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**Interpreting the Regional Problem or Interpreting the crisis? A Critical Economic
Geography perspective on uneven regional development in Greece**

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Abstract:

The burst of economic crisis in Greece has posed severe challenges on the continuation of an established mode of economic and regional development, relating to both the domestic system, and the European Union as a whole. In this critical conjuncture, the political economy approach to Economic Geography provides alternative analytical tools and notions for the explanation of the structure and causes of insisting geographical inequalities and injustices that have been formed in the context of the ongoing neoliberal globalization and financialization of capitalism, and that express themselves across different geographical scales. The purpose of the paper is to elaborate on the theoretical foundations and epistemological assumptions of the political economic Paradigm in Economic Geography and to present an analytical framework that has been used to explore the structural features, dynamics and outcomes of a historically and path-dependent mode of spatial development in Greece as a member-state of the EU. The main argument is that an alternative reading of the “story so far” of the Greek regional problem reveals unexpected side effects of rapid growth and of major political decisions to open up domestic economy to globalization, as well as alternative causes of the Greek crisis in a European context. Among various imprints in economic geography and norms of unevenness between regions, in the period 1993-2010, we highlight especially the lost momentum of Athens and of its hinterland and explore the deepening of spatial injustices that finally undermines a specific mode of economic development and leads to crisis.

Key words: Regional problem, economic crisis, Greece, European integration, Critical Economic Geography.

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Interpreting the regional problem or interpreting the crisis?

A Critical Economic Geography perspective on uneven regional development in Greece

1. Introduction

During the last decades, the regional problem in Greece has been a popular subject of discussion in academic and scientific circles, due mainly to the country's participation in the EU that has necessitated more intensive investigations of geographical unevenness in the context of the European integration, investigations that could inform effective planning policies and evaluation techniques. Since the early 1990's, with the signing of the Treaty for the EU and at least up to the burst of the economic crisis in Europe (2008-09), most researchers agree that regional economic inequalities in Greece have been decreasing or at least have not been increasing (e.g. Lolos, 2009, Petrakos and Psycharis, 2004, Petrakos and Rodriguez Pose, 2003, Cappelen et al., 2003) and almost all studies perceive disparities in terms of differences in basic macroeconomic indices and development in terms of nominal economic convergence. Usually, the positive fact of the elimination of regional inequalities is perceived as a result of fast growth and general economic upturn and as a positive effect of co-funded policies for regional development and economic cohesion in the context of the European Integration.

Economic crisis broke in Greece as a fiscal and debt crisis, as well as an aftereffect of a global financial crisis, in 2008-2009. In the few years that followed, continuing economic recession, social turmoil, political instability, and deteriorating fiscal problems, have proved that this crisis reflects a severe systemic imbalance of multiple endogenous and exogenous

processes, associated by a complex set of social, political and economic implications (Vlachou et al., 2011). Especially, the structure of the Eurozone, interregional distribution of economic growth and trade surpluses on the grounds of the EU, structural characteristics of the domestic markets, ineffectiveness of domestic economic policies, trade relations and institutional inertia of Greek governments, are some of the most common explanations in an ongoing debate (e.g. also Pelagidis and Mitsopoulos M. 2011, Kalyvas et al. 2012, Vatikiotis et al. 2010, Argitis 2012).

In general, while all financial and political implications of the Greek crisis in the context of the European one, have been considerably discussed, there has been little concern on the geographical dimensions of the problem, with a few exceptions (see e.g. Hatzimichalis, 2012, 2014). In this paper, we interpret the regional problem of Greece in a way that takes into account political economy and emphasizes the geographical and historical transformations of Greek capitalism interrupted by periods of crisis. Critical Economic Geography provides the theoretical foundations of empirical work and the building blocks for the construction of a critical analytical framework of the regional problem.

Interpretations of uneven development in the domestic spatial-economic system, in the context of European and global integration are based on empirical evidence of a period characterized by political and economic transformations in Greece, namely 1993-2010. A main argument is that the Critical Paradigm in Economic Geography reveals alternative aspects of the regional problem, hidden injustices and political power relations in economic space, which explain much of the domestic economic instability, upturn and downturn, over the last decades. In general, uneven spatial development has been found to offer the necessary impetus for Greek economy and policy in the transition to globalization, while the momentum of the

prevalent “growth region of Attica”, appears to explain a fundamental spatial injustice that has posed limits to the same “economic miracle” that it has supported.

In the above context, our argument is structured as follows. First, we present the epistemological foundations of a critical –political economy perspective in Economic Geography, and then, we propose an analytical scheme based on its theoretical and methodological principles. We follow a historical-geographical holistic approach in order to understand domestic structures and economic development processes in Greece, and we reach some final interpretations of regional unevenness that support the view that the regional problem has been regulating economic adjustment, development and regression of Greece in the European context.

2. The Critical Paradigm in Economic Geography

2.1. Space as a social construction

As it is known, there are many different ways of approaching and understanding spatial phenomena and geographical unevenness. First of all, classical and neoclassical Economics have for long ignored the importance of space and place in economic processes, on the basis of the premise that economic activity occurs on a homogenous and undifferentiated land, as it is often said “on the head of a pin” or, as W. Isard (1956) the founder of Regional Science calls it, “in a wonderland of no dimensions”. This is also the result of the basic neoclassical assumption asserting that the operation of the free market tends to lead to interregional convergence and spatial equilibrium at least in the long term. It was not until the 19th century and the appearance of the German School of location theory and Regional Science in the 1950s that questions

regarding the “where” of different activities and the regional dimensions of socioeconomic problems were first posed and answered².

On the contrary, other social sciences, along with Geography, have been interested in the notion of space and place from a very early stage and have been engaging in the study of uneven development earlier than mainstream Economics (Leontidou, 2009). Sociology, Anthropology and even Architecture have been important areas of a critical insight on the role of space and spatiality in social and cultural change (e.g. Foucault, 1967, Harvey, 1989, Soja, 1989/1996, Massey, 2008).

The “spatial turn” of Social Sciences can be conceptualized as an intellectual movement that places emphasis on place and space on the basis of an interdisciplinary perspective (Warf and Arias, 2009), while it is also evident in Economics, during the 1990’s, with the rise of Geographical Economics initiated by the work of the Nobel prize winner Paul Krugman (1991). In the case of Economics, nevertheless, space is introduced as a variable that differentiates economic activity in a one-dimension relation. In the case of Sociology and Humanities, space and place are approached as social constructs, in mutual interdependence and interrelation to other structures and processes (economic, political, cultural, institutional etc).

The argument about the spatial being inherently social and vice versa, builds on the fundamental concept of “socio-spatial dialectics” introduced by Ed. Soja (1989), which in turn has been based upon Lefebvre’s work on “the production of space” (Lefebvre, 1974). The same was developed further by D. Massey, who has asserted that not only the spatial is socially constructed, but also the social relations are a product of spatial restructuring and

² For the basics in Economic Geography see Lambrianidis (2001), Clark et al. (2000) Sheppard and Barnes (2000). Also, for a review on basic texts in Human Geography, see Hubbard et al. (2008).

transformations (Massey and Allen, 1984, Massey et al. 1999, Massey, 1984, 2005). In brief, space is a product of interrelations, interactions and correlations between the global and the local sphere of social and economic activity, and as such, it is always under formation and transformation in different scales of organization of unevenness, of politics and of social relations. Notions like “spatiality” and “locality” best describe the basic elements in an alternative perspective, emphasizing the spatio-temporal construction of social processes. In that context (Massey, 2005), space can be understood in its radical multiplicity, a thesis that implies countless places of time-space coexistence (here and now) as well as countless trajectories for development, that foster alternative imaginations and narration discourses on globalization.

2.2. On the epistemology of Critical Economic Geography (CEG)

Critical Economic Geography (CEG) stems from a creative interdisciplinary synthesis between Economic Geography, critical social theory and Neo-Marxist Political Economy. During its long period of evolution, Economic Geography has experienced a number of epistemological turns or Paradigm shifts: from 19th century environmental determinism, to possibilism and regional geography in the first half of the 20th century, to quantitative revolution, positivism and spatial analysis of the 1950s and 1960s, to the Marxian or radical Political Economy approach in the 1970s and 1980s and the post-modern, cultural and institutional turn since the mid 1980s and 1990s (see indicatively Peet & Thrift, 1989, Barnes, 1997, 2000, Scott, 2000, Kourliouros 2007).

The Marxist or Radical Political Economy perspective in Economic Geography focuses on the exploration of aspects of the injustices and contradictions of modern capitalism, and

proposes an alternative approach to the contemporary problems of the political economy of neoliberal globalization (Swyngedouw, 2005). Often, the legacy of the Regulation School³ is revived, restoring the interest on the social, institutional and economic forms that maintain successful capital accumulation and contain the contradictions and instabilities of the capitalist mode of production.

In this context, Economic Geography examines distributions and patterns of economic activity in geographical space while the critical Paradigm within it is especially concerned with the processes, dynamics and interdependencies between economic and geographical factors, in a perception of space as being a dynamic and dialectic social construction (Kourliouros, 2009). Critique is founded again on Soja's and Massey's perception of space and also on historical-geographical materialism introduced by Harvey (1989). In other words, a Critical perspective in Economic Geography is interested not only in the aftereffects of economic activity on space, but also in the implications of spatial phenomena and relations on economic activity.

To put it otherwise, Critical Economic Geography is the Paradigm within Economic Geography that focuses on the investigation, interpretation and explanation of the complex socio-economic restructuring of late capitalism and on the transforming and transformative spatialities of systemic change.

As rooted in a Marxist-Neomarxist Political Economy approach, Critical Economic Geography focuses particularly on the interaction between territories, production structures, as well as organization of labour markets in the industrial and post-industrial era in globalization (Walker, 2000, Scott and Storper, 1986). In doing so CEG adopts methodologies that reject positivism and formalistic modeling of the mainstream quantitative spatial analysis. Nevertheless, several methodological issues have divided CEG scholars from the start, up to this

³ For an overview of Regulation Theory, see Boyer and Saillard (2002).

day. In the 1970's, there has been a fierce dispute over the need to overcome structuralism and economism advocated by the "grand narrative" of Marxism, while in the 1990's the discussion concerned especially the limits and prospects, advantages and disadvantages, of a turn towards empirical studies (locality studies) that stressed the significance of place and human agency in overall geographical change.

It must be stressed from the outset that the CEG is not related to the New Economic Geography or Geographical Economics. As Perrons (2001) explains one could easily distinguish two separate Paradigms in new approaches to Economic Geography. New Economic Geography 1 (NEG 1) based mostly on Krugman's geographical work and the work of his followers, focuses on building and using complicated quantitative methods and sophisticated models, while NEG 2 emphasizes more the interpretation and understanding of causal relations and outcomes of socio-spatial interactions. The difference between the two lies not only in the applied methods, but also in the initial assumptions and analytical concepts as well as in their epistemological foundations. The first comes as a revolution in mainstream-orthodox economic analysis, by reinventing location analysis and including post-keynsian trade theories, while the second, originates from Human Geography, and has been influenced by Radical and Critical Geography.

A full historical overview of the epistemological evolution of CEG has been presented so far in relevant literature (see e.g. Kourliouros, 2009, Bangchi-Sen and Lawton Smith, 2006). In brief, CEG is founded on Radical-Marxist views in Economic Geography that emerged around the 1970's-80's (an era of deindustrialization, crisis of Fordist regime of accumulation and capitalist restructuring). Since the early 1990's, however, CEG has adopted various post-structural and postmodern critical approaches to Political Economy. In doing so, it has used in an

interdisciplinary way various eclectic, post-Marxist currents of thought, elements of Critical Theory (Frankfurt School), cultural studies, Institutional Economics and Economic Sociology, while, at the methodological level, it has adopted Bachelard's critical realism. The latter has a direct impact on the way geographical research is carried out, in that it shifts emphasis from extensive research (based on macro-data and statistical regularities) to intensive research (based on qualitative methods) and trying to interpret the deeper causal relations that underlie socio-spatial processes in various localities. Based on an interdisciplinary way of thinking, CEG includes not only economic but also non-economic, cultural, political and institutional factors in its research agenda, in trying to interpret the unique experience of place and human agency in everyday regularities and irregularities, cultural identity diversification or even political relations and institutional advantages in specific localities. From this aspect, emphasis placed by the CEG on unique localities and intensive research opposes and challenges the grand narrative of the Marxist/Neomarxist approaches.

2.3. Theories on uneven regional and geographical development

The overall theoretical framework of the uneven geography of capitalist development is set by D. Harvey (see Harvey 2001, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2010). More precisely, Harvey focuses his analyses upon the geographical implications of capitalist accumulation by introducing a "geographical" reading of Marx's *Capital*, or, to put it in other words, by introducing a "geographical-historical materialism". According to Harvey (2006a), uneven geographical development explains much of the inherent contradictions and injustices of capitalism as the world's dominant economic system. Geographical restructuring is a vital precondition for the circulation of capital, the continuation of accumulation and the reproduction of capitalism as a

whole. More precisely, agglomeration and dispersion of capital and production in different areas happens as the capital is in a constant search for a “spatial fix” in order to counter over-accumulation crises, contain class struggle and extract more surplus value. In the course of capital circulation, there are two alternatives both entailing a geographical option. In the periods of economic recession, over-accumulation and general instability, either capital relocates to other more profitable areas, or it reorganizes production, work and distribution in its existing location, by introducing new process and product technologies or by intensifying the exploitation of labor. Under this view, capital is not only involved in a continuous quest for new markets, technological means or organizational techniques, but also in a continuous struggle to find the more profitable locations.

Another significant contribution to the literature of uneven regional development is D. Massey’s work. During the 1980’s Massey critically surveys the restructuring of production and offers a new perspective on the socio-economic complexities of the transition from one mode of accumulation to another in a specific time-space context, that of the Great Britain capitalism after 1960. The original contribution of Massey’s “Spatial Divisions of Labour” (Massey, 1995) is twofold: firstly it explores the geographical dialectics between social and production structures that produce changing forms of the regional problem, and secondly it combines into one coherent analytical framework two separate, until then, discussions: one concerning regional development and social structure, and another one concerning industrial geography and location theory. Massey asserts that the economic geography of a region or a locality in a specific historical period is the complex outcome of successive “layers of investment” that produce a concrete spatial division of labour which defines the role this region play in the wider (national and international) spatial divisions of labour. In that context “spatial

divisions of labor” describe the settling at a specific time, of a historical process of consecutive restructurings of production and social relations which result in specific forms of regional unevenness, seen not only as divergence in level of development, but also as difference in the developmental path of the particular region.

In Massey’s work, socio-economic transformation and industrial change have also an effect in other areas and different spatial scales (in the domestic system of a country, or third countries) as domestic and global structures are always interrelated. Under this point of view, the local, the regional, the national and the global, are not only subject to social reformations, but also, reflect variations in political influence and power relations (a thesis that has been enhanced, later on, e.g. Massey, 2005, 2007). “Spatial politics” arise thus as a radical new concept (see also, Featherstone and Painter, 2013) in late 2000’s and early 2010’s. Given that places hold responsibilities and exert power to other places, the regional problem can also be seen as a political problem in space, a problem that is subject to policy intervention but also to spatial dynamics and does not merely reflect absolute inadequacy or excellence of a region or place.

R. Hudson (2005a, 2005b) proposes a theoretical scheme that elaborates on the geography of production and its relevance to the shaping of the map of uneven development in capitalism. Hudson focuses on the interrelation between geography and production and recognizes the existence of multiple realms of spaces of economic activity, embedded in everyday cultural and social life. Marxist theory and socio-spatial dialectics set again the starting point for the abstraction of argument, while the uniqueness of place and territory are also important. In this approach, one can recognize some influence from Institutional and

Evolutionary Economics, such as the general idea of “path dependency” in the social construction and a combined interest in agency and structure.

In his concept “Producing Places”, place obtains a double meaning. Hudson refers on the one hand to the place where production occurs and on the other, to the place that is transformed under the restructurings of production as capital meets labor and real life in specific localities. In this theorization, there is a place for humans that live and work, do politics and react, while they have a specific cultural identity, as well as for the understanding of the institutional regulations. To explain a specific social formation and the behavior of social actors, Hudson focuses particularly on four axes: a) the role of governance and institutional regulation b) social relations between classes and inside classes c) formation and reformation of place and landscape especially, against the movements of production d) establishment of production and its relation to the natural environment.

3. Regional development as a problem of Political Economy: A proposed conceptual framework

In the case of Greece (1993-2010), understanding of uneven regional development is based on the following premises:

First, economic transformation is a political and geographical phenomenon. Economic transformation is perceived under the combined effect of internal - domestic procedures and exogenous pressures, as it is described in a circle of interdependence between the nation-state and global scales. As it is presented in Figure 1, State functions as the top institution responsible for the wellbeing and structural adjustment of the domestic capitalist formation in the course of a transition to globalization. This is a precondition for the maintenance of its own

political legitimacy. Especially in a crucial time period for the country, after the signing of the Treaty for the EU, and at a stage of full economic – monetary integration, “modernization” serves as the platform discourse that affects all areas of public development policy, urging for financial stability, erosion of Social state and of Keynesian-type state regulation, liberalization of labour markets etc (e.g. Stathakis, 2007). The ultimate strategy is nominal convergence to the rest of the European partners, control of fiscal deficits and public debt, acceleration of growth and harmonization of economic policies in the context of EMU. A dual factor is especially considered as possible threat to systemic political-economic adjustment and that is social and spatial injustices. Social and regional cohesion are necessary conditions in other words, for the continuance of systemic transformation and for the avoidance of crisis.

Second, mobility of production factors through industries and spaces form the map of development. Production relations are conceived here as first, the economic relations between the two mobile factors of production, capital (financial, technological) and labor, and second, as the social relations between the social classes of capital and labor. Both types of relations are regulated via policies and institutional means, implemented and planned at distinct scales of governance (Figure 2). Movement of capital or labor between industries and economic activities, or between places and regions, can be perceived as having the following implications: On the one hand, it produces clear imprints in space that are visualized in various forms, such as, macroeconomic patterns of distribution of various aggregates (e.g. income, employment, capital formation, rates of growth) or landscapes of development or dereliction in different areas (cities, rural area, less developed areas etc). On the other hand, it produces unexpected effects and influences at the overall economic and political structure, as it

stimulates behaviors and reactions of different social agents, located in different places and spatial scales.

Third, reproduction of the system is attained through balanced relations between actors of regional restructuring. We identify two spaces of political-economic activity, a first one hosts the relations between capital and labor, and the relations formed within each class, and a second one hosts the relations between geographical-political formations, such as regions and European Union. The first one can be described as the Economic Space, while the second as the Territorial Space. Between the two, the nation-state acts as the enabling intermediary for the continuation of the mode of development (i.e. capital accumulation and economic growth) and the harmonious balance of socio-economic interests (i.e. reproduction of capitalist social relations). At the time of a crisis, however, failure of the state regulation is obvious and the implications can be noticeable in one space or the other, while they can be transferred from one space to the other.

Four, the region is perceived as an open and flexible formation and the territory of a nation-state is fundamentally perceived as heterogeneous and discontinuous. The question about “what is a region” is not new and can be found in several studies in Critical Geography (e.g. Allen et al., 2001), following the basic hypothesis about space being a relational social construction, already explained. In that context, a region presents unique institutional, production and social characteristics and borders that change in time and space, and accordingly a system of regions, within a country or a regional union (like the EU), forms also a transformative and changing whole.

In addition, a place can be a catalyst for growth or recession and induce economic effects outside its own local sphere. Places and regions have an impact on the overall systemic

transformation by exerting power, concentrating capabilities or radiating inefficiencies that generate development or regression, growth or recession to other areas and to other spatial scales. The dynamics of a locality, in the context of a certain mode of development or mode of regulation is not known ex-ante, and it is not always under the control of development policies. Thus, a “development story” of a place or even narrations and political discourses on the development at a specific locality, such as Athens and its metropolitan region, Attica, can be supportive to an overall national plan for economic or regional development or even act against it.

Lastly, answers to the regional problem can be searched in multiple realms. It must be already evident that the regional problem presents political, social and financial dimensions and takes many forms, according to different criteria. Thus it becomes a system of problems of distribution, allocation, interdependence and heterogeneity and disunity. In our point of view, all of these forms can be viewed and investigated in parallel, under a political economic perspective that aims at interpreting and explaining the causes and consequences of the regional problem. Inequality, distribution and location patterns are all aspects of the same spatial dynamics in times of development or crisis. It is obvious that plain statistics or econometric or macroeconomic modelling, are not suitable for capturing the above, hence analysis needs to turn to a variety of empirical data (statistics, legal texts and official regulations, policy documents, publications on the press, interviews with experts, local studies) and proceed on the basis of a synthesis of all different sources.

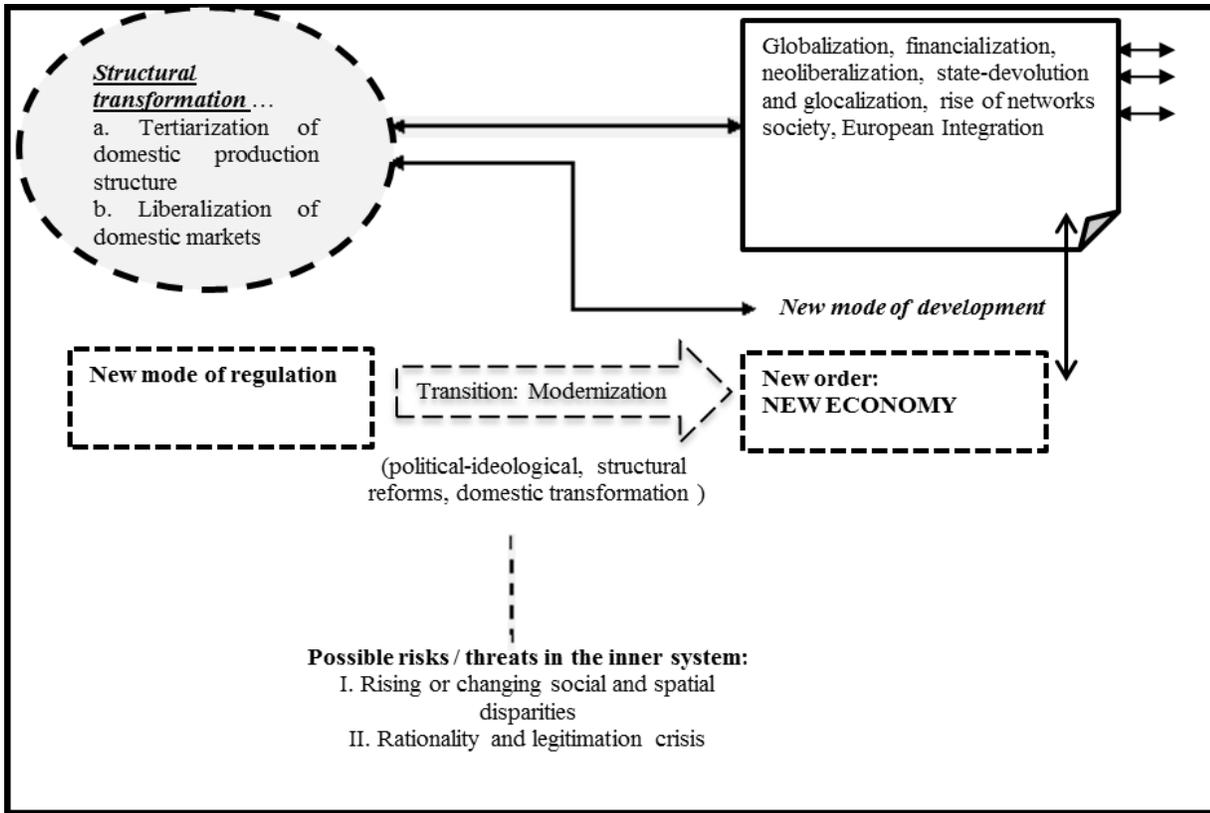


Figure 1. Structural transformation and role of government regulation

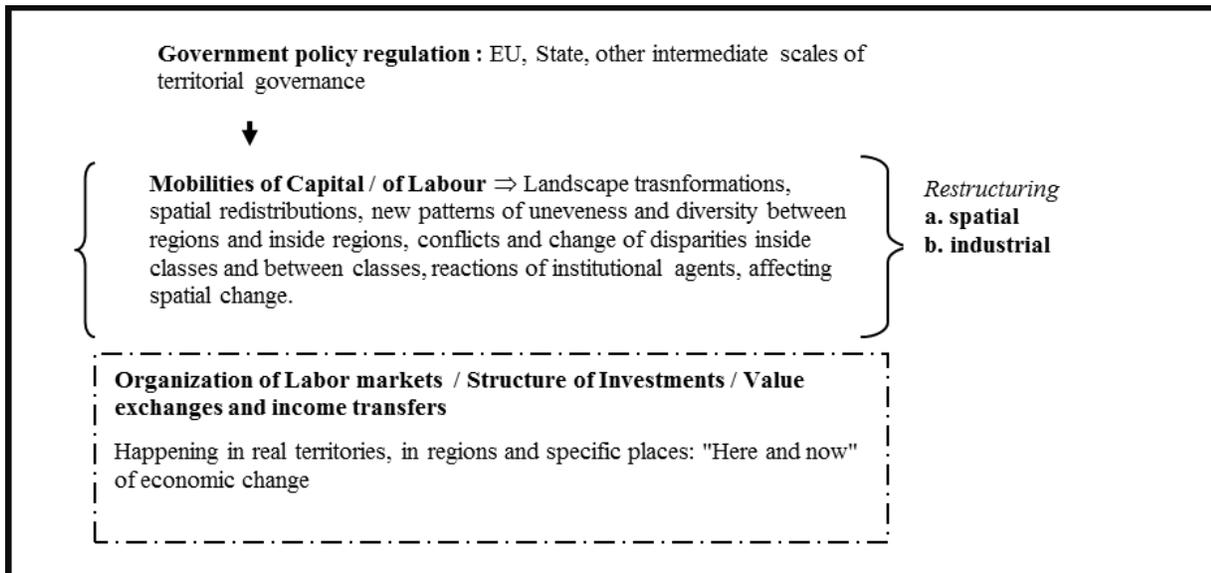


Figure 2. The political economy of uneven regional development

4. Applying the conceptual framework: Uneven regional development in pre-crisis Greece (1993-2010)

Since the early 1990's until almost the end of the 2000's, Greece has been experiencing fast economic growth as well as a significant economic transformation in the context of globalization and European integration with an inherent and inseparable spatial dimension that has been presented and analyzed in detail elsewhere (Drakaki, 2016). What is of special interest here is to explain basic elements of the analytical approach concerning the Greek mode of uneven regional development in a global and EU context. In doing that, we place less emphasis on the statistical findings of our research and more on the construction of a political economic framework of analysis. The latter is based on interrelated analytical axes and finally conveys a narration about the regional being a political challenge as described in Table 1.

For the needs of this study, we focus on the period 1993-2010 for several reasons. First of all, this is an era of an overall economic upturn and of a generalized optimism that politically fosters drastic procedures for structural adjustment. Second, this is a pre-crisis period that contains a coherent "mode of development" (or "regime of accumulation"), in terms of institutional regulation, production restructuring and interregional organization of the socio-economic relations. More precisely, 1993 signifies the starting point for the implementation of the EU Treaty and at the same time for a major political and ideologic shift in Greece. As already mentioned, reelection of the Greek Socialist-Democratic Party of PASOK marks a new paradigm of state and public policy, which is gradually constructed over a paradoxically combined social-democratic and neoliberal agenda of priorities and objectives and visions for urgent adjustment and financial stability towards the EMU. The end of the period comes with the burst of a structural crisis in Greece (2010). A critical moment is especially the signing of

the 1st “Greek Memorandum” in 2010 (by the government of PASOK again) in which European partners and international institutions agree to contribute to the “financial bailout” of Greece, within the Eurozone, provided that national governments implement prescribed structural reforms and strict austerity policies in order to secure viability of debt repayment. This is the point in our view, that it becomes evident that economic recession and severe fiscal imbalance of the late 2000’s have been only the consequences of a structural crisis, with complex economic, political, and social implications.

Table 1. A Critical Economic Geography Narration

	Axes of Analysis	Focus of empirical study	Argument as in Critical Geography Theory	Horizontal narration
1	STATE POLICY AND POLITICS	public policy, economic policy, state intervention and institutional regulation for development, structural and regional policies, central power and programming at alternative scales of supranational governance, political relations among places, regions and in different scales	Uneven geographical dynamics of European Integration - Devaluation through dispossession	The regional is a political challenge
2	PRODUCTION STRUCTURE	distributions and agglomerations of economic activity, patterns of industrial organization, structural macroeconomic aggregates, capital - labor relations, flows and power relations among capitalist production systems	Social representations of Space	
3	REGIONS AND SPECIFIC GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS	Administrative, historical or geographical regions, geographical areas of specific characteristics, such as cities, rural areas, remote and less favoured areas, “star-regions”, “normal regions”, places of everyday life, alternative spaces of production and of consumption, territories of economic power, areas of allocations of surpluses and public investments	The development story of the two-nations – Athens’ limits to growth	

By all means, the European framework is critical for understanding domestic developments, but also, for understanding the motivations and dynamics of uneven growth inside and outside the nation-state context. The country’s participation in the European Union since 1981, affected all sectors and means of public policy, while they also generated broad institutional rearrangements and provoked a total rescaling of all aspects of socioeconomic development (Maravegias, 2008, Maravegias and Sakellaropoulos, 2006). Especially, after the

harmonization of Greek regional policy to the EU regulatory framework, domestic regional inequalities became a part of a wider system of unevenness at the scale of the European territory. Similarly, the domestic regional problem became almost automatically, a subject of the EU regional policy. This has two immediate implications. First, regional policy in Greece is practically implemented with the generous and large scale assistance of the European Structural Funds and it is planned, according to co-agreed objectives and regulatory means, between European and member state institutions (Papadaskalopoulos & Christofakis 2016). Second, regional policy in Greece becomes for the first time a coherent policy that is practiced through sophisticated programming techniques and unprecedentedly increased budgetary capabilities (Papadaskalopoulos and Christofakis, 2005, Lykos, 2006).

Economic transformation in the same period can be summarized in a vast and growing economy of services, of large enterprise capital and of waged-employment, that is motivated through the expansion of credit, increasing public and private lending, rising consumption and augmenting investments in both ways (towards the inside and the outside). The same is fulfilled thanks to the adoption of the common currency in 2001. The euro favors free capital mobility, the growth of a financial sector and the import of large corporate capital in a series of services such as banking, retailing, intermediate (b2b) business activities, transport, tourism etc. At this stage, agricultural production becomes almost marginal and manufacturing experiences stagnation. On the contrary, the construction industry rises fast (at least up to 2008) and breeds -along with services- the Greek new "economic miracle" that is best reflected in accelerating rates of GDP growth, at least until the Olympic Games in 2004 and accelerating convergence in terms of GDP at least up to 2009 (Table 2). All this time, large scale development programs (CSFs/NSRFs) and in addition, the Olympic Games of "Athens 2004",

have been (along with the introduction of the euro and the liberalization of financial markets), at the center of an unprecedented significant impetus for primitive accumulation in many industries, which nevertheless tended to agglomerate mostly in Athens, and in a lesser degree in other large cities of central-continental Greece.

Economic and development policy at this time, emphasizes the need of the Greek economy to converge to the criteria of the Stability and Growth Pact, in the context of the monetary and economic integration and neglects other aspects that address structural problems in production and/or social cohesion. The latter are considered as efficiently managed through the community support and the financial help of the EU structural funds (Stasinopoulos, 2011, Argitis, 2011, Kazakos, 2010). Nevertheless, the “convergence strategy” appears to be inefficient and unsuccessful in the mid-term, as proved by the following (Drakaki, 2016): a) Unemployment remains at high levels and decreases only temporarily, on the occasion of the organization of the Olympic Games and thanks to large-scale projects, recruitments and constructions that have been co-financed by the Community Support Frameworks. b) Deficits in the external trade balance are increasing, as growth rates accelerate and despite (or due to) the fact that international-intracommunity trade expands. c) Greece converges to the European average in terms of GDP p.c. in time, but experiences no improvement in development status, comparatively to other economies in the EU, even though it is a top beneficiary of structural assistance. d) Transition to the Knowledge Economy by introducing new process and product innovations and knowledge inputs in production, remains a distant target for Greece. The new mode of development in general, appears to be addressing more short-term and urgent needs and less long-term deficiencies and problems of the domestic economy and production.

In explaining the above, we have to take into account the role of the State in two particular ways. On the one hand, fragmentary and risky political decisions underpin a strategy of globalization based on “national public events”, such as the Olympic Games, of ambiguous gains and rewards. On the other hand, three lines of economic strategy are chosen, which all together contribute to the erosion of the traditional form of an activist –Keynesian regulatory state. Governmental policy fosters the participation of the private sector in the economy, uses almost exclusively community support to promote structural change and economic development, and finally, enacts forms of a multi-level and multi-factoral national governance to strengthen democratic pluralism and enable adjustment to the functions and needs of an “internationalized state” (Voulgaris, 2008). In general, the two dominant politico-ideological discourses “modernization” of PASOK (1996-2004) and “mild adjustment” of the center-right liberal party, Nea Dimokratia (2004-2008), express a common focus on a single public policy paradigm, that is based so much on social-democratic as much as in neoliberal principles, and finally indicate a broader political pragmatism and consensus over the needs of the national economy.

Structural change in Greece has a particular spatial impact that is up to a point depicted in statistics⁸. First, tertiary sector dominates all economic aggregates all over the country’s territory. All data on income, employment, investment and entrepreneurship, show an overwhelming and universal prevalence of the sector of services and especially of activities related to retailing, tourism, and transport. Especially, the participation of the sector in new investments rising up to 90% until late 2000’s, along with the fact that the former occupies

⁸ Source: Regional Accounts, Hellenic Statistical Authority.

more than 70% of the total GDP⁹, show that the Greek economy experiences and is still experiencing an era of a mono-sectoral growth.

Second, regional economic disparities do not expand during this period, as most regions also experience growth, thanks to the rise of services and constructions. However it is Athens, Attica and its close periphery (e.g. areas in South Aegean, Sterea Ellada, Peloponnisos) that concentrate industries and activities of higher value added, activities that are technology or knowledge-intensive or express strategic change on the way to a “new Greek economy” (information and telecommunications, banks, shipping). From this point of view, there is a growing “gap” between the center and the rest of the country. Especially, as Central Macedonia, the capital region of the North, experiences rapid deindustrialization and loses steadily investments, jobs and production capacity, the region of Attica becomes the one and absolute “growth pole” of the economy in all basic sectors (except agriculture that is nevertheless also expanding in Attica) and cumulates the most productive resources (human, technological, financial etc.).

Three, the central metropolitan region is the only region that is actually driving growth of the national economic system as a whole, but also, the only one that first, converges to a European average in terms of GDP p.c. at the burst of the crisis (2010) and second, maintains a position over the average of EU regions for all period, until even the first years of crisis (Table 3). Also, it is the only one considerably improving its position in key indicators of socioeconomic development, such as population on the poverty threshold or employment in high tech sectors¹⁰.

⁹ Same source.

¹⁰ For these two findings, Source: EUROSTAT.

Finally, in our original research (Drakaki 2016) we identified a new form of regional problem, disaggregated in a critical typology of development areas, as follows: There is: a) a dominant, internationalized and self-sustained regional economy of cumulative tertiary growth, constructed around Athens. This one contains the region of Attika and its zone of influence and drives capitalist growth of the whole system b) a geographical area containing medium and small-sized Greek cities, dynamic rural areas and prosperous tourism zones, especially insular ones. Those tend to actively support capital accumulation and maintain traditional activities (e.g. agriculture, trade, tourism and transport) c) a less advantageous hinterland consisting of less developed and remote areas, covering the rest of the country's territory. Those are the areas of no clear production specialization, facing economic regression or stagnation and rely comparatively more on the distributive effects of regional policies.

In this context, regional disparities do not faint in Greece as the historical preponderance of the Capital city and its region is maintained and even strengthened. An analysis of the role of development policy proves however that as the state still intervenes in economic and social relations, in various ways (Drakaki and Stathakis, 2014), it holds also a critical role in the promotion of a certain regional development model. More precisely, the promotion of agglomeration economies, the internationalization and “take-off” of the Athenian growth pole, are top priorities, launched via specific strategic decisions and particular development strategies. For example, organization of the Games and entrance to the Euro both benefited and created new prospects for the economy of Athens and Attica (see also OECD report for Athens, OECD, 2004), while the absence of spatial planning for Greece's metropolitan region and inadequacy of land-use control mechanisms in a “laissez faire” rationale, permit impulsive motilities and location of enterprises, facilities and investments,

Table 2. Gross domestic product at current prices per head of population (EU-28=100)												
Country	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
European Union (28)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
European Union-15	121.2	120.7	119.7	119	118	116.6	117.1	116.7	116.3	116.3	116.1	116
Euro area	112.8	111.8	110.8	110.1	109.5	111.4	113.9	112.2	111.8	110.1	110.2	108.9
Euro area-12	116.8	115.7	114.4	113.5	112.6	114.4	117	115.2	114.7	112.8	112.9	111.5
Greece	<u>76.6</u>	<u>79</u>	<u>77.9</u>	<u>80.6</u>	<u>81.3</u>	<u>84.2</u>	<u>87.6</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>71.4</u>	<u>65.2</u>	<u>61.5</u>	<u>59.2</u>
Source: AMECO												

Table 3. Regional gross domestic product (PPS per inhabitant in % of the EU-28 average) by NUTS 2 regions												
geo\time	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	(rank)											(rank)
Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki	70 (9)	69	66	64	64	67	67	64	55	53	52	50 (13)
Kentriki Makedonia	75 (7)	77	72	74	73	75	75	68	60	58	58	56 (9)
Dytiki Makedonia	86 (4)	86	83	81	76	72	78	75	70	71	70	66 (4)
Ipeiros	72 (8)	70	66	66	64	64	64	61	55	52	52	51 (12)
Thessalia	76 (6)	76	69	72	69	70	70	62	55	55	56	55 (10)
Ionia Nisia	94 (3)	94	92	92	90	93	89	82	69	67	66	67 (3)
Dytiki Ellada	72 (8)	73	70	73	71	70	69	66	58	56	55	54 (11)
Stereia Ellada	94 (3)	91	88	87	83	84	82	76	68	66	67	61 (6)
Peloponnisos	76 (6)	75	72	74	73	74	74	69	62	60	61	58 (7)
Attiki	<u>120 (1)</u>	<u>125</u>	<u>120</u>	<u>124</u>	<u>122</u>	<u>125</u>	<u>128</u>	<u>118</u>	<u>105</u>	<u>101</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>99 (1)</u>
Voreio Aigaio	72 (8)	72	71	73	73	76	75	68	61	57	58	57 (8)
Notio Aigaio	104 (2)	106	104	104	102	106	101	93	81	78	78	80 (2)
Kriti	85 (5)	87	82	84	80	82	82	74	64	60	63	63 (5)
Source: EUROSTAT												

according to temporal –and in a sense opportunistic- needs (i.e. lacking long term developmental and rational spatial organization perspectives).

Obviously, many factors, in the realms of politics and society define the industrial and economic geography at this specific historical time. Migration and human mobilities, geopolitics and politics in the context of the European Union, movements and restructuring of international capital, globalization of consumption and reorganization of production territorial systems, are only a few. In addition, conflicting interests and cooperation among social groups and within social groups, explain up to a point all economic and social restructuring. Nevertheless, due to objective limitations in this essay, they are to be explained elsewhere.

5. The regional as a political challenge: Aspects of CEG and crisis as catharsis

Since the early 1990s, the state functions have been withdrawing from critical matters of socioeconomic development, via the deregulation of markets, privatizations and structural reforms to strengthen the role of the private sector and attract foreign investments and large corporate capital. Despite that, the state holds an active role that is exercised mainly via policies for regional economic development. That fact reveals a particular paradox relation between state policy and the regions while also proposes an argument explained here, namely that there is an aspect of the regional problem that serves to regulate the problems of the economy.

First of all, regional policy is a product of institutional regulation for economic development and a subject of transformation according to domestic and external political developments and pressures. More precisely, in Greece regional policy appears to be

functioning for most of the period, as a significant re-distribution mechanism, facilitating radical transformation of the Greek space-economy towards globalization. To do that, it has gradually transformed itself, in terms of principles and objectives, embracing changes in the overall regulative system of European institutions and governance for Cohesion (Andrikopoulou, 1995, Gioti-Papadaki, 2010, Kourtesis and Avdikos, 2013). Regional policy commenced as a solidarity (or socio-spatial justice) policy, aiming to redistribution and reallocation of resources at the beginning of the 1990's, while it has been gradually transformed into an "investment policy" by the end of 2000's. Especially in the start of recession, Cohesion Policy firmly emphasizes economic efficiency, competitiveness and growth and conveys a major political-economic consensus around austerity and neoliberal policies, in order to defend the problematic structure of the EMU and secure the continuation of the euro. In this sense, regional policy by the end of the period in question already proposes new answers to old dilemmas (economic efficiency-vs-social justice) and contributes to the neoliberalization of domestic policies and state-space relations.

As regional development policies during this period, provided generous financial support benefitting almost all social groups and economic and social activities, it served as a good excuse for Greece to adjust to a new policy paradigm and even defend it. Fiscal consolidation and austerity have remained up to this day as the price that Greece has to "pay" in exchange for the vast inflows of EU financial support to both the domestic system as a whole, and to the Greek regions as parts and parcels of the European territory. To put it otherwise, an essence of social justice is restored and reclaimed in European politics, as structural funds are ultimately and necessarily welcome for further fiscal adjustment, opening

of domestic markets and full deregulation of the development process, on behalf of regions and member-states in crisis and in need.

Critical Economic Geography provides some more useful insights, especially to the Greek and European mode of uneven development, in times of either an “economic miracle” or, inversely, in times of crisis.

First of all, Lefebvre (1974) theorizes the concept of the “social production of space” and identifies a triad in explaining the history of social space and the process of its reproduction. This offers an interesting perspective in the case of Greece. Especially in his concept of “*representations of space*”, space as such is an object of representation and conceptualization by technocrats, policy makers, politicians, civil engineers, spatial planners and scientists. Representations of space are tied thus to production and social relations and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose and encounter in knowledge, signs and codes. In the case of “pre-crisis” Greece, regions and places have been approached in political discourse as almost similar and homogenous parts of a system and undifferentiated nodes. Space has been perceived and planned as neutral and pierced, as an homogeneous plot serving the undifferentiated location of investment, mega projects and public or private investment. A review of stabilization and development programmes at the national level, prove that there is limited interest on structural problems of production, on the unique characteristics of regions and places, or on strategic objectives for regional socioeconomic development through structural and industrial policies (see e.g. Karamesini, 2002, Katochianou, 2011, Klampatsea, 2011, Psycharis, 2004). This allows the conclusion that during these years, space and geography matter just as much as to meet the objectives of nominal convergence.

Geographical implications of capitalist accumulation, as described in Harvey's devaluation through dispossession (Harvey, 2006a, 2006b), is also helpful in understanding uneven power relations in the context of neoliberal globalization and in explaining aspects of change of ownership and appropriation of resources, most evident during the crisis.

From this point of view, we reach two observations in the case of Greece. First, the function of the Greek capitalism presents specific norms and regularities in dialectic interrelationships between space and economy. In general, we observe two spatial-economic processes that work in parallel. The first one aims at homogenization of geographical space and is set forth by EU regional policy, which motivates regional development on the basis of combined criteria of economic efficiency, as well as criteria of social justice. The outcome, in this case, is regional socioeconomic development, fostered both in the centers and poles, as well as in less developed areas that set forth "bottom-up" strategies in order for them to converge with the more developed ones. The other process, aims at diversification of geographical space and is best executed via economic and financial stabilization policies that focus on the promotion of competitiveness and fiscal discipline among member-states and regions in the European territories. The latter support especially the enhancement of agglomeration economies in a few dynamic centers (Athens and other dynamic urban areas in the case of Greece). In this case economic divergence drives the few areas that benefit more in a process of cumulative growth that exceeds the European average.

Financial crisis in the Eurozone offers an appropriate and explicit example of the way Harvey's (2003) concept of "accumulation through dispossession" occurs in practice. In this case, a deepening of coalition and conflict of interests among regional capitalistic formations, as well as among separate sections of capital, has a dual result: first, it confines the negative

effects of a systemic crisis in one area or region, most preferably in a site “of the others” and second, it perpetuates a specific power equilibrium between financial and political elites (status quo). Devaluation of internal resources is imposed exogenously over the over-indebted countries, such as the cohesion countries-members of the European Mediterranean South, while strict and extreme austerity measures of ambiguous usefulness and of a vague perspective appear to be defending national interests of specific elites and the profits of international financial capital.

This is a narration on how international creditors gain access and control over domestic resources of “others”, especially in the dependent economies of the South, after the entrance of IMF in European affairs. Finally, this same narration explains how uneven power ends up to a sort of an “internal cannibalism” in a seemingly united and uniform regional economic formation, like the EU. Especially given the lack of a redistributive mechanism to correct the function of Eurozone and the uneven geographical dynamics in European economic integration, political volition for restoring solidarity principles and social objectives, appears to be essential for economic recovery (see also, Hatzimihalis, 2012).

In any case, in the context of a European or nation-state spatial scale, political implications between regions, cities and places raise an issue of “spatial politics”. Following Massey et al.’s concept on the story of development of the “two-nations” and on the responsibility of the Global City (London, as in Massey 2007, Allen et al. 1998), in the case of Greece, Athens and its hinterland, hold a similar kind of political responsibility. As analysis shows, the production system of Athens and its wider region agglomerate activities of a higher added value, more jobs and human resources of superior skills and knowledge, almost all contemporary infrastructure in many domains and thus deprive resources and capabilities from

all the rest of the country's territory in a way resembling the concept of "backwash effects" coined by G. Myrdal many years ago (Myrdal, 1957) or the concept of "polarization effects" coined by Hirschman in the same period (Hirschman 1958). In this way, Athens defines prospects and success for the system as whole and becomes the one dominant "growth region" or the "star region" in the "economic miracle" of that period. It is significant that until at least 2013, Attica's GDP p.c. is above EU average.

Eventually, as the crisis bursts, it brings an end to political controversies in space at both scales, in the domestic and European territory. The elimination of endogenous and territorial capacities in different geographical areas means an equalization in future prospects and a new opportunity for a radical redefinition of priorities in regional and spatial planning. This nevertheless presupposes the turn to a new policy paradigm that would focus on progressive ideas such as on the significance of spatial structures and would renegotiate social justice priorities over economic efficiency.

6. Concluding remarks

An alternative "reading" of the regional problem in Greece can be based especially on two assumptions, derived from the Critical Paradigm in Economic Geography. First, regions are open and flexible social formations that interconnect through networks of material exchanges and immaterial flows. Second, power relations take place in space and through space. It is obvious though, that both cannot be merely quantified or explained through statistics or sophisticated modeling. For this reason, we propose an analytical scheme, in which interdisciplinary synthesis and holistic approach of a critical Political Economy and Economic

Geography, if combined, can offer an alternative spatial and geographical explanation of both economic development and economic crisis.

Research on the subject renders two main narrations focusing on Greece in the period 1993-2010. A first one, concerns the relations between state regulation (state policy and politics), regions (as open and flexible territorial systems) and production structure (relations between capital and labour), and a second one politics and power between Athens and Attica and the rest of the domestic spatial-economic structure and system of regions.

In our attempt to explain the crisis, we find contradicting and supplementary forms of unevenness between regions and in different spatial scales in the context of a European political economic formation. Also, we observe norms and spatialities that govern economic transformation and produce numerous imprints in economic geography. Lastly, we find that the limits of domestic growth that is another name for the economic recession, and the limits of the domestic development mode that is another name for the start of a structural crisis, come with the final upturn just before the last fall of Athens that is the catalyst for the performance of the overall economy. The Attica region falls from 118% of EU average GDP pc in 2010 to 105% in 2011 and to 99% that is below EU average by 2014.

At this point, we reach the final argument and we assert that a fundamental function of the regional problem in Greece in the era of globalization and European integration is to assist the continuation and maintenance of a specific mode of development. The underlying rationality of the implemented policies is found in pragmatism of Greek governments to achieve growth and nominal convergence in order to safeguard a position between European partners in the EMU. Domestic spatial relations and spatial structure can be considered

eventually, as one of the factors enabling fiscal consolidation and institutional compliance with a supranational form of political-economic governance, such as the EU.

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