

*Vocational Training: International Perspectives* edited by Gerhard Bosch and Jean Charest. Routledge, Abingdon, 2010, 324 pp., ISBN 978 0 4154 6721 6, £95.00, hardback.

This comprehensive volume edited by Gerhard Bosch and Jean Charest provides an excellent overview of the state of affairs in selected vocational training systems around the globe. The volume contains detailed and well-researched case studies on developments in Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Korea, Mexico, Morocco, the United Kingdom and the USA. Its broad coverage of cases, moving beyond the 'usual suspects' by including developing and newly industrialized countries, is certainly one of the strong points of the book. Furthermore, the editors adopt a broader perspective on training by encouraging the contributors to take into account the links between vocational training and general education, further training and the labour market (pp. 11–21). This broader perspective on vocational training often also includes discussions on the role of the social partners and industrial relations as institutional factors supporting collective forms of skill formation such as apprenticeship training. Some individual chapters also look at the role of the state and consequences of changes in the partisan orientation of government (e.g. the chapter by Wiborg and Cort on Denmark and the chapter by Rainbird on the UK). Most country chapters are concerned with recent developments, i.e. during the last one or two decades. Some go back to the 1970s and 1980s, but generally not further back than that.

The broad message of the book is developed more implicitly than explicitly stated (however, see p. 22 in the introduction). Clearly, vocational training systems face different challenges and develop in different directions. In the developing and newly industrialized countries, policy makers are mostly concerned with expanding

vocational training and higher education opportunities in order to promote social and economic development. For the developed world, Bosch and Charest identify different patterns of change, depending on the particular 'variety of capitalism'.

In liberal market economies (LMEs), educational aspirations of youths and parents continue to be directed towards academic higher education, and vocational training is still seen as a dead end for weaker pupils. However, the chapter on Australia (by Cooney and Long) adds an interesting perspective to this well-known general statement by showing how policy makers have succeeded in expanding vocational training through apprenticeships with greater success than their British cousins (see Rainbird's chapter) because of stronger industrial relations. In Canada (Charest/Critoph), France (Méhaut) and partly the USA (Bailey/Berg), efforts at enhancing the 'vocationalism' of secondary and tertiary education institutions are observed.

In co-ordinated market economies (CMEs), in contrast, the challenge is to adapt workplace-based vocational training to the needs of a service and knowledge economy, which puts greater value on general and theoretical knowledge. Bosch argues that Germany's training system has been quite successful in adapting itself to this new challenge because of encompassing reforms of the training ordinances. In Denmark, recent reforms have enhanced the flexibility of the system without fundamentally changing its co-operative culture (Wiborg and Cort).

The upshot of this tour d'horizon is that, to a certain extent, a convergence process seems to take place, in which LMEs and CMEs discover each other's strengths, but maintain their particular flavour nevertheless. In LMEs, the value of workplace-based training is increasingly recognized as a tool to facilitate labour market integration, although in the USA, the trend seems to be reversing back to higher education (Bailey/Berg), and efforts of policy makers to expand the involvement of firms in training are not always successful (Rainbird). In CMEs, in contrast, the expansion of educational opportunities in higher education and the provision of transferable skills within training are becoming more important. In Germany, for example, the dual principle is extended from initial vocational training to higher education by establishing dual study programmes (Bosch, p. 158), demonstrating how transformations of the system interact with the forces of path dependency as the 'occupational principle' is transferred from secondary to higher education.

In my view, the edited volume has its greatest benefits for scholars, who are not (yet) experts on training, but in need of a reference point to delve deeper into individual cases. The case studies value dense descriptions of developments over the application of analytical arguments. Furthermore, there is no clear theoretical framework driving the selection of cases included in the book, except a relatively superficial reference to the Varieties of Capitalism debate. More cross-references between the individual case studies and maybe additional comparative chapters would have strengthened the comparative perspective.

The analytical and theoretical contribution of the volume could have been greater if more efforts had been invested in explaining the observed developments rather than describing them. Differences in the power resources of social partners, the set-up of industrial relations, as well as the role of policy makers and the state in general would be obvious candidates for further exploration. From a theory-driven perspective, the broad coverage of cases, which inexorably contributes to heterogeneity, can become a liability. In particular, the consequences of the enormous differences in the socio-economic and political contexts between countries such as Morocco and the USA need to be reflected in order to attenuate the concern that one is comparing apples with pears.

In sum, this edited volume makes an important contribution by providing an up-to-date and comprehensive collection of case studies that will benefit those scholars in need of a starting point for their own research. The strong points of the volume are its broad coverage of cases, including developing and newly industrialized countries, as well as its sensitivity to the links between vocational training, the general education system, further training and the labour market.

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