They point out three ways in which social exclusion of older people differs from exclusion in the population at large: they are not excluded by the labour market; the poverty generated by their absence from the market tends to be permanent and not temporary; and they tend in a variety of ways to be highly dependent upon their immediate neighbourhood. In their research on older people in deprived areas in three English cities they distinguished five types of elderly exclusion: from material resources, from social relations, from civic activities, from use of services and from the neighbourhood. They found a clustering of the different forms of deprivation: ‘In particular there was a strong relationship between exclusion from social relationships and exclusion from material resources confirming the way in which poverty and deprivation can combine to restrict participation in a range of informal social relationships’ (p. 178). Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.

Sociology and Anthropology, University of Wales Swansea

This book constitutes an ambitious attempt to portray the welfare mixes in five key industrial nations (Finland, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States), and to explain their sources and the ways in which they are expressed in the care of children and older people. The book has seven chapters and begins with an introduction on the importance of social care and the methodology of comparative research. Social care is defined as ‘giving informal or professional attention to whole persons who need help in their everyday lives’ (p. 7). The following five chapters focus on the five countries, each providing a full and fascinating account of the historical, economic and political origins of childcare and care for older people. We learn, for instance, how the development of Finnish care institutions was strongly influenced by international standards and by the increasing number of women taking work outside the home. Welfare in Germany, however, has been characterised by more continuity from the time of Bismarck to the present day. The Japanese case is more of a welfare-mix approach: on the one hand, people tend to live in three-generational family units and the norm is that women should care for both their parents and parents-in-law; on the other hand, the large majority of women also participate in the labour force.

Although many readers may be familiar with welfareist policies in the United Kingdom, John Baldock still provides a scholarly and extraordinarily fresh perspective. He shows how the roots of British welfare lie in a history of class-based administration and in values which are inseparable from Britain’s political and cultural history. The chapter on the United States indicates a largely market-driven system of social care, heavily supported by voluntary and denominational
provision. The final chapter should be of particular interest to scholars and academics: it attempts to embed the understanding of how care for children and older persons is provided in these five nations in a theoretical account of the developmental trajectories of social care systems.

In sum this publication has much to offer as a comparative account of social care services for children and older people in advanced industrial nations. It proposes that there are common pressures in all industrial nations which are driving their welfare systems toward similar forms of organisation and structure but, at the same time, that these trends are mediated by important differences in culture and history. This book provides a comprehensive undergraduate introduction to the diverse empirical realities of the generational aspects of social care. Its brief and concise chapters enable the reader to understand the normative and moral qualities of welfare systems in diverse geographical settings. They succeed in developing, and reaffirming, the importance of a distinctive analysis of social care welfare in a rapidly changing contemporary context. The focus on the key industrial nations sheds particular light on the comparative welfare-state literature, and on some of the difficulties of typologies of the internal logic of welfare states in diverse geographical settings.

On the back cover, the editors note that The Young, the Old and the State will be warmly welcomed by academics and researchers in social and public policy, health and social care and welfare economics. They also claim that it will be of interest to policymakers and NGOs involved in welfare and social care provision and that it is a useful source for students on undergraduate and graduate programmes. Though I agree with both assertions, I have two caveats. First, with the exception of Baldock, the authors give little attention to the inter-relation between social policy and social relations. As Fiona Williams (1994: 50) pointed out, ‘social relations, not only of class but of gender and “race” – not to mention age, disability and sexuality … underpin welfare policies, their outcomes, the organisation of labour within the welfare state, the diversity of services, political pressures and ideologies, and patterns of consumption’. I feel that the papers (especially the concluding chapter) could have given more attention to this matter. The second problem, of course, is the price of the book. At $80.00 or £49.95, it is surely out of reach of the undergraduate student, as well as of scholars from low- and middle-income countries. This is lamentable as the publication is one of the best attempts at understanding why current patterns of social care differ between and within countries, and what the consequences of these variations might be.

Reference


European Centre of Gerontology, University of Malta

MARVIN FORMOSA