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Social Welfare Voluntarism in Greece: a Fall before the Rise?

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Εθελοντισμός και κοινωνική προστασία στην Ελλάδα: πτώση πριν την άνοδο;

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ABSTRACT

Voluntarism remains globally important for many social issues and one of them is social cohesion. Historically, Greece's Civil Society was weak and dependent on the political parties. Voluntarism is totally absent from the Greek public sector and hardly developed within the Church. The main voluntary activity is channeled through Voluntary Organizations. This article focuses on formal, private, non-profit distributing, self-governing voluntary organizations whose main activity is in the field of social protection. We argue that the sector is small and weak and has not succeeded in adapting itself to the changing environment. Membership declines and all indicators show that the sector will shrivel further in the future.

KEYWORDS: Voluntarism, social protection, Greece

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ο εθελοντισμός εξακολουθεί να παραμένει παγκοσμίως σημαντικός σε πολλούς κοινωνικούς τομείς και ένας από αυτούς είναι η κοινωνική συνοχή. Η κοινωνία πολιτών στην Ελλάδα υπήρξε ιστορικά αδύναμη και εξαρτημένη από τα πολιτικά κόμματα. Ο εθελοντισμός είναι ανύπαρκτος εντός των κρατικών υπηρεσιών και ελάχιστα ανεπτυγμένος στο πλαίσιο της εκκλησίας: ο φυσικός χώρος εκδήλωσης του εθελοντισμού στη χώρα μας είναι οι Εθελοντικές Οργανώσεις. Η προσέγγισή μας επικεντρώνεται σε τυπικές, μη κρατικές, μη κερδοσκοπικές, αυτοδιοικούμενες οργανώσεις που δραστηριοποιούνται πρωτίστως στον τομέα της κοινωνικής προστασίας. Από την ανάλυση προκύπτει ότι ο τομέας είναι μικρός και αδύναμος και δεν κατάφερε να προσαρμοστεί στο μεταβαλλόμενο περιβάλλον. Το πλήθος των μελών φθίνει και όλα δείχνουν ότι αυτή η πτωτική τάση θα συνεχιστεί και στο μέλλον.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ-ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ: Εθελοντισμός, κοινωνική προστασία, Ελλάδα

1. Introduction

During the 1990s, the misleading term "welfare state" was replaced by the more accurate "welfare regim", which is the combined and interdependent way in which welfare is produced and allocated by the welfare triad: state, market and family. Now "to this triad we should rightfully add the third sector of voluntary, non-profit, welfare delivery. In some countries, the voluntary sector (often run by the church) does play a meaningful, even significant, role in the administration and delivery of services" (Esping-Andersen, 1999). Voluntarism is an international and diachronic

phenomenon, as old as human society itself. It is strategically important for fighting against poverty, social exclusion and discrimination, providing social inclusion, confronting crises caused by natural disasters and war conflicts, protecting the environment, reducing illiteracy, improving health conditions and strengthening democracy. It is literally a key concept for every single issue related to the fight of human society for a better future.

Facts about voluntarism are very impressive: 45% to 50% of the adult population in the USA, i.e., more than 100 million people, are volunteers. They spend more than 20 billion hours of voluntary work, or the equivalent of 9 million full-time jobs (Independent Sector, 2003a). The financial value of this labour has increased steadily during the past years and today it is estimated to be about € 168 million, while the percentage of people who are donors to voluntary organisations is even higher (Independent Sector, 2003b). In Canada, 6.5 million people are involved yearly in voluntary organisations, which adds up to a billion hours of work, an amount that is equal to 550,000 full-time jobs, worth more than € 10 billion (McClintock, 2004). The annual value of voluntary work is € 41 billion in the UK, and € 10.46 billion, or the equivalent of 455,000 full-time jobs, in Holland. In 1999, in South Korea, more than 3.5 million volunteers offered 451 million hours of work, worth € 1.53 billion. It is estimated that voluntary activity comes up to 8% to 14% of the Gross Global Product (NGO Committee, 2001).

Contemporary trends of social reform are probably leading towards a new environment where the role of the voluntary sector will be even more significant. During the last decades, in many European countries, new trends in economy and society are beginning to weaken the mechanisms of central programming, replacing them with decentralised and/or multi-central policies, where public, voluntary and private actors are participating, through innovative strategies of partnerships and joint actions. "In many European countries, proactive strategies, including partnerships, networks and other forms of cooperation, are contributing to the formation of organisational social capital, with a positive effect on the development of participatory processes in social policy and are motivating action groups towards negotiations for participating governance at the local level" (Petmesidou, 2003). On the other hand, the same interdependent geopolitical factors that have caused the boom of the popularity of voluntarism have also led to the understanding of its limits and have raised serious questions about letting voluntary initiative be the principal factor for solving complex social problems.

With many exceptions, the study of voluntarism in a large number of European countries is yet underdeveloped. In this article, we attempt to analyse and present the basic facts of the voluntary sector in Greece. In the next section, we try to define voluntarism and to present the current shift in volunteer motives and behavior as well as the new forms of volunteer activity and the new ways for recruiting volunteers. In section three, we focus on the theoretical context of voluntarism in Greece and we also present some empirical data related to this phenomenon, including Olympic Voluntarism during the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. In the fourth section, we attempt the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the voluntary organisations active in the field of social protection in Greece. The analysis is based on data gathered through the filling up of a structured questionnaire by almost every eligible organisation, while interviews with leaders, volunteers and members of the paid staff of these organisations as well as with civil servants in related agencies have also taken place. Finally, we present the conclusions of this analysis. We should stress though that conclusions directly depend on the set of the criteria chosen for the eligibility of organisations: different sets are possible, and these could lead to different conclusions.

2. Voluntarism: Definition and Limitations

Volunteering refers to “contributions that individuals make as a non-profit, non-wage and non-career action for the well-being of their neighbors, and society at large” (United Nations Volunteers, 2001). Voluntary service is one of the seven fundamental principles of the Red Cross–Red Crescent movement (next to the notions of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, unity and universality). Volunteers are “individuals who reach out beyond the confines of paid employment and normal responsibilities to contribute in different ways without expectation of profit or reward in the belief that their activities are beneficial to the community as well as satisfying to themselves” (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1993). “Volunteering is the voluntary giving of time and talents to deliver services or perform tasks with no direct financial compensation expected. Volunteering includes the participation of citizens in the direct delivery of services to others, citizen action groups, advocacy for causes, groups or individuals: participation in the governance of both private and public agencies; self-help and mutual aid endeavours; and a broad range of informal helping activities” (Cnaan & al., 1996).

Technically, voluntarism can be identified through the existence of eight values which are divided into four key dimensions: the first one is free choice (free will versus obligation to volunteer), the second is nature of the remuneration (no remuneration at all versus low pay), the third is the organizational context (formal versus informal), and the fourth is the intended target group (helping others versus benefiting one self) (Cnaan & al., 1996). Thus, the hard core of voluntarism would be characterised by freedom of choice, absence of remuneration, formal structure and pure altruistic motives (see also the three-dimensional model of Anheier & Salamon, 2001, the sociological modernization perspective of Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003, the phenomenological analysis, Yeung, 2004, the model of psychographic heterogeneity, Dolnicar & Randle, 2007 and the ecological model, Kulik, 2007). Nonetheless, the wider ranging criteria apply to volunteer activities as well in both theory and everyday practice. Thus, at the empirical level, and especially when it comes to gathering statistical data, it is wise to use more concrete, specific and detailed definitions (Archambault, 1997). As the borders are not clear, many organisations are misusing the term “voluntary” (Fyfe & Milligan, 2003).

After studying the criteria set by the Italian Legal Framework for Organised Voluntarism (266/91), the views of the Steering Group of Voluntary Service Organisations (1994) and the definitions given by Simonet (1998), Prouteau (1997) and Cnaan & al. (1996), Anthopoulos concludes that voluntarism is “a personal, spontaneous and free activity, aiming at no personal gain, by citizens individually or through organisations where they are members, for the benefit of the group they belong, or other people, or the local, national or international community, the motive being exclusively altruistic” (Anthopoulos, 2000). This element contradicts the notion of voluntarism as “work for other people, organisations or society as a whole that is carried out in an unpaid, non-compulsory way and within an organisational context” (van Daal, 1990). (The stress in both cases is ours).

Later, we will see that this organised context could be the state, the church, or civil society organisations. We should stress that although voluntarism is strongly related to civil society organisations, the two phenomena are neither identical nor synonymous. Some organisations may have voluntary leadership and large numbers of paid staff while others may use various

combinations of paid and voluntary staff. Other organisations may have a small number of volunteer memberships, but at the same time they can motivate a very large number of volunteers when there is a special need (Stasinopoulou, 1997)

In many cases, people working in civil society organisations are paid less than other people doing the same job in the official market. This difference could be regarded as their voluntary contributions. Another explanation may be that for some people, gaining experience and skills is more important than money, while other people may simply accept such conditions because they do not have another option. On the other hand, there is criticism against some members of international non governmental organisations that enjoy benefits such as luxury, off road vehicles and cutting-edge technological equipment that does not fit in the very poor communities where they are active. Rifkin (1996) and Beck (1999) are suggesting the establishment of credit systems that will exchange the voluntary work hours with insurance, pensions, education and other rights and benefits of a reciprocal nature (but see also the empirical evidence of Hustinx, 2007).

Nowadays, voluntarism is going through a period of rapid mutation. Old, traditional or classic voluntarism, based on altruism, giving, unselfishness, religiosity and feeling of responsibility against the nation or the society is replaced by a more selfish approach, as contemporary volunteers are interested more and more in personal benefits, freedom of choice, direct outcomes and a high degree of control (Hustinx, 2001, Kuhnlein, 1998, Olk, 1989). Voluntarism is moving towards a more individualised (Eckstein, 2001), decentralised (Beck, 1997), professional (Meijs & Hoogstad, 2001) and non – religious form (Inglehart, 1990, Anheier & Salamon, 2001, Hacket & Mutz, 2002).

Voluntarism as a permanent life style is declining, being replaced by a more short-term, occasional activity, with a lower degree of commitment. Avoiding heavy duties, such as serving aged or handicapped people, volunteers today are seeking much more spectacular, pleasant and modern activities (Bennet, 1998, Gaskin, 1998, Klages, 1998, Safrit & Merrill, 2000, Wuthnow, 1998). According to the empirical evidence, contemporary motives for volunteer activity are personal satisfaction (51% of the volunteers), making new friends (36%), staying active (29%), gaining new experiences (24%), social recognition (18%) and facing personal religious or political needs (18%) (Gaskin & Smith, 1997).

The above change of attitude, combined with rapid changes in the entire way of life, have led to new volunteer practices such as family and corporate voluntarism (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2000), virtual voluntarism (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2000), Blitz- and permanent voluntarism, while a new specialty, the manager of volunteer resources is emerging (Lautenschlager, 1991). New methods of recruiting and motivating volunteers have been invented, focused on special social groups such as the unemployed (Niyazi, 1996a), minorities (Ramos & Kasper, 2000), aboriginals (Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2001), young (Richardson, 2000), married (Carlin, 2001) or elderly women (Farkas & Himes, 1997), mothers (Rotoldo & Wilson, 2007) young (Marta & al., 2007, Kottasz, 2004), elderly men (Lindblom, 2001), seniors (Lie & Baines, 2007) handicapped (Department of Canadian Heritage's Community Partnerships, 2004, Niyazi, 1996b) or immigrants (Wilson, 2003). One thing is sure: voluntarism will never be the same in the future.

3. Voluntarism in Greece: Social Origins and current Attitudes

3.1 *The (Under) development of the Greek Civil Society*

The absence of a strong civil society is a structural characteristic of Greek society, which did not succeed in developing autonomous rules and values apart from politics and political parties: social and class struggles in Greece have primarily taken place through political party confrontation. Thus, a strong dependence of the civil society by the state is developed. Social struggle in Greece was primarily aiming at winning state power. This power was subsequently used as a starting point for further claims. Greek state apparatus was never adapted to modern capitalism while the struggle about financial issues was extremely politically polarised: “the strong grip of party politics on civil society constrains the possibilities of broad structural changes, which would facilitate a more flexible response to social demands by a mix of voluntary and statutory sectors. Awareness of such a need among trade unions, professional associations and political parties in Greece is still very low” (Petmesidou, 1991).

Class struggle was downgraded into political party confrontation; political parties have gained the status of the leader of the civil society and, thus, an unhealthy relationship between the state and society was developed. This is also evident within the field of social protection, where civil society has failed at establishing its own system of rules and values and every effort of limiting the “implicit” mechanism of income compensation was hampered by the splintered rights of various social groups (Petmesidou, 2003, Petmesidou & Tsoulouvis, 1990). A sufficient state mechanism able to bring together the local level - the first and second-tier social care foundations, the regional health systems and the civil society organisations - was never created. On the other hand, neither voluntary organisations, nor any other factors outside the state or the political parties have ever undertaken initiatives in the field of social policy (Petmesidou, 1991).

“The voluntary sector is hardly developed in Greece. The majority of voluntary organisations were set up by political parties after 1974. Strongly influenced by political factors, they are, nevertheless, only involved to an extremely limited extent in social action” (Robolis & al, 1995). Voluntary organisations have mainly focused their efforts on solving minor local problems forgotten by the central government. In many geographical areas, the motive for the foundation of voluntary organisations was merely putting pressure on the government to satisfy the claims of their members. In many cases, government responded positively. The only exception, especially after 1985, is the activity of women organizations which developed significant action regarding the position of women in Greek society and especially their professional status.

Moreover, not only did the state not support voluntary sector, but it often acted as a burden for its development. In parallel, the lack of consistent government policy for the sector contributed to its further segmentation. Inconsistent and sporadic government policies toward voluntary organisations have led to the heterogeneity of non-profit organisational forms. While well established organisations in given policy domains have been supported and controlled by the state, organisations in other policy areas have been left to their own devices (Tsakrklides, 1998). Moreover, there was no legislation specifically designed for voluntary organisations. Instead, there was a multiplicity of possible legal forms that led to the existence of a range of types or forms of social service organisations (Tsakrklides, 2000).

3.2 Public Opinion on Voluntarism in Greece

Despite these facts, philanthropy and voluntary organisations undoubtedly enjoy a high esteem by the Greek people: 67% of the Greeks trust them, a proportion higher than the appropriate ones for justice (66%), Parliament (61%) European Union (63%) the United Nations (38%), private business (24%) and political parties (17%) (European Commission, 1997). The vast majority of Greeks have a positive opinion on voluntarism (Gianniri, 2002), though this opinion is not transformed into voluntary activity: only 27.3% has seriously thought of providing voluntary work, while 55.9% thought of it to a minimal extent, and another 16.2% has absolutely not thought of it (Dionysopoulos, 2000). The above proportions are different when it comes to ages 15-29: more than 50% of this population group is thinking positively of participating in volunteer activities. Even more young people state that they have never had the opportunity of doing so: it seems that there is a serious gap between voluntary organisations and potential members, as the latter do not know the place, the time or the way they could participate (General Secretariat for Youth, 2000).

At the same time, 80.5% of the general population is not in the position to name even a single non governmental organisation. UNICEF enjoys the greater recognition among 110 organisations, followed by Medicines Sans Frontier, Greek Red Cross, Hamogelo Paidiou, Medicines of the World, Greenpeace, World Wide Fund for Nature and others (Panagiotopoulou, 2003). People would prefer to participate in philanthropy organisations (74.9%), ecology and environmental organisations (11.2%), peace and human rights organisations (5.9%) and sport associations and Olympic Voluntarism at even lower proportions. In fact, two years before the start of the Olympic Games in Athens, the very low interest of the Greeks to participate as volunteers was one of the many problems of the planning. In 2001, the proportion of the Greeks interested in participating as volunteers was only 9.5% and it dropped even more in the next year (Panagiotopoulou, 2003).

However, it was learned that intentions are different from final decisions. Three months before the start of the Olympic Games, 160,000 volunteers (in relation to 75,665 in Sydney and 78,000 in Atlanta) were officially registered. Most were under 35 years old (78%), women (55%), while 9.5% were Greeks living in 99 countries other than Greece and 25.5% were foreigners from 188 different countries (Ta Nea, 2004). Voluntarism was finally registered as one of the great successes of the Olympic Games. It is worth mentioning that many volunteers were proudly wearing their badges back home, even many days after the completion of their missions.

3.3 Identifying Voluntary Organisations in Greece

Despite significant efforts at the empirical (Stasinopoulou, 1997, Panagiotidou, 1999) as well as conceptual level (Kallas, 2004, Stylianidis, 2004, Sotiropoulos, 2004b), no permanent mechanism for the registration of data on voluntary activity was ever developed in Greece. As a result, empirical knowledge about the voluntary sector derives from studies that are focused only on current situations in separate sectors. As time passes by, such approaches are multiplying; it seems that the reaction of the civil society after the earthquake in Athens in 1999 (Sotiropoulos, 2004a) as well as Olympic Voluntarism had a positive effect in this direction. The use of different techniques is hindering the extract of comparative conclusions.

In 1997, 228 voluntary organisations active in the fields of environment, civilization, human rights, health and welfare were identified. They had 55,000 volunteers, since 72% of them used primarily volunteer work. Most volunteers were women between 30 and 45 years old and who

finished only elementary school. The vast majority of the organisations are based in or near Athens, 92.1% participates in some network and 25% is related to the Orthodox, Catholic or Evangelistic Church. Voluntary organisations also cooperate with schools (46%), state agencies (34.6%), local governments (43.4%) and other social and political factors. Their income comes from state subvention, member and non-member donations and selling of products and services. Most of them have less than 20 volunteers. Recruiting is mainly taking place through personal contact, while education and training of volunteers are underdeveloped (Stasinopoulou, 1997).

In 1999, 1,600 voluntary organisations active in the social field were identified. They met the following criteria: they have some sort of official recognition; they are not-for-profit, are independent from the state and serving, even partially, a public purpose. In 238 of these organisations, active membership is 27,710 people, total budget of € 20 million, and paid staff of 441 people. They act at the local (79.3%), regional (10.7%) or national (10%) level. In 135 pure voluntary organisations (no paid staff at all), active membership is 20,619 people and the total budget comes up to € 4.5 million, while they act at local (41.5%), regional (30.5%) or national (28%) level (Panagotidou, 1999).

In 2000, 13,552 voluntary organisations were located: 11,620 were sport associations, 1,507 were cultural associations and the rest were active in the fields of health, environment, ecology, human rights, women rights and the church (Tsoukalas and Koronaïou, 2000). At the same time, about 20% of the population claimed that it was permanently or occasionally active in the voluntary sector (Dionysopoulos, 2000) and 15.3% were members in social or cultural clubs (Gianniri, 2002). As regards to membership in non governmental organisations, Greece held the last place among all EU countries for both sexes (European Values Survey 2002/2003).

Volunteers prefer religious and church organisations (11.8%). Second choice are the fields of education, art and culture (11.20%) and then care for elderly, handicapped and socially excluded people (10.2%), sport and recreation (9.6%), professional organisations (7.7%), trade unions (6.5%), ecology, environment, animal rights (5.8%), political parties (4.9%), health (4.8%), world peace (4.7%), community action (6.5%), youth (2.5%), women rights (2.4%), development cooperation and human rights (1.8%). Choices of young people, aged 15 to 24 are very different: most of them do prefer sport associations, a trend that is progressively stronger during the last years. Their second choice are cultural and environmental organisations, while in contrast to the total population, their interest for philanthropy and religious organisations is very little (European Commission 1997 and 2001).

4. Voluntarism in the Field of Social Protection in Greece

4.1 Voluntarism within the State and the Church

As mentioned earlier, organised voluntary work can be provided through three distinct channels: the state, the church and civil society organisations. As regards to the first one, only one out of ten volunteers internationally offer their voluntary service within the public sector. Among the countries where there is data, the highest proportion is to be found in Slovakia (23%), followed by Belgium (20%) and Germany (14%), while the percentage in Ireland and Sweden are near zero (Gaskin and Smith, 1997). In the USA, Australia and Canada, it is very common that individuals provide voluntary work in places like schools, hospitals and houses for the elderly. We should not forget though, that in these countries, such institutions are parts of the non-profit, rather than the public sector.

Voluntary activity within the public sector in Greece is literally non-existing for two reasons. Firstly, the productivity of public servants in Greece has a very bad reputation. Thus, no volunteer would ever agree to do a job for free that a “lazy public servant” should normally do. Secondly, in Greece there is no legal framework for this case (with the exception of Law 1951/1991 about volunteer firefighters). So, even if there were willing volunteers, the public sector cannot face problems such as the insurance of volunteers (what happens if somebody gets hurt during the volunteer duty?) This is the same for both the central and the local governments (Kafantari, 2006).

The notion of philanthropy holds a central point in the tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church. However, voluntary activity within the church seems to be limited. In the 114 bigger church foundations (mostly houses for the elderly), the total number of volunteers are 480 people, or an average of 4.2 volunteers per unit (Holy Session of the Greek Church, 2001). If we consider that most of these volunteers are not active eight hours a day, five days a week, the full time equivalent is even smaller. We should add at this point that the legal status of the Greek Church may vary from that of other countries: the central part of the church is actually a self-administrated part of the public sector, while many other church institutions should rather be regarded as non-profit organisations.

4.2 Voluntarism within Civil Society Organisations

The greatest part of voluntary activity in Greece is taking place within voluntary organisations. Considering the field of social protection, we can distinguish two categories: organisations exclusively active in the field of social protection and others with different priorities and a secondary activity in social protection. The contribution of the latter in the field of social protection may be very important, but recording it is very difficult. The problem is that the activity may vary significantly from time to time: when there is a special need, such as a natural disaster, even a small or inactive organisation can potentially motivate a very large number of volunteers. From this point of view, the description of the situation at a specific moment can lead to wrong conclusions.

Social protection organisations can be either organisations that provide service to non-members or self-help organisations. We should not regard the latter as “voluntary” organisations, because of the benefits their members have. On the other hand, only a small proportion of the civil society organisations are indeed voluntary. But it is not easy to set the limits. This requires the definition of an “accepted proportion of paid work,” which is difficult and arbitrary. For example, if the criterion is “no paid work at all” then we should exclude organisations with large volunteer membership, just because they employ one paid secretary. On the other hand, if the criterion is the existence of even a single volunteer, then we should consider as a voluntary organisation every facility where a group of volunteers pays a visit at Christmas.

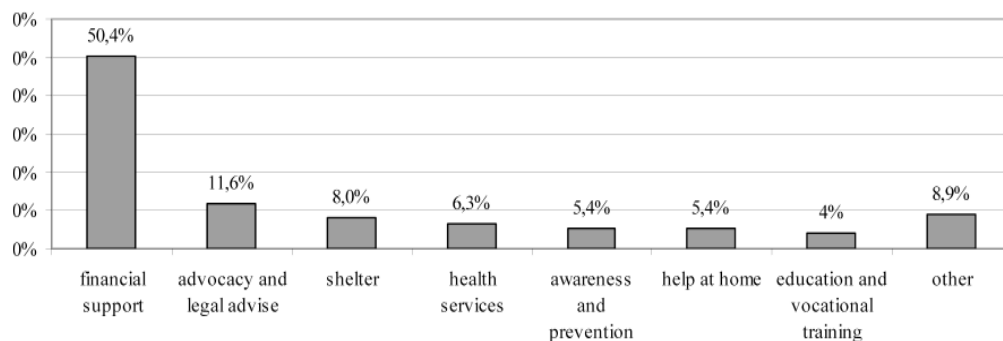
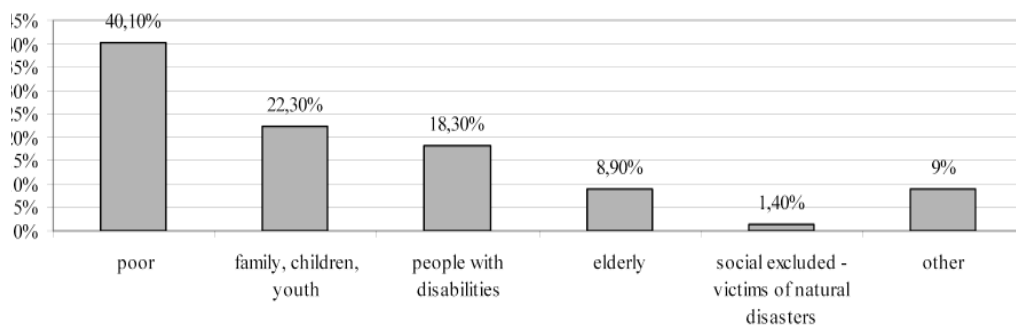
For the purpose of our analysis, we refer to organisations where volunteers are the majority – this means that the number of volunteers is higher than those of the paid staff. This is of course only a technical solution and not a suggestion for a new definition of the voluntary organisation. Secondly, we focus on organisations whose first priority is the provision of welfare services to non-members. Furthermore, we apply the criteria of the structural/operational definition of the non-profit sector: organisations are formal (that is, institutionalised to some extent), private (that is, institutionally separate from the government), non-profit distributing (that is, not returning profits generated to their owners or directors), and self-governing (that is, equipped to control their own activities) (Salamon & Anheier, 1992).

The hard core of social protection voluntarism in Greece is constituted by 224 organisations. They have 62,000 registered members, 5,500 active volunteers and 280 paid employees. The total annual budget is about € 9 million and they serve 35,000 people. In regard to sexes, the majority are women; as for ages, they range from 26 to 55 years, and as for professional status, most are pensioners. In regard to education, most volunteers have completed high school, and finally in regard to their financial situation, most claim to be neither rich nor poor. The recruitment of new volunteers is taking place basically through personal connections, but it is estimated that exposure of voluntarism on media, appropriate school education and awarding ethical prizes to distinguished volunteers could also play a positive role. The majority of paid employees are hired with no typical procedure, which is problematic as a proportion of the budget of the organisations is from the state (and so there should be equal opportunities for all candidates). Most of the employees are women, aged 35 to 54, with college degrees.

The majority of the leaders of the voluntary organisations are men, over 55 years old, pensioners, with college degrees. In many cases, the leader, the founder, the basic donor and the main volunteer worker are of the same person. The members originate from the same political, cultural and geographical background as the leader and they share common attitudes about social matters. Management is carried out with an outdated, traditional way, and the performance in using modern techniques is very poor (Polyzoidis, 2006). One third of the voluntary organisations own their chapter houses or offices, but the majority do not have computers, fax or even a telephone, while even fewer have e-mail or an internet site.

The main financial source is private donation and the second one is income from real estate. Other sources are special events, member fees, sales of products and services and public subventions from the central or the local governments. EU support is very low. Many organisations either are not interested in seeking European money, or claim that they do not have access, due to lack of information (Polyzoidis, 2005). Solving everyday problems in a non-systematic way has a negative effect on quality: most organisations describe their own performance as moderate.

Half of the voluntary organisations are specialised in providing financial support to the poor at a permanent or ad hoc basis; in Greece, there is no minimum income guarantee policy. The second biggest proportion goes to voluntary organisations that are providing advocacy and legal support. Other activities include provision of shelter, health services, public awareness, help at home, vocational training and education (Figure 1). The ways of intervention are very traditional and there are neither innovations nor empowerment. Most common and larger target group are the poor, followed by people with family problems, children and youths, people with disabilities and diseases, elderly and socially excluded and victims of natural disasters (Figure 2). It is not rare that this kind of support stigmatizes recipients, even though there are efforts for the intervention to be discreet. Most beneficiaries are women, older than 55 years, unemployed, with very low income and very poor educational background. Sometimes beneficiaries become aggressive against volunteers, seeking desperately for more support while others return the money they have received when they succeed in stabilising their income. Another problem is that people often try to cheat and gain benefits without being really in need. Voluntary organisations are giving priority to local people, whose financial background can easily be investigated. Therefore, strangers are usually channelled by organisations to seek aid from the region they come from.

Figure 1. Actions undertaken by Greek social protection voluntary organisations**Figure 2. Target groups of the Greek social protection voluntary organizations**

The more usual forms of voluntary organisations are the “Fraternities of Ladies and Young Ladies for Aid to the Poor”. They represent a long gone and declining form of charity, as the proportion of withdrawing members (mainly because of aging) to newcomers is disappointing – there are no young ladies anymore. Fraternities are normally covering some permanent needs of the poor population. Lately though, new needs emerged, upgrading their role significantly: that is, thousands of immigrants, among them children and babies, have managed to illegally pass the land or sea borders of Greece and are in desperate need for food, medicine and shelter.

One third of the voluntary organisations claim that they do not face any serious problem. Another percentage states that a frequent problem is the small number of volunteers and the fact that, among them, only a few are actually committed. The next frequent problem is the lack of equipment and staff while another problem is related to the lack of a modern legal framework. As regards to measures for the improvement of the performance of the sector in general, they suggest government subvention, projection of their mission by the media, and the creation of positive volunteer models through school education. Other proposals are staffing with professionals, concession of buildings and equipment, collaboration with scientific institutions, and establishment of national and international volunteer networks.

Even if one out of three voluntary organisations declares that the formation of social policy is influenced by them at the local, national or even international level, the reality is rather different: provided that such influence exists, this is on a very small scale and unofficial. In more than half of the cases, it is limited to organizing conferences, workshops and other events with subjects related to social policy. A not so common, but of course more efficient way of influencing policy is the establishment of informal communication based on interpersonal relationships, with decision-making centres. Another way is the participation of some people in both voluntary organisations and decision-making institutions. Furthermore, other more or less efficient methods of influencing policy are political pressure due to the representation of a large group of voters by voluntary organisations, conducting research, practising criticism, presenting alternative solutions and putting pressure on politicians by rich and famous volunteers. Many voluntary organisations state that target of their influence is promotion of reforms, strengthening of the role of the voluntary sector and resolution of legal problems, though in fact they do not have such agenda – they are only asking for money.

Elections are the common way for appointing leaders and leading groups. Being the chief executive officer or president of the Board of Directors is connected to personal sacrifices (of time, money and more). Many times, members are actually forced by others to be candidates: in many cases, the number of nominees is equivalent to the number of positions available. Members of each organisation have almost exclusively identical political, cultural and social background, so there is a good possibility that they all support the same political group. For this reason, voluntary organisations have never been a place of political confrontation; whoever disagrees just leaves the organisation.

Voluntary organisations are very active in developing relationships with other organisations as well as with various state, church and private institutions. These relationships are unofficial, superficial, and non permanent. There are no conflicts or competition between the different voluntary organisations. On the other hand, the absence of federations and confederations are one of the main characteristics of the social protection voluntary sector (see also Guo, 2007). This absence constitutes a major barrier to its communication with the state, but there are no signs that things will be changed in the near future. New and small organisations do not have the experience and the recourses to start a public consultation about this issue, while big, old established ones are part of the status quo and are not willing to enter the adventure.

5. Conclusions

Although the number of volunteers remains internationally stagnant and its nature is undergoing a period of rapid change, voluntarism still remains an exceptional global power. Especially in regards to social policy, the general prediction for all European countries is that its role will be even more significant in the future. In terms of history, voluntarism has never been well developed in Greece due to the particular way social class correlations have been shaped in this country. Volunteer studying is also underdeveloped, though there are signs of fast growing interest. The role of voluntarism within the state and the church is very limited. The natural place for the exercise of volunteer activity in Greece is through voluntary organisations. The Greek social security voluntary sector includes all organisations that are formal, private, non-profit distributing, self-governing, voluntary and mainly active in the field of social protection. There are seven major characteristics:

- a) The sector in general, as well as individual organisations is small. This is the same for all major parameters, such as the number of members, volunteers and paid staff, extent of intervention, equipment and budget.
- b) Most organisations owe their existence to one single person or a small group of people that share a common social background and same political and ethical opinions. Although democratic procedures is the rule, the whole philosophy as well as the ways of planning, organizing, staffing and controlling is based on individual choices of the leading group. Whoever disagrees quits and perhaps starts a new organisation.
- c) Greek voluntary organisations do not succeed in providing a platform for exchange of ideas to create or adapt innovations and incorporate larger groups of a wider social spectrum. Their intervention is small; it is done with the same methods as decades ago and the distance between volunteers and beneficiaries of the target group remains vast.
- d) Relationships with the government are controversial and fragmented. There is no specific legal framework while the public seems to be suspicious and acts restrictive against voluntary organisations. There are great differences in the level of access to financial support and to decision-making centers.
- e) Positive aspects are that voluntary organisations keep a distance from political parties and that they know their target group perfectly well so they can be very efficient, directing the resources towards the actual needs and allocate them effectively.
- f) Voluntary organisations are willing to cooperate with one another as well as with a large variety of public and private institutions. Nonetheless, cooperation is short and feeble and it does not lead to real partnership. In many cases, to preserve organizational independence and autonomy is a priority stronger than to provide better service.
- g) For this reason, there is absolute lack of second- and third-tier organisations. Each voluntary organisation focuses on its own claims from the government, thus, ignoring the promotion of structural changes that would be necessary for the further development of the entire sector.

The number of volunteers leaving due to aging is much larger than that of the newcomers. The designed government policies for a minimum guaranteed income will deprive voluntary organisations of their larger target group, the poor. On the other hand, a new mission is emerging, that is, helping the vast numbers of illegal migrants that are crossing this south eastern border of the European Union with a multiplied rhythm. Nonetheless, we should expect that the decline will continue. This traditional form of philanthropy will probably be replaced by new civil society organisations that will be more professionalized and will have a higher degree of institutional financing.

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