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**Conference Paper**

## Metropolitan Governance in Athens - Does It Already Exist?

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## **Metropolitan Governance in Athens - Does it already exist?**

### **Administrative Structure of the Metropolitan Area of Athens**

One of the main issues that most of the allegedly developed countries currently face is the so-called "democracy deficit". The gigantism of contemporary metropolis alienates the citizen who is thus led far from decision-making centres. Such a phenomenon affects local government as well, although it is the level of power supposedly closer to the citizen: its function is rather inefficient or distant. Therefore, citizens tend to abandon any attempt for involvement to the commons or, in other cases, rely most on higher levels of power that appear more efficient in resolving current problems.

The result of such a process is that local government is devaluated, as it seems incapable to resolve problems, such as pollution, traffic congestion, urban transport etc., that extend beyond its strict administrative boundaries, which are only a small party of the whole urban area. Two issues enter into consideration:

The **first one**, which will not be dealt with here despite its importance, is the creation of local government institutions that are able to cope with contemporary challenges having the resources and competence required.

The main problem is that National Governments "*in seeking to reduce their budget deficits, ... have tended to download financial responsibilities for many services to sub*

*national levels, including urban areas, but without increasing their revenues or their ability to raise taxes locally<sup>1</sup>” .*

The **second one** is related with the boundaries of local authorities, especially in metropolitan areas. *“As cities have expanded outward, old administrative boundaries have usually remained in place, creating a patchwork of municipalities within the urban area, each with its own political colour and vested interests to defend.”<sup>2</sup>*

Athens Metropolitan Area (AMA) is one of the best (worst!) examples. First of all there is no clear consensus about the limits of the AMA. Some consider that his borders coincide with the boundaries of the Region of Attica, and others consider that the AMA is the area which administratively is today the Hyper Prefecture of Athens-Piraeus.

My paper will not deal with this discussion, because it is not really important for my subject. For this presentation i consider as AMA the Region of Attica.

The lack of flexibility and / or willingness from the central government to face this problem has led to cases such as the AMA with a population of 3.523.374 inhabitants. Nonetheless, the current administrative structure of AMA illustrates this nonsense:

- Region of Attica (Government, appointed)
- Hyper Prefecture of Athens-Piraeus (Local Authority, elected)
- Four (4) Prefectures (Local Authority, elected), of which two (2) in the Hyper-Prefecture
- Four (4) prefectural sectors of the Prefecture of Athens (administrative divisions, appointed)
- 91 Municipalities and 33 Communes (Local Authority, elected)

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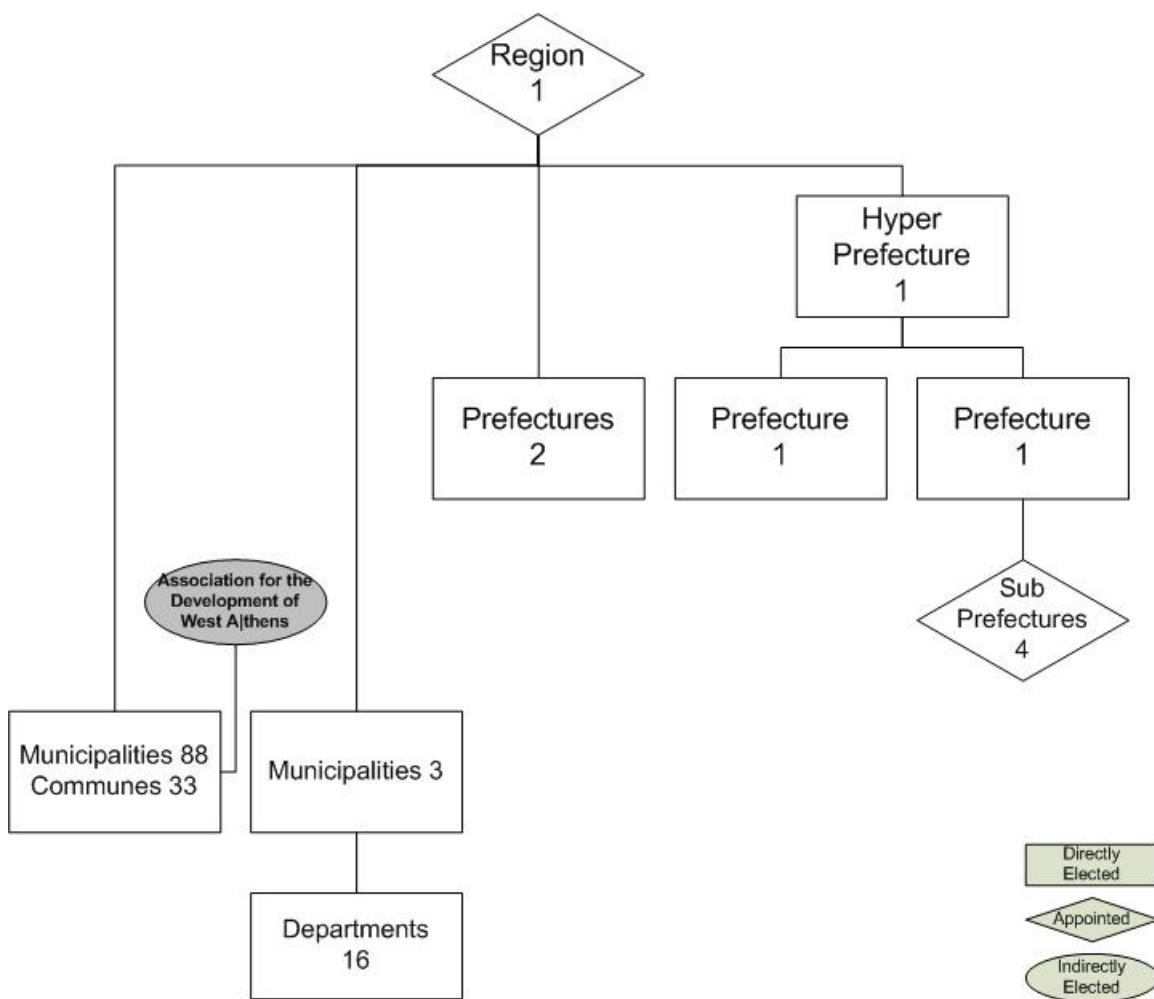
<sup>1</sup> OECD Steering Group on Urban Governance, “Interim report on urban governance”, 1998 [DT/UA/UG(98)1], page 6

<sup>2</sup> OECD Steering Group on Urban Governance, “Interim report on urban governance”, 1998 [DT/UA/UG(98)1], page 3

- 16 municipal Departments in the Municipalities of Athens, Piraeus and Peristeri<sup>3</sup> (Local Authority, elected)

This means that for the whole AMA we have 150 different public bodies!

The Region of Attica is a governmental structure, whose General Secretary is appointed by the Minister of Interior. The Councils and the heads of the Hyper-Prefecture of Athens-Piraeus, the four (4) Prefectures, the 91 municipalities, the 33 Communes and the 16 municipal Departments are directly elected, on the same day, by their respective inhabitants. The 4 prefectural Departments are just administrative divisions.



<sup>3</sup> According to article 117 of the new Municipal and Communal Code (2006) Athens Municipality has 5 to 7 Departments, Piraeus Municipality 3 to 5 Departments and Peristeri Municipality 2 to 4 Departments.

The competences of every body are different.

The role of the Region is mainly to act as a cover up for the policies of the Ministries for AMA and to distribute the European Money (what ever is left from the so called “big-works”) to Prefectures, Municipalities and Communes. On the same time the region acts as supervisor for the Prefectures, Municipalities and Communes.

The Hyper-Prefecture has is reality very few competences. Initially created to balance the political choice of creating an Hyper-Prefecture in Thrace, has mainly publicity competences.

The four (4) prefectures have most of the competences regarding the supra-local problems and the finances to face them.

Municipalities and Communes have some competences, but not the finances for them. According to the Constitution of Greece they are responsible for all local matters, but the Jurists have a very wide interpretation of what is or not local matter. The result is that if a municipality wants to pedestrianise one small road, a decision of the Minister of Planning Environment is needed. The new Municipal and Communal Code (MCC) <sup>4</sup> tries to be more precise on this.

The municipal Departments, whose Council is elected directly, have only the competences the Municipal Council will transfer to them<sup>5</sup>, or which will be transferred to them with Presidential Degree<sup>6</sup>.

To all the above mentioned public bodies with more or less conflicting competences, we must add that in the AMA many competences are either exercised directly by the respective Ministries, either by different governmental organizations, like ΟΠΣΑ (Organization for the Planning and the Protection of the Environment) and is responsible for the technical support of the Region and the Ministry of Planning and Environment (ΥΠΕΧΩΔΕ), ΕΥΔΑΠ a stately owned company responsible for the water supply in

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<sup>4</sup> Article 75

<sup>5</sup> Article 117, par. 4 of MCC

<sup>6</sup> Article 119, par. 1 of MCC

AMA, OASA a statly owned company responsible for the public transports in the AMA, etc.

The "I. Kapodistrias" plan, for the reform and the restructuring of local authorities in Greece, accommodated the chaotic situation in the rest of the country but did not affect Athens and Thessaloniki at all.

It is also useful to note that no hierarchical relations exist between the first (municipalities and communes) and the second level (prefectures and hyper-prefecture) of local authorities. They act each other independently and many times they enter in conflict.

### **Associations for the Development**

Although the institution of municipal Associations in Greece is rather old (1912), the Development Associations (DA) are relatively new. They were firstly introduced in 1984 with the article 23 of the law 1416/1984. The major difference between this new form and the older associations was the provision that they could be formed only in predefined geographical areas. It's the first time in Greece where spatial criteria were introduced. The law was very vague in the definition of their competences. The only clear thing was the obligation for the regional development plan to have a special program for the DA.

With Law 1622/1986<sup>7</sup> the DA could participate in the process of Democratic Programming which was foreseen in chapter D' of the law. This provision was never applied as the process of Democratic Planning never took place.

With article 14, par. 6 of law 1832/1989, the opportunity was given to Associations whose members were all the Municipalities and Communes of a predefined geographical area, could become DA.

The article 27, par. 1 of law 2130/1993 solved a big problem of the associations. For the first time, if a member of the association did not pay his annual subscription, the money

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<sup>7</sup> Article 15, par. 2

could be directly given to the association from the subvention of the Ministry of Interior to the local authorities.

With the law 2218/1994 a new form of municipal collaboration was introduced, the Area Councils (AC). According to article 48, DA who were included in the borders of a AC where abolished (par. 2), the AC replace the DA in the process of Democratic Planning (which never took place anyway) and no new DA could be created after the 31/12/1994. That means that the only institutional competence of the DA was withdrawn and only the ones who were not inside the boundaries of an AC could continue functioning.

Law 2307/1995<sup>8</sup> stipulates that DA whose Local Authorities Members belong to more than one AC continue functioning until their objective has been achieved.<sup>9</sup>

In 1/1/1999 with law 2539/1997<sup>10</sup> the AC were abolished.

Law 2946/2001<sup>11</sup> created a new form of associations, which resembled much with the DA, the “Sympoliteies”, but until now, five (5) years after, only five (5) have been created.

Finally, the new MCC (2006), in article 271, par. 6 stipulates that DA who insist existing after all this laws, can continue existing until the end of the time which was foreseen by their creational act.

After a 20 years struggle we arrived at the point of departure, but we don't get anything, like in Monopoly! 10 DA resisted and are still alive, from which two (2) in AMA<sup>12</sup>.

## **West Athens**

In 1988 nine (9) municipalities in the western part of the Greater Athens Area (Agia Varvara, Agii Anargyri, Egaleo, Zefyri, Ilion, Kamatero, , Peristeri, Petroupoli and

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<sup>8</sup> Article 2, par. 18

<sup>9</sup> A very weird provision, as for almost all DA the objective was the development of their area. When is this objective achieved?

<sup>10</sup> Article 16, par. 6

<sup>11</sup> Article 12

Chaidari.) decided to combine their forces and created the Association for the Development of West Athens (ADWA). In 1998 the municipality of Korydallos, which stayed out in the beginning, decided to join.

West Athens is at the fringe of the metropolitan area. It is physically separated from the main metropolitan area by the river of Kifissos, which has been transformed into a highway. The area, which has mainly developed the last 30 years, includes the municipalities of Over 15% of the metropolitan population lives in West Athens (600.000 inhabitants) and 18% of the working population of the Greek capital.

Residence is the basic land use, while services and leisure are scattered throughout the urban tissue, resulting in the lack of organized municipal centres and a high dependence from the metropolitan centres of Athens and Piraeus. The secondary sector is principally concentrated in Eleonas and at both sides of the Athens - Thessaloniki (Kifissos) Highway and the Athens - Patra Highway, which are crossing the urban tissue. Smaller industries are even inside the urban tissue, mixed with housing and offices.

Population density in West Athens is 861 inh/ha, while the national average is 79 inh/ha and the European 144 inh/ha. Between 1961-1991 the population has increased by 101,4%, while in the Metropolitan area it reached 67%.

38% of the population are economically active, according to the census of 1991 and are allocated 0,45% in the primary sector, 33,95% in the secondary sector and 58,18% in the tertiary sector. Trends are for a big decrease in the secondary, a small decrease in the primary sector and a fort increase in the tertiary sector.

In 1991 the official unemployment was about 10%. Today it is estimated higher than 15%. Young people and women are mostly hit by unemployment. The unemployment of women was in 1991 about 15,31% and of young people (ages 15-24) 23,97%, from which 79,10%(!) are new unemployed.

West Athens features higher unemployment rates, a lower educational level of the population and lower income.

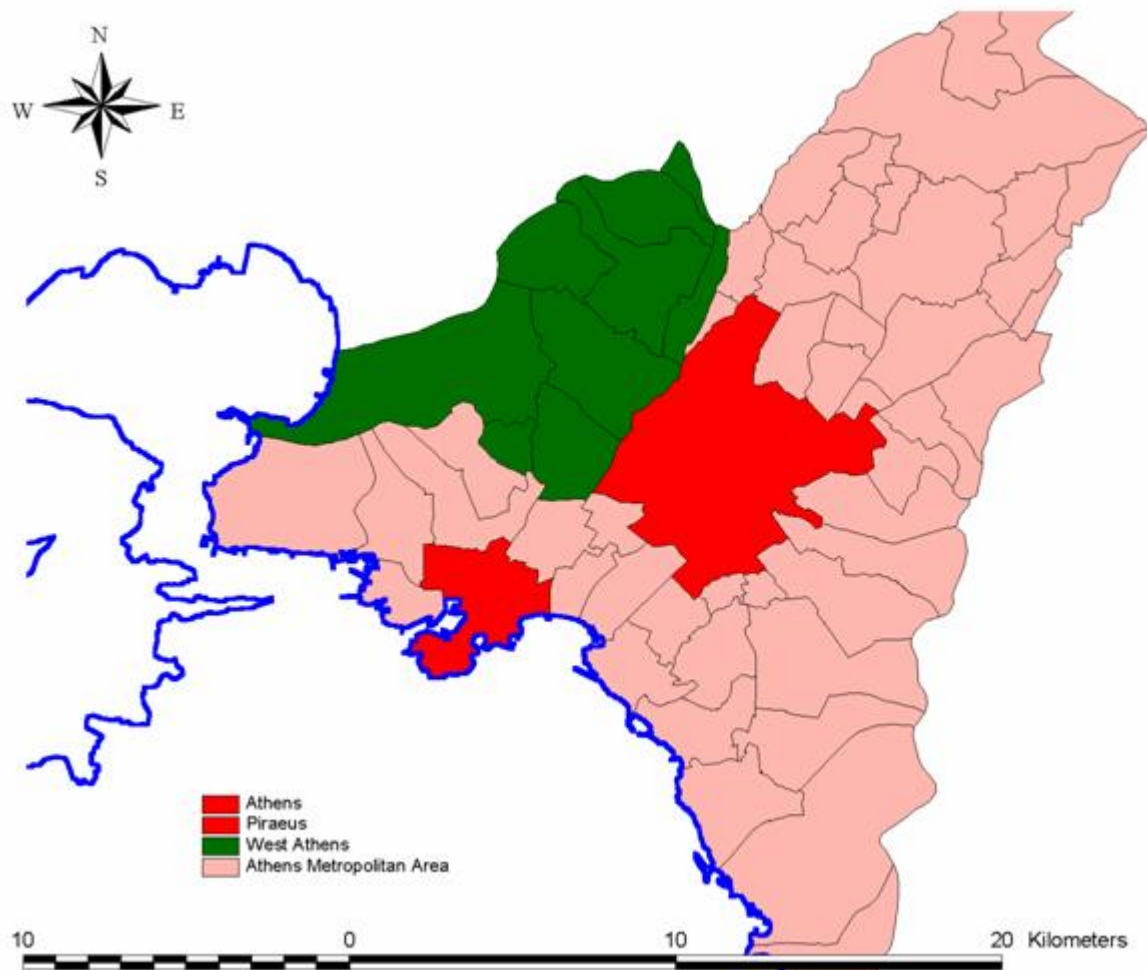
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<sup>12</sup> This is not a coincidence, but a result of the fact that all the above mentioned laws ignored the AMA



The agglomeration of West Athens is one of the most downgraded areas of the Athens Basin, with regards to the quality of urban environment, of social infrastructure and of the spectrum and quality of services offered. There is a notable shift from the secondary towards the tertiary sector, higher than the average level in Greece. Nevertheless, this is not accompanied by the respective organisational quality of SMEs , especially in terms of the level of information. In addition, the nine municipalities of West Athens have received the biggest percentage of immigrants and repatriates during the last five-year period, as the values of land and housing remain low enough. Due to high unemployment rates, as well as to cultural barriers, those groups remain relatively isolated from the local society.

Very few centrally planned actions have been undertaken to enhance the development of the sub-metropolitan centres of Aegaleo, Peristeri and Ag. Anargyri, which are foreseen by the Structural Plan of Athens (1985). Despite that, an important concentration of activities was realised during the last years in the above-mentioned centres, concerning commerce and leisure, the range of which expands to the neighbouring municipalities. This development has been achieved mainly through the market forces resulting in an uneven localisation pattern.



## ADWA

ASDA is a public body (ΝΠΙΔΔ). It is governed by a Council composed of municipal representatives, elected by each municipality from the members of the municipal council, proportionally to the size of the municipal council<sup>13</sup>. Actually his council is composed of 51 members. The council elects his president, vice-president, who together with other five (5) elected members form the Executive Committee (EC), to which most of the Council's competences are transferred. Everyday activity is conducted by the President. The EC is sitting approximately once every 15 days.

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<sup>13</sup> This is defined proportionally to the population size of the municipality.

ASDA's income comes from the municipalities members (1,5% of their regular income), the State (ΚΑΠ and ΣΑΤΑ) and European funds. In 2005 ASDA's total income was 5.000.000€, from which 1.000.000€ from the Municipalities, 3.900.000€ from the State<sup>14</sup> and 100.000€ from European Funds.

Although his competences are not clearly defined, he acts as a coordinating body of the 10 municipalities and as a representative of them to higher levels. He is make studies for inter-municipal works and carries out these works. He elaborates the West Athens Master plan and lobbies for the insertion of his objectives in the AMA Master Plan.

### **Conclusion?**

The AMA has today 3 levels of structures (regional, prefectural, local) with some intermediate organs. Almost all Ministries have even direct competences, either through Organizations as well. The need is not for new organs or levels, which will work independently and in conflict with the existing bodies. The need is for rationalization of existing structures. Everything is there.

If we consider that AMA covers the whole region, the Region of Attica could be converted into a second level Local Authority and the existing prefectures can be transformed into administrative departments.

If we consider that AMA covers the Greater Athens Area, the Hyper-Prefecture can be the metropolitan organ.

If we consider that we don't want one metropolitan organ but several ADWA is the solution.

The solution is here, it's only a question of political choice. No new structures needed, just rationalization of the existing ones. Which brings us back to the first issue of this paper, with which we didn't deal. But this is an other topic.

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<sup>14</sup> Most of the money of the State comes from European Funds (CSF, etc) and finances concrete works and studies, but it's not very easy to differentiate it.

## **References**

Tiebout C., 1956, "A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures", *Journal of Political Economy* 64, 416-424