

Economic Crisis, Quality of Work, and Social Integration is a timely reminder to policy-makers in Europe that more must be done to strengthen democracy by stemming the effects of economic crisis through social integration of employees and quality work. The book explores ways that quality of work has been affected and the implications of this for social integration and inclusion across 19 European countries. Drawing on the 2004 and 2008 iterations of the European Social Survey, it provides a comparative view of developments across nation states and examines why declining job quality may threaten democracy in the Eurozone. The analysis spans the period before the great recession of 2008-2009 through to 2010 when key countries emerged from recession.

With respect to quality of work, the chapters cover topics including skill change; training and the opportunity to train; work control and intensity; job insecurity; and work-family conflict. With social integration, the chapters cover how changed economic conditions affected employees' commitment to work; their subjective well-being; and attitudes towards the political system.

The introduction gives an overview of how the economic crisis developed through its early period in 2007 to the current day. Gallie (2013) quickly asserts it is plausible the crisis may have undermined the well-being of men and women in the Eurozone (2014, p. 3). He delves into the severity of the economic crisis and draws attention to why the policy focus changed from ensuring quality of work to sustaining employment levels. The take home message being: while important actors technically moved out of recession, there are lasting implications for employees and employers that are yet to be fully conceptualised and understood.

Chapter 2 focuses on economic contraction and what this means for cross-national variation in labour market outcomes. The discussion raises the question of what states were hit hardest and offers some conclusions about why some were hit harder than others. Advocating a conceptual framework sympathetic to North's institutionalism, Michael Tahlin provides an analytical device for understanding the magnitude of the negative effects of the recession on the labour market. This is a useful conceptual frame as it distinguishes between economic and institutional factors in a way that captures the relationship between growth and distribution in economic life. Indeed, he provides a sophisticated argument for the interrelationship of these two factors. Work sociologists, labour economists, and softer methodologists who study economic life or working life science may, however, be unsatisfied with Tahlin's narrow economic interpretation. This is because there is qualitatively and sociologically more to work, employment, and economic life than growth and distribution. Yet even the harshest critic cannot argue with the graphs and tables in the chapter that provide a general picture of the rates of employment fall across countries in the crisis. A particularly insightful figure is 2.5 on page 44. The figure plots equality promoting institutions and economic wealth, and raises issue with the unfairness inherent in the relationship between equality and GDP across nations. It brings the degree of institutionalised inequality across nations to life, relating inequality to greater falls in employment. These findings have the potential to shake things up. They paint a powerful picture that should not be ignored by employers and policy-makers.

Thereafter, the discussion moves into a deeper examination of the distribution of employment by considering issues of gender, age, and occupation. Through analysis across countries, Tahlin argues the crisis has hit some groups harder than others. While not surprising that some differences exist, it is insightful to read authoritative prose that articulates, for example, how young people, men, and immigrants are some of the key groups of employees populating short-term contracts and low-skill jobs. The chapter examines how different groups have been affected through the recession, how wage inequality has changed, and links them both

to the magnitude of the downturn and the structure of labour market institutions. It demonstrates on one hand, that young, male, and low-skill workers have experienced drastic deteriorations in their job prospects; and on the other, that conditions for older, female, and high-skilled workers have changed less dramatically. Nevertheless, the assertion that “gender inequality has decreased” (p. 87) is likely to require further unpacking beyond the fact that there have been larger losses in male employment and in the distribution of male earnings. From here, Martina Dieckhoff’s chapter considers whether institutional contexts mediate key implications of the economic recession for training participation. The chapter covers the theory and comparative contexts of training investment in times of crisis, implications for access to training and discusses comparative patterns in training provision. Examining continuing training in times of economic crisis – which the OECD (2004, see p. 88) suggests is important in halting the widening of socio-economic disparities in European labour markets – Dieckhoff suggests it is conventional wisdom that firms may cut training investment during recession. What is thoughtful about the discussion is the idea that opportunity costs and slack demand (Dejong and Ingram, 2001; Caponi *et al.*, 2010) may encourage employers to “hoard” labour and invest in training in order to be equipped with a strong staff base once demand recovers. Whether this is generally the case is unclear, but knowledge about the effects of the recession on training provision “is limited” (p. 89); hence the review is worthwhile. A standout finding is that age is found to be an important determinant in receiving or participating in training, and this aligns with some previous research (e.g. Schils, 2005, p. 175) by illustrating that older workers (50-64 years) face lower access to training than mid-career workers (35-49 years) in nine of the countries under study.

The discussion then moves onto specific elements of job quality, namely – job control, work intensity, and work stress. Gallie and Zhou neatly lay out some key perspectives on autonomy and control over working tasks. Building on accounts interested in the role job control has in moderating the negative implications of work intensity, the chapter raises the issue of whether the economic crisis has led to an increase in job control or whether employers’ have extended the responsibilities of employees? The discussion examines different trends in job control (2004-2010) such as the polarisation of control by occupational class and points towards a “very steep class hierarchy” (p. 119) in all countries’ occupational groups. It situates the discussion in parallels between groups of scholars who emphasise the inherently conflictual relationship between employees and employers, and those who see crisis as a source of creative destruction. The former, interested in the power resources that determine work-organisation under crisis and the radical transfer of power to employers; the latter, fuelled by the expectation that the crisis will “decimate the most technologically backward sectors, eliminating many of the lowest quality jobs” (p. 116), and by default, raise job quality. From the earliest inception of the European Union, an inherent understanding existed of Europe as a moral economy. Yet the transfer of power to employers and the decimation of work are arguably eroding this foundation.

The reader is then guided through chapters on insecurity and the peripheral workforce; work-family conflict and economic change; economic downturn and work motivation; unemployment and subjective well-being; and economic crisis, political legitimacy and social cohesion. Each is an excellent primer offering an important contribution. However, the chapter on crisis, legitimacy, and cohesion starts to draw the central arguments of the book together. The chapter highlights how the economic crisis has impacted on attitudes towards political systems and presents challenges to the European model of social capitalism (Offe, 2003). The discussion is impressive in its effort at drawing on the big picture, drawing in big concepts, and is written quite beautifully. Using a two-step regression approach, the section investigates the impact of economic vulnerability and economic crisis on political trust, the

relationship between satisfaction and democracy, and attitudes towards welfare state redistribution. While employment or unemployment are not mentioned directly, the chapter offers a way to think how both could dismantle or strengthen the fragile political economy of Europe. Polavieja draws attention to the global economic crisis and incomplete integration at the European level – and this has implications for the democratic legitimacy of nation states across the Eurozone. A key argument is that if citizens do not believe their elected politicians have the ability and powers to pull countries out of crisis, then frustrations may spread from those directly affected by the crisis to other voters. The evidence presented in the chapter and the wider book support the viewpoint that employment and quality of work reside at the core of the tension.

This book has the potential to frame debates on employment and unemployment in the Eurozone by shedding light on the association between work quality, employment, and social integration. Recent employment commentary about Europe highlights increases in insecure work, disparities in economic equality between men and women and those at the top and bottom of the labour market (European Commission, 2014). At the heart of a wish for quality work is an understanding that work should be a source of flourishing and well-being (Bolton, 2007; Karlsson, 2004; Sayer, 2009). These observations, alongside this book, underline a link between the growth in poor quality work and rising economic inequality and declining social cohesion. While the book could go further in defining or modelling quality work, it is undoubtedly a worthwhile and timely work of exceptional scholarship that makes an important contribution. I hope policy-makers take the findings seriously because each chapter demonstrates that quality work and social integration faded through the economic crisis. This could be won back.

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Further reading

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