

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

MICHEL CARTIER, *Les groupes d'intérêts et les collectivités locales: Une interface entre le citoyen et l'État*. Saint-Nicolas, QC : Les Presses de l'Université Laval/L'Harmattan. 2002, 137 p., 19 diagrams.

Michel Cartier's *Les groupes d'intérêts et les collectivités locales* is an ambitious book. Synthesizing critical studies of social movements, the flow of information, and the corporatization of the Internet, Cartier develops an extremely efficient book that details the ways the rise of the Internet has shaped the possibility for mobilization the populace.

The primary focus of Cartier's work is the work of interest groups as an "interface entre le citoyen et l'État." By this, Cartier means that interest groups serve three different locational functions in social life: a place of "conscientisation" where members of groups can participate in decision-making processes; a site of participation that gives these groups influence over public life; and a place that enables the complementary utilisation of traditional and new communication technologies. The terrain on which interest groups can work, though, has been simultaneously problematized and enhanced by exogenous factors, particularly those resulting from neoliberal economic, political, and social policies and changes. These changes directly impact on the ways in which interest groups function as a conduit for information, and Cartier clearly highlights both the opportunities and the dangers created by these changes.

Les groupes d'intérêts has an incredibly efficient structure, one that makes this work more than appropriate for undergraduate courses in communications, social movements, and political sociology. The book is divided into five main chapters, dealing with the new context of "la société du savoir," a multi-leveled approach to understanding the world system, the process by which conscientization is carried out, the ways that interest groups deal with information, and the ways that the Internet has complicated information delivery and the work of interest groups. Cartier's development of his argument is made more efficient in two intriguing ways: the placement of text in different fonts (*mise en pages*), indicating the relative importance of the comments for different levels of readers; and a heavy reliance on diagrams that highlight the dynamics of the ideas or situations dealt with in the text. In fact, much of the strong analytic work appears more fervently in the 19 diagrams than it does in the main text, an issue that more advanced readers may take umbrage with. Nevertheless, the work does what it needs to do – clearly and concisely lay out the key issues regarding the work of interest groups and social movements.

Each of these short chapters, yielding a work of only 91 pages, is tightly organized and sparsely argued. The remainder of the book provides three additional resources for further study: a well-developed glossary of key terms involved in this field of study; a bibliography ranked by "le *must de Cartier*;" and a lengthy compilation of the web sites of active interest groups from across North America and western Europe. These additional textual elements, combined with the detailed diagrams, make this a great resource for persons interested in further study.

Problematically, though, Cartier's work has a significant lack – a clear conclusion. Dedicated to "groupes d'intérêts," this book very clearly sides with those who see the increasing distance between citizens and the state as a social phenomena to be struggled against. Throughout the work, Cartier demonstrates an insider's understanding of what is needed to effectively serve the public. And yet, the closing chapter – just over two pages – seems to step back from that ethical commitment by merely highlighting, in a quasi-positivistic sense, what the theoretical needs for a citizenry would be as indicated by Cartier's analysis. To my mind, this anti-climactic conclusion to the book was disappointing, as it is clear from the strong, clear analytic work developed throughout the book and his ethical stance that Cartier has much to offer those who participate in and depend on interest groups for their empowerment. I would hope that Cartier would take a stronger and more engaged stance in future work, as this field of study needs more scholars willing to commit to detailing the secrets of how the system works.

In sum, Cartier's *Les groupes d'intérêts et les collectivités locales* is an excellent entrée into understanding the "what" and "how" of interest groups and their reliance on information. Its efficiency and well-developed diagrams will provide undergraduate readers with an easy-to-understand primer on the information management strategies of interest groups. It is only too bad that the same critical eye and clear ethical engagement with the task of interest groups was not deepened or taken into the realm of the prescriptive.

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