Across most contributions, the answer is not much. In some areas, such as youth policy (the 'pupil premium') and family policy (where they managed to 'delay and constrain' Conservative ministers on a tax break for married couples), LibDem ministers made a mark. In others (e.g. housing) they had none.

This lack of impact is largely put down to what got the LibDems into power in the first place. By tacking to the right, and embracing a more free market approach to public policy, Clegg and the Orange book wing of the party made ideal crewmates for a Conservative Party still under the sway of Thatcherism, it is argued. This was particularly the case with the coalition's approach to public spending and deficit reduction that shaped much of social policy in its five years of government.

Even on what on the face of it was that most progressive of coalition reforms, the launch of same-sex marriage, this is seen as an alliance of libertarian Conservative and LibDem 'mods' against the traditional Tory 'rockers' led by Iain Duncan Smith.

By focusing on the ideological dimension to politics and policy-making, how the parties actually managed to work together – or not – in government on social policy is given far less space. This is a pity. In the context of radical shifts in the British party system, the sharing of power is likely to become a more frequent occurrence. How political parties and British public administration come to terms with this will concern us more and more.

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Jan Debbernack (2014), *The Politics of Social Cohesion in Germany, France and the United Kingdom*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, £63.00, pp. 212, hbk.
doi:10.1017/S0047279417000150

The book sets out to explore what is labelled the turn to cohesion in European politics. The three cases analysed are France (1995-2005), Germany (1999-2004) and UK (2001-2007). Jan Debbernack's (JD) main contribution is to describe and analyse how the politics and the policies rhetorically linked to the notion of social cohesion are embedded in deeper "social imaginaries".

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter positions the book in a social constructivist tradition, which emphasises the importance of describing and analysing the political rhetoric, in this case the widespread rhetoric about social cohesion, rather than "buying" the idea that social cohesion is something objectively given that can be measured. In the introduction JD elegantly describes how the references to Durkheim – often used to demonstrate the naturalness of being concerned about social cohesion – are full of ambiguity. Durkheim was concerned about social cohesion. But in contrast to the rhetoric in the three countries he did not propose a retreat to former common values; on the contrary. JD builds his conceptual framework on Charles Taylor, Corneclius Castoriadis and Ernesto Laclau but adds many useful links to social constructivist arguments in the policy analysis literature, e.g. the idea that problems need to be perceived/constructed and positioned on the political agenda before any governmental action can be taken.

In chapter two JD argues that the idea of an "active society" has become an important part of the social imaginaries, not only in the three countries (analysed in the next chapters), but in general. It describes how the notion of "active society" is linked to liberalism (again elegantly pointing to the ambiguities), social cohesion and new governance ideas. In terms of concrete policies the rhetoric of "active society" often boils down to "activation" policies

targeted at unemployed. The chapter describes this as a general European trend and summarizes the critique these policies have met.

In the next three chapters, JD analyses the countries one by one. In France the analyses are focused on the notion of "Cohésion Sociale", which started with the rhetoric of Chirac and his notion of a "fracture sociale". In Germany the analyses are focused on the notion of "Bürgergesellschaft", which started with the rhetoric of Herzog and his notion about the need for a "Ruck durch Deutchland" (Germany needs to pull itself together). In the UK, the analyses are focused on "community cohesion", which started with the interpretation of the riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, especially the interpretation provided by Tony Blair. In the three chapters, JD describes how rhetoric about social cohesion is not only linked to current events (policy analysts would call it focus events) but also linked to deeper national narratives; in the French case the narrative of the republic, in the German case the narrative of economic growth and in the UK case the narrative of being a multicultural society. Thus, the book describes how the politics of social cohesion is embedded in a notion of failure, or even crises, of the former successful social models.

In chapter six JD summarizes the national-specific findings and describes similarities across the three countries. One of the great strength of the book is the sensitivity to the national context (see below), but JD convincingly argues that similarities can also be found. In all three countries there was rhetoric of disintegration, a vision of cohesion, a demand for social activity and in the end a policy targeted at particular vulnerable subgroups (despite an initial rhetoric of broad societal problems and demand for broad societal action). JD finishes the book with a conclusion that discusses the fact that the rhetoric of social cohesion got curtailed in all three countries and in Europe in general. In the moment of writing around 2009 – 2013, the economic crises occupied the politics and the policy agenda. This sudden decline of cohesion rhetoric nicely underlines that what we experienced was indeed "social imaginaries" at play. The book ends with a clever discussion about the impossibility of escaping "social imaginaries"; this after all might not be a bad thing – social imaginaries, besides having obvious uses as tools for legitimation, also contain a potential for critical thinking about the injustice of society. According to JD the aim should be to democratise the "social imaginaries".

In my opinion, JD has written an extremely useful book that offers a new perspective on something that has already been the substance of much research and debate. Media scholars might miss a more rigorous tracking of the media content, comparativists might miss a better argument for the country selection and hardcore theoreticians might miss a more coherent theoretical framework. However, the book benefits from a deep understanding of various theoretical traditions. In my opinion, it is a strength that the empirical evidence is not forced into a simple theoretical framework. The book also benefits from a deep contextual knowledge about each country's case; especially considering "the terms". One of the best passages is the description of what "bürgerlig" (bourgeois) means in German. It is not easy to find a language to write about the language. But JD manages to write a book that scrutinizes difficult concepts using standard academic language. Finally, the book benefits from the comparative perspective that enables JD to distinguish between the common and the country-specific.

The real challenge for the book is whether the politics of social cohesion could be given a simple structural explanation. Low economic growth would be the obvious candidate to explain the feeling of decline in all three countries. The supply-side policies that followed aimed at the labour market, rhetorically sold as part of an active society, could be caused by the inability to pursue classic demand-side Keynesian policies. The book could also be challenged on a middle ground. It could be the dominant economic ideas of what the economy needed, especially in the case of France and Germany, rather than broader "social imaginaries" that mattered. This discussion is at the very heart of social science and the book does not take a hard anti-structural

stand. The fruitful approach is to use this constant tension in our work as a tool to sharpen analyses. In my opinion, JD has written one of the best books to enable us to see the elephant from the non-structural perspective.

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Hartley Dean and Lucinda Platt (eds.) (2016), *Social Advantage and Disadvantage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, £25.00, pp. 400, pbk.
doi:10.1017/S0047279417000162

This book aims, in part, to replace in part the 'highly successful' *Understanding Social Exclusion* that provided a comprehensive analysis of the concept of social exclusion and used the framework developed to document and analyse its various manifestations (Hills, Le Grand and Piachaud, 2002). Both books contain contributions from researchers at the LSE, primarily located in either the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) or the Department of Social Policy. The two lists of contributors provides testimony to the enduring quality of social policy scholarship at the LSE and offers a fascinating insight into the generational change that is sweeping academic institutions generally: only two contributors – Tania Burchardt and John Hills – appear on both lists.

The Preface to Social Advantage and Disadvantage notes that the concept of social exclusion 'has slipped down the social policy agenda'. It argues that social advantage and disadvantage – which is acknowledged as having 'no established definition' – provides a new way of engaging with an array of concepts that capture how 'human society can cause, exacerbate, or fail to prevent injustices, divisions, or disruptions that are harmful to some of society's members'. There are similarities between the two concepts of exclusion and advantage/disadvantage, as the many excellent contributions to this volume illustrate. Among the most significant of these is the need to identify how the many factors that contribute to both issues often co-exist and reinforce each other. But the new approach also opens up new avenues of inquiry into how existing economic and social inequalities are formed, persist, interact and restrict people's opportunities and achievements. These ideas emerge as one reads through the book's chapters, but readers (well, this one at least!) would have benefited from a coherent Introduction that sets out the main elements of the new framework and summarises how each chapter contributes to it. The Conclusion by the editors does this to some extent by identifying some of the key themes that emerge from individual contributions but, important though these are, they come too late to inform the reader (or tempt others to join them). Here, the focus is more explicitly on inequalities and how different forms of disadvantage 'reinforce each other' and 'interact in distinctive ways' to create inequalities within and between social groups. It is noted (p. 347) that income and economic differences within groups 'dwarf average economic differences between groups' although this is largely a reflection of the fact that the number of such groups is generally rather small relative to the number of individuals. In the extreme, for a population of N individuals, it follows by definition that all inequality is within-group if there is only one group, while all inequality is between groups if there are N groups.

Hartley Dean sets the scene for later contributions in his opening chapter by contrasting the concept of social advantage and disadvantage – a continuum – with poverty – an essentially dichotomous concept. He makes some telling points, and distinguishes (p. 6) between measures