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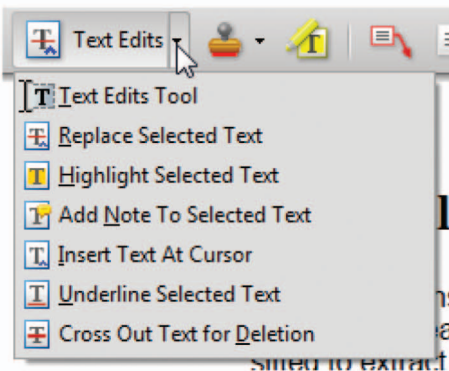
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## Book Review

### **The Oxford Handbook of Local and Regional Democracy in Europe**

Edited by John Loughlin, Frank Hendriks and Anders Lidström  
*Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, 785 pp., £80.75, ISBN 9780199562978*

Cross-national comparative research on local and regional government in Europe is a rapidly expanding field of inquiry, but has so far been dominated by exploratory and descriptive approaches, with a wide variety of theoretical concepts being suggested and upheld. Such concepts include the distinction between federal, regionalised and centralised or decentralised unitary states (e.g. by Bullmann), integrationist and separationist models of self-government and state administration (Leemans, Wollmann), political and legal localism (Page and Goldsmith) or the notion of gradual differences in regional authority, depending on combined degrees of shared and self-rule (Marks, Hooghe and Schakel). This unsettled state of the art is due to the complexity of subnational government and democracy as research objects. Correspondingly, few detailed cross-national data sets exist and the mainstreams of both comparative politics and comparative democracy assessment have largely neglected the democratic dimension and quality of subnational government.

Designing an *Oxford Handbook of Local and Regional Democracy in Europe* is thus a formidable dual challenge of structuring the existing diversity and selecting comparable, contextualised empirical information. To master this task, the editors, John Loughlin, Frank Hendriks and Anders Lidström, have relied on two conceptual building blocks. One is the concept of state tradition and the distinction between Anglo-Saxon, French, Germanic and Scandinavian state traditions (Peters and Loughlin), used by the editors to group the 29 European states they cover in the *Handbook*. The other basic concept is Lijphart's distinction between consensus and majoritarian democracies. The editors adapt this concept to the subnational level and complement it by distinctions between indirect and direct democracy as well as formal and informal democracy.

These two concepts are well-established and intuitively plausible to a professional readership. But the empirical reality of 'subnational governance in Europe ... is "hybrid democracy": a mixture of different models' (p. 729), as the editors recognise. The *longue durée* perspective underlying their distinction between state traditions may justify subsuming the historically late states of Eastern Europe as hybrids of the Germanic *Rechtsstaat* and French unitary traditions. However, grouping them together as 'New Democracies' raises the question of why this large group or its Baltic, East-Central and Southeast European subgroups are not as eligible for an additional, perhaps 'state socialist' (Habsburg? Ottoman?) state tradition as the Anglo-Saxon–French–Germanic hybrid states of Scandinavia were. East European difficulties with the editors' typology are indicated by Illner in his chapter on the Czech Republic (p.508) and by Swianiewicz, who refrains from categorising and rather stresses Poland's autochthonous state tradition (p. 481).

55 Abounding hybridity also constrains the attempt to identify subnational  
democracies as consensus or majoritarian democracies. In general, the editors find  
that the patterns of subnational democracy largely coincide with national patterns,  
i.e. the Rhinelandic (Germanic tradition) states most closely resemble an ideal type  
60 consensus democracy, although they elect their mayors directly which constitutes a  
feature of majoritarian subnational democracy (p. 736). The other state-tradition-  
based country groups are spread between this pole and the majoritarian,  
Westminster-type democracy of the British Isles. Direct democracy is found to be  
most widespread in Rhinelandic countries.

65 Regarding the empirical challenge of compiling comparable evidence from 29  
subnational democratic systems, the editors have successfully combined a  
systematised chapter structure with sufficient flexibility for its renowned country  
experts to focus on country-specific issues and harness available national data  
sources. Each chapter covers not only the institutional arrangements, functions,  
70 constitutional status, size structure and financial resources of subnational govern-  
ment, but also sketches the politics and governance of subnational levels as well as  
current reform debates. This invaluable wealth of information makes the *Oxford  
Handbook* an indispensable source for future comparative research on Europe's  
subnational democracies.

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