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## Public Policy and Health. The case of the General University Hospital of "ATTIKON". Current situation and perspectives

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# Public Policy and Health. The case of the General University Hospital of "ATTIKON". Current situation and perspectives

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## Abstract

This paper examines how public health policy is translated into hospital-level practice through an in-depth case study of the University General Hospital "ATTIKON" in Greece. The study aims to explore how national policy frameworks affect hospital performance, governance, and service delivery in a large tertiary and academic institution. Using a qualitative–descriptive case study design, data were drawn from administrative and financial reports (2023–2024), official hospital documents, and relevant Greek and international literature. The analysis focuses on operational performance, specialization, financial management, and human resources. The findings indicate that "ATTIKON" has significantly expanded its clinical output and specialized services, strengthening its role as a national referral center. However, chronic underfunding, staff shortages, and high-cost specialized care generate structural pressures that limit long-term sustainability. The paper contributes to the literature by illustrating how public policy constraints shape hospital governance in crisis-affected health systems and by identifying critical policy levers for strengthening resilience, efficiency, and quality of care in university hospitals.

**Keywords:** Public policy, healthcare management, hospital performance, Greece, health system reform

**JEL Classification Codes:** I18 (Health: Government Policy; Regulation; Public Health), H51 (Government Expenditures and Health), I15 (Health and Economic Development)

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## 1. Introduction

Public policy in the field of health constitutes one of the most important pillars of social policy, as it is directly linked to the citizen's right to health and to overall social welfare. The World Health Organization defines health not merely as the absence of disease, but as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being.

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To achieve this goal, the existence of organized health systems is required—systems financed, supervised, and evaluated by the state through mechanisms of public policy.

In Greece, the National Health System (NHS), established in 1983, represented a landmark reform aimed at ensuring equal access to healthcare for all citizens. Despite progress, its course has been marked by challenges: underfunding, staff shortages, inequalities in resource allocation, and a constant need for modernization in order to align with European and international developments. Reforms over the past decades—from the establishment of EOPYY (National Organization for Healthcare Services Provision) to the austerity measures of the memoranda—highlighted the system’s vulnerability to economic and social crises. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated emphatically that public health policy is not merely a technocratic matter but a core issue of social resilience.

The study of public health policies at both national and international levels is particularly important, as it allows for the analysis of how limited resources are allocated, how hospitals are organized, and which measures are adopted to improve the quality of services. In this context, the administration and organization of health services—as extensively analyzed in the literature (Polyzos, 2012; Dikaios et al., 2019)—provides the theoretical foundation for understanding decision-making processes and the importance of strategic planning.

The University General Hospital “Attikon” constitutes a characteristic case study where theory and practice converge. As a university hospital, it combines tertiary care with education and research, serving as a hub for the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. At the same time, it includes specialized clinics that serve not only the population of Western Athens but also patients from across the country due to its high level of specialization and infrastructure. This fact makes it an ideal example for analyzing the relationship between public policy and healthcare practice.

Despite the extensive literature on health system reforms and hospital management, empirical case-based evidence from large Greek university hospitals remains limited. Most existing studies focus either on macro-level health policy reforms or on aggregate system indicators, offering little insight into how public policy is operationalized within complex hospital organizations.

This study addresses this gap by providing an in-depth case analysis of the University General Hospital “ATTIKON”, one of the largest tertiary and academic hospitals in Greece. The motivation for this research stems from the hospital’s rapid expansion, its pivotal role during recent crises, and its increasing importance as a national referral center.

The originality of the paper lies in linking concrete hospital-level performance data with public policy constraints, highlighting how funding mechanisms, staffing policies, and governance frameworks shape

everyday hospital functioning. By doing so, the study moves beyond a descriptive institutional profile and contributes evidence on the real-world implementation of public health policy in a highly specialized public hospital.

The methodology is based on the study of primary sources—such as annual reports of activities (2024), data from the hospital’s administrative and financial services (2023–2024), and its organizational structure—combined with secondary sources from Greek and international literature on health services management. This approach provides a holistic perspective that goes beyond numbers and examines the social, institutional, and political dimensions of hospital management.

In conclusion, the introduction places the subject within the broader framework of public health policy and highlights “Attikon” as a living example of implementation, with all its contradictions and prospects. In the following sections, the Greek experience, the organization and performance of the hospital, its strengths, as well as the challenges it faces will be presented in detail, leading to conclusions useful both for academic discussion and for public health policymaking.

## **2. Research Questions and Objectives**

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach with the objective of examining how public health policy is reflected in the organization, performance, and strategic development of a large university hospital. The analysis is guided by the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do national public health policies shape the operational and financial functioning of the University General Hospital “ATTIKON”?

**RQ2:** What are the main strengths and performance outcomes of “ATTIKON” as a tertiary and academic hospital within the Greek NHS?

**RQ3:** What structural challenges emerge from the interaction between public policy constraints and hospital-level realities?

**RQ4:** What future directions and policy-relevant strategies can enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of university hospitals in Greece?

These research questions structure the empirical analysis and provide the analytical link between the literature, the case evidence, and the conclusions.

## **3. Methodology**

This paper employs a qualitative descriptive case study design. The case study approach is appropriate, as it allows in-depth exploration of complex organizational and policy-related phenomena within their real-life context.

**Data sources** included: (a) annual administrative and financial reports of the hospital (2023–2024), (b) internal organizational documents and official statistics, and (c) secondary sources from Greek and international academic literature on public health policy and hospital management.

The timeframe of the analysis covers the period 2023–2024, capturing the hospital’s post-pandemic operational dynamics. Quantitative indicators (admissions, surgeries, oncology sessions, staffing, financial data) were used descriptively to identify performance trends, while qualitative information supported the interpretation of institutional challenges and strategic responses.

Data were analyzed thematically, following the research questions, focusing on performance, specialization, governance, financial sustainability, and human resources.

As a single-case study, the findings do not aim at statistical generalization but at analytical generalization, offering insights applicable to similar public and university hospitals operating under fiscal and policy constraints.

#### **4. Public Policy and Health in Greece**

Public health policy in Greece has historically been shaped by a combination of social, economic, and political factors. The establishment of the National Health System (NHS) in 1983 aimed to ensure universal access to healthcare, reducing inequalities that had characterized the country for decades (Polyzos, 2012). Nevertheless, the system has continuously faced challenges, particularly in financing, human resources and efficiency.

**Institutional Framework:** The NHS was founded on the principles of universality, equity, and state responsibility, aligning with international models of welfare states (Mossialos et al., 2005). Health policy in Greece is largely determined by the Ministry of Health, while regional health authorities (YPEs) supervise the implementation of national strategies at the local level. Hospitals, such as “Attikon,” operate as public law entities (NPDD) and are accountable to these authorities.

**Reforms and Developments:** Over the past decades, a series of reforms have sought to modernize the system. Key developments include: the establishment of EOPYY (National Organization for Healthcare Services Provision) in 2011, which centralized health insurance and purchasing of health services; the introduction of ESYnet and digital tools for monitoring hospital activities; fiscal consolidation policies during the memoranda (2010–2018), which significantly reduced health expenditure, leading to shortages

in staff and resources (OECD, 2021); and the development of Health Technology Assessment (HTA) mechanisms, aiming to rationalize the introduction innovative pharmaceuticals and medical technologies.

Despite these efforts, problems of underfunding and inefficiency persist. According to OECD (2021), Greece's public health expenditure as a percentage of GDP remains below the European average, creating structural difficulties in meeting population needs (Saltman, et al., 2011).

**Current Challenges:** Greece's health policy faces ongoing challenges, such as the aging population and increased demand for chronic disease management; migration of health professionals abroad (brain drain), leading to staff shortages; inequalities in access, especially in remote and island regions; and limited adoption of digital health systems, despite European directives promoting interoperability and e-health solutions (European Commission, 2020).

**The Role of University Hospitals:** University hospitals, such as "Attikon," play a dual role: on the one hand, they provide tertiary healthcare; on the other, they train new doctors and support scientific research. This dual function positions them at the core of health policy, as they act as both providers of high-quality services and incubators of knowledge and innovation (Dikaios, et al., 2019).

Thus, the Greek health policy framework is characterized by efforts to balance social needs, financial sustainability, and scientific development, with university hospitals representing a central lever in this strategy (McKee, et. al., 2002).

## **5. The University General Hospital "Attikon"**

The University General Hospital "Attikon" was established in 2002 and constitutes one of the most significant pillars of the Greek National Health System (NHS). It operates as a public law entity (NPDD) under the supervision of the 2nd Health Region of Piraeus and the Aegean, according to its official organizational statute of 2012 (Government Gazette, 2012). Its legal framework and organizational structure render it a model tertiary hospital with a university character, strategically located in Chaidari to serve a large and densely populated area of western Athens.

According to its official statute (Government Gazette, 2012), the hospital's mission is to provide tertiary healthcare, educate medical students and related professionals, conduct scientific research, and develop new technologies and diagnostic and therapeutic methods. Its dual nature, as both a healthcare provider and an academic institution, distinguishes it from other general hospitals and strengthens its role within the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

"Attikon" comprises four main services: Medical Service, Nursing Service, Administrative and Financial Service, and Technical–Hotel Service. In addition, independent departments such as the Directorate of

Quality and Research contribute to continuous performance improvement and patient safety (Polyzos, 2012).

The hospital has 735 beds, with occupancy often reaching or exceeding 90% (Administrative Service, 2024). Its capacity is reflected in the large number of admissions and surgical operations. In 2024, there were 72,188 admissions and 11,300 surgeries, representing a 20% increase compared to 2022 (Financial Service, 2024). Furthermore, 15,461 chemotherapy sessions and 24,363 radiotherapy sessions were performed (Administrative Service, 2024), underscoring the hospital's vital role in oncological care.

Although the hospital is designed to serve the population of Western Athens, in practice it attracts patients from across Greece due to its high specialization and university character (Annual Report of Activities, 2024). This inflow has positioned it as a national referral center for complex cases.

As a university hospital, "Attikon" supports the clinical training of medical students at NKUA and other health sciences schools. At the same time, it actively participates in research programs, international collaborations, and clinical trials, promoting innovation and knowledge transfer (Polyzos, 2012).

"Attikon" also offers unique infrastructure within the 2nd Health Region, such as its vascular and neurosurgical clinics, where treatment costs per surgery are particularly high (€20,000–30,000 for vascular procedures and €16,000–25,000 for neurosurgical procedures) (Financial Service, 2023). While these specialized services increase operating costs, they elevate the hospital's role as a national reference center.

## 6. Current Situation and Performance

Understanding the current situation of the University General Hospital "Attikon" is crucial for assessing its role within the Greek National Health System. Data from 2023 and 2024 demonstrate an upward trend across nearly all performance indicators, highlighting both the growing demand for services and the hospital's capacity to respond to challenges.

### **Operational statistics:**

**Admissions and Hospitalizations:** In 2023, 77,426 admissions were recorded, compared to 72,188 in 2024 (Administrative Service, 2023; 2024). This slight decline is linked to the increase in afternoon surgeries and improved patient flow management, as well as the reinforcement of the Stroke Intensive Care Unit (Financial Service, 2024). The average length of stay stood at 4.7 days in 2024, indicating relatively efficient utilization compared to other tertiary hospitals.

**Surgeries:** Surgical activity increased significantly: 2022: 9,028 operations; 2023: 9,452 operations; 2024: 11,300 operations (20% increase compared to 2023) (Financial Service, 2024). This growth is

attributed to the institutionalization of afternoon surgeries, which expand the hospital's capacity, reduce waiting lists, and improve access for patients.

**Oncological Therapies:** Chemotherapy sessions: 14,884 (2023) → 15,461 (2024). Radiotherapy sessions: 22,444 (2023) → 24,363 (2024) (Administrative Service, 2024). The increase underscores the hospital's growing role in cancer care while also reflecting the broader societal demand for specialized oncology services.

**Outpatient Services:** In 2024, there were 157,926 outpatient visits at regular clinics, with additional expansion of afternoon clinics offering new specialties and increasing patient coverage (Administrative Service, 2012).

**Human Resources:** The hospital employs approximately 2,500 staff members, including medical, nursing, and administrative personnel, supplemented by temporary and contractual staff. Despite this, there are persistent shortages in nurses and specialized physicians, often addressed through temporary measures such as transfers or OAED programs (Annual Report of Activities, 2024). Staffing remains one of the most pressing issues affecting service quality and directly tied to public policy on NHS recruitment (Polyzos, 2012).

**Financial Management:** The 2024 budget amounted to €93,887,318.21, of which: €81,018,202.21 covered expenses and salaries from own resources; €12,869,116.00 was allocated to pharmaceuticals, mainly supplied by EKAPY (Financial Service, 2024). Pharmaceutical expenditure remains a central challenge, particularly due to rising demand for oncology drugs and specialized therapies. The hospital also spends €10.3 million annually on salaries for temporary and contract staff. Despite rising costs, budget execution remained high, confirming sound financial management (Financial Service, 2024).

**New Services and Innovations:** In 2024, the hospital inaugurated the first ICU-Stroke unit in the NHS, certified by the European Stroke Organization (Financial Service, 2024). The establishment of afternoon surgeries boosted operations by 20%, significantly reducing waiting lists. Expansion of the hemodynamic laboratory and the transcatheter aortic valve implantation (TAVI) center enhanced the hospital's role as a national reference hub (Kaplan & Poter, 2011).

**Overall Assessment:** The hospital presents a profile of high performance and increasing workload. Despite staff shortages and financial constraints, "Attikon" has managed to maintain high bed occupancy, improve productivity, deliver specialized treatments, and remain financially viable. Nevertheless, the continuous expansion of services without proportional reinforcement of resources and personnel raises sustainability concerns, which will be further analyzed in the following sections.

These findings indicate that the continuous increase in surgical and oncological activity reflects both growing population needs and the hospital's expanding national role. However, the mismatch between workload growth and staffing policies suggests a structural policy failure in aligning hospital missions with human resource planning.

## 7. Strengths and Achievements

The assessment of the strengths of the University General Hospital "Attikon" is essential for understanding its role within the Greek NHS. Despite the difficulties, the hospital possesses several comparative advantages that make it a healthcare provider of strategic importance. Academic and Research Character: As a university hospital, "Attikon" is directly affiliated with the Medical School of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA). This makes it a training hub for students and young doctors, strengthening the connection between theory and practice (Polyzos, 2012).

At the same time, the hospital participates in research programs and clinical trials, thus contributing to scientific innovation and the advancement of knowledge.

**High Specialization and Unique Infrastructure:** The hospital hosts unique clinics in the 2nd Health Region, such as vascular surgery, neurosurgery, and cardiac surgery (Financial Service, 2024). This renders it a reference center for complex high-cost procedures. The existence of such infrastructure elevates "Attikon" not only nationally but also as a partner in international collaborations. Resilience in Crises: The hospital played a pivotal role during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it expanded its ICU capacity and strengthened the system's preparedness (Annual Report of Activities, 2024). This experience highlighted its ability to adapt under pressure, a critical asset for public health policy (WHO, 2020).

**Social Role:** Through its Social Service, the hospital supports vulnerable groups, including uninsured patients, refugees, and socially marginalized populations. Collaborations with NGOs and social actors ensure that medical care is complemented by broader psychosocial support (Annual Report of Activities, 2024).

**Productivity Improvements:** The implementation of afternoon surgeries and the establishment of the Stroke ICU led to a 20% increase in surgical activity and broader access to specialized services (Administrative Service, 2024). These initiatives prove the hospital's capacity to leverage existing infrastructure and optimize service provision.

These findings indicate that the continuous increase in surgical and oncological activity reflects both growing populations needs and the hospital's expanding national role. However, the mismatch between workload growth and staffing policies suggests a structural policy failure in aligning hospital missions with human resource planning.

## 8. Problems and Challenges

Despite its achievements, the University General Hospital "Attikon" faces significant challenges linked both to the wider framework of the NHS and to its own organizational specificities. **Underfunding and Financial Difficulties:** Underfunding remains the most critical issue. In 2024, outstanding obligations to suppliers reached €96.8 million (Annual Report of Activities, 2024). Despite increased budget allocations and relatively efficient management, payment delays undermine the hospital's credibility, create tensions with suppliers, and risk shortages in essential medical materials (Financial Service, 2024). Pharmaceutical expenditures are disproportionately high due to the large volume of oncology treatments. Heavy reliance on clawback and rebate mechanisms creates financial instability, as the burden is shifted to pharmaceutical companies, often leading to disputes and potential shortages (Polyzos, 2012).

**Staff Shortages:** The hospital suffers from shortages in critical specialties, particularly in nursing staff but also in specialized physicians. Despite employing approximately 2,500 staff, the actual needs are significantly higher, especially given the nationwide patient inflow (Administrative Service, 2024). These shortages lead to overwork, burnout, and reduced quality of care. Furthermore, the migration of young doctors and nurses abroad (brain drain) deprives the hospital of valuable human resources (OECD, 2021).

**Overload and Waiting Lists:** "Attikon" functions as a national referral hospital, attracting patients from across Greece. This results in emergency department congestion, overcrowded wards, and long waiting lists for surgeries and specialized treatments (Annual Report of Activities, 2024). Although afternoon surgeries have partially alleviated the problem, waiting times remain significant, requiring structural solutions.

**Cost of Specialized Services:** The hospital's high specialization entails substantial costs. For example: Vascular surgeries: €20,000–30,000; Neurosurgical operations: €16,000–25,000 (Financial Service, 2023). These costs are not fully covered by state funding, leading to deficits and delayed investments in new equipment.

**Administrative and Organizational Barriers:** Bureaucracy and the lack of modern information systems hinder efficient planning (Dikaios et al., 2019). Frequent changes in health policy priorities by the Ministry of Health create uncertainty, preventing the implementation of long-term strategies. Additionally, the

incomplete application of management by objectives and performance evaluation systems restricts efficiency, contrasting with international hospitals that adopt modern management tools.

These findings indicate that the continuous increase in surgical and oncological activity reflects both growing population needs and the hospital's expanding national role. However, the mismatch between workload growth and staffing policies suggests a structural policy failure in aligning hospital missions with human resource planning.

## 9. Perspectives and Future Directions

The future trajectory of the University General Hospital "Attikon" is closely tied to developments in public health policy and the strategic decisions that will be made in the coming years. Its prospects can be structured around three key pillars: digital innovation, sustainable financing, and strengthening human resources.

**Digital Health and Innovation:** The digital transformation of healthcare services is a strategic goal at both European and national levels. "Attikon" has the potential to pioneer this process by fully implementing the Electronic Health Record (EHR), utilizing big data for clinical indicator analysis, and expanding telemedicine services (World Health Organization, 2020). Investment in information systems will allow better patient monitoring, error reduction, and improved efficiency. Moreover, enhancing medical research and innovation—through international collaborations and clinical studies—can establish "Attikon" as a reference center in Southeastern Europe.

**Sustainable Financing and Economic Stability:** To ensure long-term sustainability, reforms in hospital financing are necessary, including: increasing public investments in health (OECD, 2021); improving reimbursement mechanisms through Diagnosis Related Groups (DRGs), ensuring hospitals are compensated according to actual treatment costs; developing Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) for upgrading infrastructure and equipment; and rationalizing pharmaceutical expenditures through centralized procurement and more effective health technology assessment (HTA). Additional measures, such as expanding day clinics and afternoon surgeries, could further increase revenues and reduce operating costs (Stuckler, 2009).

**Human Resources and Education:** The strengthening of hospital personnel is vital for reducing system overload. This may include recruitment programs to attract new doctors and nurses; incentives to retain healthcare professionals in Greece and reduce brain drain (Polyzos, 2012); continuous training in emerging technologies and clinical practices; and establishment of specialized postgraduate programs in

collaboration with NKUA. Improving the working environment and implementing performance evaluation systems (Dikaïos et al., 2019) would enhance both quality of care and employee satisfaction.

**Strategic Development and Role within the NHS:** “Attikon” has the potential to become a model university hospital for Greece. This requires upgrading infrastructure and expanding bed capacity; developing specialized centers (e.g., stroke units, oncology hubs); strengthening international presence through participation in research networks; and applying quality management practices to ensure continuous improvement in patient safety and service delivery. A long-term strategy must integrate education, clinical practice, and research while ensuring sustainability and social responsiveness.

These findings indicate that the continuous increase in surgical and oncological activity reflects both growing population needs and the hospital’s expanding national role. However, the mismatch between workload growth and staffing policies suggests a structural policy failure in aligning hospital missions with human resource planning.

## **10. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **10.1 Answers to the Research Questions**

**RQ1: How do national public health policies shape the operational and financial functioning of the University General Hospital “ATTIKON”?**

The case study demonstrates that national public health policies exert a decisive influence on the operational and financial functioning of “ATTIKON” through centralized governance, standardized financing mechanisms, and rigid human resource regulations. Budget ceilings, uniform reimbursement systems, centralized procurement procedures, and delays in recruitment directly affect the hospital’s ability to align resources with its expanding and highly specialized workload. While these policies enhance fiscal oversight and formal equity, they limit managerial autonomy and contribute to persistent financial pressure. As a result, “ATTIKON” operates at high levels of productivity, but under conditions of structural strain that reflect a mismatch between policy design and hospital mission.

**RQ2: What are the main strengths and performance outcomes of “ATTIKON” as a tertiary and academic hospital within the Greek NHS?**

The analysis highlights that “ATTIKON” exhibits strong performance outcomes in terms of clinical activity, specialization, and service expansion. Its close integration with the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens supports medical education, research, and innovation, reinforcing its role as a national referral center for complex cases, particularly in oncology and advanced surgical fields. Organizational initiatives, such as afternoon surgeries and the establishment of certified specialized units,

have increased productivity and improved access to care. These strengths position “ATTIKON” as a critical institutional pillar of the Greek NHS, contributing not only to service provision but also to system resilience and knowledge production.

**RQ3: What structural challenges emerge from the interaction between public policy constraints and hospital-level realities?**

The findings indicate that the challenges faced by “ATTIKON” are predominantly structural and policy-driven rather than managerial. Chronic underfunding, persistent workforce shortages, and the absence of differentiated financing for high-complexity and academic hospitals generate cumulative operational pressures. Centralized governance and administrative rigidity restrict long-term strategic planning, while the concentration of national demand in a limited number of tertiary hospitals leads to systemic overload. These challenges reveal a structural misalignment between public policy instruments and the actual service, cost, and staffing requirements of large university hospitals.

**RQ4: What future directions and policy-relevant strategies can enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of university hospitals in Greece?**

The study identifies the need for coordinated policy and organizational strategies to enhance sustainability. At policy level, differentiated financing models that reflect case-mix complexity and academic missions are essential, alongside coherent long-term workforce planning and targeted retention incentives. At hospital level, continued investment in digital health systems, data-driven management, and specialized clinical units can further improve efficiency and quality of care. Strengthening the role of university hospitals as innovation and training hubs within an integrated national health strategy would enable institutions such as “ATTIKON” to fulfill their dual clinical and academic roles more effectively.

## **10.2 Implications**

### **Policy implications**

The case of “ATTIKON” demonstrates the need for performance-adjusted hospital financing models that account for service complexity, specialization, and academic missions. Long-term workforce planning, differentiated reimbursement mechanisms, and targeted policy support for university hospitals as innovation hubs are critical to ensuring sustainability and system resilience.

### **Managerial implications**

Hospital administrations can leverage organizational innovations—such as extended operating hours, specialized units, and data-driven performance monitoring—to improve efficiency and access to care, even under fiscal constraints. However, the effectiveness of such managerial initiatives depends on supportive policy frameworks that address staffing and financing limitations.

### **Academic implications**

This study contributes empirical evidence from a crisis-affected health system, enriching the literature on public university hospitals and policy implementation at institutional level. It provides a basis for comparative research across Southern European health systems and supports theory-building on the interaction between public policy and hospital governance.

### **Social implications**

Strengthening large public hospitals such as “ATTIKON” has direct implications for equity of access, quality of care, and public trust in the National Health System. By sustaining their capacity to deliver specialized and inclusive healthcare, university hospitals play a crucial role in social cohesion and the protection of population health.

### **Additional Contribution and Study Limitations**

#### **Contribution of the study**

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by providing a policy-oriented qualitative case analysis of a large university hospital operating within a centralized and fiscally constrained health system. By explicitly linking public health policy instruments with hospital-level organization, performance, and strategic development, the paper advances understanding of how national policy priorities are translated into institutional outcomes. The case of the University General Hospital “ATTIKON” offers analytically transferable insights into the functioning and challenges of tertiary and academic hospitals in crisis-affected and resource-constrained health systems, particularly in Southern Europe.

#### **Limitations and directions for future research**

As a single-case study, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization. Nevertheless, the analytical insights generated are relevant for comparable public and university hospitals operating under similar policy and governance constraints. Future research could adopt comparative case study designs across multiple university hospitals or incorporate longitudinal data to further examine the dynamics of policy implementation, performance, and sustainability within national health systems.

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