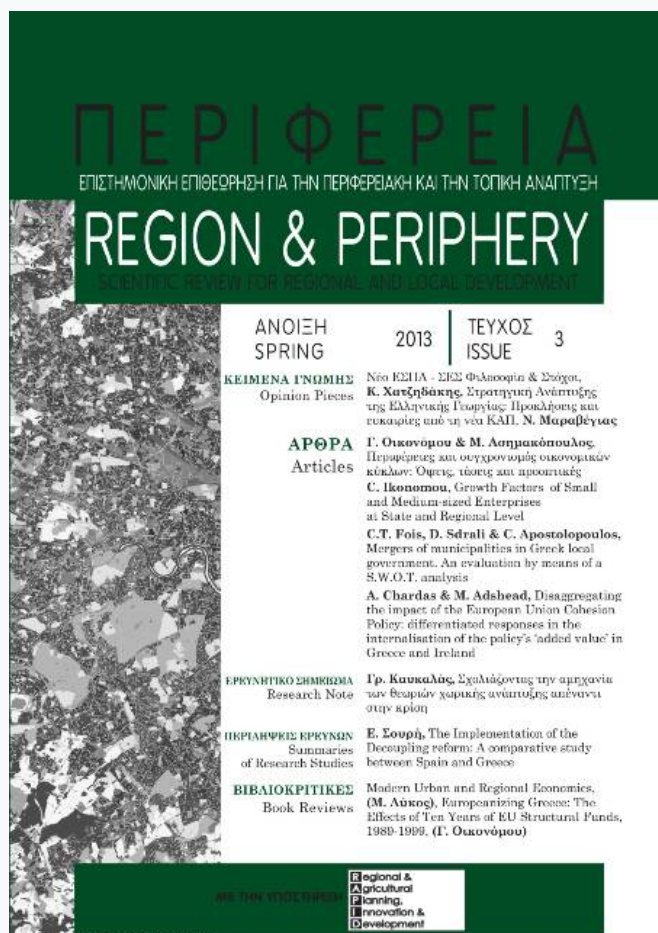


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The Implementation of the Decoupling reform: A comparative study between Spain and Greece

Ευαγγελία Σουρή

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The Implementation of the Decoupling reform: A comparative study between Spain and Greece

**Η εφαρμογή του μέτρου της Αποσύνδεσης στα αγροτικά
προϊόντα: Συγκριτική Μελέτη μεταξύ Ελλάδας και Ισπανίας**

Σουρή Ευαγγελία, Οικονομολόγος MSc

The implementation of the decoupling reform of the Common Agricultural Policy was known to be leading to a considerable reduction of agricultural production in Europe. In an attempt to tone down this effect, European Union gave some degree of flexibility to the Member States to ‘partially implement’ the reform in each sector for a specific period of time. In this essay we attempt to explain why two countries that specialize in almost the same agricultural products reacted in a systematically different way with respect to the implementation of the decoupling reform, having no economic rationale to do so. We employ the theory of collective action as well as the Policy Network approach in order to investigate the behaviour and the role of agricultural interest groups as well as the relationship between the national public and private agents with respect to the final outcome.

The theory of collective action helps us understand whether the various stakeholder groups became organised in order to further their special interests with respect to decoupling reform. We concluded that in Greece collective action did come about in the form of growers’ supporting the implementation of full decoupling, whereas in Spain the fragmentation, both literal and metaphorical, of the farmers’ unions panorama (and also the relative absence of selective incentives) did not allow growers to become engaged in collective action. Considering that a comprehensive explanation should take into consideration the level of influence that each collectively-acting unit had with respect to the policy-making procedure, along with the above theoretical framework, we use the concept of policy networks, which probably played the most crucial role in finding the solution to the puzzle.

Our findings showed that the Greek agricultural network is a relatively closed one, as its boundaries are difficult for outsiders to challenge. Moreover, one could not fail to observe that the pattern of linkages between the non-governmental members of the network is not formally ordered hierarchically, with PASEGES having a de facto leading role regarding farmers’ organizations. Probably the most interesting characteristic of the Greek agricultural network

is the fact that even if not affiliated to any specific political party, PASEGES is highly politicized as indicated by the fact that numerous of its former leaders developed political careers. This reveals the existence of the clientele relations which characterize the majority of Greek policy networks. We therefore conclude that the Greek decision for full decoupling implementation was mainly a result of a clientelistic type of agricultural policy network that this country maintains.

On the contrary, in Spain the transition from a compulsory corporatist system under authoritarianism to a new representative system in a democratic context rendered the development of farmer unions in the country a difficult task. Nevertheless, in the past ten years Spanish agriculture has consolidated a well-structured union panorama around three farmers' unions. However, there is a high degree of heterogeneity among these three unions both with respect to their social base and to their ideological discourse, which can also well explain the 'failure' of collective action to come about on behalf of the Spanish growers. The influence of farmers' unions on agricultural policies in Spain is very limited and their relations with public agents quite problematic. The country maintains a looser network, whose participation in the policy-making procedure is still limited. If identifying, 'sponsored pluralism' as a type of policy network in which the state supports more than a few interest associations in its attempt to maintain its autonomy against pluralistic interests, we could argue that the situation in the Spanish Agricultural network, as this is revealed throughout our analysis, resembles this type. Our study showed that unlike Greece, in Spain the combination of a 'sponsored pluralism' policy network and the lack of a strong selective incentive on the part of the growers, allowed the central government to adopt the solution they thought would best serve the "general interest", without facing significant reaction from the various interest groups.

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