



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

This is a repository copy of *Book review symposium: Crisis Spaces: Structures, Struggles and Solidarity in Southern Europe*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:  
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/169268/>

Version: Accepted Version

---

**Article:**

Gonzalez, S [orcid.org/0000-0003-3958-2119](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3958-2119) (2020) Book review symposium: Crisis Spaces: Structures, Struggles and Solidarity in Southern Europe. *Urban Studies*, 57 (16). pp. 3428-3445. ISSN 0042-0980

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098020954773>

---

© Urban Studies Journal Limited 2020. This is an author produced version of an article, published in *Urban Studies*. Uploaded in accordance with the publisher's self-archiving policy.

**Reuse**

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



[eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk)  
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

Review of Costis Hadjimichalis (2018) *Crisis spaces. Structures, struggles and solidarity in southern Europe*

By Sara Gonzalez, School of Geography, University of Leeds. s.gonzalez@leeds.ac.uk

Costis Hadjimichalis' book is a magnificent work of craft. It combines the magic ingredients of a critical political economy analysis of the Eurozone and its uneven geographies, the unpacking of cultural representations of Southern European (SE) countries and the documenting of resistance and solidarity practices by citizens across SE. The result is a complex, yet very clear diagnosis of the injustices inbuilt in the EU elite project and the Eurozone which have led to the misery of millions of people across SE.

The book has a clear argument: that debt in the Southern European countries was not the cause of the crisis in those countries since 2008 but the result of a much more complex and long term process of uneven geographical development in Europe. Costis Hadjimichalis smashes the popular belief that the crisis of Spain, Greece, Portugal and Italy was due to lazy southerners that lived beyond their means.

The book has distinct parts. In Chapters 2 and 3 Hadjimichalis develops his main hypothesis that uneven development is at the root of the Eurozone crisis and the subsequent harsh austerity regime in SE countries. To me this was the best part of the book and where I learned the most. In particular I was interested in the very geographically situated construction of the Eurozone and the Euro single currency. In particular, Hadjimichalis shows how the flat geography of a single currency was superimposed upon a deeply and long divided uneven economic geography. What is more, this was done without any kind of political and democratic project to oversee it. The analysis is particularly illustrative in how the Eurozone was designed to suit the particular political economy of the German model and the German version of neoliberalism: Ordoliberalism which emphasises the state's intervention to guarantee competition and the role of an independent central bank concerned with monetary stability and low inflation. These neoliberal ideas became embedded too in the 1992 Maastricht treaty which prioritised fiscal stability by policing and disciplining countries going over the limit of budget deficit to 3% of GDP and without the ECB being able to rescue regional or national economies getting in trouble. Austerity policies therefore were implemented by European member states. Spain, for example, under the labour government of Felipe Gonzalez from 1982 to 1996 oversaw cuts to social welfare and privatisations of many state and public entities. It also meant the dismantling of the heavy manufacturing sector, the so-called "industrial reconversion", which was concentrated in Asturias, Basque Country and Valencia. I can just about remember the workers occupying major roads in Bilbao in protest of these radical measures. In the same place where it now lies the famous Guggenheim museum the workers of a threatened shipyard took to block the bridge connecting the two sides of the city.

Hadjimichalis shows clearly how in the construction of the EU institutional scaffolding, the variegated nature of the economic realities of Europe was not taken into account which entrenched regional disparities. In particular the book signals several characteristics of the SE economies: the prominence of small size enterprises with low technology and difficulties in adapting to changes, the importance of the informal sector with associated problems of precarity, the particular role of the extended family as a cornerstone of social reproduction and the prominence of tourism and construction sectors which are characterised by temporal and seasonal employment. In addition the SE economies entered the European integration process as trader partners with Central and North

European economies but with globalisation and the expansion of EU towards the East, SE economies lost their competitiveness. Hadjimichalis' analysis shows how the processes of European integration, globalisation and de-localisation and the advance of neoliberal policies had a very different impact on these kind of economies vis a vis the German model.

The intricate analysis developed in chapters 2 and 3 is complemented by an examination of the cultural representations of the SE countries by the media and European elites. Inspired by Gramsci, Hadjimichalis sub-titles this chapter the "Southern question". Although the SE countries are all different and have very significant regional differences, Hadjimichalis traces the construction of totalising stereotypes and regional imaginaries prior to the Troika intervention. The images of SE people as lazy, living beyond their means, wasting money and living off the state were useful in dampening any potential resistance to these interventions; "othering" people in SE as different from "us" in the Centre and North of Europe impeded interclass solidarities between ordinary people in different parts of Europe.

Chapter 5 develops a theme that runs through the book: the role of academics and academic concepts in perpetuating and even fuelling this unjust uneven geographical development. Hadjimichalis explains how many mainstream academics and policy makers have not paid enough attention to the complex particularities of SE economies. For example, he stresses the infatuation by many academics, many of whom might consider themselves as progressive, with the industrial districts of the so called Third Italy with highly networked small sized firms that were able to react and be flexible in the context of the crisis of Fordism while other heavily industrialised regions across the SE collapsed. However the emphasis on this "superstar" case studies has neglected what Hadjimichalis calls the more ordinary places in SE characterised by informality and pluri-activity for example between small scale agriculture and the construction sector. Hadjimichalis shows how lessons derived from the "superstar" regions have become institutionalised into EU regional policy. The emphasis has moved from redistribution policies and regional development to a "growth first" approach where all cities and regions are in a level playing field and have to just create the right business environment to attract investments.

Chapter 6 smashed the myth of the lazy and passive southerner and present a rich picture of the multitude of initiatives across SE resisting the effects of the austerity and self-organising into solidarity initiatives. What was particularly insightful in this chapter was Hadjimichalis' exercise to categorise these movements and show the path dependencies with previous ones as well as the innovations. The book notes that most academic research has however focused on the newness of the square movements and brushes aside the fact that in many cases the mobilisations were led by the unions.

All in all I found the book a pleasure to read. Very esteemed colleagues in a separate book review symposium published in *European urban and regional Studies* have pointed at some ways in which Hadjimichalis might have been able to refine his analysis and his response suggests that he would be up for taking up some of these challenges in future work. Given his openness I would like to humbly add to this wish list. The analysis of the solidarity and resistance practices was a key element in this book but I am a bit disappointed that it was dealt with separately from the uneven development analysis. A great analytical achievement, in my view, would be to relate in a dynamic way the long and intricate uneven development of Europe with the resistance and grassroots initiatives. Taking a cue from the autonomist traditions, this research would be extremely interesting to understand how capital in Europe has shifted, adapted and changed in reaction to workers' and citizens' organisation against injustices and exploitation and how this dynamic has affected uneven geographical development.

A final reflection is that while reading this book in the Spring of 2019 I could not avoid thinking about Brexit. The Eurozone crisis and the lack of accountability of the EU project that Hadjimichalis details in the book definitely had an impact on the debates prior to the Brexit referendum and the long fallout. Both Brexit and the Eurozone can be seen as ill-conceived projects from powerful actors that do not have at heart the resolution of socio-spatial inequalities affecting millions of Europeans. To end in a humorous way, a twitter exchange between the President of the European Council and Yannis Varoufakis in February 2019 perfectly demonstrate this point. At the height of the Brexit discussions between the EU, UK and within the British Parliament Donald Tusk vented his frustration by saying: "I've been wondering what that special place in hell looks like, for those who promoted [#Brexit](#), without even a sketch of a plan how to carry it out safely." To which Varoufakis replied "Probably very similar to the place reserved for those who designed a monetary union without a proper banking union and, once the banking crisis hit, transferred cynically the bankers' gigantic losses onto the shoulders of the weakest taxpayers"