AN APPROACH TO THE EFFECTS OF GREEK REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY REGIONS

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Abstract
Although the start of the debate on the contribution of universities to local and regional development dates back several decades, it is only in the past 25 years that it has been intensified and seen from a new perspective in terms of investigation and consideration. It is therefore imperative that the ‘higher education – development’ relationship be reviewed and placed on a different basis. The causes for this are the major change in the content of ‘development’ and the concept of ‘university’ (mainly in terms of its role in society and the economy), new policies and socio-economic conditions globally, the contemporary weight attributed to new technologies and knowledge dissemination as a ‘development factor’, as well as the large number of unsuccessful attempts to use the universities as a ‘means’ for development. In the context of this general consideration at global level, this chapter seeks to investigate whether the Greek regional universities – as they have been established, allocated, organised and operated – have played, and may play, some part in the development of the broader areas (region, town). In other words, this chapter attempts to investigate whether the expansion of higher education institutions throughout Greece has contributed to the improvement in the quality standard of education and a resolution of the country’s ‘regional problem’. The implementation of the study was based on the investigation of the relevant international and Greek bibliography, and on a series of surveys focusing on: a) the Greek planning system for ‘development’, ‘spatial’, ‘regional policies’ and their association with ‘higher education’, and b) the entirety of regional universities and cities – prefecture capitals of Greece, placing special emphasis on the seventeen university cities.

Keywords: Regional university, higher education, regional/local development, university and economy, theories of development.

1. Introduction
Although the start of the debate on the contribution of universities to local and regional development dates back several decades, it is only in the past 25 years that it has been intensified and seen from a new perspective of investigation
and consideration. It is, therefore imperative that the ‘higher education – development’ relationship is reviewed and placed on a different basis. The causes for this are, the major change in the content of ‘development’ and the concept of ‘university’ (mainly in terms of its role in the society and economy), the new policies and socio-economic conditions globally, the contemporary weight attributed to new technologies and knowledge dissemination as a ‘development factor’, as well as the large number of unsuccessful attempts to use the universities as a ‘means’ for development.

In the international arena, knowledge (especially at higher education level) has started being acknowledged as a key factor for national and regional development, and awareness of the issue ‘university and local/regional development’ is constantly on the rise. Conferences are organised, increasingly more articles are written, and many governments promote projects for the encouragement of cooperation between universities, local communities and local productive sectors. On the other hand, increasingly more universities have started recognising their developmental role in the broader areas where they are located (Theodora, 2004: 181-304). In Greece, the expansion of university education, despite all the efforts in recent years, is still treated in a one-dimensional and fragmentary manner. One-dimensional, because it does not address the framework of the university’s multiple roles and different levels of spatial reference. Fragmentary, because it is not included in the perspective of broader policies on development and education (Cf. section 4, Footnote 8). It is true though that, following the country’s accession to the European Union, a new context of reflection has been shaped regarding the investigation of the relationship ‘university – regional/local development’.

Greece is a country where the higher education system is exclusively operated by the state. For more than four decades, governmental policies have been bringing out the decentralisation of university education as a ‘means’ to improve the quality of education nation-wide and resolve the ‘regional problem’. At the same time, local societies have been requesting, one after the other, the establishment of at least one university department, in the belief that they would thus ensure the upgrading of the quality and economic standards in their respective areas. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate the following under the new conditions (as they emerge at international, European and national levels) and while decentralisation is under way in Greece: if regional universities1 – as they have been created, distributed, organised and operated – have played and may play some part in the development of Greece’s regions.

The approach to this question is based on the grounds of two basic principles. Firstly, we studied whether and how the expansion of university education

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1 ‘Regional universities’: universities located and operating in cities of the Greek regions. ‘Central universities’: universities operating in the two metropolitan areas of the country [Athens & Thessalonica]. An unofficially established distinction adopted by the writer.