

# Book reviews

Paula Jarzabkowski,  
Konstantinos Chalkias,  
Eugenia Cacciatori, and  
Rebecca Bednarek · 2023

## Disaster Insurance Reimagined: Protection in a Time of Increasing Risk.

Oxford: Oxford University Press

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How can a risk that is uninsurable be insured? Disaster (or catastrophe) insurance offers protection for losses due to climate-related events such as wildfires, floods, or earthquakes and to terrorist attacks or pandemics. However, insurance for such risks might not be available or not affordable for three reasons: The frequency of events has increased and losses occur too often, or the magnitude of losses comes as an

unforeseen shock. In both of these cases, insurance coverage might become unavailable or unaffordable. In the third, insurance may not be available in the first place if the private sector has no incentive to offer insurance provision due to low demand. As a result, a lack of private sector insurance leads to a “protection gap” – a difference between insured and economic losses. The protection gap has widened in recent decades largely due to climate change (Swiss Re 2018).

Given the lack of economic sociology research on the insurance sector (Vargha 2015) – recent work on flood insurance was reviewed in an earlier issue of this publication (Elliott 2021) – *Disaster Insurance Reimagined* by Paula Jarzabkowski, Konstantinos Chalkias, Eugenia Cacciatori, and Rebecca Bednarek is both timely and necessary. It studies a possible remedy to the problem of insurability in the shape of “Protection Gap Entities” (PGEs) and can be read against the backdrop of the extreme climate-risk exposure of Australia, where some of the authors are based. PGEs are a not-for-profit insurance scheme set up by government legislation in partnership with the insurance industry and possibly other stakeholders. Such PGEs either move risks to the balance sheet of a PGE (and possibly the government) or distribute the risk more widely by making low-risk policyholders pay a higher premium. The authors study 17 PGEs in 49 countries between 2016 and 2020 and interview stakeholders from the insurance industry, the government, and intergovernmental organizations.

The book is organized around the following three questions: (1) What knowledge about a specific risk exists? (2) Who controls the insurance provision? (3) Who bears the responsibility for protection? PGEs originate when there is either too much or too little knowledge about a particular risk.

A lack of knowledge about the occurrence of terrorism, for instance, can prevent the pricing of a risk. In contrast, if frequent flooding of a particular area is a near certainty, property insurance is either unaffordable or unavailable. A PGE could respond by ignoring too detailed knowledge about a risk or the lack thereof. In addition, a PGE could develop new knowledge about a specific risk and make marketization of the risk possible, as an example from the Caribbean in the book shows.

Although setting up a PGE in response to an uninsurable risk is always due to government legislation, the degree of governmental control of insurance provision and the responsibility for protection can vary tremendously. In California, the private sector was required to offer earthquake insurance as part of residential property insurance. As a result, the insurance industry withdrew most residential property insurance for homeowners. In order to revive the property insurance market, a PGE was set up to provide earthquake insurance to anyone who wants to purchase it at a risk-reflective price. Hence earthquake insurance is again available, but it is not necessarily affordable. Earthquake protection remains an individual responsibility and all other residential property insurance is again offered by the market. By contrast, in Spain, a government-owned insurer offers insurance protection for all natural disasters. Regardless of individual risk, every individual or business pays a flat premium. As a result, there is very little natural disaster insurance offered by the market.

The organizing principle of the book around the three outlined dimensions – knowledge about risk, control of insurance provision, and individual or collective responsibility – helps to show that PGE is a very broad concept and very different arrangements are subsumed

under the term. The remainder of the book discusses whether PGEs should not only address the protection gap but also work to improve physical resilience, such as with better buildings or flood prevention. The authors conclude by advocating a greater future role of PGEs in disaster insurance.

Overall, the book offers an accessible introduction to PGEs and outlines both the theoretical underpinnings of insurability and practical issues that PGEs have to deal with. It illustrates very well how the term PGE refers to very different entities in terms of market or government control, for instance, but it does not discuss in detail why such entities are found in some places (or times) but not in others, or why setups differ so much across countries. However, the book offers an important and concise synthesis of case studies for economic sociologists and beyond, which combines both empirical observations of selected PGEs and theory about how disaster insurance works and how PGEs change the established risk transfer process. This allows a better understanding of both the current challenges to (re-)insurance from climate change and terrorism and what a possible reduction in the protection gap could look like.

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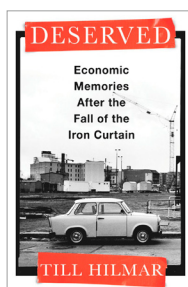
Till Hilmar · 2023

## Deserved: Economic Memories after the Fall of the Iron Curtain

New York: Columbia University Press

Reviewer **Gabor Scheiring**

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Hilmar's *Deserved* delves into economic "deservingness" during the post-1989 transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, offering a unique look into personal moral narratives crafted during the transition to capitalism in East Germany and the Czech Republic. Relying on interviews with 67 engineers and healthcare workers, Hilmar examines how individuals perceive and remember the major economic shifts of the era.

The book starts by contrasting the implementation of shock therapy in East Germany and the Czech Republic. East Germany saw industrial collapse and high unemployment, while the Czech Republic kept industry stable but wages stagnant. The German approach, perceived as patronizing, contrasted with the Czech focus on resilience. These narratives reshaped identities, with East Germans feeling marginalized by their elites and Czechs finding more hope amid the turmoil.

The analysis of shock therapy narratives serves as the macro context of the "moral framework" used to interpret the interview material reflecting on these changes. This moral framework concept centers on two themes: the link between disruptive events and jus-

tice, where people judge what's deserved based on past actions amid structural changes, and the impact of these disruptions on social relations. Hilmar's analysis uncovers a stark contradiction between the transition's hardships and the neoliberal mindset interviewees use to interpret these shifts.

Hilmar finds an individualized cultural language that "translates economic pain into a problem of moral deservingness" (p. 2). He shows that many imbue economic turbulence with moral judgments about deservingness based on effort, skill, and resilience. These assessments incorporate personal experiences in cultural archetypes, creating "economic memories." Such recollections bend toward meritocratic and individualistic explanations despite structural forces shaping opportunities.

Individuals recalling post-1989 work disruptions – like downsizing, commodification, and job loss – tend to frame these changes as stories of "success" or "endurance." Echoing insights from research on postsocialism, Hilmar finds that even if his interviewees are critical of the market transition, they tend to attribute problems to political, not market, failures. Hilmar highlights the role of the notion of "productive labor" as a holdover from the state-socialist era, showing how skills and experiences relate to social recognition and moral self-worth. This underscores a quest for a "deserving self," where legitimacy and respect are sought for personal contributions despite structural challenges.

Chapter three delves into these "deservingness accounts," where narratives assess economic outcomes based on past actions, using merit, need, or equality to justify the fairness of outcomes. The chapter highlights some differences: engineers provide more individualized stories than healthcare workers, and Czechs lean more toward personal

responsibility than East Germans. Nonetheless, meritocratic reasoning prevails in most cases.

The last empirical chapter examines the impact of societal changes on family and friendship ties. Hilmar highlights how interviewees redefine their self-image by distancing from those conflicting with their sense of economic legitimacy. The chapter again underscores a widespread desire for a “deserving self.” People seek recognition and validation for their post-1989 outcomes and relationships, even if this entails breaking ties with people whose upward or downward mobility contradicts the interviewees’ moral codes.

Finally, the epilogue briefly links these moral narratives of deservingness to the rise of right-wing populism in Eastern Europe. It argues that populists tap into desires for recognition, restoring economic pride as part of their illiberal agenda.

The book’s main contributions are twofold. First, its moral framework theory is a novel concept for understanding perceptions of economic changes, linking cultural justice ideas with economic dynamics. Hilmar has the analytical and conceptual tools to position his research as a generalist contribution, challenging the dismissal of Eastern European studies from a Western perspective. Second, Hilmar shows how skills, merit, and morality shape memories of economic turmoil, foregrounding individual moral narratives over structural factors. The centrality of individual moral narratives offers new insights into the social roots of neoliberalism’s resilience in the region.

Despite these strengths, tension lurks between the book’s analytical framework and the processes analyzed. One could quibble about the need to invent a new conceptual framework (the “moral framework”) when there are tried and tested concepts available, such as “moral economy” or “implicit

social contract.” But this is not my main concern.

The bigger problem with the analytical approach is structural in nature. While both the introduction and the epilogue make it clear that the author is fully aware of the painful effects of social dislocations during the transition, his choice to focus on individual moral narratives analyzed from a cultural sociology perspective pushes these very dislocations to the background. Cultural sociology tends to overlook structural political economy, leaving class dislocations underexplored. Webs of meaning and webs of power are two sides of the same coin, but the book concentrates on the former at the latter’s expense. A relational and dynamic class analysis – some would call this cultural political economy – could connect these symbolic and material fields more coherently.

The author’s focus on professions relatively shielded from the most violent disruptions further skews the narrative toward individualistic meritocracy, overlooking the economic discontent of others. Additionally, as the author also notes, the interviewees’ young age also reinforces this skew, as the middle-aged generation that lost the most during the transition is left out of the sample. Including workers from sectors heavily impacted by privatization, precarity, and disruptive competition would provide a more comprehensive picture. How were people at the lower end of the class structure affected by the transition, and how did they make sense of these experiences? How did the deliberate weakening of collective actors representing labor interests contribute to the demise of solidaristic narratives? These questions about class identity and its conspicuous absence in Eastern Europe could also inform the concluding discussions about the societal roots of right-wing populism in the region.

Despite its limitations, *Deserved* is a major achievement in studying economic crises through cultural sociology, blending memory, inequality, and network studies. It significantly advances our understanding of the lived experience of economic transformations. The book also helps to “deprovincialize the study of postsocialism” (p. 16) by providing broad disciplinary insights. Highlighting complex desires for recognition in tumultuous times, *Deserved* offers a model of economic-sociological analysis. The book is essential reading for those studying societal changes and their profound effects on consciousness.

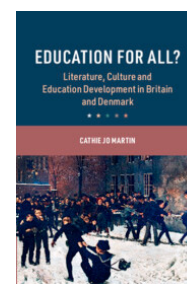
Cathie Jo Martin · 2023

## Education for All? Literature, Culture and Education Development in Britain and Denmark.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

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Cathie Jo Martin’s recent book, continuing the efforts for cultural analysis of policymaking, delves into the foundations of education systems. Martin poses the question of why some countries create school

systems that serve everybody, while others develop systems that are intended primarily for elites. Many scholars have examined the dynamics of change and continuity within educational systems (Ansell 2010), yet Martin presents a novel cultural perspective to explain the variances in educational and other institutional systems. Picking up on two of the exemplary cases of coordinated/social democratic and liberal market models in the making of varieties of capitalism (Hall and Soskice 2001), *Education for All?* analyzes in particular British and Danish education reforms in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The book presents the emergence of education systems in Denmark and Britain, shedding light on how fiction writers significantly influenced the development of educational reforms. Martin goes beyond standard text-analytical methods, employing a comprehensive approach that includes a blend of computational analysis and in-depth reading of a wide array of novels. This extensive literary exploration allows her to provide detailed accounts of reformers, their motivations, and the cultural contexts that shaped actions and institutions. The analysis offers a fresh narrative for sociological institutionalism and challenges the conventional story of institutional development. It also contributes to the policymaking strategies of elites from a political scientist's perspective. Furthermore, it has a unique methodology based on the investigation of the literary field through historical periods.

*Education for All?* comprises six chapters, four of which include empirical analysis. The first chapter stands out for its critical comparison between different components of education systems and their practical implications. Accordingly, the book identifies five main areas across which European education systems evolved distinctly in

the 19th and early 20th centuries: public versus private roles in education, accessibility for all social classes, variety in educational programs, teaching methods, and administrative oversight. In 1870, the British education system, marked by significant church involvement, led to class discrepancies and low worker-class enrollment. It lacked vocational tracks and favored rote learning, with contested state roles and centralized testing for quality control. In contrast, Denmark's system began in 1814 and was established with public consensus and was notably inclusive. It offered a multi-track secondary system with strong vocational education and preferred the philanthropist method, focusing on experiential learning. The state's role was widely accepted, with a decentralized approach and quality ensured through teacher training rather than standardized testing.

Expanding the scope beyond education, the book's second chapter introduces a novel theoretical perspective on the role of authors in long-term institutional changes. The concept of authors as architects of "cultural touchstones" is central to the argument, building on cultural constraint theory to explain how literary narratives and discourses have historically shaped and cemented institutional paths. This analysis aligns with recent literature emphasizing the importance of cultural coupling in policymaking (Swidler 1986). The book posits that authors, wielding their cultural power through literature, can put neglected societal issues on the political agenda even if public discourse is limited. Informingly, Martin convincingly leverages the relative autonomy of the literary field to reveal how elites' ideas influence education reforms cross-nationally. This approach is distinctly culturalist, placing authors and novels at the forefront as reformers and key in-

fluencers in shaping institutional configurations. By examining the interplay between literary production and political reform, Martin uncovers the often understated yet powerful role that cultural narratives play in influencing values and expectations, which in turn inform policy decisions and institutional formations: "Cultural touchstones provide a somewhat autonomous channel for institutional continuities that is separate from the path dependencies associated with institutional and policy legacies. Unlike policy legacies that build on lessons from the past, cultural touchstones influence our mental frames each time we engage in political negotiation" (p. 48). These chapters not only provide a historical context but also reveal the persistent cultural assumptions that underpin these educational systems, which continue to create the varied landscapes of welfare capitalism up to the present day.

In the third chapter, the historical analysis of the diverse paths of development of mass schooling systems in Britain and Denmark provides a rich context for understanding contemporary educational practices. The author's detailed exploration of the sociopolitical circumstances of the late 18th and early 19th centuries reveals the complexities and challenges that shaped the early educational reforms in these countries. Continuing the historical journey in the fourth chapter, the contrasting approaches of Britain's public education system and Denmark's private school movement for non-elites are well-articulated, offering valuable lessons on the diversity of educational reform strategies. In the fifth chapter, focusing on the turn of the 20th century, Martin delves into the creation of secondary education systems. The final chapter offers insightful reflections on the ongoing influence of cultural values in the struggles to balance

efficiency and equality in contemporary education reforms. These struggles can be identified along with the “huge” projects of “nation-building, industrialization, and democratization” (p. 10).

As a first discussion point, the author mentions the deep interconnection between educational and land reforms, particularly in how these reforms were perceived as key components in enhancing the capabilities of peasants (p. 83). While countries like Britain and Denmark both implemented land reforms with a more consensus-driven approach, including enclosure acts aimed at boosting agricultural efficiency, Denmark uniquely recognized the crucial role of peasant education in this economic endeavor. This perspective suggests a structural parallel between educational initiatives and land reforms, hinting at broader, potentially less visible, redistributive projects. This intersection raises a significant question: Do such reform strategies substitute and complement each other in broader social and economic policy frameworks? Furthermore, cultural relations among such reforms should be observed in the structure of ideas in different fields of society. Then, this book’s way of thinking can be promising in answering such long-run questions related to political economy literature from a cultural perspective.

Second, while current surveys and polls provide insight into modern views, understanding historical public opinion requires different methodologies, as direct data from the past are limited. From a methodological point of view, the book explores historical public opinions on education policy through cultural lenses, recognizing the co-occurrence and reciprocal influence of cultural values, interest groups, institutions, and religious beliefs within the literary scene. The author

defines “cultural constraint” as a unique set of cultural elements, such as symbols, stories, ways of judging things, inherent to each country at a fundamental level. These elements are present in the country’s cultural products and are persistent over time. Building on this concept, the author investigates the absence of certain cultural aspects in the two countries to understand the workings of cultural constraints. Theoretically, coupling nation-level analysis with “cultural constraint” arguments seems like a red flag (p. 58), given potential political undertones. The book however aims at overcoming this challenge by concentrating on the comparative elements of cultural belief sets as expressed by the idea of core authors in each country.

Third, the book illuminates how various components of culture are distinct from one another. It addresses the sociological debate on institutionalization, questioning whether this concept signifies a structured organization of schemas or merely represents a collection of diverse, subjective opinions lacking an organized value structure. The book argues for more nuanced explanations of the long-term and enduring impacts of culture on context, resonating with the views of scholars who study the “persistence of continuities” (p. 50) beyond just formal institutions’ influences. The book proposes that narratives can be seen as relatively stable structures influencing various educational ideas in each nation’s literary field. In Denmark, since education is society, there is a consensus-driven approach in the elites’ belief structure, which in turn created an environment that emphasizes more specifically skilled laborers. In Britain, since education is individual, there is a lack of consensus and more conflict between elites, which has resulted in an education

system that produces less skilled workers and peasants. This sort of analysis can be very fruitful in analyzing co-usage of value-like concepts for policies among very different social groups, such as across the partisan lines of left and right wings or across nations.

Notably, *Education for All?* challenges the generally accepted view that emphasizes the development of welfare capitalism post-World War II, redefining the social democratic model. The book focuses on society’s central role and on enabling the left to regain cultural influence from the right. Traditionally linked to the pursuit of economic equality, a key driver in the development of Nordic welfare states, a deep-rooted societal commitment preceded the quest for equality, the book argues. Yet its emphasis on cultural narratives and elite consensus in the development of education systems may inadvertently underplay the critical role of political parties, traditionally seen as pivotal in the advancement of welfare state policies, including education. The author’s focus on the cultural and elite dimensions as the drivers of significant change might overshadow the tangible impact that movements and parties have had on policy-making, social rights, and educational reforms. This oversight could lead to an underestimation of the political dynamics that social democratic parties historically contributed to shaping inclusive education systems, particularly in the context of broader welfare state development projects. Moreover, this may neglect the crucial role of strategic alliances between workers and rural peasants within electoral spaces and parliaments. Such collaborations have been pivotal in shaping legislative outcomes and social agendas. Investigating the recurring patterns in the development of the welfare state, especially in the areas of parliament,

political parties, and legislation, can be crucial in defining the various explanations. Furthermore, just as the conception of education is relative, so too do the conceptions of society and the individual vary across different cases. A shift in the definition of society or the individual, even without a change in their relative significance, is likely to be mirrored in the way educational policies and practices are perceived and shaped. In the 1935 Danish elections, the relatively *skilled* workers and peasants voted for the National Socialist Worker's Party of Denmark, which may showcase the lack of democratic tendencies in those cultural influences assumed by the author.

The author's work also notes the resurgence of Denmark's radical right (p. 223), which seems to be a recurring element of the country's cultural trope, as established in Denmark's historical narratives (p. 47). Illustratively, if a culture like Denmark's drops its non-violent beliefs related to society narrative from its cultural trope, it would still be constraining. Logically, whether the relative centrality of society within the cultural tropes over the individual enables a constant social solidarity remains an empirical question that is neglected by the book.

Overall, Martin's work insightfully dissects educational systems, elite dynamics, and the

interplay of culture and policy. The book's relevance and implications for future research and policy formulation are noteworthy, offering a cross-national perspective on educational reform in a long-term perspective.

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