

The Rationalization of Social Services in Greece in the framework of European Social Policy

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Abstract

The new European policies of employment and social protection are based on the strategy for the use of human resources and Social Capital taking into account the quantitative but mainly the qualitative factors that presuppose a developmental social policy. In parallel, they activate and improve specific human capital, by providing it with the ability to make the most of an autonomous or cooperative productive participation, creating surplus itself and contributing with its own occupation to the redistribution policy. In this way, the function of the social cohesion is enhanced in the various fields of actions' application, while the social policy, social protection and solidarity obtain a new dynamic character, contributing essentially to the increase of the developmental capabilities in geographic areas with the contribution of the individuals that until today hadn't had any participation in production.

Introduction

The European strategies¹ for social inclusion seem to intersect with the new active employment policies. In order to achieve the aim of social inclusion in accordance with the improvement of human resources and the real promotion of a developmental perspective, the European and National Action Plans² for Social Inclusion suggest the provision of motives, especially the rationalization of the Public Administration's operation with the creation of administrative structures and the promotion of the Local Government involvement in welfare policies. Through the development of high quality social services, vulnerable individuals are assisted to get over the problems that their institutional exclusion brings about. Therefore, any efforts should concern the total removal of the obstacles for the access of vulnerable groups to goods and services.

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1. At European level, the Luxemburg procedure, as the emergency top meeting for employment which took place in 1997 is known, set the terms of applying the European Strategy for Employment. Specifically, it determined the role of the European Committee, of the Member States Council, the application series of the NSE, as well as the guidelines and the structure of the National Action Plan for Employment (NAPE). The National Action Plan for Employment and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPSI) are drafted at national level, whilst they aim at convergences at European level.
2. Greek National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPSI)

These initiatives are harmonized, as it was stressed above, with reviewed Constitutions of the member states of E.U where the content of social rights and social protection are strengthened, through the formal establishment in the European law and order. To this direction, the reviewed policies for Social Inclusion contribute to the improvement of the social and financial situation and of the quality of life for vulnerable groups, as well as to the national aim for reducing the number of people who live in conditions of social and financial insecurity. Particularly positive is the use of individualized actions of social policy having as focal point the activation of the potentials of the individuals to whom the actions are addressed, taking into account the structural changes and the reforms.

Social integration and new social Services

At this point, these matters are extended in two pillars, which are gradually converged and compose a unified proposal. The first pillar stands critically on subjects, which result from the new policies and the planning for access to work and social inclusion and on subjects regarding welfare and social care, whereas the second pillar concerns the synthesis and the integration of social services for non favorite population groups to employment.

Social inclusion is a complex concept, which is difficult to be defined let alone to be accurately estimated. Its relationship with economic sizes, like income distribution or even with the low income, as poverty is conventionally defined, is neither simple nor logical. According to the social inclusion policy, there are accession problems which are not linked with low income and low income problems that do not entail accession problems. In any case, even if the relation itself between low income and employment is presented – according to the policy for social inclusion – up to a point as highly complex, only few can disagree with the self-evident fact that the upturn of the labor market leads to a significant decrease in poverty and social exclusion risk.³

Furthermore, in the reviewed Constitutions of the Member States of E.U a clause was introduced which clearly and at the highest legislative level safeguards the social state. This constitutional report establishes also typically in the Member States law and order the principle of social protection. We should also clarify the subtle distinction between poverty and social inclusion and point out that social exclusion is not only connected with insufficient income but can also go beyond income issues and manifests itself in fields like employment, housing, education, health and access to services. Additionally, the concept of social exclusion is connected with a lack of individual and social rights, which are considered as fundamental, a lack of participation in production and in enjoyment of social and public goods and with a lack of participation in public affairs but also in power exercise.

In parallel, by securing better access to educational services, by combating direct and indirect forms of discrimination which non privileged groups face, but also by planning measures (e.g. networks which reinforce social cohesion or networks for social solidarity), even through legislative regulations for the solution of the problems, the basic aim, which is the accession of vulnerable groups to the labor market, is facilitated. The effectiveness of the interventions is connected with the social and working environment in which the individual will be incorporated or re-incorporated, in order to experience the social terms of ratification of the results coming from the services offered by the supportive mechanisms. Otherwise, there is a danger of creating a negative self-image, through lack of adaptation in working environments where stress and performance deterioration is observed. By attempting, for example, an evaluation of the Consulting

³ Ministry of Employment and Social Protection : National Action Plan for the certification of the Common Supportive Services' Centers, 2002

and Supportive Services Centers' Action Plans,⁴ one can identify the following services which either indirectly or directly support the procedures for facilitating vulnerable groups' access to the labor market. Horizontal services, whose content is defined according to the separate target groups' needs

- § Social – legal counseling support (individual or team)
- § Counseling for social accession - or re-accession
- § Professional counseling and professional orientation
- § Information-sensitization
- § Socio-educational and psychosocial support

The social and working preparation is combined with removing discrimination and with empowering the individuals who are threatened with exclusion from the labor market. The completion of this circle of actions can help individuals to have access to active employment policies (pre-training, training, acquisition of working experience with ulterior motive the filling of new work posts, or the creation of enterprises as new freelance professionals).

At this point, we should mention the importance and the aim of social skills, like self-confidence, cooperation, team working skills, as well as the importance and aim of professional skills, which strengthen one's professional profile through complementary training for moving on to a professional role. Therefore, the contemporary concept of social care includes sets of actions that go hand-in-hand with the reinforcement and empowerment of the individual and with the mobilization and sensitization of the social fabric, and contribute to both social and work inclusion. For example, we believe that the realistic concept of empowerment as a procedure of self-reliance and communicational appearance of the individual is completed through active participation both in social events and at the work place.

These services are included in a complete planning of special education provision and of accession to labor market actions for all vulnerable groups or socially excluded groups. At the same time the evaluation of the effectiveness of the national policies for the social care lies with the safeguard of a services network, ranging from social rights for less favorite groups, rehabilitation of mental and social health and their application, to active policies for employment.

This new type of social policy creates a new framework for cooperation, which is defined through negotiations as a contract, in which all these bodies that can play some part in its application are involved. A prerequisite for the effectiveness of this policy is its accession to the decentralization system that the new policies of local development provide. In this way, the function of social cohesion is enhanced in various fields of activities, while the social policy and protection obtain a new dynamic character, contributing essentially in an increase in developed capabilities⁵ in geographical areas with the contribution of individuals that until today do not participate in production.

⁴ Ministry of Employment and Social Protection: National Action Plan for the certification of the Common Supportive Services' Centers, 2002

⁵ Fighting poverty and social exclusion constitutes a challenge for today's social policy. Against a background of continuously growing competition and unemployment, the Greek society talks about, and also applies, with slow rates and structures often bureaucratic, new networks of social protection. These are expected to become a powerful counterbalance to the consequences of the labor market's crisis, the restriction of public financing for the social welfare, the change in family structures and the social exclusion.

New system of Social Protection and Social Development

As we can see from the above, a relocation of the aim is observed: from accession to the labor market to prevention of the exclusion from the labor market. For those issues and in the process of searching measures which can balance the adverse situations that people and groups experience, specific initiatives with the participation of specific NGOs have been taken on like the reinforcement of the social services sector which is a special field for the activation of the social welfare system. It is about the group of the organized activities of public, private and voluntary bodies, which aim at the improvement or the restoration of people or groups' ability to meet the needs and the prospective of living and social participation.

In recent years, a great number of various social structures and Organizations have been founded, which provide consulting services and support for the entrance to employment. These Organizations, through different methods, aim at supporting the unemployed or members of groups who are subject to discriminations, to organize an active individual strategy, so as to be able to enter the labour market. These structures are different from each other as to the type, the legal form, the groups to which they apply and the methodology they use. They also target, in their majority, to support people with their orientation within a changeable labor market and with the organization of an active individual policy so as to be able to enter the labor market.⁶ Furthermore, the sectors of complex policy proposals have aim at promoting through a systematic process, the institutional aspects that can take effective measures for the improvement of the beneficiary's situation. The changes in organisation and function that are proposed through the projects of National Actions Plans for Employment⁷ and Social Protection⁸ have the possibility to give an important provision in the response of the social state to the society's needs.

It is noted that the activation of One Stop Shops⁹ between bodies in practice, exceeds the agreement networking and is not limited in technical possibilities that are offered for communication. Therefore, the opportunity to face effectively and through united systems of cooperative bodies, the complex and various problems of vulnerable socially groups is given. At the same time, through common specialised aims of projects and the thematic networking,

⁶ The research examined also a wide range of matters. Specifically, it focused on matters which are related to the structures of the "intermediate sector", meaning the structures supervised by Organizations of the Local Government, NGOs and by Civil Society Bodies. Conditions of foundation and evolution of these "structures", staffing and viability, as they are laid down by the administrative and scientific are responsible for these structures. One of the central results had to do with the coupling of job offer and demand, which also presupposes the legislation of procedures of dialogue, understanding and networking with the social partners and the local bodies, in local and peripheral level. The research venture can be placed within the wider program of E-Quality: "Development of a quality system of consulting services supporting the occupation" targeting on the formation of a framework based on quality characteristics, preconditions, criteria and procedures, through the development and the pilot application of a quality system for the organizations, their services, and their executives that provide a consulting support regarding the equal access of all people and groups to the labor market.

⁷ Greek National Actions Plans for Employment, 2005/ 6

⁸ Greek National Actions Plans for Social Protection, 2003-2006

⁹ The institution of "one stop shop" has included a modern and effective medium for the social-financial inclusion of vulnerable groups in specific countries of the European Union (N. Nagopoulos : *Concerted and Complementary Actions of integrated Intervention for the Reinforcement of Employment*, E.C / Greek Ministry of Labor, 2005). "One stop shop" is the physical or other type (e.g. electronic) concentration services in a specific area, aiming at the total arsis of all the barriers that are limiting the inclusion of vulnerable groups members in labour market as employees/self – employees, or as business men. In this framework, 'Unified Contact Points' will have to be in position to provide, according to the needs of each member of vulnerable teams, consultation services, guidance, covering services (e.g. accommodation, caring of dependent members, e.t.c) and supportive services of employment or businesses.

successful applications that fulfil multiple criteria, like innovation, broader dissemination and application, and sustainability are revealed.

According to a group of criteria and with a specific methodology, the proved successful applications of projects are selected, which are included in similar needs situations as a good practice. Comprehensiveness and the subject's content constitute the core of good practices and facilitate the transfer of successful practices in complex proposals of policies according to proved needs and priority policies in the above mentioned dimensions. According to this form, the basic structures of selected practices of Action Plans have a common aim.

Specifications of the Framework of Common Action for developmental social policy

The composition of thematic Social Networks by Developmental Partnerships¹⁰ consists in initiatives of wider partnerships aiming at disseminating tested and recognized results from the implementation of projects which specialize in national and European policy priorities for the citizens' equal access to labor markets in a variety of domains and geographical regions. Moreover, the opportunity is given so that the effective practices and the new know-how for the promotion of equality in all sectors of social life can be categorized and distributed, so that there will be essential contribution to and exchange of transnational experiences of full-time employment, promotion of quality and productivity as well as the strengthening of cohesion in labor market at a national and European level.

Henceforth, the common actions aim at getting added value and disseminating the project results, enlarging and supporting active participation of individuals from target groups; these actions primarily aim at connecting good practices resulting from the specific projects with the core of an integrated programme of projects in co-operation with other collaborating sectors that have been implementing similar actions. The final goal is to support vertical mainstreaming and increase repercussions at the level of applied political practices. In this Framework the selected discussion themes of the working groups of the European Thematic Networks¹¹ are concerned with:

- the modernisation of existing consulting structures of employment and with the development of new services with a good network and extensive co-operation so that good practices can be disseminated better;
- the support, the connection and the collaboration of consulting support structures of employment with enterprises;

¹⁰ The European and National Thematic Networks constitute dynamic Workgroups, which with the completion of their results and products, are extending partnerships with organisations that are developing relevant activities and fundamental bodies, in order to attempt the dissemination of information in horizontal level, and also the acknowledgement of innovative practices in decision – making that are contributing in the effect of systems and policies in fundamental level of policy making. Specially, they recommend initiatives for broader partnerships with the aim of dissemination of tested and recognisable results by applying plans that are specialised in sectoral and geographical environment, the national and European policy priorities for the equal access of citizens in labour markets. In addition, they are carrying the effective practices and the new know – how for the promotion of equality and exchange of intergovernmental experiences towards the direction of full employment, the advance of quality and production and the enhancement of cohesion in labour market in national and European level.

¹¹ Nagopoulos N., Bouzas N. : «National Thematic Network», www.equal.gr, 2004

- the investigation of the institutional framework as well as with drafting policy proposals for the overall treatment of problems which the most vulnerable groups encounter;
- the focus of employment consultants on new domains that strengthen the reasoning of integrated structural interventions;
- the development of supporting structures, qualitative level of services provided and mechanisms to detect needs for equal and full access to basic social goods and rights, which facilitate everyone's smooth access to the labour market;
- the continuous consulting support of the development of social and professional skills related to the needs emerging from the new organisational forms of labour and the management of variety and diversity;
- the linkage of local development with the employment needs of socially vulnerable groups and the engagement of all local sectors, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Social partners at all stages of support, starting from the planning stage up to the stage of action implementations as well as of the wider implementation of successful practices;
- the management of cultural differences, the preparation of immigrants, refugees and national minorities for issues concerning their social and labour integration;
- the elaboration of individualised plans of education, social inclusion and comprehension of the strategy for the incorporation in the labour market of individuals with multiple difficulties (i.e. comprehension of social exclusion and poverty with the help of comparative indicators) as well as the development of initiative factors that deal with social exclusion and poverty effectively and promote innovative methods;
- the adoption of enhanced methods for the right assessment of individuals' learning and abilities, the organisation of exchanges in policies that are implemented and promote reciprocal learning, in relation to the National Action Plans of the E.U Member States and the possibility to acquire life long education and training;
- the description of employers' role, the organisation of employment support and trade-union associations, motives of participation and the aid of discussion about special themes (or thematic axes) oriented towards the enhancement of coupling, so that both the unemployed and enterprises get benefit. Within this framework, actions will be undertaken, strengthening the harmonisation of professional and family life.

Thematic priorities of Common Action Plans and Criteria for demonstrating good practices for developmental social policy

The thematic priorities of Common Action Plans for developmental social policy are based on the preceding selected thematic axes of discussion at European level, something that is related directly to the composition of National Thematic Networks. In this Framework, the Developmental Partnerships' good practices for social development and their affinity with these thematic priorities have been taken into consideration. The treatment and composition of individual parts of practices that may be of interest is attempting to supply the drafting of policy proposals based on realised needs and gaps within wider socio-economic developments. Furthermore, the treatment of these parts contributes to the efforts of working groups belonging to the Networks to get those results from their work that can strengthen

texts of work with their individual good practices; on these texts the integrated, coordinated and additional character of interventions is definitely impressed. The demonstration of good practices for developmental social policy is based on the criteria as described below.¹²

Innovation: Focuses on new approaches related to existing practices which deal with current needs and problems and points out gaps in or/and the lack of policy making.

Coherence: Is related to the correct understanding of problems of target groups as well as to response to specific demands and needs derived from their socioeconomic condition.

Effectiveness: Refers to direct quantitative and qualitative results from the implementation or testing of the suggested practices and the degree of attainment of the initial and the expected results.

Consequences: Are related to the expected long-term results and their direct or indirect consequences as well as to the utilization of quantitative and qualitative indices on the effects of the implemented practices.

Ability to implement: This is a test of the ability to reproduce and re-implement practices under other circumstances and in other environments as well as to inform and set human factor requirements (i.e. specialization and size) that are necessary so that the success of the implemented practice is ensured.

Ability to implement widely: Is related to the ability to adopt successful practices from all interested parties. It also focuses on actions that can contribute to the maximization of the results of these practices.

Empowerment: This concept and practice emphasizes specific ways of how the potential beneficiaries can get involved in decision-making, designing and implementing. It also indicates to what degree the beneficiaries strengthen their position in the labor market.

Accessibility: Refers to the utilization of the target groups' accessibility to products and practices as well as to the opportunity to use the products and practices according to target groups' abilities and skills.

Utility: Is related to the other users' ability to utilize practices and/or products so that other population groups can benefit. It is generally the ability to develop and utilize products / practices as tools of frequent and independent use.

Effectiveness: Compares the resources utilized in relevant and/or previous practices and considers how to maximize the effectiveness of products / practices in relation to a potential increase of resources.

Targets of the interventions of Thematic Networks

The primary target of the actions of Thematic Networks for developmental social policy is the continuous enhancement of current integrated management systems for equal opportunities of specific vulnerable groups in the products and services provided and especially their facilitation during the integration (or re-integration) period in the labor market. This target to be achieved requires the promotion of co-operation between the Development Consortia

¹² N. Nagopoulos : *Concerted and Complementary Actions of integrated Intervention for the Reinforcement of Employment*, E.C / Greek Ministry of Labor, 2005

on the basis of a framework common actions which disseminates best practices to the thematic actions of the projects (horizontal mainstreaming) and relates innovative practices to produced products, which eventually can affect the labor systems, practices and policies and social integration at national and European level (vertical mainstreaming).

At this point, it is important to emphasize that the common target is, first, to facilitate the co-operation of the related groups so they can exchange experience and information on the thematic priorities highlighted in the study of the projects, and, second, to minimize the fragmentation and the lack of co-operation between those actors that take up lots of different actions within the same thematic priority. This common target can also highlight multifunctional areas of services that facilitate simultaneously and in many different ways the public. Furthermore, when providing services, the related groups complement each other by offering support and thus can make use, to a great extent, of the infrastructure they have as well as of the experience of the specialized workforce they employ. The central aim is that the coordinated and integrated approach can deal with the problems of the beneficiaries, so that the latter can obtain individualized support to overcome the difficulties that put off social and professional integration.

The more particular aims of the Common Action Plan specifying the framework of thematic priorities in combination with the priorities at the European level are as presented hereafter. Activation of those responsible for the projects which are relevant to the strengthening of wider aims and to the generation of those requirements for co-operative processes, so that all partners deal together with the problems of social groups, as the partners may try to adapt to the content of the National and European policies for labor. Upgrading of implementation sectors as they assume roles and take upon responsibilities that overcome a potentially restrictive and fragmented view of their involvement in the project has been assigned to them through a wider and better communication and by involving the products of their actions with other similar actions heading towards the same direction.

Whereas the respective experience of Member States is taken into consideration, promotion of perceptions and practices of integrated and combined interventions aims at a horizontal and vertical mainstreaming in order to contribute as much as possible to influencing the policy-makers of labor and social integration. Participation in drafting policy proposals - which deal with special topics that are brought up from specific products, conditions and best practices of the projects - and exploration of integrated plans of actions, coordination and Network so that there will be a more effective approach to vulnerable groups' problems.

Bringing out the competitive advantages that are connected with the target groups and the benefits derived for the economic reality as well as the upgrading of those conditions that promote social integration. Utilization of the results of projects in common actions which are promoted and disseminated widely. Furthermore, the dissemination, acceptance and implementation of specific effective practices at national and European level and their deployment in benefited actors and groups (i.e. beneficiaries) that have not been active participants in the project.

Conclusion

The complexity and the importance of the problems that the vulnerable groups are facing today demands the development of Support social Networks, which can include 'new forms of aggregative action and intervention', where the people participate actively in their inclusion procedures in the labour market as well as in the society. In this Framework the Development of local productive systems and Local Councils (Bodies of Local Government, Communities, Development Companies, Representatives of Labor Unions, Union Centers,

Bodies of the wider Civil Sector, Business Association of Local Social Economy¹³, Bodies of collective Representation of susceptible groups) based on:

- the elements and information which are collected, as well as on the analyses of the involved bodies concerning the socioeconomic situation and the local labor markets
- the diagnoses of local markets, needs and priorities
- the developmental policy of the Regions and to the focuses of the Developmental Priorities, the way they are developed in the Regional Business Programs
- the priorities and guidelines of the NAPE and of the National Strategy for Employment.

In relation to the local networking, the number and the kind of the participant bodies, their role, the cooperation form, the objectives and organization, as well as the experiences in national and European level, are taken into account. Moreover, the local peculiarities and the specific social, financial, legislation and historic - social framework of each region seek for different choices. In every case, the development of cooperation and dialogue between national, regional and local level, the safeguard of time and resources are prerequisites for the contribution of the created networks (local, regional, or thematic networks) to the planning procedure. The record and evaluation of the acquired experiences for the coherent participation of local communities to the forming of the policies for the forwarding of employment, can contribute to speculations on matters, like:

- the concept of local level
- the thematic width of the network
- the number, kind and the representation of the participant bodies
- the clarity of the role and the representation level of the bodies
- the expected benefit from each of the bodies participation in the network, but also the work that each body offers to it
- the possibility of participating in the network for the final beneficiaries (users) of its services
- the time length of the network's function the disposed resources for its utilization.¹⁴

¹³ The Organizations of Social Economy try Economy able to adjust in changing conditions, and constitutes the alternative perspective in the big sized Economy

¹⁴ Index for the expansion of regional approaches and local peculiarities in the framework of National Thematic Network of CIP Equal, 2005

Finally, we underline:

- The Participation of Thematic Social Networks, that homogenize and enforce the ways of dealing with the problems in a common framework of criteria and strategies, which explores the requirements that contribute to the making-up of multi-forced interventions that facilitate the co-operation and synergy between related actors and specify that integrated character of these interventions.¹⁵
- The Utilization of transnational co-operations, which are of a mainstreaming character at a European level, whereas at the same time the participatory actors (partners) of the projects are able to overcome the specific framework of their involvement and participate in disseminating best practices coming out of the social policy projects.
- The Activation of individuals of target groups as well as the promotion of processes and techniques so that group networking, organizations and individuals of socially vulnerable groups is facilitated.
- The Processing of collective and combined texts so that social discrimination of the above-mentioned individuals and groups is to be reduced; promotion of equal opportunities and utilization of actions so that successful cases in specific thematic domains would have the maximum possible impact.

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