

EU Civil Society: Patterns of Cooperation, Competition and Conflict, edited by H. Johansson and S. Kalm (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 1st edn, 2015, ISBN 9781137282309); xvi+273pp., £65.00 pb.

Genuine, comprehensive and reflective. I select these words with care in my judgement of this contribution to literature on civil society in the EU. I indeed recommend this book. I briefly outline why I reach this conclusion, before indicating my thoughts on where this book does, and does not, bring us forward to.

Genuine. We all recognize the difficulties involved in cajoling a group of scholars towards a shared theme. The editors make noteworthy efforts in this regard. I enjoyed the systematically theorize the individual chapters around relational based models. There is, consequently, a theoretical contribution – in the application of field models to EU civil society studies – beyond the empirical material. Although I am personally not convinced of its merit, I commend the engagement with new theoretical frameworks.

Comprehensive. Edited books tend to score well on this criterion. This is no exception. We are dealt a conquering hand of wide-ranging, sophisticated and detailed cases all focused on the EU level. I was particularly convinced by part III of the book, which entailed three dedicated chapters on the European Citizen's Initiative. They fit expertly well into the relational theoretical framework, inspiring me to rethink some of my assumptions on civil society contexts. The previous two sections build from the relatively abstract to the apposite.

Reflective. A burden that oft acts to disfigure this format of scholarship. I am delighted to report that both editors and authors work to prevent such an outcome. I note some excellent points of reflection on the theoretical framework, taking place in most conclusions, and indeed for some throughout. I would have preferred chapter 13 to be named conclusion, as it currently sits in part III. There are some good contemplations here, designed to theorize on the EU framework that guides conflict and cooperation between civil society organisations.

So where does this book not bring us to? As an avid reader in this area, it does not allow for any real advancement in thinking on civil society beyond the narrow case of the supranational level. Some non-EU chapters would have allowed for a deeper reflection on the empirical and theoretical reach of the core arguments. I would particularly urge scholars in this area to reflect more explicitly on causality and agency. Ending on a more positive note, where does this book bring us to? It does allow us to develop and move beyond network based accounts of EU civil society. I believe it could inspire more sophisticated accounts of the frameworks in which civil society act, and indeed, cannot act.

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