

Sociological, economic and operational characteristics of environmental organizations in the region of Attica (Greece)

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1. Introduction

The destruction of nature by human activities has caused some environmental threats like the disappearance of some ecosystems. The need for environmental sustainability led many people to support the idea to practise ecologically sound alternatives in their everyday lifestyle and consumer behavior in order to protect their environment (Cottis, 1994).

In particular, the problem of environmental degradation and hence, the need for protecting the environment arose after the Second World War. During the last two decades, the ecological movement led to new consciousness and behavior in people and societies toward the natural and manmade environment (Papaspiliotopoulos, 1982).

The roots of the ecological movement lie in the technological and societal changes that took place during the industrial revolution. At that time, a large number of organizations for environment protection were created. Therefore, the ecological movement was the answer to environmental threats caused by the industrialized life in the urban areas (McCormick, 1995).

Likewise, the ecological movement in Greece is not new and it includes various heterogeneous trends (Dermitzakis, 1989). Long before the creation of the first environmental movement, people started to realize that environmental

Abstract

The present study examines the role of the Greek Environmental Organizations (EOs) for natural environment (ecosystems) protection in Greece, as well as the problems and the challenges that these organizations have to face to inform and empower people on environmental sustainability issues. The study was based on a questionnaire survey of EOs set up in the region of Attica. Considering the data collected, the sociological, economic and operational profiles of the Greek EOs were built up. The results of the study indicate that the EOs success depends upon the size of their membership and their ability to raise funds, which relies on their close collaboration with the public sector. Moreover, good communication with organizations such as the European Ombudsman helps solving issues that the EOs face because of bureaucracy.

Résumé

Dans le présent travail, on examine le rôle des Organisations Environnementalistes Grecques (OE), engagées dans la protection de l'environnement naturel (écosystèmes), et les problèmes et défis auxquels ces organisations doivent faire face afin d'informer et de sensibiliser l'opinion sur les problèmes de durabilité de l'environnement. Cette étude a été axée sur une enquête-questionnaire concernant les OE basées dans la région d'Attica. Compte tenu des données rassemblées, il a été possible de tracer le profil sociologique, économique et opérationnel des OE grecques. Les résultats obtenus indiquent que le succès des OE dépend du nombre de membres et de leur capacité à repérer des fonds, liée à leur collaboration étroite avec le secteur public. En outre, les relations entretenues avec d'autres organisations, comme l'European Ombudsman, aident les OE à résoudre les problèmes posés par la bureaucratie.

problems existed in Greece. More than half a century ago, various investigators described soil erosion, anarchic urban development, deforestation and disappearance of some animal species (Louloudis, 1989). Following the peoples' awakening of interest in environmental degradation, in 1956, the first Greek environmental organization, the "Hellenic Association for the Protection of Nature" was set up (Sficas, 1989). This was the first of a series of organizations created to protect the environment.

The European Union could not ignore the need for protecting the environment and started to become concerned during the 1970's (Corcovelos, 1997; Georgakopoulos, 1995). Since then, the European Union activities have supported environment protection and allocated appropriate funds for this purpose (Chlepas et al., 1998). Indeed, Community Programs started to include environmental policy while, later on, environmental protection was associated with the economic and social development of an area (Mousis, 1999; Coccusis et al., 1997; Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, 1995). Today, in Greece, the Constitution covers many environmental protection issues, thus paving the way to the actions of environmental organizations (New Ecology, 1999; Antoniadis, 1999).

Some preliminary studies have recorded the number of Environmental Organizations in Greece, while some others have examined the profile of their members and activities (EKKE, 1997; Club of mountain's and sea's friends, 1991). On the other hand, to date, no study has been car-

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ried out on the role that these organizations play in environment protection and the problems that they have to face. For these reasons, data on the organizational and operational characteristics of the environmental protection movement were collected through a questionnaire survey. To this aim, quantitative and qualitative data of all environmental organizations in the region of Attica were collected. Based on these data, the profile of the Greek environmental organizations was built up and their problems were examined.

2. Materials and methods

The statistical frame of the study was based on the census of environmental organizations registered with the Greek Federation of Environmental Organizations (2000), which included 196 enterprises distributed in the 13 administrative regions of Greece. In the region of Attica, there were 86 EOs dealing with various issues of environmental sustainability. Therefore, the region of Attica can be a representative area for the whole country.

Data on the characteristics of environmental organizations were collected through a questionnaire survey during the spring 2000. Investigators completed the questionnaires by visiting all the organizations. The questionnaire comprised sociological and economic characteristics and general information about the foundation of the organizations and the collaboration with other public and private organizations.

The data collected were analysed by using descriptive statistics for calculating the means and standard deviations of continuous variables and the frequencies and percentages of discrete variables.

3. Results

The highest percentage (63%) of the environmental organizations had a small number of members from 1 to 300, 16% had 500 to 5000 members, while only 9% had more than 5,000 up to 20,000 members (Table 1). Most of the environmental organizations (80%) in the region of Attica were founded during the 1980s and 1990s, while during the 1940s, there was only one environmental organization. In addition, most of the environmental organizations (43%) were active at the international and national level, while 38% were active at the local level (Table 2). Nevertheless, the international activity may be limited to participation in international conferences. The main reason for founding an environmental organization was to protect the environment and inform people on environmental issues (55%). Most of the environmental organizations (35%) were involved in many activities like lobbying and environmental training (Table 3).

Forty percent of the EOs stated that people are not interested to get involved in environmental protection because they do not know the EOs' activities and 40% also stated

Table 1: *Number of EOs members*

No	%
5 - 300	63
301 - 500	12
501 - 5,000	16
5,001 - 20,000	9

Table 2: *EOs activities undertaken in different areas*

Area	%
National and international	43
Local	38
Other	19

Table 3: *Aims of EOs*

Aims	%
Concerned citizens and environment protection	55
Lobbying and environmental education	35
Other	10

Table 4: *Citizens participation in EOs*

Participation	%
Low participation (0-25 persons)	37
Medium participation (26-50 persons)	15
High participation (more than 51 persons)	14
No response	34

that people do not have time to get involved with environmental issues. Forty three percent of the EOs stated that people are not interested in environmental protection, but, on the other hand, 38% stated that people are interested. This difference is due to the different criteria the EOs use to assess peoples' environmental sensitivity. In order to inform people on environmental protection, the EOs publicized their activities through brochures (72%) or through media (25%). Furthermore, the EOs organized meetings, concerts and exhibitions emphasizing the importance of environmental protection. Advertisements through brochures were preferred because this was the most inexpensive medium.

Thirty seven percent of the EOs enrolled 25 members every year and only 14% of the EOs enrolled more than 50 new members. The EOs believed that this represented a low participation and for that reason, most EOs (69%) undertook activities to find new members. Enrollment of new members might strengthen the EOs' budget (Table 4). A major problem for the EOs was fund-raising. Seventy percent of the EOs raised funds only through memberships, while only 15% raised funds through national organizations or the European Union programs.

Forty percent of the EOs collaborated from time to time with Ministries in order to succeed in their mission and 20% of the EOs collaborated with the European Union, while, 50% of all EOs have collaborated with some other

EOs. The kind of collaboration can be as simple as sending some brochures to each other. This lack of collaboration is due to the fact that 55% of the EOs believed that they could be successful without the help of other organizations. Only 15% of the EOs believed that collaboration and teamwork is the key to success.

Forty five percent of the EOs knew the European Ombudsman and were aware of the possibility of getting legal support on environmental issues, but only 17% of the EOs had used legal action. Fifteen percent of the EOs did not know the existence and the role of the European Ombudsman.

The statistical analysis showed that there was a strong relationship between the efficiency and success of single actions of each EO and the number of people who supported this action. It was highlighted that as the number of supporting people increased in each EO, the interest of this EO in collaborating with other public or private organizations decreased. It is clear that EOs act individually and do not try to face environmental problems in a collective way. There was also a strong relation between the collaboration of the EOs and Ministries and the EOs achievement for fund allocation from the public sector. When the public sector knew that several EOs existed, various activities were supported, if there were specific funding programs. Finally, there was a strong relation between the collaboration of the EOs with the European Ombudsman and the fund allocation from E.U. programs. (Table 5).

4. Discussion and conclusion

During the forties, after the Second World War, people started to be concerned with the state of the environment. The reasons for this increasing interest were the population growth, the industrialization and the technological advances that had a decisive effect on the environmental equilibrium. Later on, environmental pollution drew the E.U. attention and concern and consequently, a series of measures for environment protection were adopted.

Nevertheless, this E.U. policy was not sufficient to improve the general quality of the environment in each member state. As a result, people began to set up a large number of environmental organizations and movements at the beginning of the 60's. The Greek citizens had the same concerns as well. The economic development requiring higher energy consumption and production led to environmental degradation. Therefore, more and more people felt the need to contribute to environmental sustainable development.

There was a large number of EOs in Greece, which contributed to environment protection by various means at various times. However, the lack of coordination and cooperation of the various EOs impaired their effectiveness. In addition, the presence of the term "ecology" in the na-

Table 5: Correlation between variables for EOs

Correlated Variables	P-value
Individual action and Citizens participation	<0.01
Collaboration with Ministries and Possibilities for fund allocation from public sector	<0.05
Collaboration with the European Ombudsman and Possibilities for fund allocation from E.U.	<0.05

me of various political groups and the insufficient promotion of the environmental dimension of ecology had aroused people's suspicion towards environmental groups.

Environmental Organizations in the region of Attica were many and small and the majority included up to 300 members. Generally, the EOs' activities were carried out at the local and international level and their main aim was the protection of the natural environment and the mobilization of citizens for environmental issues. Due to the lack of funds, most EOs used only publishing to promote their aims. Only a small number went to the Greek and European courts in order to protect the interest of the environment.

Even though members of the EOs considered advertisement as an attractive option to promote their aims, this was not an option due to the high cost. Each EO assessed the capacity of their organization according to several criteria, such as the funds or the number of active members of the groups. This is why some EOs leaders considered the citizens participation satisfactory, while the majority considered the citizens participation too low or not existing. Therefore, most EOs were not satisfied with the participation of citizens in many environmental activities and for this reason, they tried to increase their memberships.

In general, the EOs leaders attributed the lack of citizens participation to the lack of information for their effectiveness as well as their lack of concern. Furthermore, the lack of free time and the insufficient promotion of the activities were an important reason for the low citizens participation.

Most EOs considered that individual action could be effective for environment protection. As a result, the EOs' cooperation and mutual support became weaker and weaker. This belief was amplified by the strong financial situation and membership of various organizations, which thought that they could succeed in protecting the environment by themselves.

The major financial source of the EOs is the contribution of their members as well as sponsoring and earnings from various activities. Only a small number draws or has drawn financial support from the E.U.

Most EOs leaders were aware of the Ombudsman service. Only 17% of them had used this service. This finding indicates that citizens have no confidence in the E.U. institutions. It is possible that advertisement through the mass media (press), financial support to organizations by the government, and their cooperation with the various E.U. in-

stitutions can increase the effectiveness of the EOs in protecting the environment at the national and international level.

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