

## Book Reviews

Nicola Yeates (ed.) (2014), *Understanding Global Social Policy*. Bristol: Policy Press. £70.00, pp. 368, hbk.  
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As a field of study, global social policy has seen progress and growth since 1990s. In fact, in recent times, there is a general acceptance of the existence of a globalised policy process, one which, though it extends beyond the nation state, at the same time intersects with national level policy processes. This textbook, which is edited by Nicola Yeates, a well-established scholar in the field of global social policy as indicated by several research publications, is the second edition. Like the edition before it (published in 2008), this edition contributes to an examination of the study and practice of global social policy.

The purpose of this edition, to ‘provide an up to date, comprehensive and accessible collection of research based chapters that bring alive and illuminate key issues, debates and themes in contemporary global social policy’, while answering questions of what, who, why, and how (Yeates, 2014, p. 2) is in line with the new trend in understanding policy making.

There are eleven (11) chapters written by world renowned scholars, well-versed in the research, study and practice of global social policy drawn from Canada, Finland, UK, and US. The editor contributes an introduction which explains the conceptual framework that guides the discussion in subsequent chapters, methodological transnationalism. This perspective underscores ‘how social institutions, activities, practices and relations cut across, or transcend, individual countries.’ (p. 2) Such a perspective highlights the interaction and influence of global level governance and national governance in the process of policy making within countries. It acknowledges that social institutions, policies and practices are influenced by multiple factors and actors, not limited by the borders of a particular nation. Hitherto, the process of making policies to address social issues such as education, health and crime were seen as the preserve of mainly national policy actors. A view central to the concept of methodological nationalism, however, this is far from the case now, as the book shows.

The text explores the nature of this globalised policy process in the contemporary era in two parts. The first part demonstrates how the interaction of contexts, institutions and actors in global social policy process shapes policy outcomes through examination of global social governance, poverty and inequality, business and social policy, trade and welfare. Focusing on policy domains and issues, the second part of the book discusses global social policy issues covering: labour, health, pensions and social protection, education, criminal justice, and population policy.

Discussions of the various sectors or issue areas point out the nature of the governance structure of a specific sector, the activities of actors in the process of shaping global policy within that sector as well as the trajectory of sector policy. Each chapter acknowledges that there are multiple actors in the global social policy process. These actors – including international governmental organizations, international non-governmental organisations, and countries – vie to promote their interests in the policy process.

Consequently, the global policy process is not only technical but also political. Besides, actors' dealings with each other in the global social policy process are also shaped by structural differences, which reflect in struggles over definitions, measurements and rules of the game. As argued, the debate on how to measure poverty, for instance, 'is as fierce as it is only because these are at root deeply political problems that implicitly if not explicitly, challenge dominant power structures.' (Holden, 2014) There thus exist tacitly or, in some cases, more openly, contests between international organizations, world regions or countries for dominance in shaping thinking on policy issues. In this regard, several chapters point to the challenges that exist between UN agencies and the WB; between international governmental organizations and international civil society; and between the Global South and international agencies or the Global North.

It is also shown that despite the contestations and the parochial interests that covertly underlie them, there are instances of collaboration and consensus among international and national level actors in several areas. Agreements such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) underscores the nature of social issues, and the need to work together to address current challenges that transcend national borders. Yet, international agencies, set up by the express agreement of members to oversee specific global social problems and policies, in most cases, are not adequately imbued with the authority to enforce agreements and global policies, which is the outcome of transnational cooperation. Moreover, the discussions point out the dynamism of global policy issues, indicating changes in the nature of problems and the shifts in the thinking of actors on particular issues.

Overall, the discussions in the book centre on the interaction of transnational actors in shaping global thinking on social policy and by extension national policies. It stresses that such interactions are in constant flux as actors and issues gain or lose prominence overtime. This edition includes topics such as global education policy, criminal justice poverty and inequality, which were not discussed in the first edition. Likewise, migration, housing and urban policy and the transfer of social policy were discussed in the first edition but not in the second. The two editions thus complement each other. On this note, I argue that the goal of the book, to update and provide comprehensive and accessible text on fundamental issues in global social policy, was achieved.

ROSINA FOLI

Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy  
[rkf497@mail.usask.ca](mailto:rkf497@mail.usask.ca)

Brink Lindsey (2013), *Human Capitalism: how economic growth has made us smarter – and more unequal*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. \$14.95, pp. 136, hbk.  
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Inequality in America has been widening rapidly in recent decades resulting in a minority reaping the majority of the economic rewards. This state of affairs, as Lindsey recognises, is unstable and undermines overall economic growth. So I looked forward to reading the new thinking on the reasons for this widening inequality promised by the cover of this book. I was deeply disappointed.

Instead of new insights, it churns out the same old arguments that regularly crop up about the cultural shortcomings of the working class leading to their own economic failures and that of their children. This telling is no more convincing for the new context in which Lindsey aims to place them than any of the previous versions.