

Book Review

Bryden, J.M., S. Efstratoglou, T. Ferenczi, T. Johnson, K. Knickel, K. Refsgaard and K.J. Thomson, eds. 2011. *Towards Sustainable Rural Regions in Europe: Exploring Inter-Relationships Between Rural Policies, Farming, Environment, Demographics, Regional Economies and Quality of Life Using System Dynamics*. New York: Routledge.

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The editors of *Towards Sustainable Rural Regions in Europe* should be congratulated for putting together this impressive volume of work on the various aspects of rural development and multifunctionality in Europe. The book provides an in-depth analysis of the dynamic inter-relationships between public policies, the market and non-market activities and functions of agriculture and the development of rural areas. It reports the results of an EU-funded, interdisciplinary research project (2005–2008) but goes beyond this endeavor; it sets the ground for future, holistic approaches to the issues examined.

The two most innovative contributions of this volume are the linking of agricultural multifunctionality to both policies and territorial rural development, and the adoption of a system dynamics approach. The reported research is well grounded to and extends previous contributions on rural development, multifunctionality and policy analysis. This is not surprising since the editors and authors are among the world's top scholars in the field. The first three chapters introduce the reader to the topics addressed, present the methodology adopted, and provide an overview of the regions included in the study. The fourth chapter discusses the links between multifunctionality in agriculture and rural development based on the results of a survey conducted in eleven European regions. Chapter five briefly reviews the approach and describes in detail the modules of the POMARD model — the system dynamics mathematical model built for the purposes of the research project. Chapter six overviews the public policy background and describes the policy scenarios on which the analyses were

based. Chapters 7–12 are in-depth case studies of selected European regions. The reported cases have been written so that cross-case comparisons are facilitated and the reader gains a good understanding of the issues involved. Chapter 13 analyzes the results of the POMARD model but also assesses the eleven study regions, in terms of policy efficiency, by using Data Envelope Analysis (DEA). Chapters 14, 15, and 16 conclude the volume by focusing on policy implications, future research, and some concluding reflections on multifunctionality, sustainable territorial development and rural policies in Europe, respectively. While the quality of the individual chapters varies somewhat, the overall sense left to the reader is that the editors have expended significant time resources in achieving text homogeneity. Yet, the book would have benefitted from a more careful editing by the publisher (e.g., in eliminating numerous typographical errors or avoiding repetitions).

What strikes the reader is how little cross-fertilization exists between rural development and agribusiness research — particularly research on the organizational aspects of food supply chains. Understanding of the pressing issues facing European rural areas and food production would be significantly enhanced if researchers in these fields were more open to exchanging ideas and designing holistic research approaches. For example, several of the issues mentioned by rural entrepreneurs could be addressed by agribusiness economists or collective entrepreneurship scholars.

The book offers significant insights and policy recommendations. Dealing with the diverse specificities of EU's rural regions, districts, counties and municipalities poses tremendous challenges to policy-makers. The research results reported suggest that rural development policy should address these issues not only by focusing on providing infrastructure investments, creating jobs or implementing social care initiatives. Policy-makers should also include group representatives in decision-making partnerships, provide or improve information flows, and ensure effective government support and functioning institutions.

Another key finding is that, in designing rural development and agricultural policies, the EU should consider abolishing the 'Axes', the laying down of maxima/minima spending by Axis, and the 'Menu of Measures' at the EU level, replacing these with much more open integrated development programs for rural regions designed and implemented by local partnerships led by the local (elected) authorities. The editors suggest that the task of the EU and national governments is to facilitate policy coordination effectively by harmonizing funding rules and systems and by articulating all national and EU policy goals and desired outcomes for rural regions efficiently. Both are critically affected by local government structures and financing.

Overall, *Towards Sustainable Rural Regions in Europe* is a highly suggested reading for policy-makers and scholars interested in rural development and, more generally, rural areas. The authors and editors view rural development as a whole-embracing phenomenon that touches every aspect of human life. While

the book does not focus on commons-related aspects of rural development or multifunctionality, the rich discussion of public goods provision by farmers and other rural residents make it a potentially interesting book for the readers of this journal.