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“Europeanization pressures and administrative reforms in Greece:
Europe’s influence on subnational institutions”

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Draft paper

Abstract

Since 1986, the subnational authorities in Greece have gone through distinctive waves of administrative reforms, aiming largely at their democratization, modernization and the overall increase of their capacity to deal effectively with the implementation of local public policies. In particular, the European cohesion policy has been deemed as a major facilitating factor in the process of reforming the subnational administrative level, with regard to the rules it imposed for the consistent and timely implementation of the undertaken projects.

The proposed paper seeks to identify the EU’s impact on key administrative reforms of the Greek Regional and Local Authorities throughout the period 1986-2013, regarding their capacity for successfully implementing the European cohesion policy. It is argued that major administrative transformations in the Greek subnational level have taken place mainly as a result of Europeanization pressures that stemmed from the misfits of the Greek subnational administration to deal with the preconditions and the implementation demands of the cohesion policy. Although domestic factors have influenced the magnitude of the administrative reforms, it is the Europeanization process in its top-down approach alongside its mechanisms that is considered to be the driving force of change in the reform efforts of the Greek subnational administrative apparatus’.

Key words: *Administrative reform, cohesion policy, Europeanization, Greece, institutional capacity.*

1. Introduction

Since 1986 the Greek state has altered significantly in terms of having changed in a considerable way its domestic structure of governance. New administrative levels and forms of governance have been created introducing new modes of cooperation in various policy fields, allowing, at the same time, the local and regional government to substantially participate, through the new architecture, into the public policies' processes.

Subnational institutions in Greece have gained across time a variety of responsibilities, primarily related with the implementation stage of public policies. Aspects of social policy, environmental policy, local development such as the creation and maintenance of local infrastructure works and the reinforcement of local employment, as well as urban and regional planning issues have been in the forefront of the local and regional authorities' responsibilities. Since the beginning of the European cohesion policy in the 1980's, the Greek subnational authorities have found an alternative way of financially supporting many of the aforementioned local policy fields by simply trying to take advantage of the European Union's (EU's) funds. However, local and regional bodies had to prove that they were competent of making legal and appropriate use of EU's resources, meeting all the necessary preconditions and demands for receiving EU funding. In that respect, subnational authorities in Greece have gone through major changes and reforms with regard to their institutional capacity, in order to respond with effectiveness and efficiency to the cohesion policy prerequisites.

There has been research in relation to the issue of administrative reforms and the decentralization process in Greece alongside with the impact of the EU's cohesion policy, focusing mainly on institutional transformations that have been realized during the period 1986-2000¹. Yet, the recent administrative reform effort of 2010 has been rather under-examined² as far as it concerns not only the basic components of the newly established architecture of governance, but also with reference to whether and how the state-periphery relationship has been altered altogether, taking into account the EU's impact as well. Additionally, the issue of the responsiveness of the subnational authorities not only in institutional terms but also from an organizational point of view throughout the period 1986-2013 with respect to their own initiatives for exploiting the cohesion policy funding opportunities has been also a rather neglected aspect of research. The aforementioned parameters are discussed critically in this paper, in search of establishing a causal link between institutional changes and reforms that have been undertaken in the subnational level of the governance on the one hand, and the role of the EU on the other.

In that respect, the central research question is related with the issue of whether and to what extent has there been any actual impact of the European cohesion policy on the Greek subnational institutions throughout the period 1986-2013. The conceptual framework of Europeanization is employed along with the theoretical perspective of the historical institutionalism (Hall & Taylor 1996; Peters 1999; Peters, Pierre, and King 2005). It is argued that the misfit between the EU's prerequisites on the one hand and the low responsiveness of the Greek local and regional authorities on the other was considerably great during the 1980's. Yet, in 1990's and 2000's the misfit gradually decreased due to initiatives aiming at the institutional and organizational modernization of the subnational authorities, thus creating critical junctures that reshaped the state-periphery relationship. With respect to the top-down approach of Europeanization and certain elastic and inelastic mechanisms of transferring EU's preferences into the domestic level, it is suggested that by "*changing domestic opportunity structures*" and by "*framing domestic beliefs and expectations*" (Knill and Lehmkuhl 2002, 258-9) EU has critically facilitated the process of modernization of the Greek subnational authorities asserting influence on the domestic politics. The paper is organized as follows: Section two briefly presents the European cohesion policy throughout the years 1985-2013 and the corresponding critical transformations of the Greek regional and local governance. Section three deals with the research question of whether the EU has facilitated the process of modernization of the domestic structures. The implications of the undertaken reform efforts are critically discussed in section four.

2. European cohesion policy and subnational administration in Greece

2.1. The policy area: European cohesion policy, 1985-2013.

The European cohesion policy is one of the two largest spending policies of the EU. A significant share of the annual budget of the EU (almost one third) is redistributed in this particular policy field. The main objective is the reduction of economic and social disparities in order to address phenomena of divergence among the European regions. The starting point of the policy is considered to be in 1986 when the Single European Act was signed, although the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) had already been established in 1975 as the basic European instrument for redressing regional imbalances.

It has been argued that:

"the development of the region is a matter of Community capital investment in economic and social infrastructure and to formulate appropriate institutions, processes and networks for their involvement in decision making and implementation at the subnational level of government." (Leonardi 1992, 1-2).

In other words, the role of the subnational institutions in terms of their degree of involvement in the policy cycle is considered to be of utter importance. Particularly in the field of cohesion policy, in which special resources and expertise in implementing programs are fundamental, institutional capacity is the key element for the successful delivery of the policy.

The cohesion policy is a redistributive one (Lowi 1964, 689) as it aims at the reallocation of funds between the European regions. The actors involved in the formulation process of the policy are the European Commission, national authorities and subnational institutions according to the principle of partnership. In economic terms, the content of the policy is based on the logic of strengthening the supply-side stabilization of the economy rather than the demand-side (Hix 2005, 293). Thus, it focuses on enhancing the productivity of factors with a view to labour and capital, i.e. through the financing of key infrastructure projects, instead of simply transferring money as a sort of income support to specific population groups, facilitating in that way the pursuing of permanent results on the economy.

In 1985 the regulation 2088 introduced the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes (IMPs) which set a milestone in the European Community's regional policy as they were the first systematic effort of launching coherent programs for dealing with regional disparities in the South countries of the EU. The IMPs had a seven years period of implementation (1986-1992) and Greece received about 2 billion ECUs at that time. It was the first involvement of the Greek national and subnational administration with the formulation and the implementation process of the policy field, but there is evidence that show a rather limited contribution of subnational actors in the formation process (Ioakimidis 1996, 355). However, their participation is considered to be the key starting point for institutional transformations that followed the next year, both in national and sub-national level.

In 1986 the Single European Act (SEA) introduced the concept of economic and social cohesion and the 1988 reform of the structural funds put forward four key principles for the management of the funds (Bache and George 2001, 369-71). According to them, concentration of the funds on fields of greatest need, multi-annual programming, partnership in terms of the actual involvement of local and regional actors for the first time in the policy cycle and additionality in the partnership arrangements between supranational, national and subnational level of governance, were the fundamental principles which should all be incorporated within the content of the European cohesion policy.

For the period 1989-1993 Greece designed and implemented the first Community Support Framework (CSF I, 15.4 billion ECUs, current prices), which was structured into twelve regional and thirteen sectoral (national) operational programs. In the next programming period (1994-1999, CSF II) the amount of the Structural Funds for Greece doubled (34.7 billion ECUs, current prices) and sixteen sectoral and thirteen regional programs were designed respectively.

In 1999 a new reform of the Structural Funds took place for the programming period 2000-2006 (CSF III), according to which Greece agreed to receive in total about 44.7 billion euros (2004 prices), which was the largest financial support ever planned for Greece. At the same time, eleven sectoral and thirteen regional programs were designed for the implementation of the support framework. In the next programming period (2007-2013) Greek authorities designed the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) and the total funds amounted to 20.4 billion euro (2006 prices), while for the implementation of the policy twelve sectoral and five regional programs were adopted, with a view to reducing the number of the administrative regions from thirteen to only five regional bodies. After the refusal of the European Commission for such a change, Greece implemented five regional programs but for the thirteen regions (Andreou 2010, 18) without altering the regional administrative map of Greece. With regard to the implementation system³ at that period, the changes on the decision-making process contributed on the one hand to the increase of the centralization and the complexity but on the other they limited the political interference and rather improved the bureaucracy's professionalism (Andreou 2010, 18-20).

2.2. The institutional field: Greek subnational authorities

During the 1980's the decentralization initiatives begun to question the centralization of the Greek government (Hlepas and Getimis 2011, 517-8). During the first half of the decade there was not any change in the field of the subnational government structures. However, a major change took effect in 1986 (law 1622) when thirteen administrative regions were established as the territorial institutions responsible for the designing, planning and coordination of the regional development. A presidential decree issued the following year settled their spatial authority. The creation of the regions can be attributed principally to Europeanization top-down pressures stemming from the significant misfit between the EU and the domestic level⁴, giving the opportunity for the formulation of an administrative tier that would be able to contribute with efficiency and effectiveness to the regional planning and the implementation stage of the cohesion policy (IMPs at that time).

Besides, the participation of regional bodies in the process of democratic regional programming was another reason for the establishment of the regions, providing not only legitimacy for their creation in the domestic level but also contributing to the gradual deconcentration of responsibilities. However, the new institutions remained largely inactive, since their power in terms of responsibilities, personnel and financial resources was extremely limited. With regard to the Prefectures, in 1986 it was originally designed to become the second tier of local government, apart from the one and only level of self-government (municipalities and communities) at the local level, but that change took

effect in 1994 when they finally became the second level of local self-government with elected leadership and council. In terms of public policy, all the above changes do not constitute radical transformations but could be typically described as having a rather incremental character (Lindblom 1979, 517).

In 1997, (law 2503) regions were assigned with new responsibilities and resources reinforcing their role of decentralised administrative units of the state, providing evidence of further deconcentration of authority. In parallel with this change, at the same year (1997, law 2539, “Kapodistrias” plan) 5825 local institutions (437 municipalities and 5388 communities) were merged forming 1033 new institutional bodies (900 municipalities and 134 communities). These transformations can be attributed firstly to Europeanization pressures for increasing the institutional capacity of small, fragmented and weak local institutions lacking the necessary resources, such as the low-skilled human resource, in order to take advantage of the EU’s financial opportunities, by modernizing their managerial and functional competencies. Apart from that, domestic politics also influenced the process of merging, as it was the government that, despite the fact of facing fierce opposition by the other political parties, finally managed to pass the reform initiatives. The nature of the these transformations can be characterized as incremental with a few radical traits such as the vast merging effort, given the redistribution of political power, which occurred within the actors of the local and regional level of administration and in terms of the axis “centre-periphery” as well (Hlepas, 1999) inasmuch as it led to the strengthening of the local administration.

Given the fragility and the weaknesses of the local and regional institutions to exploit EU’s opportunity funds as final beneficiaries of programs (Management & Organization Unit (MOU) S.A., 2005), in conjunction with the EU’s support of the concept of multilevel governance (European Commission, 2001; Committee of the Regions, 2009) and the government’s commitment for increasing the local autonomy, the democratization and the decentralization process at the local level, “Kallikratis” plan was the next big reform effort issued in 2010.

The new initiative introduced a second wave of obligatory merging of the local government institutions thirteen years after the previous attempt. In the first place, the 1034 (at that time) municipalities and communities formed 325 new municipalities. Regions from decentralised state administration units integrated the fifty seven prefectures and became the new organizational structure at the second tier of self-government administration. At the same time, seven decentralized administrations were established as a form of state decentralized institutions with the responsibility, among others, of monitoring the first and the second tier of administration. The above changes provide strong evidence of radical reforms in terms of not only deconcentrating new responsibilities to the newly formed decentralized administrations but also decentralizing authority by establishing a clearly more powerful second tier of regional government (thirteen self-governed regions) and transferring new competencies with the necessary resources to municipalities as well.

3. Europeanization and the Greek subnational institutions

In many policy fields the European Union has proved to be a driving force for domestic change. But is this the case with regard to the transformations of the Greek local and regional institutions during the period 1986-2013? Is it a simple task for someone to establish causality considering the EU as the independent factor of posing influence on the Greek subnational authorities? On the one hand there are other variables as well that may influence by shaping the final scope and the magnitude of the transformations, such as powerful domestic actors and advocacy coalition frameworks (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999) in favour or against the proposed changes. On the other, the concept of Europeanization may well facilitate the research. Employing the prevailing top-down approach of the Europeanization (McCauley 2011, 1021) and adopting the definition of Radaelli (2003, 30) according to which the concept refers to:

“Processes of: a) construction, b) diffusion, and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies”

it is evident that the goodness of fit (Risse, Cowles, and Caporaso 2001) between the domestic level of governance and the EU demands with regard to the cohesion policy in the 1980’s was considerably low. Local and regional authorities lack the necessary capacity for absorbing the EU’s funds. In fact, they were administratively weak, fragmented and with poor resources in terms of skilled civil servants and own revenues. The Greek state gradually responded to the pressures posed by the prerequisites of the cohesion policy and in order to implement the principles of the 1988 reform of the structural funds established the regional level of governance creating the regions as state institutional bodies. During the period 1990-2010 central-left governments managed to implement their reform agenda with respect to the subnational level of governance, overcoming domestic mediating factors against changes, such as opposition from other political parties. Gradually, the misfit between the domestic and the EU level decreased.

The role of the Europeanization is highly related with these changes. It was the mechanism of “changing domestic opportunity structures” and the respective “framing domestic beliefs and expectations” (Knill and Lehmkuhl 2002, 258-9) that clearly facilitated the process of modernization of the Greek subnational authorities during the period 1986-2010. The establishment of the regions in 1986 is evidently related with the changing of domestic

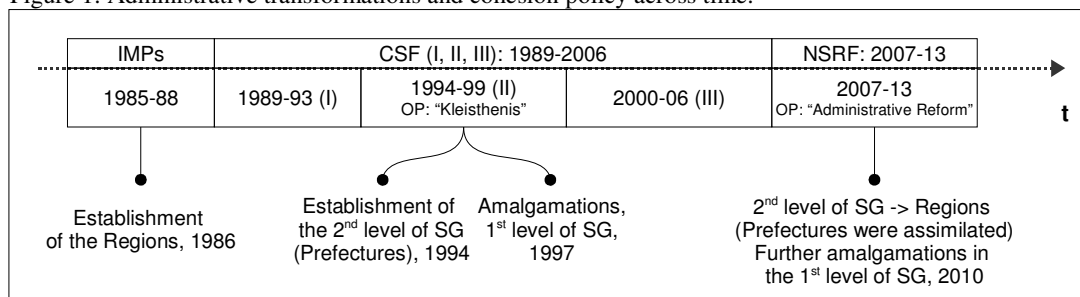
opportunity structures, a mechanism which is attributed to the EU's pressures for creating authorities in the regional level of the Greek governance system with the capability and the responsibility of the implementation of the cohesion policy. Given the weak institutional performance of the local and regional actors (Management & Organization Unit (MOU) S.A., 2005) the successive efforts (1997, 2010) for the merging of the municipalities and the communities and the creation of new stronger and more powerful local organizations are totally in line with the EU's cohesion policy demands, in terms of implementing effectively and efficiently the policy's content.

Furthermore, Europe framed beliefs and expectations of the domestic actors. By providing the concept of the multilevel governance (Marks, Hooghe, and Blank 1996; Hooghe and Marks 2001; Pagoulatos and Tsoukalis 2012; Stephenson 2013; Committee of the Regions 2009) the EU in fact encouraged domestic actors (such as local level associations like the central association of municipalities in Greece, "KEDE") to favourably support efforts of a further decentralisation and strengthening of the local authorities.

The establishment of the self-governed prefectural level in 1994 and the 1997 and 2010 merging initiatives of the government are also in accordance with the EU's multilevel concept. For instance, with respect to the transformation initiatives in 2010, references of the treaty of Lisbon related with the principle of partnership are found in the introductory report of the law 3852. In addition, it should be noted that at the time of the outset of these administrative changes there were two respective operational programs (OP) that were implemented within the cohesion policy's framework (figure 1). In 1997, the operational program "Kleisthenis" was connected more with e-government projects of the central state rather than with multilevel administration's issues. On the contrary, the OP "Administrative Reform" of the 2007-2013 programming period did facilitate the organizational restructuring of the Greek multilevel governance, as there were projects related with the regional and local level re-organization that were financially supported by the EU structural funds. Besides, both the 1997 and the 2010 transformation efforts were planned to be partly financed by the EU's funds. The 1997 special program for the local authorities ("EPTA") and the respective program for the Greek architecture of the administration and the local government "ELLADA" were planned to be co-financed by the EU structural funds. With regard to the structure of the "EPTA" program and its successor ("Thiseas"), it is clear that its procedures bare great resemblance with the respective processes of the cohesion policy operational programs, thus providing strong evidence of policy diffusion aspects. Regardless of implementation issues, the initial design of "EPTA" and "ELLADA" framed domestic beliefs and expectations and reinforced the prospect of realization of the multilevel system of governance in Greece.

As a result, the EU has critically facilitated the evolution of the local and regional administrative level, not only in terms of partly financing but also in terms of transferring policy paradigms into the domestic level. All the above administrative changes provide evidence of adaptation in terms of the final outcome (Bache, 2008, p. 12) (Radaelli, 2003, p. 37) of the Europeanization of the Greek local and regional institutional structure, thus increasing the goodness of fit between domestic subnational authorities and the cohesion policy demands.

Figure 1: Administrative transformations and cohesion policy across time.



Source: Own elaboration.

4. Discussion

The undertaken reforms of the period 1986-2013 compose significant transformations of the local and regional authorities. Attributed mainly to the Europeanization pressures, as well as to domestic preferences for democratic programming and participation of the local and regional authorities into the cohesion policy's cycle, local economies of scale their structure changed slowly and incrementally. On the other hand, the 2010 reform effort proved to be more radical, since the regions incorporated the prefectures, forming the new second self-governed tier and increasing their power and authorities.

In terms of public policy analysis, the reforms of 1986, 1994, 1997 and 2010 constitute critical junctures that have created discontinuities and have also genuinely facilitated the process of decentralization and deconcentration of the central state authority. Thus, the subnational level of governance, which is comprised of local, regional and decentralised authorities seem to have gained gradually considerable responsibilities. With regard to the reform employed in 2010, it is evident that broke the path dependency in terms of having substantially changed the point of the equilibrium in the centre-periphery axis in favour of the latter. However, the central state maintain the core competencies, not to mention the fact that it firmly keeps the authority of monitoring the legitimacy of both the local

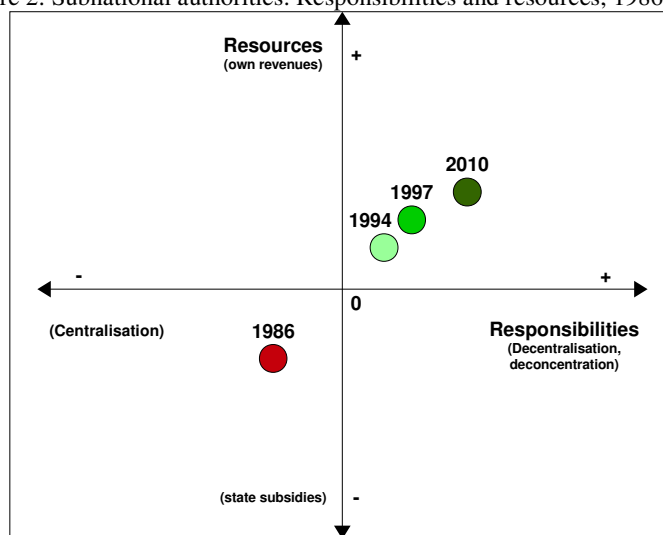
and the regional institutions' decisions. Table 1 summarizes the transformations throughout the period 1986-2010 providing the main legitimacy basis for the upholding of the reforms. In figure 2 is showed the gradual reinforcement of the first and the second tier of local government in Greece for the same period of time.

Table 1: Transformations in the subnational level of government: 1986-2010.

Time	Transformations	Legitimacy	Type of change
1980's (1986-87, 1989)	- Establishment of the regional level of governance - Own revenues (1 nd level of SG)	Regional development, democratic representation in the process of regional policy, Europeanization	Incremental
1990's (1994, 1997, 1999)	- Establishment of the 2 nd level of SG (Prefectures) - Amalgamations (1 st level of SG) - Deconcentration (Regions) - Reinforcement (2 nd level of SG)	Europeanization, modernization, economies of scale, administrative effectiveness/efficiency.	Incremental
2000's (2010)	- Establishment of the Regions as the 2 nd level of SG (Prefectures are incorporated) - Amalgamations (1 st level of SG)	Europeanization, economies of scale, administrative capacity, fiscal consolidation	Radical

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2: Subnational authorities: Responsibilities and resources, 1986-2010.



Source: Own elaboration.

It is worth mentioning that in 1989 and in 1999 the first and the second tier of the self-governed (SG) institutions were granted respectively with their own revenues, (central independent resources, KAP) speeding up the process of their empowerment. Nevertheless, their financial semi-independence did not reinforced them in organizational and functional terms and especially with regard to the cohesion policy demands, thus paving the way for the establishment of a plethora of local agencies (Société Anonyme, SA) both locally and centrally. In the local level, in 1997 there were more than seven hundred similar agencies, dealing mainly with EU's projects. In 2010 their number increased to 6000 before the reform, to drop respectively to 2000 after the "Kallikratis" plan. In the central level, there were formed two prominent agencies, the EETAA SA (Hellenic agency for local development and local government) and the PETA SA (Information, training and local development agency) in 1986 and 1990 respectively, as the institutionalized operational partners of the local authorities. Shares of their capital are hold by the central state (Minister of Interior), municipalities and the central association of the municipalities (KEDE).

All in all, the two agencies were used as a mechanism for implementing projects financed by the EU in relation to the responsibilities of the local government, thus overcoming the fragmentation and the inadequacies of the local institutions. From a bottom-up Europeanization approach, the local authorities having realised on time their organizational weaknesses tried to respond to the EUs' opportunities and demands at the onset of the cohesion policy (1987) by achieving the establishment of the two aforementioned agencies that could deal in a more flexible way than they would with the prerequisites posed by the EU's policy. In that respect, EU has served as a window of opportunity

(Kingdon, 1995) for change in the late 1980's, leading to the establishment of the new agencies, as soon as the local government realised the opportunities stemmed from the new European policy. From another point of view, local institutions were totally aware of their limited organizational competence and responded earlier enough in comparison with the central state which established the central agency responsible for managerial and implementation aspects of the cohesion policy only in 1997 (Management and Organization Unit, (MOU) SA)..

5. Conclusions

The paper tried to examine the influence of Europe on the reform efforts with regard to the Greek local and regional authorities. Using the historical new institutional approach, and by employing the concept of Europeanization it is evident that the regional and local institutions gradually managed to increase the goodness of fit between the cohesion policy demands and their institutional response through successive ways of reorganizational initiatives. The institutional transformations in 1986, 1994, 1997, and especially the radical reform of 2010 were heavily influenced by the EU, constituting critical junctures for breaking the path dependency of fragmentation and providing a window of opportunity for the reallocation of human and financial resources and the respective responsibilities. Apart from European factor, the process of modernization and reorganization of the Greek subnational authorities has also been a matter of domestic politics, but it is the EU that is considered to be the driving force of the crucial transformations.

Although the European pressure is evident throughout the period 1986-2010 the misfit of the domestic and the supranational level has been decreased over time, as the institutional capacity of the first and second tier of self-government has been respectively enhanced. Europe has influenced domestic politics by changing domestic opportunity structures as well as framing domestic beliefs and expectations. In that respect, EU has critically influenced the subnational level of government in Greece by transferring its preferences through elastic mechanisms of Europeanization. On the other hand, the response of the local government towards the EU's pressures for adaptation was the forming of new autonomous and flexible agencies in order to meet the demands of the European cohesion policy. All in all, Europe is considered to be the primary force for inducing transformations in the Greek regional and local government apparatus during the period 1986-2013, affecting the equilibrium on the axis centre-periphery in favour of the latter as well.

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Short CV

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¹ For instance: Ioakimidis (1996, 2000); Hlepas 1999; Hlepas and Getimis 2011; Hlepas 2010; Andreou (2006, 2010); Vamvakas 2012; Spanou (2008, 2012); Spanou and Soriropoulos 2011; Verney 1994.

² Leontitsis 2013.

³ Regional and local authorities have contributed to the implementation of around 12% of the total structural funds for the programming period 2007-2013 (source: own estimations, data available on: www.ops.gr).

⁴ According to Spanou (2012, 181) the creation of the thirteen Regions is largely "...a result of EC membership requirements".