

LOCAL STRUCTURES AND SOCIAL POLICIES: DESIGN AND USE OF SERVICES IN THE CASE OF A TYPICAL URBAN GREEK MUNICIPALITY

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Abstract

Local Authorities constitute the statutory expression of the local state. Amongst the policies they implement, social interventions are of particular importance, as they aim at the welfare and development of local society. The aim of this study is to examine the restrictions of social interventions carried out by Local Authorities, as dictated by central social policy. In relation to the study of the Greek institutional framework in force, those factors are examined which bring about the successful provision of social services by the local state.

According to a model of logistic regression that interprets the factors of satisfaction among those benefiting from the social services in the Municipality of Keratsini Attica, it was discovered that the problems in planning local social actions are similar to those in central systems.

Keywords: Local Authority, Local Structures, Social Policies

1. INTRODUCTION

The problems regarding the design of the central systems of social policy focus around the axes of the redistribution of income and opportunities, of ensuring social cohesion and of protection from social exclusion (Htouris, 1999).

Existing social policy and its effectiveness constitutes an indicator of social prosperity, sustainable development and quality of life. The basis of this study rests on the evidence that the factors contributing to social development can be approached and dealt with in a more ideal and appropriate manner at a local level.

Local Authorities, as statutory units of the decentralized administration of the state and being in closer contact with the citizen, implement social policy at a local level. Focusing on this, the working hypotheses ensued.

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The aim therefore of this study is to examine the framework of the role of Local Authorities in the implementation of social policy, how that is depicted in relation to the central systems and which factors must be taken into account during the planning of actions in order for them to be successful.

Through the results of research carried out among users of social services in a typical Municipality in an urban Greek area (Municipality of Keratsini, Prefecture of Attica), a model of logistic regression is presented as part of an attempt to evaluate the factors affecting citizens' satisfaction. The results arising are in relation to the Greek institutional framework in force and the widely accepted principals in the design of social policy.

2. SOCIAL POLICY: CENTRAL ISSUE OR LOCAL INITIATIVE?

The local state emerged as the most significant level of implementing social policies during the period of development of the Welfare State¹. This provided fertile ground for the promotion of various theoretical trends that analyze the relations between the central and local levels and more specifically the role of local institutions in the implementation of social policies.

Among those trends that stand out, attention is drawn to the institutional approaches which claim that the local level ensures the most effective provision of social services, as local institutions are in a position of having more specific knowledge of local conditions. They therefore incorporate the participation of the citizens in decision-making and promote democratic values (Stewart, 1986; Rhodes, 1987). Contrary to these views, neo-liberal approaches refer to cuts in social benefits due to unavoidable bureaucracy and selective service and propose their partial privatization to best satisfy citizens' social needs (Adam Smith Institute, 1983). The pluralistic approach constitutes the trend of opinions, according to which the local level enjoys relative autonomy within the framework of a centrally designed social system, assisted by non-institutional social bodies and atypical networks (Saunders, 1984).

However, the afore-mentioned theoretical trends point to the consideration of the local level as a significant field in which to implement social policies. Within this framework, it would be feasible to mark out the unified role of the local authorities in social systems, regardless of the way in which the relationship between the central and local state is expressed.

¹ The term «Welfare State» refers to state intervention in the social sector. Its main feature is its expanded social function and the undertaking of many actions for the social protection of its citizens and the achievement of their prosperity. The golden age of the expansion of the welfare state began post-war and continued up to the end of the 60's. The crisis took place at the end of the 60's, reached its peak mainly during the economic crisis of 1973 and continued up to the middle of the 80's.

The redistributive function, as the fundamental characteristic of social policy, cannot be autonomously expressed by the local state. Redistribution cannot be restricted within the boundaries of each community, thus unsettling national parity and very likely causing the movement of citizens within the boundaries of the same country (Tatsos, 2001)². On the other hand though, local social issues and the related interventions by local authorities do not emerge independently of the general economic and social framework. Yet, specific solutions may be applied locally, but without them taking on a redistributive character, thus threatening wider cohesion, that is the same structural characteristic of social policy (Psychopedis, 1998).

Local authorities' contribution to safeguarding social cohesion and avoiding social exclusion is considered to be of major importance (Pitts and Hope, 1997). The basic parameter for this relationship is the natural ability of the local state to understand and react much more directly than the corresponding mechanisms of the central state and the main means for this is undertaking local initiatives (Papakonstantinidis, 2002). However, the issue of local initiatives lies on the one hand to a great extent within the framework of the intervention of central mechanisms in the process and on the other hand, in the observation of the limits of central planning, so as to maintain the unity and equality of the system. At once, confronting social problems clearly takes on greater flexibility at a local level. In conclusion, local authority's basic role can be pinpointed in the ideal adaptation of central policies at a local level, based on conditions prevailing in each area, on the assumption that reliable and equal-ranking communication mechanisms with residents are in operation.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES AT A LOCAL LEVEL

The structure and organization of personal social services is directly linked to the decentralization of social policy and the expansion of the local authorities' social functions. The nature of these services plants their local dimension within an organized framework of central planning (Stathopoulos, 1999).

The range of services that can be locally developed is exceptionally wide. Essentially, local authority has the ability to operate on two levels, according to local needs and initiatives undertaken. The first includes the provision of primary care services (open care services and preventive measures for the elderly and vulnerable groups). The second level concerns meeting needs of a personal nature

2 As regards this issue, unanimity is not absolute. Some claim that the redistribution of income cannot be the exclusive responsibility of Central Administration as long as the economic activity of Local Government constitutes a significant part of the overall economic activity of the State (Bös, 1973). Others maintain that redistribution is a local state commodity (Pauly, 1973).

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(reintegration, training programmes, etc). These two levels are located respectively in the two main functions of the central social policy systems (Hill, 2000).

In accordance with established practices, the criteria acknowledged as significant in the provision of personal services at a local level are: (a) the development of access, which refers to the ability to use, access and receive information, (b) the integration – coordination of services, through the operation of multicentres and service networks to avoid fragmented response, and (c) control and accountability for the proper functioning of services and for ensuring the active participation of citizens (Greek Society for Local Development and Local Government [E.E.T.A.A.], 1995).

4. GREEK INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND LOCAL SOCIAL POLICY

The development of local social policies in Greece is indissolubly linked with the strengthening of the institution of local government. Only in 1975 was the institution of primary self-government constitutionally established, a fact which partially justifies the fact that related benefits are still at an early stage. Consequently, the implementation of social policy by Local Authorities is regulated by joint legislation. However, beyond the particular legislative framework, the Greek state has from 1976 incorporated into its development plan the consolidation of the institution, by means of local development programmes (Delitheou, 2007).

The recent Municipal and Community Code (Law 3463/2006) lays down the existing institutional framework and provides for greater responsibilities in the sector of social policy for primary Local Authorities. Apart from the operation of «traditional structures» for the care of babies, infants and the elderly, more initiatives are being undertaken through planning and programme implementation for the care and support of all vulnerable persons and groups, through the creation of local social support networks and participation in absorbing the local workforce (Karanastasis, 2006).

The Local Authorities implement their social policy either by forming independent legal entities, or by providing for corresponding Divisions and services in the same organizational unit. In 2006, 46.2% of all Local Authority business divisions were active in the sector of health and welfare and provided personal social services (Delitheou, 2006).

Yet, ensuring that Local Authorities carry out practical social policy presupposes a great number of conditions concerning issues of programming, organization, creation of infrastructure, staffing and first and foremost financial backing.

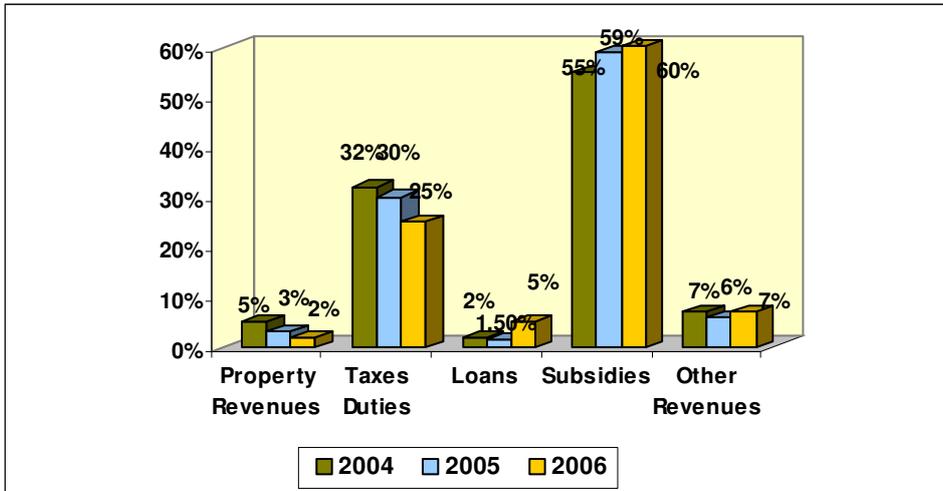


FIGURE 1 - STRUCTURE OF INCOME OF GREEK LOCAL AUTHORITIES FOR THE PERIOD 2004-2006
Source: KEDKE(Central Union of Greek Municipalities & Communities)

The afore-mentioned conditions have up to now been ensured by external funding from the central state and the European Union. More specifically, as seen in chart 1, in 2006 subsidies accounted for 60% of the income of Greek Local Authorities, a fact which increases dependence on overlying levels of social policy implementation.

5. THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY LOCAL AUTHORITY

The main axis for the examination and assessment of social policy carried out by local authority is the impact that social benefits have on citizens. With the aim of measuring the satisfaction of townspeople making use of social services, research was carried out in the Municipality of Keratsini, Attica. According to the population and social data accumulated on the basis of information acquired in the two last censuses carried out by the National Statistical Service of Greece (ESYE) (2008), this particular municipality represents an average specimen of a typical tertiary-type urban Municipality.

5.1. Methodological approach

The research was carried out within the social structures of the Municipality of Keratsini and was completed in two months (January – March 2009). The basic tools used were the anonymous questionnaires filled in by service users and factors under investigation concerned the variables referring to the means of meeting their needs and their level of satisfaction.

The size of random sampling was set at 3% of the total and the most representative distribution per service was aimed at, yet without at the same time the origins being opposite in nature. The annual number of users amounts to 6,115 persons³. All in all a total of 207 questionnaires were collected.

Analysis of the results was carried out by evaluating an example of two-valued logistic regression to determine the townspeople's' «Overall Level of Satisfaction» with the social services.

5.2. Facts determining citizens' satisfaction from the use of municipal social services

Examination is made of the way in which the variable «Overall Level of Satisfaction» is interpreted by the townspeople's satisfaction with the Impartiality shown in handling their issues, the Procedures for Integration into corresponding services and the Total Service Time.

The choice of explanatory variables was based on the structural elements that make up the provision of social-type services. The integration-registration procedures reflect accessibility to them, impartiality lies in the principles of equality in provision and avoiding social exclusion, while the total service time refers to individualized intervention required by personal social services.

The afore-mentioned variables were converted into dichotomous variables (0/1), as the questions were of fivefold gradation. The pseudo-variables resulting took the value 0 in the event of a low level of satisfaction and the value 1 in the event of a high level of satisfaction. The following chart depicts the statistical measures and the coefficients of logistic regression.

TABLE 1 - LOGISTIC REGRESSION WITH DEPENDENT VARIABLE BEING THE OVERALL LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

Variables	Coefficients	Odds ratio
Objectivity	2,161 (.001)***	8,682
Registration	1,758 (.015)**	5,799
Total time service	2,191 (.052)*	8,947
Constant	-5,919 (.000)***	.003
-Log likelihood	94,058	
Hosmer-Lemeshow	.841	
Nagelkerke R ²	.624	

The P-value is included in brackets. ***,** and* indicate statistical significance at 1%, 5% and 10% respectively.

According to evaluation measures, this particular example allows for the ascertainment of the correct adaptation of the facts. Consequently the regression equation will be:

³ The rendering of the total refers exclusively to the annual number of users and not to the total number of those benefiting from the Municipality's social policy, which probably also includes users' families, the student community, etc.

$$\text{Satisfaction Level } \ln[P(A)/P(A')] = -5,919 + 2,161 * \text{Objectivity} + 1,758 * \text{Registration} + 2,191 * \text{Total time Service}$$

where A= High Level of Satisfaction and A'= Low Level of Satisfaction

According to the results, the positive signs of the coefficients show the positive effect of the explanatory variables on the independent. More specifically, it emerges that the townspeople assessed to be highly satisfied with the impartiality of social services, have an increased probability of having a high overall level of satisfaction. Service users who are very satisfied with integration procedures also have an increased probability of being highly satisfied overall. Those very satisfied with total service time show an increased probability of also having a high overall level of satisfaction.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions resulting from the investigation into the framework of Local Authorities' role in implementing social policy concern the two aspects of their participation in social systems.

On the one hand, local government agencies can undertake social actions according to local needs in each case, and on the other hand, the actions in question result from planning by the central administrative system.

Thus, in order for local government's important role to produce successful results and to essentially prove itself effective, it must incorporate the following interactive procedure. It must supply the central system with good practices that result from local action initiatives, with respect for greater social cohesion, and in turn be supplied by the system with a suitable institutional and legislative framework, with flexible and strategic guidelines, within a framework of cooperation and mutual complementation.

However Greek Local Authorities are way behind on an operational level. Consequently, while the extended institutional framework of social function allows for undertaking social initiatives and actions, the implementation phase reveals financial barriers. In this light, the coherence of actions is indeed ensured by national and community policies, but this reduces the relationship to one of dependence. The issue thus arises of programming and of the appropriate investment activities to find own resources.

In planning local social interventions, as revealed by the example of logistic regression in the case of the Municipality of Keratsini in Attica, the «ingredients» that leave the townspeople satisfied are similar to the problems in forming social policy by the central systems. The potential for satisfying citizens, through which in the end successful social actions are judged, is provided by means of equal treatment

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(impartiality), ease of access (integration procedures) and by means of highlighting the uniqueness of each social problem with individualized intervention (total service time).

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