

## *Special Issue*

### **Selected Articles from the International Conference “Systemic Approaches in Social Structures” University of the Aegean and Hellenic Society for Systemic Studies, Mytilene, Greece, June 23-26, 2010**

**Guest Editors:** Kostas Rontos and Nikolas Nagopoulos

#### **Introduction to the Conference and to its significance**

The Conference sought to provide a platform to foster multidisciplinary discussions and support debates on the different sociological, economic, historical, pedagogical, philosophical, scientific and technological issues surrounding systemic studies. It sought to advance knowledge about the effective and efficient implementation of systemic thinking by individuals, groups, organizations, society and nations for the improvement of economic and social welfare.

Important for the Conference were the contributions building on established lines of work as well as novel research streams. In particular, focus was placed on high quality well-defined and analyzed theoretical surveys that provide a synthesis and comprehensive review of the historical development of one particular area of interest, and empirical studies, with strong grounding in a current or new theory, on important issues that have potential impact on organizations and are of value to researchers and practitioners in general and to the social sciences research community in specific.

Being open to a wide variety of issues and topics, the Conference was accepted a variety of system-related issues and topics from a wide range of scientific fields including, but not limited to: sociology, management, e-business, public policy, economics, finance, accounting, engineering, computer science, communication technologies, operations research, design science, organization studies, decision making, health care, cognitive science, environmental science, education, project management and strategic management. Diverse methods and approaches were welcomed providing that they were relevant to the main theme of the conference.

#### **Main themes of each paper**

The paper by George Manolas, Konstas Rontos, George Sfakianakis, Ioannis Vavouras “The Determinants of the shadow economy: The case of Greece” aims at assessing the relative importance of various factors as key determinants of the size of the shadow economy in a sample of OECD countries. Using panel data for a group of 19 countries for the 2003 – 2008 period, the authors claim that the quality of governance, the regulatory framework in the product, labor and credit markets and the tax burden both in the sense of the direct cost on entrepreneurial activity and the cost of compliance to the tax administration framework, are the most important factors affecting the part of the economic activity that takes place outside the official sector, that is the shadow or underground economy. These results are used to evaluate the potential gains Greece could obtain, in case it could converge to the best practice or even to the average levels of the determining factors of the rest of the OECD countries.

With her article “Radio Regulation in Portugal: a contribution to the study of a decision-making process”, Susana Santos focuses on two radio laws in Portugal which had the purpose of boosting private initiative. In the short period of 1987-1991, a long discussion which had started in the seventies was solved. The purpose of this paper is to study the decision making process, in other words, what were the reasons for the success of 87/88 law instead of 8/87 law, how the lobby groups worked, what kind of resources they managed, what kind of networks emerged, who were the main actors, when and where were they transformed to authorized agents. In this paper Ms. Santos focuses her attention on the political system using the parliamentary debates of that period as a source of content analysis. The main goals are: a) identification of the political actors; b) identification of the external actors (radio groups, lobby groups, etc.); c) identification and analysis of the main themes; d) identification and analysis of the core arguments; and e) the negotiation strategies that conduced to the acceptance of the proposals.

“The expansion of ICT: a new framework of inclusion and exclusion from the global realm” is the title of the paper of Thomas Mavrofides and Dimitris Papageorgiou. The authors of this article argue that originally the proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and their interaction with certain social systems, led to the emergence of the phenomenon of globalization. Globalization lays on a technological infrastructure that makes it possible, by minimizing the time needed for communication and inter-systemic interactions. This also has led to a strong support of the global financial system to the ICT industry, so that the latter can provide faster applications at any level of networking, thus putting both globalization and the ICT industry in an accelerating mutual development. The paper goes on to examine the problems certain social systems face into this new environment, due to the structural coupling of those systems with a technological backbone that functions as a system of inclusion (and thus exclusion as well) of those social systems which do not conceive of the ICT as a prerequisite for their own continuation. This situation is challenging the political subsystems, as to their ability to govern the social systems through their way towards a global society. The paper initially presents the state of globalization in a brief way and next introduces some of the basic concepts of contemporary systems theory. The rest parts examine the problems posed to the basic social system-reconstituting functions by the “real-time” communications global network and finally introduce some preliminary thoughts about the ways the political system (or any other management system for the matter) can try to solve those problems.

J. M. Vilas-Boas da Silva is the author of the next article under the title: “Systems Approach to Test the Usefulness of a Model to Challenge Organisational Change”. The impact of this proposition concerning the split of the structure of a precision engineering company into two clusters is holistically analysed and verified for consistency, as regards the structure design parameters. A conceptual model supported by both the schools of strategists and structuralists is used as an audit tool for ordered questioning, debate, learning and dialectical discussion. Moreover, the Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) provides orientation to theoretical validation of the model whose outcomes identifies the potential, desirable and feasible change of both manufacturing systems and production planning and control (PPC). A situational, hermeneutics, interpretivist, learning oriented process of enquiry, rather different from best practice views, is shown adequate to the problem nature and to the case study confirming the interest of the two clusters. Thus, formal planning and control procedures exhibit a very weak stand requiring both development in line with the contingency factors and complementarity with the other work co-ordination mechanisms. This holistic, systemic, strategic and structured approach produces the reviewing and reformatting of the manufacturing strategy decision areas and recommended that PPC procedures should be further analysed in detail, in order to fit the two clusters. To sum up, the audit tool is found useful and able to identify potential change in a credible way, to classify it as desirable/undesirable by following a learning process and, to discuss its feasibility in the context of a specific organisational culture. Thus, SSM provides an original contribution to Operations Research through the design of complex organisations under a systems view.

In his Article “The Rationalization of Social Services in Greece in the framework of European Social Policy”, Nikolas Nagopoulos argues that 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 underpin 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 framework, the author underlines that the function of the social cohesion is enhanced in the various fields of actions, 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.

And finally, in “A Socio-Instrumental Pragmatism View for Strengthening Sales Representatives Productivity in B2B Face-to-Face Sales Interaction System” Spais and Vasileiou examined the possibility of an extension of Lind’s and Goldkuhl’s (2005) and Goldkhul (1998) conceptualization of business transaction (in terms of Business Action Theory, B.A.T.), in order to examine the value of a socio instrumental pragmatism view of communication actions for B2B face-to-face sales interaction system. Such an approach allows them to introduce clear propositions for strengthening sales representatives’ productivity.