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Book Review
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Environment and Society: Sustainability, Policy and the Citizen

Stewart Barr; Ashgate Studies in Environmental Policy and Practice; Aldershot, Ashgate; 2008; xv + 280 pages; £60.00; ISBN 978-0-7546-4343-2

Sustainability policy can only be successful if it shifts from a mostly negative approach to a positive perspective, writes Barr. The necessary change of behaviour must be mainstreamed and become part of every-day life in the consumer society. These findings are based on both broad empirical research and strong dogmatic conceptions. They lead to a concrete agenda identifying specific target groups and, afterwards, dealing with concrete obstacles and motivations for behavioural change.

Barr acknowledges the complexity of the cross-cutting discourses of sustainable development, participatory democracy and environmental activism. But he outlines these discourses so clearly that the reader understands the major impact of their linkage: Policy moves from mere crisis management to a holistic approach which in the end will enable mankind to survive. Of course, this is a long way to go and the process is always confronted with objectives. Nevertheless, Barr is of the opinion that today we have the tools to create a significant commitment to change our lifestyles and ways of thinking and working. He elaborates that this change will not come from the majority's shift towards a conservation-ethic or from a Damascene conversion towards altruistic values. He believes in the tool of capitalism and in the power of the market.

Barr describes behaviour change with regard to sustainability as the result of the newly conceptualised involvement of the individual. The individual is no longer seen as the mere addressee of governance but as an active participant in democratic and deliberative processes. This covers three main domains of sustainability: environment, society, and economy. Being sustainable in one area may be in conflict with the aims and objectives of another, Barr points out confronting 'buying local'-initiatives with the support for fair-trade-concepts.

In the UK, behaviour change policies were initiated by the government with regard to the environment and did focus on certain areas of individual behaviour such as cutting down waste, traveling sensibly, saving energy and combined these more general approaches with concrete proposals such as turning off lights in unused rooms. Barr broadly discusses the critique vis-à-vis behaviour change policies. The general criticisms of environmental policy is raised by geographers and has led, as Barr makes quite clear, to new ideas for a more effective set of policies for behaviour change. In his further analysis, he points out that a social-psychological perspective provides a very useful conceptual framework which helps to understand how a change of environmental behaviour can be realised. Chapter 5 is a very well written piece on this issue and Barr sketches the complexity in environmental action that highlights the need of a true political debate. One of his findings is rather surprising: values, Barr says, appear to have less direct impact on environmental practices on the one hand but may be a very important motivating factor on the other hand. Another finding is very convincing: there should be made a difference between certain lifestyle groups, an idea that might bring values back in.

Barr further develops this more segmented research in the following chapters. First, he provides us with an in-depth analysis of several studies and surveys on environmental behaviour in the United Kingdom. This is a useful compilation of facts and shows how environmental practices relate to each other and to everyday practices. Then, he develops a range of sustainable lifestyles and tests them with regard to one of the case studies he dealt with before. Careful enough, Barr says the results should not be interpreted out of context but he underlines that they demonstrate the potential for identifying behavioural trends. Chapter 8 discusses the value-action gap using detailed path analyses. His research shows which influencing factors have to be taken into account when dealing with

purchase decisions and reveals concrete differences to other fields of behavioural change (such as recycling). Hence, there is need not only for segmenting the targeted groups but also for segmenting the value-action gap. Both innovative approaches allow much more effective measures aiming at behavioural change.

The last part of the book is devoted to the application of the findings on behaviour change policies. Barr explores the effectiveness of the 'social marketing' method. This method focuses on a specific behaviour for change (to be effective), it focuses on specific target groups, and singles out concrete obstacles and motivations for behavioural change. The final section outlines the policy implications of the research both in a more general manner ('concepts') and with regard to more specific measures ('implications'). Thus, Barr's study combines high scientific relevance with a strong practical impact. It will be a valuable source for university teaching and should initiate further research. Social scientists will profit from reading as well as policy makers, especially on the local level.