

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



*One Company, Diverse Workplaces. The Social Construction of Employment Practices in Western and Eastern Europe*, By Marta Kahancová, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 263 pp., ISBN: 978-0-230-57977-4.

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Volume 67, Number 1, Winter 2012

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1008200ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1008200ar>

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### Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

### ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

McDonnell, A. (2012). Review of [*One Company, Diverse Workplaces. The Social Construction of Employment Practices in Western and Eastern Europe*, By Marta Kahancová, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 263 pp., ISBN: 978-0-230-57977-4.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 67(1), 148–150. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1008200ar>

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vers une autre voie que celle déjà tracée à maintes reprises, nous nous serions attendus à un peu plus de recul de la part de l'auteure à l'égard de ce que les dirigeants rencontrés racontent.

Parlant d'hommes, avec un petit « h » cette fois, il est également étonnant qu'aucun des témoignages récoltés et présentés ne proviennent de femmes dirigeantes. Hors de toute forme de rectitude politique ou d'essentialisme, il appert que le témoignage de femmes dirigeantes aurait pu être fort éclairant, notamment sur des thématiques comme le risque, la responsabilité des entreprises ou encore le leadership. Bien entendu, cela relève de choix méthodologiques certainement très valables que ne pas avoir de témoignages de femmes dirigeantes, mais cette absence saute aux yeux et atténue la portée de l'ouvrage et des conclusions que l'on pourrait en tirer. On dira la même chose de l'absence de la diversité ethnoculturelle en tant que phénomène social de plus en plus pris en considération par les entreprises. On s'étonne davantage de cette absence que la trame méthodologique et théorique de ce livre suggère une pluralité de possibles au niveau des identités et des appartenances.

Cet ouvrage a le mérite d'intégrer un ensemble de disciplines à une réflexion élargie sur les relations individus/entreprises. Plusieurs réflexions pertinentes parsèment ce livre et sa lecture est somme toute agréable car on y trouve un bel équilibre entre le livre savant et l'ouvrage de gestion axé sur les bonnes pratiques et le fameux « Que faire ? ». Cela dit, sous des allures de réflexion critique, au sens épistémologique du terme, se cache une approche nettement et beaucoup trop positiviste, du moins par rapport à ce que la première section annonce. En somme, voici un ouvrage à travers lequel se reflètent les efforts importants de l'auteure pour en arriver à une véritable réflexion et quelques pistes de solutions qui pourraient intéresser les gestionnaires d'entreprises. Loin de n'être qu'un ouvrage de type

philosophico-critique ou encore un livre de recettes du bon gestionnaire, *Mutation de la société, mutations des entreprises* possède toutefois les défauts de ses qualités, ou plutôt les défauts de la volonté de son auteure. À la fin de la lecture, on ne sait pas ce qu'il faut retenir. Faut-il conclure que l'apparent relativisme, omniprésent dans le livre, demande aux entreprises de constants ajustements et prises de risque ? Ne faut-il pas plutôt y voir une tentative de réconcilier individu et entreprise à travers une approche, voire une vision, par trop idyllique des relations humaines et sociales qui se tissent au sein des organisations ? Faut-il plutôt prendre acte des changements, des mutations, sans mesurer pour autant les impacts directs de ces mutations sur les relations entre les individus et les entreprises ? Voilà autant de questionnements qui demeurent suite à la lecture de cet ouvrage. Deux sections, deux objets, peu de mise en commun en conclusion. Voilà le point le plus négatif de ce livre qui, au demeurant, possède une pertinence certaine, notamment parce qu'on y retrouve tout au long de la lecture une volonté de sortir des cadres stricts de la science économique et de sa manie de ne voir en l'être humain qu'un acteur mû par le désir, l'envie et la domination. Qui plus est, on y note une volonté d'intégrer des objets et des thématiques dans une seule et même analyse, ce qui n'est pas chose commune, disons-le.

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### **One Company, Diverse Workplaces. The Social Construction of Employment Practices in Western and Eastern Europe**

By Marta Kahancová, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 263 pp., ISBN: 978-0-230-57977-4.

This is a well-written and researched book that examines the influence of home and host factors on the employment practices enacted by multinational companies (MNCs) in both western and, most significantly,

eastern European contexts. Although this is a field that has been subject to significant research, the refreshing approach adopted by the author in integrating sociological and institutional theory to explore how Electra, a Dutch owned MNE, has become embedded in its subsidiaries in France, Belgium, Hungary and Poland is particularly welcome and significant. The key focus is on the *process* of embeddedness rather than the more common approach adopted thus far on the *outcomes* of MNC embeddedness in different host environments. There are three principal objectives. First, the book maps the employment practices in subsidiaries of MNCs to explore the extent of their diffusion within the organization. Second, it explores how MNC embeddedness takes place. Finally, it investigates the conditions that support the embeddedness of MNCs and the construction of employment practices. The innovative theoretical foundation of the book is supported by high-quality, in-depth case study research incorporating some one hundred interviews with key actors, as well as analysis of company reports, documents and media publications.

The core themes in which the book engages are strongly linked to these objectives with the first chapter setting out the theoretical framework utilized for analyzing the empirical data, followed by setting the case study context and highlighting the employment practices focused upon. The next two chapters deal with interactions between headquarters and subsidiaries and the role institutions and other actors play in the development of employment practices across the studied operations. Prior to the discussion on how the diversity of employment practice is strongly linked to their social construction, there is some fascinating discourse surrounding the role of trade unions and more particularly cross-border interaction between unions and other employee representatives.

There is no doubt that the theoretical framework developed through integrat-

ing institutional and sociological theory is sophisticated and innovative. The author makes a compelling case for researchers to consider looking outside the realm of institutional theory as a sole theoretical approach in explaining variation in employment practice. The author effectively argues that institutional and economic conditions (e.g., employment standards, labour legislation) fail to sufficiently explain divergences in employment practices and that social interactions play a acute role. Explaining variation in employment practice in MNCs is now a long standing literature but, as the author suitably notes, the focus has too often been on the macro institutional level, with a failure to include more micro level social interactions. Consequently, future research should attempt to incorporate greater complexity through the inclusion of social interactions. This would assist in informing whether the findings from this one case study organization, a limitation of the research, have more generalizable applicability. In particular it would be interesting to establish if social interactions play as important a role in MNCs headquartered in more economically dominant and 'best management practice' associated countries (e.g., United States) as they did in this case.

Linked to the preceding point, it emerged from the subsidiaries studied that the role and impact of local actors varied according to host country. There was a complex interaction of the MNC, local actors and the institutional conditions of the host countries resulting in distinct interactions occurring. The dynamic of these interrelationships were significantly associated with how much involvement local actors had in the construction of employment practices. What clearly emerged in the research was the importance of trust and informal relationships for cooperative engagement and interaction to take place. Yes, the institutional environment emerged is of great consequence through providing some degree of regulation in the

local labour market, however it was the social interaction and associated trust and informal relations that were particularly important factors in the determination of local employment practice. This was particularly the case in the central and eastern European (CEE) subsidiaries where employment standards and regulations were far from extensive vis-à-vis the western economy subsidiaries. The author suggests that the decentralized management approach involving the social construction of local employment practices had long-term profitability benefits to the MNC. While this could have been validated in a stronger manner it did appear that the social constructionism approach readily apparent in how practice was determined at local level, coupled with the concern expressed for employee welfare by the MNC, had a positive impact on the bottom-line. Further to the benefit to the MNC, the local actors benefitted through societal spill-over effects. For example, the study illustrated a significant improvement in employment standards in the two CEE societies, along with improved wages and fringe benefits. While the case made for terming Electra as a company that takes corporate social responsibility seriously is strong, one could suggest a more cynical, critical stance and argue that they may be going beyond current local employment standards to set the agenda in advance of these economies becoming far more developed and institutionalized.

The impact of trade unions and employee representatives and their cross-border coordination and cooperation/competition on the sustainability of the social construction mechanism was a particularly interesting aspect of the book. Indeed, I feel that these findings could have been drawn out further because there are points of great importance to the labour movement. However, I acknowledge that this may have taken away from the three primary objectives of the book. The clear inference of unions failing to effectively engage in cross-

border cooperation, which is argued could strengthen their bargaining power in some MNCs, is worthy of greater reflection and investigation. It appears that these unions suffer from some of the main problems long highlighted in the extant MNC literature on an ethnocentric ideology and the failure to leverage the potential advantages from cross-border cooperation and learning.

In summation, the key contribution of this book is that it moves beyond the traditional focus of home and host country effects in MNCs by integrating a social construction approach. This productive line of theorizing argues that one cannot separate the social construction of employment practices from the institutional environment and the overarching interests of the MNC and vice versa. The empirical evidence provides support for this and the novel approach adopted here is one of considerable merit. Indeed, the in-depth nature of the comparative data is a major strength of this work. The comparative analysis illustrates some interesting insights into variation in employment practice across the subsidiaries of the same MNC and the processes through which this occurs. While the practices included are somewhat narrow there is no doubt about the value of this research. Researchers in this line of enquiry should consider its use in engaging in more thorough, deeper and complex levels of theoretical analysis which can facilitate knowledge advancement in a significant way. The case made is quite compelling that a rational perspective of MNC behaviour along with institutional determinism accentuating significant host country impacts is insufficient in explaining employment practice variation, rather one needs to also account for the interests and power resources of the key actors and how they interact. With its fresh approach to a long-standing area of academic enquiry, this book is a fine addition to the literature.

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