

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT TALES AND REALITIES

MICHALIS GOKAS

President of Cultural Centre of Marathonas

Recently, a radical reform has been attempted with a series of Laws, on the status of operation of the Organisations of Local Government (OLG) of first degree, and the introduction of the Local Government of Second Degree, the Prefectural Government.

Amongst the many and various changes and new adjustments, not always specifically successful, several issues of general cultural activities are included, in spite of the fact that in none of the relevant Laws the concept of «culture» or «cultural activity», etc, is defined.

Following a long-tested principle being stated by the ancient Greek «cynic» philosopher Antisthenes «principle of wisdom is definition of terms» we attempt a first approach of the term «culture» stating here indicatively one of the 170 (!) «known» up till now definitions «Culture, in the wider ethnographic meaning is a complex set, including notions such as knowledge, faith, ethics, law, tradition and all other abilities and customs of Man as member of society» (E. Taylor). The so defined culture can be divided in two sectors: the spiritual and the material culture.

The OLGs (irrespective of degree) according to the legislation in force «are concerned» with issues of culture in various ways.

Thus, according to Law 2218/1994 (art. 4) the administration of local affairs belongs to responsibility of Municipalities and Communities, of which a main concern is the promotion of the social and economic interests, as well as the cultural and intellectual/spiritual of the inhabitants of their jurisdiction.

In the responsibilities of the Municipalities and Communities can be included, among others, the setting up and the maintenance of operation of cultural centres, libraries, museums, galleries, philharmonic orchestras, theaters, etc. Also, the maintenance of traditional or historic buildings, offered by public or private entities, social and cultural actions and also the maintenance of archaeological sites of the jurisdiction, in cooperation with the respective public entities responsible and the (by subject or area) responsible public authorities (central, regional and prefectural).

Besides, the Local Councils, according to Law 2218/1994 (art. 48), that have succeeded the «unsuccessful» Development Associations have the responsibility to offer (and also for the above mentioned issues of general cultural character) «organisational and administrative support to their OLGs - members».

The Prefectural Government that has been established by Law 2218/1994 (and has not yet been ammended on this issue) includes in the responsibilities: «The establishment of Centres of cultural and social services provision», without of course any further specification of the kind, the spectrum and the financial support of those activities, that the initial creator of the Law transferred to the Organisations of internal Management and Operation of the respective Prefectural Governments.

Of course, the Prefectural Governments having estimated - according to the above regulation - «on their own judgement» the «real situation», have included into the Organisations of Internal Management and Operation various regulations, variable in type and width.

Thus, for example, in the Organisation of Internal Management and Operation of the United Prefectural Government of Athens - Piraeus, the following are mentioned, respectively:

Services Division

The Services of the Pref. Gov. of Athens are articulated as follows:

Section C: Services of Social Development, Culture, and Quality of Life.

Part B

Division and responsibilities of Central Services of the Department of Athens and the Central Sector of Athens...

Section E: Division of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The responsibilities of the Division are the promotion and development of sports, the foundation of Centres offering cultural services and the maintenance and promotion of the cultural heritage, the improvement of the image of the metropolitan Centre, so as to become an international pole of touristical attraction, the strengthening of relations with the Greek communities abroad, the care for the utilisation of the free time of the youth, and the study and care of their social problems.

The Division consists of the following Sections and Offices with respective responsibilities:

1. Section of Cultural Issues of which the responsiblities include:

The foundation of Centres of cultural and social services and in general responsibility, for the cultural development of the metropolitan centre.

2. Section of Sports Issues.

3. Section of popular retraining

4. Section of Youth

5. Office of Emigrants. (Greek Communities abroad) of which the responsibilities include:

The strengthening of relations of the Prefecture of Athens with the emigrant communities, which represent nationally or internationally all Greek emigrants.

The co-operation with the above organisations for the common planning of cultural festivities aiming to the continuation of tradition and the cultural heritage and the spread of the above among the youth, born and living in other areas, for the organisation of common development Conferences and the support for their possible repatriation in the Prefecture, as well as the utilisation of scientists abroad.

Similar, but more detailed are the regulations included in the Internal Organisation of Management and Operation of the Prefectural Government of Eastern Attiki:

Service of Culture and Sports:

The Service is divided at various section-levels and has all the responsibilities

transferred from the Central Agencies. More specifically, it has the following responsibilities:

A. In the section of Culture:

1. The care for the protection, promotion and valuation of the cultural heritage that exists in the area of jurisdiction of the Perf. Gov.

2. The care for the development of the artistic culture, music, ethnography, archaeology, theatre, cinema, dance, and other arts, in the jurisdiction of the Perf. Gov., in which the settlement of the exhibition of the above in conjunction with the finance and conditions of operation takes place.

3. The care for the organisation of cultural, artistic and spiritual festivities and the support of private initiatives for foundation and maintenance of museums and cultural centres in co-operation with the relevant agencies of Department of Culture, the OLG and the Church authorities.

B. In the Section of Sports.

From the above mentioned provisions the following come forward:

The width of responsibilities of the Local Entities concerned with culture issues should be considered as satisfactory.

The way of management, operation and finance of those activities is rather vague and it should be considered as given that the cultural activities - in general - at the local level will have the same status of «hauling» as all other issues within the OLGs and the Prefectural Government.

But, since the economic scarcity at the local entities in Greece is profound, the traditional belief of local Governors that «each action should carry with it immediate financial or political profit» together with the hesitance of the Central Administration to generously finance cultural activities at the local level, the whole situation cannot be described as «fruit full».

Here, one is not implying the actions of the newly - founded Prefectural Governments. But experience from the past cultural activity of the OLGs to them leads to bitter comments.

The Greek OLGs have up till now taken actions in cultural issues - according to the respective legislation - mainly through Community / Municipal Enterprises, which have often been regarded from state as «productive investment», with consequence that they could be financed by specific status through Laws 1262/1982 and 1892/1990.

Law 1262/1982, art. 2, par. 1st.

The provisions of this Law include investments, which are regarded as «productive» (with whatever this bears), those made by OLG enterprises for erecting buildings of cultural activities.

Law 1892/1990, article 2, par. 1st.

The same as with previous Law.

Under this legislation and according to the gained experience - based on elements of recent Studies - the situation is as follows:

A small number of Municipalities and Communities has proceeded to the setting up of a special Entity (Municipal or Communal Enterprise, Development Association, or public entity of any other kind, Service or Section within the Community or Municipality) for the «provision» of cultural activities / services / goods to the inhabitants of their jurisdiction.

The produced cultural activities - irrelevant of special texture - have in general reduced range of local spread.

The cooperation with other OLGs or Local Cultural Entities, or Academic Institutions are very rare.

The covered areas of cultural activity at the local level are rather wide:

As explanatory reasons of these limitations the following can be mentioned: The lack of financial resources, lack of trained staff, the lack of a flexible institutional framework for cooperation between OLGs and other entities of similar orientation, (Public or private).

For those in fond of epilogs of specific orientation, it should be mentioned here that at a first stage, until the pragmatic establishment of operation of the Prefectural Government, there is a need for a **Managing Entity** under the coverage of Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece (KEDKE) to be established. This being «spread» at central / regional / Prefectural level should study, plan, support, facilitate finance and orientate the cultural activities of OLGs.

The finances of this Entity may source from various sources such as: central government grants, support, loans, selling of the cultural «product» / services», special (and local) levies, income from archaeological sites and support from International Organisations such as U.N., UNESCO, E.U. et.

In this case, the international experience is valuable and should be spread to the OLGs.

Otherwise, the whole issue of cultural activities in general, which are in themselves «condicio sine qua non» for the development and progress of our Society will continue to be ruled by the centripetal inflexible central government, which, with few remarkable exemptions, has not given satisfactory cultural intervention and results.

NOTES

1. See C. GE. ATHANASSOPOULOS: Regional Government, Local Government. Vol. B' Athens, 1995, p. 34 .

2. See «Review of Decentralisation, Local Government and Regional Development», vol. 1 Athens, 1955, p. 2.

3. See C. GE. ATHANASSOPOULOS: The development organisation in space. Scientific annal of the Institute of Regional Development of the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences. Athens, 1992, p. 2.

4. Several «objections» have been mentioned against the Municipal and Communal Enterprises, such as, for example that the majority of those enterprises is oriented Lowards non-productive sectors of the economy, that they tend to belong solely to the tertiary sector, that they «cover» procedures of «uncheched» hiring of staff, etc.

5. See C. GE. ATHANASSOPOULOS: The Financial Incentives in the institutional framework of Regional Development. Vol. A', Athens 1993, p. 19 fol. Vas. D. DELITHEOU: The legal status of foreign direct investments and foreign capitals in Greece. Athens, 1996.

6. See C. GE. ATHANASSOPOULOS: Institutional framework of Regional Development. Vol. A', 3rd Ed. Athens 1996, p. 123 fol. Vol B', 3rd Ed. Athens 1995, p. 28 fol.

7. See EETAA/ΚΕΔΚΕ: The cultural activity of the OLGs. Athens, 1993.

8. See general issues in D. KONSOLA: The international Protection of global cultural heritage. Athens, 1994.

9. See C. GE. ATHANASSOPOULOS: Regional Adiministarion - Local Government. Vol. A' 3rd Ed. Athens, 1996. Vol. B', 3rd Ed. 1995, p. 74.