

Book Review: Jørgensen, H., and Schulze, M., eds. Unemployment and Activation Policies in Europe and the US. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023. xv + 289 pages. Hardcover, \$170.00.

In *Unemployment and Activation Policies in Europe and the US*, Jørgensen and Schulze present a comprehensive study of how welfare states redefine the relationship between social protection and employment. The editors, both experts in labour market policy and governance, compile thirteen chapters that examine the rise of activation as the dominant model of unemployment management. The central question is how societies balance public support with individual obligation once welfare becomes conditional on employability. The editors state that activation represents a structural and moral transformation of welfare. Earlier systems provided income maintenance; current systems prioritize employability, accountability, and a moral duty to work. This text therefore offers a comprehensive and enlightening perspective on how these transformations differ across national contexts.

The first few chapters establish a clear conceptual foundation issue. Jørgensen and Schulze trace five historical periods from early unemployment insurance to current digital labour market regulation. Chapter 2, "Understandings of Activation," identifies a persistent lack of conceptual clarity in the field and explains that activation functions as a policy, discourse, and administrative method. Drawing on Peter Hall's paradigm theory, the editors describe activation as a sequence of partial changes rather than a single shift. This structure invites further analysis of how reform occurs over time. The country studies form the empirical core of the book, illustrating how activation takes shape within distinct political and institutional settings. The comparative design of the text captures both convergence and divergence across systems. Northern European systems, such as those in Denmark and Finland, link activation to education and social investment, whereas continental and liberal regimes, including Germany and the United Kingdom, frame it through conditionality and market discipline. Other contributions,

such as those from Austria and the United States, highlight how ideology and administrative capacity shape policy outcomes. Across these diverse contexts, the volume shows that activation is never uniform. Each welfare state reinterprets the balance between obligation, support, and efficiency in accordance with its institutional history and political culture. The final chapter synthesizes the case studies into a typology of coercive, enabling, and hybrid activation systems. Jørgensen and Schulze propose a model that links employability with human dignity. They argue that future welfare policy must favour inclusion and social investment. This closing framework provides coherence and direction to the comparative analysis.

The book demonstrates a careful structure and strong editorial discipline that will instill confidence in its reliability. Its comparative design supports cross-national study and classroom use. The strength of the collection lies in its attention to policy performance and the contextual challenges that shape reform. Each contribution identifies both the advantages and limits of national strategies, addressing issues such as long-term unemployment, the social impact of austerity, and the disruption created by the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach offers a realistic assessment of how activation functions under pressure. A limitation of the work lies in the limited attention given to digital transformation. Several chapters note the growing influence of technology on labour market governance, but the treatment remains brief. The volume acknowledges the role of data systems, automation, and algorithmic assessment, yet it stops short of examining how these tools alter the administration and experience of activation. This limited attention, though, creates an opportunity for further conversation about how digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence, and platform management continue to reshape welfare policy and redefine the boundaries of employability.

For scholars across the social sciences, *Unemployment and Activation Policies in Europe and the US* offers a valuable foundation for examining welfare reform and labour policy. It not only provides a comprehensive understanding of the topic but also invites further analysis and research. The collection clarifies how activation operates as both an instrument of inclusion and a mechanism of control. Its insights inspire and motivate researchers to contribute to these important discussions, providing a roadmap for future research and policy development.

Unemployment and Activation Policies in Europe and the US distinguishes itself through its depth of evidence and clarity of analysis. The editors present a measured assessment of activation as both reform and restraint. The cost may limit individual purchases, yet the book deserves inclusion in academic libraries and research collections for its substantial contribution to debates on how societies define participation and human value within labour markets, which now equate worth with employability.

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