



**Introduction to a Major Project:
COMPARATIVE REGIONAL POLICY:
THE EUROPEAN UNION, AUSTRALIA AND ASIA**

Regional Policy has become an increasingly significant dimension of European Union activity, such that annual expenditure in this area comprises more than one third of the total EU budget. Extensive research has been undertaken on uneven economic and social development in the 270 EU regions, and over time, a clear policy direction, aimed at strengthening the economic competitiveness of all regions, has developed.

In Australia, regional development policy has a much less prominent and consistent standing. Research on regional development issues has been crude and there is little to show that policy development has been evidence-based.

Asian countries differ widely, and there is no supranational entity such as the European Union with such clear commitment to policy intervention within member states. However, a number of Asian countries have clear interest in recognising their internal regional variations and in policy interventions which might address at least questions of uneven development, and possibly a range of other cultural, economic, social and political issues.

This Project establishes a comprehensive framework within which more specific studies can explore differences in regional issues in the European Union, Asia and Australia, and highlight challenges of policy development in these settings. The purpose of this document is to outline an overview of questions the Project might address.

On its website, the European Commission has described the purpose of its Regional Policy as being

... to **reduce the significant economic, social and territorial disparities that still exist between Europe's regions**. Leaving these disparities in place would undermine some of the cornerstones of the EU, including its large single market and its currency, the euro.

To what extent do similar challenges exist in Australia and Asian countries? Are similar interventions effective in the different political, cultural and economic settings that are found in European countries, and in Australia and Asia? Specific project topics might include:

- What strategies are effective at addressing regional inequity and increasing competitiveness?
- What similarities and differences arise in relation to urban and rural regional policy processes?
- What issues of regional governance arise under various national political structures?
- What can be learned from different settings about measurement concepts and criteria for comparison, using various data sets?