

By John Smyth. Palgrave Macmillan. Published 6 July 2017. 235pp.

The central thesis of this well-constructed and well-referenced book is that in recent decades higher education policy – in common with much else that matters in human existence – has come to be shaped by neoliberalism’s blind and evidence-free prescriptions. As many commentators now assert, the real economy – which depends on cohesive social relations, humanism and respect for ecological integrity – has been usurped by a form of speculative, consumer-driven financial capitalism that may be divorced from reality but that nevertheless continues to dominate political discourse and, by extension, the governance of our institutions, including universities.

Apparently even the International Monetary Fund now believes that the virtues of neo-liberalism have been oversold because of the manifest social and economic failings of austerity. And yet such is the hold that even effete economic theories have on our collective mind-share, we seem unable to shake off their assumptions, attendant coercive rules and required behaviours, however negative and obviously damaging their effects.

Smyth describes the pernicious effect of fears peddled by politicians, policy elites and of course the eponymous “zombie leaders” of our universities, whom he accuses of slavishly adopting consumerist systems of rankings, metrics and reporting systems in order to demonstrate global competitiveness and thereby achieve reputational gain. (Fonte: D. Wheeler, THE agosto)