

## ***Making a living in Europe: human geographies of economic change***

by Alan R Townsend; Routledge  
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In recent years there has been a refiguring of the economic in economic geography (Thrift and Olds, 1996, 313), but as Alan Townsend comments even in the 1990s some, "economic geographers have tended to ignore the human aspects of economic change and to explore theories only of the manufacturing sector" (Townsend 1997, 6). His book explores 'peoples struggle to make a living' in Europe today, by focusing on jobs (work for economic relations) and the changing nature of labour markets in a much-changing Europe. His analysis involves 'looking' beyond Europe, for example when examining globalization (through the strategies of European TNCs) and flexibilisation (with comparisons with the US labour market). In order to write such a book on Europe the author has naturally had to make extensive use of published data, with the attendant definitional problems, especially with the 'blurring' of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity.

The book is divided into three sections and eleven chapters. Part One explores *Restructuring, flexibility and unemployment* in which the European employment 'problem' is set in its global and regional context. Part Two - the core of the book - *The main sectors of change*, highlights the central issue of the replacement of industrial jobs for men by more flexible jobs in the service sector for women. Part Three the *Consequences across the map of the European Union* examines the outcome of change in terms of the shift of people and jobs from urban to rural areas, and the need for stronger EU policies.

In the introductory chapter, *Principal Themes*, Townsend feels that, "we need a people-based economic component of human geography rather than 'economic geography'" (8). Chapter Two focuses on unemployment, "the leading problem of the EU as a whole in the 1990s" (22). It is refreshing to see the unwaged placed 'centre stage'. In Chapter Three the dynamics of prosperity in Europe are highlighted at a number of spatial scales (regional, metropolitan).

Part Two, the core of the book, begins with a chapter exploring factory job losses for organisations, especially transnational corporations, with case studies. The complexity of globalization is thus presented. Unfortunately we have to wait until Part Three for any discussion of the role of small manufacturing firms. Part Two focuses on feminisation and the rise of the service sector, in all its diversity - producer and consumer services, including retailing, the geographies of consumption and tourism. All of which are well articulated. I will highlight just one chapter, Chapter Five, *Flexibility through Feminisation*.

In this chapter there is an excellent exploration of gender roles, labour markets and the household. Here we have an integration of 'work' and 'home'. Thus although the focus of the book is very much the 'workplace' he does address Peck's (1996, 34) comment that, "it is necessary to look over the factory gates, to consider the social production and reproduction of

workforces and the values that unite and divide them". He thus explores the home as a site of work, discussing the tasks of social reproduction, the commodification of some of these tasks, homeworking and teleworking (107-9). I personally would have liked to have seen part of this discussion on the implications of the intertwining of home and work in decisions relating to access to the labour market for men and women presented in Chapter One, and then he would have really stretched the definition of 'work' right at the outset of the book.

In Part Three the consequences of counterurbanisation are explored (Chapter Ten *Geographical Trends - Towards Rural Areas*). The changes highlighted earlier on in the book are drawn together. The changing face of rural areas is described, with brief mention to agricultural changes, the growth of small firms, and the complex reasons that lie behind decisions relating to rural in-migration in Europe today (Dahms 1998; MacFarlane 1998). The final chapter is a well written conclusion.

*Making a Living in Europe* provides a useful account of a wide range of issues relating to the changing nature of work for economic relations and its spatial dynamics in Europe today. It certainly succeeds in examining the intersections of economic geography with political, social and cultural theory and we have a richer understanding of the economic to capture the changing nature of work for economic relations in Europe. The book will provide a useful source text, and his critical analysis has been applauded elsewhere (Gregson *et al* 1998, 3). Townsend certainly succeeds in passing on his fascination in the "living geography of work" (ibid XIII) through an accessible text in which good use is made of case studies, maps, diagrams and statistics. The summaries of the key points made in each chapter will be useful to students, and I am sure that the book will find its place on many reading lists, if it hasn't already.

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### **References**

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