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The Impact of the "Social Structures to Tackle Poverty in Greece" through the eyes of its people

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The Impact of the “Social Structures to Tackle Poverty in Greece” through the eyes of its people

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Ο αντίκτυπος των «Κοινωνικών Δομών Άμεσης Αντιμετώπισης της Φτώχειας» στην Ελλάδα μέσα από τα μάτια των εμπλεκομένων

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ABSTRACT

The present article focuses on the implementation of the programme of Social Structures to Tackle Poverty in Greece (hereafter: “SSTPGs”) realised throughout the period 2012-2017. In particular, the paper presents the results of evaluation conducted at five (5) different municipalities of Attica. The paper emphasizes on the findings of qualitative research carried out on the basis of sixteen (16) interviews, with employees directly benefiting from the SSTPGs as well as with participant members of the Implementation Bodies, Vice Mayors and officials from the Non-Profit Civil Partnership (AMKE) Scientific Society for Social Cohesion and development (hereafter: “ΕΠΕΚΣΑ”). It constitutes the second part of assessment which was realised with the purpose to allow the individuals involved in the programme to provide feedback on it, for themselves. Basically, the key point concluded from the interviewees’ own responses has been that the programme’s mission was fulfilled successfully. Also, another main objective achieved has been the beneficiaries’ re-inclusion into society, through guided counselling and psychosocial support.

KEY WORDS: Interventions to tackle poverty, Social Policy at local level, social policy assessment, SSTPG.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Το παρόν άρθρο επικεντρώνεται στην υλοποίηση των Κοινωνικών Δομών Άμεσης Αντιμετώπισης της Φτώχειας (εφεξής ΚΔΑΑΦ) που υλοποιήθηκαν στην Ελλάδα κατά το χρονικό διάστημα 2012 – 2017. Πιο συγκεκριμένα, παρουσιάζει τα αποτελέσματα αξιολόγησης που διενεργήθηκε στις ΚΔΑΑΦ σε πέντε (5) Δήμους της Αττικής. Το άρθρο εστιάζει στα αποτελέσματα της ποιοτικής έρευνας που διενεργήθηκε μέσω δεκαέξι (16) συνεντεύξεων, σε εργαζομένους – έμμεσα ωφελούμενους των ΚΔΑΑΦ και σε συμμετέχοντες από τους Φορείς Υλοποίησης, Αντιδημάρχους και στελέχη από την ΑΜΚΕ Επιστημονική Εταιρεία για την Κοινωνική Συνοχή και Ανάπτυξη (εφεξής ΕΠΕΚΣΑ). Αποτελεί το δεύτερο σκέλος αξιολόγησης που διενεργήθηκε, αποσκοπώντας στο να προβούν οι ίδιοι οι εμπλεκόμενοι στην αξιολόγηση του προγράμματος. Το βασικό συμπέρασμα που συνάγεται από τις απαντήσεις των ερωτηθέντων είναι ότι καλύφθηκε πλήρως η στοχοθεσία του Προγράμματος. Επίσης, ότι επιτεύχθη να ενταχθούν και πάλι στο κοινωνικό σύνολο οι ωφελούμενοι, μέσω της συμβουλευτικής καθοδήγησης και της ψυχοκοινωνικής στήριξης.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ-ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ: Κοινωνικές Δομές Άμεσης Αντιμετώπισης της Φτώχειας, Ελλάδα, Αξιολόγηση, Αξιολόγηση της Κοινωνικής Πολιτικής, Κοινωνική Πολιτική και Τοπική Αυτοδιοίκηση.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to assess the work of the SSTPGs at local level, so as to reveal the extent to which the programme's objectives have been met, through testimonials of persons involved in its execution. The present study is the accompanying section of the synthetic research, which has intended to provide an evaluation summary of the above-mentioned structures by the beneficiaries themselves and to outline the services they offered as well as their problems (Pantazopoulos, 2020).

The present paper showcases the implementation of the SSTPGs in Greece during 2012-2017. More specifically, it presents the assessment results carried out in the structures of the following municipalities-boroughs; Glyfada-Metamorphosis-Philadelphia, Chalkidona-Irakliou and Lykovrysis-Pefkis. The paper highlights the conclusions of the qualitative survey conducted on the basis of sixteen (16) interviews both with employees-immediate beneficiaries of the SSTPGs and with four (4) participant members of the Implementation Institutions, two (2) Vice Mayors and two (2) representatives of the Non-Profit Civil Partnership EPEKSA responsible for the implementation of the programme.

The four (4) questions posed in the interviews, fall under four (4) thematic categories. The first has been to clarify what social exclusion and poverty mean, according to the interviewees. The second has been for the participants themselves to proceed with the programme assessment. The third one has been to report any issues and deficiencies, which the individuals encountered during their experience at the SSTPGs. Finally, the fourth (4th) and last one has been to facilitate the formulation of suggestions for improvement, which might prove useful for future reference. All these objectives were reflected by the Thematic Axes in the Interview Guide.

2. The European and Greek Social Policy Programmes: A Brief Overview

The first time that social exclusion is officially cited as a term by the European Union dates back to 1989, when the Committee of Ministers for Social Affairs of the EU member-states, at that time, agreed to the decision to build a "charter" to tackle the problem. From this point onwards, the term is being used in official EU documents, while it has also functioned as reference for the commencement of a series of actions to battle the very phenomenon it describes.

The Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers issued in 1989 has been one of the initial political documents of the European Union, which referred to social exclusion as a main component of its unresolved affairs (Sakellariopoulos, 1992; 189). In this EU resolution, there is a correlation to the labour market and poverty, there are references to the necessity of taking action to eliminate the phenomenon of social isolation; ultimately, in the document the planning and implementation of a developmental policy by the member-states is viewed as a persistent imperative, which would finally contribute to eradicating social exclusion (Sakellariopoulos, 1992: 2; Sakellariopoulos, 2003; Sakellariopoulos, 1999a: 112). The following significant step by the EU was the establishment of the 24th of June 1992 Council which oversaw the sufficiency of resources and provisions in social protection systems (Official Journal of

the European Community, 1992). Without a doubt, the latter emphasized mostly on poverty rather than on social exclusion, yet it validated the 1989 resolution, commenting on the demand for sufficient income to be coupled with policies for the economic and social integration of the deprived (Sakellariopoulos, 2011).

Since 1993, Jacques Delors, the EU president back then, called upon businesses operating in Europe to actively participate in combating social exclusion, both in groups and across the continent. The immediate result of this was the creation and development of the European networks of businesses (Sakellariopoulos, 2005). As a result, in March 2000, the European Council addressed a message appealing to entrepreneurs' sentiment as well as to their social corporate responsibility, with the purpose to implement optimal practices in sectors, such as life-long learning, work organisation, equal opportunities, social and occupational integration and sustainable development (EU, 2001: 4).

The White Bible for social policies published in July 1994, constituted the next milestone within the context of European politics against social exclusion. In this particular document, there is a detailed analysis of the measures which had to be taken in order to facilitate an alleviation policy via the labour market, while there is also extensive reference to the broader social policy by the European Union as well as to the social welfare of the European citizens, as a whole (European Social Policy, 1994).

Following 1994 and the publishing of the White Bible for the Development, Competitiveness and Employability, workforce adaptability and the creation of jobs featured prominently in the EU social welfare agenda. More specifically, the urge for a solidarity economy and social policy dominated the European Community. Still, the main issue within the EU during that particular period remains that of the distinct interconnection between poverty, destitution and social exclusion of its citizens (EU, 1993). Thus, it should be noted that the European Union has attributed two different aspects to social exclusion, one pertaining to destitution and the other to deprivation of basic rights, which holds a prominent place among the bibliography.

In 1997, Article 13 (later substituted by Article 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) is embedded in the Treaty for the foundation of the European Community hence enabling the Council of Europe to bear responsibility to abolish discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs, descent, gender and so forth (Sakellariopoulos, 2006a). In 2003, an amendment to the relevant article took place in accordance with the Nicea Treaty, providing even further possibilities for action, to fight social exclusion (Sakellariopoulos, 2001: 128).

Passing the second half of the 1990s, when the European Union acquired its essential role, social exclusion made its reappearance only in the year 2000, during which the "Charter of Fundamental Rights" was drafted by the EU, a declaration which was a synopsis of the European citizens' rights (Izemos, 2009: 23). Besides the basic human rights (i.e., dignity, equality, liberty, solidarity, nativism and justice), it also described the rights of social provision and sheltering assistance, with the purpose to battle social exclusion (Altanis, 2006: 309). From the above, it is clear that the European Union considers tackling social exclusion a priority, aiming to improve its citizens' life. Following the making of the Charter, in 2000 the Treaty of Lisbon was signed, in which it is explicitly stated that the EU places high value on the eradication of social exclusion and discrimination, while social justice, gender equality and the safeguarding of children's rights are also pointed out (Stergiou, 2011: 42).

On the level of social policy, the Treaty of Lisbon has brought about two major developments. On the one hand, it granted legislation which would allow the member-states to design a

coordinated policy for poverty and social exclusion while, on the other, it facilitated the application of an Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which basically consists of a set of shared guidelines to be utilized by all member-states (Sakellariopoulos, 2004a: 62; Sakellariopoulos, 2004b).

In addition, the European Union has put into practice specific reinforcement measures to promote the elimination of social exclusion among its member-states. In particular, in 2002 the Council of Europe decided to implement a community scheme which would fight social exclusion within the EU. The scheme's timeline covered the period from the 1st of January 2002 until the 31st of December 2006. Through the use of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) the member-states would achieve a better comprehension of social exclusion and develop action plans for the battle against it, too (Sakellariopoulos & Economou, 2006: 233). Furthermore, an exchange of information and of good practices would take place among member-states, while studies drawing on statistical data and quantitative indicators would be put together as well, with the goal to tackle the problem, as fully as possible (EU, 50/2002/E.C.).

From 2007 onwards, a new era for the European programmes begins to unfold, since all the pending activities since then were later incorporated and embedded into the project entitled 'Progress'. This specific Scheme pertained to "the even allocation of costs, to progress and to the dissemination of comparative analytical knowledge of high quality as well as to the facilitation of an effective and unobstructed exchange of information, mutual learning and dialogue"¹.

As an outcome of the latter, the scheme that was realised next was the one for employment and social policy (E.a.I), which lasted for seven (7) years (2014-2020)². Its goal was to combat social exclusion on pan-European level³, while it also aimed at consolidating and expanding both the former project called 'Progress' as well as two additional Community Programmes (that of the European Employment Services – EUR.E.S. and the scheme 'Progress: European Microfinance Support Mechanism').

Similar actions against social exclusion were sponsored and implemented by the European Social Fund (ESF) across the continent. The aim of such activities has been to eliminate discrimination, to support vulnerable social groups and, ultimately, to eradicate social exclusion⁴.

Equally important has been the activity of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). By passing regulation 223/11-3-2014 of the European Parliament and Council, FEAD was created in order to cater for the underprivileged citizens, by providing food and material means, and with the ultimate purpose to enable their social integration (Official Journal of the European Union, 2014: 8). Its time span was seven (7) years, while its budget was estimated to approximately four (4) billion euros, co-funded to 15% by member-states implementing it (Official Journal of the European Union, 2014: 10).

From 2010 and onwards, with the ratification of law 2010/2039 (INI) "European Strategy for the Disabled 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment for a Europe without barriers", the EU has laid the foundations for the prevention of poverty and the fostering of social inclusion. Through this particular legislation, the establishment of a minimum guaranteed income among the European member-states was promoted (that is, a minimum of 60% of the average income in each country), not least to mention the setting of the base salary margin, so as to support individuals on insufficient financial resources (EU, 2010: 14).

As a result, these earlier actions gave birth to Strategy "Europe 2020" which emerged as feasible application of the decisions taken back in Lisbon. The Strategy's key objective lies, among other things, in making the EU a viable place for all of its citizens, without limitations (EU, 2010: 8). Also, it should be taken into consideration as significant the fact that for the very first time

an EU policy makes provisions for quantitative measures and quantitative objectives towards tackling social exclusion and poverty (Feronas, 2013: 14).

In terms of the Greek reality, social policy in Greece can be divided into two (2) phases. The first one covers the pre-entry to the EU period and the second one follows immediately afterwards. What is more, the latter phase has been sharply marked by the global financial crisis of the past few years, since the Greek state was called upon to proceed to huge changes to its fiscal policy, a fact which did not leave the social sector unaffected (Skamakis & Pantazopoulos, 2015).

During the pre-entry to the EU era, the type of social policy practiced by the Greek government had been the outcome of national planning and priorities, since at that time the European Union did not have active involvement into designing and exercising politics in Greece (Sakellariopoulos, 1999b: 25). Until the decade of the 1980s, social policy in the country was neglected, lacking central planning and national strategy, in contrast to the developed countries of western Europe mainly, which had already come up with concrete social welfare policies (Sakellariopoulos & Economou, 2006: 7).

A breakthrough point occurred during the 1980s, when critical interventions were made with the aim to modernize the social structures of Greece (Sakellariopoulos & Angelaki, 2007: 54; Sakellariopoulos, 2006b: 26). The National Healthcare System of Greece (ESY) was created, Health Centres were established across the country's rural areas, the pension system in the private sector was organised and, lastly, considerable raise applied to wages and pension salaries (Economou, 2005). Under those circumstances, the public funding intended for the implementation of social policies increased from 15,6% to 22,6%, within the period of five (5) years (1980-1985) (Ministry of Labor and Social Security, 2010). Nevertheless, these amounts were to cover only the fields mentioned above, without being attached to a wider and/or targeted plan for reformation (Matsaganiis, 2003: 137-141; Sakellariopoulos, 1993a: 74).

Entering the 1990s, Greece is falling behind in terms of social protection readjustments compared to other countries in Europe (Stergiou & Sakellariopoulos, 2010: 94). However, although the radical changes made were quite enough, they were not aligned with the respective ones in the member-states of the EU, but rather imposed due to national imperatives (Sakellariopoulos, 1993b: 191). During this decade, as in the millennium years (2000), three (3) major reformations took place: the first in the healthcare sector, the second in the insurance system and the third in the area of work relations. All of them focused on normalizing the field of social protection, so as to elevate it to the standards of the corresponding ones in the European countries (Sakellariopoulos & Economou, 2006: 8).

Over the decades preceding the economic crisis, the reformations made were neither targeted nor well-designed, and hence they proved fragmented and ineffective, to a large degree (Kourachanis et al., 2018); ultimately, the structures left to fill the gaps created by the official government were the family networks and the charities (Feronas, 2019: 200-201). Nonetheless, those reformations were of utmost importance to the Greek state, in order for it to be able to enter the EU and to get attuned to the rest of countries in Europe, as much as possible.

According to the European Union's actions and law enactment, Greece as a member-state of the EU is obliged to apply the community guidelines (Manou-Pantazopoulou, E., 1999: 32) and to implement policies for the eradication of social exclusion and poverty. With the validation of the Green Bibles⁵, mostly via the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF), Greece was called to put into practice Programmes and policies with the purpose to tackle poverty and to create the appropriate conditions for the social and economic inclusion of socially susceptible groups

of people (The Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare, 2014: 39). In this context, several Actions and Programmes were realised throughout the Greek territory (via financial resources deriving from the EU), (Sakellariopoulos & Economou, 2006: 16-17), all of which functioned as basic tools for the exercise of social policy on national scale.

One of the most significant efforts made is that of the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) (presently also referred to as Social Solidarity Income – SSI). It was established by law 4093/2012 to contribute to the family income of deprived families, providing also social inclusion services. Its primary goal was to cater for employment re-inclusion with the ultimate purpose to aid towards the alleviation of poverty and social exclusion. Some of the services offered by the SSI is the distribution of the uninsured persons booklet, social residential tariffs, registering for social programmes and the provision of counselling⁶.

The scheme “Sheltering and Re-inclusion” is another Programme implemented by the Ministry of Labour, which has intended to function as a complete guide in dealing with the phenomenon of poverty and the homeless. Its direct aim has been to set the desired prerequisites both for individuals and for families hosted in shelters to be entitled to stable and independent housing. Ultimately, its mission is to cater for the social and occupational re-integration of its beneficiaries⁷. The programme commenced in 2015 and by the year 2017 one thousand two hundred and sixty-nine (1.269) beneficiaries had already enjoyed its benefits (Dimoulas et al., 2017).

Particularly important has also been the contribution of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). This specific scheme was addressed to socially susceptible groups, which were at risk of poverty and social exclusion, offering them nutritional aid (EU Regulation, 2014). Food provision has been conducted via a network, comprised of local government units, regional bodies and the Non-Profit Civil Partnership (AMKE) EPEKSA. Until today, fifty-seven (57) Social Partnerships are in operation throughout Greece⁸.

By law 4320/issue. A/19-3-2015, the Greek state has taken on action to enforce immediate measures to manage the humanitarian crisis. The so-called “Humanitarian Crisis Management Programme” presupposed (3) three actions, which began to be implemented upon its effect: a) the “free re-installation and provision of electricity to persons and families living under conditions of extreme poverty”, b) the granting of rent allowance to thirty thousand (30.000) individuals to secure housing and c) the sponsored supply of food to independent persons and to families. (Greek law 4320/issue. A/19-3-2015: 225).

Complementarily to the schemes and Actions described above, the Greek state also provides privileged allowances⁹, the ability for the deprived to access healthcare services, allowances to cover domestic heating¹⁰, social groceries and soup kitchens¹¹, all of which intend to support persons on the brink of poverty, to fight social exclusion and to promote social inclusion.

3. Research Methodology

Interviews were conducted in order to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the SSTPGs so as to seek solutions with the prospect of their available services continuation. Additionally, there has been an attempt to bridge the gap in the already existing bibliography, which revolves around the insufficiency and lack of empirical data, in the field of social structures evaluation in Greece.

The selected method was that of the qualitative semi-structured interview conducted in real time, at the SSTPGs premises. The objective has been to retrieve spontaneous responses from the participant interviewees, which would not be guided but rather intimate (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 141) drawn from the individuals' own life experiences and based on their work at the structures, previously mentioned. Thus, the qualitative characteristics, which the interviewees have accumulatively acquired through experience, would be showcased and the research findings would be interpreted on the basis of analysis and clarification (Mason, 2003: 25).

The process carried out throughout the Qualitative Research survey has been the following. Firstly, initial communication over the telephone took place with the individuals preoccupied in the institutions, which were making use of the Social Structures. On behalf of the Scientific Committee for Social Cohesion and Development (EPEKSA), two (2) persons were asked to be interviewed, that is the ones who were involved in the completion of the present research study. On behalf of the municipalities, two (2) vice Mayors were chosen to participate, those who had been in charge of supervising the Social Services, within the jurisdiction of their municipality.

Chart 1. Participants from the Implementing (Coordinating) Institutions

Structure	Identity
EPEKSA	Person in Charge of the programme's Object of Study
EPEKSA	Person in Charge of the Activities, Publicity and the Call for Sponsorships
Municipality of Metamorphosis	Vice-Mayor
Municipality of Glyfada	Vice-Mayoress

Source: Author's own processing.

As a follow-up to the telephone communication, a letter was sent out to the Non-Profit Civil Partnership and to the respective municipalities. The letter included the reasons for conducting the interviews, the research objectives and a brief summary of the questions to be posed during the interview. Both the Scientific Committee for Social Cohesion and Development and the Municipalities of Metamorphosis and Glyfada replied positively. The average time for each interview was about an hour. Answers were recorded with the participant's consent, and then decoded at later stage.

Next, it was asked by the Scientific Committee for Social Cohesion and Development to hand in the private data of the indirect beneficiaries-employees in the Social Structures, in either of the two (2) Corporate Structures so as to carry out the interviews, accordingly. AMKE replied positively to this request and submitted the employees' contact information.

The initial intention was to conduct interviews with one (1) employee from each Structure, of either Corporate Structure. Following communication over the telephone, the employees that were selected to participate from each Structure were confirmed, as listed below.

Chart 2. Participants in the Municipalities of the Northern Boroughs

	Structure	Specialization
IRAKLIO	Social Grocery	Administrative Assistant
METAMORPHOSIS	Open Day Centre for the Reception of the Homeless	Social Worker
PHILADELPHIA	Kitchen Soup	Administrative Assistant
METAMORPHOSIS	Social Pharmacy	Social Worker
LYKOVRYSI	Public Garden	Agronomist
METAMORPHOSIS	Time Bank	Social Worker
	Intermediation Office	Administrative Assistant

Source: Author's own processing.

In total, (12) interviews were realised with the indirect beneficiaries, one from each Structure. Six (6) out of them were Administrative Assistants, four (4) were Social Workers, one (1) was a Pharmacist and one (1) was an Agronomist. The choice of individuals of such expertise aimed at producing an in-depth analysis, since the particular indirect beneficiaries were the Structures' Supervisors. During the interviews, a corresponding process similar to the previous ones was applied.

The qualitative research was based on an interviewing guide, which was designed according to a very specific methodology. First, the scope of research was explained, taking into account the need to assess the Social Structures, and then the expected results were extracted. Subsequently, an evaluation of the current situation in the Structures was carried out, on the level of staff and of the products and services offered. Then, the thematic axes were defined, on the basis of which the Structures' assessment would take place and, lastly, the interview questions were formulated.

Chart 3. Participants in the Municipality of Glyfada

Structure	Specialization
Social Grocery	Administrative Assistant
Soup Kitchen	Administrative Assistant
Social Pharmacy	Pharmacist
Time Bank	Social Worker
Intermediation Office	Administrative Assistant

Source: Author's own processing.

The questions that were included had four (4) goals. The first was to pinpoint what social exclusion and poverty stand for, as expressed by the interviewees. The second was that the involved individuals would provide feedback on the programme, while the third one to report various problems and deficiencies, which they came across during their work at the Social Structures. Finally, the fourth (4th) and last aim of the questions was to allow for the participant interviewees to make proposals, which could be of use to similar programmes in the future. All these objectives were delineated in the Interview Guide by the Thematic Axes.

The questions that were chosen in the end intended to evaluate the Programme at hand, attempting to shed light to the Social Structures in relation to their operation and the services they provided. On the whole, sixteen (16) questions were posed, falling under the thematic axes mentioned before.

Chart 4. Interview Guide

Thematic Axes	Questions Asked
Social Exclusion and Poverty	1. In your opinion, what does Social Exclusion and Poverty mean?
	2. In your experience, which social groups are affected the most by Social Exclusion in your borough?
	3. Are you aware of other Programmes or Institutions offering Social Services in your area?
	4. Within the local policies framework, how would you rank this programme, in particular?
	5. How do you assess the structures as to the fulfilment of the programme's objectives?
	6. How do you assess the structures as to service quality for the beneficiaries of the programme?
Programme Evaluation	7. How do you evaluate progress on the level of programme implementation (in relation to the available financial and human resources?)
	8. How do you evaluate the Structures as to their accessibility for the beneficiaries?
	9. How do you evaluate response on the part of the beneficiaries?
Programme's Deficiencies	10. Was there an equal and of the same measure distribution of the offered services throughout the borough?
	11. Did any issues arise in the cooperation between the local authorities and the Implementation Body (AMKE)?
	12. Were there any problems in terms of publicity and the transmission of information about the Structures?
Proposals	13. Can you report any other problems or deficiencies in the Programme that you might have noticed?
	14. In your experience, what could contribute to the improvement of the existing structures?
	15. How could the Social Structures be enhanced in order for the provided services to become better?
	16. Is there any sort of policy or programme that you would like to propose for it to be implemented in the future?

Source: Author's own processing.

In their majority, the questions were of open-ended type, giving the interviewees the chance to build their own thoughts. The reason for the open-ended questions' existence was to collect as much information as possible and to carry out an in-depth assessment. Out of them all, one (1) question was hierarchical, in which the interviewees were asked to categorize the examined programme with respect to local policies of the municipality where they used to work. The questions were direct and targeted, since they were addressed to people involved in the programme and hence conscious of all its dimensions. At the same time, there was an effort to avoid any guided or generalized and misleading questions. On the contrary, interview questions were neutral and precise, while it was also possible for the interviewees to develop their thinking in their own way.

4. Research Findings & Results

4.1 Individual Interviews with Members of the Corporate Structure

Starting from the very first question, all four (4) participants asked argued that the terms Poverty and Social Exclusion are distinct yet interrelated with one another, as well. As the Person in Charge of the Object of Study in the Non-Profit Civil Partnership (AMKE) states:

“poverty equals to the economic inability that someone faces. Social Exclusion differs, it means a person’s isolation either from society at large, or from some of its facets (social and political institutions, the labour market, the healthcare system, the educational system). Nevertheless, both notions are people-centred, something which shows that either of the two issues are inherent to the human nature and constitute society’s ailments”.

The above viewpoint is shared also by the other three (3) interviewees, who claim that social exclusion is the process of isolation and alienation of individuals with special social qualities and, whereas poverty means the lack of resources.

As a reply to the question “which social groups are affected the most by Social Exclusion”, all participants to the survey said that it was mainly about people who, in terms of income, were below the limit of poverty, the ones who had lost their job and, in general, those struggling financially. A significant factor was the one put forth by the Vice Mayor of the Glyfada Municipality, who admits that:

“unemployment or the lack of a pension salary or other form of income combined to the inexistence of a supportive environment makes these people extremely vulnerable. In cases of drug use or disability, social exclusion is even harsh”.

The Person in Charge of the Object of Study, from the Non-Profit Civil Partnership, added that the individuals who were afflicted the worst were the ones “struck” by the recent economic.

Moving on to the question whether “[they] are aware of other Programmes or Institutions offering Social Services in [their] area”, the two (2) Vice Mayors referred to Programmes related to the primary prevention of drug use, the assistance to students with learning difficulties, the Help at Home, the Care Centres and the Open Care Centre for the Elderly. These Programmes are realised within the municipality borders. The participants from the Non-Profit Civil Partnership

AMKE mentioned also the food provision services by the Church and the Diocese as well as food supply projects like the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD).

Upon completion of the first thematic unit of questions, the interviewees were requested to answer how they would rank the researched programme among other policies implemented by the local authorities. Of particular gravity was the opinion of the Vice Mayors in charge, who responded that the social structures were the capstone of all social services within their municipality. The partakers from the Non-Profit Civil Partnership mentioned that although the social structures scheme was supplementary to their municipality's services, it was equally important overall. Originally, it started its operation complementarily, yet its contribution was ultimately greater than that of other programmes within the local framework of social policy.

As far as the theme of the SSTPGs evaluation is concerned, the survey participants were requested to answer the question of "how [they] assess the structures as to the fulfilment of the programme's objectives". The Vice Mayors in charge reported that the structures did meet the purposes for which they had been designed. Whether they are to be examined in numerical terms that is based on the number of beneficiaries who enjoyed services, or in tangible terms that is based on the products and services provided, it is evident that the structures managed to accomplish the programme's mission. The Person in Charge of the Object of Study, on behalf of the Non-Profit Civil Partnership, shared the same view on this, by saying that:

"The Structures were designed within a specific context, legislative, economic and social. On the basis of that framework, they developed their operations. Being responsible for the Pragmatic Subject of the programme, I believe that there weren't any deviations from the plan set. On the opposite, there were efforts to carry out the Activities in accordance with the Strategic Plan of Action".

To the question of "how [they] assess the structures as to service quality for the beneficiaries of the programme", all four (4) interviewees replied that there was a quite satisfactory level of service quality, in general. The two (2) Vice Mayors claimed that the customer service code of conduct towards the beneficiaries was based on criteria set beforehand by the contracting body (i.e., the Ministry). The aim was to assist individuals who were facing economic problems and were socially marginalized. In the end, that was succeeded via the implementation of the examined programme.

To elaborate on the previous, the seventh (7th) question deals with the programme's assessment according to the available financial and human resources. The response which all the interviewees provided was that under the given circumstances (i.e., economic crisis) in which the SSTPGs took place, they achieved in making good use of the available financial and human resources at the furthest extent. In spite of this acknowledgement, however, as the Person in Charge of the Activities, Publicity and the Call for Sponsorships commented:

"...in some cases, inadequacy of or belated access to the necessary resources was observed, which, in turn, had an impact on the Structures' functionality. Overall, though, the programme was completed rather satisfactorily. And, to be accurate, it was realised in a better way compared to what happened in other municipalities, something that proves a right management of the available resources".

With regards to the evaluation of accessibility to the structures' facilities by the survey participants, the two (2) Vice Mayors, whose municipality implemented the SSTPGs, differentiate themselves in answering, accordingly. More specifically, the Vice Mayoress of the Glyfada Municipality argues that, for the particular municipal area, accessibility had been ensured. In fact, the location of the building, which accommodated the structures, had been deliberately designated to be in the centre of the borough (Glyfada) so as to cover both the northern and the southern side of the municipality; also, there was a bus stop just outside the structures' premises. On the other hand, the Vice Mayor of the Municipality of Metamorhosis replied that accessibility was a huge issue which put into trouble not only the beneficiaries but also the employees throughout the implementation of the programmes. As he supports:

"The truth is that although it happens for the two municipalities to be adjacent, yet practically they fall quite apart. The allotment of structures was without good planning and that resulted in our beneficiaries' inconvenience, moving between structures".

Finally, the last question pertaining to the programme's evaluation was that of how the partakers interpreted the beneficiaries' reaction. Both Vice Mayors said that the beneficiaries' response exceeded every expectation. What is more, they also added that the beneficiaries themselves acted in absolute cooperation, a fact which aided in the seamless operation of the structures. Furthermore, they admitted that through the SSTPGs the beneficiaries managed to find solutions to many real-life problems. The Person in Charge of the Activities, Publicity and the Call for Sponsorships, on behalf of the Non-Profit Civil Partnership, reported that:

"...certain structures were more preferable, owing to what kind of services each structure had to offer as well as to the fact that the beneficiaries possessed different opinions about the structures due to uneven sharing of information".

In addition, all interviewees mentioned that, on the one hand, many citizens did benefit indeed, still, on the other, it is regretful to say that such a large portion of people struggles to make ends meet.

Starting off with the set of questions related to the deficiencies and problems which occurred during the programme's implementation, the interviewees answered that there was a fairly equal distribution of the provided services across the municipality area and towards the beneficiaries. On behalf of the Non-Profit Civil Partnership AMKE, it was highlighted that services included all socially susceptible groups at local level, to which the particular products and services were offered.

To the question of whether any issues existed, regarding the collaboration between the Municipalities and the Non-Profit Civil Partnership, all four (4) interviewees supported that nothing was problematic, since everything was based on good planning, in the first place. Only in certain cases were there difficulties in incorporating the Programme's Structures into the already existing Structures or services, as a formula for social welfare provision pre-existed originally, still not so well-organised as with the deployed Programme, nor so welcomed by the public. In detail, the two (2) Vice Mayors commented that the cooperation between the Municipalities and the Non-Profit Civil Partnership was indeed exemplary. Also, they emphasized on the fact that any kind of issue which emerged during the implementation of the social structures programme was handled with immediate reaction.

In terms of promoting and raising public awareness of the structures, the majority of survey participants claimed that things ran smoothly. According to the Person in Charge of the Object of Study for the Programme:

“Both via the Non-Profit Civil Partnership AMKE as well as through the partner municipalities there was sharing of information (through events and their respective websites). Also, the volunteers played a key role in spreading the word for the existence and the usefulness of the structures. The employees helped the most to raise public awareness (special thematic events, informative about the structures) yet also the beneficiaries themselves contributed to making them known”.

With respect to the question of whether they could report other issues related to the Programme which they have noticed, the participants referred to an array of deficiencies. For instance, the Vice Mayoress of Glyfada supported that:

“their basic problem was that there was no strategy and planning on the part of the central authorities in order to allow the continuation of the social structures operation. Also, another discrepancy observed was the resetting of the prerequisites for the selection of candidates, thus occasionally dismissing candidacies of people who were suffering truly”.

The Vice Mayor of the Metamorphosis Municipality added that the provided services were dispersed among structures in the two bordering municipalities and not concentrated in each area and for either borough, thus creating problems commuting problems. The representatives from the Non-Profit Civil Partnership AMKE mentioned that the SSTPGs were based to a large extent on sponsorships, putting their operation at risk. Furthermore, the fact that sponsorship was assigned to a single person hindered or even prevented the development of a network to seek funding. Lastly, the need to secure additional resources for certain structures (for example, food distribution or the social grocery) was also brought up as well as the delays in employees' payments.

Proceeding to the set of questions referring to the proposals, which the beneficiaries could make for the structures' improvement in their entirety, the involved parties suggested that it would have been important if more available resources and more personnel had been in place. Also, they stressed that vital importance of the structures' further support in terms of equipment, funds and staff.

The previous question is couple with the penultimate one in the Interview Guide, referring to ways of enhancing the offered services by the municipalities, for the beneficiaries' best interest. The partakers noted that central planning and administration on regional level is crucial as much as it is to impose specified, fixed parameters which would pervade these programmes (income and entry criteria). At the same time, they said that the SSTPGs could be boosted mainly by personnel necessary along the running of the programme, and also with an expanded and more effective activation of the volunteers' team, especially of people whose profession is relevant to the provided services.

As a proposal to improve services, the Vice Mayoress of the Glyfada Municipality recommended the existence of an inter-disciplinary scientific team, which would help in the central planning for the structures from the beginning. The Person in Charge of the Activities, Publicity and the Call for Sponsorships, on behalf of the Non-Profit Civil Partnership, stated that:

“there might be a plan which presupposes more active involvement and of its target groups within the context of its activities, with greater participation”.

The Vice Mayor of Metamorphosis as well as the Person in Charge of the Object of Study from the Non-Profit Civil Partnership pointed out that there is no good reason for the creation of a new project, either complementary or substitute for the structures. The suggestions for improvement that were expressed above could enhance the structures without altering their nature, since the specific programme has been one of the most successful ones in terms of social policy, over the past few years.

4.2 Individual Interviews with Workers at the Social Structures

To begin with, for the first question, the vast majority of the survey participants answered that the terms “poverty” and “social exclusion” represent two different situations, though interconnected. To add to it, they consider them to be phenomena, which have been exacerbated recently in Greece due to the economic crisis and decadence. Indicative is the response given by the employee in the Mediation Office in the Municipality of Glyfada:

“the term Poverty focuses on income, whereas Social Exclusion also includes the inability to access social institutions, such as the labour market, the healthcare system, the educational system and the community. At least, this is my understanding of those two notions through my preoccupation with the Social Structures for the Immediate Eradication of Poverty”.

From the sum of the given answers by the workers at the social structures, it is reasonably safe to argue that, based on common sense, the term Poverty emphasizes on income, whereas the idea of Social Exclusion implies the lack of privilege to social institutions. Thus, it becomes clear that Social Exclusion is a phenomenon structural and institutional, while both concepts are people-centred, something which proves that these two issues are inherent to the human society.

In support of this, one of the interviewees claimed that Social Exclusion:

“...is the society's inability to integrate all of its citizens and the nurturing of the feeling in the socially marginalized people that they cannot change their position”.

By this statement the blame is put on society itself, since it fails to create the appropriate conditions for its citizens to adjust to its developments and to the changes of modern times.

As for the social exclusion attributes, quite a few answered that it could be racial, religious or economic and that it is usually linked to verbal or physical violence against these target groups. Accordingly, poverty is characterized by lack of income and the inability to secure funds to cover the bare necessities.

The second question examined which social groups suffer the most from Social Exclusion at local level, that is in the municipal area where each interviewee worked at. From the replies it appears, as in the previous case, that they survey participants had correlated poverty to social exclusion. In particular, twelve (12) out of the sixteen (16) argued that socially excluded are “the poor”, “people below the limit of poverty”, “the lowest socio-economic layers” and those strug-

gling with “financial hardships”. As other categories of socially isolated people are considered to be the disabled, the homeless, the Roma, the immigrants, the children, the elderly, the single-parent families and the drug addicts.

If we were to draw a connecting line between the previous answers and the invitation for the programme published by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in 2012, it is evident that the real beneficiaries of the social structures are “the homeless”, “individuals in a state of at risk of poverty”. From the above, two main conclusions can be reached; on the one hand, that the given responses reflect the reality and, on the other, that the social structures have managed to integrate groups of people, who were originally described as target groups in the fight against social exclusion. Moreover, it seems that the Ministry of Labour and Social Security had entirely turned its attention to the elimination of income-based discrimination and not to catering for the isolated groups, such as the disabled, the homeless, the Roma, the immigrants, the children, the elderly, the single-parent families and the drug addicts, as mentioned earlier by the interviewees. Indicative of the latter is the answer of a worker in the Social Grocery of the Metamorfozis municipality, who comments that:

“...social exclusion has been intensified due to the long-lasting financial difficulties which the country has fallen in, even though we should distinguish people who had fallen in this situation at an earlier stage. In the past, the main cause was associated with the level of education, while now it is linked to unemployment. Families of the so-called “middle-class” have been found on the brink of social exclusion, not just because of economic hardships but also due to the fact that they were forced to change their lifestyle in various ways. The employed and especially the young people are facing this problem, mostly in cases where family obligations exist. Also, the pensioners category is another social group affected by this phenomenon”.

To the question where they were aware of other Programmes or Institutions providing Social Services in their municipality, most interviewees responded that they knew some of the social services provided by the local authorities, such as the scheme “Help at Home” and the distribution of food organised at various locations by the Church. It is worth noting that besides food provision by the Dioceses, the social services run exclusively by the municipalities, which have also implemented the presently examined programmes, involved activities similar to these of the social structures.

The fourth question, entailing the prioritization of the programme in relation to other programmes realised by the Municipal Social Services, is of particular interest since all interviewees have thought that the Social Structures to Tackle Poverty constitute the most significant programme executed so far. As a worker in the Social Grocery of Metamorfozis argues,

“this programme is, in essence, the cornerstone in the application of social policy by the Municipality”.

By the fifth question, the survey participants were invited to enter the circle of questions that intended to investigate and evaluate the Programme. To the question of whether the social structures have accomplished their mission, all twelve (12) interviewees contended that their objectives had been covered, from satisfactorily to excellently. The key finding extracted from their

relevant answers was that, apart from the structures' main purpose, that is to be of practical use to the beneficiaries by supplying them with the basic necessities, the beneficiaries' successful re-inclusion into society was also achieved, through guided counselling and psychosocial support.

Especially important was the statement of a worker in the Social Grocery of the Metamorphosis Municipality, who comments on a serious ailment of the social structures:

“the structures despite their insufficient planning (duties and limits of action are vaguely defined) carry out a significant task for the good of our weak fellow-citizens. Still, the intentions of the institution, of the municipality and of the corresponding social services are often conflicting. To make things worse, several interventions are made on the part of the municipal authorities which are not aligned with the objective and scientific task of the workers. In many instances, there are contradicting goals which lead to confusion”.

To the question of “how [they] assess the structures as to service quality for the beneficiaries of the programme”, ten (10) interviewees replied that, on the whole, there was a fairly satisfactory level of service quality. Two (2) survey participants among the indirect beneficiaries reported that friendly relationships had been developed between the employees and the users of the structures, while one of them mentioned that during the structures' operation the efficiency level would increase. Nevertheless, three (3) partakers claimed that there had been a few issues as to service quality towards the beneficiaries, whereas one (1) person supported that the structures had specified financial and human resources, which lacked the capacity to cater for the needs of the total number of beneficiaries.

“the existing structures have got specified resources in terms of finance and staff, both of which fail to cover the needs of this size of beneficiaries”.

Following the previous question, the seventh (7th) refers to the programme's evaluation on the basis of the resources available on the level of funds and personnel. All interviewees answered that the social structures provide the best possible services to the beneficiaries, yet they could be more efficient if there were more available resources and more secure work prospects. It is worth noting that most survey participants comment that the economic crisis had a huge impact on the field of service provision, since the structures were affected on technical level (lack of equipment) as much as on work level (delay in employees' payment, repeated prolongation of activities).

“the pace of improvement in the management of human resources is relative to the time which the particular programme is 'running in'. Indeed, it is a big issue that funding is able to cover only the employees' wages, while no provision is made for financial contribution in support of these structures”.

As for the assessment of accessibility to the social structures' facilities, there is differentiation among those who had worked in the Corporate Structure of the Northern Municipalities in comparison to the ones who had worked in the Corporate Structure of the Glyfada municipality. In detail, the interviewees from Glyfada reported that accessibility was at the highest possible level thanks to the existence of a bus stop right outside the structures' premises, with shuttle service by OASA as well as with two zero-fare public transit lines.

On the other side, the partakers from the Northern Municipalities Corporate Structure said that the black mark was probably the great distance which the beneficiaries had to cover in order to reach a structure. Their answers show that there was an inconvenient arrangement with the public means of transport.

As the Pharmacist in the Social Pharmacy of the Glyfada municipality argues:

“I would say that [accessibility] was really satisfactory since public service passed just outside the buildings for the structures. Also, the latter were situated in a central spot of the borough. The buildings were accessible by persons with reduced mobility. Therefore, I find accessibility a “strong asset” of the Social Structures”.

On the other hand, the worker in the corresponding Social Pharmacy of the Northern Corporate Structure, supports:

“I think that the premises where the structures conducted their activities were not easily accessible to the beneficiaries, due to failure in public connection”.

The final question to evaluate the programme deals with the partakers’ assessment of the beneficiaries’ response to it. The important element underlined by the interviewees was its breadth, justified by a variety of coincidental factors, such as economic hardships, the fulfilment of basic needs, the workers’ nice behaviour and the extended publicity surrounding the programme. Still, reference was made also to negative incidents, for example, cases of abuse or dependency, or of denial to appeal to the structures, for fear of being targeted or pitied by other residents in the borough.

“I should say that the beneficiaries’ response has been remarkable, since we would cater for their basic and essential needs, thus making them happy. However, single cases of abusive or dependent behaviour by the beneficiaries existed, as these were individuals who besides their economic and real-life problems were also users of addictive substances”.

Starting off with the set of questions pertaining to the deficiencies and problems which occurred during the implementation phase of the programme, the workers in the social structures of the Glyfada municipality reported that there had been an as much as possible even distribution of the provided services across the borough and towards the beneficiaries. In juxtaposition to the previous ones, the workers at the structures of the northern municipalities stated that the allotment of structures had been unequal.

They said that there had been no good planning beforehand, adding that municipalities small in population hosted structures similar to the ones in larger municipalities implementing the programme. As a result, a big number of beneficiaries would move together from one borough to another, so as to receive assistance. According to a worker in the Soup Kitchen of the Northern Corporate Structure:

“I would say no. I reckon that they are disproportionately allotted. There had been no good planning, and municipalities, which are small in size, have accommodated structures similar to the ones of larger municipalities implementing the programme. This has led to many

beneficiaries being forced to move in groups from one area to another in order to seek assistance. In other words, I believe that he structures should have been distributed according to ratio, or to exist within the borders of a single municipality”.

As a reply to whether any issues had emerged in the cooperation between the local authorities and the Implementation Body (i.e., the Non-Profit Civil Partnership ΕΠΕΚΣΑ), the workers referred to matters of trivial nature, which basically had to do with differences in terms of approach. A more serious issue is the local authorities’ intention to demonstrate their social policy before the elections. On the other hand, the Non-Profit Civil Partnership wished to make good use of every available resource so as to cover the beneficiaries’ needs, disagreeing with the municipal authorities. Indicative is the answer of a worker in the Social Pharmacy of the Glyfada Municipality, who comments:

“Yes, there were [issues], mainly due to the different point of view. The municipal authorities wished to exercise its social policy every now and then (mostly over the pre-elections period), whereas the Non-Profit Civil Partnership wished to exploit any means available to meet the beneficiaries’ needs, trying also to sustain the prescribed limits of the structures’ economics. At times, the combination of these two things has provoked issues. Other than that, I would describe their collaboration as exceptional. Furthermore, I must stress that it was an ideal cooperation regardless of which elected party prevailed”.

In terms of the structures’ public promotion, the employees in their majority did not mention any problems. Publicity was monitored by all involved bodies (by the municipalities through one-day events as well as through sports, artistic and cultural happenings, and by the Non-Profit Civil Partnership via website and press releases). Also, the workers themselves contributed towards this direction by organising visits to the boroughs and activities for the public. In the words of a worker at the Social Grocery of the Northern Corporate Structure:

“Publicity and awareness were raised by the structures’ personnel with the aid of ΑΜΚΕ. Moreover, the role of the Glyfada municipality was vital in that it organised one-day events as well as sports, artistic and cultural happenings through which the Social Structures’ activities were also promoted”.

Being asked about other spotted issues in relation to the programme, the survey participants reported numerous deficiencies. The most striking one was the inability of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security to ensure the continuation of the Social Structures. Additionally, another major issue was the change in the economic criteria by the Ministry, as a result to alternating beneficiaries in terms of eligibility or illegibility throughout the year. Most interviewees replied that there were other problems equally significant, as well; the lack of financial and human resources, the delays in payments, the entanglement of many parties and services of different aims and interests, and the lack of consistent supervision and monitoring by the relevant Ministry.

Some of the basic problems are mentioned by the worker at the Social Grocery, in the municipality of Glyfada:

“There were no safety nets with regard to the economic criteria set by the Ministry. Some individuals who had been accepted a year before, ended up being rejected the year after, and

vice versa. What is more, there was no way to check the existence of extra revenues potentially obtained by certain beneficiaries through undeclared work”.

Proceeding to the set of questions which refer to the beneficiaries’ proposals for the structures’ enhancement in their entirety, the partakers responded that the most important thing to do would be to increase the number of staff members, and to fortify them both with equipment and funds. Also, another recommendation was the improvement of buildings and facilities as well as the beneficiaries’ stimulation for work upon their completion of the programme. According to the agronomist in the Public Garden, of the Northern Corporate Structure:

“Members of staff must always be knowledgeable and, mainly, intervening as to the beneficiaries’ psychosocial support, in order to help them develop their own skills on the journey towards social reinclusion. This would, in the long run, bear the essential results of the current programme, meaning that persons, who have forsaken the economic and social life, would be guided in such a way so as to cater not only for their basic needs, such as food and health, but also for their social needs, like work, communication, social involvement and social contribution”.

Complementary to the previous is the second-to-last question in the Interview Guide, which refers to ways of enhancing the services offered towards the beneficiaries. The participants mentioned that it is of vital importance for the personnel to stay constantly informed and updated, by attending seminars and training, so as to know how to handle groups of beneficiaries such as the Persons with Special Needs and the addicted.

A recommendation to improve the services was the beneficiaries’ creative engagement within the Structures’ premises, which would thus function also as a centre for socialization, beyond their role of catering for the basic necessities. Also, a proposed idea was to promote volunteerism and altruistic social contribution.

In addition, the running of a social school and the development of primary healthcare, via the establishment of a clinic at the structures’ premises, were also suggested. Last but not least, the opportunity for the beneficiaries themselves to provide feedback on the level of satisfaction with the services offered and to propose ideas for their improvement were also mentioned.

In it worth noting that, in response to this question, the interviewees argued that the Social Structures should operate under the close supervision of the central administration and not by the municipalities’, in order to halt their dependency on local government entities, which more often than not exercise social policy in the hunt for votes. Also, reference was made to the creation of a network of social structures across Greece, which would assist a lot in the dissemination of knowledge, in the handling of common problems, in the implementation of good practices, and even in tracking individuals who had been using social structures of other municipal bodies, as well.

Indicative of the above is the reply of workers in the Social Pharmacy of the Glyfada Municipality and in the Time Bank of the Metamorphosis Municipality, as follows:

“The Structures would have more to contribute, if more seminars and training programmes were available for us, the employees. Interacting with special social groups, (such as the Disabled and persons with addictions), in need of personalized care is something which we

as members of staff are not always able to offer. Also, provisions should be made for the beneficiaries' creative engagement at the premises of the Structures which, in this sense, would acquire the role of a centre for socializing, besides their contribution in the supply of the basics".

The final question of the interview asked from the survey participants to delineate a policy framework or a project to be implemented in the future, as follow-up action to the programme of Social Structures. The majority of them answered that there are no good reasons to design additional programmes, but to continue that of the Social Structures, instead. Many advocated for its re-design with interdisciplinary scientific teams in place and with more active involvement on the part of the users and by society, as a whole. Rather enlightening is the comment made by an interviewee, saying that the workers at the Social Structures should not be regarded as indirect beneficiaries, but rather simply as employees. Equally interesting is the proposal made by a worker at the Kitchen Structure in the Municipality of Metamorphosis, cited below:

"...there is room for future programmes, ones that could combine economic and social policy in Greece, like the "Building-up Skills and Employment" scheme, for example. They would give beneficiaries the chance to enjoy services and to learn things, all at once, and to gain expertise, so as to be ultimately in the position to stand in the labour market by their own means".

5. Conclusions

As far as the first thematic axis of research is concerned, the supplied interview answers are fully agreeable to international and domestic secondary sources. [Poverty and Social Exclusion] are both social phenomena which have recently been exacerbated in Greece – mainly due to the financial crisis. In relation to one another, they are interconnected, but not identical. The social groups which are affected the most, according to the interview responses, are the individuals living below the poverty limit, the homeless, the persons with special needs, the Roma, the immigrants, the children, the elderly, the single-parent families and the users of addictive substances.

Furthermore, the interviewees replied that they were aware of the existence of other programmes providing similar services, whose conduct, however, unlike the case of the Social Structures, was fragmented or incomplete. In addition, they consider the Social Structures to be the most significant service of social policy, compared to the respective social services offered by the municipal authorities.

Proceeding to the thematic unit of the Programme Evaluation, the key point resulting from the interviewees' responses is that the scope of the programme has been fulfilled entirely. More predominantly, the beneficiaries' re-integration into the community was also achieved through guided counselling and psychosocial support. At the same time though, the interview data shed light to the main issue which the Social Structures had to deal with, and that was the lack of resources. To be precise, they stated that the social structures were managing to deliver the best possible services to the beneficiaries, despite their considerable shortages in technical equipment and funds.

Indeed, the Social Structures of the Northern Corporate Partnership did face a serious problem. The workers in the Structures of the Northern Boroughs reported that the structures were disproportionately allocated due to mismanagement. As a consequence, a lot of beneficiaries had to move in numbers from one borough to another, in order to seek assistance. To add to it, transfer was problematic, too, since the public transit was inconvenient for the beneficiaries because of the inappropriate geographical dispersion of the Structures.

Completing the assessment part for the Structures, of great value is the conclusion that the beneficiaries welcomed the programme with a huge embrace. According to the interview data, such a warm response was prompted by the poverty and destitution of the times, while the workers' good manners and the extended publicity, which the programme received, also played a role towards its vast acceptance.

Some of the programme's main deficiencies reported have been the change in the potential beneficiaries' income criteria by the Ministry, which caused inconsistencies by accepting some and rejecting others, over the course of a year. Also, basic problems were the lack of financial and human resources and, the delays in payroll, the co-existence of multiple governing entities and agencies with divergent objectives and interests, as well as the lack of seamless supervision and guidance by the Ministry in charge.

Less important issues emerged in the relations between the partner bodies (Municipalities and the EPEKSA), owing to differences in term of approach. In other words, the local authorities wished to exhibit signs of social policy as heading for the elections, whereas the Non-Profit Civil Partnership had the intention to make good use of any available resources so as to cover the beneficiaries' needs, thus putting itself opposite.

The proposals submitted by the participants in the present study are, to a large extent, solutions to the problems mentioned above. The most insightful suggestion of all has been to re-design the Social Structures and re-start their operation with additional staff and improved facilities and equipment. Finally, another useful idea was the establishment of a network among all social structures in Greece, which would very contribute to the transmission of knowledge, the tackling of common issues, the application of good practices, and even to tracing individuals who might have been enjoying social structures' services in other boroughs as well.

Notes

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