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Book Review

Detterbeck, K. 2012, Multi-Level Party Politics in Western Europe *Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 280 p.*

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This study by Klaus Detterbeck examines the effect of multi-level governance on political parties. For the most part, until now, internal party organization and party competition has been located on the level of nation states, neglecting the role of regions and other territorial entities. Despite a large volume of literature about the “new regionalism”, party politics seems to remain nationalized, a gap in the scholarly research the book addresses. The closer look on political parties is split in a perspective between parties and within parties. These two aspects form the center piece of this densely written book. Therefore the book is located at the intersection of party research and the study of multi-level governance.

Despite the tendency of studies related to multi-level governance to remain diffuse and at times obscure, Detterbeck’s book provides a clear cut view to the conceptual framework from the outset. The large amount of literature dealing with political parties and federalism, decentralization, territorial politics, multi-level governance, among others, is summarized concisely in chapter two. Subsequently the underlying challenges and problems are dealt with in chapter three. From the developed methodological point of view in the following chapter, the book is supplemented with the data collection on the personal homepage (www.klaus-detterbeck.de) of the author. This relieves the book of the need to present a large appendix or longer footnotes with data sources. Instead, any reader can easily access the data through the internet and are encouraged to enter in contact with the author for further information or exchange. Starting from the framework for analysis in chapter five, the book derives from the literature two basic theoretical concepts for the effect of multi-level governance on party politics in chapter six and seven. Building upon that, the author proposes a typology to group the parties and factors, while the groupings are elaborated in chapter eight before the book concludes in chapter nine.

The first concept is devoted to the relations between political parties, and is referred to by Detterbeck as “territorial symmetry of Multi-level party competition”. His framework operationalizes the concept through the dimensions of voting behavior, party systems and government formations (p. 62). Secondly Detterbeck analyses the internal organization of selected political parties. He constructs a theoretical concept, “Vertical integration of Multi-level party organizations”. For the picture within parties the concept relies on dimensions of the structures, resources, activities and elites (p. 65). Regarding these dimensions it might (as in any case) be discussed if the limited indicators cover the whole dimension. One such question would be whether voting behavior can really be limited to election turnout and election results. Detterbeck interprets more the changes through time between election results and election turnout than the results and turnout itself. But in the overall picture the chosen indicators seem to draw a plausible picture from the dimensions of both concepts in Multi-level party politics. As elaborated in the analytical framework, the book dedicates one chapter for each concept. These chapters deal with the empirics of territorial symmetry of party competition and the vertical organization of parties in Austria, Belgium, Great Britain,

Germany and Spain. Hence the analytical framework is not applied for each country, but along the theoretical concepts and explaining factors across the selected countries. Against this backdrop the book is highly comparative in its theoretical approach and empirical application. At the same time only the description of the explanatory factor of regional identity is carried out on a country to country basis (p. 207-228). The chapters include a multitude of summarizing tables and figures providing an overview of the empirical cases in point. The two theoretical concepts, the typology and the factors of explanation should move towards a theory of party politics of multi-level systems. Critics to the typology might raise the question as to where the initial impetus for a change within parties and in party competition might come from. To work out a set of causal explanation however would still need more steps to be done. But with the suggested typology of parties, the book has opened up the debate for bringing the notion of territory apart from the traditional nation state into the study of party politics. At the same time the book also moved party politics more into the center of federalism and multi-level governance.