Neoliberalism is a peculiar phenomenon: Nobody, to my knowledge, identifies as being a neoliberal, yet several publications have recently demonstrated how four decades of neoliberal reforms have transformed Western democracies in surprisingly uniform ways. In this sense, neoliberalism is an ideology without proponents, or, to use vocabulary from The Relational Welfare State: Between Utopia and Ideology, a utopia that has successfully manifested itself by replacing or transforming other socio-historical regimes.

Neoliberalism is clearly the antagonist in this rich, and often thought-provoking volume on social policy research, with perspectives from legal studies, management, political science and history. The centre of attention is how neoliberal reforms serve to restructure the state apparatus modelled on the business enterprise, while transforming public services in fields like health services, care and education. Driven by a discourse of scarcity, permanent reforms are launched to increase 'efficiency' and 'productivity'. The question is how well the Nordic welfare states can survive this type of pressure.

The Nordic welfare states, as described over 12 chapters, were developed via political struggles where conflicting interests were historically settled in the form of mediating, institutional arrangements such as collective bargaining. The relative equality, trust in authorities, and aspirations to full employment in these states were founded on the open recognition that a society consists of conflicting interests, notably between labour and capital – a recognition that is currently being eroded by neoliberalism's harmonising policies and governance. This historical background could also explain why Anglo-American political theory, rooted in different historical experiences, fails to grasp the relationship between individual and state in the Nordic context (and possibly therefore can serve as a spearhead for neoliberal reforms). In one of the most informative chapters, political historian Pauli Kettunen sets forth a notion of "social citizenship" where individuals are engaged as parties to social relationships based on their interests, in contrast to the (Anglo-American or neoliberal) notion of the isolated individual's social rights. Work is a central category here, as the development of the Nordic welfare state can be seen as an effort to "make it everybody's right to fulfil everybody's duty to work" (p. 102). Paradoxically, perhaps, the focus on individual rights is a source of new, social conflicts nurtured by distrust between groups.

The Nordic nations, with their history of valuing solidarity, equity and inclusion, have not

resisted international trends of increasing inequality in wealth and income (indeed, the increase is among the largest in the OECD area). This development is buttressed by neoliberal orthodoxy whereby individual subjects are posited as responsible via their choices. Replacing collective interests with individual rights, a structure of metrics and incentives (often operating in the reverse, as punishment), render collective arrangements seemingly irrelevant. An illustrating example (chapter 9) is how the discipline of social work is being transformed by the discourse of responsibilization where individuals are targeted with measures to make them "employable". This process increases the administrative load of social workers and reduces the ability to exercise professional judgment, much to the dismay of the social workers and local administrators who nonetheless comply.

A central thesis seems to be that the Nordic welfare state is not only a set of political and economic arrangements and institutions, but more importantly a type of regime where relations are central, described in terms like "relational rationalities" and "social sustainability". The foregrounding of the relational is only partially coherent: In some chapters, the term relational is used as a synonym to corporatism, while in others it is refers to the education of social workers, as a new professional paradigm. Considering that the chapters frequently analyse notions like values, political imaginaries, norms and "symbotypes" and make reference to specific, historical Nordic imaginaries such as equity/parity, trust (in authorities and institutions), and solidarity, the foregrounding of relations is hardly justified. It thus seems exaggerated when the editors state (in the epilogue) that individual subjects are "made by" their relations. Moreover, is there not a danger that the "soft" term relationality can be consumed by the neoliberal jargon of soft governance? Other aspects of the title are also somewhat misleading. Notably, the term Nordic in this volume means Finland and Scandinavia, with emphasis on the former. Iceland is not mentioned in places where it would have been natural, for example when nations are compared on various variables, and only figures in one sentence plus a footnote. Another disappointment is that the notions of utopia and ideology, so central in the title, are not explained or used for anything significant.

When read from the beginning to end, it becomes clear that several of the chapters are unique studies. Several chapters are well-written and -portioned, but some of the more specialised chapters use too complicated terminology to be of general interest. However, after a bumpy first section, where each new chapter sets out with a new introduction and

conceptual framework, the flow of the volume improves considerably. To avoid consecutive setbacks, a good choice would be to start with chapter 5, ”The rise and fall of the Nordic utopia of an egalitarian wage work society” by Pauli Kettunen, which is cross-referenced by several other chapters, even preceding ones. Other highlights for this reader are chapters 6, 9 and 10, whose respective topics are the introduction of rights-based childcare (Finland), transformations in the discipline of social work (also Finland), and notions of social sustainability in Nordic firms (Denmark, Norway and Finland) – all of which added insight to the book’s central theme. Taken together, the collection elucidates why the notion of individuals being responsible for their own lives is faulty, politically dangerous and socially erosive.

One question that begs itself is this: Could there not be something in the rationality of the Nordic welfare state, a form of biopolitics – for example in the fact that relationships of care are impersonal, set inside institutional arrangements where individuals are replaceable – that could help to explain how neoliberalist reforms have penetrated the ideological fabric of the Nordic model? In the present volume, neoliberalism is treated as an outside force, a threat or opponent to the Nordic relational welfare regime, but I would have liked to see a discussion that cast a sceptical eye on this narrative as well. Also curiously lacking is a discussion of how immigration – and mobility in general – puts pressure on the legitimacy of universal services and social benefits. As the narrative goes, the Nordic welfare arrangements were developed during a time of cultural homogeneity which is now challenged by immigration. But this is not true: the homogeneity was only on the surface. Unfortunately, the volume makes no mention of national and indigenous minorities, and no references to Greenland, Sápmi or Lappland.

That said, the volume is a timely contribution, and through concrete examples also very helpful to understand how forty years of reform have fared in this corner of the world. Through their choice of perspectives, the authors demonstrate that there is still a particularly Nordic outlook whose arrangements are the result of concrete, interest-based struggles and thus not as continuous or robust as some might like to believe – along with the dawning realisation that not only our states, but also the ecological systems are not necessarily sustainable.