

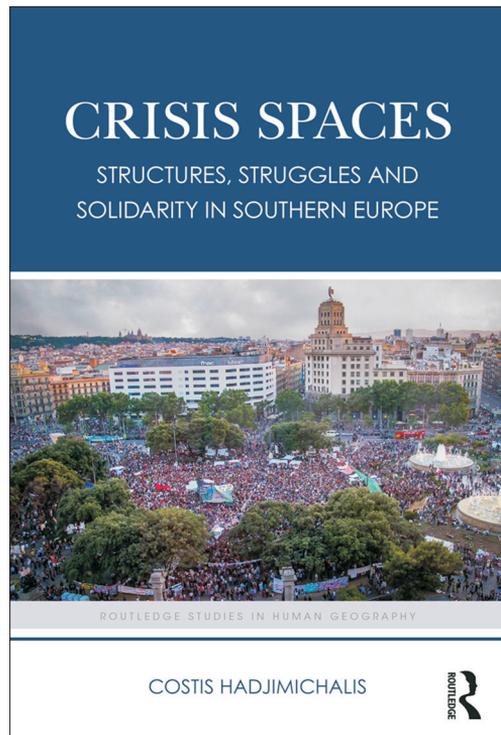
Hadjimichalis, C.: Crisis Spaces: Structures, Struggles and Solidarity in Southern Europe. London–New York, Routledge, 2018. 217 p.

Although almost ten years have passed since the financial breakdown that launched the latest structural and financial crisis of capitalism, its socio-spatial consequences are still with us and subjects to public and academic debates. While the former are revolving around sluggish economic recovery, geopolitical shifts, migration and rising political extremes, academics grew concerned also with the complexity and multiplicity of crisis mechanisms spreading at all spatial scales. These mechanisms are limiting national sovereignty, destroying local communities, subjecting households to the turmoil of financial markets, and polarising societies by class, gender, ethnicity, family, and place of living (CHRISTOPHERS, B. 2015; PIKE, A. *et al.* 2017). Critical scholars interpreted the crisis as a driver of re-distributing wealth under capitalism, taking the post-2008 downturn particularly devastating and widespread – as it unfolded in the context of the polarising mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism such as the privatisation of public goods, shrinking systems of collective consumption, and the

financialisation of state affairs and the processes of social reproduction (e.g. through rising public and private debts) (HARVEY, D. 2006; AALBERS, M.D. 2009; HADJIMICHALIS, C. 2011).

Researching the structures, practices, and discourses reproducing unevenness and subsequent crises has led scholars to re-thinking key concepts explaining socio-spatial inequalities, such as uneven development, the central idea of the book “Crisis Spaces”. The concept traditionally has a strong macro-focus, considering unevenness (social and spatial) as well as the propensity to crisis inherent to capitalism. Yet, political economists and economic geographers grew increasingly sensitive to socio-cultural diversity of institutions and social practices, and the entanglement of macro-structural changes and local/institutional contexts that produced new polarities and marginalities in the last two decades. This re-focusing rested on a growing body of research on the complexity of economic links and power relations, new forms of exploitation and the effects of financialisation facilitated by new technologies and changing state policies (HUDSON, R. 2016; PECK, J. 2016). Consequently, in current debates on uneven development, there has been a shift to looking at macro and local processes relationally. As Jamie Peck puts it, it’s time to “displace centric, prototypical theorizing with alternatives that are not just polycentric in an unprincipled way, but which carry the responsibility of actively confronting situation, position, location and relational context” (PECK, J. 2016, 14). Such ideas are resonating with the rising critiques of European development policies and the theoretical grounds they rest on as they failed to address socio-spatial polarisation (PIKE, A. *et al.* 2017) and with arguments for re-politicising development policies articulated by critical scholars (e.g. by MASSEY, D. 2005; HADJIMICHALIS, C. and HUDSON, R. 2014).

Costis HADJIMICHALIS’ book is embedded in, and it puts forward, such debates in various ways. His systematic analysis of the causal mechanisms of the recent crisis highlights the major structural processes that reproduced the vulnerable position of South European (SE) economies within the EU (politically and economically) and the entanglement of such processes with the financialisation that made SE states, firms and households dependent on global financial markets. Although the argumentation is grounded in critical political economy, the author goes beyond the macro-focus. By adopting a consequent cross-scalar approach, he discusses recent SE processes of dispossession, socio-spatial polarisation and marginalisation relationally in the context of global finance,



European division of labour and power relations, national institutional practices, regional economic restructuring and households' changing position. Moreover, the book enriches the uneven development debates by analysing the construction of the 'South Question' in European public discourses from a critical-and-South-European perspective. It highlights the ways the spatial narratives of the crisis were (and still are being) created, embedded in ahistorical and partial explanations of the meltdown, and employed to justify the highly unequal spread of the consequences of the crisis. The author links such discourses to macro processes fuelled by institutional restructuring and practices in the post-Maastricht era regarding the governance and development policies toward neo-liberalisation in the EU, along with the de-politicisation of the interventions and their outcomes (i.e. the reproduction of inequalities). Finally, discussing multiple spatial processes (re)producing inequalities from this very (SE) position, the author is also searching for a way out for the weak and marginalised through institutional change and emerging new political subjectivities.

The argumentation follows a clear logic, from the analysis of the changes in the spatial division of labour and the uneven emergence of the European common market processes (Chapters 2 and 3), through discussing how uneven development was depoliticised discursively and through institutional practices (Chapters 4 and 5) to finding alternatives and arguing for more democratic and just European and national policies (Chapters 6 and 7). The analysis is richly illustrated by figures, and supplementary information (brief overviews of key documents, events and case studies) inserted in boxes helps the reader get a comprehensive view of the processes without losing the track of argumentation. Yet, this brief overview would be superficial without discussing the author's positionality. He is a critical scholar and a South European confronting the everyday reality of crisis and marginality as well as the 'South Question' in various discursive contexts. A major question is how this position raised new ideas and lessons to the academic community and policymakers, and to Central and Eastern Europeans (likely, the majority of readers of Hungarian Geographical Bulletin) in particular.

A key argument of the book is to understand uneven development as an outcome of interrelated external and endogenous processes and factors operating at various scales. *Scalar approach* is employed in the book as an analytical tool for revealing power relations that are shaping socio-spatial processes. One key point discussed is the ways the ambiguously and one-sidedly emerged European institutional frameworks were employed to push forward neo-liberalisation homogenising institutional practices (privatisation, export orientation along with deflatory regimes and

fiscal discipline), to exploit internal differences within the common market along national and private elite (capitalist) groups' interests. Thus, the author argues for understanding apparent and less visible mechanisms and agencies behind economic, and the related political, dominance that operates across scales, from unequal state relations manifesting in supranational institutional practices (e.g. imposing the principles of German 'ordoliberalism' on the euro zone), to the manoeuvring of the capitalist elite groups in a multi-scalar space to get a tighter control over labour and resources across Europe. This approach is employed also to highlight how such interests and institutional practices produced inequalities at various scales and deepened national, regional and local dependencies across South Europe.

Everyday life and social reproduction as a scene to crisis and a source of resistance as well are also central issues in the book that links the argumentation to recent debates on uneven development. The author discusses the organisational structure of SE economies and its specifics (i.e. informality, flexible employment forms, and entanglement of small family businesses and households as scenes to social reproduction) in a historical perspective. He highlights the destructive nature of homogenising neoliberal regulations that neglect such socio-cultural peculiarities and undermine the pillars of local and regional economies as the frameworks of everyday life – from local SMEs to community and family ties. Such processes, along with financialisation (emerging property market bubbles and growing debt), made SE economies highly vulnerable and the 2008 crisis devastating to businesses as well as to households, endangering the daily survival of many. This is a heavy argument against "centric, prototypical theorizing" of spatial processes (see PECK, J. 2016, 14) and policy making focused on growth and based on model regions (best practices) that failed to manage socio-spatial polarisation in Europe during the crisis and thereafter.

Nevertheless, as a critical scholar, the author considers everyday life also as a source for new political activism. SE social movements addressed the consequences of the crisis and related austerity schemes that destroyed the existing frameworks of social reproduction (through housing crisis, growing poverty and need for food, and a rising number of citizens marginalised within the shrinking system of public health care). Although various forms of political activism are highly diverse by aims, social basis and organisation, they manifested a new political subjectivity against the corrupt (and failing) state and the global capitalist elite, representing alternatives in political life. Going further, the author considers social movements as potential sources of political change in times of crisis and post-crisis, for several reasons. They are being grounded in everyday life, they ex-

hibit and address fundamental problems of social reproduction and the diverse aspects of inequalities (class, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, age, etc.), and they raised international recognition and solidarity). Thus, they might support the renewal of leftist politics through re-thinking key issues such as sovereignty, citizenship, state roles and socio-spatial justice across Europe. Still, the central ideas here are the related processes of spatialisation of politics (linking abstract mechanisms and policies to everyday life) and of the emergence of new political subjectivities (involving people in the former process) that might produce an alternative to the recent political regime.

This argumentation raises fundamental questions on the diverse trajectories of European (semi) peripheries and, thus, on uneven development – i.e. the structural contexts of the scarcity and weakness of such movements in the East. These questions include the lack of leftist political forces (and, generally, of organised political articulation of interests of powerless and vulnerable social groups), the colonisation of civil grassroots initiatives by party politics and/or the state, and the dominance of state-capital alliance over alternative organisations in the economy (e.g. linking consumers and producers to favour domestic capital against major transnational retail corporations). Getting further, it is a matter of debate whether a better, just Europe could be forged in the SE ‘laboratory’ of emerging grassroots/spatialised politics, if the rest of the (semi)periphery of the EU is divided and faces emerging oppression.

The position of the author (a South European/Greek critical scholar), from which he discusses crisis mechanisms and its consequences, opened up the argumentation anchored in critical political economy to discursive aspects of unevenness, to everyday life, to socio-cultural diversity and its historical roots. This position was a source of knowledge about the everyday reality of the crisis, social relations and practices in the European (semi)periphery, and also a source for inspiration to get engaged in social movements. It was constantly challenged, however, through confrontations in public and academic discourses. This position also has made the author bring his theoretical argumentation to the ground, place it in a non-core context and translate his findings into political alternatives. By doing so, the author is challenging core-biased theories and concepts in knowledge production as well as the neoliberal hegemony in political discourses. I think a powerful lesson of the book for CEE scholars is the need to place ourselves and our academic work in a wider non-academic context to do meaningful work, in order to reveal and address apparent and also hidden social problems and needs. It is also indispensable to learn more about socio-spatial processes in the (semi)peripheries beyond CEE and Europe as a whole, and reconsider the

relevance of concepts and theories coming from the global centres of knowledge production, driving our research practices, institutions and everyday lives.

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