

Book Review

Paul Henman & Menno Fenger (eds)
Administering Welfare Reform: International Transformations in Welfare Governance
Bristol: The Policy Press (2006)

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The literature on comparative social policy and welfare reform is very extensive. Many aspects of contemporary reform processes have been examined: the exogenous and endogenous causes of reforms, the actors and institutions promoting or hindering their course, the changing ideas and discourses, the various directions of reform, as well as the policy outputs and their effects on welfare policy recipients. By presenting a critical analysis of 'welfare reform as governance reform', this book addresses issues that have received considerably less research attention. The declared goal of this book 'is to give greater prominence to the administration of welfare reform as a way in which to understand and assess the range of effects of welfare reform on welfare claimants, staff and agencies' (p.2). It therefore examines the transformations of the welfare administration that have accompanied welfare reforms and focuses on the effects of this transformed welfare governance. It does so by analysing changing governance practices in welfare administration in a comparative, or at least international (several chapters are single-country case studies), perspective.

The chapters of the books are inspired by 'the focus and observations of both the governance and the New Public Management (NPM) perspectives' (p.9). The key trends in the examined transformations show the effects of the implementation of 'governance' and NPM principles: a growing use of ICTs and 'e-government' practices; a concomitant shift to more conditional and targeted policies; the development of contracting, outsourcing or partnerships, blurring the boundaries between the public, private and non-profit sectors; the appearance of new participants and the changing state-citizen relationship; and the use of new managerial techniques (performance indicators, customer charters, framework agreements).

The book also aims to go beyond the classical delineation between policy making and policy implementation. Policy is seen as the intertwining of the formal substance of policy, the discourses of policy reform, reforms to public administration and governance, and the practices and technologies of policy reforms. In this perspective, policy is produced by 'the confluence and confrontation of changes in both the substance of formal welfare policy and public sector organisational structure and practice' (p.21).

'Street-level research' is presented as the most promising methodology for studying 'welfare reform as governance reform' and an original conceptual framework is developed by P. Henman (chapter two). He advances a 'Foucault-inspired governmentality perspective as a critical analytical approach to examining welfare reform as governance reform' (p.35). Although one of the issue discussed in the chapter is the operationality of this approach based on the study of 'political rationalities' and 'technologies of government', the empirical chapters of the book do not adopt this framework. Yet, the conclusion, by P. Henman and M. Fenger, is largely devoted to showing how the empirical observations can be incorporated into a governmentality analytic.

The empirical section of the book is divided in three parts, respectively focusing on the shifts in the participants, the practices and the processes of welfare administration. *Part One: Participants: reforming the agents of welfare delivery* examines how the identities and nature of the participants of welfare are redefined by welfare reform. In chapter three, D. White discusses the partnership frameworks between the state and the third sector in England, Canada, France and Québec. M. Fenger analyses the governance shifts between state, private and non-profit sectors in the delivery of employment services in The Netherlands, Germany, the UK and Sweden (chapter four). Next, J. Barnes examines the enrolment of voluntary social service agencies by government in welfare delivery in the UK, New Zealand and the US (chapter five).

Part Two: Practices: the welfare governance of street-level practices focuses on the production of welfare at the local level and its implications for welfare workers and recipients. J. Handler examines experiences of welfare-to-work programmes implementation in the US (chapter six), C. Howard analyses the transformations of Australian welfare (chapter seven) and S. Wright discusses the implementation of welfare reforms in the UK (chapter eight).

Part Three: Processes: the changing spaces of welfare governance examines processes that are more internationalised, regionalised and localised thus shifting the focus formerly put on the nation state. In chapter nine, G. Ramia discusses the growing role NPM principles and of international non-governmental organisations in global social policy. C. Valadas analyses the implication of new local-level approaches in European social policies and focuses on the Territorial Employment Pacts (chapter ten). Y. Kazepov and A. Genova examine the impact of increasingly localised welfare governance in Italy that brings about higher regional inequalities (chapter eleven).

This book provides interesting international comparative data and stresses very convincingly the need to study the transformations in welfare governance and administration in order to understand its role in the nature, practices and effects of the welfare state. It presents a promising research agenda. And further research is indeed needed. Three ideal-typical welfare administration models are outlined (bureaucratic, NPM and governance models) but the issue of specific paths of reform in different countries and the link of these administration models with welfare policy regimes is only briefly touched upon. This point would have deserved more treatment notably because, on the other hand, the issue of convergence appears as an underlying and implicit theme throughout the book. It would be interesting to address the divergence/convergence hypothesis in a systematic and explicit fashion. This raises the issue of the selected case studies. They are drawn from liberal (UK, US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand), corporatist-conservative (France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands) and social democratic (only one, Sweden) regime countries. Yet, in Part Two, the chapters examine shifts in practices in liberal regime countries only, and point unsurprisingly to similar developments regarding the production of welfare at the local level. Further research is necessary to provide more comparative data on social democratic and conservative countries.

This book will be of particular interest to scholars and students who want to understand the interactions of welfare policy reforms and administration reforms. Beyond welfare state and social policy experts, public administration students as well as welfare policy practitioners will benefit from reading a book that advocates for the integration of the traditional focus of public and social policy and public and social administration.