

Book reviews

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Europe's City-Regions Competitiveness: Growth Regulation and Peri-Urban Land Management, eds N. BERTRAND & V. KREIBICH, 187 pp. Assen: Royal Van Gorcum (2006). €27.50 (paperback). ISBN 90 232 4183 5 and 978 90 232 4183 6.

This book is a product of a 2000–2004 EU-funded research project (Urban Pressure on Rural Areas (NEWRUR)) ‘which dealt with the changes and dynamics linked to urban pressure on rural areas within European city regions’ (p. 1). The initial chapters explain the policy background, i.e. the search for a European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), and various concepts, such as ‘polycentricism’, ‘spatial planning’ (a somewhat broader profession than traditional UK-type land use planning), and ‘territorial cohesion’. The specific role of city-regions in this search, and associated ideas such as ‘urban–rural partnerships’, ‘peri-urban regions’, are explored, though not always in great depth. Later chapters include four ‘evaluations of the factors that contribute to city-region success or failure in achieving the kind of regulatory aims spelt out in the ESDP’, in England (Cambridge and Norwich), France (Annecy and Valence), Spain (Andalusia) and Germany (Munich) respectively. A final chapter reviews the earlier material, and attempts to draw some ‘lessons for the future?’

There is not much in here that is directed specifically towards (or from) agriculture, or indeed other specific land uses and economic sectors, with the exception perhaps of housing. The book is more concerned with the roles and objectives (or ambitions?) of various levels and segments of government, from the European down to the local level. Even so, relationships with the private sector and with non-governmental organizations and interest groups are not dealt with in detail, even in the four case-study chapters. Despite its presence in the book’s title, ‘competitiveness’ – a term borrowed from economics – also receives little analysis. Although the English is generally good, the absence of an index (or even a listing of section titles) is a drawback.

Thus the book is a useful insight into the world of spatial planners, and illustrates both idealism and

intellectualism at the European level. Depending on your point of view, this may be taken as a warning or an inspiration. The question mark in the title of the final chapter seems justified.

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The State of Food and Agriculture 2006: Food Aid for Food Security? Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). FAO Agriculture Series no. 37. xii + 168 pp. + mini CD-ROM. Rome: FAO (2006). US\$65.00 (Paperback). ISBN 978-92-5-105600-4.

This issue of the FAO’s annual ‘SOFA’ series, authored by a very international team, focuses on the issues and controversies surrounding international food aid. The benefits of food aid are obvious when it reaches the mouths of the hungry (if uncontaminated by dirty water), but it has been criticized as a costly and often inefficient donor-driven response that creates recipient dependency, undermines local production and trade, and weakens long-term sustainability. Over 80 pages (and 8 pages of references later on) examine the economic arguments and evidence, and cover programming (timing and management), governance (organization, e.g. Food Aid Conventions and the World Food Programme), the security of food supplies, economic and political dependency, disruption of production and commerce, and emergencies (‘sudden-onset’, ‘slow-onset’, and ‘complex and protracted crises’).

The report concludes that ‘the available evidence regarding these issues is surprisingly thin’, but it appears that considerable improvements have been achieved over recent decades in the world’s food aid system. Hence the numbers of undernourished have been kept at about 850 million people (mostly in Asia) since the early 1990s, after an impressive previous fall due to improved food production (again, in Asia). Nevertheless, the recurrent crises in parts of sub-Saharan Africa are well known, and natural-disaster emergencies seem to be increasing in frequency and severity. Recommendations include better targeting, untying from donor requirements, the use of local or regional purchases, and better information systems to anticipate food shortages in time, and to avoid