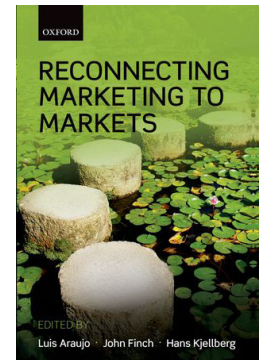


NEW BOOKS

Vadim Radaev

Bringing Marketing Back to Markets

Book Review: Araujo L., Finch J., Kjellberg H. (eds) (2010) *Reconnecting Marketing to Markets*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.



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Abstract

This book review is devoted to the interdisciplinary volume *Reconnecting Marketing to Markets* edited by Luis Araujo (Lancaster University Management School), John Finch (Strathclyde University), and Hans Kjellberg (Stockholm School of Economics). The volume includes texts authored by scholars representing fields of academic marketing, economic sociology, science and technology studies, and economics. These collected texts aim to re-examine the historical link between markets and marketing and develop an integrative approach to connections between academic marketing, marketing management and markets with the help of the performativity argument.

In this review, Radaev discusses the relationship between the sociology of markets and academic marketing as neighbor research areas, which focus on studying markets, but he discusses how they ignore each others' achievements. He notes that the interest in how markets really work integrates both economic sociology and academic marketing. Then, Radaev describes the general idea of the book — marketing produces markets — and points out its four conceptual premises. First, markets are practical outcomes of organizing efforts. Second, theories about markets are performative. Third, market exchanges require framing with considerable investment in material arrangements and measurement instruments. Fourth, market agents are hybrid collectives, involving material elements and non-human objects. Finally, Radaev briefly describes the content of the book, which covers various empirical research on branding, retailing, product qualifications and so forth.

Keywords: academic marketing; economic sociology; market exchange; relationship marketing; social embeddedness; material practices; performativity.

Economic sociology and academic marketing present neighbor research areas. They have common theoretical roots and many common research interests, including their focus on the relational aspects of market exchange viewed as an ongoing process, accompanied by the formation of long-lasting ties between exchange partners; the active use of the network approach; studying motivation of the market participants; and stressing the importance of communication and information exchange [Kotelnikova 2012]. When studying market exchange, marketing researchers use categories that are very familiar to sociologists. These categories may include solidarity, durability, flexibility, information exchange,

and mutuality as relational exchange dimensions as well as satisfaction, performance, and commitment as outcome variables [Rajamma, Zolfagharian, Pelton 2011]. However, there is a remarkable deficit of papers on relations between economic sociology and marketing research although markets were acknowledged as a main object of studies by proponents of both disciplines long ago. Even in very comprehensive and highly professional reviews of studies in relationships marketing like the review produced by Jagdish Sheth, Atul Parvatiyar, and Mona Sinha in this volume [2015] you will find virtually no reference to sociological research although many topics would be relevant for sociology of markets.

It is worth noting that the term “relationship marketing” was formally introduced in the beginning of the 1980s [Berry 1983], which coincided with the years when new economic sociology developed a major research program based on the concept of social embeddedness for the following decades [Granovetter 1985]. It was not accidental given the two disciplines had some common sources of inspiration in the contractual theory of Ian Macneil [1980] and a critical evaluation of the transaction cost approach of Oliver Williamson [1994]. Despite having some common roots, economic sociology and marketing research took different paths. And even dealing with the same subjects and facing similar conceptual problems, today they rarely cross over disciplinary boundaries in an explicit way. Instead, they do many things in parallel [Radaev 2015]. It is true that marketing scholars have borrowed some categories from sociology, including the notion of embeddedness from Mark Granovetter, but the mutual exchange of ideas is very limited.

We believe that marketing research with its traditional “distributive bias” and focus on exchange and marketing channels could be complementary in some important elements to economic sociology which still has a certain “production bias”. Keeping this in mind, we should appreciate efforts to build bridges between marketing research and economic sociology. The book *Reconnecting Marketing to Markets* accomplishes this task rather effectively from an angle that was not considered by relational sociology [Fourcade 2007].

The book was edited by Luis Araujo (Lancaster University Management School), John Finch (Strathclyde University), and Hans Kjellberg (Stockholm School of Economics), who share our concern with the disconnect between academic disciplines, such as economics, marketing research, and sociology. The book includes a collection of empirical studies, mostly authored by marketing researchers with some important contributions from sociologists. It is aimed at examining the role of marketers in markets.

The main problem described by the contributors to this volume may seem unexpected to a reader who is not familiar with modern trends in marketing studies. They claim that insufficient attention in academic marketing research is paid to how real markets are constructed, shaped and changed over time. The point is that marketing research went through a substantive evolution from a broad social perspective to much more narrowly focused marketing management when a market was defined from a one-sided, supply perspective as a set of actual and potential buyers. Furthermore, early work in marketing was devoted to careful empirical studies of markets’ functioning when the markets were described as “perfectly heterogeneous.” Today, marketing theories largely postulate the outcomes of market mechanisms whereas theoretization of markets *per se* is under-developed. The same paradox is observed in economic theory, which often takes markets for granted [North 1997].

The major insights of this book are based upon four conceptual premises. First, markets are practical outcomes of organizing efforts. Markets are always “in the making” rather than “ready-made.” Second, theories about markets are performative. They cover theories of academic marketing, along with economics and economic sociology. Third, market exchanges require framing with considerable investment in material arrangements, calculative and measurement instruments. Fourth, market agents are hybrid collectives not confined to human beings but involving material elements and non-human objects. In short, marketing produces markets. These premises would be easily recognized by sociologists as manifestations of the performativity approach which originated from science and technology studies [Callon 1998; Callon, Muniesa, Millo 2007]. Indeed, the book

contains a lot of direct references to the performativity research stream. Thus, readers who are interested in contemporary marketing research and in performativity studies will have at least two reasons to read this volume.

This review briefly summarizes the book's chapters. Elizabeth Shove and Luis Araujo reflect upon the role of materiality in mundane consumption. They reject the concept of value that is inherent in material objects or in the meanings they evoke. Values are dependent on how objects are used and coordinated within practices.

Franck Cochoy describes grocery retailers' strategies of fencing and branding aimed at organizing marketplaces and persuading customers to behave like cattle rather than rational human beings.

Johan Hagberg rejects the notion of buyers and sellers as pre-existing types as a result of his observation of the market practices of a food company. He demonstrates that market agents are shaped by the exchange process as much as they shape it.

The study by Sophie Dubuisson-Quellier is focused upon multiple qualifications of the same product. Qualification activities are based on different techniques which help to stabilize the characteristics of products and consumers' preferences temporarily. She argues that there is no need to arrive at a single definition of the product or taste in the process of constant redefinition of products.

The role of calculative devices and reconfiguring managerial responsibilities are examined in the chapter by Frank Azimont and Luis Araujo. They trace the evolution of performance metrics as a fuel-retailing network moves from product to category management.

John Finch and Susi Geiger bring in the concept of trading zones from science and technology studies to the market studies. These zones are differentiated by the ways in which difficulties in communication and culture are negotiated and overcome by the actors. It explains how these actors who represent diverse expertise and culture are engaged in exchanges and learn to understand each other's calculations.

Liv Fries demonstrates how a business association for the service sector arranges interactions between the firms and assists in enhancing the reflexive capacities of market actors. These interactions help to shift agency between intertwined market and political spheres by framing the firms as actors with a distinct identity in the political world.

Thomas Reverdy discusses unexpected effects of gas market liberalization in Europe where despite numerous efforts competition is still limited to incumbent suppliers. He explores links between stabilizing market devices inherited from a previous monopolistic order and changing calculative practices.

Hans Kjellberg investigates controversies that could be provoked by certain marketing strategies. Taking the case of legal trials concerning a frequent flyer program EuroBonus, he explicates how market images are generated and how normalizing statements about the market are produced.

Daniel Neyland and Elena Simakova confront conventional marketing literature with the practices of Fair Trade clothing markets that construct economic exchanges as a solution to social problems, such as poverty. The notion of 'hybrid forums' is used to describe these market practices.

We would also draw attention to an extended commentary *Market as an Art and Science of Market Framing* written by Michel Callon whose work is extensively cited by the book's authors. Callon points out that well-established marketing concepts reflect upon the outcomes of competition rather than on mechanisms that

frame the market. He praises the authors of the book not just because they call for more realism and try to bring marketing closer to market realities. What is more important, they make an attempt to endogenize marketing practices described as a work of design, experimentation, and implementation of market socio-technical agencements. Callon argues that this endogenization of marketing makes it possible to understand market dynamics and processes of innovation in particular.

There are several themes that integrate this volume despite the different approaches and objects of the study. First, marketing efforts have consequences beyond individual exchange while they format a larger number of exchanges. Second, the book demonstrates how agencies are equipped with stabilizing market devices helping to accomplish the exchange. Third, the studies focus on the ongoing process of valuation rather than on the attribution of values to products. Finally, the whole book is not about how markets stabilize exchanges but rather how markets produce and tolerate instability. All in all, it is an attempt to prove that academic marketing not only helps practitioners to validate the findings of their experiments but performs certain kinds of markets. Most of the studies are ethnographic as it could be expected from the proponents of science and technology studies. However, data may come from a variety of sources including documents of legal processes or the trading journal *Progressive Grocer*.

We wrap up this review with a statement made by David Stark, a distinguished economic sociologist from Columbia University, in his reference to this book: “What happens when Science and Technology Studies examines the worlds of marketing? You get exciting studies in cases ranging from grocery stores and gas stations to Fair Trade and frequent flyer programs. This is a wonderful contribution to the new economic sociology of material practices.”¹

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¹ The Stark’s review printed on the back cover of *Reconnecting Marketing to Markets* [Araujo, Finch, Kjellberg 2010].

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Received: February 10, 2015.

Citation: Radaev V. (2015) Bringing Marketing Back to Markets. *Journal of Economic Sociology = Ekonomicheskaya sotsiologiya*, vol. 16, no 2, pp. 150–154. Available at: <http://ecsoc.hse.ru/2015-16-2.html>