

## Book review

### EUROPEAN COHESION POLICY, REGIONS AND CITIES

W. Molle. Routledge, Regional Studies Association, UK, 2007.  
ISBN 978-0-4154-3812-4, £35, 368pp.

Over the last decade the European Union's cohesion policy has undergone growing academic scrutiny. The cohesion policy has been developed to reduce the large disparities in wealth between countries and regions within the EU territory and, the social and political problems these disparities lead to. Fuelled by the largest share of the EU budget, the cohesion policy is implemented through thousands of development projects administered at the national/sub-national level. Some are 'structural actions in support of urban issues' such as, the URBAN programme dedicated to the regeneration of urban areas and neighbourhoods in crisis. The URBAN initiative requires a high degree of involvement of local level authorities responsible for day-to-day implementation and, is advised by local community groups and in partnership with the national/regional authorities and the European Commission. Overall, there is no consensual view on the validity of purpose, form of implementation and actual impacts of the EU cohesion policy.

Several academic disciplines have incorporated the EU cohesion affairs as part of their research agendas, so a wide range of authoritative literature on the topic can easily be found. Harder to find however, is comprehensive cross-cutting analyses that help those new to the topic to place the available reading material in perspective. In this regard, Molle's *European Cohesion Policy*, has the hallmarks of a seminal book. The author demonstrates an impressive control of the topic addressed, doing so through a well-crafted user-friendly format. This may well be a skill developed in the course of over twenty authored books over a period of nearly thirty years, of which one may highlight the five editions of *'The economics of European integration: theory, practice, policy'* (1990–2006).

Molle's *European Cohesion Policy* provides a gateway into the topic, not as an in depth analysis per se (although all issues addressed are thoroughly referenced), but as a set of robust departure points that the readers can select and pursue according to their specific interests. The book's intended audiences are practitioners, researchers, policy makers working

with any aspect of the European cohesion policy and students from a range of academic fields identified by the author. Any student examining regional spatial strategies in Europe, European spatial planning or territorial cohesion in the context of a postgraduate planning course or research degree would greatly benefit from reading this book. This is not only because of the content, but also because of the way in which it has been structured and systematised.

From the outset, the author brings under close scrutiny the logic behind his choice of topic. Under the sub-section title, 'The controversy', Molle outlines a concise summary of the different standpoints on the validity of the European cohesion policy. In a nutshell, the book aims to make sense of these differences. In terms of structure, the first chapter lays down a clear route map of what the book sets out to deliver. This may be true of all introductions but, through the description of the core concept of the book, 'the policy cycle', the author provides with undeniable clarity the matrix that guides the reader through the whole book. The 'policy cycle' itself is split into six stages: 1. Assessing problems and identifying their causes; 2. designing a solution-oriented intervention system; 3. specifying objectives and matching them with instruments; 4. implementing actions and delivering outputs; 5. checking effectiveness and consistency and, 6. drawing lessons. These stages are the backbone around which the chapters are organised. Naturally each of the stages and corresponding chapters could be further developed, but the text is nonetheless sufficiently referenced to guide further in-depth reading elsewhere if the reader so wishes.

The author aimed to provide a clear yet, comprehensive review of the key themes and challenges of the European cohesion policy and, how these may influence the policy's future. This reviewing exercise opted to test the author's assumption that each of the stages could be read as an independent unit not, requiring a sequential use of the book to fully grasp its contents. The book delivers exactly what it sets out to. Furthermore, the accessibility of Molle's writing maximises his potential audience.

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