

## BOOK REVIEWS

**An Operational Approach to Policy Analysis: The Craft: Prescriptions for Better Analysis—(Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), xxx 253 pp.**  
by Iris Geva-May and Aaron Wildavsky

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Geva-May and Aaron Wildavsky set out in the early 1990s to write a different type of book on policy analysis; they succeeded, despite Wildavsky's untimely death in 1993, mainly because of Geva-May's dedication to the joint cause. They sought to "cut through the ambiguity and contradictions inherent in policy analysis by means of an operational-prescriptive approach" (p. xviii). Together they plotted a "how to do it" book, in the tradition set by a myriad of books on good management practices, nevertheless one that is full of useful maxims.

Each of the five chapters considers a major step in the policy analysis: problem definition, modeling, alternative selection, argument presentation and implementation termination. This structure is unexceptionable, although one could quibble with the proposition that implementation "is not a de facto part of the policy analysis process, but rather a follow-up consideration" (p. xxix). Post-modernists in policy studies might take exception to the inherent positivist presumptions. Economists might find the references to "production possibility frontier" (p. 107) and Pareto efficient distribution" rather trite. Of more significance to the intended reader, however, is the conspicuous lack of a conclusion.

Each chapter reviews the relevant literature (interestingly with a focus on books rather than journal articles), teases out the practical implications, and captures the essence in a selection of maxims—a set of universal practical principles of policy analysis. The advice tendered is pithy, although the initiated might say trite (e.g., "Adopt backward problem definition" (p. 6), "Focus your analysis on your client's

needs" (p. 15), or "Consider the policy locus" (p. 181)); sometimes bold (e.g., "Buy-off beneficiaries" (p. 213), or "Rule out all alternatives that are 'dominated' by others" (p. 107). Each chapter ends with a summing up section. Indeed the book ends with a three-page, point-form summary (analyst's check-list) under the rubric "considerations," "strategy identification," and "pitfalls."

While Geva-May is to be congratulated for completing an innovative book on policy analysis, not so Kluwer, who has done her a considerable disservice. The book abounds with minor but irritating errors that should have been corrected at proof reading. A discussion on p. 44 on population growth refers to Figure 5, which contains a time series on export growth, which has a strange title "Subjective and Subjective Choice of Variables and Manipulation Techniques." There is at least one incomprehensible sentence: "Policy decision making is a process subject to choice among alternatives assessed against their potential impacts and intrinsic feasibility" (p. 39). Surely the process of decision making is, itself, not subject to choice among alternatives assessed! Instances of poor proof reading abound (e.g., pp. 44, 137, 138, 142-3 (in particular), 158, 164 (n. 105), 224 and 225). And the use of American slang confuses the uninitiated ("be leery" (pp. 117 & 137), "to glom on to" (p. 110)). As does the mention of a US public figure without context: one Jerome Miller is mentioned on p. 191, but his public position that gives him relevance is not mentioned until p. 209. The referencing method used makes the footnotes laborious and tiresome because of repetition born, it would seem, of a desire to impress the initiated learned; for to the policy practitioner seeking wisdom they are a distraction that obfuscates. Indeed, it almost seems that an insightful and well argued "how to do it" book on good policy practices was, self-defeatingly, camouflaged to make it look more like an inaccessible scholarly text.

Geva-May has produced a book that passes the twin tests that she and Wildavsky set themselves (p. xviii): it is a cohesive whole; and it does offer clear action guidelines, at least for analysts and practitioners in the US, although its relevance and transferability elsewhere remains to be demonstrated.