



Greece Beyond the *Crises*, an Enhanced Resilience

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Abstract

Although Greece has been brought to the forefront of international attention over the last 10 years, much is still to be learned from this badly understood country. Far away from standard clichés opposing sunny beaches, ruined monuments, and Mediterranean cooking vs. corrupted people, oversized bureaucracy, and polluted urban landscapes, we will address Greece's changing geography through the angle of crises and resilience. Well beyond the financial collapse and Troika experience, crises cover a wide array of events in Greece, from earthquakes and wildfires to extreme climate variability, environmental pollutions, war disasters, demographic collapse, and pandemics. Against these threats, Athens has shown a remarkable capacity to change, adapt, and adjust through innovation and inventiveness.

Geography is an excellent gateway towards a better understanding of how the country managed to develop its resilience to repeated shocks. Through a natural cross-disciplinary ability and in connection with complexity science, geography opens up new avenues for discussion on the Greek “black box.” Greece's geography is made of acute landscape contrasts, multi-scalar event combinations, fierce resistance of local forces against global interests, and enhanced interconnectedness through its diasporic networks abroad. Chaos theory, nonlinearity, and dynamic systems are among the key concepts that will allow us to change the overall outlook and to extricate ourselves from the catastrophe logic that gained too much momentum in public opinion.

Keywords

Crises · Resilience · Complex science · Economic downturn · Nonlinearity · Greek geography · Cross-disciplinary research · International cooperation

Crises and Development

Over the past few years, Greece has drawn considerable attention from the international media. Newspaper articles, TV documentaries, movies, and books generated a massive although heterogeneous flow of information. This small country on the border of the European Union has been attacked from all sides and blamed for structural ills explaining the emergence of a purported universal threat: The collapse of the European currency as an outcome of a sovereign debt default. Why such a disproportionate focus on a country representing only 0.13% of the world population and 0.18% of GDP value? Is the *Greek Crisis* a real issue for the international financial authorities or is it that Athens served as a scapegoat for many social and economic problems that emerged after the fall of the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe?

Most analyses assume that the crisis is greater than a contingent phenomenon related to adverse circumstances. Critical voices were directed at the *Greek system*, the defects of which have been intensively discussed. Carefully chosen incriminating statements were used against the government in Athens. These draw up great indictments against the political and economic choices that further contributed to the deterioration of the financial situation. For the vast majority of observers, Greece had become a *black sheep*, a leading country of the so-called *PIGS* group, a nation suffering from major systemic flaws largely hidden from public view.

Systemic corruption, widespread clientelist networks, cheating in connection with statistics, inefficient public administration, inability to collect taxes, and to honor the commitments entered into at the international level were

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among the charges brought against the government. But, surprisingly, the accusations did not remain in the field of finance, they spread to other areas pertaining to culture, through disparagement and reject. The Hellenic Republic has been associated with the ideas of laziness, venality, mistrust, and... backwardness (Chiot, 1989; Garde, 2004; Lampe & Jackson, 1982). Old stereotypes die hard. Greece would be lagging behind in its development, trapped somewhere in the past, unable to adapt to the new realities of the twenty-first century. Even the Orthodox Church, seen as a vestige of the past, is suspected to have played an active role in the unfolding of the crisis. A number of presumptions-shortcuts without scientific foundations were offered under tight deadlines, especially in the early stages of the crisis, but these have subsisted beyond reasonable interpretation. Easy judgments induced by badly defined diagnosis often lead to disturbing verbal blunders justifying ex-ante the use of authoritarian methods.

In the eyes of Brussels, such a *deviant* behavior and the associated disorders implied the development of adapted solutions. In 2010, the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund formed the *Troika* group with the mandate to carry out a financial bailout program expected to have heavy social, political, and structural implications. For years, Greece was placed under foreign trusteeship and its sovereignty repeatedly breached by the forced adoption of legal *packages* or *memorandums* by the Greek Parliament, sometimes against the Constitution. The adjustment programs initiated a number of reforms deeply impacting local economy and finance, but they also introduced changes well beyond these spheres. During the period 2011–2018, Greece would have lost about 380,000 people (–3.4% of its population) and Attiki 247,000 (–5.9%) according to the *ELSTAT* estimates. Between 2007 and 2018, its GDP decreased from \$332 to \$253 billion (–24%) in 2010 constant US\$ (World Bank data). Austerity necessarily fueled tensions and resentment: Increased mortality, decline in public health, massive job losses, rise of political extremism, and retreat of democracy are among the outcomes of strong external pressures exerted by the *global system* on this small European country.

As a result of considerable efforts, after decades of government budget deficit, Athens returned to balanced accounts in 2016 and even achieved a surplus of 1.5% in 2019—an unprecedented situation since the early 1970s. Austerity policies would have proved their effectiveness. In August 2018, at the end of a third program, Athens officially exits the bailouts. A new era is seemingly beginning, paving the way towards a return to *normality*—a great relief for populations who went through difficult times. This is at least what the official scenario says. End of the game? Not really. If we leave aside the still unidentified consequences of COVID-19, with a government debt at about 180% of GDP in 2019 (esti-

mated to have reached 200% in 2020), no need to be Cassandras to predict that considerable problems are still ahead and shall be tackled in the years to come.

Beyond statistics and expert-level talks, in terms of analysis and research this scenario leaves us pretty well unsatisfied. In fact, the surface of the issue was not even scratched. The crisis years brought about tremendous changes in Greece, but these mutations continue a long line of initiatives, the existence of which is barely known from the outside. In the absence of adequate scientific evidence, as a result of whole areas of research laid dormant for decades, the international authorities remain conditioned so far by old patterns of thought and false images. While concentrating on the Greek case and looking away from much bigger states affected by worrisome levels of public debt, they developed a skewed vision of reality.

Despite the accusations of backwardness, *Old Greece*—the one of historians, the nation emerging from *the dark ages of Turcocracy*, deeply entangled in the Cold War through its forefront position in the fight against neighboring communist countries—is now a distant memory. After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the European integration process achieved in 2001 with the replacement of the Drachma by the Euro, the Hellenic Republic had finally emerged from tough economic and political times. Gone are the days of runaway inflation, oversized agricultural activities, geographic isolation, low workforce productivity, high emigration pressure, heavy militarization, and strong bureaucratization. The renewal of generations also instilled a new momentum into the process. As it happens in other places, the baby boomers reached retirement and well beyond. With people passing away, the old wounds left by WWII and the Civil War are healed. There are today rare opportunities for travelers to meet the survivors of the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) and Asia Minor Catastrophe or their direct descendants. Relating Greece with the remnants of some *archaism* inherited from the Ottoman era is thus a mistake made by people who precisely ignore the pace of mutations and reforms the country had already undergone *before* the crisis started.

The concept of *crisis* itself is puzzling. “Greek crisis” or “Grexit” have become common expressions since 2007, a mantra recited continuously as a form of exorcism by countries fearing a similar form of fall into the clutches of economic decline. Crises are supposed to be brief time sequences expressing a transition between two stable phases, not lengthy periods revealing development cycles. From 2007 to 2018—start and end of the *official crisis*—a whole decade has passed, much more than a parenthesis. Besides this, the dates proposed for the official-financial scenario are conveniently positioned although they do not express the actual pace of crisis propagation, development, and alleged resorption. People familiar with the country perfectly know that all

premises of the financial collapse were already in place as early as 2001. Furthermore, different system *malfunctions* or distortions were readily identifiable in the 1990s and 2000s, but their existence was spontaneously associated with the negative side effects of modernization, not with the premises of a future breakdown.

Pretending that the financial collapse is related with speculative positions adopted by reckless and unresponsive banking institutions leading to an explosion of debt with the Greek government's agreement is a partial and very specific view of the subject. The root causes of the *crisis* go deeper. They are to be found in sequences of cumulative events, series of insignificant decisions or adaptive behaviors that eventually produce gradual adjustments. Many results attributed to the Troika represent a straight continuation of policies implemented before and after Greece joined the Euro zone. Attention usually focuses on snapshots and critical events altering old balances, although real changes take place *in the background* and require a great deal of time to gain momentum.

As early as 1986, the Delors Commissions had already laid down the general principles of indebtedness mechanisms through massive financial transfers to Athens, paving the way for the adoption of a single currency. These financial transfers produced immeasurable effects on local economy and significantly altered people's mind. Easy money had become reality. The Integrated Mediterranean Programs (IMP) and three further Community Support Frameworks (Christodoulakis & Kalyvitis, 1998) initiated a series of structural changes through surging capital inflows. The IMP (1982–1988) provided €3.5 billion, the Delors package (1989–1993) about €10 billion, the Santer package (1994–1999) €19 billion, and the third Community Support Framework (2000–2006) €26 billion. Not surprisingly, the support granted after 2007 through the National Strategic Reference Frameworks reached €26 billion (2007–2013) and €19 billion (2014–2020).

These cash inflows did not contribute directly and significantly to further indebtedness. Private and public debt surged concurrently through different channels (Greek Central Bank, private banking networks), but economic support programs created a global *atmosphere*. New public facilities were erected everywhere across the country and major public works were engaged against all expectations—the state of public finance would have prevented the projects from being started. However, the downside is that this uncontested and effective modernization process encouraged corrupt practices both at international and local levels (black money, *maúro chríma*). This has been widely documented by journalistic investigations.

There is no doubt that administrative reform, major building projects, and direct allocations provided to various economic sectors created an overall dumping effect through

sustainable job creation and economic growth. Unexpectedly, Greece seemed to rebound and emerge from a lengthy period of stagnation or recession (early 1970s–late 1980s). Painful memories of industrial slowdown, falling productivity, and informal/survival economy would have been relegated to the annals of history, thanks to the invisible hand of the market. The *Greek miracle* once identified as the happy years following WWII and the Civil War had already provided new development opportunities and brought prosperity to ordinary people through the implementation of large industrial-social programs and infrastructure upgrading. After the chaotic period of the Colonels' dictatorship (1967–1974) and the global contraction of the 1970s, the active European inclusion phase would have propelled Greece into a second era of prosperity. The accession process had far-reaching consequences for the vast majority of people through an obvious increase of living standards. Ultimately, Greece escaped marginality and started playing “in the big league.” Most observers agree that the 2004 Olympics in Athens epitomize the desire of the Greek nation to be delivered from a marginal existence and attain international recognition, with “memories of the past.”

Greece's Academic Geographies

Within the *World Geography Book Series*, the present volume aims to address Greece's case on a new basis and to move away from the established clichés that thoroughly tarnished the reputation of this country over the last years. Geography is an excellent gateway to help people get over prejudices. The variety of techniques, the extent of thematic expertise, the all-embracing dimension of spatial issues, and the capacity to illustrate territorial dynamics make geography a sure way both to bring new insights and to look beyond the *crisis* as an economic-financial problem.

In Greece, geography is a rather “new” academic discipline. Without going up until Ptolemy and Strabo, since the emergence of *New Greece* as an independent state in the 1820s–1830s, geography remained first a military matter. Most geographers were to be found in military institutes, or in university departments dedicated to geology and earth sciences. A clear sign of this discreet although essential public existence is the inability to find out good maps in this country until the 1990s. For strategic reasons, map dissemination was voluntarily limited in the civil sphere, hence the serious difficulty faced by travelers in finding appropriate maps and plans able to characterize for instance the road network. Even major cities were badly charted, more specifically their built outskirts, the semi-official existence of which impeded accurate mapping. Traveling through Greece was sometimes challenging. In remote border areas, roads and lanes mentioned on maps could have no real existence, and vice versa.

The Cold War and the related paranoiac atmosphere did not help much getting out of this stalemate. As an answer to potential attacks, a number of topographic maps related to strategic objectives were falsified on purpose. Only military officers could access high scale imagery and documents, whereas individuals and even civil professionals (architects, land planners, landscapers, engineers, and surveyors) were granted with a limited access to cartographic tools. All this had far-reaching effects on the everyday life. Land planning was deeply affected by this state of affairs. How could civil servants ensure a smooth functioning of the urban or rural systems without dedicated tools? Black economy and black geography are two faces of a secrecy principle applied in vast areas of daily life.

With the end of the Cold War, Greece entered a new era. Simultaneously, the country escaped from the curse of a forefront position in the fight against socialist neighbors, and new spatial technologies allowed for an amazing growth and development of mapping tools. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and satellite imagery became products of “general commodity” in a few years. One can easily imagine the revolution faced in Greece as regards land management. The transition from secrecy to mass consumption accompanied a general reversal in access to information. Private

agencies developed and offered GIS databases for sale in place of outdated declassified military topographic maps.

This information revolution and the early political détente operated by Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou in the 1980s had another counterpart. In 1984, the University of the Aegean, the University of Thessaly, and the Ionian University were founded within the framework of a decentralization project—Athens and Thessaloniki being by far the most prominent places within the local academic system. Not surprisingly, as a premise of further developments, geography could join the system as an independent discipline and obtain official recognition:

- In Mytilene, the first department of Geography was created within the School of Social Sciences (1994), in close relationship with other schools (Environmental Studies, Business Studies, and Engineering) thus forming a cohesive unit for the promotion of applied spatial sciences (Fig. 1.1).
- In Volos, a department of Agriculture, Crop Production, and Rural Environment within the School of Agriculture Science emerged, backed up by the departments of Architecture, Civil Engineering, and Planning and Regional Development in the early 2000s, thus including *urban* and *rural* studies within the same functional group.



Fig. 1.1 University of the Aegean, Mytilene. (© G. Sidiropoulos, 2021)

The University of the Aegean is a perfect example of national decentralization. The development of local universities is an essential way to rectify the geographical balance at the expense of Athens or Thessaloniki

while supporting less-favored border areas. The University comprises different schools and departments located across the Aegean (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Rhodes, Syros, and Lemnos), which entails specific organizational difficulties

- In Athens, the Harokopio University was founded in 1990 with its main facility located in Kallithea and hosting a new Geography department since the end of the 1990s, closely connected with economy, spatial planning, and applied geography.

Accordingly, what forms today's "geography" within the Greek academic system is much more consistent than it used to be in the post-WWII and Cold War era, each site bringing its own expertise. Other events support the emergence of a more firmly established discipline: (1) The first Pan-Hellenic Symposium of Geography organized by the Greek Geographical Society was held in Athens in 1987; (2) the journal *Historicogeographika* was created in 1986 (historico-geographica.blogspot.com); (3) and the journal *Geographies* was edited for the first time in 1999 (geographies.gr).

At international level, a series of less visible processes occurred in parallel. As described above, geography, and more specifically its human component, used to be a sidelined discipline locally. It nevertheless existed outside Greece's boundaries through the external expertise provided by foreign scholars. These could be expatriated Greeks conducting their research in British, American, Australian, German, or French Universities—as a part of the worldwide Greek diaspora—or non-Greek researchers who expressed a keen interest in studying the country's specific characteristics. As a paradox, Greece's geography had a more prominent existence outside than within the Hellenic national boundaries. Cross-border academic cooperation followed the vagaries of international vs. military relations, external diplomatic support remaining a historical constant since the Independence. The system reached its acme during the Cold War. These laid down the foundations for lasting relationships among scholars. The present book is somehow part of that heritage. We all here want to pay tribute to our philhellene professors and predecessors who contributed actively to building and maintaining beneficial contacts.

Unfortunately, with the end of the Yugoslav Wars and the EU expanding its borders towards the East, most of these old collaboration ties were broken. The EU integration process produced a paradoxical effect—the collapse of pre-existing international cooperation and the reinforcement of local expertise. Some might say that, at last, Greece's geography had come back into the national arena independently from external influences. The overwhelming presence of Greek scholars in this book thus expresses altogether a resurgence of national interests, a renewed control on territorial development, a reinforcement of academic expertise, an international recognition for dynamic local universities, and unfortunately reflects disconnected links between international scholarly associations and within certain knowledge networks.

This state of affairs has an influence on the substance of scientific production. There are very few if no up-to-date reference books available on Greece's geography. In major international bibliographic databases, Ancient Greece is the focus of much attention, but Modern Greece is obviously disgraced. Among the noteworthy volumes published since the 2000s that might serve as a starting point for further research, one can find (Sivignon et al., 2003; Burgel & Demathas, 2001), and more recently (Kalyvas, 2015; Chatzimichalis, 2016). Beyond these volumes, core references are to be found in thematic, segregated works.

Most authors in the present book edited or published major contributions to the scientific debate, and their approaches are all the more so relevant as they focus on specific scientific areas, covering geopolitics and geoarchaeology, urban and rural areas, economy, demography and migrations, environmental issues, or land planning and its many challenges. Among the available books published over the past 20 years, we can find many (Burgel, 2002; Burgel & Demathas, 2001; Gospodini & Beriatos, 2006; Karybalis et al., 2014; Korres, 2007; Leontidou, 2015; Maloutas, 2000; Marmaras, 2012; Mazis, 2006; Moira, 2018; Papazahos & Papazahou, 2003; Petrakos et al., 2000; Sidiropoulos, 2000; Sivignon et al., 2003; Zouros, 2007).

Recently, we witnessed the emergence of thorough analyses about the crisis. Beside the well-known pamphlet written by former minister Yanis Varoufakis (Varoufakis, 2018) and its political counterpart published by former prime minister Costas Simitis (Simitis et al., 2016), many publications focus on the economic, financial, and social outcomes of the events (Dalègre, 2013; De Waal, 2020; Dertilis, 2016; Doxiadis & Placas, 2018; Ikonou, 2018; Karasavoglou & Polychronikou, 2014; Marangos, 2017; Mylonas, 2020; Petrakis, 2021; Triandafyllidou et al., 2013). These works provide for detailed explanations about the origins and evolution of the crisis, albeit with a limited insight into spatial/geographical developments.

This brief review of literature would not be complete without mentioning the specific case of *physical geography*. As in other countries worldwide, this field of modern science sometimes assimilated with *geosciences* or *earth sciences*—including climatology, geomorphology, environmental studies, pedology, geology, risk/hazard assessment, hydrology, geodesy, but also geoinformatics, geographic information (GI) science, and remote sensing analysis—runs its own life. The bunch of academic literature in these areas is published in dedicated high-ranked journals through the form of articles written in English. Expert knowledge is here altogether dispersed in specialized books, special issues of peer-reviewed journal, and *varia* papers maximizing the contribution of engineering. These manuscripts are easily accessible, and the distinction between foreign and national expertise is less relevant.

The present publication is thus positioned at a crossroads. On the one side, social sciences expressing their ideas in not always visible publications written in Greek; on the other side, environmental sciences deeply embedded into international English-speaking scientific networks, the visibility of which is supported by major publishing houses worldwide. This contrast presents challenges and opportunities at the same time:

1. Many references published by local editors should remain out of reach for non-Greek-speaking readers despite their fundamental contribution to the scientific debate. Their titles will be translated into English for easier identification.
2. The number of papers relating to human geography published in English is so small that people might believe that this area of expertise is nothing but an empty shell. Nothing could be further from the truth. One can easily understand the frustration of foreign readers looking for essential—and basic—information that search engines will never be able to provide—despite automatic translation capabilities.
3. Difficulties in accessing information and uncovering certain areas of knowledge may explain why so much misleading information was spread in the media. This book precisely serves as a basis for breaking this stalemate.
4. Practicing Greek is an obvious prerequisite for people interested in providing general information and carrying out scientific research based on authoritative sources. Our objective will be to ensure quick and reliable access to essential information for those who are not familiar with this foreign non-Latin *exotic* language. It should be remembered that many terms and concepts are simply not transposable between Greek and English. Any translation is a betrayal. For that reason, we may need to make the meaning of certain Greek words or expressions clearer.

As a background for the below research works, particular attention must be drawn to the importance of field activities (Fig. 1.2). For decades, before the invention of internet networks, geographers had to spend a lot of time traveling the country, meeting people, and collecting information at the most local level, as close as possible to the realities of life. Discovering new landscapes in the most unlikely places implied wearing out a dozen shoes and endure heat or cold stress, showing patience and flexibility with local administrative services. This invisible part of research also gave the opportunity to create and develop long-lasting ties while



Fig. 1.2 The French geographer Emile Kolodny in Amorgos, a renowned specialist in island geography. (© R. Darques, 2006)

Field works played an essential role in building a knowledge base about Greece's geography, especially in the 1960s–1990s. Running across the countryside or conducting investigations in public administrations was the best way to provide detailed and verified information. Being in close contact with local populations was critically important for geographers, given that mapping and survey information were often missing

meeting fabulous folks. Looking for digital information behind a computer screen carries a higher level of risk in scientific terms and is far less rewarding.

Unraveling the Complexities of Change Mechanisms

As an outcome of the above reflections, we defined an early objective: Providing for an up-to-date state of knowledge about Greece's geography while associating the wide variety of approaches this scientific discipline is able to offer. The momentum of initiatives and the multiplicity of positions and viewpoints shall be considered as a hallmark of scientific soundness, a prerequisite enabling an enhanced understand-

ing of complex dynamic processes continuously altering the reality of landscapes and territories.

1. We are honored to bring together a wide array of renowned geoscientists. About 50 people coming from different backgrounds, institutions, and places contributed to the drafting of this project both in Greece and abroad. The sum of human and organizational competence assembled is quite impressive. This network of partners aimed at producing an *operational scheme*. Information availability played an important role in defining the boundaries of the project. Despite a seemingly *all-embracing* ambition, we worked together keeping in mind that large areas of science are still beyond our reach, some of them being closed for further investigation (for legal, technical, or security reasons, for instance), others remaining untapped because of missing data or material means that would allow for their exploitation. And these uncharted areas of knowledge are several in Greece.
2. Mixing all facets of applied geography was a clear guideline. We early chose to break down the barriers between internal subdisciplines and engage into an active scientific dialogue. Following our own shared practices of cross-disciplinary research, it was agreed that no branches of science dealing with cartographic representations and spatial analysis would be left aside.
3. The human dimension of scientific cooperation is an essential part of our activities. We would like to underline the extraordinary dynamic of mobilization our group has shown during the COVID-19 pandemic period and its imposed *social distancing*. These adverse conditions paradoxically improved collective motivation and enhanced the commitment of people. We recorded an excellent working climate resulting from a shared spirit of openness and culture of fairness. Such a positive dynamic deserves to be highlighted.

Environment is a key concept that promoted and facilitated cooperation (Fig. 1.3). Environmental studies deal with complex mechanisms and develop at the interface of different disciplines, integrating human and physical components, and relating earth, biological, and social sciences. Putting this integration process into practice was not a very challenging task. *Natural* bridges preexisted, so we only had to activate connections. The operation confirmed, if it was still necessary, that geography does not need to develop cross-disciplinary approaches, being itself intrinsically characterized by an enhanced variety of application areas and methods. We conducted this project keeping in mind the obvious self-consistency of our discipline, the range and combination of approaches reflecting a strong momentum boosted by the expansion of GI science.

Crises and resilience are other concepts enabling us to evolve towards closer integration. Crises are moments describing an abrupt change in the evolution of systems. Resilience is defined as the way systems adapt to new conditions before an equilibrium is reached again. These terms are to be understood within the framework of systemic thinking and complexity science. For this school of thought, “wholes are more than the sum of their parts,” e.g., reality always trespasses the boundaries that mathematical modeling generates as a result of an always limited number of variables examined and given the self-limitations induced by data production and measurement. The unknown is to be found in the residues of statistical distributions, outliers resisting normalization, and unexpected events in time series databases. Complex phenomena result from densely interconnected systems where multiple causes create positive and negative feedbacks. The conjunction of microscopic issues may also have a direct impact on macroscopic events. Instability, unpredictability, chaos, and nonlinearity are part of *silent* dynamic processes permanently altering reality—precisely these unseen events that certain self-proclaimed experts in economics and finance did not identify.

These general considerations might be seen as a formal statement of intent. In fact, they are much more than that. They draw the lines for applied scientific practices based on extremely effective methods. The approach allows for the reintegration of seemingly inconsistent inputs, assesses for an enhanced reliability of statistical databases, and delivers much more solid results through the explicit mention of certain statistical limitations. Not surprisingly, over the last years complex systems developed hand in hand with big data analysis because the integration of large panels of datasets and variables is a straightforward way to get into complexity—although not the only one.

The bibliographical background is constantly increasing about chaos theory, *collapsology*, and the evolution of dynamic systems. Many publications opened avenues for research in geosciences, among which we can find quite a few (Banerjee et al., 2014; Bardi, 2018, 2020; Linkov & Trump, 2019; Merry, 1995; Meyers, 2009; Nijcamp & Reggiani, 2012; Papadimitriou, 2020; Scheffer, 2009; Schofield & Gallego, 2011; Selvam, 2018; Sornette, 2006; Williams, 1997). Through the development of complex systems, science is currently sliding into a spiral of regeneration. Mandelbrot, Prigogine, Gleick, and Thom—among others—laid down the foundations for a large-scale renewal of science through methodological innovation (Gleick, 1987; Mandelbrot, 1982; Prigogine, 1997; Thom, 1989). Although a number of contributions adopted complexity as a reference concept, the present book will not focus on this specific dimension of knowledge advancement. Complex science will form a background of reflections assisting us in escaping from the influence of political correctness.



Fig. 1.3 Landscape contrasts. (© R. Darques)

The richness and diversity of Hellenic landscapes is unique. From the shores of the Mediterranean to the slopes of central highlands, Greece is a multifaceted country. (a) Balos Beach, an extraordinary tourist spot

in Western Crete, 2002; (b) Central square in Metsovo (Epirus), the small “capital city” of former Wallachian nomads, on top of the Pindus range, 2001; (c) the “rising tide” of concrete buildings in Central Athens seen from Plaka, beneath the Acropolis, 2006

Crises are many in Greece. They cover a wide range of events, from wildfires and earthquakes to landslides, volcanic activities, demographic collapses, economic disasters, wars, and not least climate-environmental changes. Greece has been submitted to such a large number of problematic situations in its recent history that one might consider criticality to be rooted in local traditions or coded within its DNA. From this viewpoint, one might think that our perception is loaded with partiality or even pessimism *vis-à-vis* the country’s fate. However, the ability to overcome adversity, succeed in facing times of trial, cope with life challenges, and maximize recovery potential expresses a strong force of social cohesion and integration. Some may say, not entirely joking, that Greece made its way across the ages despite difficult odds and daunting setbacks and will endure for many

other centuries while certain influential nations might be covered one day by the tide of history.

About the book structure, we decided collectively to distance ourselves from the classical approaches perpetuating divisions that we consider to be artificial. Distinguishing between human and physical geography was not an enthusiastic perspective for anyone in the group. For that reason, we chose to mix contributions and revolve around *integrated* thematic issues:

- Part I focuses on the historical dimension of geography. History is clearly a gateway to better understand recent Greece. Addressing the process of state building since the Independence and its territorial-cartographical counterpart is a preliminary step before focusing on further

issues. Geoarchaeology and a critical analysis of the role of the Orthodox Church with regard to Greece's development will provide for other deep perspectives. These shall reveal underlying mechanisms, the importance of which is often underestimated.

- Part II deals with conflicts. Since the 1820s, Greece has been caught into the turmoil of ceaseless wars. Conflicts and compromises are part of national development, to such a point that one might consider that the country developed its own expertise in conducting targeted war operations while managing compromises with neighboring partners. This logic of mixed scalable international relationships has an equivalent in different areas of sociology and land management: Internal conflicts are often resolved at regional and local levels through an enhanced ability to make mutually beneficial compromises between opposing parties.
- Part III is about the way Greece has been able to overcome many past challenges and find new ways towards development. The country has known many success stories, especially in the area of urban development, tourism, and transportation. Drawing the lessons from the mistakes of the past and following a radical change in people's thinking, we even saw an increased account being taken of the environment dimension of development through the direct implication of civil society and political circles.
- Part IV states that understanding local specifics is another way to get past old clichés. Most often, external observers seeking details about the Greek crisis faced contradictory or even biased information. The diagnoses posed were unable to appropriately qualify the Greek context and background, which could have served for the promotion of more efficient *solutions*. Urban–rural relationships, formal planning, the making of cities, and administrative and territorial reforms are among the most misunderstood areas of knowledge about Greece. Part IV attempts to address this information gap.
- Part V investigates the ability of the country to adapt to change through innovation. Four themes were identified and will help assess resilience on a sectorial vs. geographical basis: (1) the changing face of the Greek countryside in relation with the redeployment of agricultural activities; (2) the dynamics of maritime transport; (3) the evolution of the Greek coastal zone, an area submitted to major environmental and human pressures; and (4) the place of Greece within the international migration system and its ability to manage unstable global dynamics.
- Part VI is dedicated to the study of emergency situations and chaotic events, in other words to disruptive phenomena altering system dynamics. Wildfires, extreme weather events, and earthquakes vs. active geodynamic processes are excellent illustrations of these mechanisms. They regularly generate disasters, the outcomes of which are to be

managed closely by the authorities. Among these moments of emergency, we also find major demographic collapses, war destructions definitively altering territorial balances, and economic-financial breakdowns.

- Lastly, part VII opens the debate to a series of oncoming challenges: Climate change, demography, interrelationships with the EU, and the future of ecology are issues that could direct strategies and actions for a better management of territorial development in the years to come.

Rather than a *black sheep*, Greece remains a *black box* for many non-Greek-speaking experts who chose to ignore the complexity of the Hellenic system. Against the scenarios validating the idea of deterministic *controlled* systems, the Troika way, we will rather refer in this book to chaos theory and nonlinear dynamics. Multi-scale analysis and multi-temporal approaches will draw the lines of a research project overseen by an academic community that has learned not to place trust in pipe dreams, straightforward explanations, and easy answers.

Hopefully, from the wide array of contributions presented in this volume, a different picture of Greece might emerge. Away from standard clichés promoting an alleged backwardness or underdevelopment, these might show that through its ability to manage repeated crises and an enhanced recovery capacity, through adaptation and flexibility, Greece might have gained a competitive edge over its rivals and guardianship authorities. Organized chaos, one step ahead?

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