
Editorial: Socio-economic sustainability, regional development and spatial planning

George M. Korres

Department of Geography,
University of the Aegean,
University Hill, Geography building,
Mytilini 81100, Lesvos, Greece
Email: gkorres@geo.aegean.gr

Current socio-economic developments have renewed the interest for the role of regional development and spatial planning, underlining the interactions with socio-economic sustainability, technological change and socio-economic growth worldwide. The reason is that these new developments lead to increase productivity of factors of production, contributing in the long-term improvement of competitiveness, innovation and entrepreneurial spirit. Moreover, as currently, international financial markets are facing a serious sovereign debt crisis, as economic growth seems to stall in the face of budget tightening and uncertainty being abundant.

Socio-economic sustainability, through competitiveness and growth enhancement, upgrading the production infrastructure and organisation through capital equipment, state-of-the-art knowledge, and human capital investment, combined with innovative and technology-based production processes are among the most important issues of today's socio-economic analysis. The key elements for the sustainable development policy concern the efficient use of resources, encouraging the development of new productive technologies, extending the use of productivity and efficiency enhancement schemes and encouraging both innovative and productive activities. Within this framework, socio-economic development increasingly relies on information and knowledge, and creates value through their ability to manage these valuable assets.

One of the main aims of regional policy planning regards the encouragement of innovation, knowledge and research. Furthermore, encouraging investments in intangible assets and human capital is crucial, in order to maximise the efficiency of the current technology and its effects. Furthermore, supporting entrepreneurship and developing industrial sectors is an objective that goes beyond the limits of the regional policy, by joining actions of the educational policies, internal market, financial services and tax policy. Certain fields require specific intervention, in order to improve the internal market, such as the financial or services markets, where the technical barriers and the legislative differences limit the free trade, in order to improve the economic environment, with special attention in areas which present the fastest technological progress. However, the development objectives set at European or international level cannot be reached without a tight interconnection of the regional policy measures with those of some complementary policies, such as the commercial policy, the single market policy, transport and energy policies, research and development policies, competition policy, regional and macroeconomic policies, as well as environmental policies. While in these fields, the policies are getting coordinated, the sustainable development requirements,

with the three development pillars: economic, social and environmental, require supplementary measures for coordinating regional policy with the associated policies and requirements. Thus, the balance between the different policies must be insured. On the other hand, cohesion policies amount to an efficiency-based long-run strategy of 'catch-up growth', in which the interventions aim to accelerate catch-up growth and achieve cohesion policies, rendering regional policy aims into increased growth and employment and the improved international competitiveness.

Under these circumstances, a framework more reliant upon regional development has become an important policy objective in order to promote efficiency, effectiveness and competitiveness. The acceleration of structural reforms is a policy priority for restoring the fundamental disequilibria of the economy and for permanently increasing productivity. However, the social consequences of this financial crisis are one of the major aspects to be faced, particularly in need of a more coherent, more coordinated approach. However, the pressure on public budgets adds to the urgency of this matter in different policy areas, introducing a more focused strategy to facilitate the creation of areas for action, and in particular introducing a more focused strategy to facilitate the creation and marketing of sustainable regions, ensuring employment, social progress and cohesion.

An open, efficient and competitive policy planning environment is a crucial catalyst for growth in a global context. There need to be strategic approaches, which not only promote closer interaction among sectors but also among policy-makers (from different policy fields and different levels of government). For this, an environment which favours new ideas and new businesses is required, being the primary driver of a successful and sustainable regional policy, of central importance in finding solutions to socio-economic challenges, for spreading social progress, environmentally friendly technologies and innovations, worldwide.

A new generation of policies have to overcome the limitations and failures of past experiences, such as collusive practices between political and economic power, heavy bureaucracy, lack of accountability and obstacles of entrepreneurship. They have to be creative and selective, with decision-making mechanisms that are more democratic and inclusive of different social interests, pulling out of the current crisis. The politics behind such a new departure has to be based on a wide social consensus over the distribution of the productivity and efficiency gains deriving from new technologies and socio-economic activities.

This special issue, based on the International Conference on 'Socio-Economic Sustainability, Regional Development and Spatial Planning: European and International Dimensions and Perspectives', 4–7 July, 2014, Mytilene, Lesvos, Greece, summarises the debate for the future and prospects of socio-economic and regional development of the European Union, under the fields of European, economic-geography, sociology, regional development and spatial planning. More specifically, this special issue covers the following sections:

- 'Policies and practices for sustainable growth'
- 'Socio-economic sustainable growth and regional development'
- 'Regional and territorial governance: economic and social policies'
- 'Social economy innovations and sustainable communities'

- ‘Territorial innovation and planning policies: regions and enterprises’
- ‘Local and global social dimensions in sustainable development’
- ‘Innovative community and social development’.

The special issue includes the following reviewed papers:

- Kiran Prasad: ‘The green path to sustainable development: perspectives from India-EU partnerships’
- Aikaterini Kokkinou: ‘A theoretical approach of technical efficiency and stochastic frontier analysis in logistic services and industrial performance’
- Elias Kourliouros, George M. Korres and Aikaterini Kokkinou: ‘Spatial planning deficiencies in Greece during the 1980s: what went wrong and why?’
- Charalambos N. Louca and Aliko Demosthenous: ‘Education and sustainable economic growth – a theoretical approach of measuring efficiency in education’
- Maria P. Michailidis, George K. Gantzias and Evie Michailidis: ‘Unemployed: training and development, employability and social support’
- Stilianos Alexiadis, Olga Gioti-Papadaki and Christos Ap. Ladias: ‘Evaluating agriculture productivity growth in the EU-28: a spatial econometric analysis’
- Charalambos N. Louca and Surasinghege Suranga: ‘Causality patterns of the tourism industry in France’.

Furthermore, this special issue explores and studies various dimensions of the interaction between regional development and spatial planning, along with links to socio-economic development. The important task is to relate social consequences to a number of factors that are likely to be determinants, and measure the extent to which they affect economy and society. This special issue considers both an economic and social perspective to increase the information base and derive broader conclusions about the social consequences of the economic crisis, with this issue being of particular research relevance because evidence shows that even though economic crisis has been widely analysed with respect to economic consequences, yet little attention has been paid to the evaluation of social consequences.

Finally, the editors would like to express their thanks to all authors and peer reviewers, as well as Inderscience Publishing, for their important contributions towards this special issue, expressing their belief that this special issue will offer an elaborative framework for rigorous academic and scientific dialogue.