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Mahua Roy Chowdhury

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Review of: Social Trust and the Management of Risk (George Cvetkovich & Ragnar E. Loftstedt, eds.)

Abstract

Review of the book: Social Trust and the Management of Risk (George Cvetkovich & Ragnar E. Löfstedt, eds., Earthscan Publications Ltd. 1999). Tables, Figures, and Boxes, Acronyms and Abbreviations, Forward, Preface, Introduction, References, Index. ISBN 1-85383-604-4 [196 pp. \$25.00. Paperback, 120 Pentonville Road, London, NI 9JN UK].

Keywords

risk management, public policy

Social Trust and the Management of Risk (George Cvetkovich & Ragnar E. Löfstedt, eds., Earthscan Publications Ltd. 1999). Tables, Figures, and Boxes, Acronyms and Abbreviations, Forward, Preface, Introduction, References, Index. ISBN 1-85383-604-4 [196 pp. \$25.00. Paperback, 120 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9JN UK].

Social Trust and the Management of Risk is a compilation of research papers on social trust, and the perception, and management of risk by various authors who participated in two Bellingham International Social Trust conferences on Risk Management (BIST) held in June of 1996 and June of 1997. Various schools of thought on the definition, character, and influence of social trust on risk management are presented in the book while cross support (rejection) and reliance by each author on the views of some of the others is clearly evident.¹ Assessments of past and current theories and research practices and of where the research should actually be headed (presently inconclusive) are the central themes of the book. The book emphasizes the need for empirical inputs and exhaustive testing of various theories on social trust and risk management.

In Chapter 1, Timothy C. Earle and George Cvetkovich demonstrate the Salient Values Similarity (SVS) theory of Social Trust via two study methods. This theory supports the view that we tend to trust those who are judged to hold the same values as we do. SVS theory is also discussed in chapters 4, 5, 8, and 10. Daniel Metlay (Chapter 8) uses survey data from the U.S. Department of Energy to test this theory without actually reaching any conclusion as to whether the data supports or refutes it. He considers trust to be a conceptual and intellectual quagmire, but at the same time suggests it may actually be a two dimensional notion.²

In Chapter 2, Roger E. Kasperson et al. promote the Democratic theory. They believe that social trust is a positive force for resolution of risk controversies. They also suggest that rational distrust generates

¹ **Social Trust and the Management of Risk** (George Cvetkovich & Ragnar E. Löfstedt, eds., Earthscan Publications Ltd. 1999).

² *See id.* at 109.

alternative control mechanisms by checking the power of the economic elite and those with technical expertise.

In Chapter 3, Paul Slovic argues that trust is fragile.³ In what he calls the asymmetry principle, Slovic argues that it is easier to lose trust than to gain trust because of the tendencies to believe trust-lowering information.

In Chapter 4, George Cvetkovich discusses the process used in making attributions of social trust via three studies. He suggests the direction for continuation of such studies.

In Chapter 5, Branden B. Johnson focuses on Hazard Management Systems (HMS), which he feels is a neglected area. He suggests that further research on HMS would increase our understanding of the dynamics of trust judgments.

In Chapter 7, Lennart Sjöberg challenges the findings that trust accounts for a significant percentage of variance in risk perception. Using a study of Sweden and Spain, he provides empirical evidence that trust accounts for only ten percent of the variance and concludes that further studies are needed to explain how much variance in risk perception trust can actually explain.

In Chapter 9, Judith A. Bradbury et al. attempt to answer what trust is, what its functions are, and the relationship between trust and public participation in risk policy issues.⁴ They argue that increasing trust and reducing distrust should be a basis for developing a consensus on risk management policies.

Finally, Cvetkovich and Löfstedt summarize the text by noting that public perceptions and acceptance of risk are not significantly influenced by technical risk assessment. They believe trust is more fundamental to conflict resolution than risk assessment or communication, and that risk assessment studies tend to increase perceived risk. Successes and failures of risk management are subject to complex psychological, social, cultural, and political forces.

Since the book is a compendium of articles by several authors, it leaves the reader with many more questions than answers. The surveys and data used are from yesteryears and hence may leave a question as to their relevance in present times. Despite many authors agreeing that

³ See *id.* at 45.

⁴ See *id.* at 117.

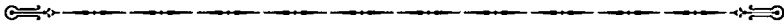
trust varies based on cultural values, political forces, and regional behavior, the use of specific agencies in the United States and the United Kingdom as examples narrows the approach of the book. Furthermore, the book examines how social trust and risk issues interact in a democratic environment by way of understanding and examining survey processor and poll data in empirical studies. The use of statistics and statistical tools limits the target audience.

Although the book is a research presentation, it provides a useful overview on the emerging ideas of perceived risks and risk management in the context of health, safety, and the environment. Since trust is varied and relates to different levels of a political system, the book examines the relationship among these different trusts and their inter-level effects while highlighting the factors affecting trust.

The diversity of the theoretical perspectives represented makes the book a good choice for students of social sciences, researchers, and risk managers. It can be used for guidance to provoke debate for future conceptualizations and research and to evaluate various theories.

Mahua Roy Chowdhury †

† Ms. Roy Chowdhury recently received her L.L.M. from Franklin Pierce Law Center. She is a graduate in Food Technology and has an L.L.B. from Delhi University, India. She is a litigator in Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court of India.



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