



## Book review: "Handbook of Territorial Politics"

Kévin Vercin

### ► To cite this version:

Kévin Vercin. Book review: "Handbook of Territorial Politics". European Review of International Studies, 2019, 6 (1), pp.89 - 93. 10.3224/eris.v6i1.12 . hal-03456063

**HAL Id: hal-03456063**

**<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03456063>**

Submitted on 29 Nov 2021

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## **Detterbeck, K. and Hepburn, E. (eds.), *Handbook of Territorial Politics***

(Northampton (MA): Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018), pp. 432, ISBN: 978 1 78471 876 3

*Reviewed by* **Kévin Vercin**

Sciences Po Paris

Students in territorial politics will find in this *Handbook of Territorial Politics* a helpful introduction to the main themes and schools which are present in this field of social sciences. Edited under the supervision of Eve Hepburn and Klaus Detterbeck, both leading academics when it comes to territorial parties, this handbook brings together political scientists, lawyers, historians, sociologists and geographers. The volume is divided into four sections: the first deals with institutions, actors and ideas involved in territorial politics, giving a general overview of the subject; the second is focused on territorial parties, culture and elections; the third is concerned with public policies conducted by territorial entities; and the final section covers how territorial politics vary from one continent to another. We shall follow the four sections and give a brief review of each contribution alongside some general remarks before presenting some elements which could have further enriched this already exhaustive handbook.

As indicated above, the first part of the handbook deals with some general notions regarding territorial politics, its acts, and institutions. The section is opened by an excellent contribution from Michael Keating which, taking a constructivist perspective, traces back the evolution of territorial politics over the last decade, showing how it was reinforced and resulted in different rescaling of political and economic systems within and outside States. The following chapter by Nathalie Behnke makes a case for the concept of ‘multilevel government’ in order in order to better understand the rationale and different ways States allocate competences and resources. The contribution by Nicole Bolleyer looks at the difficulties resulting from the delicate interplay between interdependence (which is to be distinguished from decentralisation by looking at the allocation of legislative, administrative and fiscal resources) and coordination (both intergovernmental and interparliamentary) within federal system. Simona Piattoni’s contribution proceeds to a conceptual genealogy of the notion multilevel governance in order to justify its distinction from other concepts and how it results from political mobilisations. Jill Vicker’s chapter is one of the most innovative in the handbook, studying territorial politics through the lenses of gender in order to determine how perceptions of federal arrangement vary between men and women, how these arrangements can hinder or favour women’s rights and under which circumstances they could be appropriated by women. Finally, the chapter by Soeren Keil and Paul Anderson examines how decentralisation has been used a tool for conflict-resolution and how it is not enough by itself, sometimes

even being counterproductive, echoing some of Badie's analysis in *The End of Territory* regarding the failure of territorialisation to end conflict between warring ethnicities (Badie, 1995).

The second part of the handbook is more focused on political mobilisation, mostly by political parties and citizens, and how they interact with territorial politics. The first chapter by Arjan Schakel is built around the refutation of the paradigm of nationalisation of elections, according to which territorial particularism progressively disappears and a unification throughout the State takes place. Countering this argument, we have seen the development of a denationalisation process in elections in multilevel States, which calls for further studies. The contribution by Klaus Detterbeck and Eve Hepburn focuses on how political parties adjust their internal organisation to the evolution of territorial politics within States. In their analysis of different European countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Russia, Spain, United Kingdom), they propose the following typology to classify parties: centralist; consensualist; federalist; decentralist; confederalist and bifurcated. The next chapter brings together three leading scholars of ethno-regionalist parties, Lieven De Winter, Marta Gomez and Peter Lynch, and aims at giving a general overview of this particular party family and the opportunities European integration provided them with. Although quite exhaustive, this chapter could use an update: one of its main examples, the Catalan CiU, no longer exists due to disagreement over the question of independence (its main component the CDC has been rebranded the PDeCAT) and there should be some further investigations on the special nature of the Lega which has evolved from ethno-regionalist to fully nationalist, whilst not completely foregoing its decentralisation credentials, and has risen to prominence in Italian politics. Finally, the question of European opportunities and the evolution of the European Free Alliance needs more in-depth study, as attempted by more recent work on this issue (Vercin, 2016). The next chapter by Eve Hepburn provides a theoretical framework of territorial contagion from regionalist to state-wide parties, drawing inspiration from case studies regarding the contagion of gender and migration issues. Whilst enlightening, such a chapter would have been enriched by more empirical evidence to back up its claim. Klaus Stolz's chapter focuses on how territorial politics provide different career opportunities for politicians depending on specific arrangements, and proposes a fourfold typology. Luis Moreno's chapter for its part focuses on how citizens within multilevel politics develop and combine different set of territorial identities. Finally, Lorenzo Piccoli's contribution discusses the notion of regional citizenship and the multilevel system of rights it creates. Often embedded within a national and supranational context, this creates complex arrangements of rights, therefore leaving open the question of whether regional citizenship is a welcome, or a dreaded development, echoing debates over federal arrangements for women's rights (Vicker, 2018).

The third section of the handbook is concerned with territorial public policies such as education, health, environmental, immigration, diplomacy, and fiscal and economic. The first chapter of the section by Sandra Vergari compares elementary and secondary education policies in two federal States (Canada and the USA) to determine whether there has been a dispersion of central authority on these policies or to the contrary continuing (re)centralisation, which seems to indeed be the case for these two countries. Scott Greer then focuses in his chapter on a topic rarely touched upon, as he notes, by political scientists: health policy. Drawing both

from the theoretical perspectives (which he dismisses in his chapter) and empirical findings of health studies, Greer calls upon for more dialogue with political science in order to further enrich their perspective on territorial politics. Sonja Wälti's chapter touches on the issue of climate change and how environmental policies are being developed and conducted within federal States. She proposes a model based on three actors (political parties, interest groups and federal jurisdiction) to explain how policies regarding climate change and resource allocations are conceived. Ilke Adam's contribution analyses another important topic for territorial politics: how do sub-state entities and actors react to immigration which could be seen as a threat to the particularism which justifies their existence. He reviews existing typologies and frameworks to account for the variation of reactions amongst sub-state actors. Michaël Tatham's chapter focuses on presenting the para-diplomacy conducted by sub-state entities and the factors which explain why and how this is being deployed. Whilst an excellent introduction to the topic, this chapter could have used more concrete case-studies of para-diplomacy such as Stéphane Paquin did with Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland (Paquin, 2001) or touch, in links with the second section of the handbook, the question of how ethno-regionalist parties can conduct forms of subversive diplomacy (Laible, 2008). Daniel Béland and André Lecours' contribution deals with fiscal federalism through a comparison between Canada and Australia in order to uncover how these fiscal arrangements came to be and explain their absence in the case of the United States. Whilst interesting in its case studies, perhaps this chapter would have been more helpful for laymen in territorial politics if it had studied Catalonia, considering how fiscal autonomy was at the centre of the most important crisis in territorial politics. John Agnew and Agostino Mantegna's chapter turns its attention towards the relationship between economic development and territorial politics, presenting an overview of the literature surrounding this question. Finally, César Colino's contribution looks at constitutional territorial reforms within federal and multiple systems and how they are negotiated. He notably distinguishes four potential area of reforms (authority or jurisdiction; fiscal relations and autonomy; representation and participation at the central level; symbolic or community recognition) and four paradigms of reforms (disentanglement/coordination; integration/inclusion; differentiation/asymmetry; devolution/recognition) which are helpful tools to analyse each specific situation of constitutional territorial reforms in any given polity.

The final section of the handbook aims at giving a comparison between the development of territorial politics amongst different geographical areas: North America, Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Australia. The first contribution by Carol Weissert and Kevin Fahey focuses on comparing how North American and European academics have analysed territorial politics, showing how they are diverging (focus on institutions in North America; on actors in Europe) and yet have progressively been converging over the last few years. The next contribution by Jane Erk, regarding Sub-Saharan African, is probably one of the most interesting chapter in the handbook. Erk critiques how applying territorial knowledge acquired from Western experience to the "Rest" had backfired in many cases, echoing some of Bertrand Badie's older analysis (Badie, 1992), calling instead for more research on the long history of territorial politics in Africa since colonisation. The contribution by Wilfried Swenden presents the diversity of territorial settings in South Asian countries since decolonisation. Unfortunately, the chapter does not live up to the

promises of its title: Afghanistan, Burma, Maldives and Nepal are left untouched; Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are hastily covered. The chapter would have been better named a study of India territorial organisation. It is then followed by chapter from Nicholas Aroney and Campbell Sharman, who study how Australia historically came to be federally organised rather than centralised, and how this constitutional arrangement fits the economic and social evolution of the country.

Whilst an excellent introduction to territorial politics, there are a few points which could have addressed. First and foremost, this handbook lacks a clear and concrete engagement with an author, whose work is indeed briefly mentioned in several contributions. Indeed, this handbook could be seen in a way as a refutation of one of this author's thesis, considered almost typical of the delusions of the 1990s political scientist by the editors, regarding the end of territory: Bertrand Badie. However, this handbook is both lacking something from Badie's famous work and also confirms part of his analysis. What this handbook is lacking in comparison to Badie's work is a clear definition of territory: instead of clarifying what is meant by this notion, it is throughout the chapters considered as something given, self-explanatory. Therefore, there is tendency to consider only the evolution of territorial politics without questioning the evolution of the concept of territory itself, rendering it ahistorical (even though some chapters, such as Keating's, do address this shortcoming). Hence, by not sufficiently linking the classical notion of territoriality with Western modernity and the Westphalian State, many contributors do not grasp that the parallel rise of regional politics and supranational integration radically alters the State, perforates its borders and hence does confirm the crisis of territoriality in its classical sense of which Badie spoke (Badie, 1995). Besides, some of the chapters dealing with decentralisation as a failed conflict-solving tool (Keil & Anderson, 2018) or the inadequacy of territorial politics in regard of some cultural contexts (Erk, 2018) also confirm many of Badie's intuitions rather than invalidating them.

Whilst the example of the EU is mentioned throughout the chapters, paradoxically, no single chapter focuses solely on how the European Union is radically altering the notion of territoriality. It is rather surprising since there is no lack of political scientists working on such issues, such as Teresa Pullano whose work focuses on how what she calls acts of European citizenship are progressively producing a quasi-state territorial space at the European level (Pullano, 2014). Moreover, both the past of European integration and its future with Brexit are full of illustrations of the multiple transformations the territory can experience. In the past, there was for instance the withdrawal of Greenland from the EEC, whilst still under the sovereignty of Denmark, a member state of the Community, thus partially disaggregating Danish territory, or the Ibarrexe Plan concerning the Spanish Basque Country (partially inspired by Alain Lamassoure's proposal) which represented an interesting rearticulation between regional, state and supranational levels. In the near future Brexit could also radically alter the European territory both through the disaggregation of the European Union's territory and of Great Britain with the Irish border question and the proposal by the Scottish government to remain both within the United Kingdom and the Single Market. Whilst obviously not all of these topics could have been covered in the handbook, it would have certainly gained from a more in-depth study of the European Union.

Similarly, as it is a phenomenon which has mainly developed within the EU, this handbook could have studied a specific dimension of subnational diplomacy:

interregional cooperation. Such a phenomenon could have been studied under two different, whilst complementary aspects: bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements concluded by regional governments; the creation of cross border regions between regional entities. Regarding the first aspect, cooperation between regional entities is interesting as it demonstrates how subnational diplomacy can mimic the forms and habits of national diplomacy by the conclusion of bilateral agreements between regional authorities; such bilateral agreements were, for instance, concluded between Scotland, Catalonia, Flanders or Bavaria (Lachapelle & Oñate, 2018: 143). Since cooperation aims at realising certain objectives, it can also be conducted through the creation of multilateral fora: one prominent example being the Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power, which was particularly active during the negotiations surrounding the European Constitutional Treaty in order to fashion it in a manner more respectful of the constitutional and legislative prerogatives of regions such as the German Länder, Catalonia or Scotland. Regarding the second aspect, whilst an extension of the former one, the creation of cross border regions, such as Euro-regions, represents a qualitative step since it creates new territorial entities which further perforate traditional State boundaries. One example which could have been worth studying is the SaarLorLux Greater Region both due to its age (dating back to the 1970s), its content and the heterogeneity of the entities which are part of it: Luxembourg (a State); Rhineland Palatinate and Saar (German Länder); Wallonia (Belgian Region), the French and German Communities (Belgian Communities); French region and departments.

Obviously these few remarks are only here to suggest some topics which this handbook could have covered in order to reinforce the plurality of disciplines and examples it already contains. By any means, this handbook is definitely a must read both for students and scholars of territorial politics.

## Bibliography

- Badie, B. (1992) *L'État importé*. Paris. Fayard.  
 Badie, B. (1995) *La fin des territoires*. Paris. Fayard.  
 Laible, J. (2008) *Separatism and Sovereignty in the New Europe*. NY. Palgrave Macmillan.  
 Paquin, S. (2001) *La revanche des petites nations. Le Québec, l'Écosse et la Catalogne face à la mondialisation*. Montréal. VLB Éditeur.  
 Vercin, K. (2016) *La coopération entre les partis régionalistes européens*. Sciences Po.