

perspective on a student's capability in a specific course.

This book provides several arguments about why going gradeless can be the future of education. It also emphasises how removing grades is not only tied to one specific course or field. Likewise, it also shows that there is more than one way to do this, and this makes it a source of inspiration and a tool for teachers and other educators to use. Furthermore, the book questions whether grading should continue to be used in our school system, as it may not help our students to become better learners, and also because giving grades might not be the right way for teachers to get to know their students' competences, as giving grades does not generate an environment for dialogue and feedback. Going gradeless as a teacher may be difficult, as the entire school system is often built upon grades, which are themselves an entry to step up to another level. The cases discussed here are practical rather than just theoretical. However, as the book also argues, switching to a gradeless classroom also requires a change in mindset for teachers. What is valuable in this book is how the teachers also explain the different obstacles they encounter and how they overcome these obstacles by adjusting to the cultural framework they work in and to the requirements they have to meet. The book encourages us to base learning on dialogue, which should be monitored along the way to give more empowerment to the classroom. Thus, it provides several arguments for why going gradeless is the future of education and encourages teachers and other educators to experiment with what should be the primary focus of being in a classroom. It encourages us to reflect on the questions we ask students if we want the students to focus more on learning than schooling.

*Nanna Rahbek Jørgensen*  
*University of Southern Denmark, Odense*  
*nannarahbek@live.dk*

**Violaine Delteil and Vassil Kirov (eds):**  
*Labour and Social Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe: Europeanization and Beyond*  
London and New York 2020: Routledge,  
266 pp.

Among the simultaneous challenges of post-communist transitions, the liberalisation of markets has been surprisingly constant and successful [Appel and Orenstein 2018], but the related transformation of labour markets and social regimes has unfolded along a much more sinuous path [Vanhuysse 2006a, 2006b]. According to Delteil and Kirov, fully dissecting this intricate process relies crucially on understanding how Europeanisation, involving economic integration and fiscal and political regulation, has been an 'ambivalent force for change' (p. 1). While most studies adopt a supply-and-demand, diffusion-style view of Europeanisation, across 12 dense chapters the co-edited volume by Delteil and Kirov analyses in depth how both the 'top-down' Europeanisation and its 'bottom-top' counterpart have been partial and contingently defined (p. 1). By recognising that the various socio-political actors in CEE states were not just passive rule-followers, the book sheds new light on the prevailing theories of post-communist transitions, such as historical institutionalism, varieties of capitalism, or the burgeoning 'diversity of capitalism' literature (p. 2).

To begin with, the crucial coordinate for understanding the ambiguities of Europeanisation is the tension between the weakening of the EU's strength after the accession of the CEE states and its newfound strength in the aftermath of the 2008–2009 global crisis (p. 7). On a broad level, the latter in particular has given the EU enough thrust so that 'top-down' Europeanisation appears stronger than its 'bottom-top' counterpart (p. 4). On a more discrete level, however, the 'bottom-top' Europeanisation that did unfold was – particu-

larly in the area of work and labour laws – fragmented among sectors and even firms, according to a plethora of factors that relate to ‘commercial activities, nationality and culture of the headquarters, local politics’ and so on (pp. 4–5). This was further complicated by the fact that FDI, the crucial component of rebuilding CEE capitalism (Appel and Orenstein 2018), had a non-homogenous impact in the guise of ‘agglomeration effects’ (p. 9). These manifested either as spatial disparities, through the creation of ‘special economic zones’, or as a productive divide between domestic and foreign business, as states sought to invest in high-tech foreign firms with an immediate payoff that could be used for political gains (pp. 9–11). In addition to FDI’s own ambiguities, further ambivalence was generated by the growing role of remittances, which tended to overwhelmingly concentrate in the ‘low value added domestic services sector’ (p. 10).

The layering of contingently defined solutions to such ambivalences implies that the trajectory of labour was by no means linear. On a first level, neoliberalisation, as an early component of Europeanisation, built on the legacy of diluting class conflict through targeted state policies [Vanhuysse 2006a, 2007]. On a deeper level, however, particularly in the aftermath of the 2008–2009 crisis, unions have increasingly carved out space for a ‘voice’ through mechanisms such as the ‘externalization of domestic conflicts’ (pp. 14–15). The crux of the issue is that, given the increasing range of actors involved and the ambiguities of capital, unions have had to craft innovative strategies and seek out new partners that range from social movements to domestic business and political parties (p. 14). The fact that unions have become more proactive and have sought specific alliances can be seen in that the shifts in the power of labour over time are both more fluctuating and more complex than the macro-level ebb

and flow of economic and/or institutional cycles (p. 14).

While the emphasis of the book is on the various facets of agency, the individual chapters essentially offer a complex analysis of the co-constitutive relationship between actors, structure, and process in shaping labour and social transformations in post-communist Europe. Let me provide an overview of two chapters: Drahokoupil and Myant’s re-evaluation of the major conceptual tenets of ‘dependent capitalism’ as the hallmark of CEE economic development, and Meardi’s in-depth analysis of the limited success of both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ *acquis*. For Drahokoupil and Myant it is beyond a shadow of a doubt that CEE economies are dependent on ‘outside know-how and technology’. But neither the degree nor the exact nature of the ‘dependency’ are fully clear (p. 42). Moreover, it is not at all unambiguous how MNCs shaped the trajectory and mechanisms of organised labour. For instance, while multinational companies (MCSs) have enough thrust to bypass domestic institutions, by giving host countries easy access to capital and know-how, in their on-the-ground functioning MNCs cannot simply superimpose pre-existing practices and norms. Instead, they need to factor in a range of contingent realities (pp. 42–43). This raises some key questions as to how exactly MNCs shape the institutional landscape of host countries (p. 43). On a very broad level, since MNCs themselves do not appear to have been causal factors for liberalisation, they typically eschew partisan strife (p. 45). This suggests that MNCs did not push for reducing the space for a voice and collective bargaining (pp. 45–46). Rather, domestic business seems much more likely to offer a broad base ‘for pressure for more substantial reductions in employee protection’ (p. 47). Therefore, on a more concrete level, as the authors show through a comparative study of motor vehicle manufacturers, MNCs mostly influence the *nature* of col-

lective bargaining. While some foreign-owned firms exhibit a pattern of reducing the worker's voice, the more common pattern, especially in export-oriented manufacturing (p. 48), seems to be that MNCs are quite tolerant of local employment practices, and more often than not seek contingently defined negotiation, both implicit and explicit (p. 42).

Broadly speaking, the chapter unearths five fundamental factors that have shaped the potential strength of trade unions, understood as its concrete capability to extract demands from management (p. 52). First, since the product market itself has warped MNCs' long-term investment strategy, it has also directly influenced collective bargaining. The key trade-off, even if not always at the forefront of formal agreements, has been between 'concessions to management on pay, conditions and flexibility' and employment security (p. 49). Second, unions have gained significantly more power in situations where MNCs had to offer, from the outset, attractive conditions just to secure a labour force adequate for their specific sectors (p. 49). Third, historical legacies have also played a role in a more-or-less proportional way: the longer the period of time spent under state socialism, the higher the likelihood of a strong union existing, as keeping up membership and strength is easier than creating it out of a void (p. 50). Fourth, although direct superimposition does not seem likely, labour relations in the HQ or parent MNC do influence their counterparts in CEE host-countries. At the very minimum, HQ practices make investors either more willing to maintain or, conversely, completely dismissive of good relations with labour representatives (p. 50). At the same time, however, because HQ practices are not grafted onto a void, the fifth crucial factor is the scope of international employee contacts, which enable unions in the host-countries to internalise, in a contingently defined manner, the practices that

management takes as fixed and exogenously given (p. 51).

These multiple overarching ambiguities are also reflected at the level of company responses. Drahekoupil and Myant use work-time flexibility as a crucial test through which they highlight two ideal cases and the scope of contingent negotiations (p. 53). The crux of the issue is that the reaction of management can come into conflict with the long-term prospects of solidifying a reliable workforce, and this creates room for union power and negotiation (p. 52). The two ideal cases imply either full union recognition, wherein management acquiesces to most worker demands, or full dismissal, wherein only minimal national standards of labour protection remain in force (pp. 53–54). The common denominator is that overall power relations tend to lead to *sui generis* types of bargains. A particularly noteworthy thread, however, is that even within *ad hoc* negotiations, MNCs appear more willing to accept existing practices than to seek leverage for major structural change (p. 55). This occurs because MNCs are typically confronted with ready-made conducive environments [Appel and Orenstein 2018], where it would cost them more to push for change than it would to accommodate some demands (pp. 54–55). What further strengthened this specific development was the nature of wages: on the one hand, since MNCs offer lower wages in CEE than in Western Europe, they can still be profitable even if they do accommodate union demands; on the other hand, since they offer higher wages than domestic businesses, the demands they are presented with are more nuanced and less violent (pp. 54–55).

For Meardi, the crucial question for understanding the reach and nature of Europeanisation in CEE is whether EU policies were enough to engender the type of 'holistic' convergence that would cover the institutional as well as the social level (p. 123). In this sense, Meardi dissects how,

during the 'settled times' of 2004–2008, the new member states of the broader CEE region adopted and implemented the parts of the 'hard' and 'soft' *acquis* that pertained to labour relations. On the one hand, part of the dilemma is that the 'hard' *acquis* is both limited to a relatively narrow set of policies and seemingly 'adoptable' through a formalistic approach, without the ensuing monitoring and sanctioning that lead to the creation of specific polity-wide norms (p. 123). This is particularly evident in the case of EU regulations on health and safety, whose emphasis on broad preventive principles has in the CEE new member states has only been translated as a set of more-or-less new, fixed guidelines (pp. 124–124). In addition to problematic issues, such as shady reporting, this has led to a very unclear picture of what actual improvements have been achieved by applying the 'hard' *acquis*. Similarly, the attempt to create a dual channel for employee representation has yielded mixed results, as it was formally implemented, only to clash in practice with the specific legacy of communism (p. 127). In post-communist countries work councils are at best ineffective and at worst even disregarded by workers (p. 127). Even in the case of policies on equal opportunities, which seem arguably the most successful part of the 'hard' *acquis* in CEE, application and enforcement are lacking, to the point that the pace of convergence has grown markedly slower (p. 130).

On the other hand, the 'soft' *acquis* also has an ambiguous track record in CEE new member states and has mostly failed to create the channels for wide-scale social dialogue (p. 133). In this sense, while the European Employment Agenda may very well have led to an increase in funding for active labour market policies, CEE new member states understood it mostly as a tool for 'flexibility', with comparatively less emphasis given to the 'security' side of this agenda (in an understanding of the EES

as Danish-style flexicurity – pp. 133–134). Similarly, the arguments for tripartite social pacts (the state–unions–employers) have not garnered much political support outside amorphous roles for gaining legitimacy (p. 139). One particularly important barrier is that employers proactively choose not to organise, as the institutional environment allows them enough backdoors for different arrangements, which the EU is simply incapable of eroding (p. 141).

Summing up, Delteil and Kirov's co-edited volume impresses with its analytical clarity, conceptual richness, and vast research scope. In addition to challenging entrenched theories of Europeanisation, all the chapters unearth new facets of pre-existing explanations and causal relationships. The book's dialogue with mainstream studies sends the strong message that understanding broad processes such as Europeanisation can only be done by factoring in the contingently defined role of agency.

Sergiu Delcea

Central European University, Vienna

sergiu.delcea@gmail.com

#### References

- Appel, H. and M. Orenstein. 2018. *From Triumph to Crisis: Neoliberal Economic Reform in Postcommunist Countries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vanhuyse, P. 2006 a. *Divide and Pacify. Strategic Social Policies and Political Protests in Post-Communist Democracies*. Budapest and New York: Central European University Press.
- Vanhuyse, P. 2006b. 'Czech Exceptionalism? A Comparative Political Economy Interpretation of Post-communist Policy Pathways, 1989–2004.' *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* 42 (6): 1115–1136.
- Vanhuyse, P. 2007. 'Workers without Power: Agency, Legacies, and Labour Decline in East European Varieties of Capitalism.' *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* 43 (3): 495–522.