers to broaden the empirical platform to strengthen their theoretical underpinnings.

Chapters eight and nine revisit the rationale behind the hybrid domain by drawing on the empirical evidence in the book. Chapter eight refines the hybrid domain as a borderless amalgamation of loose and flexible activities with public and private characteristics, and evolutionary thrusts that require an interdisciplinary understanding of their causes and consequences. Chapter eight extends the hybrid domain to include scalar flexibility, which the authors explain by demonstrating how stakeholders combine local solutions with global actions and in the process bridge territorial knowledge and resources with transnational access to technology and capital to support social innovations.

The final chapter presents the conclusions. In contrast to Ostrom's polycentric governance approach, the authors go beyond cohesive norms and territorial borders to focus on diverse actors from different sectors that are shaped by different priorities, norms and cultures, which are loose and open in an evolutionary sense.

Overall, this is a wonderful book that offers promise for the hopeful that institutional mechanisms governing development can be improved with broader reach and inclusion of non-state and non-market influences. As acknowledged by the authors themselves they are not the first to articulate such an alternative to address the broad interests of the problems of the world in general, and the disadvantaged masses in particular. This follows from the tradition begun by others, such as Gramsci, Habermas and Polantzas, and taken on later by Jessop, Skocpol and Evans. While it is necessary to go beyond the role of civil society and state-market relations to address this, it is time for geographers to go beyond the path taken by new geography scholars so that a profound set of interdisciplinary lenses that is woven through spatial analysis to return the field to its original coordinates. Unless, geographers take this bold new step initiated by the authors, they will remain infatuated by developments in other disciplines that not only will continue to blind them from the unique strengths in normative theorizing but hold them back to recycling old approaches borrowed from different disciplines.

Rajah Rasiah
Asia-Europe Institute
University of Malaya
Email: rajah@um.edu.my