

### Book review: Benz, A. and Broschek, J. 2013, Federal dynamics: continuity, change, and the varieties of federalism

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## BOOK REVIEW

### **Benz, A. and Broschek, J. 2013, FEDERAL DYNAMICS: Continuity, Change and the Varieties of Federalism. Oxford University Press 394p.**

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Federal Governance is an online graduate journal on theory and politics of federalism and multi-level governance. Its mandate is to engage the global federalism community and reach out to outstanding graduate students interested in federalism and multi-level governance. By providing a platform for graduate students to have early success in their careers, Federal Governance seeks to promote and sustain interest in federalism and multi-level governance research among graduate students. Allied with the Forum of Federations and founding partner, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations at Queen's University; Federal Governance aims to contribute to a global dialogue on federalism.

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This edited book is ambitious and insightful, drawing on the distinct and diverse theoretical traditions of constitutional design and reform, historical development, comparative federalism and institutionalism, to better elucidate the ontology and dynamics of federal systems. Students will find it a challenging but not inaccessible text, which will abundantly reward their diligent attention.

The structure hinges on a dual enquiry into the varieties of federalism and federal dynamics, ensuring the penetrating and comprehensive analysis that the subject matter deserves. It opens with the themes, classifications and qualities of federalism, fusing this discussion into aspects of timing, sequence and historical evolution. The latter parts canvass the impact of social change and political structuring and the role of actors and institutions in shaping federal dynamics. This approach yields a detailed and cohesive analysis ensuring little of the 'ambivalence and complexity of federalism' is unexplored.

Critics might highlight the paucity of empirical data - a point acknowledged by the authors - but this book has two redeeming features. Firstly, such empirical lack does not detract from the value of the project in unifying disparate traditions within one accessible work, providing a powerful resource for students of federalism and showcasing some well-integrated and perceptive writing from contributors. This is no small triumph, given that the chapters 'outline quite different perspectives' of comparative federalism (state-society relations, for example, tend to have a much faster evolutionary process than constitutions). However, the disparities inherent in the subject matter are adeptly coalesced by the common thread of the 'interplay of continuity and change'. Secondly, the editors substitute empirical enquiry for an 'extended conceptual framework', promising to 'explain how researchers can use different analytical and theoretical tools introduced in the book to theorise about federalism and federal dynamics'. The analysis is at the macro (structural) and micro (internal) level, encouraging a multi-dimensional understanding. Students will be assisted by some helpful case studies, visual depictions, charts and tables.

A final observation is that the text is, perhaps, somewhat diffident in its protestations that no new theory of federalism is being proposed but rather, a "perspective which contrasts to prevailing views of federalism". Semantics aside, this reticence does not prevent some pertinent and useful conclusions being drawn. These can be summarised as: (1) dynamics are an essential feature of federalism resulting of its multi-dimensional character; (2) federalism should not be construed as merely 'models', since these are varied by continuity and change operational through exchanges/interactions between the various layers; and (3) linking theories which have evolved in different areas of research can help make sense of an inherent complexity. It is hoped that this timely collaboration will both fertilise new interest and go some way to overcoming the 'fragmented research agenda' which has hindered progress in understanding systems of multi-level governance.