

Understanding “failed” markets: Conflicting logics and dissonance in attempts to price the priceless child ^[1]

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ABSTRACT

While scholars have developed increasingly well-developed accounts of institutional change, little attention has been paid to how change is resisted and, in particular, how efforts to marketize fail. We draw on the institutional logics perspective to guide analysis of an empirical case of the failed attempt by the Dutch state to marketize childcare organizations and create a market for childcare. We document that even though the existence of logics that were antithetical to the market logic did not catalyze organized collective resistance to marketization, the market logic never took root, and marketization has even been rolled back. We argue that the failure to create a childcare market in the Netherlands was caused by individual-level cognitive dissonance that cumulated into profound field-level ambivalence that undermined efforts to implement market practices. We develop several propositions that could usefully guide future research on how cognitive dissonance might underlie the failure to construct markets. By theorizing failure to change a field, we contribute to the limited body of work that has looked at failed attempts to change institutions, arguing for more attention to individual-field cross-level dynamics.

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