

BOOK REVIEWS/RECENSIONS

GETTING AHEAD COLLECTIVELY

Albert O. Hirschman. 1984. New York: Pergamon Press Inc.

Getting Ahead Collectively is an unusual work about grassroots organizations in Latin America. The form of the book does not easily fit the common standard of a scholarly work (i.e., a minimum of footnotes, no bibliography). It is composed of brief stories supported by richly expressive photographs about the author's experiences and observations during visits to grassroots groups in six countries in Latin America: The Dominican Republic, Columbia, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay.

In a way, it is like a travel book, light and easy to read, taking us smoothly from one country to another. The novelty of the content lies in the "inverted sequences" through which the author discusses and reevaluates some of the fixed assumptions and prerequisites regarding the development process. Rather than providing highly theoretical and analytical discussion, the content is developed through the stories, pictures and brief comments aimed at capturing the heart of these different grassroots experiences.

From a critical point of view, the author expresses doubts concerning macro-social analysis perspectives which consider large-scale political-structural change as a precondition for grassroots development. Further, he questions some "wrong-way-round" or "cart-before-the-horse" approaches to development. The swinging of the pendulum from autocratic authoritarianism to more or less democratic forms and back again has led many people to mistrust "top down" approaches. The repeatedly unfulfilled promises of central governments' policies have prompted people to rely more on the resources that they have at hand: their solidarity and willingness to act, which grow out of a sense of deprivation, lead them to organize in the pursuit of solutions to their problems. This political disillusionment goes along with a mistrust of national economic plans, as conceived by central bureaucracies, for the betterment of the poor.

By examining case studies, the author discusses some of the inverted sequences or "cart-before-the-horse" approaches, such as those which rely on "Security of Title" as a precondition for housing improvements. He shows that it has been, in fact, the "insecurity of title" which moved people to take action for such improvements. Along the same line, he finds that education, rather than being a prerequisite, often is induced only after the action. The achievement of some forms of development will naturally lead people to demand some form of education, i.e., training in literacy, arithmetic, health-care, etc., when these are seen as necessary tools to deal with and increase the objectives which have already been attained.

On the question of aid for grassroots development, the author quite rightly refers to the changing perspective regarding this. International aid is no longer mainly channelled from the central government bureaucracy of the donor country to that of the recipient country. Presently, the aid is increasingly coordinated by non-government organizations and humanitarian and church organizations, and is aimed more directly at the grassroots groups through similar organizations at the national level. This shift is perceived as being doubly beneficial in that it avoids tied-aid, political manipulation, and allows freer movement to local participants to deal with the needs that are more strongly felt. Clearly, this new orientation attempts to overcome traditional approaches which regarded aid as charity work or individual-oriented remedial alleviation. The shared view that this aid ought to be directed toward organized groups with concrete projects for collective action serving various functions (education, public health, housing improvements, agricultural extension, development promotion or handicraft, and small business, etc.) is greatly beneficial to grassroots development.

Hirschman believes that the state of oppression and deprivation, authoritarian governments' attempts to privatize human lives along with the economy, and other aggressive acts against the poor, has the unintended virtue of generating and expanding people's solidarity and willingness to "get ahead collectively" as the only means to find possible solutions to their isolation and material abandonment. The author calls this "the Principle of Conservation and Mutation of Social Energy." Such a principle is clearly seen at work in a region where people have participated in one form or another in collective experiences attempting to change their situation. Although such attempts may have been frustrated and ended in strong repression

and imposed silence, the energy is always kept alive and does not disappear. On the contrary, it is increasingly renewed and accumulated to reappear when conditions allow, and with a more mature commitment gained from the experiences lived.

In the final chapter, "What Does It All Add Up To", the author presents his views in clearer terms. Contesting more radical political positions from both the Right and the Left alike, he questions the practicality of theories which perceive social change mainly dependent upon changes in the central governments. According to the author, it is this long tradition, dating from the French Revolution, which is seriously questioned today. From this perspective, he rejects the Gross National Product macroanalysis approach to development and social change so widely embraced in preceding decades. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to perceive that his perspective is, to some extent, aligned with some of the modernization assumptions regarding development and social change. His suggestion that "for political conditions to change more fundamentally, a great many social, cultural and even personal relationships must become transformed" could be considered as such.

Naturally, the author's general position could easily be criticized from the perspective of more radically political-oriented theories such as those of the pro-marxist, dependency and liberationist types which are strongly advocated in the region. However, it is only fair to remember that the author is not concerned with macrotheoretical analyses and that his observations, experiences and impressions are field-rooted and the result of personal contact with these organizations and their work in different communities. The experiences in the field do not always correspond to those of more abstract theories. In any case, his distrust of more radical approaches is not an isolated attitude. A number of thinkers and politicians who deal with the regional matters are becoming more cautious about the extent to which radical changes are equally feasible or desirable within the different conditions of the various countries. Even some left-wing representatives, in light of the alarming deterioration of human rights and general repression, perceive that the goal of the moment is not by far, at least for now, the pursuit of pro-socialist changes, but simply the recovery of very elemental democratic forms such as respect for human rights, freedom of the press and a minimum of political tolerance.

In this context, the very existence of these grassroots organizations is already a laudable achievement. Hirschman enthusiastically believes that grassroots organizations hold promise for greater human and material development in the region. Despite the author's reservations in considering radical changes for the area, he can hardly refrain from showing his enthusiasm, born out of his personal experience with these organizations, in envisioning the potential prospects of grassroots development in Latin America.

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THE ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING OF ADULT EDUCATION

Theodore J. Kowalski. 1988. Albany: State University of New York Press

The book's main focus is the organizational context in which structured learning programs for adults are offered. Organizational theory is infused throughout, offering the reader a foundation for understanding the relationship of the sponsoring agency and the dynamics of learning activities.

The book is divided succinctly into four Parts: Organizational Context; Organizational Theory; The Planning Process; and The Future of Planning. The first two Parts provide a well-organized conceptual framework while Parts 3 and 4 discuss the basic elements of program planning. Using the organizational context, the reader will find practical suggestions for proceeding with tasks such as needs assessment, setting up advisory councils, budgeting, curriculum planning, and evaluation. The debilities of technical models are examined, and both linear and nonlinear paradigms of program planning are discussed. The final two chapters in Part 4—The Future of Planning—offer a summation, focusing mainly on how the future is apt to alter, even more, the challenges and responsibilities of administrators who select adult education as an occupation.

It would appear that this book has been written essentially for adult education programmers and administrators. They will find this to be a useful but not indispensable reference. The main strength of the book lies in the author's ability to convey the impact of organizational