



Osaamista
ja oivallusta
tulevaisuuden
tekemiseen

Tämä on rinnakkaistallenne. Rinnakkaistallenteen sivuasettelut ja typografiset yksityiskohdat saattavat poiketa alkuperäisestä julkaisusta.

Käytä viittauksessa alkuperäistä lähdettä:

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Working in the Context of Austerity: Challenges and Struggles, edited by Donna Baines, Ian Cunningham. Bristol University Press, 9 Nov 2020, 364 pp., ISBN: 978-1529208672, Price, £80.00.

Deductive reasoning begins with a set of core axioms and proceeds to apply these to hypothetical scenarios or models that yield determinate outcomes. By contrast, inductive reasoning involves the collection of empirical observations and attempts to identify patterns or recurrences that enable the formulation of generalizable postulates. Neoliberalism's core axioms regarding the superiority of both methodological individualism and market-based provisioning have thus yielded an ever-expanding transformation of social practices whereby collective action and non-market modes have been repressed and, where possible, eliminated. The contents of this book offer an inductive confirmation of this process across a sample of OECD countries as well as China. Despite the variety of legal jurisdictions and work environments featured, the seemingly relentless march of welfare state retrenchment, punitive workfare regimes, new public management (NPM) and employment flexibility, among other aspects of this permanent counter-revolution, is shown to be global in scope. While refracted through the institutional and legal frameworks of the individual states featured, the isomorphism inherent in this process is especially striking, given the juxtaposition of telling case studies.

There are sixteen chapters in all. The editors open with an introduction that firmly places the focus of scrutiny on the impact of the austerity policies implemented following the North Atlantic Financial Crisis that began in 2007 and which continues to unfold in myriad contradictory ways, of which more below. Thereafter follow sections on general trends and themes (such as precarity, the gig economy and privatisation, broadly conceived), case studies of austerity in a variety of work environments (encompassing private, public and nonprofit sectors), and the challenges and contradictions of efforts to resist the onslaught on labour and social welfare provision.

There is ambiguity with respect to the provenance and vintage of the ideology driving the phenomena under scrutiny here, and this derives in significant part from the differing experiences of austerity prior to the financial crisis. Austerity is treated as both specific to the post-crisis response and a more general feature of neoliberalism that can be traced back to the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state in the 1970s. The former depiction makes

more sense in Ireland (see chapters 11 and 13), where the heady debt-fuelled growth of the “Celtic Tiger” era preceded the “stark and sudden contrast” of what followed (Pauric O’Rourke, p. 217). Similarly, while Canada and China both avoided post-crisis recession, the “policy diffusion of NPM” (Kendra Strauss & Feng Xu, p. 132) has served as a particularly effective vehicle of reductions in labour income and standards. Meanwhile, for the USA and especially Britain, the rhetoric of austerity and personal responsibility, alongside restructuring and retrenchment, has been an integral feature of state policy ever since the rise of Margaret Thatcher in the late 1970s (Donna Baines & Ian Cunningham, p. 10).

Given the relative brevity of the contributions, theoretical content is squeezed by the empirical. Nevertheless the case studies are prefaced with references to the framing devices employed in the design process and subsequent analysis, while the outlook chapters provide both historical context and greater theoretical weight. All chapters contain a substantial bibliography. As a result the book is particularly effective as a reference collection with a strong editorial continuity.

Among the several recurring themes that emerge is the individualisation of social care. Users or clients are recast as “customers” with all the associated rhetoric of choice and empowerment, and formerly pooled budgets are allocated to each “customer” separately in the name of fairness and transparency. Donna Baines’ and Doug Young’s comparative study of care work in Scotland and Australia highlights the impact of NPM-inspired restructuring, in which the spurious precision of the spreadsheet rides roughshod over the individual needs of those receiving care. “Standardization implies a standard patient as well as a standard worker, neither of which applies in care” (Pat Armstrong & Donna Baines, p. 102). Nevertheless, the reduction of tasks and ultimately service users themselves into identical units facilitates the sort of efficiency that, in the name of fairness, results in service quality diminution, rather than improvement. With individualised travel budgets assigned to each service user in Australia’s National Disability Insurance Scheme, there is no longer the possibility to pool the aggregate budget allocation. Thus, some service users experience a significant reduction in service provision, while whatever remains of other budgets can be clawed back and used to justify future reductions in the

aggregate allocation, given what was not spent in the present budget year. A similar pattern is observed in the experience of personalization and individual budgets for care users in Scotland.

The extent to which both the logic and technologies of austerity-led hypothecation are applied throughout the public sector is not addressed here. The contradictory effects of resistance are, however. Donna Baines highlights the under-researched nature and thinness of the “line between self-exploitation and self-empowerment in this unpaid care/resistance nexus” (p. 284). The deliberate performance of unpaid work that is compensated unofficially in other ways via acts of resistance “tends to be viewed as a trade-off between self-exploitation and trying to maintain a sense of integrity in the work and the workplace” (p. 289). The price of that integrity, however, can be to “unintentionally lend credibility to the claims that austerity-embracing policies are working and workable” (p. 294). This applies also to the ability of managers to exercise discretion and protect service integrity. The proliferation of bureaucracy (contrary to NPM’s official rationale) and paperwork is highlighted in the case study of Scotland’s Fire and Rescue Service by Eva Jendro and Dora Scholarios. Alina Baluch meanwhile highlights the “limited prospects for career development” as a result of flatter management structures in Scottish adult social care (p. 251).

This book offers a panoramic overview of a multi-level, grim struggle to apply one-size-fits-nobody templates to organisations, tasks, and ultimately people, many of whom do their best to alleviate and even subvert the rational madness that shows no sign of abatement, notwithstanding all evidence of its unsustainability and fundamental inhumanity. It is a highly informative and insightful collection that deserves a wide readership.

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