

Social Cohesion and Development

Vol 11, No 2 (2016)



Social Cohesion and Development
Biannual Scientific Review, Autumn 2016, volume 11, issue 2

Κοινωνική Συνοχή και Ανάπτυξη

22 Εξαμηνια Εποτιμονική Επιθεώρηση, Φθινόπωρο 2016, τόμος 11ος, τεύχος 2

ARTICLES Άρθρα

Maria Botsari and Stavros Zografakis, Labor Market Trends in Greece over the Crisis Period, 2009-2014

Varvara Lalioti, Guaranteed Minimum Income 'à la Grecque': The Chronicle of a Long-Awaited Scheme

Christoforos Skamnakis, Local Child Care Policies: A Reformulation of the Structural Deficiencies of Social Protection.

Panagiota Bathis, NGOs as Learning Organizations: Investigating the Means and the Potential

RESEARCH Έρευνα

Αντώνης Κώστας, Η Σημασία και Ο Ρόλος των Οργανώσεων της Κοινωνικής Οικονομίας και των Κοινωνικών Συνεταιριστικών Επιχειρήσεων στην Ελλάδα. Μια Μελέτη Περιπτώσεων στην Περιφερειακή Ενότητα Καβάλας

BOOK REVIEWS Βιβλιογραφίες

Charalampios Economou, Barriers and Facilitating Factors in Access to Health Services in Greece, (S. Pantazopoulos), Σήμερος Σένα, Η Απομάνωση μιας Συλλογής Αυτοανάτης: Οι Οικονομικές Διαθέσεις και Πρακτικές των «Φρεσούμενων» Ανέργων του Προγράμματος ΤοπΕΚΟ Ζακύνθου, (Α. Πύργος)



Local child care policies: A reformulation of the structural deficiencies of social protection

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doi: [10.12681/scad.14132](https://doi.org/10.12681/scad.14132)

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To cite this article:

Skamnakis, C. (2017). Local child care policies: A reformulation of the structural deficiencies of social protection. *Social Cohesion and Development*, 11(2), 139-153. <https://doi.org/10.12681/scad.14132>

Local Child Care Policies: A Reformulation of the Structural Deficiencies of Social Protection

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Τοπικές Πολιτικές Φροντίδας Παιδιού, η Αναδιατύπωση Θεμελιωδών Αδυναμιών της Κοινωνικής Προστασίας

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ABSTRACT

For years, care has been at the fore of social policy among local government authorities in Greece. In a context of budgetary constraints and protracted austerity policy, both of which lead to a retrenchment in social protection, the contribution of local government authorities has become essential. Our study engages with the present-day context, and with the features, objectives and prospects for the dynamic role of local government authorities in preschool care. We highlight those features that shape the new environment, while accounting for the demand and supply of the relevant services, the funding of the facilities, and finally, their contribution to social protection, as the latter proliferates at the local level.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η φροντίδα αποτελεί για σειρά ετών την αιχμή της κοινωνικής πολιτικής των ΟΤΑ στην Ελλάδα. Σε πλαίσιο δημοσιονομικής στενότητας και εκτεταμένων πολιτικών λιτότητας που απολήγουν στη συρρίκνωση της κοινωνικής προστασίας, η συμβολή των ΟΤΑ έχει καταστεί κεντρική. Η έρευνά μας αναλύει την υφιστάμενη κατάσταση, τα χαρακτηριστικά, τις στοχεύσεις και τις προοπτικές του εξελισσόμενου ρόλου των ΟΤΑ, αναφορικά με τη φροντίδα παιδιών προσχολικής ηλικίας. Αναδεικνύουμε τα στοιχεία εκείνα που διαμορφώνουν το νέο περιβάλλον λαμβάνοντας υπόψη δεδομένα της ζήτησης αλλά και την προσφοράς των σχετικών υπηρεσιών. Τη χρηματοδότηση των δομών και τελικά τη συμβολή τους στο παράδειγμα κοινωνικής προστασίας που αναπτύσσεται στο τοπικό επίπεδο.

KEY WORDS: Social policy at local level, crisis, social services, childcare

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ-ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ: Κοινωνική πολιτική στο τοπικό επίπεδο, κρίση, κοινωνικές υπηρεσίες, φροντίδα προσχολικής ηλικίας

1. Introduction

The development of care services was the starting point and, for several years, also the heart of municipal social policy. Childcare is a key preoccupation not only for the policies that local government agencies initiate and execute, but also for the broader system of social protection.

Childcare highlights some of the key views related entire structure of social protection; It is present in every system, and as such reflects its central goals and character.

Notably, it assumes a central role in the context of *social investment* policies. It is a critical part of the mechanisms used to contain the reproduction of existing social inequalities (Morel et al. 2012). That is to say, it is a sub-division of the policies combating the reproduction of inequality, since those policies support the development of knowledge and skills for the benefit of the entire population, and even more so for members of vulnerable social groups. In other words, it provides a foundation for open and unhindered access to education of a high standard, to knowledge and skills for these groups. In this manner, the shortcomings of education, which are tied to the economic and social position of the family, are not allowed to spill over to the next generations. Furthermore, though education *per se* is not at the fore of the discussion, a new approach develops that seeks to confront *new social needs*. From this particular perspective, the development of care structures for preschoolers is intended to support the parents' right to work, women in particular. In other words, it strives to address care needs during the working hours (Esping-Andersen, 1999). In addition, the development of local social protection facilities is supported by the broadened role local of government agencies. Interventions at the municipal level proliferate in a context of decentralization of social protection (Andreoti, 2012, Del Pino, 2015).

The aim of this paper is to outline and analyze the role of local government authorities in care for preschoolers in today's recession-ridden Greece. We establish that the provision of such services increases dramatically during the Greek crisis years; however, this development is not sufficient to address the ever-increasing demand. This intervention is still residual, while the role of local government authorities is in essence peripheral, and the future of the services in question is dependent upon uncertain sources of funding, giving rise to questions about its future.

We analyze the expanding context of social protection in local government authorities, and attribute this growth to a broader tendency of re-scaling of social protection. Simultaneously, we highlight the frail foundation on which the intervention of local government is executed. In addition, in combining quantitative data from different sources for the 2008-2015 period, we shed light on the impact of the crisis on the demand for services, but also on the simultaneous and remarkable growth in this specific public provision. In combining theoretical responses and quantitative data, we manage to shed light on a fundamental aspect of local interventions at the level of social protection, and we have delimited the role that corresponds to local government authorities in Greece today.

2. The Dual Approach to Childcare and the Re-scaling of Social Policy

The general goals of the dominant paradigm of social policy are also inscribed in the mechanisms of care (Daly and Lewis, 2000). Greece presents a significant under-development in social policy, and in relation to Europe the services on offer are residual (Matsagganis, 1999). In particular, in the context of the rapid economic recession in the economy and dramatic fiscal adjustment, the entire spectrum of interventions has diminished and continues, seven years on, to undergo limitations and cuts. Either through a clear limitation of resources, or under the rubric of "rationalization" (OECD, 2013), public spending is reduced. The cuts in social protection per capita are reduced by 72% for 2010, to 60% in 2014 with respect to the corresponding mean

for Eurozone states, according to Eurostat. Meanwhile, the lasting recession has dramatically exacerbated social conditions and the demand for social services.

The development of childcare facilities in local government authorities is supported by two parallel forces that share the same origin. The first concerns the upgrading of the role of local government agencies. The second relates to the re-scaling of social policy.

With respect to the first, through a series of changes in the operation of the state and the long-term commitment to decentralize their operation, local government authorities assume an ever-growing role in the spatial field of their remit. Local government authorities in particular assume the implementation of policies that are designed centrally, seeking to specialize local needs. Less frequently, they design and implement locally-scaled interventions, usually in areas of minor importance (Kazepov, 2010).

The process of decentralization has made for a slow but steady reform for the strengthening of local government agencies. Without the absence of step backs, the core policy of consecutive Greek governments has been to upgrade local government agencies with a wide array of new powers. Despite the waves of reforms –three from the 1980s to the present day– the system remains centralized, the result being that both the control of the design, as well as resources, is preserved in the central mechanisms (Hlepas and Getimis, 2011). Despite the strengthening and the enrichment of local policy, local government agencies remain dependent on the center, and the decisions of the state and its central mechanisms (Dexia-CERM, 2012).

Especially in the Greek case, the local government map changes and the totality of the institutions that constitute local government and its functions are codified in a new regulatory framework¹. The new reality that is ushered in transforms local government authorities into key agents in the implementation of policy in the spatial context of their remit, while embodying needs that emerge from broader economic and social conditions (Hlepas, 2011).

With respect to the second in particular, the *Kallikratis Plan* continues with the endeavour to strengthen local authority bodies, while creating the necessary framework for municipalities to play an important role in the field of social protection, though as we speak municipal policies are still anemic (Chardas and Skamnakis, 2015). More specifically, the content of social protection policy, local social policy, is promoted mostly as a response to the challenge posed by an increasing ‘singling out’ of interventions, the personification of services and provisions, as well as the reinforcement of practices seeking to mobilize (Heidenreich and Rice, 2016). Gradually, a portion of these interventions is implemented by local government agencies, while attempting to cater to special needs as these are found at the local level, and as these assume features that may be spatially identified (Garcia, 2006). The expansion of social policy among Greek local government authorities is determined by a context that presents a *dual weakness*: we have a centralized system of organization of the state and the lack of space for local autonomy on the one hand, and the underdevelopment of social protection policy in the country on the other (Skamnakis and Pantazopoulos, 2015). That weakness is ever more burdened by the austerity policies implemented in Greece over the past five years. Indicatively, the budget of local government agencies allocated toward social protection has suffered a severe strain: whereas in 2005 it made up 7% of the total budget of local authorities, in 2015 it is at 4.5% (Interior Ministry, Local Government Authority Finance Division).

More specifically, childcare is a terrain for the proliferation of targeted interventions along two axes that function in tandem and in a complementary fashion. The first axis is that of a broader policy of social investment, as the latter is specialized in the space of education; here

the imperative to remove mechanisms that reproduce inequality is at the core (Esping-Andersen, et al., 2001). The second axis concerns interventions that seek to remedy "*new social needs*", and here all the interventions that address needs borne of contemporary social and economic conditions are addressed, in particular with respect to the means of work and daily needs (Taylor-Gooby, 2004, Bonoli, 2005).

With respect to the first axis, the broader framework of social policy cannot demonstrate significant interventions and mechanisms that combat inequalities and the mode of its reproduction (Petmesidou 1992, Dafermos and Papatheodorou, 2012). In the context of the residual paradigm of social policy in Greece, very little has been done to make education functional as a means of addressing inequality (Mouzelis, 2012), and even less so in the model of social investment. This 'anemic' form of social protection does not succeed in addressing, in a dynamic manner, existing social formation. What is more, it is not oriented toward preventing social inequalities or containing the mechanisms of their reproduction.

In specializing in care and education for preschoolers, its importance is highlighted with respect to the thereafter development of people, especially those who come from groups that face obstacles in accessing satisfactory services (Gregg and Machin, 2000). The ground on which personal and collective prospects of development will evolve is cultivated to a great extent during the first years of the child's education (Waldfogel, 2013). The ensuing inequality is confronted or reproduced to a great extent during the first years of childhood through the educational system and its corresponding structures of care (Bradbury et. Al., 2012).

The degree of success of social investment policies is also determined by parameters in the broader environment. The conditions that the system of social protection shapes, decidedly determine the measure of their success (Heckman, and Lochner, 2000). The policies addressing preschoolers cannot be confined to the infrastructure and their mode of operation. On the contrary, they require a complex spectrum of policies related to and defined by the character and orientation of the social protection system (Esping-Andersen, 2002).

Meanwhile, with respect to the second axis, the care of preschoolers is part of the spectrum of broader adjustments to social policy, with the intention of responding to new social needs. The new conditions in economic and social organization differentiate social needs and create new issues for provisions in social care. They do not lead to the complete reformulation of systems of social protection, despite their adaptation to new facts (Bonoli, 2007, Pfau-Effinger and Geissler, 2005, Gerhard, Trudie and Weckwert, 2005). Provisions and services develop and proliferate in order to respond to needs, in the domain of care in particular. In order to reduce unpaid working time, among women in particular, new facilities are set up under a program titled "Reconciliation of work, family and private life", and are supported by both state and transnational institutions. The greatest support comes from the EU (EIGE, 2015). This axis is part of a more individual approach that makes everyone responsible for their position in the job market and in social stratification in a broader sense (Dawson, 2012. Daguerre and Taylor-Gooby, 2004).

The two axes that lead to the field of care for preschoolers do not necessarily serve the same goals. They emanate from different starting points with respect to the role and operations of the system of social protection. However, they also support the development of structures at least at the first stage of their intervention. The ultimate character that they adopt is judged according to the broader framework in which they are integrated and the objectives of the social protection system that they serve.

3. The Perpetual Growth that Fails to Meet Persistent Needs

The demand for childcare services responds to a long-term need. It is a rooted social need which, like others, is addressed by the Greek social care system in an inadequate manner. This need, in and of itself, does differentiate itself dramatically from a quantitative perspective with regards to the period being studied. The changes that are observed relate to qualitative characteristics that correspond to the recession and its impact on family income. The services that proliferate at the local level, to this day, do not succeed in fully covering the needs, whereas the financial background of their operation poses questions as to their near future.

The data presented below is drawn from the *EU SILC*, as it is published on the *Eurostat* web page. In addition, we should also refer to the data that is published by *EETAA*² which is also a public institution and publishes aggregated data as coordinator of the project titled "Harmonization of Family and Professional Life", of the operational program "Development of Human Resources", from which significant support is drawn in favor of social care structures. Moreover, the data of national accounts are used, and so are the data published by the Europe-wide network *Eurydice*.³

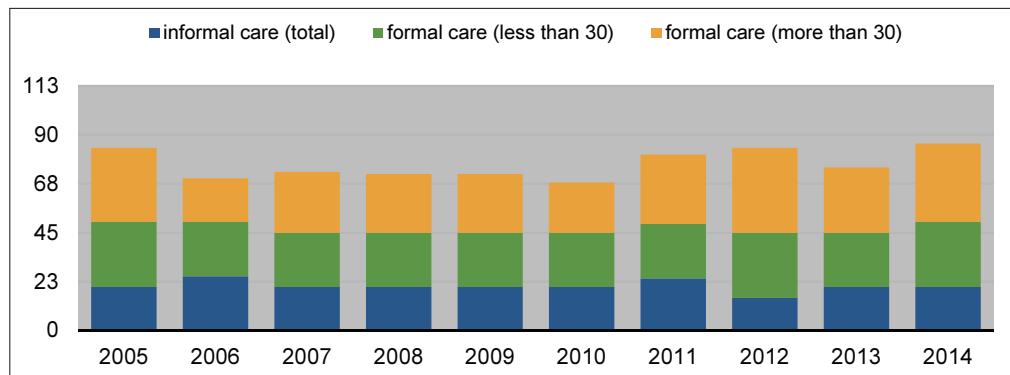
Our goal is to demonstrate the non-elastic character of the needs that the structures of pre-school care are called upon to address. The structures form a network that functions through the responsibility of local authorities. However, the support and operation of this network prove to be dependent upon the state and central mechanisms. Moreover, in the current environment of austerity and restrictive policies, the funding of this system depends upon European Community funds that also have a determining impact on the orientation and broader contribution of this network to social protection.

The quantitative dimension of care elucidates the boundaries and content of the role of local government authorities. It supports the analysis with respect to local action of social protection policies by local government, but also their relationship to broader strategic targets in the country, and more broadly in the European Union. Yet a particular interest stems from the environment shaped by austerity policies and their impact on social policy. Therefore, we initially highlight the features of the need for care and its long-term development. We then describe the breadth of the intervention as the latter develops in the current period. For this reason we discuss the total number of children that these facilities may serve, as well as the resources that support them. Finally, we reach a conclusion with respect to the contribution of local government authorities and the prospects for their function in the near future.

Childcare facilities for preschoolers are within the remit of local government authorities from the previous decade, through the form of public entities (Law no. 2880/01). This is the entirety of services that formerly operated under the administrative and fiscal aegis of central social protection agencies. The above provision is part of a broad policy of de-centralization, that occurs through the allocation of significant infrastructure to local government authorities, so that they may organize their policies in their spatial operational framework and constitute the central axes of intervention at the local level. The transfer of power entails corresponding resources, as laid out in the Charter (article 102,§5), without, however, this being entirely guaranteed every time. This follows on a voluntary transition of facilities (through Law no. 2503/97), whereby the formal process is provided for, whereas the pursuant decisions described the context and the intents of the operation of the facilities.⁴

Initiating from the delimitation of the need for the growth of facilities and services, diagram 1 (below) displays the relative stability of time that households require in order to care for preschoolers. As the study shows for households in Greece, the need follows a stable trajectory that remains uninfluenced by changes in the external environment. Both the formal structures, as well as the informal sector, preserve their share in the distribution of time. It is worth emphasizing here that the stability of this amalgam, given that it determines in a quantitative manner the demand that emerges, is in general terms irrespective of the economic situation of the household or other parameters, irrespective of the economic situation of the household or other parameters relative to the occupation of adults, the decline in income, etc., irrespective to problems that were greatly exacerbated in Greece during the period being studied⁵. From our observation of quantitative data it appears that childcare by service providers outside of the household is a feature of everyday life. In particular, with respect to care provided for by formal institutions, we discern a strong preference that confirms the centrality of the relevant services.

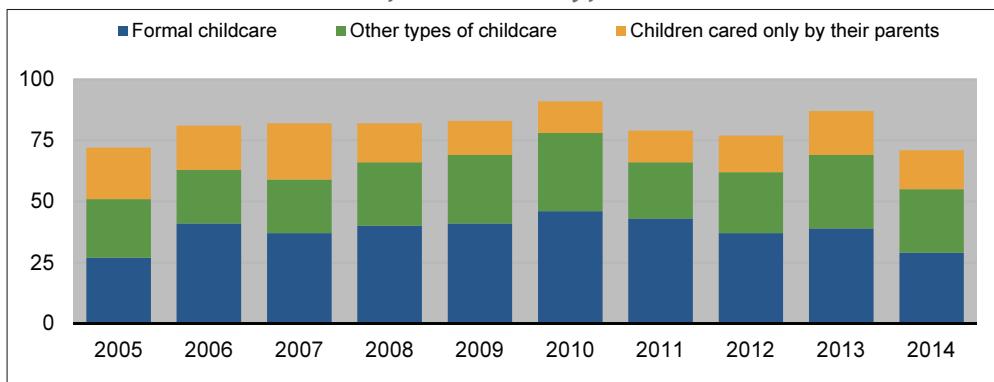
Diagram 1: Percentages of care and the distribution of time



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC, 2016

Households with children are steadily supported by formal institutions, whereas they also accept informal forms of assistance, whether these are offered by the family environment, or by facilities with no formal license to practice. The preference for care within the household by parents is high in comparison to the 19 countries in the EU, but also significantly high with respect to Southern Europe, with which the country shares significant similarities, in particular shortcomings in services provided by the formal sector (Petmesidou & Guillen, 2015).

Diagram 2: Distribution by type of care in Greece and the countries of the European South, Cyprus included



Source: Eurostat

The key features of the need do not greatly diverge during the recent period. As with the study among households, the need for care is addressed through an amalgam of formal and informal mechanisms. That is, the needs for every household remain relative to a standard that is not easily altered and stays relatively unaffected by external factors, such as unemployment, the loss of one's income or precariousness in general. Potential minor shifts in the type of demand are not reflected in the study and so a different approach is required. However, it is important to highlight the stability in the distribution of time and choices that households with preschoolers will make with respect to care. We should note here that other European countries correspondingly present stability in needs for hours of care, but also with respect to the distribution between the different categories of services.

Public childcare services for preschoolers develop in the context of the powers of local government institutions, especially following their assignment to local government authorities through the Kallikratis Plan in 2010. With the exception of certain minor central structures –see for instance the agency for Unemployment Benefit and Allowances, with 25 facilities in total in the country. Reliable aggregated data is not available, as the dynamic aspect of the structures is different every year⁶. The most comprehensive survey of the staff in the facilities is that which took place in the context of the funding of the stations through the ESIF 2010-2015 funding cycle.⁷

Table 1 presents the places being funded by Community resources –and thus provided at no cost– and which are increasing in numbers every year. The growth of facilities that function under the aegis of municipalities, and in which participation is free and granted according to priority for households with two employed persons, following an audit in the means of subsistence. This development demonstrates the clear orientation of social policy towards care and family support.

Meanwhile, it also demonstrates another parameter that is tied to the crisis and its consequences. It is a demand for services without alimony, since demand is, as one may observe, on the rise. The ratio of applications to available places is very close to the unit at the start of the program and is quickly exacerbated (on average by 40%) until 2015. It must be noted here that public facilities lag far behind the population of potential beneficiaries. Even after the growth of the facilities and the increase in places, less than half of potential users may be served; that is, children older than three years of age, until the start of compulsory education (ELSTAT, 2011 census).

Table 1: Development of number of available places/applications

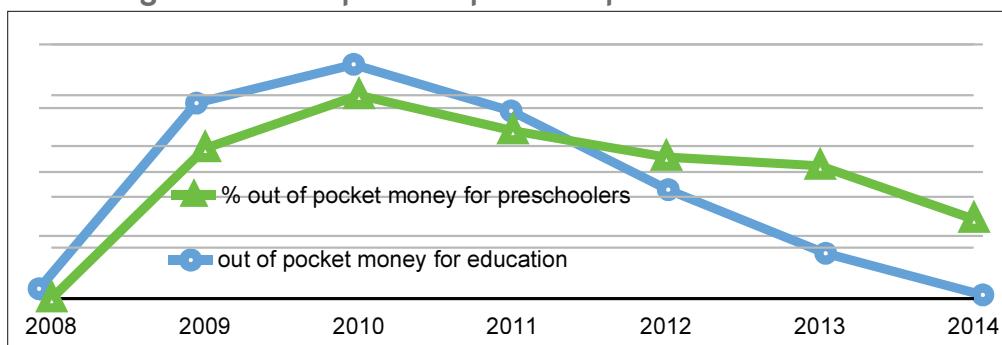
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Availability	26.727	48.360	57.534	68.526	80.341	81.003
Applications	30.846	67.311	96.130	98.253	112.282	121.250
Ratio	1,15	1,39	1,67	1,43	1,39	1,5

Πηγή: EETAA

The public provision does not cover demand and confirms its residual character. The expansion of the program is not enough to address the rapidly growing demand. The correspondence between available places and demand is not unlike what is happening in other EU states, with the exception of the Scandinavian countries, in which despite the broader performance of the social protection system, a rather premature initiation of compulsory education is implemented (EC, 2014:59).

The discrepancy between the services at hand and demand itself is bridged through out-of-pocket expenditure. However, in the current environment of the long-drawn recession and the pressures weighing down on individual income, this element grows in importance. This also happens because private expenditure for education is reduced, as shown in diagram 3. Relative expenditure presents a dramatic and steady increase for five consecutive years, until 2005, a pivotal year (EU SILC). This trend is also replicated with care expenditure. What the following diagram demonstrates is the resilience, and, ultimately, the non-elasticity of childcare expenditure, a reminder that the character of this particular service is multi-dimensional.

Diagram 3: Development in private expenditure on education



Source: EU SILC, 2016

This expense shows the smallest elasticity, confirming the conclusions of [diagrams 1 & 2](#). To an extent, it explains the demand for services with no immediate cost for those users who will turn *en masse* to the facilities of local government authorities. However, as mentioned previously, they are not services of institutional or open character; on the contrary, access is dependent upon specific criteria. More specifically, the service is meant for dual income households (single parent households exempted), while income-related criteria are used to prioritize between applicants.

Social policy at the local level is mostly supported by resources to which local government authorities do not have great opportunities of access and control. Although the regulatory framework explicitly ties powers to resources, there is no possibility of designing and managing local policy, if the latter is autonomous from central policy. Local government institutions do not organize local interventions in a framework of autonomy; on the contrary, their interventions are organized on the basis of central decisions and prescriptions. Correspondingly, resources that are directed toward local government authorities for the operation of social protection facilities are under the control of central services and essentially control the interventions of social protection at the local level (Skamnakis and Pantazopoulos, op.).

The expansion of care for preschoolers reflects the contribution of local government authorities in the organization of mechanisms of social protection at the local level, but also reveals the central directions of social policy in general. During the years of restrictive austerity policies, the total expenditure for education was restricted not only as a percentage of the GDP but also in real numbers. However, expenses for pre-school education do not follow the same trajectory. On the contrary, they are reinforced and confirm the central decision to support the strategy of promoting care for preschoolers (table 2). The orientation of the system is not entirely clear, but, as has been highlighted above, the data on the social care system provides us with a hint as to the choice of childcare, as a means of support for new family needs among dual income households.

During the years of implementation of restrictive policies, the state's expenditures for education are on the decline. Either as a percentage of GDP, or in numbers, the resources towards education are declining. The operation of pre-school education facilities are not, however, subject to cuts that are proportional to the overall cuts in expenditure. This observation is tied on the one hand to what we observed earlier and concerns the non-elasticity of demand for preschoolers. On the other hand, it corroborates the strategy of selecting central mechanisms for the preservation of care as a priority of social policy.

The total level of expenditure for education is at 3,42% of the GDP for 2010 (likewise for 2005) and it is limited to 3,2% in 2013 and drops to 2,8% in 2015, whereas in different approaches and for the decade 2005-2014 we once again observe a mixed image that includes an increase in relative expenses until 2009, when the dramatic decline begins [KANEP/GSEE, 2016:57]. Clearly, the 25% decrease in the GDP within the 2008-2015 period restricts funding further ; it now becomes crucial that resources for the first levels of education are increased (in the years for which we have aggregated data). As observed from the data in [table 2](#), expenditure concerning the mixed category ISCED_0&1⁸ increases both in real numbers, and also as a percentage of total expenditure. It appears that care for preschoolers in public facilities continues to play a central role at a time when restrictive policies leave their imprint on the domain of social protection (Kallinikaki, 2015).

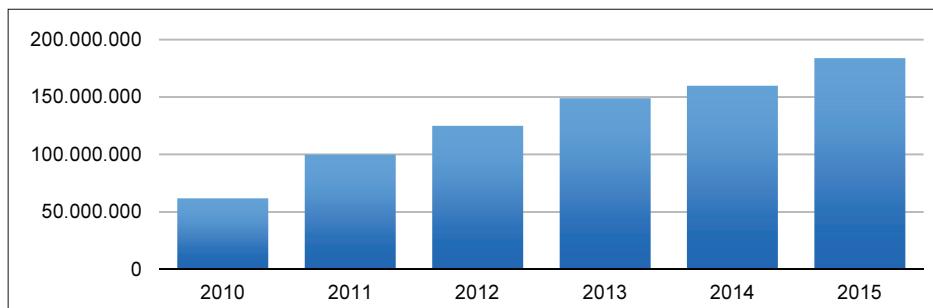
Table 2: Expenses for education in total and in particular for primary and pre-school education

	2013	2014	2015
Educational system expenditure	5.916.112.723	5.710.025.285	5.269.852.453
ISCED_0&1	1.580.173.747	1.614.041.532	1.855.561.084

Source: Eurydice 2016

The strategic choices of the social protection system are reflected in the resources that it directs toward particular fields of intervention. In particular, with respect to the NSIF resources that are directed exclusively toward daycare stations, what is evident is the year-by-year increase until the completion of the program. As diagram 4 shows, the flow of resources increases during the period of reference of the study, suggesting a clear choice to strengthen the operation in question. The resources that support this function aim toward the support of the family and are part of the axis of *integration between professional and family life*. The element that we demonstrate through the diagram is the constant increase of resources, which, in any case demonstrates the great degree of hierarchy in addressing the need in question. Community funding serves the broader strategic targets of the Union, although (at present) their orientation is naturally in relative conformity with national targets and priorities (Sakellaropoulos and Oikonomou, 2006). In conformity with the above realization, it appears that during timeframe that we are studying and despite the implementation of broadened restrictive policies, programs are geared in favor of care facilities.

Diagram 4: National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) funds for the operation of nurseries



Source: Ministry for Development and Competitiveness

The growth of the program takes place during the long period of growth and the restrictive austerity policies that accompany it. The two observations from the development of resources toward the structures of pre-school care are first, that they are supported and reinforced as to their function. Second, the decision to reinforce facilities operating under the aegis of local authority institutions is highlighted.

However, given that the main source of funding originates from the Structural Funds, they emphasize that facilities under the division of the available transnational funding. It reveals the absolute dependency of the system upon its own character. The actions implemented undeniably serve real and urgent needs. The interventions for confronting them must forcibly be, both in terms of the method of implementation, as well as with respect to the content, compatible or even integrated in the directions of the EU, thus potentially overtaking local needs.

In conclusion, the inflexible needs for care, during the long period of recession, feed the demand for public services. The role of local authorities is upgraded since it now hosts the central state intervention in the field. Despite the fact that facilities are increasing in number, they do not meet the demand, and the result is that a significant portion of this demand remains unaddressed, perpetuating the deficient character of the broader system. Even more decisive is the aspect of dependency upon external resources, and the uncertainty that this entails.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the provision of care services for preschoolers is a field whose character is symbolic and substantial vis-à-vis systems of social protection. The aims of the system as a whole determine the content of the particular aspect, which proves critical, as has been shown above. The breadth and the operation of structures of care are features of the intervention and determine the importance of social policy for social formations.

The sub-national parameter is of key importance for the development of care facilities for preschoolers. In the context of policies restricting social protection, the intervention is expanded, leading to an upgrade in the services of the system. Nevertheless, the detailed presentation of basic facts that make up the operation of the system demonstrated the persistently residual character of this operation.

The particular need for childcare presents a long-term stability, and so do household preferences regarding the type of provider. The economic crisis has a manifold impact on the system of social protection. One such impact is an increased demand for social provisions. The reaction (paradoxical, given the circumstances) through the rapid expansion of the intervention, which ultimately accounts for a four-fold increase in the total capacity of facilities, does not in the end succeed in centrally altering the features of the system. Initiating from the case that we examined, we observe that during the current period needs are multiplied and –paradoxically– despite the increase in resources, the system remains deficient and unable to effectively address need.

What is more, unstable funding may indeed compel us to conclude that the future is uncertain. The breadth of the intervention is under negotiation; the outcome of this negotiation is determined by a series of factors that lie beyond the system of social protection. The dependency of the facilities upon community funding, in tandem with the established inability of the central state to produce guarantees, means that the next steps of these facilities are precarious.

Finally, in evaluating the role of local government authorities, we realized that their contribution remains trapped in what is essentially a centralized system. Both the design and the resources of the system remain within the remit of the state, whereas only certain sections of the current management are local. The scaling down of social policy remains within the realm of distribution, without entrenchment, or the adoption of a local character, a situation to which local government itself contributes.

In sum, the study outlined the character of re-scaling of social protection. In the context of broader changes in the operation of the state and its central mechanisms, local government authorities are taking on seemingly crucial responsibilities and execute central functions.

The role of local government authorities remains dependent upon the central state, especially at the level of powers. In the Greek case we observe that their contribution also remains tied to funding. As a consequence, they are not capable of organizing locally geared services.

Consequently, the possibilities and weaknesses of local government agencies toward society stem from two central factors. The first concerns the system of social protection itself, which develops centrally. Its support and orientation reflect central preferences that originate beyond local government institutions. The second concerns the degree of autonomy that local governance enjoys, in order to organize local interventions.

Nevertheless, the importance of local government authorities is upgraded with relation to the past. The study now turns to the prospect of development of multifactorial formations in the provision of social services. The involvement of NGOs as well as companies in the provision of

services, signals a shift in social protection. The governance of social policy includes the active involvement of its formal agencies.

Notes

1. The *Kallikratis Plan* presents the most recent reform that radically altered the terrain of local government in Greece. It is the implementation of a new map in local government that is determined as a first degree of local government, the second being the administrative districts. The first degree of local government counts 325 entities (as opposed to 1034 previously) and the second 13 administrative districts (according to the previous provision the second degree was the prefectures, which were redubbed as 'administrative districts' without a change in their spatial boundaries). See Law no 3852/2010.
2. EETAA aims to provide scientific and technical support to local government agencies, but also to public and social sector bodies.
3. The EURYDICE network is the European Information Network for education and provides data and analysis for European educational systems and policies.
4. *"Daily guardianship, care, daily nutrition, education and recreation of babies and infants of working parents, the multifaceted mental, emotional, social, psychosomatic development of children, their preparation for a physical transition from family life to the school environment* (ΚΥΑ Π2β/2827/1997).
5. For the sharp decline in income in Greece see Matsaganis and Leventi, 2014.
6. Aside from the data presented here, another point of reference is a survey carried out by the Union of Municipalities and Communities, completed in 2003, which refers to a radically different terrain and to local governance in particular, prior to the implementation of the Kallikratis Plan (Union of Municipalities and Communities, 2006). However, the data to which we refer covers the largest section of the terrain and clearly record the tendencies, allowing us to draw conclusions on the outlook and prospects of local care facilities for preschoolers.
7. National participation in the program is not stable in time: on the contrary, it shows a significant shift, touching on the entirety of the program.
8. ISCED 0: pre-primary education ISCED 1: primary education or first stage of basic education.

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