

# Рецензія

## (RE)THINKING INFORMALITY AS MULTIFARIOUS SOCIAL PRACTICES

### (ОБ)МІРКУВАННЯ СТОСОВНО НЕФОРМАЛЬНОСТІ ЯК БАГАТОВИМІРНОЇ СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ ПРАКТИКИ

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This book is possibly an excellent place to start for anyone keen to gain insights of everyday social macro- and micropractices of the post-socialist societies. It features an impressive collection of studies undertaken by different authors about diverse informal practices within 10 various countries from Europe and Asia. The book presents context-bound understandings of ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ in a society. As formal and informal practices are blurred and loosely mixed, characterized by variable magnitude, the distinctions between them is symbolic, so authors follow this view. Moreover they take into account that many of so called informal practices are well-institutionalized, have long history and rooted in cultural traditions or have evident political causes. At the same time, the book prolongs conventional for many scholars recognition that the informal sector is widespread, persistent and even growing relative to the formal sector in many global regions (ILO, 2002; Schneider, 2011; OECD, 2012; Williams, 2014), not only in the post-socialist countries. Therefore readers of the book may see it as relevant to any context.

The book starts from the preface written by Abel Polese and Jeremy Morris who discuss the phenomenon of informality and suggest more than a wide definition of it as ‘continuum of actions, behaviours and attitudes that

can influence a particular outcome in a given situation' (p. 10). Authors (and editors of this collection) explain their interpretative frame and firmly link 'informality' to the concepts of 'agency', 'institutionalism', 'socially acceptable practices', 'normativity', 'Weberian state', and so on. In this way, the sociological, not economic conceptualization is determined from the very beginning, and all chapters provide theoretical considerations and empirical data for conceiving the societal nature of informality phenomenon.

The first four chapters present the reader with an array of interesting research ideas and concepts which include a wide range of topics. These chapters compose the Part I of the book titled 'Thinking Informality and Development Writ Large and Scale'. The very first chapter (authors - Collin Williams and Olga Onoshchenko) presents study based on semi-structured interviews conducted in 2009 in the Ukrainian city of Mykolayiv about participation in the informal economy. Though findings might be informative for someone seeking deeper comprehension regarding informal employment in Ukraine, for me the theoretical part of this contribution evokes the main interest. Authors review consistently a range of 'old' and 'new' views on the informal economy and then use a number of rivaling theoretical approaches to discuss their own study findings - residue theory (dualistic approach), by-product theory (structuralist approach), complimentary theory, alternative theory (neoliberal approach) and post-structuralist theory (diverse economy approach). Researches come to the grounded conclusion that the most up-to-date is the diverse economy approach because 'it recognizes the plurality of economic practices in post-socialist societies and the fact that capitalism is not yet hegemonic' (p.34). Definitely post-structuralist theories with their broad conceptualizations of power, societal relations and governing practices (Bacchi, 2016) could be regarded as underpinning philosophy for the whole book, meanwhile authors of all chapters argue application of innumerable theoretical paradigms for thinking and researching informal practices.

Huseyn Aliyev in his chapter 2 'Institutional Transformation and Informality in Azerbaijan and Georgia' looks at various aspects of day-today social and interpersonal interactions, including institutional reforms and resilience of the informal sector. Researcher defines informal practices as 'an integral part of inter-personal associations and institutional behavior' (p. 52). Author provides numerous accounts to demonstrate the nature of the macro-scale informality in two Caucasian societies and the impact of the institutional transformation on broadening informal practices after the Soviet Union collapsed.

Chapters 3 and 4 introduce peculiar ethnographical studies conducted in Lithuania (author - Idda Harboe Knudsen) and Estonia (author - Aet Annist) after financial crisis of 2008. These contributions vividly describe issues of marginalization, mistrust, informal relations and informal networks. These studies might be of interest to those looking for sound qualitative research methods.

Part II "Rethorizing Informality: Power, Culture, Kinship and History" goes further within the fields of informal practices in South Eastern European countries.

Anne Danielsson in her chapter about Kosovo's vignette seeks explanations of informality through the concept of 'symbolic power' and 'asymmetric power'. In this and the next chapter by Karla Koutokova on Bosnian experience of bringing different actors into process of democratization there are few judicious arguments on necessity taking into account 'cultural codes' of the particular society for the deep understanding of the complex phenomenon of informality and building next political actions with regards of the 'cultural decoding'.

The two next chapters explore the familyism and personalized trust within the informal practices in small business (Tanya Chadvarova) and agricultural sector (Christian Giordano) in Bulgaria. In this relation-oriented society the discrepancy between legal framework and informal practices was observed by researchers who pointed out to 'a rift between legality and legitimacy' (p. 191) of social norms and institutions.

The most challenging and the most appealing to me personally is part III 'Informal Public Sectors and Welfare: State Intervention or Withdraw?' with the focus on 'cutting edge' issues in interaction between state and informal sector, mostly within state-run institutions.

I would certainly recommend my students to read at least two chapters out of it - "Informal Payments for Healthcare Services in Lithuania and Ukraine" (Tetiana Stepurko, Milena Pavlova, Irena Gryga, Liubove Murauskiene and Wim Groot) and "Governing Informal Payments in Healthcare: Lessons from China" (Gingqing Yang). Both chapters overview practices of under-the-table payments as a wide-spread phenomenon within the healthcare facilities. Authors analyze relevant policies and level of state intervention, argue from different perspectives

the need for eradication of informal payments. After all researchers propose steps to formalization of informal practices and changing institutional environment within healthcare based on SPACE-matrix analysis (in case of Ukraine and Lithuania) or to complete elimination of informal practices (in case of China). In my opinion, policy recommendations for Ukraine are well-augmented by their authors. Such or similar advices are discussed for a long time; the healthcare reform was proclaimed a few times, yet not implemented. And healthcare system became isomorphic as such. It preserves formal socialist welfare features being at fact totally different, market-driven by its nature. This non-transparent system run by the state demonstrates so called self-organized adaptiveness to marketization of health services, as any other services in Ukraine (Semigina, 2013; Semigina & Mandrik, 2017).

The chapter 11 by Thom Davies deserves special mention. This chapter presents the three-year ethnographical research in the unique territory contaminated after the 1986 nuclear plant catastrophe. It describes the life of people around Chernobyl zone where state doesn't act at all and views informality as a coping mechanism or 'a normalized part of everyday life' (p. 230). Davies also brings up the rather contentious point that within the context of abandonment 'Chernobyl-affected citizens are compelled to employ unofficial understanding of space, and enact formal activities which circumvent their bio-political status of bare life...' (p. 229). That sentiment is a valuable one for those who wants to research the 'margins of society' (p. 229), however, I'm not sure it holds the same gravity for policy makers, as people had moved or come back to Chernobyl zone voluntarily, while the state took care of those who had been displaced to other regions.

The final chapter by Liam O'Shea related mostly to the Soviet and post-Soviet informal practices occurring within Kyrgyz police as the one of institutions of a patrimonial society. Among many of the evidences of marketization of police and relations of police with organized crime groups author mentioned the new practices of 'the purchase of positions and promotion in police' (p.286). It is worth to stress that this practice was (and is) rather similar to many public sectors of Ukraine. And overall analysis of police practices and mutual dependency relations could be applicable to Ukrainian situation up to 2014 disregard different political situation and political regime in two countries.

The book ends with the three-fold conclusions about nature of informality. Jeremy Morris and Abel Polese critically summarize findings and concluding remarks of contributing authors on cultural dimensions of informality, negative effects of such practices and their institutional-agency accounts.

All in all, the book is rather logically built, moving from one theme to the other, describing transformations on post-socialist societies that are by large rather similar. Despite the fact that the majority of contributions are not quite novel (as authors had already published papers and books with their findings), the strengths of this collection is the synergy of the presented ideas and concepts that altogether shape the multilayered and colorful picture of multifarious informal practices from macro-scale to community and personal levels. The diverse content allows readers to rethink, reconsider or reevaluate their own perception of informality as a social practice in different context and as at fact a universal societal phenomenon.

In the concluding remarks, it worth to mention that I was reading and reviewing a new book through triple-insider perspectives. First of all, I am a person who has a life experience of living in a country with high level of corruption, and manifold informalities belong to common practices in my environment, therefore I cannot be anything else but a subjective reader. Secondly, I am a scholar researching Ukrainian healthcare system that is noted for its informal practices and rigid formalities at the same time, and so I have my own visions of such practices. Finally, I am a lecturer teaching health policy analysis and used to look on the issues of informality within certain political and social theoretical frameworks. Thus I am also inevitable bound by that perspective and acknowledge that the economic opinions on the book regarding informal economies might result with other evaluations.

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