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<cn>chapter 30

<ct>EUROPEAN SUBNATIONAL DEMOCRACY: COMPARATIVE  
REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

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<h1>Introduction

<p>This book has surveyed a wide range of European countries, all twenty-seven members of the European Union as well as Switzerland and Norway. All of these countries are now democracies although they all present a rich and varied experience of democracy. Some of them—mainly the countries of Western Europe—have been democratic from at least the nineteenth century; others—in Central and Southern Europe—have become democratic only after undergoing extended periods of anti-democratic dictatorship as happened in Germany, Italy, Spain, and Greece; the rest—the countries which found themselves under communist dictatorships for shorter or longer periods—have discovered democracy, in many cases for the first time, only since around 1990. We found it useful to position these countries in the first instance within the Loughlin-Peters typology of four distinctive state traditions in Europe and asked our authors to respond to the question as to which state tradition, if any, their country belonged. These so-called state traditions are useful heuristic devices for describing the nature of political and administrative institutions of the state, the values and culture which underlie these, as well as the relationship between the state and society. But it is also possible to create a country typology which might help us to organize their principal democratic features at both national and subnational levels and how these two levels of democracy relate to each other: the Rhinelandic states, the British Isles, the Nordic states, the Southern European states, the Eastern European New Democracies.

<p1>But our primary intellectual quest in this book has been to explore further the meaning of democracy itself. In this regard our frame of reference has been the theory of democracy developed for the national level by Arend Lijphart (1999), distinguishing majoritarian from consensual democracy, further developed by Hendriks (2009), distinguishing between ‘consensus’, ‘pendulum’, ‘voter’ and ‘participatory’ democracy. Each author was asked to see to what extent this theoretical approach was useful in understanding subnational democracy in his or her country. We shall return to the results of this enquiry below. Beyond these theoretical concerns another important aim has been to provide an up-to-date survey—a snapshot—of the state of play in the first decade of the twenty-first century of subnational democratic practice expressed in terms of institutions, political realities, and relations with the public. We feel that the *Handbook* is a useful survey of the great majority of European countries through the lens of how subnational democracy is practised. This level of democracy tends to be underestimated in assessments of European politics, despite providing the overwhelming bulk of democratic decision-making, through the 100,000 units of subnational government that exist in Europe (Appendix 1). In this sense, we feel that it will be a mine of information for policy-makers, researchers, teachers, and students interested in how the democratic political

systems of both ‘old’ and ‘new’ Europe are evolving. The following conclusions and comparative reflections are based on the detailed country studies presented in this book, unless otherwise mentioned.

## <h1>Institutional Patterns: Mapping Subnational Democracy in Europe

<p>We will investigate patterns in subnational democracy in two steps. First, we will look at the groups of European countries that we have distinguished from the outset (the Rhinelandic states, the British Isles, the Nordic states, the Southern European states, the Eastern European New Democracies). Second, we will look at subnational democracy in Europe at an aggregated level. In doing so, we will refer to the analytical categories and typologies of subnational governance and democracy introduced at the beginning of this book. We will also evaluate and discuss the heuristic value of the ideal types used.

<p1>However, some words of caution are in order. First, we are proposing here ‘ideal types’, that is, types towards which there is a greater or lesser correspondence in reality. Even France and Germany—the archetypal Napoleonic and Germanic states—do not correspond fully to the ideal types but are, in fact, themselves a mixture of types. France, for example, was influenced by German administrative theory towards the end of the nineteenth century, while parts of Germany, Bavaria for example, were influenced by the French Napoleonic occupation after the French Revolution. Second, the ‘types’ may also be regarded as starting-points of analysis rather than complete descriptions of a particular country. Even within one ‘state tradition’ there are considerable variations. Within the Napoleonic tradition, for example, France, Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Spain differ greatly from each other. Thus, there may be processes of evolution when states shift from one dominant tradition to another, as was the case with Belgium. It is clear that states today may be regarded as ‘hybrid’ in that they combine a number of state traditions and the dominance of one of these state traditions over the others may change over time as a result of factors which are internal to the state—for example, the transition to democracy in Spain, Portugal, and the former communist countries of East and Central Europe or the dynamics of the relations between French-speakers and Flemish-speakers in Belgium; or they may external to the state—accelerated European integration, globalization, the neo-liberal revolution, etc.

## <h2>The Rhinelandic states

<p>Referring to the various state traditions, the Rhinelandic countries are all clearly and strongly influenced by the Germanic state tradition. Some combine this with Napoleonic influences that can be traced back to French occupation during the nineteenth century. The Low Countries became unitary states in this period, with meso-institutions that came to resemble the French departmental (*departments*) and prefectural (*préfets*) systems: the Netherlands adopted a similar system of territorial organization with provinces (*provincies*) and communes or municipalities (*gemeenten*); Belgium, created in 1830, was first of all modelled on the French Jacobin state with *provincies* and *communes* dominated by French-speakers and making no concessions to the Flemish-speaking community; Luxembourg, understandably given its tiny size, also adopted the French unitary model. However, in all three cases, there was also a ‘Germanic’ influence. The Netherlands remained a

unitary state in formal terms, but also a highly decentralized one, still influenced by (con)federal traditions in existence from the period of the United Provinces until the French occupation. Belgium was riven by linguistic conflict from its very foundation and slowly evolved, first into a regionalized unitary state by the 1960s, and then into a fully-fledged federal state, somewhat influenced by German federalism. Clearly Germany, Austria, and Switzerland are also in this tradition and are federal states. In the cases of Germany and Austria, federalism was imposed by the victorious allies after the Second World War, but both countries could, in fact, draw on much older federalist traditions going back to the Holy Roman Empire and the strong local polities that existed up to modern times. All the Rhinelandic states—except the small ‘local state’ of Luxemburg—have comparatively strong meso-governments, with intertwined local and national tiers of government.

Like the other states analysed in this book, the Rhinelandic ones have increasingly come to resemble the ‘hybrid state’, combining and connecting different models, albeit often around a dominant core model. We see this not only in terms of state traditions, but also in their models of democracy. All Rhinelandic states display strong inclinations to consensus democracy, some more pronounced than others: Switzerland and Belgium are ‘prototypes’ of consensus democracy in Lijphart’s formal analysis of democratic patterns; taking informal patterns of democracy into account, the Netherlands can also be seen as a strong and classic case. Consensus democracy comes, however, in combination with elements of other models of democracy, including the theoretically opposite model of voter democracy. In Switzerland, Germany, and—to a lesser degree—Austria, strong expressions of voter democracy (binding referendums and initiatives) are combined with equally strong expressions of consensus democracy (coalition politics, elite accommodation, and pacification). In Belgium and especially the Netherlands, the advisory (local) referendum is on the rise. All Rhinelandic countries display a growing role of directly aggregative opinion polls, consumer surveys, and the like, which are non-decisive but influential all the same. Some elements of pendulum democracy can be discerned in Germany’s adversarial ‘two-and-a-half party system’ and in tendencies to political polarization in most Rhinelandic countries. The directly elected mayor in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland implies competitive elections for political office. The Netherlands and Belgium, however, are hesitant to move in this direction.

In general, we can say that consensual patterns are challenged by majoritarian inclinations in the Rhineland, but certainly not eliminated. Consensus democracy itself remains firmly established and confirmed by elite-driven practices of ‘multi-level governance’ (along vertical state–state lines) and ‘interactive governance’ (along horizontal state–society lines). Institutions of participatory democracy—equally integrative but more direct and citizen-oriented—are often developed to compensate for the elite bias in consensus democracy. Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands seem to lead the way here.

## The British Isles

This group contains only two cases but their distinctiveness warrants separate treatment. The UK and Ireland are both vivid expressions of what we have earlier defined as the Anglo tradition in subnational governance, characterized by a relatively insulated two-tier local government system, a comparatively centralized unitary state,

and a relatively weak meso-level of government. The UK was characterized by Loughlin (2001) as a ‘hyper-centralized’ state with centralization growing apace with the establishment of the post-war welfare state but, somewhat ironically, also during the neo-liberal reforms of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. Thatcher had sought to achieve ‘less state’ and ‘less bureaucracy’ but succeeded in creating one of the most centralized and bureaucratically interventionist states in the developed world. Local government was one of the parts of government that most suffered under Thatcher’s centralization as she believed it was one of the worst examples of inefficient and wasteful government. Some modification of this tendency towards hyper-centralization was introduced with the devolution reforms introduced by Tony Blair’s New Labour government elected in 1997. Devolution set up a parliament in Scotland and assemblies in Wales, Northern Ireland, and London, but an attempt to establish elected regional assemblies in England failed in 2004. There were also renewed attempts to implement a ‘new localist’ agenda by establishing a renewed partnership with local authority associations in all four parts of the UK and by allowing local authorities to introduce some reforms such as elected mayors and new types of executive (initiatives which have been spurned by most local authorities). With devolution to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, the UK has mixed in some elements resembling the Germanic federal tradition (but also influenced by the Spanish experience)—albeit at the fringes of the state. The English ‘mainland’, however, continues to resemble the classic ‘dual polity’, with centralization in London on the one hand, and local autonomy in designated areas on the other. In its degree of centralization and concentration of power, Ireland even beats the UK, but this is not surprising given the smallness of the country, which could be regarded as similar to a large region. This was quite important during the years leading up to the Celtic Tiger economic boom when the Republic was indeed for Brussels a single Objective One Priority region (Northern Ireland had the same status). This allowed the Department of Finance in Dublin to play a key role in the distribution of the Structural Funds, thus reinforcing the centralized character of the state.<sup>1</sup> In any case, it is only very recently that Ireland has begun to take seriously local government reform in a way which strengthens it.

Referring to models of democracy, both the UK and Ireland are clearly defined by pendulum democracy, the best-known expression of which is Westminster democracy—referring to the sovereign, bipolarized, Houses of Parliament in the centre at London. This is where power concentrates, where adversarial politics are centralized, and the winner ultimately takes all. Pendulum democracy continues to dominate, despite some recent and selective insertions of consensus democracy: some decentralization and devolution (already mentioned); some PR elements (also on the fringes of the UK and not on the English mainland); some coalitions at the local level (growing to one-third of local governments in the UK). In the Republic of Ireland, there is an STV PR electoral system and coalition government is more common at the national level, which does occasionally allow smaller parties such as the Labour Party or the Greens to participate in government. Nevertheless, Irish politics is still dominated by two main parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, the successors of the two sides who fought each other during the 1922–3 civil war. There is thus also a tradition of alternating blocs characteristic of pendulum democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> Only when Ireland’s economic development meant that, in aggregate terms, it no longer satisfied the criteria for Objective One recognition, did it ‘invent’ a new region ironically entitled the BMW (Border, Midlands and West) region, which did meet the criteria.

<p1>Democracy in the British Isles tends to be defined as party-political, representative democracy. More direct forms of democracy are traditionally not common. In recent years, however, there have been attempts in the UK to introduce elements of participatory democracy at the local level. The chapter on the UK in this book mentions a range of participatory instruments, supported by the 2006 Local Government White Paper. In Ireland, the Taskforce on Active Citizenship has suggested various ways to further citizen participation and engagement, although their institutionalization is still well away. Expressions of voter democracy such as local referendums are not institutionalized in Ireland. Referendums are somewhat more common in the UK, but clearly less so than in the Rhineland: there thirty-five referendums were held, mainly during 2001 and 2002, to decide about the introduction of the directly elected mayor (twelve returning a ‘yes’ majority). Apart from that, some local governments have arranged referendums on a voluntary basis, but these are merely consultative, as well as local authority-initiated. Counting heads is more often organized on an informal and instrumental basis, using consumer surveys, opinion polls, and the like. Although there are expressions of alternative models of democracy, pendulum democracy still remains the overriding democratic form.

## <h2>The Nordic states

<p>The subnational systems in this group—Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark—have a few distinctive but interrelated features that make them stand out in comparison with the rest of Europe (Sellers and Lidström 2007). Nordic local governments have strong financial strength as they are the main providers of welfare services. Citizens trust their local authorities more than in other countries and the level of corruption is low (Appendix 3).

<p1>These countries are also largely consistent with the so-called Scandinavian state tradition, which in itself is a mix of elements that resemble the Anglo tradition (demarcated local autonomy, strong unitarism, weak meso) but also the Germanic tradition (decentralization, organicism, legally protected subnational government). There is not a strong tradition of fully fledged meso-government as found in the Rhinelandic tradition, which is comprehensive and multi-purpose. On the contrary, despite the strong position of local governments in the Nordic states, these have operated within tight parameters defined by either the central government or the central parliaments.

<p1>Two recent trends are worth noting in this regard. First, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were attempts to lessen this central control in the experiments known as the ‘free commune’ (also known as the ‘self-regulating municipality’). This reform, which began in Sweden and was subsequently adopted in slightly different versions by Denmark, Norway, and Finland, allowed local authorities to free themselves from central control in specified policy areas such as education or child-care. This was subsequently ‘mainstreamed’ and is now part of the Nordic approach to local government (Baldersheim and Ståhlberg 1994). The second significant development, again adopted in different versions by the various Nordic states, was the setting up of ‘regions’ (although sometimes this term is used also to describe what in English are called ‘counties’, which can be a source of confusion) (Bukve et al. 2008).

From the 1990s, and undoubtedly under the influence of a perception that they are necessary elements of European integration, the Nordic countries experimented with regions (although each country adopted a different model). Finland has retained its system of indirectly elected regions. Denmark recently created larger regions although these are financially weak. Sweden is gradually replacing its county councils with a smaller number of directly elected regions possessing more extensive functions (Lidström 2010). In Norway, several proposals for new regions have been considered, but no clear direction can be detected.

<p1>All countries in this group display expressions of consensus democracy, with organicist and neo-corporatist approaches to collective decision-making, but, generally speaking, less strongly than the countries in the Rhinelandic group. On the ‘executives-parties’ dimension, all four cases appear to be moderately consensual (with multiparty systems, but often a dominant party or two; with coalition governments, but also single-party or minority governments), while, on the ‘federal-unitary’ dimension, all appear to be relatively majoritarian (unitary welfare states, geared at uniformity rather than heterogeneity). So also here, regarding models of democracy, we discern a hybrid pattern that we have seen expressed more prominently in the previous two groups: consensus democracy, but not as deeply entrenched as in the Rhineland, combined with some elements of pendulum democracy, but not as dominant as in the British Isles.

<p1> ‘Citizens care about and trust local government . . . but direct forms of participation remain limited’—the quote is taken from the Danish chapter in this book, but in the other Nordic chapters the picture is more or less the same. Subnational democracy in the Nordic countries, generally speaking, takes the form of party-political, representative democracy. Direct democracy and citizen self-determination are not deeply rooted in their strongly developed welfare-state culture. The Nordic countries display almost the same variety of participatory initiatives as the Rhinelandic states—with citizen panels, citizen juries, citizen surveys, deliberative hearings, youth councils, and the like—but their institutionalization is notably less advanced, and more comparable to the situation in the British Isles. Typical is Finland’s ‘Citizen Participation Policy Programme’, which could just as well have been named the ‘Indirect Democracy Policy Programme’ for that is what it really aimed to strengthen.

<p1>Voter democracy by way of (local) referendums is more developed than in the British Isles, but again less than in the Rhinelandic group. Local referendums are somewhat more common in Sweden than in the other Nordic countries, but also tend to be non-binding, dependent upon political approval and often related to amalgamations of local authorities. The strong tradition of well-organized political parties in these countries has blocked attempts to introduce forms of democracy—for example binding local referendums—that would challenge the position of the parties. As in many other countries, there is a fair amount of NPM-type consumer polling and preference counting, but, in general, it is safe to say that aggregative patterns of democracy have not crowded out the mainly integrative political culture. There is also little discussion about, or revealed preference for, the directly elected mayor.

<h2>The Southern European states

<p>This group is more diverse than the previous ones, but still some general patterns can be discerned. All of the main Southern European states developed in the Napoleonic state tradition, which continues to be of great influence; the small islands of Malta and Cyprus are exceptional and special cases, being influenced by British administrative practice also. All the countries in this group share a history of strong centralization and concentration of political and administrative power. Through deconcentration, decentralization, and even (quasi-)federalization in recent decades, a few of the Southern countries have adopted elements that bear resemblance to the Germanic state tradition. We see this in Spain, Italy, and to a lesser degree in France. Portugal and Greece have remained clearly centralized unitary states. Although Portugal's 1974 constitution does make provision for autonomous regions, this has only been applied in the cases of the Azores and Madeira islands. An attempt to apply it to mainland Portugal was defeated in a referendum held in 1995. In the Greek case, there has been some modification of the centralized character of the state with the adoption of elected prefects, a reform pushed by the Greek socialists which, surprisingly, has been adopted quite successfully. On the other hand, Greece, like Portugal, still remains highly centralized and dominated by the national political parties. Malta is a special case because of its tiny size, and local government in any meaningful sense of the term has been set up only comparatively recently and seems to be primarily concerned with issues such as parking tickets. Cyprus remains a complicated, special case, with Greek/Turkish subdivision combined with centralization, to be tackled by recent plans for federalization.

<p1>Referring to models of democracy, Cyprus remains a special case, being the only country in this group where consociational democracy of the Rhinelandic type has been tried (the 1960 settlement even drew on Swiss experience). France, Greece, Portugal, and Malta continue to display strong inclinations to pendulum democracy, especially in the majoritarian party-political landscape. On the federal-unitary dimension, France still inclines to the majoritarian side, although centralization and concentration of power have become less pronounced since the 1980s. Italy and Spain have become highly complex mixtures of pendulum democracy and consensus democracy. Italy used to be exceptional in this group for displaying consensual inclinations on the executives-parties dimension, but, on this very dimension, Italy has changed to a more majoritarian, polarized, and adversarial mode, not only nationally but also subnationally. The coming of the directly elected mayor and regional governor has fortified pendulum democracy at the subnational level as well. Unlike Italy, Spain has never been significantly consensual in the executives-parties domain, but, like Italy, it has become somewhat more consensual on the federal-unitary dimension.

<p1>In all the Southern European states, indirect democracy is much more important than direct democracy, and political leadership is significantly more important than active citizenship. Voter democracy through (local) referendums is less advanced and less mature than in the Rhinelandic group, or even the Nordic group. The modest referendum culture of the British Isles comes closest to the Southern European group, although some countries in this group (Italy, Spain, France) have done more to make future referendums on subnational matters possible than others (Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, Greece). Participatory democracy has traditionally been weak in Southern European governance at the subnational level in general, and is still comparatively weak when compared to the Rhinelandic states; but less so when compared to the

British Isles and the Nordic states. Particular places in particular countries—mainly Italy, Spain, and France again—display significant patterns of participatory democracy: participatory planning in Grenoble, participatory budgeting in Seville, and deliberative regional planning in Tuscany are cases in point.

## <h2>The new democracies in Eastern Europe

<p>The new democracies of Eastern and Central Europe share a common experience of communist dictatorship for longer or shorter periods. They also share a common experience of the transition to democracy and preparation for, and accession into, the European Union. During the period of communist dictatorship they described themselves as ‘people’s democracies’, but this must rank as one of the greatest misnomers of all time since they were neither democratic nor ruled by the ‘people’ but, rather, by party apparatuses and systems of administration that were also under party control. The ‘Big Brother’ watching over them was the USSR, itself ruled in a dictatorial fashion by the Soviet Communist Party in Moscow. The legacy of this period was political systems marked by high levels of centralization and uniformity. Local government, in most cases, was simply non-existent, but there was local administration to ensure obedience to the dictates of the central party. To some extent Marxist-Leninist states were influenced by French Jacobinism, for which both Marx and Lenin had a great admiration and, in the cases of Lenin and Stalin, an enthusiasm for the Terror. The latter predilection was a large factor in producing another important legacy of communism: the destruction of civil society. Democracy is not only a set of procedures but is also underpinned by a set of values: the importance and dignity of the individual, the rule of law, freedom of thought, opinion, and expression, the right of assembly, etc. All of these were denied and trampled on by communist systems, which had scant regard for any values except the naked power of the party over society. All of this has meant that the transition to democracy and market economies has been difficult for many of these states as often there was simply no memory of democratic life. It had to be invented from scratch.

<p1>The transition to democracy was assisted by a number of countries and agencies. Initially, the United States supplied a number of advisors impregnated by the Anglo-Saxon model of public administration and market economies and these had an important impact in the sympathy for the new elites for neo-liberal and pro-American ideas. However, in the longer run a more important influence was perhaps the European Union, which quickly realized that the future of the new democracies lay within its own system. After the initial euphoria which followed the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet empire, there were some hesitations on the part of western elites when they saw the scale of the problems faced by the new democracies. It soon became clear, however, that there was no realistic alternative to further enlargement. Following the success of the Maastricht Treaty and the Single Market project, the Union began to prepare for eventual enlargement with the Amsterdam and Nice revisions of the Treaties. In order to prepare the new countries for accession, the EU established a number of programmes such as PHARE<sup>2</sup> to help them to reform their political, administrative, and economic systems to cope with membership. They also drew up the Copenhagen Criteria, which were in effect

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<sup>2</sup> Created in 1989 as the Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies (PHARE) programme but subsequently extended to the other accession countries.

conditions of democratic practice and economic market-based economic activity that the candidate countries had to fulfil in order to accede to membership of the EU. Implicit in these criteria was a model of liberal representative democracy quite different from what they had experienced under communism. As pointed out in the Introduction to this book, the Council of Europe also assisted the new democracies in very distinctive ways.

<p1>These factors meant that there was a certain general commonality in the systems the new countries adopted. However, the EU refrained from laying down what particular institutional expression their democratic systems should adopt—federal or unitary, regionalized or decentralized. Each country had to decide this on its own. In effect, although the new democracies do hold in common these several features outlined above, they are, in practice, a quite heterogeneous group. First, before communism, they had quite different historical experiences. Some, such as Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, or Western Poland, had been part of the Austrian-Hungarian empire although some were found in different parts of the empire which gave them distinctive characteristics. The lands of what is now Western Poland, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic, for example, were on the Austrian side, while what is now Slovakia was on the Hungarian side. Some of the countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, and parts of the Balkans, were part of the Ottoman empire. Parts of Poland were under Prussian rule, while other parts were under Russian imperialist rule. The Baltic states were also quite diverse.

<p1>From the point of view of state traditions, the French Napoleonic tradition is clearly a dominant one. This may date from pre-communist days and result from long-standing affinities between France and countries such as Poland or Romania (part of la Francophonie). It was also the case that, during the nineteenth century, France was held to be the exemplar of the modern progressive state and was admired by nationalists in the Balkans and Central Europe. Finally, as already mentioned above, Marxism-Leninism also admired the French Jacobin tradition and this undoubtedly influenced the form of the communist state. On the other hand, the Germanic state tradition influenced countries such as Hungary and Estonia, while Scandinavian influences may also be discerned, unsurprisingly, in the Baltic states, including Estonia.

<p1>Practically all Eastern European countries have introduced ambitious reforms after the fall of communism, aiming to improve subnational democracy and self-government (Baldersheim et al. 2003). These reforms include amalgamations (in some cases splitting) of municipalities, establishment of regional levels of government, decentralization of functions from central to local levels, improving managerial skills, and establishing new forms for citizen participation. Although there are examples of successful reforms, the general lesson to be learned from these countries is that subnational democracy can only be improved marginally by administrative reform and that more substantial changes require more fundamental societal transformations. There are many obstacles to success. Local authorities usually have sparse resources and limited financial autonomy. The party systems of the new democracies, twenty years after the transition, are still not fully consolidated as they had to be invented anew after the fall of the old regimes. One general tendency has been a proliferation of political parties, many barely sustainable and soon to disappear. This in turn has meant a dominance of coalition governments. On

the other hand, there have been some aspects of pendulum democracy, with coalitions of right and left emerging and usually alternating power following competitive elections. At the local level, parties are present but often weakly organized. Although turnout in the first local elections tended to be high, it has now stabilized on much lower levels. The instrument of local referendums has turned out to be inefficient as they have often failed to engage the required share of citizens. This lack of citizen engagement reflects more fundamental problems of distrust among the general public towards the local decision-makers, a weak civil society and the continuing existence of corruption (see Appendix 3). Given the extraordinary degree of neutralization of local civil society under communism, it is not surprising that there is weak citizen participation at the local level.

## <h1>European Subnational Democracy: Some General Reflections

### <h2>Comparison with the US

<p>Is there anything that we can we say about subnational democracy in Europe on the whole, taking all the previous groups of countries together? Are there any commonalities that stand out among all of the many differences? One useful way of answering these questions is to compare subnational democracy in Europe with the situation in the United States (see also Wolman and Goldsmith 1992; Denters and Rose 2005).<sup>3</sup>

<p1>One striking difference is the position of direct democracy—civic self-determination and self-governance—in the subnational realm. Voter democracy at the local level—through referendums, initiatives, town meetings, assembly voting, opinion polling, consumer surveying, and the like—is significantly more developed in the US than in Europe. In Europe, only in Switzerland is direct democracy deeply established, and it has developed only in Germany, where it has, fairly recently, developed in a way that is similar in a wide range of states in the US. Participatory democracy has been developed to a considerable extent and with significant variety in specific parts of Europe—firstly in the Rhineland—but European subnational democracy as a whole does not seem to surpass the US experience in this respect.

<p1>Indirect or representative democracy, dominated by party-dominated institutions, is prominent in both the US and Europe, but the majoritarian, competitive, and adversarial version of it is clearly more popular in the US, in both national and subnational politics. The most prominent exception in Europe is the UK, where the parliamentary version of pendulum democracy has been strongly established. Competitive win-or-lose elections for subnational political office—the mayor’s office, the governor’s office, and many other offices in the local and supra-local realm—are well established in the US. In Europe, this pattern of pendulum democracy is less pronounced, with only some countries having directly elected figureheads at the local and the meso levels: Italy, Germany, and Austria. In these cases, concentration of political power is strongly checked and balanced by accompanying expressions of consensus democracy.

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, other comparisons could be made with other parts of the world. But the US is a country with a highly developed democratic system both at the federal and subnational levels.

<p1>With regard to subnational governance models and state traditions, it should be noted that the European experience is older and more diversified. In European subnational democracy we still find vivid expressions of a Napoleonic, a Germanic, an Anglo and a Nordic state tradition—with respective elements increasingly combined, but still distinguishable. In some respects, the US experience might be close to the Anglo tradition developed in the UK—also a pluralistic, incrementalist, limited state, cherishing a free (market) society—but in addition to this it displays a peculiar and pronounced pattern of federalism and associated checks and balances that cannot be found in the UK. The federalized democracies of Germany and Switzerland may be more similar in this respect, but not in many others. It seems fair to say that the subnational actors in the US work in one state tradition—the distinctively American one—while their colleagues in Europe work in at least four distinctive state traditions. Drawing the map of subnational governance in the US is not easy either, but it is not as complicated as understanding the variety in Europe.

<h2>Merely a reflection of national democracy?

<p>Is subnational democracy in Europe merely a reflection of the characteristics of the various national democracies or does it have more or less independent sources? Subnational democracy is related to national democracy in a way that is not unlike the way in which European cities are related to the countries in which they are situated. Cities often ‘breathe’ the character of the country in which they are situated, but their characteristics cannot be simply deduced from the general country characteristics. Likewise, subnational democracy cannot be simply deduced from the patterns of national democracy. For instance: the Westminster model of democracy does not facilitate a lot of citizen participation at the macro-level of the state; at the micro-level of towns and neighborhoods there are nevertheless quite a few participatory initiatives.

<p1>Liberal representative democracy developed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in tandem with the development of the nation-state as the quintessentially ‘modern’ form of political organization. Admittedly, not all nation-states were democratic (for example, Fascist Italy or Francoist Spain) but the notion that the nation embodied ‘the people’ and that this was represented at the level of the state was facilitated by the nation-state model. Furthermore, political legitimacy and sovereignty were exercised in the modern Westphalian system of international relations by *national* governments. Subnational governments, dominated by their centres, could not exercise these functions. It was inevitable then that, to some extent, the exercise of democracy at the subnational level should reflect its exercise at the national level. In any case, only the national level could legitimize this. This does not mean that the actual procedures of democracy are identical at both levels. Clearly, electoral procedures and representation will differ depending on the size of the political entity. Thus, we find different electoral systems at both national and local levels and, at the local level, municipalities with different population sizes will adopt different systems. As a general rule, when this occurs, as in countries such as France with large numbers of municipalities, the smaller-sized populations will use a majoritarian system, while the larger ones adopt some form of proportional representation or list system.

Nevertheless, despite this close connection between national and subnational democracy and the prominence of the former, since the 1980s there has been a growing recognition of the legitimacy in its own right of the latter. One element of this has been the recognition of the right of local autonomy contained in the Council of Europe's Charter of Local Self-government (see the Introduction to this book). This, however, is primarily concerned with the rights of local authorities vis-à-vis other 'higher' authorities such as national governments but also regional and county governments. This is in line with a general trend from the 1970s onwards towards greater political decentralization and regionalization. But the Charter says relatively little about the relationship between local authorities and their own citizens. The concept of participatory democracy became prevalent from the 1960s and it was only in 1971 that Carole Pateman published her ground-breaking work of that title. But participatory democracy is easier to practise at the local level than at other levels of governments including the regional. During the 1980s and 1990s, there has been a general trend towards devising institutional mechanisms that would facilitate such practice. It is clear from our survey of the twenty-nine European states found in this book that, in the great majority of cases, these initiatives have met with only very partial success.

## The heuristic value of typologies: understanding the hybrid state

Working with typologies, such as the ones that we have used here, is common in comparative governance studies. The major drawback of using typologies is the temptation of 'pigeon-holing': putting complex cases in one 'box' at a time, reducing rich realities to only one particular label. In this book we have tried to resist this temptation as much as possible. Typologies—of state traditions, of democratic models—have been used not to erase but to identify the heterogeneity and hybrid nature of the many complex systems of subnational democracy in Europe, which have been discussed case by case each in its own right.

What can be learned from this process is that subnational governance in Europe cannot and should not be 'pigeon-holed' but that it is 'hybrid democracy': a mixture of different models. This is not to say that it is uniformly the same. On the contrary there is a great variety in the ways in which, and the degree to which, models are mixed. The Swiss hybrid (very strong consensus democracy matched by very strong voter democracy, and considerable participatory democracy) is not the same as the Spanish hybrid (pendulum democracy, infused with significant elements of consensus democracy, some voter democracy, and a bit of participatory democracy), which is not the same as other hybrids. Typologies help to grasp, qualify, and 'name' the mixtures or the hybrid systems scattered across Europe. They also help to compare—diachronically and synchronically—and explain—or at least contextualize—what we observe in the various countries and country groups.

Theoretical constructs such as 'the Napoleonic governance tradition' or 'the consensus model of democracy' are attempts at analytical generalization. They are 'ideal types' and should not be equated, one-on-one, with the time-and-space specific 'real types'. In this book, we have concentrated on the specific real types—the Dutch experience, the Italian pattern, and so on—but in doing so we have also learned something on a more aggregative level, closer to the ideal types. We have observed, for example, that the Napoleonic subnational governance tradition is significantly on

the decline in Western Europe, but not so much in Eastern Europe. At the same time, we witness a growing influence of the Germanic governance tradition, most notably in the traditionally quite ‘Napoleonic’ systems of Belgium, Spain, Italy, and France. The Nordic tradition is still there, though mixed-up with new elements (more ‘choice’, more regionalism) and the same goes for the Anglo tradition (more devolution, a bit more power-dispersal).

<p1>Models of direct democracy—voter democracy and participatory democracy—have proved to be heuristically valuable for research into subnational democracy in Europe. Looking at regional and especially local democracy across Europe, these categories do not remain empty at all, although the actual importance of referendums, voting assemblies, citizen forums, participatory planning arrangements, and the like does vary greatly. The role of voter democracy in the interpenetration of models is considerably more prominent in the Rhinelandic group than in the British Isles; the Nordic group comes somewhat closer to the former; the Southern and Eastern groups to the latter. The role of participatory democracy is considerably more prominent in the Rhinelandic group than in the Eastern group; the British Isles, the Nordic, and the Southern groups of cases are generally speaking in between (although particular places may diverge strongly from the average pattern). There may also be diversity *within* single states and this seems to be a growing phenomenon.

<p1>Consensus democracy and pendulum democracy are heuristically valuable categories, at the subnational level as much as at the national level of democracy, although ‘pure types’ appear to be non-existent. Closest to pendulum democracy are the British Isles, but also there some elements of the theoretical rival—consensus democracy—have been mixed in. Closest to consensus democracy are the Rhinelandic countries, although some are increasingly spiced-up with adversarial ingredients. Subnational democracy in the Nordic, Southern, and Eastern groups of countries is often a weakened or ‘hybrid’ version of consensus democracy and pendulum democracy (with the Nordic cases somewhat closer to the former and the the Southern and Eastern cases somewhat closer to the latter).

<p1>Lijphart’s ten-item operationalization of consensus democracy and what he calls Westminster democracy can be translated to the subnational level in a heuristically valuable way, but it has also become clear that this is not enough. There are items beyond the ten-item list (see the Introduction) that need to be looked at also: ‘competitively elected mayors and regional governors’ are not only theoretically consistent but also empirically relevant indicators of pendulum democracy at the subnational level; the same goes for indicators of consensus democracy such as ‘interactive policy-making procedures’ and ‘multi-level governance networks’. Majoritarian and non-majoritarian patterns of representative democracy express themselves not only in formal institutions but also in many informal ones.

<h2>Institutional change: reform versus continuity

<p>Following historical institutionalism, with its emphasis on path-dependency, one would expect to see a great deal of continuity and not a lot of change in the institutions of subnational democracy in Europe. It would predict institutional change to be the exception and institutional stability the rule. Taking a more dynamic and voluntaristic perspective, one would be less surprised to see political institutions

change in periods when technological, economic, and social circumstances shift significantly. Voluntarism would suggest that change agents will use their capacity to act when pressed for change.

<p1>But what do we see in the empirical realities of subnational democracy in Europe? The right answer but not the nicest one for those who like simple answers is: a great deal of variety. There are countries, on the one hand, with comparatively little pattern-changing reform and relatively high levels of institutional stability. One could think of Switzerland, Austria, Luxembourg (in the Rhinelandic group), Sweden, Norway, Finland (in the Nordic group), Portugal, Greece, Malta (in the Southern group) and Ireland (in the British Isles). There are indeed institutional changes in these countries, but they display mostly variations on the same theme, rarely pattern-changing reform.

<p1>There are also European countries, on the other hand, with a great deal of pattern-changing reform in subnational democracy, displaying much less stability and much more change than the previously mentioned countries. We could point to all the current 'new' democracies in Eastern Europe, to the previous 'new' democracy of Spain, but also to founding countries of the EU like Germany (significant shifts to more direct democracy), Belgium (wholesale federalization) and Italy (significant change on both the federal–unitary and the executives–parties dimension).

<p1>And there are country cases between these two extremes. A good example is France, which has changed into a decentralized, and perhaps even regionalized, unitary state, with some participatory democracy added on to it, but also many institutional continuities. Almost the same can be said about the UK. Regionalization in Denmark has attracted a fair deal of attention because it was, indeed, a remarkably swift big-bang reform, but it has not done a lot to redirect the governance tradition or the pattern of democracy.

<p1>All the countries in the Nordic group are relatively similar in displaying little pattern-changing reform, and all the countries in the Eastern group are relatively similar in displaying a fair deal of this type of reform. The Rhinelandic group entails relatively stable cases (Switzerland, Austria, Luxembourg) but also cases in flux (Germany, Belgium). The same goes for the Southern group: little reform (in Portugal, Malta), but also a great deal of change (in Italy and Spain, and to a lesser extent in France, Greece,<sup>4</sup> possibly also in Cyprus).

<p1>In sum, within the whole set of European countries, as well as within particular country groups, both historical institutionalism and voluntarism would find supporting evidence: there are many path-dependent, stable institutions, but in addition to this there is also scope for institutional change and reform.

## <h2>Reform initiatives: common themes

<p>When we focus on the conscious efforts to reform subnational democracy in Europe, what then are the most important and empirically salient initiatives? What are

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<sup>4</sup> Greece is the only southern European country that has carried out an extensive amalgamation reform of their municipalities.

the new institutions and adaptations that are likely to develop ‘staying power’? In the country chapters of this book a large number of different initiatives, inclining to different models of democracy, have been identified and discussed. It is possible to identify four items that have appeared regularly on the reform agendas of many European countries: multilevel governance; interactive policy-making; the local referendum; and the directly elected mayor.

<p1>*Multilevel governance.* This concept refers to the interaction across the different levels of governance—European, national, regional, local—that are increasingly interconnected and interdependent. The concept was originally coined to describe the relations between the European Union and subnational authorities (Marks 1992) but has increasingly been used to analyse relations between levels of governance both within and between states (Bache 2008). As we noted in the Introduction, the notion of a ‘Europe of the Regions’ was popular during the 1990s and multilevel governance was sometimes seen as an aspect of the new-found salience of regions in Europe. However, it was soon challenged by claims that the significance of regions was exaggerated and, on the contrary, that ‘cities’ were the important level of governance (Le Galès 2002). Thus, two influential concepts of Europe—‘Europe of the Regions’ and ‘Europe of the Cities’—have been pitched against each other. However, more recently a more collaborative notion of urban–regional relations appears increasingly to be accepted (Harrison 2007). The games that cities and regions in Europe play are not necessarily zero-sum, but may also be positive-sum, as various case studies in this book and others illustrate (Hendriks et al. 2005). It has been suggested that the emergence of a ‘New City-Regionalism’ is characterized not only by the transboundary nature of many subnational policy problems, but also by the intergovernmental nature of EU decision-making. In institutional terms, the EU is a consensus democracy writ large (Lijphart 1999), characterized by a great deal of interconnectedness and interdependency, a lot of power-dispersal and power-sharing. Even countries like Spain, France, and the UK—traditionally more geared to concentration and centralization of political power—have been affected by the situational and institutional pressures to change their systems of intergovernmental relations. The Treaty of Lisbon can only increase the complexity of these relations both within states and between them and the EU institutions.

<p1>Although, even after Lisbon, the older notion of a ‘Europe of Nation-States’ has not disappeared, the European institutions and the EU member states are dependent on each other to get things done, and are in need of collaboration with regional and local actors. Multilevel governance is an understandable and pragmatic response to these situational and institutional challenges. It does however have implications for the practice of democracy at both national and subnational levels. It has all the disadvantages of intergovernmental networks with a strong reliance on professional dealmakers, experts from umbrella organizations. It is clear that we are here far from democratic practice whether national or subnational, representative or direct or participatory. This raises a real challenge to democratic practice.

<p1>*Interactive governance.* This is a form of policy-making that has been developed (the term originated in the Netherlands) to overcome the weaknesses both associated with representative democracy but also of what has been called ‘network governance’ by decision-making experts (Kohler-Koch and Eising 1999). ‘Participatory’, or ‘deliberative’ democracy, which are variants of interactive governance, are often

geared to ‘bringing the citizen back in’, or at least attempting to make and keep connections between local and regional policy-makers and the people. In this volume, there appear a great number of initiatives that reflect this approach: interactive visioning exercises in Dutch cities; neighbourhood councils in Lille, France; participatory budgeting in Seville, Spain; participatory regional planning in Tuscany, Italy; *Mitwirkungsverfahren* in Zurich, Switzerland; *Bürgerkommunen* in Germany; citizen participation policy in Finland; citizen assemblies in Slovenia; various forms of *e*-participation in many countries—and this is just a tip of the iceberg.

<p1>Two aspects of this are striking. First, the participatory discourse may be found in all of the country groups that we have distinguished. Although it appears that participatory approaches find a more ready acceptance in the Rhinelandic group of countries than in the new democracies in Eastern Europe, even in the latter the participatory discourse is somewhat on the rise. The British Isles, the Nordic group and the Southern group lie between these two positions on the continuum, with some countries in the Southern group—Italy, Spain, France—remarkably active in this field. Second, the discourse around new initiatives is usually closer to direct democracy than the actual practice, which tends to be a mixture of participatory democracy combined with still dominant patterns of representative democracy. Very rarely, participatory democracy gains an autonomous position vis-à-vis the established model of representative democracy. At best, citizens are ‘brought in’ via participatory extensions to the established model. ‘Interactive governance’—establishing connections between government and the people—is an apt umbrella concept for this reason.

<p1>Under the umbrella concept of interactive governance are also initiatives that are not primarily focused on bringing individual citizens back in, but on reaching out to organized society in the shape of corporations, trade unions, schools, churches, housing agencies, and the like. Notions like ‘urban regimes’, ‘public-private governance’, ‘third-sector involvement’, ‘stakeholder networks’ come to the fore in this respect. What they have in common is that relations between organized society and the formal centres of local and regional decision-making are conceptualized not in a vertical but in a more or less horizontal way. The Brainport Initiative in Eindhoven (the Netherlands) establishes tripartite relations between the city, the business community, and the institutions of higher education. The Strategic Policy Committees in Ireland—to mention just one other example—connect local councillors (two-thirds) to business, trade unions, community groups, voluntary associations, and the like (one-third of the committees).

<take in Table 30.1 near here /local referendums>

<p1>*The local referendum.* Whether to allow a referendum or not, how to deal with it properly, how to combine it with representative democracy, appear to be issues almost everywhere in Europe. There is a big contrast with the US in this respect. There, the institutionalization of directly aggregative decision-making is not only more developed, it is also less questioned. In most European countries, heeding the voice of the people in this direct fashion is still a contested notion, which is gaining in acceptance only gradually and with substantial opposition. The most prominent exception is, of course, Switzerland—world champion in organizing referendums at all levels of government. Not only at the national, but also at the subnational levels of

decision-making, have citizens the last word in mandatory referendums (for ‘constitutional’ matters), optional referendums (for ‘normal’ legislation), and popular initiatives (for citizen-initiated calls to action).<sup>5</sup> For the last two versions, citizens need to collect a certain number of signatures (varying per level and unit of government). The optional referendum needs governmental legislation, but the popular initiative does not depend on that. The referendum might be called a modest step toward direct democracy, ‘but, combined with the initiative, it becomes a giant step,’ as Lijphart (1999) argues. At the national level, no other country in Europe has the popular initiative, but at the subnational level Germany and Austria have followed the Swiss example, albeit both at a respectable distance, with Austria coming clearly last in terms of actual use.

The results of direct voting in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria are binding, which as a rule is not the case in other local referendums in most of the other European countries. An exception to the rule are the referendums in the UK held to establish whether a local community wants a directly elected mayor, but in the larger scheme of things this is a big exception, also within the UK itself. Apart from the cases just mentioned, local referendums are government-initiated and advisory. In countries like the Netherlands, councils may feel morally obliged to respect clear and valid referendum outcomes, but they are not formally compelled to do so.

In addition to the category of countries that have a binding referendum combined with the popular initiative, two other broad categories of cases can be distinguished. First, a category of countries where the local referendum, as a rule government-initiated and consultative, has become fairly common in terms of both formal and social institutionalization (albeit to varying degrees). Second, a category of countries where the referendum has been formalized quite recently, and/or where the referendum has been little used up to now (when the various country cases were analysed and written down). Many of the newer democracies, first in Southern Europe, then later in Eastern Europe, have established referendum rights. In many of the latter countries, for example Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia, referendums may be binding under certain conditions. However, they are not often used. Table 30.1 summarizes the picture painted by the various country reports in this book.

The referendum is a potentially strong expression of (directly aggregative) voter democracy, which may present opportunities but also considerable risks to policy-makers. In most countries, subnational governments have started to use instruments like opinion polls, consumer surveys, and the like, which also have a directly aggregative logic (preferences are quantified, aggregated, and interpreted as the voice of the people), but do not have the formal characteristics and challenges associated with real referendums.

<take in Table 30.2 near here /directly elected mayors>

*The directly elected mayor.* The directly elected mayor is a potentially strong expression of pendulum democracy: candidates for a political office at the apex have

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<sup>5</sup> At the federal level, the mandatory referendum and the popular initiative require a double majority—among the entire population, and among the populations of the majority of cantons—which still means that the last word is spoken by citizens at the polls.

to compete for electoral support, and only one candidate can win; the winning candidate can win again after a successful term of office, but can also be ousted and replaced by a rival. Traditionally, this has always been an important point of contrast, comparing subnational democracy in Europe with patterns displayed by the US, where competitive elections for subnational political office—the mayor, the governor, and many other offices—has been institutionalized much more strongly. The contrast is still there, but it has become somewhat less stark because of reforms in various European countries.

<p1>The group of countries with no council-elected or directly elected mayor has become relatively small. Only the Benelux countries and three Nordic countries occupy this position. It should be noted that the local mayor or chairman is by no means independent from local democratic pressures in this group of countries. The Belgian mayor is formally appointed by higher authority, but by way of informal rules of the game he is normally the leader of the political party with the most votes in the local elections. The appointment of the Dutch mayor is nowadays prepared to a large extent by the local council, which sketches the desired profile of the new mayor, interviews candidates, and selects the final options from which the Minister of the Interior must choose. In the Nordic countries, with the exception of Denmark, collective forms of political executive prevail. Although there are examples of powerful municipal chairmen, all decisions are formally taken in the board or the council. Apart from experiments in Norway, there have been no serious suggestions that these chairmen should be directly elected.

<p1>The mayoral models of countries like Belgium and the Netherlands may be formally different from the countries where the local mayor or chairman is formally appointed by the local council, and not by some higher authority, but materially the differences have become smaller than the dichotomy appointed vs. council-elected would suggest. With regard to mayoral profile, responsibilities, and powers, the differences between and within the groups distinguished in Table 30.2 are, however, still substantial. In some countries, like Spain, there are also distinctions made between mayors of smaller and bigger communities. In the UK, a very small minority of local communities have opted for a directly elected mayor, while the vast majority still works with a mayor selected from among the ranks of local councillors.

<p1>Countries with directly elected mayors now form the biggest group within Europe. The number of directly elected mayors grew considerably in the 1990s, when, after reunification, most German *Länder* opted for the model which had become common in southern Germany (the American occupying-power zone), and when the Austrian *Länder* and the Italian government also opted for this model. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, most of the new democracies in Eastern Europe also formalized the directly elected mayor in new legislation on local government and home administration.

## <h2>Challenges to reform

<p>Agents of reform to subnational democracy in Europe are forced into action by challenges that are partly generic and partly specific to the various countries and country groups.

<p1>*The Rhinelandic states* are mostly challenged by the advent of new cleavages—such as nationalism versus cosmopolitanism or traditional vs. post-materialist values—usually deviating from, and sometimes complicating the older cleavages—capital versus labour, religious versus secular, Catholic versus Protestant—that, from a Rokkanian perspective, have defined democracy in earlier periods. Related to this is the advent of new, mainly right-wing, populist groups and movements that define themselves in opposition to the established democratic culture of pacification and accommodation. What used to be seen as a strength of consensus democracy and the Germanic governance tradition—moderation—is viewed by growing numbers nowadays as weakness. The inclination to complexity, opaqueness, and tardiness by decision-makers is often criticized as well. Attempts at democratic reform in subnational democracy in the Rhineland tend to be legitimized with reference to such challenges. Directly elected mayors and other competitive elections for political office should improve electoral sensitivity as well as the scope for democratic leadership and decisive political action. New participatory and deliberative arrangements are supposed to lead policy-makers to look beyond ‘the usual suspects’ of external consultation and cooperation, while (quasi-) plebiscitary arrangements such as referendums, (electronic) town hall meetings, consumer polls, and user surveys are expected to give individualized input and feedback to systems that tend to focus on group representatives.

<p1>*The British Isles.* A major challenge is to integrate more participatory and consensual patterns in a traditionally majoritarian system. This has happened to some extent in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, but less in England. The challenge facing subnational governance in the United Kingdom is to relate these reforms in the Celtic periphery to governance in England. The attempt to establish regional governments in England was massively rejected in the only referendum that was held. Opposition came primarily from local councillors who feared losing their positions in the existing local government system, but also from the population, who were not convinced that a new regional government would not lead to greater bureaucracy and waste. This anti-politics has actually grown in recent times (2009) with a series of scandals relating to MPs and Lords claiming expenses in an unethical and sometimes @criminal{possibly criminal?} manner. This has led to a great deal of disaffection from the political system on the part of ordinary citizens and is stoked by the media.

<p1>*The Nordic states* experience challenges to traditional forms of representative democracy and the previous very strong position of the political parties. Instead, new means to strengthen citizen governance and self-determination have emerged, in systems where the state, the political representatives, and the professionals used to look after the collectivity. ‘Choice’ approaches are replacing paternalism associated with strongly developed welfare states. The redistributive and relatively generous Nordic welfare systems are under pressure, with implications for subnational self-government and democracy. An ageing population, fewer citizens in the productive age-groups, and neo-liberal values all exert pressure for more efficient provision of the welfare services. Regionalization has partly been launched as a response to these challenges.

<p1>*The Southern European states.* The southern European states face the challenge of overcoming a Napoleonic bureaucratic system which sometimes finds it difficult to adapt to new challenges of governance. Sometimes, there is an institutional inertia

which means that institutional reforms—both political and administrative—are blocked by the maintenance of the previously existing institutions alongside the new ones. The worst case here is France, where there is a plethora of subnational governments and administrations: twenty-two regions, 100 departments and over 36,000 communes with about 500,000 local politicians besides those at the national and European levels! The system of overlapping institutions is sometimes called the ‘millefeuille institutional français’.<sup>6</sup> Although significant reforms have occurred in Italy and Spain, this tendency still persists. In France, Italy, Portugal, and Greece, another problem is the overbearing weight of the central state, which, despite regionalization and decentralization reforms in some of these countries, still manages to weigh on the subnational level. One problem found in Italy, Greece, and Portugal is a recurring clientelism in which local favours are distributed on the basis of patron–client relationships of support. This does not always lead to a strong local civil society of active citizens.

<p1>*The New Democracies.* The most serious challenge facing the arrival of subnational democracy in the new democracies is the challenge to democracy itself: overcoming the legacy of the centralized communist system and the damage done by this system to civil society. Of course, some of the new democracies—Poland for example—are in better shape than others and their reforms are advancing at a satisfactory rate. The international community, including the European Union and the Council of Europe, have been an enormous benefit in this transition to democracy. Nevertheless, obstacles remain, not least the task of converting into reality what are usually excellent constitutional positions on local and, sometimes, regional government. Many of the new states also face enormous problems of corruption and the deformation of the law which has led to a collapse of self-confidence in the populations themselves. Sometimes there are close links between organized crime and the political system. A final problem is the low level of economic development in most of the new democracies. This too is a source of corruption and crime. Finally, although the European Union has helped the new democracies to install more or less functioning political and administrative systems, it has also encouraged reliance on the central government rather than on political decentralization and even less on political regionalization. The reason for this is that the European Commission often shares with the central government a distrust of the subnational level and the Commission’s primary concern is not so much political democracy as the efficient and effective implementation of the funds it is providing. Furthermore, as many of the new democracies recovered, or even newly discovered, national independence, they are reluctant to share this new-found national sovereignty with other levels of government. In some cases, there is also a fear of encouraging divisive regionalism given the existence of linguistic and religious minorities within their borders.

## <h1>Concluding Remarks

<p>With subnational democracy analysed in twenty-nine European countries, clustered in five major groups, many comparative avenues could be followed, and many interesting patterns can be discerned. Some of the more salient, but by no means all of those discernable, have been discussed in the previous pages. At this point, it would be useful to take a ‘bird’s eye view’ of subnational democracy in Europe, and

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<sup>6</sup> The image is taken from the many-layered cream cake called a ‘millefeuille’ (‘a thousand leaves’).

to attempt to formulate some general remarks. There are seven points that we want to stress here:

<p1>1. *Democracy in Europe means hybrid democracy at both the national and the subnational levels.* Pure models of democracy—models not touched by others—are non-existent. In different ways and to varying degrees consensus, pendulum, voter, and participatory democracy are being mixed—not by random shuffling, but in a patterned way as we have determined in the earlier section on institutional patterns. The Napoleonic, Germanic, Anglo and Nordic traditions in subnational governance are still influential, but by no means in a deterministic way. Not only goods and people move around in Europe, the same goes for administrative methods and techniques.

<p1>2. *Subnational governance in Europe has not become predominantly homogenized.* Discourse about governance, especially governance within the realm of the European Union, sometimes suggests a massive process of homogenization. If this were true, understanding one or two country cases would suffice to understand the workings of subnational governance in Europe in general. This is by no means the case. Nation- or country-specific patterns are still highly salient. The Dutch mayor operates in a political opportunity structure that is very different from that experienced by an Italian or Danish mayor, not only because their mandates as mayors are different but also because their institutional habitats differ significantly—withstanding the fact that they also come across some similar European rules and regulations.

<p1>3. *Neoliberalism and New Public Management have been mainstreamed.* Stimulated by the advent of Thatcherism and Reaganism, neoliberalism and its practical translation in terms of the New Public Management have exerted influence on regional and especially local government—firstly in the Anglo-American world but later also on the European continent. The influence is still there, but it has also been mainstreamed and channelled into formats that are relatively far removed from Osborne and Gaebler's vision of 'reinventing government'. It has impacted on local government by encouraging a 'choice' model both in terms of institutional design and relations with the private sector and in terms of policy options.

<p1>4. *The regional movement in Europe has become divided.* In the 1980s and the 1990s regionalism and regionalization in Europe were 'hot topics'. As a vision, 'Europe of the Regions' competed with 'Europe of the Nations', sometimes teaming up with 'Europe of the Cities'. In 1994, the Committee of the Regions was being established, but was something of a disappointment. Today, the regional movement is divided between 'strong' regions with legislative powers and 'weaker' regions without these. Nevertheless, the issue of how to fill the 'meso' level of governance between the national and the local is still relevant. In some cases, there is ongoing experimentation with elected or appointed regions; in others, the emphasis is more on encouraging cooperation between municipalities themselves to permit the efficient delivery of public services. These, however, in turn raise the issue of their democratic accountability.

<p1>(5) *Democratic innovation often centres on the local level.* The regional level is certainly not devoid of democratic experiments or initiatives to reform democracy,

but, in general, there is more reform energy invested at the local level. This is where interactions with citizens are often most intense, but also often quite tense. Discussions about direct legislation, directly elected officials or participatory planning are more often about local than about regional referendums; more often about elected mayors than about elected regional governors or presidents; more often about local than about regional planning. Local democracy serves as a field of democratic experimentation that also influences supralocal institutions of democracy. Quite often, democratic innovations travel ‘upwards’ in the system of home administration. This is seen, for example, in the many experiments with participatory or interactive decision-making.

<p1>6. *Subnational democracy has to deal with citizen disaffection and society’s problems.* Citizen disaffection is driven by factors that are by no means all related to subnational democracy, but subnational actors—mainly local and urban policymakers—have to deal with it all the same. In subnational democracy, civic society is close up and personal. Some cabinet ministers actually manage to evade direct contact with citizens, something an executive politician at the local level could rarely do. Decisions (or non-decisions) of the former are often off-loaded to the latter, who usually has to account for much more than he is formally responsible for. Local government is also in the front line of issues such as migration, multiculturalism, homelessness, and social problems such as drug addiction, prostitution, and petty crime. This makes working in subnational democracy highly complex and challenging at the same time.

<p1>7. *Citizens’ participation in local affairs is becoming increasingly skewed.* On the one hand, there is a growing well-educated upper and middle class, with knowledge on how to approach the political system efficiently, but on the other hand, large numbers of disadvantaged persons and groups, among those an increasing number of immigrants, are feeling left out. This state of affairs is reported in many of the country cases covered in this book. It is perhaps the greatest challenge for policymakers aiming at broadening democratic participation at subnational level.

<p1>Taken together, the complexity of these developments underline the need for a renewed research agenda on subnational democracy. There are almost 100,000 units of subnational government in Europe, but the activities taking place in these tend to be forgotten in overall European decision-making. Comparative studies that take the local level seriously are particularly welcome.

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<table 30.1>

<tn>Table 30.1 <tt>The local referendum in Europe

<b>Popular initiative and binding referendum institutionalized and frequently used</b>	<b>Government-initiated/ advisory referendum fairly common</b>	<b>Referendum recently institutionalized/sparingly used</b>
Switzerland, Germany, Austria	Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia	UK, Ireland, France, Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria

<tsn>Source: The chapters in this book.

<table 30.2>

<tn>Table 30.2 <tt>The elected mayor in Europe

<b>Directly elected mayor</b>	<b>Council-elected mayor</b>	<b>No council-elected or directly elected mayor</b>
Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Slovakia	Denmark, Ireland, UK, <sup>1</sup> Spain, <sup>2</sup> France, Malta, Portugal, Czech Republic, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania	Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Norway, Finland, Sweden

<tfn>1 Except twelve municipalities that have voted for elected mayors in referendums.

<tfn>2 Except the very small municipalities.

<tsn>Source: the chapters in this book.