

EDITORIAL PREFACE

Special Issue on Local Development and Comparative Advantages: An Important Tool towards Crisis

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In modern economic world, economic development varies enormously among regions or countries. The explanation of these differences may be an important contribution to public and private policies towards development enhancement. The first step towards this is to decompose development into main components: increases in factor inputs and improvements in productivity and efficiency. The first component attributes growth differences to differences in physical resources, physical capital, and labour. Notwithstanding, reducing differences in factor inputs is not sufficient to guarantee a proportional reduction in economic development differences. The main reason is that productivity and efficiency differences, the second component, may also play a determinant role in economic development. Within this framework, examining and estimating develop-

ment of a city, region or country is of interest to both economic theory and economic policy, which today renders a rather important task in economic analysis, especially in the case of European Union current crisis.

Historically, European Union was structured according to the vision of solidarity, convergence and cohesion of European member states. Eurozone has a single currency, but however, they do not have any convergence, running the risk of being especially vulnerable as tied into a monetary framework, which leads in a great number of regional and local irregularities. Today, more than a decade since the establishment of European Monetary Union, the member states of Eurozone are facing a multi-faced deep economic crisis, with high public debt and public deficits for most of the Eurozone member states. More specifically, fol-

lowing four years of recession and stagnation, not only with high unemployment rates, high inequalities, increasing poverty rates, but also with the lowest figures of public and private investment and declining economic growth rates, the main question today for Eurozone is whether there is any solution or way out from the European financial crisis?

Until today, the European economic policy has been the main engine pursuing economic growth, competitiveness, convergence and consequently fostering social cohesion in European members of Eurozone, affecting directly the socio-economic performance, along with economic growth and competitiveness process. However, the Eurozone is facing a harder battle in the fight against its debt crisis, as economic growth seems to stall in the face of budget tightening and uncertainty is abundant for European countries. The economic policy aiming solely to reduce the public expenses and to minimize the public and social policies may also be misleading and lead to shirking growth and moreover to increase the social inequalities and social explosions.

What is mainly needed is a concrete policy based in long-term-planning, with orientation to growth and development, focusing on local development and the related comparative advantages. The future European policy should be oriented towards economic growth and the use of the triangle of capital, local resources, knowledge and innovation, as well as exerting local comparative advantages, as a core policy and a driver of growth and competitiveness, cohesion and economic growth.

This special issue aims to analyze the issue of current economic crisis with an alternative policy orientation focusing on local development, as well as on the ways that local advantages could be utilized towards promoting socio-economic growth. Furthermore, it discusses the limits and the prospects regarding convergence attainment, focusing on issues like: public spending efficiency, regional development strategies and planning, cultural policy and cultural management, along with

urban and demographic features towards local development. As a special issue, we have tried to select a group of papers which offer a wide variety of subjects and treatments, ranging from public spending efficiency and regional strategy planning to urban, demographic and information and communication policies, in local and national level, trying to integrate and spherically approach the issues described above.

The first paper, by George M. Korres and Aikaterini Kokkinou, titled: '*Public Spending Efficiency: The Missing Factor Through Financial Crisis*' attempts to define efficient public expenditure performance, investigating the attainment of efficiency and examine efficiency in public expenditure as a way to recover from the current financial crisis. The paper examines public expenditure as efficient if its planning and policy objectives are achieved, and inefficient if they are not and measures efficiency by an index of observed and desired performance and involves a comparison of actual performance with optimal performance located on the relevant frontier. The paper is concerned with the identification of various ways which might depart from efficiency, the specification of an appropriate method of measuring inefficiency, and an exploration of the implications of each type of inefficiency, comprising a) academic interest, b) managerial decision making, and c) public policy relevance.

The second paper, by Papadaskalopoulos Athanasios and Christofakis Manolis, titled: '*Regional Development Strategy in insular space: The recent experience of Greece*', presents the formulation of a specific regional development strategy for insular areas, which has attracted strong interest in recent years. Despite efforts so far, no specific strategy for the development of insular space exists. This is the focus point of this paper, which is based on a survey of policy measures for the Greek insular regions, covering the framework of regional and territorial planning since 2000. The paper tries to search for a particular insular development strategy, with the definition of the sector-based and territorial priorities, the

formulation of strategic objectives, and the setting of guidelines for interventions.

The third paper, by George K. Gantzias, titled: '*Cultural Policy, Administration and Info-Communication Landscape: The Cultural Management Model, 'Info-Communication Cultural Management' (ICCM)*', examines and analyses cultural management, administration, new technologies and info-communication globalization. In addition, it examines cultural heritage as a very important issue of cultural diversity in the info-communication landscape. It focuses on info-communication landscape, cultural heritage and digitalization of cultural goods (products and services). Moreover, this paper explores digitalisation of cultural management and administration structures and proposes a new dynamic cultural management model, the 'Info-Communication Cultural Management (ICCM)'.

The fourth paper, by Emmanuel V. Marmaras and Athena Wallace, titled: '*Land allotment patterns and urban features in post-Second World War Athens: Existing situation and betterment scenarios*' deals with the formation of the urban space, analyzing the land ownership patterns in relation first to the socio-economic conditions of the owners, second to the applied building regulations, third to the urban features and the road network, and fourth to the housing conditions. A complex co-relation of the above parameters is the outcome of this research work, which illuminates the real conditions created by the specific post-Second World War conditions in the basin of Athens. For the support of this research, special measurements have been undertaken concerning the geometric characteristics of the urban space in a suitable number of sample areas in the above basin, comprising planned areas, as well unplanned squatter areas. This kind of approach aims toward the formation of realistic scenarios in analogous cases.

The fifth paper, by Vasilis S. Gavalas, titled: '*The demographic footprint of economic development: the case of two Cycladian islands*' examines the dynamic relationship between economic development and the demograph-

ics of population for a group of islands in the middle of the Aegean Sea, namely the Cyclades, in the period 1860-2011. In every stage of the transition, the changes in mortality and fertility levels tended to destabilize the relationship between population and the limited resources of the islands. Migration is the key factor in understanding the demographic regime of these islands. Either negative or positive (emigration or immigration), population mobility has always been and still is the element that regulates natural increase and determines the real increase of the population. Whenever rates of natural increase were too high, emigration acted as a counterbalancing factor by taking population away from the islands, while when rates of natural increase reached very low levels from the 1970s onwards due to low fertility, immigration came as a substitute.

The sixth paper, by Sidiropoulos Georges, titled: '*Interpreting the Local Development through the history of the place: The Example of Nigrita (Visaltia, Greece)*' examines the case of regional development of Nigrita, Greece. The town appears for the first time in the 15th century and quickly evolves into a strong town with a significant presence in all the historical periods. The determining factor for its establishment is the change of traffic policy, in which the city of Nigrita serves one of the main intersections in the region. Since then, the growth of the city is continuous until two decisive events in the early 20th century. The first one, concerns the change in traffic policy of New Greek State, which sets new routes that bypass the city. The second fact is linked with the transformation of Nigrita's geographical situation, making the city part of a mandatory central corridor in a typical city in an open plain. Since then, the city has a very slow and declining growth, because of certain particularities and also the general situation of the Greek periphery. The text seeks to understand and interpret the present city, through data in-city and regional scale, attempting to study-specified cross sections in the historical geography of the place.

Offering our thanks and gratitude to the issue authors, the members of the editorial board, as well as our publisher for making this special issue possible, we strongly wish that this issue will render a creative think tank for knowledge dissemination and scientific dialogue.

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