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E-Governance, Metropolitan Governance and Development Programming. The Case of the Thessaloniki Metropolitan Area

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e-Governance, Metropolitan Governance and Development Programming

The case of the Thessaloniki metropolitan area

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SUMMARY

e-Governance has recently emerged as a new field of interest for both researchers and public policy makers. This has to do in the first instance with the rise of information and communication technologies and with the strategy for promotion of the information society. It also reflects growing interest in the capacity of various forms of governance to manage complex development issues and facilitate decision-making in the era of globalization.

The potential of e-Governance extends from improvement of public services at the various levels of administration to empowerment of community engagement within decision-making processes. e-Governance is also of manifest relevance to questions such as the digital divide and democratic participation.

Metropolitan areas in particular are considered to be at the centre of the developmental process. They thus become the appropriate spatial level for the implementation of development programmes aimed at enhancement of competitiveness and employment. New forms of multilevel metropolitan governance emerge, in response to the economic and institutional transformations occurring in them. e-Governance represents a new challenge for metropolitan governance and in particular for development programming.

In the context of the EU structural regional policy, development programming in Greece identifies the development of metropolitan areas as one of its main policy objectives. e-Governance is in any case a basic component of the Information Society strategy. This paper examines the implementation of e-Governance in the Thessaloniki metropolitan area, in the specific context of development programming. From this starting point, lessons are drawn for the necessity of e-Governance as an element of metropolitan governance.

Keywords: e-Governance, e-Government, metropolitan governance, development programming, Thessaloniki metropolitan area

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has progressed in leaps and bounds over the last two decades and its progress has affected developments in all sectors of the economy, society and politics. At the same time the expansion of its use has served to highlight potential new modes of interaction between both the public and the private sector as well as between the public sector and the citizens, via modes of electronic governance, in a context of readjustment of their mutual relations.

In present-day conditions the parameters for sustainable urban development are shaped by the dynamics of spatial development as determined by globalization on the one hand and the re-emergence of the regional/local level on the other, with the intervening national level apparently receding or claiming a new role. Within this shifting framework there is an upgrading of the significance of the metropolitan areas, which function as centres for the promotion of development and for provision of services to wide geographical regions (Dunford and Kafkalas, 1992).

Given that in the metropolitan areas changes in the sphere of the economy proceed in tandem with institutional changes, they comprise a terrain for the emergence of problems of a new type, as well as of new forms of governance. In this context the strategic aim should be to attain economic competitiveness without compromising the other components of sustainability, namely social cohesion and quality of the environment. e-Governance offers a variety of tools for sustainable urban development, such as access to information and to participatory processes, along with the possibility for co-ordination of the various public policies into an integrated approach implemented in the metropolitan areas.

The aim of the paper is to examine the implementation of e-Governance in the context of development programming, focusing upon the metropolitan governance of Thessaloniki. The paper is divided into three sections. The first introduces the concept of e-Governance, linking it to metropolitan governance and sustainable urban development. The second section examines e-Government in the context of both European Union Information Society strategy and the corresponding strategy in Greece, along with a short presentation of the organizational scheme of development programming procedures in Greece. The third section presents the advancement of e-Government in the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki, providing in particular evidence from the websites of four key institutions in the area.

1 Electronic governance and metropolitan areas

1.1 Electronic governance: potential, prospects, limitations

In the context of specific applications of ICT pertaining to governance, the field of electronic or digital governance has been in expansion internationally since the early nineties in the USA and the late nineties in the European Union including Greece (particularly after the year 2000). Even though the term electronic or digital governance is frequently used to denote all relevant services and functions provided by the public sector and effectuated through digital means of communication, a corresponding distinction should be made between e-Government and e-Governance to that between government (in the sense of administration and more generally executive power) and governance.

e-Government “is the use of technology to enhance the access to and delivery of government services to benefit citizens, business partners and employees. ...The relationship is no longer a one-way ‘us-versus-them’ proposition; rather it is about building a partnership between governments and citizens” (Silcock, 2001: 88). e-Governance is not to be equated simply with employment or utilization of digital technology. It is its utilization for the facilitation of procedures that have already been initiated in the context of a different approach to the role of government and of the state. A useful outline of the concepts is to be found in the relevant report of the IntelCities project¹:

“eGovernance as a tool to enable a transformation in the way government operates, designs and delivers services, participation and results, making maximum use of both information and technology.

eGovernance is formed from the merging of eGovernment and eParticipation principles, and in its most basic form consists of the use of ICTs in the relations between citizens, politicians and government administrators to increase cooperation, participation and transparency at local and national level. Inclusion and accessibility are key-words for realizing eGovernance.” (Thorleifsdottir et al, 2004: 12).

The development of ICTs and their applications has triggered a dialogue at global level on the consequences, both negative and positive, of their dissemination and use. Above and beyond the generally accepted potential for better services to citizens and businesses, one argument in favour of the new technology is the capacity for improved public information, greater transparency and greater participation by citizens in decision-making. On the other hand there is nothing automatic about the activation of this capacity, given the existence of prerequisites both material and immaterial that are not always present. These include infrastructures (data net-

¹ The IntelCities project is a research and development project in the context of the EU Sixth Framework Programme. The general goal of WP 11: “e-Governance” is to promote urban governance within the knowledge society. For details see the project’s website <http://www.intelcitiesproject.com>.

works, computer hardware and the corresponding software) and the ability to utilize them and benefit from them, both from the viewpoint of ability (necessary skills and knowledge not to mention access to the infrastructures and the technical means) and from that of will and motivation for change in daily habits and adaptation to the new situation by all parties involved (administration, business and citizens).

Of these three prerequisites the first (technological infrastructures), notwithstanding the fact that it demands significant resources, is perhaps rather easier to secure. The second prerequisite (skills and access) appears more difficult given the existence of the “digital divide”. Progress is contingent on sufficiency of time, availability of adequate funding and ability to re-orient the country’s educational system. It is also inevitably linked to questions of income distribution, poverty and social exclusion. The third prerequisite (will and motivation for change), to conclude, has to do both with changes inside public administration and related behavioural readjustment to it by social actors.

Evidently electronic governance combines two different processes: on the one hand technological developments and potentials and on the other changes in the way the relationship between public and private is shaped in the sphere of economic, social and political life. Thus, before we can speak of electronic governance, governance *qua* governance sets the parameters of principle and potential for the former. For urban centres and metropolitan areas in particular, the forms of urban governance establish the framework for their electronic governance while at the same time developing in accordance with the potential provided by the ICTs.

1.2 Metropolitan areas, metropolitan governance and development programming

In the era of globalization the new dynamics of metropolitan regions is a source of pressure, the basic reason for which is urban sprawl and the spread of development, with repercussions for infrastructures, energy, environment, social differentiation, etc. Specific problems include the proliferation of activities on the outskirts of the cities, resulting in a permanently increasing need for new infrastructures and new means of transport, pressures on the natural and cultural environment of the city, etc. (Getimis and Kafkalas, 2003).

The way of dealing with problems through the institutions and mechanisms that govern the functioning of the public and private sectors in the city is closely inter-related with urban development. It is at the urban level that new forms of multi-levelled intergovernmental bargaining and co-operative procedures between the public and private sectors make their appearance. These forms of governance emerge as a result of differentiation in the role of the state, as part of a procedure of gradual withdrawal of its regulative, interventionist functions that has been underway since the 1980s, and of a parallel tendency towards differentiation in the de-

velopment process, characterized by deindustrialization of urban centres but also by successful attempts at adaptation and restructuring.

Differentiation from the traditional role of the state also leads to employment of the differentiated term “governance” rather than “government”. In the latter the key role is played by the state, which sets the rules for participation by all other bodies and individuals. In the case of governance the claim is that relations are not hierarchical and the participants, whether private sector or social bodies, equally participate in production of policies and rules for regulating the economy and society (Wasenhoven and Sapountzaki, 2005).

The importance of metropolitan areas for the promotion of development and employment, not only in the cities but in broader geographic regions, underlines the significance of development programming in fostering sustainable urban development and above all in promoting the objectives of competitiveness of the metropolitan centres, of employment, of protection and upgrading of the environment and of social cohesion. These objectives may be supported through individual programmes and interventions whose success is interwoven with the way development programming is organized and implemented.

Development programming as a key field for implementation of policy at the metropolitan level is closely associated with the forms of metropolitan governance. Fragmentation of organizations and their powers along with overlapping of their competences in metropolitan areas lead to fragmentation and conflicts in the processes of development programming and ultimately in all interventions. The framework of metropolitan governance influences these processes not only on the side of the administrative agencies but also on that of relationships between the administration and individual citizens on the one hand and the various stakeholders on the other. The procedures that are generally followed in a metropolitan area for dissemination of information, for participation and for public consultation are important both in planning and in implementing development programmes. The goal is to secure the broadest possible dissemination of information, the greatest possible degree of public acceptance, the fullest implementation and the maximum possible effectiveness of development programming.

As in the case of metropolitan governance, new challenges emerge for development programming, both because of the complexity of the problems, organizations and competences in a metropolitan area and because of the new, multi-faceted and urgent requirements for urban competitiveness, without compromising environmental protection and social cohesion.

Electronic governance in particular, in the context of metropolitan governance, can under certain preconditions, with its evolving potentialities (e.g. Internet), serve to facilitate synergies and policy integration, and therefore development programming at the metropolitan level and to further promote sustainable urban development.

2 e-Government policy framework²

2.1 eEurope strategy

As far as European urban centres are concerned, e-Government practices are usually linked to the eEurope strategy as set out by the European Union. This strategy is considered to be “part of the Lisbon strategy to make the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy, with improved employment and social cohesion, by 2010” (CEC, 2002: 2). More specifically e-Government is one priority set by the eEurope 2005 action plan.³ In this context:

“ ‘eGovernment’ means the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in public administration combined with organisational changes and new skills. The objective is to improve public services, reinforce democratic processes and support public policies... eGovernment seeks to use information and communication technologies to improve the quality and accessibility of public services. eGovernment can reduce costs for businesses and administration alike, and facilitate transactions between administration and citizens. It also helps to make the public sector more open and transparent and governments more understandable and accountable to citizens” (EC, 2005).

The action plan eEurope 2005 provides for two interrelated groups of actions. The first is focused on services, applications and content stimulation, covering both online public services and e-business. The second addresses broadband infrastructure and security matters. As regards the former, it is stated that by 2005, Europe should have “modern online public services (e-Government, e-learning services, e-health services) and a dynamic e-business environment” (CEC, 2002: 3).

The so-called i2010⁴ is the new strategic framework for “A European Information Society for growth and employment”, which aims at supporting knowledge and innovation in the context of an endeavour to achieve the new Lisbon Strategy goals. Objective 3 “An Information Society that is inclusive, that provides high quality public services and promotes quality of life” is one out of three objectives of the i2010 strategy that is relevant to e-Government. The “adoption of an Action Plan on e-Government and strategic orientations to ICT-enabled public services (2006)” is one out of five steps by means of which the Commission aims at introducing the “societal agenda of i2010” (CEC, 2005: 11).

² It has to be mentioned that the existing policies and practices at the national and the European level are mainly limited to e-Government. Hence, this term is used when we refer to the policy framework as well as to the case of the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki.

³ eEurope 2005 priority areas are: Broadband, eBusiness, eGovernment, eHealth, eLearning, eInclusion, and Security. For more details see the website http://europa.eu.int/information_society/policy/index_en.htm.

⁴ All the references to the i2010 strategy are from the website <http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/el/cha/c11328.htm>.

Notwithstanding the wide range of potentialities provided in the abovementioned policy framework, e-Government practices at the urban level in the field of development programming are not identified as a specific potential. In other words, in the context of eEurope strategy e-Government is not directly associated with development programming at the urban level. This is due to the fact that the European Union does not have an urban policy. However, there are important links between the Information Society strategy (e-Government included) and the specific EU policies that have spatial dimensions, above all regional policy. These links are enhanced by a number of EU programmes – such as IST programmes - and also by Structural Funds, which co-finance the necessary infrastructure and skills creation.

Information Society policies share a number of key aims with regional policy, which has a strong spatial dimension to it. Through regional policy:

“the EU supports the provision of telecommunications infrastructure, particularly in those cases where market conditions do not result in sufficient investment in certain areas.... EU regional policy also aims to stimulate new electronic services and innovative ICT applications in areas such as eBusiness and eGovernment. In addition, policy aims to ensure that people have the necessary skills and capabilities to make the most of the opportunities created by the Information Society” (EC, DG INFSO, 2006).

Besides, under the successive Framework Research Programmes, many e-Government initiatives related to the various fields of spatial governance are being undertaken at the regional and the urban level, often in partnership with established regional and urban networks (ELANET, EURADA, EISCO, Telecities, etc.) (ibid).

The fact is that e-Government practices have spread throughout European urban areas. In order to help the creation of comprehensive e-Government services across all levels of the Union, the European Commission/DG Information Society and Media has adopted The "Good Practice Framework" (GPF) among a series of measures⁵. What is also important is the fact that the EU strategy for e-Government stresses the significance of re-establishment of back-office operations along with front-office ones (EC, DG INFSO, 2005b: 26). This gives a boost to e-Government applications in the field of development programming, in the sense that it involves particularly back-office operations.

⁵ The main objectives of the Good Practice Framework are: “to collect examples of well-defined eGovernment cases, to make the examples available for those involved in eGovernment by means of an intelligent knowledge database, to offer expert know-how on general or special eGovernment features and providing easy access to existing communities or expertise centres, to support the sustainable transfer of good practices and learning experiences in an easy and helpful way” (EC, 2006).

2.2 e-Government in Greece: The policy framework

The strategic framework for e-Government in Greece is pursued under the overall policy for the Information Society. This strategy is expressed above all in the Operational Programme “Information Society” (OP IS), which is an innovative horizontal programme in the context of Community Support Framework (CSF) 2000-2006. All ministries and regional authorities have been asked to prepare operational programmes for the Information Society to facilitate the OP IS priorities implementation. In terms of policy planning and programme management “the Greek approach to e-Government might be characterised as centralised ...with distributed implementation” (iDABC, 2005: 7)

It is said to be the duty of public administration to make high-quality services available to citizens and firms, on time and at the lowest possible cost. It is also said that ICTs provide the necessary instruments for achieving that aim, while at the same time facilitating the “operation of public administration within a framework of transparency and democratic participation” (Ministry of Economy and Finance, and Ministry of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation, 2001: 21). e-Government priorities, which are included in the second Action Line of the OP IS “Citizens and Quality of Life”, are as follows (iDABC, 2005: 7):

- “Improved quality of services to citizens and enterprises by public administration at central, regional and local level.
- Development of online applications, as well as use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)....
- Support the creation of geographical and environmental mapping and management information systems, linking central to regional and local government.
- Use of IT to promote and support a broader strategy for providing higher quality health and welfare services to all citizens.
- Introduction of telematics applications in land, sea and air transport (‘intelligent transport’)”

Three out of nine Measures of the OP IS Action line 2 could promote e-Government in the field of development programming at the urban level (Ministry of Economy and Finance and Ministry of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation, 2001).

Measure 2.2 “Government on line” aims at using ICTs “in order to improve the quality of the services provided for citizens and firms by Public Administration at central, regional and local levels...”. It includes “the development of applications that promote the real time Internet provision of services, and the use of ICTs in simplifying and redefining procedures and communications within and between public services throughout public administration, the networking of PA (Public Administration) agencies at central, regional, prefectural and local levels, the installations required, ... as well as measures for improved service delivery contacts

to citizens and firms ..” in six main areas. Regional development and administration is one out of these six areas that can be connected to development programming at the urban level.

MEASURE 2.3 “Administration of the Structural Funds and transition to the Euro” aims at supporting the management of Structural Fund resources at central, regional and local levels that is a precondition for the successful implementation of the CSF III interventions. The basic instrument for this purpose is the Management Information System (MIS)⁶ of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, while all agencies involved in CSF III projects must be supported with management tools too.

MEASURE 2.4 “Regional geographic information systems and innovative actions” aims at formulating “a strategy and an action plan for the IS in all regions, to encourage innovative pilot activities related to the development of IS applications at regional and local levels, and to establish and support geographical and environmental mapping and administrative systems at a central, regional and local level.” The Measure’s objectives can enhance e-Government applications in the field of development programming at the metropolitan level.

In addition to the OP IS, a programme called “Politeia 2005-2007”, for the “re-establishment of Public Administration” has been adopted by the Ministry of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation, which is responsible for promoting e-Government in Greece. It is aimed at provision of better services to all citizens “by focusing on their real needs: increasing transparency in public administration, implementing e-Government at all administrative levels (central and regional administration, municipalities), restructuring agencies and processes, protecting the citizen’s privacy and consolidating the rule of law” (iDABC, 2005: 4).⁷

In the abovementioned context, first- and second-tier local authorities are encouraged to participate in EU programmes and projects aimed at the utilization of e-Government for varying areas of their competences. This process has considerable, albeit not permanent, influence on the development programming process, in both the planning and the implementation phase. Even though it only gradually affects the decision-making process at the local level, its progress is strongly connected to the overall state of spatial governance in the country.

2.3 Governance and development programming: the Greek experience

Local authorities, public administration and the scientific community in Greece have recently been engaged in a constructive dialogue on metropolitan governance in the Thessaloniki and Athens metropolitan areas. It is worth noting that the Min-

⁶ Known as “Integrated Information System”.

⁷ For details see <http://www.gspa.gr> (in Greek)

istry of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation (Ministry of the Interior) has already commissioned two major studies on this subject, aiming at the analysis of the preconditions and the mechanisms for establishment of metropolitan governance (UEHR/MIPAD, 2003).

Leaving aside the influence of international and European trends, these developments derive from new needs and new challenges emerging for the metropolitan areas. The National Development Plan 2000-2006 for Greece makes provision for a new metropolitan role of international and European dimensions for Athens and Thessaloniki. This role presupposes administrative reforms along with the creation of metropolitan structures for the purpose of achieving a broader legitimization, higher degree of effectiveness, and better co-ordination and synergy of different policies at the metropolitan level.

The implementation of European Union policy, above all its structural policy, through various co-financed programmes has given a rise to new forms of governance as well as to sustainable urban development policies. It has prompted “the emergence of new forms of co-operation between local authorities and socio-economic city-based forces for the implementation of urban sustainability”. However, this dynamics is not favoured by the existing political and institutional framework (Getimis and Grigoriadou, 2004:5).

In the particular case of development programming, within the existing institutional framework the spatial levels of the programmes are: national, regional, prefectural and local. The corresponding planning institutions are: central public-sector bodies (e.g. ministries), regional councils, prefectural councils and municipal councils. A hierarchical system of vertical linkage is provided for planning purposes. Medium-term programmes are compiled by the institutions at the corresponding spatial level on the basis of a framework defined by the institution at the higher spatial level and are ultimately ratified by the latter. This process could properly be characterized as formal hierarchical administrative procedure with many advantages but also with disadvantages (Tat-Kei Ho, 2002). The fact is that even though there are no specific development programmes for metropolitan areas, development programmes of all spatial levels are carried out in them.

The abovementioned procedure is not implemented in its most comprehensive form in the sense that some of the prescribed stages or some of the programme types are missing. At the same time development programming in Greece since 1989 has been influenced to a significant extent by the European context through implementation of European Union regional structural policy. It could be argued that there have been two parallel trajectories, converging at certain points. Specifically, the institutional framework and the organizational structure, which are defined at the national level, have been mainly confined to the institutional framework of Law for the so-called “Democratic Programming” (Ministry of the Interior, 1986), while the changes that have emerged out of the needs for implementation of EU structural

policy are not fully incorporated into the established organizational development programming configurations.

Although the effects of implementation of EU structural policy are still not directly visible at the institutional level, their influence may be seen in specific practical issues in the development programming procedures. One crucial issue in relation to which implementation of EU structural policy can have a direct influence on the latter is the promotion of electronic government. This is effected through: (a) co-financing of the abovementioned “Information Society” Operational Programme in the context of the Community Support Framework (CSF) 2000-2006, which includes the provision for promotion of electronic means of data interchange (Management Information Systems (MIS) - Measure 2.3), (b) the obligation to comply with the publicity and information rules set by the EU Structural Funds Regulations.

According to the Commission Regulation on information and publicity measures, “Information and publicity concerning assistance from the Structural Funds is intended to increase public awareness and transparency vis à vis the activities of the European Union and create a coherent picture of the assistance in question across all Member States” (CEC, 2000: 32). The aim of information and publicity measures is to:

“(1) inform potential and final beneficiaries, as well as:

- regional and local authorities and other competent public authorities,
- trade organisations and business circles,
- the economic and social partners,
- non-governmental organisations, especially bodies to promote equality between men and women and bodies working to protect and improve the environment,
- project operators and promoters,

about the opportunities offered by joint assistance from the European Union and the Member States in order to ensure the transparency of such assistance;

(2) inform the general public about the role played by the European Union in co-operation with the Member States in the assistance concerned and its results.”

Special provision is made for the utilization of ICTs: “In drawing up the communications action plan, due regard must be had to new technologies which permit the rapid and efficient distribution of information and facilitate a dialogue with the general public” (ibid: 32, 36).

As a result, information about the Community Support Framework and the Community Initiative Programmes is frequently available from electronic sources (e.g. websites). In order to inform both potential and final beneficiaries, as well as the general public, the managing authorities have developed websites providing a variety of services. Following the enumeration of the various e-Government sectors, these ini-

tatives cover the whole spectrum of such sectors, i.e. G2G, G2C and G2B.⁸ In most cases these websites can be classified on the basis of their stage of development, up to the second stage (Stage 2: “one-way interaction”).⁹

The implementation of EU structural policy in Greece, above all through the CSF 2000-2006, has had a significant influence on e-Government in the field of development programming, both directly and indirectly: directly through the funding of ICT infrastructure and skills creation; indirectly through the adoption and implementation by the managing authorities of the publicity requirements of Structural Funds. This is reflected in all the bodies involved, in both public and private sectors. The majority of these bodies respond by utilizing existing e-Government applications.

3 The Case of Thessaloniki

3.1 Development programming in the Thessaloniki metropolitan area

Thessaloniki is the second-largest conurbation in Greece after Athens with a total population above one million inhabitants (city and suburbs, 2001). It accounts for around 12% of the total GDP in the country and the GDP per head is 72% of the EU average (2002).¹⁰ It is located in the region of Central Macedonia, approximately 60% of whose population lives within its boundaries. Greece comprises four administrative tiers: two tiers of central (national) government i.e. ministries and their supervised organizations along with regional (decentralised) administration (13 administrative regions), and two tiers of (local) self-government.¹¹ Despite the fact that according to the Greek Constitution (Article 101) “the administration of the State shall be organized according to the principle of decentralization” (Hellenic Parliament, 2004: 111), the Greek administrative system is essentially a centralized one. This is reflected in the competencies of the four tiers of government.

The area of Greater Thessaloniki is also part of the prefecture of Thessaloniki, which is under the jurisdiction of the Prefectural Authority of Thessaloniki (second-tier local government) whose seat is in the city. In the area there are about thirty municipalities (first-tier local government) but there is no overall administra-

⁸ It is widely accepted that e-Government applications can be grouped according to the three main categories of stakeholders, i.e. government (G2G), citizens (G2C), and business (G2B).

⁹ It is considered that at the Second Stage (“one way interaction”) “The publicly accessible website provides the opportunity to obtain in a non-electronic manner (by downloading forms) the paper form required to start the procedure for obtaining this service.” (EC, DG INFSO, 2005a: 7).

¹⁰ It should be noted that the corresponding value for Greece is 61%. The data for the year 2002 are the latest available and refer to the prefecture of Thessaloniki (NUTS III). (Eurostat, 2006a).

¹¹ According to the Eurostat NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) and LAU (Local Administrative Units) classification, in Greece there are 13 NUTS II regions (regional administration - *periferies*) and 51 NUTS III departments (prefectures - *nomoi*). In addition since 1997 there are 1034 (LAU I) first-tier local self-government authorities (municipalities - *dimoi*) (Eurostat, 2006b),

tion for the metropolitan area as a whole. The Region of Central Macedonia, which also has its seat in the city of Thessaloniki, is responsible for the entire region (comprised of seven prefectures) and is a decentralized agency of the central government, headed by a government-appointed General Secretary. The Organization of Planning and Environmental Protection of Thessaloniki also is a decentralized agency of the central government supervised by the Ministry of the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works and is responsible for spatial planning and environmental protection in Greater Thessaloniki. Finally, the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace also has its headquarters in Thessaloniki. It has territorial jurisdiction over the three regions of Northern Greece, with very limited competences and budget, however.

This administrative structure is reflected also in development programming. In the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki all the different levels of planning institutions are intertwined, given that every tier of government is present there. Specifically, the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace, the Region of Central Macedonia and the Organization of Planning and Environmental Protection comprise the agencies of central (national) government at regional level, while the Prefectural Authority of Thessaloniki and the region's Municipalities comprise the agencies of local government.

All the abovementioned agencies engage in development programming. At the same time it should not be overlooked that a number of other institutions with national jurisdiction such as ministries, prepare projects carried out in Thessaloniki, usually in the framework of national sectoral development programmes (e.g. the Ministry of Transport and Communication is responsible for the airport, the Ministry of Mercantile Marine for the port of Thessaloniki, the Ministry for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works for important transportation projects such as the Metro).

Taken in conjunction with the developmental dynamics of the city in recent decades, this fragmentation of administrative bodies and planning procedures has aggravated the city's problems of administration and government. This is due to the fact that on the one hand the geographical area to be regulated broadens out (e.g. the case of traffic), on the other hand the agenda of issues to be dealt with has been expanded (e.g. civil protection, economic development, employment/unemployment). As a result there has been an increase in the number of issues¹² that are semi-neglected or left out of the planning procedure altogether (Getimis and Kafkalas, 2003).

As a result, in Thessaloniki (the prefecture, the metropolitan area, and the municipality) development programmes are being implemented which have either been

¹² According to some recent studies the competences of a metropolitan-level government could be grouped in six broad categories: economic development (growth)/competitiveness, employment/unemployment, spatial planning, land use plans, transportation, environment, social policy, and civil protection (UEHR/MIPAD, 2003 and Getimis and Kafkalas, 2003).

planned for the corresponding spatial levels or, notwithstanding the fact that they are part of a broader sectoral programme, are finally carried out in this specific area. This distinction could be represented schematically as: programmes “for Thessaloniki”, programmes “in Thessaloniki”, respectively. But the reality is that none of the development programmes are for the metropolitan area as such, however designated or defined.

Even though, as is evident, information and communication technologies (ICTs) can in no way fully compensate for the absence of metropolitan-level government, the creation and operation of thematic sites on some of the issues of metropolitan government could –to the extent that it would constitute a conscious political choice– go some way towards solving these problems, even if only at the level of the absolutely indispensable provision of information to citizens, to instil awareness and encourage political mobilization for creation of the metropolitan institution.

We shall now move on to focus on development programming and electronic government for the main institutions in the metropolitan area with related competences at all relevant tiers of government.

3.2 e-Government and development programming institutions in the Thessaloniki metropolitan area

For public agencies with competences in development programming, the European Union four-Stage framework (Stages 1 to 4, along with Stage 0)¹³ can be used to explore the forms of e-Government both in the phase of planning and in the implementation phase. As outlined above, the Regional Authority of Central Macedonia, the Municipalities and the Prefectural Authority of Thessaloniki, all have development planning competences in the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki. The Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace also has responsibilities for the three regions of Northern Greece. The e-Government aspects of these four institutions are presented in this section.

Specific urban issues (e.g. zoning system, environmental protection) are under the jurisdiction of the Organisation of Planning and Environmental Protection of Thessaloniki (Organization of Thessaloniki). Although it has apparently important and crucial competences concerning sustainable urban development and planning, the

¹³ Stage 1: information, Stage 2: one-way interaction (downloadable forms), Stage 3: two-way interaction and Stage 4: transaction (full electronic case handling). Stage 0 corresponds to absence of publicly accessible website, or a website that does not provide any relevant information, interaction etc. (EC, DG INFSO, 2005a: 7).

Organization does not have a website. Therefore according to the EU e-Government Stage Framework it could be classified as Stage 0.¹⁴

3.2.1 First-tier Local Government: the Municipality of Thessaloniki

Greater Thessaloniki comprises about 30 municipalities, the largest of which, the Municipality of Thessaloniki, with more than 400 thousand inhabitants, has the widest range of administrative services. Despite the fact that the Municipality of Thessaloniki has rather limited competences at the stage of the planning of development programmes, it is the implementation authority for many public investment projects that are either nationally financed or co-financed by the EU.

The Municipality of Thessaloniki has a publicly accessible website¹⁵ that offers only a few options for citizens on issues of development programming. The information provided is mainly generic in character. As far as development programming procedure is concerned, the website of the Municipality of Thessaloniki should thus be classified as Stage 0.

3.2.2 Second-tier Local Government: Prefectural Authority of Thessaloniki

In terms of its geographical extent, the Prefecture of Thessaloniki roughly corresponds to the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki (Moutsiakis and Foutakis, 2003).¹⁶ The Prefectural Authority's website is oriented to information provision, along with some limited options for interactive functions including a facility for downloading application forms.¹⁷

As an institution that designs and implements state-financed local development programmes (including both programmes financed from national resources and programmes co-financed by the EU) and as an implementation authority for specific projects in the framework of other regional or national development programmes, the Prefectural Authority of Thessaloniki has important development programming competences. Development-programming-related e-Government applications are limited to information provision, usually following completion of the projects. They cover in the first instance the School Buildings Programme but have been extended also to some Decisions taken by the Prefectural Council.

¹⁴ The Organisation of Thessaloniki has a webpage at the Ministry's website providing very limited and brief information in Greek (<http://www.minenv.gr/3/31/314/g314.html>). The English version of the webpage is <http://www.minenv.gr/3/31/314/e314.html>.

¹⁵ Details at <http://www.thessalonikicity.gr> (content mainly in Greek).

¹⁶ In Greece there is no official delimitation of the metropolitan areas. The term is loosely used to describe a wide Functional Urban Area (FUA) of the corresponding conurbations (Athens and Thessaloniki). According to a relevant exercise which used demographic, economic and geographical criteria as well as GIS techniques, the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki is approximately comprised of the major part of Thessaloniki prefecture along with small parts of the neighbouring prefectures of Chalkidiki, Imathia and Kilkis (Moutsiakis and Foutakis, 2003: 334-336).

¹⁷ Details at <http://www.nath.gr> (content mainly in Greek).

What is important is that participation in EU projects on e-Government has paved the way for the Authority's involvement in e-Government applications. In particular, the Prefectural Authority of Thessaloniki participated in the EU-Publi.com¹⁸ project and is lead partner in eGOVREGIO project.¹⁹ The latter aims "to build on and integrate pan-European, invaluable know-how and experience in the 'soft' aspects of eGovernment, i.e. strategic planning and benchmarking, organizational change and acquisition of new skills" (eGOVREGIO, 2006).

A "Strategic, Operational and Action Plan for the Region of Thessaloniki" was recently compiled in the framework of the e-GOVREGIO project, which is identified with the single strategic goal of accomplishing high-quality e-services (Prefectural Authority of Thessaloniki, 2005). The present infrastructure, according to the Plan, is adequate. What is lacking is integrated and fully electronically-handled services that can be completed on-line by citizens, businesses or other administrative authorities. The project's coherent and comprehensive terms of reference place the emphasis on "inward" processes that are potentially exploitable in the field of development programming. But the Strategic and Operational Plan of the Prefectural Authority of Thessaloniki is apparently focused mainly on the provision of services, i.e. on "outward" processes.

Despite the fact that not all the relevant information is available, given the Authority's growing involvement in e-Government in general, the Prefectural Authority of Thessaloniki should be ranked as Stage 1 in the framework of e-Government applications concerning the field of development programming.

3.2.3 Decentralized national government: Region of Central Macedonia

The Region of Central Macedonia has a crucial role in development programming given that it not only exercises a great deal of administrative responsibility, but is also responsible for the planning and implementation of the Regional Operational Programme, in the context of the Community Support Framework. It is moreover the financing authority, through the regional section of the Public Investment Programme, for a number of public investment projects. It also shares competences in local development programmes, in particular in the so-called THISEAS programme for first-tier local government.

The Region's overall IT strategy is based on an Operational Plan which refers to the region's priorities and actions in the context of the CSF III towards information society (BCS et al., 2002). According to the plan the exploitation of digital applications is restricted to some basic functions for service provision. The Region's main goal is to ensure the technical prerequisites for digital applications serving front-

¹⁸ The project was completed in October 2005. Details at <http://www.ba.uom.gr>.

¹⁹ For detailed information about the INTERREG IIC eGOVREGIO project see <http://www.e-govregio.net/egovregio>.

office operations (in the first instance service provision to citizens), with the promotion of back-office operations relevant only insofar as they are linked to the front-office ones. On the other hand processes of digital networking, public information and consultation, e-voting in support of strategic issues such as development programming, are not at the centre of its e-Government strategy.

The Region has its own website,²⁰ providing a great deal of information. Some options for interactive use of the site, for the most part are related to provision of administrative services mainly through links to other governmental sites. In terms of the EU grading stages, it could be characterized as Stage 1. As far as development programming is concerned, it provides some information on the “THISEAS” programme, most of the information being made available through a link to the Ministry of the Interior. Information on the regional section of the Public Investment Programme is confined to announcements on specific projects under implementation in the region (roads, bridges, urban areas renewal etc.). The site also provides information on major projects, such as the “Regional Innovation Pole of Central Macedonia”, that are being implemented in the framework of the CSF III Operational Programmes.

The main e-Government development programming application at the regional level is carried out via the special website for the Regional Operational Programme (ROP) that is run by the Programme’s Managing Authority. In accordance with the publicity and information rules established under the EU Structural Funds Regulations (CEC, 2000), as presented above, this site offers a wide range of information on the structure and implementation of Regional Operational Programme of Central Macedonia. Given that the ROP is in its implementation stage, most of the information provided has to do with beneficiaries and with implementation authorities, the aim being both to ensure transparency and to facilitate the implementation of the actions selected. The site also offers general information on Programme implementation and on the meetings of the Monitoring Committee. Besides this, some transactional operations are supported, mainly for communication between the various authorised administrative units involved. The planning procedure for the regional development programmes of the next period (2007-2013) is reinforced through links to Ministries as well as to the overall CSF Managing Authority websites.

In conclusion, e-Government applications in support of the Regional Operational Programme are quite well-developed, mostly at the implementation stage of the Programme, while the planning procedure (CSF 2007-2013) is for the most part centrally supported. Therefore the website could be assigned a Stage 2, possibly 3, grading.

²⁰ For details see <http://www.rcm.gr> (in Greek).

However the high level of this development contrasts with the low level of e-Government applications for regional development programmes financed only from national resources. This may be attributed to the fact that the institutional framework for nationally-financed programmes (so-called “Democratic Programming”) makes no provision for publicity and information measures. On the contrary, it has not been radically updated to cater for new needs and the new developments. It could be argued that this is not unrelated to the fact that two virtually independent development programming procedures have been established in Greece over the last 15 years. On the one hand the national-only financed projects and programmes which are confined to ‘traditional’ programming procedures and on the other the EU co-financed programmes which are regulated according to EU Structural Funds procedures and regulations.

3.2.4 Ministry of Macedonia – Thrace

Given that the central government’s responsibilities for the three regions of Macedonia – Thrace are exercised by the corresponding decentralized national government at the regional level (“Regions”),²¹ the Ministry of Macedonia-Thrace has no important development programming competences. It accordingly provides no information of its own but merely links to EU and governmental websites. It should be mentioned that the Ministry has recently commissioned a study on an Integrated Information System aimed at collecting and automatically processing all the data about the socio-economic situation in the three regions of its competence as well as in the whole area of South Eastern Europe.²² It is not yet possible to provide any assessment of this project, given that it is still in its initial stage. The Ministry’s overall presence in relation to e-Government applications for development programming should be ranked as Stage 0.

CONCLUSIONS

Metropolitan areas have recently emerged as an important determinant factor in regional and national competitiveness and consequently in general socio-economic development in the era of globalization. The need for co-ordination and control of developmental processes in a globalized economy has led many countries, at least in the European Union, to a renewed interest in establishment of a new metropolitan level of administration (Brenner, 2003). This is combined with a shift towards the concept of governance, which is connected to changes in the traditional hierarchical relation between government, citizens, and enterprises, and their involvement in various negotiation schemes aiming at the resolution of complex socio-

²¹ In Northern Greece there are three NUTS II regions: the Region of Central Macedonia, the Region of East Macedonia–Thrace and the Region of Western Macedonia.

²² Detailed information at <http://webserver.hypertech.gr/ymath%5Fops/istoriko.htm> and <http://www.mathra.gr> (both sites only in Greek).

political problems. Governance, according to many researchers, raises questions of democracy and democratic legitimacy, even entailing a redefinition of the concept of citizenship (Heinelt et al., 2002). As a result governance, like globalization, has become a source of controversy.

Sustainable urban development in the metropolitan regions is an exceptionally complicated process. At this geographical level a variety of policies are interwoven, originating from different tiers of government with diversified developmental priorities, but all applied to this specific geographical area. Spatial integration of policies in the context of sustainable development planning for the metropolitan area could be one of the main aims of a metropolitan level of administration.

Over the last decade, as a result of the abovementioned policy developments and of rapid change in the field of ICTs (above all the emergence and dissemination of Internet applications) e-Governance has become established as a research field and an arena for policy applications. The transfer of certain real-life processes – for example commercial activities - to digital space (e-commerce), gave rise to promotion of the concept of digital government (e-Government). The inherent functional capabilities of the Internet form the basis for a shift towards the more demanding and much more complicated concept of e-Governance. Nevertheless it must be mentioned that the debate, at least in the European Union, is mainly about e-Government, although it is taking place under the heading of e-Governance.

In the case of the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki, the geographical area discussed in this article, the focus is on development planning and implementation of development programmes at the metropolitan level. Existing e-Government/e-Governance applications in the field are also of relevance.

One main conclusion is that the lack of political will and leadership constitutes the main obstacle for the development of such applications. This conclusion is based primarily on the absence of a corresponding administrative level (e.g. metropolitan administration), but also on the lack of commitment by the institutions involved (Municipalities, Prefecture, Region, Ministries) in the regulation of the metropolitan area. The high level of centralization of the Greek administrative system, in conjunction with the difficulty in changing the established hierarchy and power relations within and between existing institutional structures, provides a possible explanation for this fact.

It is moreover evident that the problem cannot be attributed to any kind of technological disadvantage. The existing digital divide, and the imbalance in the use of Internet between the two main stakeholders, namely enterprises and households (citizens), are of course determinant factors behind the low level of use of existing e-Government applications. But, from another point of view, the extended use of a fully developed electronic application of tax revenue collection (above all by enter-

prises), is an illustrative example of the ability of central government to implement successful e-Government applications (iDABC, 2005).

The success of the most promising example examined - the Management Authority of ROP - though as a decentralized regional agency this authority is directly related to central government, must be attributed to different causes. It has to do in the first instance with the "Europeanization" process of certain aspects of public administration, and their gradual adaptation to the Regulations of the European Union Structural Funds. The creation of such web applications may be ascribed to the publicity and information requirements of the EU Structural Funds. This has a two-fold aim: transparency in the implementation procedures and positive publicity for the role of the EU. This also happens to be the aim of the Integrated Information System (IIS) of the Ministry of Finance, which is functionally connected to the ROP's website. Such developments are undoubtedly positive steps towards more democracy and transparency at both the EU and the national/regional level.

The parallel and essentially identical procedure of non-co financed programmes and projects is however "handled" in a completely different manner: although it is incorporated into the IIS it is "invisible", meaning that information about a fairly large part of public financial intervention in the metropolitan area (and in the country) is not publicly accessible. This points to the existence of two parallel procedures complying with different sets of regulations. The first, which employs e-Government applications, is linked to European institutions and financing while the second operates in accordance with "traditional" administrative procedures.

A second finding is that delays are occurring at the regional/local level. The only development-programming-related e-Government application in place is that concerned with "Europeanization" of decentralized national government (and more generally of central government). There is no active involvement in e-Government application by the regional/local, government engaged in development programming. This fact highlights an evident absence of local dynamics and of political initiatives to provide useful digital applications that both inform citizens and help them to participate in the planning process.

The concept of governance employs the model of the network, by definition overturning long-lasting established hierarchies and inter-administrative and intra-administrative relations. Engagement in a process of restructuring mutual relations among the different levels of administration is a prerequisite for movement in the direction of governance. This could be part of the explanation for the difficulties currently being encountered by the whole institutional system in progressing towards governance models, as well as for the reluctance to establish a metropolitan level of government.

One way of contributing to overcoming of the abovementioned problems could be through establishment of thematic websites on some major issues related to the de-

velopment prospects of Thessaloniki and to the everyday life of its citizens (sustainable urban development, regional and urban planning, unemployment, traffic, etc). Evidently ICTs can in no way substitute for the absence of a metropolitan level of administration but e-Government applications of this kind could contribute to promotion of the concept of metropolitan governance, to more transparency, greater accountability of public authorities and reinforcement of democratic process.

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