

UC Berkeley

UC Berkeley Previously Published Works

Title

Research for Action: Cross-national Perspectives on Connecting Knowledge, Policy, and Practice for Children - Edited by Robert J. Chaskin & Jona M. Rosenfeld

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4j44m0cb>

Journal

International Journal of Social Welfare, 17(3)

ISSN

1369-6866

Author

Berrick, Jill Duerr

Publication Date

2008-07-01

DOI

10.1111/j.1468-2397.2008.00580.x

Peer reviewed

Book reviews

already be poorly served. Recognising the constraints of space in what is, after all, a concise text, there is, nonetheless, one global issue in the 'Western' welfare economies that is not addressed. This is the situation of indigenous peoples in North America and Australasia, whose life chances are generally much worse than the majority populations that surround them. Some consideration of how contemporary changes may be affecting them would seem apposite.

Dr Richard Pugh
Professor of Social Work
Keele University, UK

Reference

Martinez-Brawley E (1980). *Pioneer Efforts in Rural Social Welfare: Firsthand Views since 1908*. University Park and London, Pennsylvania State University Press.

Reforming the Bismarckian Welfare Systems edited by Bruno Palier and Claude Martin. 2008: Blackwell. ISBN 978-1-40518-348-2

Continental European welfare regimes have been known to be sluggish; they are 'frozen landscapes' to use the imagery of Esping-Andersen. These 'Bismarckian' social insurance systems guarantee work-related social rights that provide earnings-related benefits, largely paid by the insured and employers. As corporatist welfare regimes they have been criticised for their path-dependency due to the status quo defence of vested interests groups. 'And yet they changed!' is the claim of this informative edited volume on Conservative welfare states, which was previously published as a special issue of *Social Policy & Administration* (2007, volume 41, issue 6).

Under the Germanic concept of 'Bismarckian welfare systems', Bruno Palier and Claude Martin, both French social policy experts, collected seven chapters that undertake most-similar-country comparisons. The editors stress the common reform trajectories – the sequence from small parametric to larger systemic changes – thereby transforming but not displacing the Bismarckian tradition. France, not Germany, is the pivotal case covered by all chapters, while the other case studies vary from including Germany and Italy in several chapters, occasional comparisons with Austria and Belgium, four chapters include the hybrid Dutch case and one even includes the liberal counter-example of Britain.

The first three comparative chapters cover the hallmarks of Bismarckian social insurances against the 'old' social risks of old age, sickness and unemployment. The challenge of ageing societies and passive labour market policies has put particular pressures on the pay-as-you-go financed and relatively generous Bismarckian pensions. After early parametric reforms, a more recent second wave brought changes slowly, turning public old age income security into a multi-pillar system. A slow conversion of the corporatist health systems by a dual strategy of both marketisation and state intervention is evident. Moreover, a U-turn from passive to active labour market policies has been a stepwise process that changed hardly the core but mainly the margin of the labour market, largely in line with insider interests. Although the old Bismarckian steamboat is moving, she deepens the dualisation between insider safe haven and outsider rough sea.

Continental European societies have been criticised for their male breadwinner tradition and subsidiaristic family reliance. The last four chapters focus on important aspects of family policy, in particular childcare policies for female employment, activation measures for lone mothers, the family-oriented long-term care benefits, and the social partner's role in family policies. These case studies indicate more or less substantial changes in a common

direction, increasingly facilitating the re-entry of women into employment, while acknowledging their role of care giving. Although the set of countries varies from chapter to chapter, the reform trajectories show similar tendencies but vary cross-nationally in emphasis, scope and timing. For instance, recent moves beyond traditional family models have been faster in Germany than in France, despite having lagged behind for many years. Indeed, family and care policies follow less the neat sequence model of the social insurance reforms.

Bernhard Ebbinghaus
MZES, University of Mannheim, Germany

Research for Action: Cross-national perspectives on connecting knowledge, policy, and practice for children edited by Robert J. Chaskin and Jona M. Rosenfeld. 2008: Oxford University Press. ISBN13: 9780195314083; ISBN10: 01953140

Social service agencies throughout the U.S. and Europe are increasingly turning to evidence-based practice as a strategy for ethical, informed service delivery. Policy makers too, while sometimes moved to action by anecdote, are using data more than ever to anchor decision making. But how do data come to influence policy makers, and what role do researchers play as instruments of change? Robert Chaskin and Jona Rosenfeld's edited volume, *Research for Action*, addresses these questions and others, and provides sound advice to bridge the research-policy divide.

This unique volume uses six case studies to frame a range of questions relating to knowledge development, knowledge dissemination, and research utilization for policy makers, administrators, and practitioners. The case studies are drawn from six countries including Northern Ireland, South Africa, the United States, Israel, England, and the Republic of Ireland. The case studies are unified by their focus on children's services, and the structure of each case study is relatively similar, including a description of the socio-political and service context, a description of the research study, communication techniques used among researchers and end-users, dissemination strategies, and ultimate outcomes. These similarities are well-constructed, making the cross-national comparisons easy to grasp for the reader; the range of studies focused on children's issues is equally appealing for readers whose interests align with those of the authors. Indeed, complimentary texts on aging services, mental health services, and/or disability services, for example, would be a welcome addition to the field.

The editors of this volume clearly set out to develop a single volume with a unified voice and purpose; this is not simply a collection of essays, but instead is a work of various authors artfully woven together by its editors. The authors appear to mirror the proscriptions set out in the book, creating a learning collective among researchers. Each chapter is not only descriptive of the research-policy connection, but is also self-critical of the researcher's role in forwarding agency, administrative, or policy change as a result of their research activities. For example, some chapters (e.g. South Africa and the U.S.) speak to the significant successes of research-informed policy, whereas others (e.g. on the Republic of Ireland) speak to the actions or inactions of researchers that may have limited change in the practice and policy arenas.

The lessons learned across these diverse sites, using different research methodologies (e.g. some are descriptive studies, some explanatory, and some exploratory) are enormously instructive to researchers and students of research who want to make a difference. For too long, research has been used largely to inform the academy. Researchers have been insufficiently prepared, educated, and/or supported in their efforts to influence the broader field of policy and practice, and have been reluctant to

do so for fear of being viewed as biased and thus un-scientific. *Research for action* provides concrete suggestions to help researchers balance the line between research and advocacy, to clarify researchers' roles vis-à-vis government and agency actors, and to guide researchers in their quest to be relevant in real, political time. This volume is a must-read for researchers and students of research whose passion for improved services to children and families drives their daily work.

Jill Duerr Berrick
School of Social Welfare
University of California at Berkeley

Privatization. Property and the remaking of nature-society relations edited by Becky Mansfield. 2008: Oxford, Blackwell Publishing. ISBN 1405175508

This review has been filtered through a disciplinary lens that is not radical geography and thus the assessment is from an "outsider." However, this does not diminish the importance of this source for social policy students and academics who seek to understand privatization in all its complexity. The structure of the book is to present the theoretical framework for the study of privatization and then to follow this with case illustrations. Mansfield's theoretical framework is clearly laid down in the introductory chapter and states that, through privatization, the state creates new property rights that increase and support capitalist accumulation. Particular examples of state-driven property enclosure and the co-modification of nature are then presented. These include biotechnology, water rights, fishing rights, water quality management, volunteer food labelling, and land reform.

A book this size makes it impossible to provide substantive reviews of each individual chapter. However, several of the chapters warrant inclusion as they are well-written and exceptionally informative for those interested in exploring privatization. Prudham opens the debate by exploring two diverse illustrations of the theoretical framework: 1) a patent for an oncomouse or "a non-human mammal genetically engineered to develop cancer" (2008: 18); and 2) the property rights of farmers to own the random seeds that drift onto their properties from neighbouring GM canola farms. Through these cases, Prudham cautions that with the co-modification of nature, we are at risk of producing "socio-nature" (*nature which is transformed and produced as opposed to natural and universal*) that will eventually reduce citizen rights. The third chapter by Guthman examines privatization through an exploration of how voluntary food labelling devolves regulatory responsibility to consumers. Guthman deals with the enclosure of food through voluntary food labelling by pointing out that voluntary food labelling allows standard setting bodies to confer a property right to the use of that label on a commodity for which consumers are willing to pay a price premium. Mansfield, in Chapter 4, builds on the work of Prudham and Guthman by presenting a case example of native fishing rights in Alaska. She explains how the state has developed Community Development Quotas (CDQ) which native communities can treat as property and sell to firms who must pay for the right to fish. She exposes the contradictions within the CDQ where nature is treated as property (a privatization strategy of commodification of nature) while at the same time property enclosure of nature brings resources to disenfranchised native communities (a social justice strategy).

This collection is both complex and thought provoking and makes a valuable contribution to understanding privatization, state-driven property enclosure, and the commodification of nature. Mansfield, in her concise and clearly argued introduction, sets out the theoretical framework which is explored across diverse case examples. A few of the chapters in this book fail

to provide well articulated illustrations of the theme and this produces a slight lack of flow in the collection. Choosing to have fewer chapters might have provided an opportunity for more depth from those that remain. On the other hand, the diversity of case examples strengthens the book. It might be worth considering a concluding chapter by Mansfield that discusses the contributions of each of the authors and summarizes the examination of privatization. As an outsider, these generally minor criticisms do not detract from the value of this book. It does deliver a compelling analysis of the challenges to democracy inherent in privatization in an era of neo-liberalization. The progressive nature of the debate and the recommendations for alternative strategies in the book will be familiar to social policy scholars and students. The book brings together a wide range of material that would be useful as supplementary reading particularly for graduate students who have a fundamental grasp of political economy theory. This book offers a much needed critical edge to exploring the contested space characterized by the co-modification of nature and the remaking of nature – society relations as property.

Judith Dunlop
University of Western Ontario, Canada

Child Poverty and Inequality. Securing a Better Future for America's Children by Duncan Lindsey. 2009: Oxford, Oxford University Press. ISBN13: 9780195305449; ISBN10: 0195305442

In a recent study on income distribution and poverty in thirty rich countries, 21 per cent of the children in the United States were reported to be poor in the mid-2000s (OECD, 2008: 138). With a poverty line defined as 50 per cent of the median income in the country assessed, only Mexico, Poland and Turkey have higher child poverty rates than the United States. Recent child poverty rates in the United States are at least twice as high as those for European countries such as France and the United Kingdom, and at least four times higher than for the Nordic countries. The high child poverty rates in the United States originate mainly from the high poverty risks present among single-parent families and families with less than two parents working.

Duncan Lindsey has taught at UCLA on the comparatively unfavourable position of disadvantaged children in the United States and on the causes and attempts for change. Based on this experience, he has written a book with many references to articles, books and reports. He provides historical background, quotes statistical information and discusses policy changes.

Following a short introduction, the reader is informed as to what characterises child poverty in the United States. Risks of child poverty differ greatly by colour; two-thirds of all black children are raised by single mothers and they have a greater than 50 per cent risk of living in poverty. Single mothers and their children are poor for various reasons. In contrast, three-quarters of all white children live in two-parent families with less than a 5 per cent poverty risk.

The disappointing child poverty record of the U.S. is put in a broad, historical context in Chapter 2. The 1950s and the 1960s were the era of the middle class in the U.S. People at the bottom and middle positions of the income distribution shared economic growth with those at the top. After a time, however, the ideological climate changed and taxes were cut for the better-off households. Since the beginning of the 1980s until the present, the United States is in the era of the wealthy class. The purchasing power of households at the top of the income distribution has increased rapidly, while there has been little change in the lower parts of the distribution.

History shows that the United States can be successful in eliminating poverty among its inhabitants when there is the will,