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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Multinational Federations edited by Michael Burgess & John Pinder. London: Routledge, 2007. ISBN 978-0-415-41490-6

Multinational Federations is an edited volume that explores the challenges and strengths of federations containing constituent elements that are ethno-national and/or linguistic minorities. As a multi-authored collection stemming from a conference, it is difficult to discern a clear analytical thread running through the volume. The various authors each have different views not only on the particular strengths and weaknesses of multinational federations, but also on what constitutes a multinational federation. This lack of coherence should not, however, be interpreted as a weakness. Instead, it highlights a number of issues surrounding the nature of a type of state which appears, on the surface, to be easily recognizable. In doing so, the collection not only offers the reader an overview of the nature of the individual states under analysis, but also introduces the reader to debates on what exactly is a multinational federation.

Some of the federations examined are clearly multinational, such as Canada, Belgium or India. However, the use of Switzerland as one of the key cases needs further justification. Although Switzerland is a multilingual state, the issue of whether Cantonal identities are on a par with minority national identities (like Quebec within the Canadian federation) is never clearly established. If linguistic identities did form the main basis for national identities in Switzerland, it would have made for a more interesting case for comparison. In particular, it would mean that in Switzerland the sub-state nations and the sub-state orders of government did not map onto each other directly, which is very different from multinational federations in which the borders do match. The issue of identity could have been resolved by the use of survey data on identity in Switzerland, similar to the Moreno Question as used in Scotland and other parts of Europe, to examine layered identities (see Moreno, 2006).

Some of the case study chapters, such as those by Moreno on Spain or Ross on the Russian Federation, offered clear analysis and insight into the evolution and expression of federalism in the society under study. This author found the Spanish case to be especially intriguing as Spain does not officially regard itself as a federation. Similarly, the argument that current central government developments in Russia may be undermining the shared/self-rule aspect of federalism and federation demonstrated the fluidity of federalism in Russia and was written in such a way as to give a thorough overview of the Russian case to those less familiar with it. The chapters by McGarry and O'Leary, and Watts offered insight into some of the more theoretical aspects of federalism. In particular, by challenging the view that multinational federations are prone to failure, and using the examples of Canada and Switzerland (two of the world's oldest constitutional regimes), McGarry and O'Leary made a strong argument for how multinational federalism can work and, indeed, successfully.

The major theme running through this volume is the importance of the role of political culture. The success of multinational federations stems not only from formal constitutional arrangements, but also from the ways in which political actors interpret their states and make arrangements work. This is what Richard Simeon (2006), the Canadian scholar of federalism, refers to as the “federal ideal”. As Simeon was writing about policy making in Canada, and not multinational federations *per se*, it is not surprising that his work is not cited. Yet, its spirit is evident in this volume. This is especially true with regard to Simeon’s belief that federations take their shape not solely from formal arrangements, but also from how actors believe they should be run. From Canada to India to Russia, it was evident throughout this volume that the relationship between actors and institutions was essential to the success of multinational federations. As Watts notes in his concluding chapter, many of the arrangements that were deemed to be successful in these federations were not found in the formal constitutional arrangements of the states, but in the manner in which actors within the state interpreted the way in which federations should operate. Overall, this volume would be an asset to those generally interested in federalism, especially of the multinational kind, or any of the specific cases explored.

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Multi-level Europeans. The Influence of Territorial Attachments on Political Trust and Welfare Attitudes by Linda Berg. Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, 2007, ISBN 978-91-89346-32-4

This book presents the results of a study (PhD dissertation) carried out within the general analytical context of territoriality and welfare. The main normative thrust of this book is that more attention ought to be paid to citizens’ attachments and attitudes toward European system-building, as compared to the ever-growing analyses focused on the creation of EU institutions. Indeed, social sciences in Europe have been greatly influenced by neo-functional prescriptions which generally hold the view that universal progress requires a kind of integration that is made equal to cultural assimilation and single identity formation, along the lines of the American ‘melting-pot’ experience. This approach is often coupled with the view that ‘command-and-control’ policy provision is quintessential for securing organized solidarity and the maintenance of redistributive welfare. Alternatively, researchers such as Linda Berg envisage that European rules can be achieved and successfully accommodated only by taking into account both history and cultural diversity within the mosaic of peoples in the Old Continent.

Both territoriality and welfare have too often lived separated lives. Linda Berg's contribution is to be praised, above other considerations, because it bridges a long-standing gap whereby the territorial politics literature has tended to neglect the social dimension, while research on welfare has taken the centralized model of the nation-state for granted. This volume combines a large-scale comparative study of opinion data from all European member states with an in-depth study of opinion data from one country (Sweden). The datasets used in this study were collected in 2004, the year of the greatest enlargement in EU history, with ten new member states joining at the same time on 1 May.

The author develops both theoretical and empirical sections in each and every one of the chapters included in the book. As such, there is no single chapter devoted solely to theoretical matters, although there is an overall system-level discussion in a short introduction. In each chapter, Berg deals with an empirical section related to measurement and methodological aspects, and presents the results of the analyses conducted. Chapter 2 concentrates on the concept of multi-level territorial attachments. Chapter 3 investigates the relationship between multi-level territorial attachments and political trust, while Chapter 4 is concerned with the relationship between multi-level territorial attachments and welfare attitudes. In Chapter 5 the institutional context is included in the analysis as an intervening variable. Finally, Chapter 6 connects conclusions from the previous chapters to the model used in the study, and discusses the overall challenges to the state and European integration.

Berg rightly underlines the lack of commensurable data for carrying out comparative empirical analyses that are territorially disaggregated. On finding evidence to corroborate theoretical assumptions about 'nest' and 'multiple' identities, the maintenance of some categories of the NUTS classification appears most inappropriate. Let us remember that NUTS is a five-level hierarchical classification (three regional levels and two local levels), which subdivides each EU member state into a whole number of NUTS 1 regions, each of which is in turn subdivided into a whole number of NUTS 2 regions, and so on. As a consequence of this numerical breakdown some cultural and political regions, which are crucial for studies on citizens' attachments and self-identification, are not properly identified and operationalized for statistical purposes.

An entrenchment of EU statistical sources in what could be labelled the 'methodological nationalism' of some EU member states is out of tune with research and scientific activities. It makes no sense whatsoever to maintain artificial regional groupings which do not respond to the real cultural, political and social internal boundaries of the EU's member states. As a consequence, we still lack empirically grounded answers to important Europe-wide research questions such as: Does the legitimacy of national welfare policies decrease when there is an increase in people's regional attachments?

Despite difficulties posed by the NUTS hierarchical classification, the book written by Linda Berg will be most useful for all those interested in both comparative and in-depth studies on territoriality and welfare in Europe. In particular, this volume is to be welcomed by those researchers engaged in attempting to shed light on the intricacies of compound nationality, solidarity and welfare re-distribution in Europe.

Explaining Federalism. State, Society and Congruence in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany and Switzerland by Jan Erk. London: Routledge Series in Federal Studies, 2008, ISBN 978-0-415-43205-4

Federalism may be fruitfully studied from a political and a sociological perspective, as multiple examples in the literature have shown. Nevertheless, the sociological outlook has received far less attention than the political approach over the last decades. *Explaining Federalism* brings sociology back to the fore without resorting to the fallacy of structural-determinism inherent in some politico-sociological theories. Therefore, Jan Erk provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of the evolution of federalism in federal states.

Basically, the argument put forward in *Explaining Federalism* is that ethnic–linguistic–cultural cleavages in society lead to adaptations of federal institutions so that policy provision becomes congruent with society. The direction of change—i.e. centralization or decentralization—is given by a difference between the territorial scale of the ethnoregional community and the boundaries of federal institutions. Although the emphasis is on social structures, Erk makes it very clear that his theory of congruence does not rule out agency: “. . . the societal structure [predisposes] decision-makers towards demarcating their political communities in line with the ethno-linguistic structure, and thereby not only constraining the options available to them but also providing opportunities” (p. 88).

The theory of congruence is supported by an analysis of two policy areas (education and media) in five cases—Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany and Switzerland. The evidence presented is strong. For example, the linguistic/cultural communities in Belgium (Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia) and Canada (French-speaking Québec versus the English-speaking provinces) have developed linguistically demarcated public spaces and public policy is accordingly decentralized. Conversely, in Austria and Germany, Erk observes centralizing tendencies fostered by nationwide cultural homogeneity, despite explicit *Länder* jurisdiction over education and media. Apparently, the allocation of authority over tiers does not matter.

Explaining Federalism presents even more interesting findings. Centralization does not imply that the federal tier gains authority at the expense of the state tier. In Switzerland, for example, the six French-speaking cantons co-ordinate their education policies via numerous commissions at the supra-cantonal level but there are few efforts to co-ordinate policies with the *Bund* or the German-speaking cantons. In addition, incongruence may lead to decentralization or centralization in one country at the same time, which leads to asymmetries. For example, in Canada, federal grants and shared-cost programmes for education have been welcomed by the English-speaking provinces but not by Québec, which reserves its provincial rights.

Asymmetry in federal design is a well-known object of study. However, what is new in Erk’s analysis is that he shows that incongruence may lead to adaptations in the day-to-day practice of federalism, which bypasses the constitution. The examples above indicate that para-constitutional solutions for the inner workings of federalism may flourish to the extent that the jurisdiction of constituent units does not overlap with the territorial scale of the linguistic community. These solutions may, or may not, eventually lead to formal institutional change.

To what extent is the theory of congruence generalizable? Erk deals with the federations of the USA, Spain and Australia in the final chapter but he does not ask the question of whether his theory can be applied to other policy areas. And here the theory of congruence probably finds its limits.

Exploring Federalism does not provide—nor does it need to—an explanation of why certain policies are centralized or decentralized. Erk observes in Germany that the *Bund* has a large role in *higher* education policy whereas the six French-speaking cantons in Switzerland standardize their policies also with respect to *secondary* education and vocational training. What determines the decision to provide higher education at the *Bund* level in Germany whereas the *Romand* cantons in Switzerland opt to coordinate multiple education policies at the supra-cantonal level? Functional and economic characteristics of policies may explain these centralizing trends. An expert survey on the functional characteristics of policies (Schakel, 2009) shows that higher education should be provided by jurisdictions of 1 to 10 million people and secondary and vocational education by jurisdictions of 100 000–1 million people. The average population size of the *Länder* is about five million, whereas that of the *Romand* cantons is about 300 000. For the French-speaking cantons there are efficiency arguments to centralize secondary education and vocational training, which are absent in the German case.

Interestingly, the citations used by Erk provide evidence that political actors recognize the economic and functional benefits associated with the centralization of education policies. For example, the first Federal Minister of Education and Science in Germany said that "... if the *Bund* and *Länder* can agree on an educational reform ... [this] ensures society a productive and efficient educational system" (p. 69) and a Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) member of the *Nationalrat* in Austria declared: "... our responsibility towards future generations urgently demands from us a school system that is as unitary as possible in order to provide these generations with the tools to function in a modern economy" (p. 24).

To conclude, *Exploring Federalism* reinvigorates the sociological approach of federalism by highlighting the usefulness of a society-based approach. At the very least, the theory of congruence shows that conventional institutionalist approaches cannot sufficiently account for patterns of change and continuity in federal countries. In this sense, the book is of great interest for federal scholars but also for comparative political scientists in general. It could be that the theory of congruence has policy- and country-(jurisdiction) specific implications. Therefore, more work needs to be done in order to fully understand the dynamics of change in federal systems. A promising avenue for further research would be to apply the theory of congruence to other policy areas and to provide an analysis which 'accounts' or 'controls' for functional and economic characteristics of policies.

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