



Spatial (in)justice and place-based strategies in innovation ecosystems: the case of the Alexander Innovation Zone in Thessaloniki

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Abstract. The concept of spatial justice relates to the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and opportunities. In other words, spatial justice is the spatial dimension of social justice, placing more emphasis on the geography of distribution. On this basis, this paper examines the innovation ecosystem of the Alexander Innovation Zone of Thessaloniki in Greece. What is attempted is to scrutinise, through the lens of spatial justice, this state's initiative to deal at the regional level with innovation. This paper investigates whether a focus on localities and decentralisation would be better able to deliver the demands of spatial justice. The hypothesis to be tested is that equity in socially valued resources and opportunities can be better achieved through place-based strategies. Based upon empirical material, within the framework of the RELOCAL project (H2020, www.relocal.eu), this contribution attempts to shed some light on the aforementioned research hypothesis.

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1. Introduction

The normative concept of spatial justice, with its holistic approach, places emphasis on the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice. Edward Soja (2010) defines spatial justice as the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them. Moreover, the term “spatial injustice” was proposed to depict injustices emerging from the passage and implementation of unjust spatial development rules and processes that are meant to re-organise geographical spaces (Philippopoulos-Michalopoulos, 2011). Envisioning spatial justice from the perspective of social justice requires rules to be devised that equally allocate urban resources to all urban dwellers (Friendly, 2013). It also endows the combination of active participation of all dwellers, and dialogue between the major actors (Rawls, 1999).

On this basis, the paper examines the case study of the Alexander Innovation Zone (hereinafter “the Zone”) located in the Metropolitan Area of Thessaloniki, an area with a significant industrial and science base. The Zone’s mission is to develop and manage an innovation ecosystem and to establish a collaborative platform among academic, research and business communities within the locality. Paradoxically, the metropolitan area demonstrates low innovation performances and a low rate of setting up innovative and dynamic enterprises. At the same time, dramatic losses in income and employment are detected, due to the recent economic crisis (Psycharis et al., 2014).

What is attempted in this paper is, through the lens of social and spatial justice, to test place-based regional policies dealing with innovation ecosystems. More specifically, the hypothesis to be tested is that spatial and social equity in resources and opportunities by focusing on localities can be better achieved through place-based strategies.

Given that the Zone’s endeavour stands as a classic top-down public intervention, it would be interesting to know from the governance perspective to what extent the policy configuration under question is detrimental to efficiency. If it is, does such type of policies reinforce the claim for a higher degree of autonomy and decentralisation on account of spatial justice? Once we focus on the distributive and

procedural forms of justice in relation to endogenous growth, it seems that subsidiarity and interregional transfers are two sides of the equation. From the spatial justice perspective, the critical question that arises is: what are the likely outcomes if one of the two sides of the equation is enhanced or weakened in the future? Answering this question will provide a useful insight into the spatial (in)justice and place-based policy-making in innovation ecosystems.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The next section briefly outlines the discussion in the relevant literature, while section 3 focuses on locality and policy-driven action. Section 4 presents and discusses the empirical findings on spatial (in)justice and place-based policies, while the last section provides the conclusions.

2. Literature Review

The question of fairness and justice has spurred a growing literature that theorises justice in space. Existing studies on spatial justice have been deployed across varying spatial processes, scales and phenomena (Smith, 2000; Israel and Frenkel, 2018). The development of the relationships between geographical distributions of resources and social justice implications have been inspired by many studies (Lefebvre, 1991; Smith, 1994). In addition, many efforts in the literature have been exploring the extent to which development and economic growth benefits vary among social groups (Florida and Mellander, 2016).

Citing Smith (1994), justice can be described in terms of “who gets what, where, when and how”, while for Soja (2009) “justice” fosters “collective political consciousness and a sense of solidarity”. Given the discussions over the years in the social sciences around justice, equity and inequalities, several scholars became conscious of the geographic aspects of injustices and started to contemplate issues of regional and local development, suggesting the basic principles of spatial justice (Heynen et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2019). Nowadays, the notion of spatial justice is one of the most compelling themes in spatial studies.

According to Soja (2009), spatial justice can be seen as both outcome and process, as geographies or distributional patterns that are in themselves just/unjust, and as the processes that produce these outcomes. Thus, it refers to an intentional and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice and involves the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources. Spatial justice consists therefore of a form of social justice providing all people with equal rights to access and/or use spatial resources in order to meet their basic needs (Miller, 1999).

Social and spatial processes are mutually inter-correlated, since social processes are spatially reflected, while spatial processes influence social processes. Social justice focuses more on the distribution between social groups, while spatial justice places more emphasis on the geography of distribution (Soja, 2010). Social and spatial justices are fuzzy and overlapping theoretical concepts, with a strong normative character and a wide variety of different interpretations (Morange and Quentin, 2018).

Envisioning spatial justice from the perspective of social justice, it requires that rules be devised that equally allocate urban resources to all local stakeholders. This can also be achieved by providing these actors with equal opportunities to use these resources (Friendly, 2013). According to this logic, social injustice can contribute to reducing or preventing economic inequalities and deprivation of resources (Soja, 2009). It also favours the combination of active participation of all stakeholders regardless of their socio-economic precincts, and dialogue between the major actors in the management of urban spaces and their users. This results in a balance of power among these actors and the creation of equal opportunities for all to access and/or use urban resources (Rawls, 1999).

Spatial justice combines two important forms of justice – distributive and procedural. Distributive justice is focused on identifying the patterns of exclusion and unfairness as well as the perceptions of spatial injustice, while procedural justice focuses on actions and institutional arrangements that can combat spatial injustice (Allen et al., 2003). For the distributive paradigm, an equal distribution of goods, services and opportunities is the basic prescription for justice. Noticeably, for the procedur-

al paradigm, what matters are the just institutions and procedures necessary to a just society (Madanipour et al., 2017; Soja, 2010). However, meaningful components can be found in both paradigms of justice. Just procedures are necessary but not sufficient for the fairness of the outcome, while attention to the outcome may mask the injustices of the process within a specific locality (Soja, 2010).

Deriving from the Barca Report (2009), place-based development refers to the idea that public policies ought to be context-sensitive in a way that better takes into account the specific needs, characteristics and potentials of places and regions. A place-based policy is typically expected to take into consideration the characteristics of the regional ecosystem, where market, social and institutional ties generate critical scale, cumulative effects and growth (Giuliani, 2007). In this perspective, the idea of a place-based approach is of particular importance in this discussion.

Notably, the issue is whether there is a rationale for inequality to be tackled by a place-based development policy rather than by financial transfers (redistributive justice) from the central state to the periphery. Regional development policies could be exercised either through a redistributive logic, where the emphasis is placed on ensuring a better balance in access to resources and opportunities across space, or through an emphasis on localities, based on the endogenous competitive potential of each territory (Madanipour et al., 2017). On the other hand, the “aggregate efficiency” approach, calls for “a national and mainly institutional intervention with no concern for territorial specificities” (Mendez-Guerra, 2017).

3. Locality and policy-driven action

Why this case?

The empirical work in this paper is articulated upon the key notions of “locality” and “policy-driven actions”. In the abstract notion, “locality” is defined in this research as multifarious and porous, at the intersection of vertical, horizontal and transversal forces. To this end, localities are not bound enclaves,

but interlinked parts of bigger wholes (Madanipour et al., 2017). To this end, “localities” are areas with obvious challenges of spatial justice and coping strategies for promoting a more balanced and sustainable development (Weck et al., 2018). “Policy-driven action” within a locality, in this research refers to place-based approaches that have an identifiable impact on the locality, aiming to promote spatial justice.

On the above basis, the paper examines the “policy-driven action” of the Alexander Innovation Zone in the Metropolitan Area of Thessaloniki. The starting point for the selection of the Zone was the fact that the particular case demonstrates obvious challenges of spatial justice and coping strategies for improving the local innovation ecosystem, by acting as a connecting platform among academic, research and business web. Despite the fact that this policy-driven action was initiated by a government body, it has been shaped and influenced by local stakeholders that have an identifiable impact on the locality.

The profile of the area

The metropolitan area of Thessaloniki sprawls over a total of 1,285.61 km² (496.38 square miles), while the population density of Thessaloniki comes to approximately 287 residents per km² (Greece 81 residents per km²). The city has one of the largest student populations in Greece and continues to be an attractive option to live for students and youngsters. From the business and innovation perspective, evidence shows low rates of setting up new and modern manufacturing enterprises, far from internationally competitive standards. The low innovation output indexes, which have pertained for several years, reflect the so-called “paradox” of demonstrating moderate innovation performances in an area of great innovation potential, (Georgiou et al., 2012). On the other hand, the current economic turbulence had a substantial negative impact on well-being and development. The latter confirms that urban economies are more exposed to international influences, making metropolitan areas more vulnerable to economic turbulences (Petraikos, 2014; Hadjimichalis and Hudson, 2014).

Turning the analysis towards the regional profile of the locality in terms of GDP *per capita*, Table 1 provides summary information for regions at NUTS II level in Greece. It is an uncontroversial observation that Central Macedonia, the region that includes the metropolitan city of Thessaloniki, has a significantly lower GDP *per capita*, equal to 77% of the national average.

According to Petraikos and Psycharis 2015, regions hosting large cities or specialising in manufacturing (like Central Macedonia) were also hit hard by the difficulties of most industries in maintaining production in the face of reduced demand, severely cut bank credit for running capital, imported supplies and export guarantees. This evidence is in line with Hadjimichalis and Hudson, 2014, who argue that urban economies are more exposed to international influences, making metropolitan areas more vulnerable to the economic crisis. Within this context, place-based policies could contribute to spatial justice by mobilising local assets and resources, to ensure higher levels of efficiency and deal with the development gap.

Examining spatial (in)justice in terms of innovation performance, the “Region” and its capital Thessaloniki, appears to be an “innovation consumer” rather than an “innovation producer”. The low innovation output indexes, which have lasted for several years, indicate that local industry demonstrates low or no demand for innovation. Interestingly, Georgiou et al. (2012) labelled this evidence as a “European paradox”, since while there is a high level of research activity and knowledge production by a number of scientific entities and initiatives, the performance of the locality in the field of innovation remains low. Table 2, based on data derived by the Regional Innovation Scoreboard, 2019, re-confirms the aforementioned “paradox”. It is obvious that the region ranks higher than the national average at tertiary education, and also higher than the national and EU average at international scientific co-publications, most-cited scientific publications and R&D expenditures in the public sector.

The above facts indicate a weak efficiency of the regional innovation policy in capitalising the locality’s research and knowledge assets. In the same vein, empirical evidence has shown that research and innovation has never been a priority in the regional policy agenda. Perversely, the attention has

Table 1. GDP and GDP *per capita* in the Greek NUTS II regions, 2015

Geographic area	GDP share in the country	GDP <i>per capita</i>			GDP/cap change
		€	EU=100	Greece=100	(constant prices)
	2015	2015	2015	2015	2010–15
EU28		29033	100		
Greece	100.00	16,294	56	100	-15.86
EL30 - Attiki	47.86	22,192	76	136	-15.7
EL52 - Kentriki Makedonia	13.45	12,557	43	77	-16.46
EL61 - Thessalia	5.14	12,393	43	76	-10.29
EL43 - Kriti	4.98	13,912	48	85	-15.95
EL63 - Dytiki Ellada	4.6	12,097	42	74	-17.72
EL64 - Sterea Ellada	4.46	14,117	49	87	-16.12
EL65 - Peloponnisos	4.41	13,358	46	82	-12.43
EL51 - Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki	3.83	11,164	38	69	-22.18
EL42 - Notio Aigaio	3.45	18,153	63	111	-12.24
EL53 - Dytiki Makedonia	2.44	15,642	54	96	-5.68
EL54 - Ipeiros	2.2	11,500	40	71	-15.24
EL62 - Ionia Nisia	1.76	15,039	52	92	-17.39
EL41 - Voreio Aigaio	1.41	12,582	43	77	-16.86

Sources: ELSTAT (2018), Eurostat (2018), Petrakos and Psycharis, 2015

Table 2: Research & Knowledge base according to Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2019

REGIONAL INNOVATION SCOREBOARD 2019	Relative to	
Western Macedonia (EL52)	EL	EU
Tertiary Education	110	126
International scientific co-publications	102	84
Most-cited scientific publications	107	83
R&D expenditures in public sector	104	94

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/innovation/facts-figures/regional_en, own elaboration

been focused on policy areas and initiatives that could produce “visible results” such as works and infrastructure.

The profile of the policy-driven action

The policy-driven action of the Alexander Innovation Zone was initiated by the state in 2006. The main argument for the establishment of the Zone was that in Thessaloniki there is an extensive academic, research and business community that can formulate an efficient metropolitan innovation eco-

system. Within this context, the Zone’s role is to create, develop and establish a permanent cooperation platform between associations, companies and research institutions of the public and private sectors, placing emphasis on purposes of common benefit and public interest and functioning as a magnet for large and small enterprises (Topaloglou et al., 2019a).

The Zone is supervised by the Minister of Interior, appointed (in a form of company) as the managing body of the local innovation ecosystem. Decision-making is based upon a board of directors appointed by the Ministry of Macedonia and



Fig. 1. The location of the Innovation Zone

Source: <https://www.thessinnozone.gr/en/innovation-ecosystem-in-thessaloniki/>

Thrace, constituted by local key stakeholders such as the region, the Greek International Business Association, the Federation of Industries of Northern Greece, the Aristotle University and the CERTH research institute. Given this background, Table 3 presents the businesses and research entities comprising the metropolitan innovation ecosystem. In this economy, and through the lens of the spatial justice perspective, the Zone attempts to exploit the territorial assets and potentials for local actors to shape a place-based and innovation-oriented agenda (Camagni and Capello, 2015).

Tab3

Methodology of research

The empirical work included mostly qualitative methods to investigate the chosen case and analyse the specific evidence on the articulation between action and locality for achieving spatial justice. Field research was preceded by background research, comprising mainly desk research and exploratory field visits. The relevant documents that have been assessed and analysed in order to start and support empirical work include administrative documents, statistics, evaluation reports, studies and articles in local mass media. In order to start empirical work and prepare expert interviews, specific focus was

placed on the decision-making processes in the locality, by screening secondary data such as spatial planning and development documents at different levels of government. Also, the statute and relevant legislation and laws referring to the Zone have been scrutinised.

Expert interviews with key stakeholders have been the most important source for case study evidence. The in-depth analyses' objective was to obtain a holistic picture of the particular case under consideration. In this context, 21 formal interviews were conducted with representatives of stakeholders, mainly face-to-face, employing a snowballing sampling technique. Furthermore, observations and informal talks and discussions with stakeholders were conducted, aiming to explore spaces of injustice and their physical and infrastructural environment, narratives of local stakeholders, agenda setting, articulated and hidden interests and expectations of particular groups of the local elite, etc. The interviews established the opinions of different actors involved in implementing the action. Certain viewpoints articulated within interviews with policy-makers and practitioners proved to be helpful sources to develop a well-nuanced picture.

4. Spatial (in)justice and place-based policies

Spatial justice, incorporating social justice, is a core theoretical notion addressed in the empirical work

of this paper. It focuses on both the just geographic distribution of resources, and on the power mechanisms that cause (in)justice among stakeholders and among spaces.

Table 3: The Metropolitan Innovation Ecosystem

Universities
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki University of Macedonia International Hellenic University Alexander Technological Educational Institute of Thessaloniki
Research Institutes
Centre for Research and Technology Hellas Chemical Process & Energy Resources Institute Information Technologies Institute Hellenic Institute of Transport Institute of Applied Biosciences Institute for Research and Technology Thessaly
National Agricultural Research Foundation
Plant Breeding and Genetic Resources Institute Forest Research Institute Industrial and Veterinary Plants Institute Institute of Olive Tree, Subtropical Plants and Viticulture Institute of Animal Production Science Institute of Mediterranean Forest Ecosystems Land and Water Resources Institute Institute of Agricultural Products Technology Fisheries Research Institute Veterinary Research Institute Agriculture Economics and Policy Research Institute
Incubators
i4G-Incubator 4 Growth Thermi-Group Technopolis Thessaloniki ICT Business Park Thessaloniki Technology Park
Pre- incubators
Ok!thess
Co-working spaces
Coho Lamdaspace
Prototyping
Make

Source: own elaboration based on <https://www.thessinnozone.gr/en/ecosystem/>

Institutional Context and Governance Practices

Governance and configuration of power in Greece are strongly influenced by the surrounding economic and political situation. To this end, the Kallikrates reform in 2011 put special emphasis on state efficiency through a bottom-up process (Kalimeri, 2018). Moreover, it aimed to create economies of scale, improve the management of human and financial resources, and deliver professional quality services. Ultimately, however, any improvements to social capital were extremely limited, perhaps because the reform's implementation began during a major financial crisis in Greece (Kalimeri, 2018).

It has been widely accepted that the centre-region model is dominant in Greece in almost all aspects of state administration and development planning (Petraikos, 2014). This model still has a great margin for decentralisation, leaving the central state with responsibility for designing, controlling and implementing only critical national interventions. All other implementation responsibilities should go to the regional and local level. However, it should be ensured that the responsibilities of each level are clear, without any overlap, and accompanied by guaranteed resources capable of assuring their independence and autonomy.

Given that Greece ranks 28th among 39 European countries according to the Local Autonomy Index suggested by Ladner et al. (2016), what is examined is how local autonomy is portrayed in the specific case. Empirical evidence derived from the case study research confirms the significance of the aforementioned ranking, reflecting forms of political dependency, ineffective administrative structures, overlapping of competencies and low civic participation.

It is worth noting that the central state has the power to intervene in the Zone's management issues whenever it considers this necessary. To this end, access to the decision-making centres may reproduce dependency relationships that have clear spatial manifestations, as space is the site in which this form of access is made possible or denied (Madanipour, 2011). Based on the above, it seems that the region has a limited authorisation and means to act

efficiently on local needs and push locally-based development into a higher level of policy making.

Tracing the governance practices that are supposed to contribute to spatial justice within the localities (Madanipour et al., 2017), it is clear that the specific action represents a typical top-down initiative launched by the central state. In practice, however, there has been room for a bottom-up perspective, since the planning and implementation was the sole responsibility of local actors, such as the region and the municipalities. In other words, a mix of top-down and bottom-up elements was detected (Weck et al., 2020) where there had been potentially various "modes of governance" (Hooghe and Marks, 2001).

Spatial justice challenges vs policy outputs

The main spatial justice challenge behind the Zone's endeavour has been the establishment of a "connecting channel" among the academic, research and business web. In this economy, the Zone aims to inspire academia, policy-makers and the business community in the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki to enrol more readily into a local coalition of interest that is capable of addressing spatial justice (Topaloglou, 2019a). Justice in this regard should imply the active participation of local actors able to shape and implement a place-based agenda (Dikec, 2001).

In view of the procedural justice, the issue of consultation and stakeholders' mobilisation prove to be critical to how actors' involvement is promoted and agreements are reached. Empirical findings, however, show that awareness activities and consultation with local stakeholders (at least until the latest developments) provided no specific added value, since most of the times such debates took place due to mandatory regulatory provisions defined by the formality of the institutional setting (Schmitt, 2020). In addition, the reluctance of the beneficiaries to participate is highlighted, as they believe that the consultation is a pretext and often aims to legitimise predetermined decisions.

Through the lens of the spatial justice perspective, and contrary to place-neutral policies, the Zone attempts to exploit the unique metropolitan territorial assets and potentials for local actors to shape a place-based and innovation-oriented

agenda (Camagni and Capello, 2015). In particular, the challenges that lie ahead are the capitalisation of metropolitan Thessaloniki as a gateway to the Balkans and an intermodal transport hub, the emphasis on dynamic industry sectors, the development of new forms of tourism and the exploitation of the unique cultural heritage, combined with the strong research and knowledge base. Evidence, however, indicates that these favourable metropolitan assets have not operated in practice – neither as “engines of growth” nor as “innovation promoters”, since Thessaloniki today behaves more like an Innovation Taker than an Innovation Maker (Topaloglou et al., 2019a).

The Zone could, under certain conditions, contribute to making the area of Thessaloniki one of the most recognisable innovation hubs in Southern Europe. In particular, it has been underlined by experts from academia and business support organisations that the Zone should have been playing the role of “facilitator” by establishing a dynamic collaboration platform within the locality by creating channels of communication across fragmented worlds. Contrary to expectations, what actually exist are scattered islands of innovation initiatives with no critical size or coordination with each other. More specifically, in the Metropolitan area there are four universities, three major colleges, four major research centres, four major incubators, two pre-incubators and one organised industrial area. This critical mass of players has never been able to effectively coordinate with each other or to formulate a commonly accepted vision of “where we want to go”, mainly due to the diverse and antagonistic agendas of priorities among them.

Drivers of policy outputs and place-based enabling factors

It is uncontroversial to state that the just demand to establish a “connecting channel” among the academic, research and business world has come from above, initiated by the government. In that sense, a positive contribution could be detected in terms of spatial justice. However, after having touched upon the types and modes of procedural (in)justice, the inefficiency of the local leading actors comes into

light in the specific case (Schmitt, 2020). Attempting to interpret the Zone’s failure to play the role of “connecting channel”, the evidence has shown a dominant driver to be local leadership that lacks vision and is inspired by an individual rather than collaborative culture and by temporary political benefits with an eye on the next election cycle. Given the rather diverse and antagonistic agenda among stakeholders, the role of the local political staff in forming a place-based strategy seems to be vital.

On the other hand, the Zone endeavour represents a classic top-down public intervention and stands as a central institutional initiative. It has been highlighted, however, by several expert interviewees that this top-down approach has caused serious delays in setting up the appropriate structures, staff and mechanisms that would allow the Zone to establish an efficient mechanism in the local innovation ecosystem. In addition, the legislative framework was considered extremely complicated, putting the initiative under the rigorous umbrella of public accounting. Thus, these top-down practices applied in the case of the Zone have proven detrimental to efficiency and have led to serious over-regulations and bureaucratic obstacles. In the same vein, the so-called “centre-periphery” administrative, political and economic development model is considered to be one of the interpretative factors producing and reproducing spatial injustice (Storper, 2011).

On the other hand, the empirical evidence suggests going beyond this usual top-down or bottom-up dichotomy. Interestingly, the crucial issue for spatial justice, is the extent to which there is clarity in vision and roles, consistency in policy choices and acceleration in decision-making (Topaloglou et al., 2019b). In other words, the two policy-making perspectives should not be considered to be mutually exclusive, since just procedures are necessary but not sufficient for the fairness of the outcome (Madanipour et al., 2017). Seen in this respect, a multi-level governance model seems to be more appropriate for achieving a better distribution of resources and opportunities and a more efficient innovation ecosystem in the locality (Hooghe and Marks, 2001).

Despite the fact that redistributive policy may initially stand as an attractive recipe for growth, it is over-simplistic to achieve spatial justice to the

extent that it is treated as a “resource conveyor belt” from one region to another. Thus, redistributive policy will not accomplish spatial justice if it fails to mobilise endogenous dynamics and give incentives to improve the locality (Topaloglou et al., 2019b). To this end, exogenous (state-influenced) and endogenous (bottom-up) approaches are not able alone to reduce inequalities and bring about balance without embracing local ownership and accountability for implementation (Jones et al., 2019).

5. Conclusions

The paper addresses the locally-driven action of the Alexander Innovation Zone, based on the locality of the Metropolitan area of Thessaloniki – a locality with its own specificities and territorial assets. These local specificities concern the unique historical, geographic and economic profile of the Thessaloniki area on the one hand and a strong research and knowledge base on the other. This setting designs to a certain extent the scope, limitations and potentials for the local actors to shape and address a place-based agenda.

The scattered and weak innovation spots within the metropolitan area indicate that the robust academic, research and business community has failed to formulate a locally-oriented agenda based on a commonly agreed vision and strategy. Quite the contrary seems to prevail – a rather diverse and antagonistic policy agenda among the local key players. This in turn reflects the lack of visionary leadership capable of transforming all these scattered and competing priorities into a common vision and strategy. This makes a lot of sense, in an attempt not only to interpret the Zone’s failure to act as a “facilitator” within the innovation ecosystem but also to shed light on the effects of antagonisms among local stakeholders in a place-based perspective.

When the question of autonomy comes into play, it becomes clear that the degree to which decentralisation is related to spatial justice depends on the institutional characteristics of decentralisation itself. It is uncontroversial that the administrative setting in Greece has a strongly centralised character in terms of spatial organisation and configuration of power.

In addition, the focus of the current administrative reform (Kallikrates) has been placed on the state’s efficiency rather than on autonomy itself, due to the recent economic crisis.

Given this background, the empirical analysis has revealed that the state mechanism proved to be bureaucratic, over-regulating, sluggish and inefficient, offering plenty of room for highly political interventions. Based on this background, one might assert that such aggregate efficiency approaches, which are based solely on national and institutional intervention with no concern for territorial specificities, are not able adequately to contribute to spatial justice. However, the contrary is true: this top-down and place-neutral perspective seems actually to reproduce spatial *injustice*.

Once the question revolved around whether top-down or bottom-up approaches contributed better to spatial justice, the empirical evidence suggests going beyond this usual dichotomy. In other words, the two policy-making perspectives should not be considered to be mutually exclusive. In this sense, the processes of multi-level governance in the case of the Zone seems to be more appropriate in order to achieve a better distribution of resources and opportunities and better mechanisms to ensure an efficient innovation ecosystem in the locality.

Investigating the impact of redistributive policies on endogenous growth, an interesting empirical finding emerged. According to the dominant perceptions, it seems that an intra-regional financial transfer from one region to another treated as “conveyor belt” alone will not necessarily provide a panacea for addressing inequalities and spatial injustice if it does not mobilise endogenous dynamics. Hence, there is no room for simplistic recipes.

To sum up, a place-based policy should appreciate the characteristics of the regional innovation ecosystem, including all key stakeholders, in order to facilitate the development of knowledge and business networks in a spatial context.

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