This book is a valuable contribution to the debate on the growing importance and competitiveness of city regions across Europe. It is published in a series entitled ‘European Perspectives on Rural Development’ launched by the Circle for Rural European Studies (CERES), a network involving several European agricultural universities, faculties and research institutes. The publication of the book followed a seminar in April 2004 on ‘Regulating peri-urban change’ that marked the end of the four-year European research programme ‘NEWRUR’. The programme explored the changes and dynamics linked to urban pressure on rural areas within European city regions.

Based on contributions to the seminar, the book explores how far the regulation of change within city regions in Europe is contributing to the European objectives of more balanced competitiveness across the EU territory, polycentric development and rural-urban partnership, as set out in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). It seeks to further understanding of the ESDP emphasis on promoting city-region competitiveness through ‘management’, with particular attention to spatial,
social, economic and political processes at work in city-regions. The book is timely for four main reasons: the increasing importance placed on the principles embodied in the ESDP across the European Union; the relative shortage of research on the rural commuter belts of major cities and on their interaction with those cities; the importance of rural areas in current policy debates as they undergo fundamental cultural, economic, environmental and social adjustment; and the ongoing need for a genuinely comparative understanding of how regulatory processes within the European Union are played out at sub-nationally and locally.

The book is divided into ten chapters. It is structured in two main parts each with four chapters, with additional introductory and concluding chapters. The introductory chapter sets out the European policy context (reviewing the current situation regarding regional and rural development policy in the EU), discusses the guidelines for the development of the European territory as set out in the ESDP (polycentric development and rural-urban partnership) and examines the notion of competitiveness and its application at different spatial scales. Following this, Part I of the book includes four conceptual contributions, evaluating current issues surrounding regulatory processes (Chapter 5, W. Knapp), exploring potential new mechanisms for encouraging more sensitive goal specification for spatial planning (Chapter 2, A. Faludi) and proposes new mechanisms for enhancing the effectiveness of goal achievement (Chapter 3, M. Tewdwr-Jones). Chapter 4 (V. Pivateau) explores the issues that underlie rural-urban relations in terms of territorial planning, particularly within city-regions.
The second part of the book adds to these conceptual discussions of key issues by exploring the practical regulatory issue of policy implementation in particular national settings. There are four in-depth evaluations of the factors that contribute to city region success or failure in achieving the aims set out in the ESDP, including a considerable amount of technical detail regarding the operation of the planning systems in different European countries. The case studies are dissimilar environments in terms of features such as predominantly top-down systems (England), strong local autonomy (Germany), complex regulatory frameworks (France) and relatively straightforward administrative structures (Spain). Within these national contexts and regulatory frameworks, the chapters explore dissimilar socio-economic contexts, such as the Norwich and Cambridge city-regions in the UK. The concluding chapter of the book provides useful comparative summaries of the case study chapters and draws some lessons for the future of European spatial development policy.

The publication is comprehensive, up-to-date and accessible, and well suited to both academics and policy-makers interested in the planning system and its potential impact on the future sustainable development of urban and rural areas across Europe. The authors successfully achieve a balance of general, conceptual discussion and in-depth empirical analysis of four regulatory systems. Overall, the book highlights how central issues in European policy, including notions of balanced communities and sustainable development, are played out in different ways in different contexts and result in uneven consequences across Europe. It makes an important contribution to improving our understanding of how the current regulatory system reinforces or weakens rural-urban interaction within city regions and how the competitiveness and
attractiveness of city regions can be enhanced through improving the interdependence of cities and their hinterlands.

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