Governing Social Risks in Post-Crisis Europe

Colin Crouch, Professor Emeritus, University of Warwick, UK, Fellow of the British Academy and External Scientific Member, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Cologne, Germany

In this illuminating book Colin Crouch examines the diverse approaches presented by advanced societies in their attempts to resolve a central dilemma of a capitalist economy: the need to combine buoyant mass consumption with insecure workers, subject to, and responsive to, the fluctuations of an unregulated global economy. He demonstrates that the approaches of different national economies have varying degrees of success, and diverse implications for social inequality. Through the study of European societies, and comparisons with experience from the rest of the world, Crouch scrutinizes this diversity, and looks at how the 2008 global financial crisis has impacted it.

‘... the book is a very strong scientific effort to shed light on questions that are, or arguably should be, at the center of discussions about how our economies ought to function. It provides a valuable framework for structuring those discussions, and it generates insights that are rooted in meticulously analyzed empirical data.’
– Niall Michelsen, Western Carolina University, International Social Science Review

‘Crouch’s new book offers an empirically based up-to-date theory relating governance, egalitarianism, and labor market security in contemporary post-industrial societies. It provides a highly sophisticated, original assessment of modes of governance in Europe in terms of their social and economic performance, drawing on an extensive comparison of European countries including the new Eastern democracies. Contrasting in particular neoliberalism and social democracy, Crouch shows that the social-democratic model of state and associational intervention in markets performs much better than its neoliberal opponent, raising the question why it is the latter rather than the former that has become the leading model for the post-crisis capitalist political economy’
– Wolfgang Streeck, Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Societies, Germany

‘In Governing Social Risks in Post-Crisis Europe, Colin Crouch mounts an impressive comparative analysis to uncover the contrasting ways in which different countries have sought to address the exacerbated social risks, both ‘new’ and ‘old’, unleashed by the financial and economic crisis. It demonstrates that growing recourse to market forms of governance in social and labour market policy is inversely related to the strength and influence of organised labour across countries and, in turn, to the degree of security provided for workers and their dependents. The three main patterns identified for governing social risks in the current era – neo-liberal, social democratic and traditional – are shown to exhibit a clear lineage reaching back to the early 20th century.’
– Paul Marginson, University of Warwick, UK

‘Social risks are presented along a continuum that is not easily packaged between labour market and social policies. Crouch presents us with the concept of tradable risks. But the capacity to trade, or protect against these risks, is sharply demarcated by class positions, politics and resource ownership. This is an important, impressive, comprehensive and original contribution to comparative political economy in its simultaneous analysis of how producers and consumers absorb risks under different macro economic circumstances.’
– Jacqueline O’Reilly, Centre for Research on Management and Employment (CROME), University of Brighton, UK

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– Hans W. Micklitz, Journal of Consumer Policy
‘What are the benefits from reading this book? It can be recommended as an attempt to provide a comprehensive account of social policy developments in a wide variety of different countries. It offers an abundance of findings that are all very important for assessing the status quo in the particular welfare state in question.’

– Eberhard Eichenhofer, European Journal of Social Security

‘The book is to be commended on a number of counts. First, the book engages risk and uncertainty broadly, proposing an analytical framework which both covers the institutional landscape of social risks more fully than is usual and also serves as an integrative analytical tool by connecting approaches to risk management across institutions. Crouch utilizes this fully, skilfully connecting the different institutional domains into a master narrative of regional and national trajectories of risk management strategies founded in class relations and the institutionalization of state, market, associations, and community. Secondly, the amount and diversity of empirical evidence amassed and analysed in this book is impressive as Crouch sets out to provide in-depth investigations of all the relevant aspects of institutions and practices identified by the analytical framework. The reader is provided with a masterful tour of available statistics of both within-country change and between-country differences across Europe. Thirdly, the analysis employs a more differentiated typology of eastern and central European countries than is usual in both industrial relations and welfare research. In particular, Crouch’s highly differentiated treatment of the Baltic states, the Visegrad cluster, and the other central eastern European countries is informative and analytically efficient. Finally, the ambitious proposition of three major governance profile zones in Europe is both bold and efficient in combining themes otherwise treated in separate literatures into one empirical categorization... This is a highly informative and rigorous work which engages the issue of social risk and the consequences of the financial crisis in an engaging and thought-provoking manner.’

– Acta Sociologica