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Ioannidis, Panos

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Decentralization, Local Government Reforms and Perceptions of Local Actors: The Greek Case

Dr. Panos Ioannidis[‡]

Abstract

Decentralization deployed in the last two decades in Greece via two local government reforms. Kapodistrias Plan and Kallikrates Project amalgamated successively the huge number of 5.775 municipalities and communities into 325 enlarged municipalities, institutionalized the 13 regions as second tiers of local government and transferred an unparalleled set of rights and powers to municipalities and regions. The abovementioned reforms changed the operation of local governments and established new conditions for the role of local actors in regional planning.

This paper aims to assess the decentralization process in Greece, by taking into account the perceptions of local actors. A primary research was held in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace region, in order to understand the affiliation of local actors to the reforms. Results demonstrate that Kapodistrias reform had bigger social acceptance than Kallikrates, as economic crisis and rough spatial planning deter the effective implementation of the second wave of reforms. Non institutional actors and members of societal and cultural organizations perceived more substantially the reforms, than institutional actors and non members of local organizations did. Further improvements are necessary for the modernization of Greek local governments, in the fields of financial decentralization and administrative capacity

Key Words: Decentralization, Local Government Reforms, Greece, Eastern Macedonia and Thrace

JEL Classification: H73, R28, R58

[‡] Ph.D. Economist-Regionalist, Democritus University, e-mail: panosioann35@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Local governments are the prevalent administrative bodies of a territory by determining a set of different options in public sphere. After receiving citizen's acceptance through elections, local governments operate in different activities, associated with a number of issues like development (Blatter, 2006; Blom-Hansen et al, 2012), administrative efficiency (Hankla & Downs, 2010; Kuhlmann & Wollman, 2011), spatial planning (Lalenis & Liogas, 2002) and advancement of cooperative strategies (Bel et al, 2007; Hazakis & Ioannidis, 2014).

Decentralization is a multidimensional process, consisted by the conveyance of different competences from central government to local government units (Treisman, 2002; Pollitt, 2005; Ongaro, 2006). The legislative instrument of decentralization is local government reforms, as by these statutes local governments receive competences to expand their power and to reshape economic and administrative space, by generating new conditions for regional governance. In a broader context, the establishment of local government reforms is affected by the perceptions of local actors. Local actors can advance or undercut the procedure of decentralization by holding implicit structures of power (Jakobsen, 2012). Thereof the inquiry of local milieu's perceptions about devolution of powers and competences to local government illuminates the very characteristics of decentralization process.

The system of local government in Greece experienced unparallel modifications in the recent years, by two major reforms, namely Kapodistrias Plan (Law 2539/1997) and Kallikrates Project (Law 3852/2010). The amalgamation of municipalities and local communities into larger municipalities and the conveyance of competences from central state to local government units were the dominant characteristics of the reforms. In addition, regions (NUTS II), substituted prefectures (NUTS III), in the field of second tier of local government units. These changes apart from the rearrangement of the local government map improved the operation framework for municipalities and regions and brought into the frontline cooperation of local actors as an intangible asset of regional development (Ioannidis, 2014).

The aim of this paper is to assess the process of recent local government reforms in Greece by taking into account the perceptions of local actors. Case study of the research is Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, one of the thirteen regions in Greece.

Research was conducted by a closed type questionnaire that was distributed in institutional and non institutional actors of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 emphasizes on the literature review of decentralization and local government reforms. Section 3, studies the local government system in Greece. Section 4 presents the methodology that was adopted by the research. Section 5 analyzes the results of the research and Section 6 summarizes the conclusion of the research.

2. Literature Review

Decentralization is defined by World Bank (2014), as the transfer of authority and responsibilities for public functions, from central governments to regional governments or quasi-independent government organizations and/or the private sector. The devolution of powers to sub-national authorities is a multitude process (Dubois & Fattore, 2009), determined by a set of different factors such as territorial scale, citizenship and socioeconomic characteristics (Treisman, 2002), and especially by institutional arrangements and country characteristics (De Vries, 2000; Politt, 2005; Marks et al, 2008).

Devolution of competences and services is consisted by the quietus of central government in specific administrative functions and the simultaneous reception of these powers by local governments (Hlepas, 1999). This happens for the sake of effectiveness, as local governments have the potential to regulate more accurately local affairs (Wollman, 2004). Local actors are affected by decentralization, wherefore their set of options is now widest: the greater the competences that local government units of their territory have, the bigger the domain of their interest is, and as a sequence, the more selective their strategies are as they have more powers to interplay with local actors by participating in local planning.

Decentralization was evolved as dominant strategy for the reconstruction of state after the economic crisis of the 70's. The downward compression of public expenditures in conjunction with the intense competition from emerging Asian markets pushed Western states to convey a set of services to local and regional authorities (Piore & Sabel, 1984; Jessop, 1993). As aptly stated by Harvey (1989: 279) "...decentralization and deconcentration taken together with the cultural concern with the qualities of place and space creates a political climate in which the politics of

community, place, and region can unfold in new ways”. In other words, decentralization and regional renaissance follow parallel routes, showing that the enhancement of regional and local authority can be embraced with regional development.

Interaction among local government units and local actors reproduce substantial knowledge and information sharing, about local res publica throughout the acceptance and implementation of cooperative strategies (Iyer et al, 2005). Two critical conditions boost these formations (Ioannidis, 2014): firstly, the necessary condition is that local and regional governments ought to have high levels of authority, allowing them to shape local socioeconomic environment, and secondly, the efficient condition is that local actors have motives to participate and to collaborate in local development projects. These progressions favor the establishment of multilateral forms of governance. As Piattoni argues (2009:164), “...multi-level governance often relies on the creation of ad hoc networks, which may include...legitimately constituted deliberative assemblies together with other public and private, individual and collective actors”. Multi-level governance is indissolubly directed by local government reforms as the interest of local institutional and non institutional actors are engaged to local economic milieu.

Reforms of local governments are pivotal instruments of revitalization of local economic, administrative and cultural space (Arsnenault, 2006; Blom-Hansen et al, 2012). Hereupon local actors become acquainted with local environment, as their participation in commons affects more promptly local public policy. Nonetheless, local government consolidation is not sine qua non drivers of local economic development since are determined by the very special characteristics of the local socioeconomic circuit (Carr & Feiock, 1999).

Under this standpoint, local government reforms have a number of advantages and disadvantages. Initially, the transfer of powers from central government to municipal and regional government broadens the institutional field of action for decentralized units. Local and regional governments are able to improve local living standards, by operating in a number of fields like tax collection, local investments and exploit of comparative advantages (Davey & Pteri, 2006:595). Concurrently, the administrative efficiency of local and regional governments pervades substantially in local public sphere whereas social interaction with local actors is strengthen (Jakobsen, 2012). Additionally, state’s restructure following the way of conveyance of

powers to local and regional administration can be connected more easily with development (Kuhlmann et al, 2006). Decentralization, when taking into account local characteristics, establishes municipal and regional authorities as dominant actors of local environment (Hlepas & Getimis, 2011, Teles, 2014).

On the other hand, local government reforms might affect negatively local interaction. The special constituents of each community i.e. economic, social, cultural and administrative judge the successive implementation of reforms, if not weighted accurately by the legislator, can decrease the interest of local actors to collaborate (Ladner & Fiechter, 2012; Alexander, 2013). This omission entails the persistent strategy of central government to regulate local affairs in order to defend its bureaucratic interests (Kjaer et al, 2010). Another one factor that can hinder the normative process of decentralization is the number of local government units after amalgamation. This element is more crucial for the first tier of local government units, as the operation of small territory municipalities hamper inter-municipal cooperation of local actors and further increase transaction costs (Wollman, 2004; Rusavy & Bernard, 2012).

Apart from the bureaucracy of local government reforms, decentralization is determined by the embrace of local actors in its provision, as well. According to Bell et al (2013), the size of municipalities modulates the kind of collaboration and interaction among local governments and agents. In bigger territories privatization and outsourcing are dominant choices for public service delivery, whereas in smaller municipalities cooperative strategies are selected as instruments of scale economies. The path dependence that a local government unit has displayed to collaborative strategies is also a crucial factor. Informal rules in social behavior, commonly accepted beliefs and perceptions, and repeated interaction among agents improve the level of social capital and make feasible the adoption of collaborated strategies, that advance local welfare (John et al, 2011). Social capital is a critical and simultaneously a multilateral determinant in the acceptance of decentralization, by advancing intraregional cooperation (Ioannidis, 2013). Except from the formation of trust, reciprocity and social networks, cooperation in this case is fostered by the inter-municipal cooperative strategies (Park, 2005; Feiock, 2007; Tiller & Jakus, 2005), and the partnership amid firms and local governments (Cruz & Marquez, 2013).

3. Local Government System in Greece

Until the execution of Kallikrates reform, local and regional governments in Greece did not have crucial competences. Central administration scheduled and implemented the majority of associated with local affairs public policies. With some exceptions-see for instance Lalenis (2003) about the significance of law 1614 for open cities- local government units did not experienced crucial conditions where their intervention was something more than necessary. Contra wise municipalities and prefectures functioned primarily as structural part of the state and not like self government units. As a result, the level of regional authority was not high and Greek municipalities and prefectures lagged to manage their own affairs (Getimis & Grigoriadou, 2004).

Only recently the local government system in Greece faced important revitalization. Two successive reforms (Kapodistrias and Kallikrates) reduced the huge number of municipalities (5.755 in 1997), substituted prefectures with regions in the second level of local government, and conveyed a set of authorities to municipalities and regions from central government.

Table 1: Elements of Kapodistrias and Kallikrates Reforms

	Kapodistrias Reform (1998-2010)	Kallikrates Reform (2011-)
First Tier of Local Government	900 municipalities and 134 communities	325 municipalities
Second Tier of Local Government	52 prefectures	13 regions
Regional Authority	13 regions	13 regions now second tier of local government
Sort of Election	Directly election for mayors, presidents of the communities and prefects. Appointment of regional governors by the state	Directly election for mayors, presidents of the communities and regional governors.
Level of Competences	Low level of competences for communities, municipalities and prefectures. Regional governors implement the rule of the state	High level of competences for municipalities and regions. Cognitive conditions for local actors to participate in the commons
Main Financing	Intergovernmental Grants	Intergovernmental Grants

Source: Law 2539/1997, Law 3852/2010 & Ioannidis (2014)

Sharply Kapodistrias reform (Law 2539/1997) amalgamated the 5.755 municipalities and rural communities into 900 bigger municipalities and 134 enlarged communities, but did not upgrade the quiver of competences that merger municipalities and communities had. Concerning that the second tier of local government was constituted by the 52 prefectures, with low level of competences as well, it can be easily understood the complexity of the system and the restraints that municipalities and prefectures were confronted. The second step to regionalism took place by the implementation of Kallikrates reform (Law 3852/2010). As it can be seen in table 1, the new phase in amalgamation process confirmed the number of municipalities to 325, institutionalized regions as second level of local government and transferred an unparalleled set of powers to regions and municipalities.

Rationally up to Kallikrates reform the engagement of local actors to local planning was not influential, as municipalities and prefectures were not motivated to interact with them. Decentralization proceeded with slow rates, because central state determined the limits of actions for the two tiers of local government (Skamnakis, 2011). The feebleness of local government units to commit in substantial fields maintained the sovereignty of traditional bureaucracy at the expense of innovative forms of local planning (Matei & Lazaar, 2011). Despite the modernization that Kapodistrias reform caused in Greek local government system, did not devitalized its path dependence from central administrative system (Ioannidis, 2014).

The abovementioned features gave prominence to the necessity of Kallikrates reform (Law 3852/2010). Kallikrates is a more integrated process of decentralization, as rearranges the Greek state in favour of local government (Akrivopoulou et al, 2012). The two more important pillars of the reform are the advancement of local and regional authority, and successively the creation of institutional corps like the Regional and Municipal Consultation Committees. Local actors have the potential to participate in local and regional level by regarding and resolving issues that are associated with their interests. Concerning these evolvments, it can be stated that Kallikrates' provisions encapsulate options of urban multilateral governance. Howbeit, Kallikrates did not improve so much the constitution of social capital, possibly because was implemented during the great fiscal crisis of Greece (Hazakis & Ioannidis, 2014), Moreover the statute did not foresee any improvement in the finance of local government units and the main promoter still is the central state throughout the process of intergovernmental grants.

To summarize, Kapodistrias and Kallikrates reforms reorganized, not only the Greek local government scheme, but also the Greek administrative system as a total. Under this perspective, it is necessary to study the perceptions of local actors in a Greek region, in order to comprehend more accurately the effects that the two reforms generated in local economic space.

4. Methodology

4.1 The Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace

Eastern Macedonia and Thrace is a border region, located in the north-eastern part of Greece. After the implementation of Kallikrates reform the five prefecture of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, explicitly Drama, Evros, Kavala, Rodopi and Xanthi, renamed as regional units

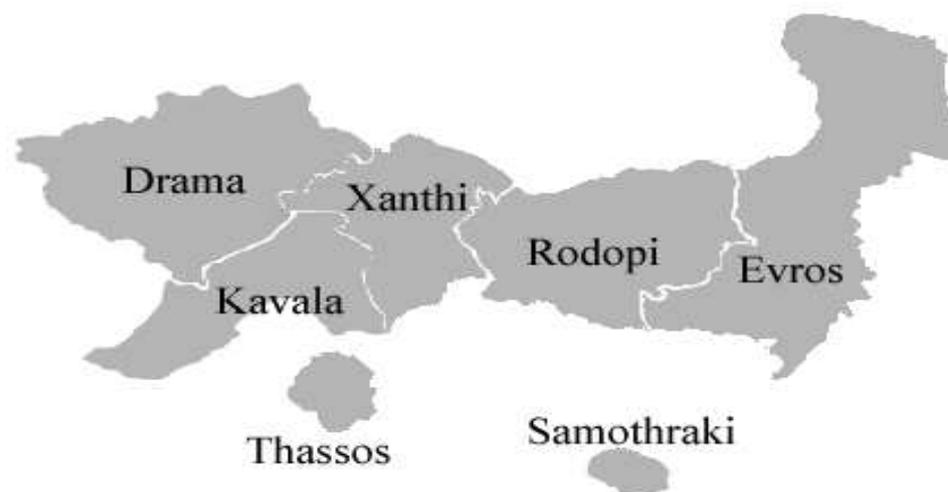


Figure1: Eastern Macedonia and Thrace Region

Source: Regional Government of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace Website

Table 2 depicts the number of first tier of local government in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace during Kapodistrias and Kallikrates reform.

Table 2: Number of Municipalities and Communities in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace

	Kapodistrias Reform	Kallikrates Reform
Drama	8 municipalities and 1 community	5 municipalities
Evros	13 municipalities	5 municipalities
Kavala	13 municipalities	4 municipalities
Xanthi	6 municipalities and 4 communities	4 municipalities
Rodopi	9 municipalities and 3 communities	4 municipalities
Total	49 municipalities and 8 communities	22 municipalities

Source: Law 2539/1997, Law 3852/2010 & Ioannidis (2014)

Drama and Evros have 5 municipalities after the latest reform, whereas Kavala, Xanthi and Rodopi have four. Drama faced the most minor reduction of its municipalities, whereas Kavala the bigger. Totally the 49 municipalities and 8 communities of the region amalgamated into 22 enlarged municipalities.

According to Eurostat's regional accounts (2014), Eastern Macedonia and Thrace is a lagged region as regional per capita income sizes less than the 75% of the mean of European Union. It should also be notified that according to recent data, per capita income in the five regional units of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace corresponds approximately to the 70.09% of the mean per capita income in Greece (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2014). In prices of 2012, Kavala has the biggest per capital income, among the five regional units of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, and Drama has the lowest. Per capita income of Evros' residents is slightly more than the regional average, but per capita income in Xanthi and Rodopi is below this index.

Table 3: Per Capita Income of Regional Unities in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace

	per capita income	per capital income as % of average per capita income of Greece
Drama	10.767	61.5%
Evros	12.724	72.68%
Kavala	14.148	80.81%
Xanthi	11.606	66.29%
Rodopi	11.321	64.67%
Eastern Macedonia and Thrace	12.270	70.09%

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority

4.2 The Questionnaire

Methodology employed primary research in order to study the perceptions that actors of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace formed about the two recent reforms of local government. Reforms of local government are considered as basic instruments of decentralization.

A closed type questionnaire was distributed to local actors of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace via post or e-mail. Overall 245 queries were selected, providing to the research a response rate equal to 48.32%. The questionnaire was scheduled by following a set of previous studies that focused on the broader association among local government reforms and perceptions of local actors (Krishna & Uphoff, 1999; Ha & Feiock, 2011; Park; 2005 Alexander, 2013; Falleth and Hansen, 2013).

The questions adjusted to the directions and provisions that Kapodistrias and Kallikrates reforms introduced to the two tiers of local governments in Greece and the questionnaire was divided into three main parts. The first part focuses on the planning terms of the reforms, the second on the impact that reforms exercised on social capital and the third on the respective influence that was exerted on the local governments' operation. The choice to put common questions for the two different statutes permitted research to compare and to extract robust conclusions.

The sample was divided into two categories, namely institutional and non institutional actors. The ensemble of institutional actors was comprised by public servants of local and regional administration, head officials of professional and scientific units and board of directors in societal and cultural organizations. The other group of the sample was constituted by active actors of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace in different professional occupations i.e. employees in private sector, self employed and entrepreneurs. In the first case the sample selection was defined by the limits of the five regional units of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace and had the characteristics of convenience sample. In the second case the sample was collected randomly, so to be compared the perceptions of the two groups. Steinacker's research (2002) featured the significant role of institutional actors in local planning, while Blatter (2006), notified that the cognitive transfer of competences pass through institutional actors.

In addition, the participants in the research were asked about their affiliation with local cultural and societal organization. This selection took place randomly so as to estimate the association among networking and perception of local government reforms. Previous studies have shown that networking improves the levels of social capital (Knack & Keefer, 1997; Iyer et al, 2005), as cultural and societal characteristics determine the acceptance of local government reforms (Arsenault, 2006;), but Ladner & Fiechter (2012) proved that the conveyance of powers to local governments from central governments, do not improve essentially local cooperative culture.

Table 4 informs about the sample characteristics, due to institutional role and participation in local cultural and societal organizations. The more participants in the research had an institutional role during Kallikrates period, whilst relatively lesser are the respondents with institutional role during Kapodistrias reform (46.53% to 53.47%). Participants in societal and cultural organizations are the majority group for the two reforms (53.47% and 55.41% respectively), and are relatively more for Kallikrates period.

Table 4: Sample Characteristics due to Institutional Role and Membership in Societal and Cultural Organizations

	Kapodistrias Period	Kallikrates Period
Institutional Actor	46.53%	53.47%
Participation in Societal and Cultural Organizations	53.47%	55.41%

Apart from institutional role, and membership in local societal and cultural organizations, research studied the spatial dimension of reforms' perceptions. Relevant studies had research the complex association among local government reforms and local space (De Ceuninck et al, 2010; Wollman, 2010; Rusavy & Bernard, 2012). Table 3 illustrates the spatial distribution of the sample into Eastern Macedonia and Thrace region.

Table 5: Response rate of each regional unity in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace

	Number of questionnaires sent	Number of questionnaires answered	Response Rate	% of participation to the research	% of population in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace
Drama	92	68	73.91	27,8	18.1
Evros	124	45	36.29	18,4	24.4
Kavala	105	50	47.61	20,4	20.91
Xanthi	94	47	50	19,2	18.49
Rodipi	92	35	38.04	14,3	18.1

Comparing these characteristics with the relative results of 2011 Census, some sampling bias is observed. Specifically, minor deviations were considered in gender, where women were slightly under-presented. In declinations were appeared in the education variable, as participants in the research are over-qualified. As regards the spatial distribution of the population, Drama is over-presented while Rodopi and Evros are under-presented. These distortions are associated with the distribution of human capital in the local and regional administration of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.

The basic limitation of the research was that actors were asked to assess also the previous state in local and regional government (Kapodistriasis Plan) during the implementation of the new reform (Kallikrates Project). Research tried to overcome this trammel, by incorporating questions about the negative options of the two reforms, in order to allow participants to express more roughly their perceptions. Moreover, the research had difficulties to divide the sample into institutional and non institutional actors, taking into account the response rate of each regional unity. Nonetheless, the distribution of queries to institutional and non institutional actors proceeded due to the first column of table 5.

5. Results

In the next tables the results of the empirical research are depicted. Table 6 portrays the main results about the planning of the two reforms and the respective influence that exercised on social capital and local government operation. In addition, the

correlation between the two reforms is studied by taking into account the perceptions of local actors.

As regards, the planning process, Kallikrates reform achieved significant economies of scale. Kapodistrias' planning considered more substantially the historical background of the settlements, and interestingly transferred more effectively the competences to municipalities. The persistent economic crisis acted as a deterrent for the implementation of Kallikrates, whereas political expediencies were not negligible in the planning of the two reforms.

Concerning social capital results denote a more cognitive affiliation of local actors in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace with Kapodistrias reform. Extensively, the first reform improved more the cooperation among non governmental organizations (N.G.O.) and local cultural-societal organizations and the citizen's participation in N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations, but however not in high levels. On the contrary, Kallikrates reform compounded relatively more the complaints of local actors about the amalgamations of municipalities and emerged debates about localism. Furthermore, volunteerism did not accept major influence by the two reforms.

The last sessions of the questionnaire captured the field of local government. Investment projects for local welfare that was held by municipalities and local policies for local welfare, associated rather with Kapodistrias than Kallikrates reform. No significant deviations were found in the other three variables of the local government operation.

Kapodistrias and Kallikrates reform are connected with significant path dependence. The correlation coefficient in the most variables of the questionnaire exceeds 0.4 and in a lot of cases is bigger than 0.5. In contrast, the correlation between the two reforms was moderately low for two variables: economic crisis and citizens' complaints in disestablished municipalities. These findings, combined with the above mentioned results, indicate that Kallikrates' implementation is directly connected with economic crisis and moreover that the spatial amalgamations of municipalities did not enjoy the acceptance of local actors.

Table 6: Average Scores for Kapodistrias and Kallikrates Reform

	Kapodistrias		Kallikrates		t-test (3)	Correlation (4) (1)-(2)
	Mean (1)	St.dev	Mean (2)	Stdev		
<i>Planning</i>						
Economies of scale	3,02	1.24	3,36	1.21	4,389*	0,547*
Political Expediencies	3,6	1.3	3,66	1.22	0,878	0,671*
Historical Background of settlements	2,59	1.13	2,33	1.03	-3,506*	0,465*
Effective transfer of competences	2,38	1.07	2,16	1.06	-3,008*	0,436*
Influence of economic crisis	2,62	1.41	3,74	1.45	9,573*	0,197*
<i>Social Capital</i>						
Cooperation among N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations	2,88	1.12	2,75	1.13	-1,915***	0,567*
Citizen's participation in N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations	2,41	1.21	2,22	1.12	-2,597**	0,554*
Citizen's volunteerism	2,64	1.13	2,58	1.19	-0,801	0,592*
Emergence of old debates among localities	3,09	1.22	3,17	1.21	1,78***	0,537*
Citizen's complaints in disestablished municipalities	3,18	1.18	3,35	1.25	1,768***	0,304*
<i>Local Government Operation</i>						
Cooperation among central government and tiers of local governments	2,77	0.96	2,75	1.09	-0,339	0,576*
Cooperation among regional government (second tier)	2,44	0.96	2,5	1.04	0,919	0,51*
Investment projects for local welfare	2,74	1.13	2,45	1.1	-4,038*	0,522*
Local policies for local welfare	2,8	1.17	2,61	1.19	-3,157*	0,689*
Research and innovation projects	2,22	1.03	2,18	1.06	-0,584	0,545*

Note: *, **, *** significance at the 0.01, 0.05 & 0.1 level

4.1 Intraregional Distribution of Results

The two following tables focus on the spatial dimension of local actors' perceptions. For Kapodistrias reform, differences were found in five variables, i.e. two for social capital and local government operation and one for planning. The respondents from regional unity of Evros supported more the transfer of competences from central government to municipalities, whilst stated that citizens' participation, volunteerism and research innovation projects by local government upgraded during the first reform. In parallel, the respondents from regional unity of Xanthi argued that local policies for local welfare were improved comparatively more to the residents of the other four regional units.

For Kallikrates reform, the intraregional deviations of local perceptions stood roughly speaking at the same level. One statistically difference observed for planning and one for social capital as well, whereas two were remarked for local government operation. Deviations in the effective transfer of competences were designated by residents of Kavala, but respondents living in Komotini, the capital of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, denoted that cooperation among regional government enhanced by the second reform. On the other side of the spectrum, residents of Evros stated that Kallikrates reform emerged debates among localities, but slowed the two tiers of local governments to implement local welfare policies.

Table 7: Intraregional Distribution of Results: Kapodistrias Reform

	Drama	Evros	Kavala	Xanthi	Rodopi	Levene test	F statistic
<i>Planning variables</i>							
Economies of scale	3,15	3,19	2,98	3	2,71	2,143***	0,915
Political Expediencies	3,67	3,71	3,66	3,48	3,43	0,113	0,394
Historical Perspectives of settlements	2,62	2,64	2,48	2,66	2,57	0,818	0,189
Effective transfer of competences	3,67	3,71	3,66	3,48	3,43	1,632	4,607*
Influence of economic crisis	2,85	2,73	2,58	2,27	2,57	0,918	1,114
B							
Cooperation among N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations	2,73	2,89	2,92	2,98	2,97	1,184	0,429
Citizen's participation in N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations	2,17	2,58	2,44	2,75	2,16	1,513	2,118***
Citizen's volunteerism	2,35	2,8	2,76	2,89	2,49	1,663	2,113***
Emergence of old debates among localities	3,1	3,09	3,1	3	2,79	0,754	0,436
Citizen's complaints in disestablished municipalities	3,4	3,09	3,28	3,11	2,89	1,119	1,293
Cooperation among central government and tiers of local governments	2,74	2,84	3	2,68	2,54	1,58	1,371
Cooperation among regional government (second tier)	2,45	2,63	2,42	2,38	2,3	2,938**	0,616
Investment projects for local welfare	2,48	2,87	2,61	3	2,94	0,709	1,96
Local policies for local welfare	2,47	3,02	2,55	3,24	3	3,415**	4,160***
Research and innovation projects	1,72	2,47	2,46	2,33	2,35	2,056***	5,718**

Note: *, **, *** significance at the 0.01, 0.05 & 0.1 level

Table 8: Intraregional Distribution of Results: Kallikrates Reform

	Drama	Evros	Kavala	Xanthi	Rodopi	Levene test	F statistic
Economies of scale	3,42	3,55	3,36	3,28	3,06	0,661	0,886
Political Expediencies	3,72	3,76	3,56	3,68	3,43	1,87	0,49
Historical Perspectives of settlements	2,07	1,69	2,47	2,34	2,37	2,418**	0,113
Effective transfer of competences	2,07	1,69	2,47	2,34	2,37	2,381***	4,013*
Influence of economic crisis	3,93	3,87	3,8	3,74	3,23	2,732*	1,569
B							
Cooperation among N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations	2,77	2,55	2,68	2,79	2,91	1,339	0,587
Citizen's participation in N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations	2,25	2,14	1,96	2,34	2,35	2,311***	0,98
Citizen's volunteerism	2,45	2,71	2,64	2,64	2,43	1,762	0,511
Emergence of old debates among localities	2,88	3,58	3,22	3,26	2,91	1,303	2,733**
Citizen's complaints in disestablished municipalities	3,31	3,67	3,4	3,06	3,14	0,529	1,577
Cooperation among central government and tiers of local governments	2,73	2,6	2,86	2,77	2,71	1,179	0,329
Cooperation among regional government (second tier)	2,61	2,4	2,26	2,49	2,91	1,54	2,233***
Investment projects for local welfare	2,42	2,73	2,16	2,36	2,6	3,256**	0,683
Local policies for local welfare	2,34	2,78	2,45	2,76	2,76	2,501**	2,477**
Research and innovation projects	1,88	2,33	2,24	2,18	2,44	5,815*	0,901

Note: *, **, *** significance at the 0.01, 0.05 & 0.1 level

4.2 Institutional Dimension of Results

Table 9 portrays the responses of local actors due to their institutional or non institutional role, as noted in the methodology section. For both reforms minor significant differences associated with the non institutional role of local actors were found.

For Kapodistrias reform, non institutional actors assessed that the institutional arrangements respected the historical background of amalgamated communities and municipalities. In addition, the members of this group argued that Kapodistrias reform was connected more successfully with investment projects form local welfare and local policies for local welfare. Apart from the aforementioned deviations, it is notable that in the eight of the twelve other variables of the questionnaire, non institutional actors perceived more essentially the reform than institutional actors did. At length, institutional actors dwelled on political expediencies, economic crisis and citizen's complaints, and in contrast, on the importance of volunteerism.

This is also the case for Kallikrates reform since non institutional actors stated that cooperation among N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations was significantly advanced. Moreover, this group of respondents denoted that the second wave of local government reforms emerged old debates among localities. Regarding the role of non institutional actors in Kallikrates' perception, turns out findings that concern the importance of political expediencies in reform's planning, but also the enhancement of citizen's volunteerism and the cooperation of regional governments. Nevertheless, none of these deviations are significant due to the t-test.

Results display that non institutional actors perceived rather more substantially the importance of the two reforms, than institutional actors did. Informal actions of citizenship are associated with a broadest perspective in local res publica. On the other hand, the abstemious stance of institutional actors might be corollary of their intrinsic information to the planning and implementation terms of the two reforms.

Table 9: Institutional Dimension of Results

	Kapodistrias Reform			Kallikrates Reform		
	Institutional Actor	Non Institutional Actor	t-test	Institutional Actor	Non Institutional Actor	t-test
Economies of scale	3,02	3,04	0.124	3.3	3.41	0.698
Political Expediencies	3.65	3.56	-0.51	3.6	3.69	-0.545
Historical Background of settlements	2.4	2.75	2.403*	2.26	2.43	1.262
Effective transfer of competences	2.35	2.4	0.345	2.06	2.41	1.793
Influence of economic crisis	2.76	2.51	-1.345	3.85	3.65	1.091
Cooperation among N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations	2.81	2.95	0.946	2.54	2.94	2.732*
Citizen's participation in N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations	2.24	2.55	1.971	2.16	2.25	0.597
Citizen's volunteerism	2.7	2.59	-0.732	2.61	2.53	-0.482
Emergence of old debates among localities	3.01	3.06	0.288	3.03	3.29	1.669***
Citizen's complaints in disestablished municipalities	3.22	3.16	-0.406	3.32	3.33	0.08
Cooperation among central government and tiers of local governments	2.69	2.84	1.115	2.61	2.87	1.885
Cooperation among regional government (second tier)	2.43	2.45	0.117	2.61	2.42	-1.419
Investment projects for local welfare	2.27	2.57	1.815**	2.36	2.53	1.161
Local policies for local welfare	2.63	2.95	2.096**	2.49	2.68	1.224
Research and innovation projects	2.1	2.32	1.577	2.14	2.11	0.559

Note: *, **, *** significance at the 0.01, 0.05 & 0.1 level

4.3 Networking Effects

Networking effects of local actors' perceptions were tested by the use of a dichotomous variable. Participants in the research were asked if during Kapodistrias (1998-2010), and Kallikrates (2011-ongoing) reforms were members of a societal or cultural organization operating in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.

For Kapodistrias reform, networking allowed local actors to estimate the importance of scale economies, but also the role of political expediencies in planning process. Clearly, in the field of social capital, participation in societal and cultural organizations gave prominence to the understanding of reform's provisions that concern not only cooperative strategies, but conflict issues as well. Interestingly, only the cooperation among N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations did not displayed significant difference between the two groups. Nonetheless, in the field of local government operation, results followed relatively similar paths as only one variable was revealed more by respondents with no participation in local organizations, namely the cooperation among regional governments.

For Kallikrates reform, results are not so distinctive. In planning variables, networking permit local actors of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace to recognize more promptly the negative influence of economic crisis. In the field of social capital, two variables were distinguished, one with positive dimension (citizenship's volunteerism) and one with negative (emergence of old debates among localities). Similarly, no significant deviations were observed in the field of local government operation.

Table 10: Networking Dimension of Results

	Kapodistrias Reform			Kallikrates Reform		
	Participation	Non Participation	t-test	Participation	Non Participation	t-test
Economies of scale	3.18	2.85	-2.024*	3.54	3.1	-2.854
Political Expediencies	3.73	3.46	-1.628***	3.68	3.61	-0.447
Historical Background of settlements	2.55	2.64	0.623	2.28	2.42	1.072
Effective transfer of competences	2.41	2.34	-0.479	2.13	2.24	0.822
Influence of economic crisis	2.73	2.5	-1.177	3.91	3.56	-1.917**
Cooperation among N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations	2.98	2.76	-1.503	2.72	2.75	0.245
Citizen's participation in N.G.O. and local cultural-societal organizations	2.54	2.26	-1.772***	2.29	2.09	-1.381
Citizen's volunteerism	2.85	2.41	-3.054*	2.76	2.33	-2.825*
Emergence of old debates among localities	3.17	2.87	-1.917***	3.3	2.97	-2.101**
Citizen's complaints in disestablished municipalities	3.37	2.98	-2.515**	3.39	3.25	-0.855
Cooperation among central government and tiers of local governments	2.83	2.71	-0.888	2.83	2.62	-1.422
Cooperation among regional government (second tier)	2.39	2.5	0.928	2.51	2.53	0.151
Investment projects for local welfare	2.85	2.62	-1.519	2.47	2.4	-0.525
Local policies for local welfare	2.9	2.7	-1.274	2.68	2.46	-1.397
Research and innovation projects	2.25	2.18	-0.518	2.25	2.07	-1.302

Note: *, **, *** significance at the 0.01, 0.05 & 0.1 level

6. Conclusions

Decentralization in Greece deployed significantly via the two recent local government reforms. Kapodistrias Plan and Kallikrates Project induced major improvements in Greek local governments, in the terms spatial planning, social capital and local governments operation. The former reform focused mainly on the spatial restructuring of the country, by reducing approximately to the one fifth the units of first local government tier. The latter, apart from the further amalgamation of municipalities into enlarged municipalities, institutionalized regions as units of second local government tier and transferred a wide set of powers to municipalities and regions.

The two local government reforms contributed to the substantial modernization of the state, by upgrading the role of local governments in regional planning process. Municipalities managed to handle effectively local affairs and to operate in a more flexible environment. Regions can anymore participate in local development projects, by being more independent to central government. Local actors adopted more rights as they have the responsibility to elect regional governors and to cooperate with local administrative bodies.

The research that took place in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace region, in order to comprehend the perceptions of local actors anent to Kapodistrias and Kallikrates reforms, revealed significant findings. According to the responses, the first reform connected more with socioeconomic strategies of municipalities and societal activities of local actors, whilst the second focused on efficiency and large economies of scale. The relatively moderate level of local actors' responses corresponds to the respective findings of Alexander's research (2013), about municipal reforms in Australia.

Interestingly, non institutional actors perceived rather more profoundly the improvements in local governments operation, than institutional agents did. This finding is in accordance with Steinacker's research (2002), concerning the institutional impediments in local governments' cooperation. Nonetheless, the institutional role of local actors is a crucial parameter in connecting effective decision making and regional planning with local development (Krishna & Uphoff, 1999; Blatter, 2006).

Members of social and cultural organizations joined their activities with the provisions of Kapodistrias Plan and Kallikrates Project. In fact, networking was associated with the functional perception of reforms and the concomitant affiliation in

cooperative practices. As argued by Arsenault (2006), the broadest cultural-societal environment influences positively the acceptance of local government reforms. Ladner & Fiechter (2012), proved that the transfer of competences from central government to local governments do not per se advance the level of cooperative culture. Taking into account that the level of social capital improved more during Kapodistrias reform, it can be stated that Kallikrates reform did not improved significantly the cooperative strategies of local actors in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.

As regards, the intraregional distribution of results, the minor differences that were observed gave prominence to a cognitive acceptance of reforms primarily by citizens of Evros. Evros is, in the course of per capita income, among the five regional units of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace and has in unison with Drama five more municipalities. Results of other studies denote that there is no direct linear association between the range of geographical space of municipalities and the effectiveness of local government units (Wollman, 2004; De Ceuninck et al, 2010; Rusavy & Bernard, 2012).

In a broader context, it can be stated that decentralization in Greece was determined by plexus of institutional, economic, societal and cultural factors. This argument follows the path of previous studies (Treisman, 2002; Politt, 2005; Marks et al, 2008; Dubois & Fattore, 2009), but contributes to the research by revealing the negative influence of economic crisis in the acceptance of local government reforms by local actors. As notified by the participants of the research, economic crisis enact as a deterrent to the procession of Kallikrates reform. Accounting for the importance Kallikrates' reform provisions i.e. institutionalization of regions as second tiers of local government, significant transfer of powers from central government to municipalities and regions, turns out the finding that economic and financial environment affects crucially the decentralization process. On the other hand, this finding reveals the financial restraints that the two tiers of local governments confront. The reduction in the amounts of intergovernmental grants to municipalities (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2013) compressed local economic activity and weaken the motive for local actors to cooperate, as institutional actors were compelled to manage Kallikrates reform with much less financial resources (Hazakis & Ioannidis, 2014).

Even so, decentralization in Greece is a continuous process as proved by the values that correlation index received. Therefore, some further improvements are

necessary. Besides the enhancement of financial autonomy for both tiers of local governments, the upgrade of administrative capacity of regions can advance the terms of intraregional cooperation. Under this perspective, regions and municipalities will adopt the power to collect their resources and sequentially to invest them in efficient operations.

For a lagged region, like Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, this context has crucial consequence as puts forth the significance of intraregional cooperation in the effective handling of decentralization. Intraregional cooperation can act as a unique intangible asset, that joins the different interests of local actors to commonly accepted strategies. Municipal and regional governments ought to have in this framework a principal role in order to affect and to be affected by decentralization.

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