

Editorial Note

Regional Disparities and Convergence

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First of all, we would like to thank the editor in chief, Prof. José António Filipe (ISCTE-IUL), for the invitation to be Guest Editors of this special number of the Journal. We thank also all the authors for their precious contributions to this Journal's issue.

This number of the IJLTFES – International Journal of Latest Trends in Finance and Economic Sciences – is dedicated specifically to Regional Disparities and Convergence. As is known, from the point of view of economic, social and territorial cohesion, it is important to check the extent to which any national convergence process guarantee, or is synonymous of, the reduction of disparities at regional level. To put it in the simplest way possible, when two totals approach, this does not necessarily mean that their components also approach. This number intends to contribute for the analysis of these matters. It is composed of four articles and one book review, which are succinctly described below.

The first article, whose author is Hans Kramar, analyses the relation between national growth and regional disparities within the old and the new European Union member states. According to the author, while European integration has significantly contributed to economic convergence between the EU member states, the diverging progress of highly developed metropolitan regions and lagging rural areas has become a rising challenge especially for the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe. In this framework the article queries to which degree the process of economic restructuring and catching-up in European countries was accompanied by increasing spatial disparities. By the use of regional and national GDP data the article confirms the trend towards

economic convergence on a national scale between 2000 and 2011, mainly caused by the rapid growth of the most lagging countries. On a regional scale, however, the process of convergence was much slower and almost came to an end after the beginning of the global economic crisis in 2008. According to the article, the reason for these diverging results can be found in the change of disparities within the countries.

The second article, whose authors are Konstantinos Rontos, Maria-Eleni Syrmali, Ioannis Vavouras and Efstratia Karagouni, examines the sectoral specialization and export orientation of European Union countries and regions in the period of crisis. According to the authors, the groups of countries that are to be determined in accordance to the sectoral specialization and export orientation do not lie on the traditional axis (of favoured) North – (less favoured) South, but mainly, on the configuration axis (of favoured) West – (less favoured) East. As a result, the regions of Europe that specialize in dynamic sectors of economic activity can be identified and located. These regions demonstrate comparative advantages, which give rise to export capacities as well. Moreover, the intertemporal analysis of indicators exhibits the great contribution of sectoral composition in relation to the general socioeconomic basis along with the structural characteristics of countries and regions, which are fundamental for the developmental process.

The third article, whose authors are Gertrudes Saúde Guerreiro and António Bento Caleiro, look at the spatial convergence of knowledge in Portugal. In accordance to an established fact, the authors

consider that human resources are an essential element in territorial development. When these are characterized by a high level of training, they also enhance a number of effects in fundamental areas of binomial territorial-social cohesion. In this respect, the existence of higher education institutions throughout the territory allows the spread of human resources' qualification but, by itself, does not guarantee the retention of these resources in different regions. Thus, the objective of this article is to undertake a spatial analysis of convergence of knowledge through the inspection of the evolution of the percentage of population with a higher education degree in the periods elapsed between the last three censuses in Portugal (1991-2011). Although that percentage, at a national level, has risen appreciably, the regional convergence is shown to be (very) insignificant.

The fourth article, whose authors are António Bento Caleiro, António Guerreiro and Gertrudes Saúde Guerreiro, considers the spatial convergence of (un)employment in Portugal. The article points out that, regarding the EU policies of territorial cohesion, is common to assume that, having the same been successful (in Portugal), regional disparities decreased. The purpose of this article is to assess the veracity of this allegation, for that considering the values of employment and unemployment rates by municipalities, determined in the last two censuses held in Portugal, i.e. 2001 and 2011. In doing so, spatial econometric techniques are used, namely local indicators of spatial association and spatial clusters, in order to better understand the eventual process of spatial convergence that may have occurred in Portugal in that period. The results point towards a spatial convergence of employment rates (both in total and by genres) and also of female unemployment rates but a spatial divergence of male unemployment rates.

The number ends with a review by Manuel Alberto M. Ferreira of the book *Beyond the Limits to Growth (New Ideas for Sustainability from Japan)*, published by Springer, whose author is Hiroshi Komiyama. According to the author the book:

- Provides fresh insights to the challenges of and pathways to sustainable societies,
- Includes a chapter on the realistic development of "platinum societies" that will serve as models for the future,

- Shows how new consumer demand for quality will determine the development of new sustainable technologies in both developed and developing countries.