

The Oxford Handbook of Local and Regional Democracy in Europe analyzes the state of play of democracy at the subnational level in the 27 member states of the EU plus Norway and Switzerland. It places subnational democracy in the context of the distinctive Anglo, French, German, and Scandinavian state traditions in Europe asking to what extent these are still relevant today. The Handbook adapts Lijpharts theory of democracy and applies it to the subnational levels in all the country chapters. A key theoretical issue is whether subnational (regional and local) democracy is derived from national democracy or whether it is legitimate in its own right. Besides these theoretical concerns it focuses on the practice of democracy: the roles of political parties and interest groups and also how subnational political institutions relate to the ordinary citizen. This can take the form of local referendums or other mechanisms of participation. The Handbook reveals a wide variety of practices across Europe in this regard. Local financial systems also reveal a great variety. Finally, each chapter examines the challenges facing subnational democracy but also the opportunities available to them to enhance their democratic systems. Among the challenges identified are: Europeanization, globalization, but also citizens disaffection and switch-off from politics. Some countries have confronted these challenges more successfully than others but all countries face them. An important aspect of the Handbook is the inclusion of all the countries of East and Central Europe plus Cyprus and Malta, who joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. This is the first time they have been examined alongside the countries of Western Europe from the angle of subnational democracy.

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