

## Book Review

# Poverty in Scotland 2011: Towards a more equal Scotland

John H. McKendrick, Gerry Mooney, John Dickie and Peter Kelly (eds) 2011.  
Child Poverty Action Group ISBN 9781906076597. 240 pages

We live in an information age. Statistical information and sociological trends are available in quantitative and qualitative abundance. From a few households to a nation state the information is out there in the ether.

Therefore, it is the interpretation and understanding of the available information that should shape any analysis. *Poverty in Scotland 2011. Towards a more equal Scotland* attempts to interpret, analyse, understand and makes some attempts to suggest responses to poverty. The book is a collection of essays with an underpinning theme relating to poverty in Scotland. The sixteen contributors are from a broad social science spectrum covering health, children, housing, families, income, environment and academia.

What might the reader learn from this book?

That poverty is a complex issue and opinions on what it is and how to measure it are manifold. Some of the many aspects discussed include absolute, relative and fuel poverty. The disproportionate impact of being old or having young children is also considered. Levels of income before and after housing costs are analysed, educational outcomes relative to deprivation are also thrown into the mix. The list goes on and it is hardly surprising, given that the sixteen contributors have created twenty-three chapters split into six sections over the 240 pages, that the book lacks a natural flow. However, the introductory chapter by Gerry Mooney sets the framework for the book with substantial clarity. Mooney thunders out stark statistics about the massive increase of wealth for the UK's top thousand multi-millionaires and contrasts this with the level of cuts being inflicted on the poorest in society.

The next two sections bombard the reader with statistics on the relative nature of poverty in Scotland and in a wider European context. It is encouraging to see the extensive use of statistics from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). This robust and regularly updated index should play a major part in any analysis of poverty and community profiling for both students and practitioners in the social science fields in Scotland.

The raw statistics paint a bleak monochromatic picture of poverty in Scotland. This image is brought to life in full technicolour with a brief study of the 'othering' of those living in relative poverty in Shettleston and elsewhere. The study of how people living in relative poverty are portrayed by the media uses the Glasgow East By-election in 2010 as a backdrop. Images of residents as helpless and hopeless ne'er do wells living on the public purse abound! The short passage on this subject crystallises the whole debate about poverty. For some it is 'their own fault', and if only the poor

got motivated they could waltz out of poverty in no time. For others, poverty is regarded as a result of several social and political processes impacting on individuals and families over a period of time. The book gives ample evidence that living in poverty has a negative impact on health, income, education and the length of life. It also contrasts the 'we are all in this together' rhetoric with the widening gap between the haves and have nots. The reversal of the positive but limited improvements in child poverty and health over the previous decade is evidenced. Tanahill and Whyte appear to suggest that aspects of the existing health model are unsustainable in the current climate. Therein lies the dilemma: for some the current model of resourcing society's needs is unsustainable; for others the current model could be maintained and improved using the massive wealth in the UK.

Other contributors to *Poverty in Scotland 2011* focus on changes in emphasis and delivery models. The range of ideas and partial solutions to poverty appears quite an eclectic but thought provoking mix. I suspect that this book might be more influential in developing a broader understanding of poverty than directly influencing policy on the issue. The scale and scope of the contributions could make *Poverty in Scotland 2011* an excellent reader on the subject for students new to the social sciences and the complexities of poverty as a concept. If it is aimed at that market, it is probably a very useful and influential read for the next generation of social scientists.

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