

Jonas Radl

Hans-Peter Blossfeld, Sandra Buchholz, and Dirk Hofäcker (eds.), *Globalization, Uncertainty and Late Careers in Society*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, 383 pp.

(doi: 10.2383/25962)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 3, novembre-dicembre 2007

Ente di afferenza:

()

Copyright © by Società editrice il Mulino, Bologna. Tutti i diritti sono riservati.

Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it>

Licenza d'uso

Questo articolo è reso disponibile con licenza CC BY NC ND. Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it/>

Recensioni

Hans-Peter Blossfeld, Sandra Buchholz, and Dirk Hofäcker (eds.), *Globalization, Uncertainty and Late Careers in Society*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, 383 pp.

doi: 10.2383/25962

It is a common place that globalization is altering the organization of work in advanced contemporary societies. However, despite the prominence of the globalization theme in the public discourse, the consequences of this macrosocial change on individual work trajectories have not been put to an empirical test thus far. Correspondingly, the ambitious objective of the volume under discussion is to evaluate the impact of “globalization” on the economic activity and labour market mobility of elderly people. The book originates from the *Globalife* project, which in foregoing volumes assesses the consequences of globalization on the transition to adulthood as well as men’s and women’s changing mid-career trajectories. In this fourth book-length contribution, Hans-Peter Blossfeld, Sandra Buchholz, Dirk Hofäcker and their collaborators now analyze late careers in a changing socioeconomic environment.

The study covers a wide range of European societies (Britain, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and Sweden) and the United States in the time span from the 1970s to the present. Accordingly, the core of the book is formed by twelve single-country case studies conducted by national experts. They are linked through a common theoretical and methodological framework, which is set out programmatically in the introductory section. Globalization is understood as a multifaceted socioeconomic process that includes the internationalization and deregulation of markets as well as technological innovation and the spread of global networks. Since the 1970s the world economy has undergone a period of deep structural transformation, which inter alia has led to a universal intensification in market competition, an accelerated rate of economic turn-over and a rising vulnerability to global shocks. Yet, it is argued that on the level of individuals this increase in economic strain and uncertainty did not affect all workers alike. Instead, as companies adapt their work organization to a quickly changing economic environment, the employability of elderly workers is expected to diminish more rapidly as compared to mid-career workers. Given the higher pace of technological change in a knowledge-based economy, the human capital of senior workers gets outdated earlier, thereby reducing their marginal productivity. Significantly, the industrial sector is precisely characterized by a high share of older employees, but vast deindustrialization makes the job qualification of manual workers obsolete. In short, the guiding hypotheses of the book at hand can be summarized as follows: Firstly, globalization has been the driving force behind the overwhelming trend towards early retirement. And secondly, national institutional configurations have been crucial in molding the consequences of grown market pressure for people’s later working lives.

In theoretical terms, the authors insist in the need to account for institutions promoting or hindering early exit as well as institutions promoting or hindering employment continuation [p. 12]. Consequently, the conceptual framework distinguishes four sets of “institutional filters:” 1) Pension systems and welfare arrangements; 2) Occupational

structures; 3) Employment relations systems; 4) Employment-sustaining policies. While the pension system is primarily responsible for selectively opening and restricting early retirement pathways, the latter three institutional filters play a major role in shaping employment opportunities beyond prime working age. Analogous to the path dependence theorem on the macro level, which implies divergent institutional responses to external shocks, the “institutional filters” approach predicts that changes in micro level career trajectories that stem from universal globalization pressures should vary immensely according to the national institutional configurations.

In what refers to methodology, the contributions to Globalization, Uncertainty and Late Careers in Society invariably employ dynamic econometric models based on micro level data. Where available, the authors of the country-specific chapters have relied on individual level panel data, otherwise pooled cross-sectional survey data or administrative data has been used. Inevitably, the time span or birth cohort covered differs to some degree across the various case studies, with the core period ranging roughly from 1980 to 2002. In the main, the contributors have applied variants of event history analysis, the family of statistical methods best suited to analyze life course transitions, all the more in a dynamic framework. Especially the estimation of competing risk models that contrast career exits with downward mobility often sheds new light on late working lives. The impact of globalization is captured through the magnitude of cohort and period effects on the one hand, and through the salience of shifting sectoral patterns on the other hand. For the purpose of comparison, the welfare regime typology plays a predominant role in serving both as an overarching categorization scheme and as an analytical device that provides a short-hand reference to the relevant set of institutional filters [p. 16]. Apart from the three original regime types outlined by Esping-Andersen, a Southern European and a Post-Socialist welfare regime are distinguished in order to account for the institutional heterogeneity among the political economies included in the study.

Turning to the main findings, it is confirmed that globalization exhibits differential effects in function of the prevailing institutional configuration, notwithstanding a shared trend towards greater labor market flexibility. By and large, regime differences are in line with the formulated hypotheses [pp. 362–366]. In countries belonging to the liberal welfare regime, low employment protection standards are identified as one of the main reasons for relatively high downward labor market mobility among older workers. Low income security in old age – equally characteristic for the strategy of “market-induced employment maintenance” – translates into moderate early exit rates. Opportunities for early retirement, hence, depend largely on private savings, and social class positions play a major role in determining the chances to avoid downward mobility. In social-democratic welfare regimes, relatively long working lives are found to be consequence of active labor market policies and a high emphasis on life-long training, defining elements of a “public-induced employment-maintenance strategy.” However, thanks to universal welfare benefits there is less job mobility in later careers than in liberal countries. Furthermore, the age of retirement is found to be not particularly concentrated in specific occupational groups or sectors of the economy. Instead, after first affecting mainly workers in the declining industrial sectors, the possibility of an early exit is now distributed rather equally across social groups. Surprisingly, as revealed by Hofäcker and Sørensen, the Danish retirement scenery deviates from the other Northern countries.

As a result of a series of untypical policy changes that introduced incentives for early retirement, Denmark rather represents a hybrid case combining employment-maintenance and employment-exit strategies. For conservative and for Southern European countries, the findings are remarkably similar. In both country clusters, retirement policies follow an “employment-exit strategy.” A high incidence of early retirement results not only from strong retirement incentives, but also from strong employment protection legislation, thus limiting downward career mobility. This conglomerate of factors fosters a “stratified logic of employment exit:” while the group of sheltered insiders are largely protected from early exit pressures, the vulnerable groups of outsiders faces serious restrictions in their employability and hence tends to retire considerably earlier. Notably, based on the (cross-nationally robust) finding that more educated workers in Spain retire significantly later than less educated workers, Bernardi and Garrido put forward the hypothesis that the exit age of future retirement cohorts will rise significantly as a consequence of the continuously growing educational attainment levels of the senior workforce.

Being the ample country sample one of the assets of the book, it is interesting to have a closer look at the results for the Eastern European countries. With regards to post-socialist countries, the editor team admits that theoretical predictions have been difficult because of the quite divergent paths of modernization and the limited research results available. It turns out that in transition economies high early retirement rates are one of the salient implications of globalization, which was featured by massive liberalization and privatization. At the same time, a high incidence of precarious work beyond official retirement ages is often observed in post-socialist countries as a consequence of serious cuts in old age pensions. In their interesting contribution on Estonia, Täht and Saar find that the deep structural change that was triggered by the integration into the global economic system has made elderly workers more vulnerable to be pushed into early retirement. As in most CEE-countries, the transition from a command economy to a market society brought about a widening of social differences with regards to the timing of retirement. For Hungary, Bukodi and Róbert find that cohort membership, mediated through the age at the time of regime change, is the strongest predictor of retirement timing. Whereas younger workers could often keep working at the cost of some downward mobility, members of the birth cohort 1939 to 1943, who were over 45 years old at the beginning of the 1990s, had the lowest chances to stay in the labor market. In this sense, globalization has been most noticeable in the late careers of Eastern Europeans.

In addressing the impact of globalization on late careers, the *Globalife* project makes a significant contribution to the comparative study of retirement. Relying on micro level data from a broad set of countries, including the under-investigated societies of Eastern Europe, the authors are able to show how late careers differ not just between countries, but also between different sectors and occupational groups within countries. Their theoretical account with “institutional filters” and welfare regimes as its main pillars rightly comprises both “push” factors (i.e. labor market constraints) and “pull” factors (i.e. financial incentives) for the analysis of exit from work. What is more, the adoption of a comparative approach is straightforward given the central importance of institutional configurations in retirement dynamics. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the country-specific analyses largely stick to the common framework, and that the editors’ conclusion provides a comprehensive evaluation of the findings. In this way,

the reader is enabled to compare the country-specific evidence from any of the three main analytical viewpoints: the cross-regime perspective, the globalization perspective, or the social selectivity perspective. Its integrated comparative setup is, hence, one of the merits of this book, which can equally be used as a rich source of information for country-specific consultations.

A possible criticism is related to the somewhat eclectic framework, which oscillates between a three-fold and a five-fold regime typology. In this way, the distinctiveness of the Southern European and Eastern European regime cluster is not always clear. Besides, as globalization is a markedly inclusive concept, it remains an open question to exactly which dimensions of macro social change the various transformations in individual behavior are attributable. Nevertheless, it is the virtue of this insightful and innovative study to systematically address the scope of the ongoing globalization tendencies with respect to retirement behavior. In pinpointing the cross-nationally divergent micro level responses to the common challenges inherent in globalization, the book enhances the reader with a thorough understanding of the heterogeneous developments in the employment patterns of elderly workers.

Jonas Radl

European University Institute, Florence