



54ème colloque  
**ASRDLF**

5-7 juillet 2017, Athènes, Grèce



15th conference  
**ERSA-GR**



Les défis de développement pour les villes et les régions dans une Europe en mutation

## **Spatial impacts of economic crisis in regional small Greek cities. Case study: City of Nafpaktos**

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### **Référence à la session / reference to the session**

T1,T3

### **Résumé / Summary**

The existing public debt crisis has impacted on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of urban life, with significant implications for the present and future quality of life in Greek cities. Cities have always been a major component of the crisis and its management. They have embodied what the crisis and its aftermath meant in a spatially condensed form. Those effects in small and medium sized Greek cities can be observed mainly in the real estate and construction sectors, in urban infrastructure provision, in new forms of urban poverty and vulnerable groups and in relaxation of environmental standards. The residential real estate sector has been severely affected in Greece in the post Olympics period, and furthermore the current crisis has led to further impoverishment of already disadvantaged urban areas. Those factors mentioned above, have led to negative urban trends. Economic, social, and environmental planning measures embodying 'urban sustainability' have been proposed as antidotes to these negative urban trends.

This paper sets out to examine the determinants of urban development in small and medium sized Greek cities before and during the economic crisis. Furthermore, it aims to critically explore whether urban parks (green open spaces) and urban regeneration in general constitute a viable alternative to current urban policy. It is a fact that urban parks which are a component of urban green surfaces can be defined as green areas that have been designed and are managed to meet some needs of the population. But also it has to be mentioned that those areas can also improve cityspaces and set a sustainable development path while moreover provide economic benefits. Furthermore, we aim to analyze whether open green spaces can not

only lead a cityspace to sustainable development but also ameliorate the urban socio-spatial impacts of economic crisis.

We present our findings from the city of Nafpaktos. It is a town located on a bay on the north coast of the Gulf of Corinth. Today its population is about 20.000, people according to the 2011 census. The city shows small presence of green open spaces located nearby its center and also signs of urban sprawl and unregulated expansion are visible. Moreover, in recent years, more areas are spotted to be isolated and that's a fact that encourages the imbalanced development within the city. During this crisis period more than 45% of the existing small businesses were closed. More abandoned houses were recorded than before and also green open spaces were degraded.

A comprehensive plan of an open green spaces network is designed for the city of Nafpaktos. It includes firstly, an investigation and analysis of the existing land use pattern. The analysis results are compared with the pre-crisis land use pattern. The problematic hotspots of the city are highlighted and particular attention is given to the areas that were downgraded during the crisis. This new plan is being evaluated not only in vitro conditions but also through personal questionnaire interviews of specific residents groups. The main goal of research focuses on the hypothesis that successful urban renewal, such as open green spaces networks, not only can increase the quality of life but also can balance the asymmetric development of urban areas.

(Keywords: open green spaces network, public debt crisis, small and medium sized Greek cities, spatial impacts of economic crisis, urban sustainability)

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