This book brings together papers on ageing policy originally presented at the Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies, Norway, in 2012. A common theme across a number of the chapters is the importance of ideas (alongside institutions) to policy-making in this area. This is a welcome emphasis, given the danger of relying exclusively on institutional logics and path-dependency, which can make change hard to explain. A number of chapters make reference to Campbell’s (1998) distinction between different types of ideas, with some focusing in particular on ‘framing ideas’, which are used to make policy reforms acceptable to the public. Following the introduction, the first two chapters focus on the development of ideas at the macro level. Alan Walker and Liam Foster examine Active Ageing, an influential concept in policy discourses that seeks to promote activity in older age. Nanna Kildal and Even Nilssen likewise discuss framing ideas used by international organizations regarding health and long-term care policy. Both chapters identify EU and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) economic ‘productivist’ policy discourses; framing ideas are based on the perceived economic burden of population ageing. In contrast, the World Health Organization (WHO) is said to consider activity in older age more broadly, and frames ideas in relation to the quality of life, autonomy and independence of older people. Walker and Foster are keen to promote a version of active ageing that is more closely aligned to the latter thinking.

In the remaining chapters, the emphasis on ideas in policy development is perhaps strongest in the chapter by Rune Ervik and Ingrid Helgøy, exploring how demographic ageing is addressed in policy in the UK and Norway. This draws usefully on Kingdon’s (1995) agenda setting theory and Béland’s (2005) policy ideas; it argues that while there are some similarities in terms of how the problems are understood (related to pressures on public finances), solutions vary considerably because of the different policy/political environments (or ‘streams’).

Attempts to build legitimacy through consensus are identified in a number of the chapters. Chrstof Schiller discusses the ‘new activation compromise’ in Germany, which drew together a diverse coalition that has made it possible to cut pensions, close early retirement pathways, strengthen activation and, as a consequence, increase employment levels.
Tord Skogedal Lindén argues that government pension commissions in Norway, Denmark, Germany and the UK were used as blame-avoidance strategies for implementing change. However, this strategy could backfire: the recommendations of the Danish commission proved too unpopular and complex to be implemented to the extent found in other countries. Furthermore, a chapter by Martha Doyle and Virpi Timonen based on qualitative interviews with Irish policy officials illustrates the constraints on implementing unpopular reforms. The researchers found that interviewees felt older people were overly privileged in terms of resource allocation, but felt constrained in addressing such inequalities.

Two chapters focus solely on changing policy on long-term care. Zuzanna Drozdzaka and colleagues compare long-term care in Poland and Italy. In both countries, families remain important in the provision of care, but in Poland private care arrangements are more affordable, and in Italy the use of migrant care workers is more widespread. Rune Ervik, Ingrid Helgøy and Tord Skogedal Lindén examine the extent to which current and proposed long-term care reforms in Norway, Germany and the UK break with existing traditions. In the UK, the proposed increase in state responsibility for long-term care would deviate from the traditional path. Interestingly, this would appear to be in conflict with the concerns expressed by policy officials about pressures on public finances in the earlier chapter by Ervik and Helgøy. It therefore remains to be seen whether the UK reforms to long-term care funding are actually implemented in full.

The editors end the book by arguing that future work should examine the question, 'Did the European Year of Active Ageing have any influence, or was it hot air?'. In a sense, this illustrates where I was left wanting a bit more by this book. Although early chapters examined the positions of international organizations such as the EU, the OECD and the WHO, only one chapter by Anna Ruzik-Sierdzinska and Jolanta Perek-Bialas considered the impact of an international organization (the EU) on policy (in Poland). This chapter found the EU had a relatively small impact on ageing policy in Poland, but I would have been interested to see more on this in relation to other countries and across a range of policy areas. Of course, no book can possibly address all the issues that its readers want it to; I would recommend this book to readers on its own merits as providing a solid and insightful analysis of ageing policies across a range of countries.

References


David Lain, University of Brighton
Polity’s ‘key concepts’ book series focuses on highly complex concepts, and this definitely holds for Phillipson’s subject matter: ageing. The series is also meant to get to the heart of debates about the meaning and usage of concepts and, again, this book delivers. Phillipson provides a clear critical outline of crucial issues surrounding ageing. The book draws on historical developments, provides succinct overviews of current situations and speculates on possible futures.

The book is organized around three key themes: the demographic and social dimensions of ageing; inequalities and divisions in later life; and new pathways for later life. The first part explains the demographic and social dimensions of ageing from a global perspective by outlining age-based differences and inequalities. A key issue is the diversity within the terminology employed, an issue that the book itself also exemplifies, for example by using ageing and later life as synonymous. There follows a clear historical overview of the social theories of ageing, most of which are still utilized in current research. If one were to be picky, it would have been useful to include considerations on how the various positions outlined continue to take influence and shape current research. This would have added further weight to the already solid argument that ideas about age and ageing are socio-historical constructions. For example, historically the introduction of pensions responded to specific social issues. Since then the retirement process has become a normative contribution to constructing age as a problem. Phillipson thus points to the issues that emerge if the heterogeneity of the ‘older’ group is not acknowledged. He goes on to argue that as a consequence of the welfare state and society being the main pillars responsible for providing care, old people are labelled as a welfare issue and a problem. At its worst, (basic) care is compared to the poor law provision. The development from organized to disorganized capitalism is seen to be an underlying explanatory factor for these developments. An important conclusion is that our society is unsure how to respond to our ageing demography.

The second part of the book continues with the theme of the social construction of ageing but focuses on inequality, pensions and the role of the family. The (financial) problems with pensions are increasingly shaping attitudes to ageing even while poverty rates amongst pensioners are decreasing overall. These trends occur notwithstanding the considerable differences between pensioners based on class, gender and ethnic or racial background. The importance of family and generational context is, therefore, brought into focus. Phillipson questions whether the extent of change in living styles and interaction between generations has been exaggerated. He emphasizes the rise of ‘personal communities’ (whether they consist of strong, weak, bridging or bonding ties) and transnational communities (based on various forms of migration). These issues may become less pertinent as the book moves on to discuss late old age. However, this is only the case if this period is experienced as ‘structured dependency’, which might occur where there are poor care.
standards. The extent of such dependency signifies how the concepts of a ‘secure retirement’ and ‘dignified old age’ have become disembded from their original social purpose.

The third part of the book addresses the question of what to do with the extra years of longer lives and how to build these into the life course. It is questioned where and how integration and segregation of the old are used (and useful) and to what extent they are due to a conflation of individual and societal ageing. The extension of working lives is discussed at length in this context. It is not clear how longer working lives can be achieved, especially when crucial support, for example in the form of workplace learning and training or via engagement within higher education institutions, is missing. Despite increasing awareness and knowledge regarding the ageing process, the momentum to find the means of benefiting from the process has slowed. Phillipson suggests how this trend could be averted. Ageing could become a counterpoint to individualization as exemplified by the strength of inter-generational ties, the enhanced role of grandparents in family life and the net contributions older people make within families. To establish and strengthen this sense of caring solidarity between generations would require a return to the founding roots of welfare and to extend solidarity on a global level. Such a development of new forms of solidarity across different age and social groups would also require individuals and society to overcome the common fear of private and demographic ageing.

Vanessa Beck, University of Leicester

The Political Geography of Inequality. Regions and Redistribution
By Pablo Beramendi

Based on the remarkable variety of federalism that can be observed, Pablo Beramendi asks under which conditions decentralized political systems with an uneven economic geography are willing to overcome their fragmentation. When do poor regions sacrifice income to preserve autonomy and rich regions engage in redistribution? The result is a refined and refreshing comparative study of the evolution of fiscal structures and the politics of redistribution.

It is a major strength of the book that it refrains from the conventional, one-dimensional expectations with respect to fiscal federalism, but provides complex and multi-dimensional explanations throughout. Five in-depth case studies (the EU, the responses of Canada and the USA to the Great Depression, Germany after Reunification, and Spain) corroborate the basic argument: two major factors – the scope of interregional economic externalities and the interplay between the geography of inequality and political representation – influence a political union’s fiscal structure. Political representation is operationalized as a continuum between centrifugal and centripetal structures of decision making. That is, the stronger the political impact of the constituent
members of a union, the greater the impact of an uneven geography of inequality on the decentralization of redistribution.

After the basic theoretical model is outlined, the case studies provide evidence for the economic logic of redistribution, and the political logic of distributive conflicts. The role of individual cross-regional mobility for actors’ redistributive preferences is especially striking. In centrifugal political systems such as the EU, so the argument goes, the level of interregional redistribution increases with growing levels of mobility. Thus, while poorer regions obtain additional resources, wealthier ones protect themselves against undesired inflows of low-skilled workers and dependents. However convincing the argument, empirical insights are mixed though. On the one hand, since the actual level of mobility is very low in the EU it was rather the anticipated high migration rates that drove the decision-making. On the other hand, in Germany the success of post-Reunification interregional redistribution has been limited, given the still massive inflows from East to West. This is just one example where it would have been preferable for the author to clarify these inconsistencies instead of saying how well the results fit the model.

Another achievement of the study lies in the importance granted to institutional legacies, which prevents the book from taking merely a welfare economics perspective. The natural experiment provided by the different responses of Canada and the USA to the Great Depression offers an extremely interesting theoretical puzzle here that also illustrates the strength of comparative historical analysis. In Canada, the massive inflow of dependents undermining the revenue base of wealthier provinces helped to overcome the regions’ vested interests and made possible centralized unemployment insurance. In contrast, the specific regional interests in the USA stemming from Southern Paternalism and less pressing interregional mobility prevented the development of such a centralized system.

Although ‘self-interested help’ as a motor for interregional redistribution is nothing new to social scientists, the cases provide rich empirical evidence and are able to account for both the political and economic reasoning in different historical situations.

For Europeanists, the study provides rather bad news. Although ‘the push for fiscal integration derives from major transformative crises’ (p. 243), in order to enable the EU to overcome the institutional obstacles spelled out, this shock has to be of a fundamental nature for its centre and constituent parts. So more recent, crisis-induced fiscal transfers among EU members can be explained with Beramendi’s model, but they show at the same time how hard it will be for the EU to push for further fiscal and social integration. Last but not least, Beramendi’s analyses hint at the territorial dimension of social policy. Depending on a country’s spatial allocation of inequality, an increase in social benefits automatically implies transfers across poorer and wealthier regions. In turn, this could affect the solidarity equilibrium between these regions.

Overall, this is an interesting and timely book that is able to explain the nature of distributive conflicts and different redistributive preferences. Its sophisticated research design, consisting of a combination of both within-case
and cross-case historical comparative and statistical analysis, allows for high theoretical and analytical standards.

Stefanie Börner, University of Jena

Social Capital and Rural Development in the Knowledge Society
Edited by Hans Westlund and Kiyoshi Kobayashi

This volume usefully brings together a range of thinking on social capital in rural areas. Case studies are drawn from Northern Europe, Canada, China and Japan, indicating that rural areas are highly diverse in terms of demographics and networks of community action. The material is relevant to a global audience, particularly in relation to the movement towards bottom–up approaches to rural development and growing emphases on voluntary and co-operative models for delivering services. Analyzing social capital through the lens of economic theory and applying quantitative techniques helps the book to stand out from others in this field.

The introduction paints an uncertain picture for rural economies where ‘the knowledge economy is an urban economy’ and ‘the share of urban-rural interaction and trade has decreased with changing consumption patterns and shrinking rural populations’ (p. 1). From this starting point, the volume assesses the roles of social capital as a driver of rural development. The spatiality of the networks that sustain social capital emerges as a particularly interesting theme in a mobile world where the interdependencies between urban and rural space are attracting increasing attention.

The first part sets out some fairly well-rehearsed debates about the potential value of social capital within community groups and clubs, along with ‘health-warnings’ about some of its negative attributes such as introspectiveness and free-riding. Each of these chapters also refers to concerns about the public good quality of social capital, and issues relating to the exploitation of common assets. At a local level, questions are also raised about the role of social capital within bottom–up development and the extent to which it is shifting traditional power relations within governance structures. These are all important issues that might easily be overlooked given the attractiveness of social capital as a potential panacea for economic and social development (Lovell 2009).

Part II presents a collection of chapters that analyze the effects of social capital in a range of rural settings. We see that the quality rather than quantity of social capital in a locality is seen to have a material impact upon both economic growth potential (Chapter 5) and community sustainability (Chapter 6). In rural areas, there is greater focus on internal characteristics such as a strong sense of belonging and attachment to the land (Chapter 6). By contrast, social capital in the urban knowledge economy is more about outward connections and the ability for information to rapidly flow between actors – as seen in the more developed provinces of China (Chapter 8). In each case, trust and reciprocity continue to be the underpinning features.
In drawing together the volume, Part III connects theory and evidence of social capital with implications for rural policy. The relationship between social capital and economic growth in the knowledge economy highlights the need for interventions that facilitate knowledge networks and mobilize local communities. In each case, the importance of place and existing local community structures is recognized. In this respect, social capital relies on an idea from ‘new economic geography’ where place matters both for creating and sustaining community identities and for influencing the clustering of knowledge-based businesses. Where locally nuanced approaches are proposed, the challenge is to mobilize actors – which is most difficult in areas with more limited stocks of social capital (and other forms of capital if we assume the Bordieuvian logic of the transferability of capitals). Thus, grassroots development usually requires some degree of supportive external stimulus, especially where high rates of poverty and out-migration persist. Rather than purely endogenous action, the neo-endogenous approach of the EU LEADER initiative is cited as a potentially viable alternative (Chapter 7). Equally, other forms of collective action (Chapter 11) or ‘voluntary association-mediated public services’ (Chapter 13) require engagement with public and private sector organizations, and they should embrace local and non-local actors within dynamic networks in order to maximize the effectiveness of social capital.

Overall, the range of indicators applied to test social capital offers a valuable methodological resource for researchers in this field, while the range of findings within the chapters demonstrates that social capital continues to be a key concept in theorizations of spatial development. A final summary drawing together themes from across the volume would have been the icing on the cake, but perhaps there is scope for the editors to develop this into a future publication.

Reference

Gary Bosworth, University of Lincoln

Faith and Social Capital after the Debt Crisis
By Adam Dinham

This book offers a thoughtful analysis by a leading author in the field of faith-based social action in the UK. The book takes a comprehensive look at the concept of social capital and how useful or helpful (as argued by the author) it is in understanding the contribution of faith groups to wider society in Britain. It concludes more in favour of the former than the latter.
The book is set against the backdrop of the 2008 recession and casts a fresh look at the concept of social capital in relation to faith-based social action following previous works by the author in the 1990s. The book also explores correlates of the notion of capital such as religious capital, spiritual capital and faith capital as concepts which can help to explain the contribution of the faith-based social action in the UK.

The book is informed by theory, empirical research and discussion of contemporary British policy in relation to faith groups. To this end, the book brings together discussions of sociological perspectives covering Bourdieu’s original conceptualization of social capital as a vehicle for class and power inequalities embedded in its correlate concepts, cultural and economic capital, and the subsequent stripping away of the radical dimensions of the concept of social capital by subsequent sociologists, such as Coleman and Putnam, the latter taking most credit for the contemporary conceptualization of social capital as social bonds and social networks which bring about positive life outcomes. Empirically, the book draws upon focus groups with representatives of the main faiths in the UK from various major cities in England and Wales. These provide the basis of ‘an alternative discourse of faith’ based on a number of key values that are outlined in the final chapter of the book, namely community building, spirituality and well-being, outreach, networking and economic contribution. Other research by the author is drawn upon about the engagement of faith groups in wider British society, which helps to give a good overview of what role such actors play in the public sphere, ranging from advocacy work to social welfare.

The theme running throughout the book is an engagement with some of the key principles of the capitalist worldview – how this is apparent through such concepts as social capital, social enterprise and Big Society, all of which, the author argues pose real challenges to the beliefs and practices of faith groups. Indeed, the discussion of capitalism covers the extent to which the Church of England reports, such as Faith in the City (CoE 1985), were able to challenge the free market world view and propose measures of wealth redistribution and social transformation that are needed for a more equal and fair society.

So the crux of the book’s argument is that faith groups are more than just ‘repositories of resources’, which is why the final chapter seeks to promote an alternative discourse of faith. The concept of social capital traps faith groups into a narrow instrumental view, easily exploited by policymakers. Faith groups need to express themselves on their own terms and not in the liberal language of ‘public reason’ employed by Rawls or Habermas. This is a really good argument to make, although the book does not quite show us what this new language is. But in order to devise it, faith groups need to be empowered and given the space to articulate their identity. It may be argued that this is an overly romantic view of faith-based organizations since many of them are self-confident and well aware of the choices and challenges they face. Some faith groups in the UK have happily taken on the role of social welfare sub-contractors to the state, and they do not see this as undermining their prophetic mission.
The book does not address the fact that the concept of social capital has also been extensively critiqued in the social sciences as elusive and neutral so, to a large extent, it is expressing dissatisfaction with a term which has been well rehearsed already. Perhaps, drawing links between religious disdain for the concept of social capital and other discourses would have helped to broaden the debate. However, that should not undermine the importance of social support networks that the concept of social capital drew attention to in the first place. Sufficient empirical research now exists which shows how social context has a clear bearing on individual welfare outcomes. So the importance of relationships and community for faith groups puts them on a par with other research not of a religious nature.

The extent to which faith groups can engage much more deeply with the moral value systems upon which British society is now based is a mammoth task and one which this book starts to point to. It should be remembered that the strongest critique of capitalism has come from far left politics; in the 19th century, Christian reformers were also called Christian socialists. So the desire to challenge the adverse tendencies of capitalism is one which some, but not all faith groups share. This means two things. First, if faith groups are to articulate a new way of public engagement in society, they may need to open dialogue with other groups as, for example, has happened in some of the citizen and social justice movements in the UK. But, second, many faith groups share some fundamental moral values with some proponents of free market capitalism, namely the reliance of the family as the basic unit of society and social welfare; or that charity is an important show of social solidarity.

What stands out in the book is how the author rightly points to the underlying forces of power and class in the concept of social capital but does not see this analysis through by mapping it onto faith groups. We need to know how relations of power and class intertwine between religious actors, religious institutions and those of the capitalist establishment. The danger is that faith groups have accommodated themselves to the capitalist system in which they are now located, hence the emphasis they place on their personal relationships and community. The bigger question which enjoins religious actors to secular actors in responding adequately to the challenges of capitalism is the disengagement of social concerns from economic realities. The two themes of spirituality and economic contribution that are highlighted in the final chapter of the book need to be much more deeply scrutinized if an alternative discourse of faith is to be found. Some deeply spiritual people are also shrewd business people, and rely on charity and philanthropy to give back to society – not on radical social transformation.

Reference


*Rana Jawad, University of Bath*
Transformations of the Swedish Welfare State: From Social Engineering to Governance?
Edited by Bengt Larsson, Martin Letell and Håkan Thörn

Much of the recent study of social policy in Scandinavia has been preoccupied with discussing whether there is still a specific and distinct cluster of Scandinavian welfare states. There has also been much discussion of whether Sweden remains a beacon of universal and egalitarian society despite far-reaching neo-liberal reforms during the 1980s and 1990s. It is debateable whether Sweden could be considered as either universal or egalitarian in spite of an onslaught of new public management, consumer-oriented reforms and the ongoing marketization of social services such as education and healthcare.

This volume offers an interesting new angle on the transformation of the Swedish welfare state, and aims to start with Foucault’s governmentality rather than Esping-Andersen’s welfare regime models. The book is interesting and might breathe some life into this area of study by using different theoretical approaches to make sense of the welfare state and how it has started to transform the last four decades.

Thörn and Larsson’s conclusion argues that the recent transformation of the Swedish welfare state should be understood as a move from ‘social’ to ‘advanced liberal’ engineering. The traditional social democratic social engineering argued that ‘individual freedom was supposed to be achieved through the state’ (p. 263). The state would emancipate individuals from dependence on family and the market. The change of discourse towards neo-liberalism argues now that individuals need to be emancipated from the power of the state, ‘[I]ndividual freedom could only be achieved by liberation from various forms of state regulation, and through the market, in the form of individual choice’ (p. 264). The re-engineering of the welfare state is now centred around processes of marketization, responsibilization and new governance arrangements focusing more on market actors than traditional social movements.

The book is divided into four parts: the first discussing the Swedish model; the second elaborating on security and control; the third discussing public health; and the fourth discussing social policy and ‘the city’. The largest section of the book is on security and control (six chapters), followed by the city (five chapters) and public health (four chapters). This is all interesting material, but the section approaching the Swedish model is much shorter (two chapters). There is a slight imbalance here, where the theoretical discussion of the Swedish welfare state could have been more fleshed out. Larsson, Letell and Thörn’s introduction is interesting but it is on the short side. A more extensive section could have been devoted to elaborating the welfare state through a discursive approach. This becomes even more evident since many of the book chapters do not really engage with the editors’ Foucauldian starting point.

For example, Peterson’s chapter covers a time span of over a century of Sweden social policy in less than 15 pagers. It is an interesting read but this
specific chapter does not really continue the discussion around govermentality and the Swedish welfare state. Glimell’s chapter on Sweden’s ‘New Security Architecture’ could also have done with being more directly linked to the ideas of Foucault.

One has to turn quite a few pages before governmentality is mentioned in a substantial way. Backman provides a thought-provoking chapter on criminal records from a neo-Durkheimian approach. Elam and Gunnarsson’s chapter on nicotine replacement is equally interesting, and uses the concept of bio-power to shed some light on Swedish health policy. There are many other excellent chapters in the book that merit a read, such as Hansen Löfstrand’s chapter on homelessness and Thörn’s chapter on the urban space. In this way, the book is an important contribution and offers more depth than many other texts on the Swedish welfare state.

There are a couple of things that I would pick up on. The book touches on education in places, but I would suggest that a section on education policy would have been beneficial, as the dominance of ideological frames such as the competition state, the knowledge economy and new public management have changed the nature of education in Sweden.

Another aspect that is missing is the recent rise of the right-wing populist discourse on the welfare state. The populist party, Sweden Democrats, entered parliament in the 2012 election on a platform of welfare nationalism – that the welfare state should be first and foremost for Swedish citizens, often implying an ethnic-cultural understanding of Swedish citizenship, welfare and the labour market.

Nevertheless, this is very much a worthwhile introduction to the transformation of the Swedish welfare state. It is a book that merits reading as a first step in understanding how neo-liberalism has changed Sweden in more profound ways than merely increasing inequalities and the rise of market rhetoric.

Johan Nordensvard, University of Southampton