Governance and Citizen Engagement in the 21st Century

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This mini-symposium on governance and citizen engagement consists of two interesting and informative articles. Each article takes a different approach in urging governments to engage citizens in governance processes – public policy formulation processes in particular – in order to strengthen governance and decrease citizen alienation, and for the establishment of a multicultural organizational moral code to enable the conduct of business across national boundaries. These papers were originally presented on a panel at the annual conference of the American Society for Public Administration," March 2, 2102, in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The fundamental assumption that underlies these articles is that citizen participation in governance using shared value sets is a necessity, not a nicety (Also see Kooiman, 2003). The implications of continuing citizen estrangement and alienation from governments appear to be approaching crisis levels in the United States (Box, 1998; King, 2011; King & Stivers, 1998), in many totalitarian nations in the Middle East and Asia (Farazmand 2002; 2009), and in the recent turbulence associated with the debt crises in Europe. Likewise, the increasing globalization of businesses, NGOs, and government alliances has been complicated and restricted by clashes of culturally-based values that cannot be resolved by simply expecting participants from one country to defer to the ethical codes of another. These articles thus present conceptual frameworks for citizen engagement that are rooted in the ethics of citizenship.

"Sound Governance: Engaging Citizens through Collaborative Organizations," by Ali Farazmand addresses the framing question, "Why is the issue of citizen engagement important enough to warrant a mini-symposium?" Or, "What are the stakes and/or the potential stakes?" Farazmand's article articulates the need for citizen engagement compellingly: Citizen disengagement and alienation from government and governing is endemic in this era of rapid global change. Farazmand proposes that globalization of capital, "a process that transcends nation-states, economies, markets,

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institutions, and cultures" has fundamentally changed the nature of governments and governments' institutional foundations (See also Farazmand, 2002, 2009). Farazmand asserts that "sound governance " – beyond simply "good governance" – including engaging citizens through collaborative organizations and institutional arrangements, is needed to counter the negative effects of globalization and to advance values that advance human dignity values in governance systems, including equity, justice, fairness, and accountability (See also DeMars, 2005; Iriye, 2009).

Farazmand uses the term "governance" to represent a broader and much more comprehensive notion of government and administration than the terms "government" and "governing" have usually implied. "Governance" for Farazmand means a participatory process of governing the social, economic, and political affairs of a country, state, or local community through structures and values that mirror those of the society.

Farazmand proposes criteria for an ideal state of "sound governance," a concept that includes citizen-based values and extensive citizen engagement through collaborative civil society organizations (As also in Barkdull & Dicke, 2004; Edwards, 2009; Park, 2004; Read, 2009; Schwartz & Shieh, 2009; Smith, 2005). He also suggests alternative forms of citizen engagement in governance that are informed by Nabatchi (forthcoming).

"Developing a Multicultural Organizational Code of Ethics Rooted in the Moral Obligations of Citizenry," by Carole L. Jurkiewicz, is concerned with ethical norms and values rooted in cultures as barriers to the conduct of business among governments, businesses, and NGOs internationally. "A fundamental issue in global business and government relations is, when ethical conduct conflicts, which country's values should prevail?" It is not reasonable to expect participants from one country to simply accept the norms and values of another country. Jurkiewicz's article proposes an approach for answering the obvious question: How is it possible to overcome conflicting values while creating a multicultural organizational code of ethics?

Building from Plato's "social contract" or "mutual transfer of rights" (as in Lewis 1939), Hobbes' notion of "communities established through a social contract wherein individuals agree to abide by a constitutional authority," and "homophily, the unconscious desire to develop associative bonds with individuals who are similar to one another in values, interests, and goals," she postulates that the ethical obligations of citizenry can provide the foundation for establishing an international/multicultural organizational code of ethics. Jurkiewicz offers ten socio-ethical tenets that might serve as "possible starting points for a global moral code rooted in citizenship" and encourages cross-sector conversations to build on these tenets, for example at conferences and in publications.

It is easy to identify reasons for the lack of citizen engagement in the U.S. and in other countries with different forms and histories of governance, and to warn about the likely negative impacts of citizen disengagement on the ability to govern. It is considerably more difficult to propose conceptually sound practical approaches that may lead toward more and better engagement. The articles in this mini-symposium by Farazmand and Jurkiewicz offer admirably useful steps in this direction.

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