

Scott A. J., Storper M. (2003), Regions, Globalization, Development. *Regional Studies*, 37, 6-7: 549-578. DOI: 10.1080/0034340032000108697a.  
Throsby D. (2010), *The Economics of Cultural Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511845253.

CHIARA BURLINA  
GSSI – Gran Sasso Science Institute

V. FEDELI, C. LENZI, P. BRIATA AND L. PEDRAZZINI (EDS.) (2020)  
EU Regional and Urban Policy: Innovations and Experiences from  
the 2014-2020 Programming Period  
Springer International Publishing, ISBN 978-3-030-34575-4

Since its origins in the 1970s, EU Regional Policy has been central in the process of European integration and has grown significantly in importance and sophistication. Every round of the EU budget has been accompanied by a variation in the amount of resources allocated to EU Regional Policy and, most notably, by reforms in its logic and approach to development promotion. The 2014-2020 programming period has seen one of the most radical transformations in the history of Cohesion Policy. In their book, *EU Regional and Urban Policy: Innovations and Experiences from the 2014-2020 Programming Period*, Valeria Fedeli, Camilla Lenzi, Paola Briata, and Luisa Pedrazzini provide an in-depth and thorough examination of some of the crucial changes the policy has undergone for the 2014-2020 period. The focus is on key concepts, innovations and policy experimentations involving the regional and the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy. This attention to both the regional and urban aspect of Cohesion Policy is in line with the conceptual underpinnings of the reformed policy, adopting a «place-based» approach to regional and local development promotion (Barca, 2009; Barca *et al.*, 2012). The book's coherent structure lucidly guides the reader along key principles and policy tools inspiring the renovated Cohesion Policy in the 2014-2020 programming period, reviewing their role and possible shortcomings, moving from a regional to an urban perspective.

To begin with, the authors give space to the discussion of the socioeconomic context within which the reform towards a place-based policy took place, tying that to the concept of Smart Specialisation. The Smart Specialisation approach is arguably the most significant application of the place-based principle within the reformed framework. Smart Specialisation Strategies require EU regions to design development policies tailored to their pre-existing economic assets through the collaborative involvement of local communities and institutions. The book analyses the process that led Smart Specialisation Strategies to become a key conditionality for the 2014-2020 policy round and presents all key features of this fundamental concept. Importantly, besides extensively commenting on the potential merits associated to Smart Specialisation, the authors perform a systematic review of some issues that may limit its effectiveness (such as the tendency of regions to define too large areas of specialisation), highlighting a number of ways in which the strategic approach may be improved.

Next, the book analyses a key pillar of the reformed 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy, that of territorial cohesion, and the role of macro-regions. The authors review the evolution of EU programmes of territorial cooperation (Interreg, ESDP, ESPON) since their introduction in 2000, discussing how they have been renovated in order to fit the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy place-based paradigm and the Europe 2020 strategy. The design of macro-regional strategies for cross-border functional territories with common spatial characteristics (e.g. Alpine region) may be seen as one way to overcome the «spatial-blindness» of policy interventions. In that, macro-regions would represent the ideal ground for an application of the place-based policy method. Yet, while the authors claim that macro-regional strategies are assigned a central role for the promotion of territorial cohesion under the reformed Cohesion Policy system,

they also contend that the specificity of investment strategies is increasingly more focused on identifying regionally-tailored «thematic» objectives than on defining common approaches for cross-administrative regions with shared spatial features (e.g. mountains, islands), up to the point that, they argue, «the spatial policy approach [of *Cohesion Policy*] to homogeneous regions [...] is becoming evanescent» (p. 45).

The book then moves from a regional viewpoint to an urban perspective. The authors review the process through which the urban dimension has been progressively integrated within the EU integration project, and praise the creation of an EU Urban Agenda as a sign of the increased attention of Cohesion Policy for urban problems. In the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy, cities are acknowledged as strategic assets for addressing current societal challenges and managing innovations. Nevertheless, the authors also note that the policy has only partially recognised the high degree of interconnection between urban and regional issues, and the need of coordinated urban policy interventions dealing not just with city-level challenges, but also with metropolitan-level ones. Furthermore, they claim that more steps are needed to guarantee the success of the EU Urban Agenda. Being it a voluntary partnership with relatively limited resources, it may lack the necessary funds to implement its main findings.

Finally, the book places its attention on the concepts of social and urban innovation, regarded as key principles for intervention in urban areas for the 2014-2020 programming cycle. Social innovation concerns localised initiatives introducing novel practices, services, or models involving a transformation of social relationships and helping to address unmet needs. These initiatives may represent «a new source for *prosperity beyond economic growth*» (p. 66). Urban innovation programmes of the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy such as Urbact or the Urban Innovative Action, intended to promote out of the box urban policy-making solutions, may help to bring about and govern social innovation at the urban level. In this regard, the authors warn that the capacity of social innovation practices to reach the more disadvantaged groups in society is not granted, hence the need for a direct intervention from public authorities to help fostering these processes where they do not emerge in an autonomous way. More generally, they claim, public investment for social innovation and for welfare provision should be seen as complements, not substitute.

All in all, this book provides fundamental insights on many important aspects of EU Cohesion Policy for the ongoing 2014-2020 round. The careful assessment of the interplay between regional and urban EU policies and concepts represents a novel and important contribution with respect to similar works (McCann, Ortega-Argilés, 2015; McCann *et al.*, 2016; Medeiros, 2019). Each topic is presented from a historical perspective and in relation with up-to-date issues. Furthermore, several case-study analyses allow the reader to dig deeper into the complexity of the aspects treated. As such, the book constitutes a very important and useful reference for any student or scholar interested in EU policies and urban studies.

Even more importantly is, in my view, the critical approach adopted by the authors throughout the book, when examining the various aspects of the 2014-2020 policy. Alongside the advantages and merits of some new tools and concepts, they present possible avenues for improvements, whenever they feel there is room for them. Hence, this book can fruitfully be consulted by EU policy-makers, practitioners and local administrators. In light of the ongoing discussions on the unspent Cohesion Policy resources – included in the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) – and the 2021-2027 EU budget, the future Cohesion Policy is likely to play an important role for Member States, in order to help them face the turbulent times ahead. Any scholarly contribution carefully revising the most recent policy choices and proposing possible ways forward – such as the book by Fedeli *et al.* (2020) – should be welcome and noted by policy-makers.

#### REFERENCES

Barca F. (2009), *An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy: A Place-Based Approach to meeting European Union Challenges and Expectations* (Independent Report Prepared at the

- Request of the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Danuta Hübner*). Brussels: European Commission.
- Barca F., McCann P., Rodríguez-Pose A. (2012), The Case for Regional Development Intervention: Place-Based Versus Place-Neutral Approaches. *Journal of Regional Science*, 52, 1: 134-152. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9787.2011.00756.x.
- Fedeli V., Lenzi C., Briata P., Pedrazzini L. (2020), *EU Regional and Urban Policy: Innovations and Experiences from the 2014-2020 Programming Period*. Cham: Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-34575-4.
- McCann P., Ortega-Argilés R. (2015), Smart Specialization, Regional Growth and Applications to the European Union Cohesion Policy. *Regional Studies*, 49, 8: 1291-1302. DOI: 10.1080/00343404.2013.799769.
- McCann P., van Oort F., Goddard J. (eds.) (2016), *The Empirical and Institutional Dimension of Smart Specialisation*. London: Routledge.
- Medeiros E. (ed.) (2019), *Territorial Cohesion. The Urban Dimension*. Cham: Springer.

MARCO DI CATALDO  
Dipartimento di Economia, Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia

