

Book Review: Social Quality Theory: A New Perspective on Social Development by Ka Lin and Peter Herrmann

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Lin, Ka, and Peter Herrmann, eds. *Social Quality Theory: A New Perspective on Social Development*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015. viii + 206 pages. Paperback, \$39.95.

Social Quality is defined as the extent to which people are able to participate in social relationships under conditions which enhance their well-being, capacity and individual potential. *Social Quality Theory: A New Perspective on Social Development* brings together eleven previously published articles on Social Quality Theory from two important journals devoted to Social Quality studies. The main purpose of this collective is to systematically explore the assumptions, perceptions, and methodology of Social Quality Theory. In addition, this volume explores the historical development and current status of Social Quality Theory and its applicability.

The editors, Lin and Herrmann—both professors working in the area of social policy and social quality—have organized the book into two parts. The first part of the book focuses on theoretical discussions of Social Quality Theory. Fairweather et al. (Chapter 1) reconceptualize Social Quality Theory by examining the four main components of social quality: social-economic security, social inclusion, social cohesion, and social empowerment. Masen and Walker (Chapter 2) outline a list of ninety-five indicators of social quality in eighteen domains and forty-nine sub-domains. By doing so, they clearly identify the key variables to social quality analysis. Walker (Chapter 3) provides an interesting overview of the relationship between social quality and welfare sustainability. Lin (Chapter 4) analyzes the prototype of Social Quality Theory by examining four conditional factors and four approaches of social quality studies. Herrmann (Chapter 5) discusses indicators of social quality by examining the ‘Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi Report.’ Finally, Gasper (Chapter 6) reveals the theoretical grounds of the social quality approach by comparing Social Quality Theory with the Human Development Approach and the Human Security Approach.

The second part of the book deals with research on individual countries. Hacking (Chapter 7) introduces the four components of social quality from a British perspective. Therborn and Therborn (Chapter 8) describe the status of social quality in Sweden. Hiroi (Chapter 9) extends Social Quality Theory into the Asian/Developmental context by presenting visions of the sustainable welfare society. Bobkov, Verdyuk and Aliyev (Chapter 10) argue that social quality conditions vary significantly in different types of societies by examining social quality issues in Russia. Lastly, Taylor-Gooby (Chapter 11) argues that rational choice is an engine of social quality. He also stresses the importance of using surveys of individual opinions to measure social quality.

This book captures the essential features of Social Quality Theory, and it makes a significant contribution to this new field of studies. Theoretically, the book clearly defines the framework of social quality analysis and its rationale. It explores the origin of the theory and briefly reviews its development. In addition, it clearly demonstrates that the new theory is

different from “Quality of Life” studies. Methodologically, the book explores the four major domains of social quality analysis including economic security, cohesion, inclusion, and empowerment. It also discusses major approaches and indicators of social quality, as well as the applicability of Social Quality Theory in non-European countries.

There are a few shortcomings of the book. Firstly, the two parts of the book cannot be clearly differentiated. Many chapters in the second part of the book simply regurgitate the same theoretical argument presented in the first part of the book. Secondly, the book is limited in its ability to demonstrate the applicability of the theory outside of Europe. This is something that could be addressed in future editions.

Overall, Social Quality Theory encourages a more balanced approach for understanding social change and development beyond that proposed by economic paradigms. It is a new and exciting perspective and *Social Quality Theory: A New Perspective on Social Development* is a significant resource which can be used in university classrooms as well as adeptly inform debates on development and sustainability.

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