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The Return of Decentralization Greek Local Government Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the greatest crisis faced by humanity. It had a significant negative impact that affected public health, the society, the economy, and the performance of public administration. Although national administrative system's response to COVID-19 pandemic was set up, the performance and the resilience of strategic management patterns at national and local level was also initiated. This paper focuses on identifying and evaluating the strategies and models adopted by Greek local government to build resilience during the COVID-19 crisis. The results of the research are based on an empirical survey conducted in 27 municipal authorities in Greece, which showed that despite the various government policy initiatives and funding provided during the last decade and the formal introduction of crisis management and resilience focused planning models, urban resilience is downgrading due to the continuation of important implementation and compliance gaps in strategic planning and performance measurement adoption from the municipal authorities and the lack of an effective model of multi-level coordination among policy's stakeholders.

Keywords: Urban Resilience, Municipal Management, Strategic Planning, Crisis Management, Local Government Innovation, Reform

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis was the largest modern pandemic over the last century that caused the death of nearly 3.5 million people (OECD, 2020; European Commission, 2021; Boin, 2021; Ansell, 2020) and brought many nations to the brink of economic and social collapse, especially in the public health sector where many national health systems collapsed or were on the verge of collapse due to the rapid increase in hospitalizations (WHO, 2021; OECD, 2020, 2021). At the same time, the COVID-19 crisis has put enormous pressure on the financing and performance of the public sector which should continue to perform effectively in an environment of crisis and constant emergencies. The crisis in the performance of the public sector, both in terms of financing and fiscal sustainability, was particularly visible at the local government level (OECD, 2020, 2021; European Council, 2020; World Bank, 2021; UN, 2021; Linkov eds, 2021). The local government had to address several problems in meeting the emerging and increased needs of the citizens, as well as the negative effects of COVID-19 on the local economy and society via actively contributing to the assurance of a minimum level of efficient and effective performance of the national administrative system for confrontation to the threats and dangers of the current pandemic crisis (Turniti, 2020; Capano, 2021; Ansell, 2021; Coafee, 2018; Chellleri, 2021).

The turbulence of current times of the COVID-19 pandemic prompts the need to replace the concept of sustainability with the concept of resilience. It is argued that sustainability traditionally means practices and solutions expected to lead to stability and reversal of past mistakes (Ahern, 2011). However, turbulence calls for resilience, the ability to withstand and absorb sudden shocks and disturbances, and to recover and transform while maintaining basic functions and identity (Giannakis & Bruggeman, 2017; Shaw, 2012). Resilience is the ability to bounce back. In the context of local government resilience, the Rockefeller Foundation 100 Resilient Cities Initiative describes city resilience as *“the capacity of cities to function so that people living and working in cities – particularly the poor and vulnerable – survive and thrive no matter what stresses or shocks they encounter”* (100 Resilient Cities, 2018). These stresses and shocks could be natural or human-made disasters and events (Sharifi, 2014, 2020). Research suggests that some of the more broadly applicable characteristics that prevent municipalities from being resilient include rigidity, fragility, and government action geared towards maintaining the status quo (Pelling & Manuel-Navarrete, 2011; Nomandim, 2019; Coafee, 2018).

One key element of a resilience strategy is the capacity to make decisions about programs intended to build and support resiliency. This capacity for decision-making requires information about achieving goals and strategies and using the information properly. For example, in its resilience

strategy developed as part of the Rockefeller Resilient Cities, the resilience team sought to develop mission, goals, objectives, and performance baseline that can help the municipality improve the quality and delivery of city services and support priority sectors (Holzer, 2021; OECD, 2021; UN, 2021; Therrien, 2021; de Lancer Julnes; Broom & Park, 2018). This is found in a similar lacuna when studying the integration of community indicators with performance measurement systems. Similar to the current resilient efforts in Greece and cities around the world participating in the Rockefeller Foundation initiative, community indicator projects seek to build sustainable communities and support policy change (Dulhy & Swartz, 2006; Innes & Booher, 1999; Murphy-Green & Blair, 2004; Bryce, 2020).

In this context of the COVID-19 crisis, strengthening the local government's urban resilience has been at the heart of government's policy to address and mitigate the effects. The effects of COVID-19 at the local government level were intense and large scale, which caused a further increase in local inequalities and inequalities in the quality of life of citizens, especially for the most vulnerable social groups. As a result of local inequality in terms of access to public health services, the poorest and least developed areas are faced with problems such as accessibility and availability, limitations, and social security services, which creates a greater deficit in the poorest urban and rural areas (Linkov eds, 2021; OECD, 2020; Golan, 2020; Capano, 2021; Ancell, 2021). The pandemic also had a negative impact on education due to the digital accessibility gap directly related to the citizen's income and the financial strength of the municipality and national local government system (OECD, 2020, 2021; Nomandin, 2019; Sand, 2021; Eurocities, 2020; 2021; IMF, 2020). Significant problems also emerged in the sectors of employment and entrepreneurship, where unemployment was at a high level, especially for the blue-collar employees and young people with limited skills. Furthermore, they were most likely to lose or face the risk of losing their jobs as most of them were unable to work from home. Although the local small and medium-scale enterprises are the least competitive and innovative, they face the biggest problems of financial viability (Mccoy, 2020; OECD, 2021; Eurocities, 2021; UN, 2021; Frensen, 2021). Negative effects and problems were observed at the local level due to the crisis of COVID-19. In combination with the high-level reduction of local government revenues, local business taxation and charges increased from 25% to 65% while local government financing increased from 5% to 35%. Subsequently, public investments increased from 25% to 75% while user charges increased from 25% to 75%. At the same time, the reduction of local government revenues and an increase in its expenses varied from 25% to 75% in the policy areas of social policy and social protection subsidies, primary health care, school education, and the digital transformation of municipal services. Local government expenditures are

expected to remain at the same level or to experience a limited reduction of less than 30% due to the maintenance of citizen and business support packages in the Post-COVID-19 period and for a period of 2 to 3 years (Eurocities, 2021; EU, 2020; OECD, 2021; Linkov eds, 2021; Holzer, 2020; Holzer eds, 2021; Ansell, 2021).

Problems and increasing pressures on the performance of local government agencies put the issues of strengthening urban resilience, together with the issues of digital transformation, at the center of the debate on public administration reform in the Post-COVID-19 era (ICLEI, 2021; World Bank, 2021; Yang, 2020; Brosselle, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the long-standing and intractable problems of strengthening local government's performance at international level and the need to strengthen local government's resilience to deal effectively with the contemporary, public health, social and economic crises, currently occurring more frequently and intensely. Nonetheless, there is a possibility of an increasing frequency and intensity in the upcoming years (OECD, 2020, 2021; McKinsey, 2020; European Council, 2021; UN, 2021). A new role for local government worldwide requires strengthening its responsibilities and financial resources and adopting a coherent and effective strategy for urban resilience (UN, 2020, 2021; ICLEI, 2019). The strategy for urban resilience, which appeared to be absent from most of the municipalities' response to the COVID-19 crisis at international level, should stand out as the core of their performance strategy and the effective coordination of the various and different policies enforced by the municipal government (OECD, 2020; Ansell, 2020; Dooren, 2020; George, 2020, 2021).

Based on international data and resources on the effects of COVID-19 crisis on municipal government performance, it appears that the level of preparedness and the performance of municipalities' urban resilience strategies in correlation with the level of decentralization and local autonomy of the national local government system affected the effectiveness of municipalities' response in managing the effects of COVID-19 (UN, 2021; World Bank, 2021; Eurocities, 2021; OECD, 2020, 2021; Linkov eds, 2021; Toshkov, 2020; Capano, 2021). The national administrative systems characterized by a high degree of decentralization, fiscal decentralization, and municipalities appear to have dealt comparatively more effectively with the effects of COVID-19 (Turniti, 2020; OECD, 2020). In addition, the degree of decentralization of the national health system and the introduction and performance of a primary health care policy, combined with the presence of an enhanced role of local government in social policy implementation, also appears to affect the effectiveness of municipalities in the COVID-19 crisis (OECD, 2021; McCoy, 2020; WHO, 2021). According to these initial results of the international data and resources, the fiscal decentralization initiatives

should be accompanied by the implementation and compliance of the municipalities with new strategies and standards of fiscal sustainability, fiscal resilience, and fiscal efficiency in their financial management and planning.

The analysis of the international data shows that the COVID-19 crisis highlighted the importance of promoting the decentralization of responsibilities to local government in several policy areas important to urban resilience such as public health, the green and circular economy, entrepreneurship, the entrepreneurship policy of small and medium-sized enterprises, the environmental protection, and the policy for life-long learning and public infrastructures policy (UN, 2020; 2021, ICLEI, 2019; OECD, 2020; Holzer, 2021; Sharifi, 2020; Frensen, 2021). The promotion of decentralization should be supported by strengthening the critical functions of multi-level and horizontal coordination and the development of regional and local partnerships by providing municipal services to citizens, especially to vulnerable citizens and small and medium-sized enterprises. This will provide efficient utilization of public funding and ensure the effective and sustainable delivery of public services in key areas of urban resilience such as public health, school education, public transport, public procurement, and local enterprise's supply chain and logistics (UN, 2021; OECD, 2021; PES, 2020; Chung, 2020; Eurocities, 2021). According to international data, the strengthening of the decentralization of responsibilities in local government should be accompanied by an increase of public investment in important areas of urban resilience such as public health, social policy and social protection, urban infrastructure, digital and green skills development, and the digital transformation of the public sector and the national economy (OECD, 2021; World Bank, 2021; Deloitte, 2020; Sharifi, 2020).

Along with the required decentralization of responsibilities to local government, the COVID-19 crisis highlighted the negative effects of the digital gap among the municipalities at national and international levels and the importance of municipalities' level of digital preparedness and digital transformation in urban resilience and crisis response (EU, 2021; UN, 2021; ICLEI, 2019; OECD, 2020; Ansell, 2020; Holzer, 2021). In terms of digital transformation and digital provision of municipal services, the most advanced municipalities were those that effectively covered the needs of their citizens and the local businesses and were able to perform well remotely. In addition to the digital provision of municipal services to citizens and businesses, the strategy of digital transformation of the municipalities during the COVID-19 crisis also included data collection tools and actions regarding citizens' needs and the online and real-time tracking of their activities (Holzer, 2021; Yang, 2020; Chung, 2020; McKinsey, 2020; OECD, 2020). The quality of data, especially the advanced digital and real data regarding the performance of the municipalities, the behavior of the citizens, and the social and economic

activity within their geographical limits contributed to the effective municipal decision-making on COVID-19 response and the effective cover of local population needs (SLGE, 2020; UN, 2020; OECD, 2021; Holzer, 2021; Golen, 2020). Data-driven decision making and the provision of services based on performance and behavioral analytics and advanced, intelligent, and real-time data has been a key factor in municipal policy's effectiveness in managing the effects of the COVID-19 crisis at the international level (Turniti, 2020; Linkov eds, 2021; Thompson, 2020; OECD, 2021). According to international data, the adoption and performance of the municipal digital services are also associated with the strengthening of public communication, public consultation and citizens' guidance, and steering online policy tools for the prevention of further expansion and the mitigation of COVID-19 effects (SLGE, 2020; Ansell, 2020).

The digital transformation of municipalities should be accompanied by the emergence of a new model of municipal organization and performance that is more decentralized, flexible, and less bureaucratic in decision making, with municipal services design and provision (OECD, 2021; Eurocities, 2021; SLGE, 2020; European Council, 2021). Municipalities with a greater degree of administrative autonomy and flexibility were designed to implement more effective and faster policy initiatives and programs to address the problems of COVID-19. This includes the critical but highly bureaucratic sector of public procurement of goods and services. The digitalization and simplification of public procurement procedures and the strengthening of the municipal supply chain emerged in the COVID-19 crisis as an important policy area for citizens' safety and protection of their quality of life (SLGE, 2020; UN, 2021; Ansell, 2020). Municipalities' effective response to COVID-19 appears also as the quality of trust and cooperation between the municipalities and the citizens. The level of citizens' trust in municipal government, the specific municipality, the effective introduction and performance of interactive communication, public consultation channels and tools, mainly digital-governance tools, the long-standing existence and performance of local policy networks, and active civil society organizations positively influences the quality of municipal performance to COVID-19 negative effects, especially social and economic threats (UN, 2020; 2021; OECD, 2020; ICLEI, 2021; SLGE, 2020). The appearance of trust-based relations between the municipal authority, the various local, social and economic groups, and a culture of participatory planning and citizen's participation in municipal issues and services supports the level of citizens' compliance with the guidelines and restrictions imposed for the protection of public health at local level. In addition, it supports and enforces national and municipal policies (ICLEI, 2019, 2021; Ansell, 2020; Greer, 2020; Steen, 2020).

Evaluating Urban Resilience in Greece: Research Methodology

The key question attempted to be answered in this article is to analyze what factors are responsible for this lack of integration and what challenges may need to be overcome to realize the potential of resilience in municipal management in Greece. This paper helps to fill this gap by exploring the use and adoption of urban resilience policies and tools by the municipal governments in Greece, based on the evaluation of their strategic planning and performance measurement capacity. Municipal resilience capacity is assessed based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative research includes the analysis of the central government's policies toward the strengthening of municipal resilience (27), municipal authorities' operational plans and progress reports (38), urban resilience plans, policies, actions (32), and various municipal decisions on strategic planning and civic protection policy (23) to evaluate the adoption and the impact of central government's policies and financial tools and municipal policies on urban resilience.

Qualitative research includes the completion of 192 semi-structured questionnaires (response rate 54%) from municipal employees (169) and staff of central government-involved agencies (23). 39 interviews were also conducted with local government employees (25) and officials (14) that participated in urban resilience, strategic planning, and performance measurement activities at their municipalities. Qualitative research results were analyzed with the use of SPSS software. Using data from an empirical survey, the article discusses the challenges and opportunities that municipal governments in Greece currently face regarding performance management and the implications on their ability to build resilience in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was conducted between February 2021 and November 2022. The research sample of 27 municipal authorities in Greece introduced and implemented specific policies and actions in the urban resilience policy area (more than the 80% of the total number of the municipalities).

Furthermore, they are experienced in strategic planning and performance measurement through the implementation of municipal operational plans (more than the 60% of the total number of the municipalities). Apart from their experience in urban resilience policy's introduction and implementation, surveys' sample was selected according to the representation criteria of municipal authorities in Greece. This included 7 municipal authorities in metropolitan areas, 5 big municipal authorities in regional areas, 7 medium-size municipal authorities at regional areas, 5 small municipal authorities at regional areas, 1 small mountain municipal authority, and 2 small island municipal authorities.

The Missing Link of Resilience: Strategic Planning Adoption and Local Government Performance in Greece

The implementation and effectiveness of strategic planning in Greek local government is greatly influenced by the implementation of policy at the central government level. This is an implementation framework characterized by limited compliance of public agencies both at the level of strategic planning and at the level of evaluation (OECD, 2012, 2020; Spanou & Sotiropoulos, 2011; Karkatsoulis, 2019; Goderis, 2015; Featherstone eds, 2020; Spanou, 2021; Makridimitris, 2018). At the standard level of compliance and introduction of strategic programs, only 35% of central government agencies (Ministries and Public agencies) and 25% of municipalities have introduced strategic planning (OECD, 2012; 2017; ITA, 2017). In the field of performance appraisal, despite the limited availability of data, only 18% of central government agencies and 11% of municipalities regularly evaluate the performance of their services (Plymakis, 2019; 2021). As a result, there were implementation and compliance problems due to several organizational and political factors such as the maintenance of centralism, the lack of effective fiscal decentralization, the presence of increased responsibilities and overlaps in the provision of municipal services, and the lack of a comprehensive policy process and codification of the institutional framework governing the functioning of local government, especially the absence of a substantial evaluation of the provision of municipal services by the central state. These creates significant barriers to the implementation of strategic planning and evaluation at the local government level. However, this is a policy failure which is the reproduction of the failure of politics at the central government level (Karkatsoulis, 2014, 2018, 2019; Sotiropoulos & Christopoulos, 2018; Featherstone eds, 2020; OECD, 2014, 2018, 2020).

A significant milestone in the effectiveness of strategic planning at the local level is the obligation of municipalities to comply with multiple and overlapping levels of central government policies and programs for local government. Also, more than 19 policies at the national level are characterized by limited horizontal coordination or often due to the lack of horizontal and multi-level coordination and increased bureaucracy in the provision of municipal services (ITA, 2017; Hlepas, 2015, 2018). An inefficient model of municipal services, based on the formal compliance of services with the provisions of the institutional framework of local government and funding requirements of the municipal budget are the main criteria for evaluation and supervision of municipalities and their services. Nonetheless, the efficiency, quality, and effectiveness of their services are not evaluated. No form of evaluation is based on data, and it does not incorporate the needs and views of the beneficiaries of services. At the same time, there is no link between funding of municipalities and the performance provided by their services

(Hlepas, 2020, 2021; Ongaro, 2010; Kickert, 2011; Featherstone eds, 2021; Karkatsoulis, 2018). Reducing the aforementioned factors to the particular and complex policy environment for urban resilience in Greek local government, the negative effects on the implementation of the policy becomes apparent, both from the incorrect implementation of strategic planning and evaluation, and from the organizational and administrative fragmentation of policies and actions for urban resilience to different policies of municipalities and stakeholders at local and regional level. Municipal authorities must harmonize and comply with the different management and evaluation requirements of the 5 operational programs and the 13 regional operational programs of the NSRF 2014-2020, the 9 national policies and programs of 5 co-responsible ministries for the financing and implementation of urban resilience actions. This should account for 64 different categories of audits imposed by 8 different public agencies responsible for the control and supervision of municipalities in Greece (Hlepas, 2018, 2020; Plymakis, 2019; ITA, 2018; EU, 2019).

In the Greek case, urban resilience policy is not a discreet national policy and local government policy. Still, it is integrated and implemented, piecemeal, to a limited extent and often unsuccessfully, mainly through civil protection policy. Since the reform of the Kallikratis program in 2010, municipalities have acquired increased responsibilities in the field of civil protection and especially in the prevention and response to natural disasters. This is a decentralization of responsibilities which, according to popular administrative practice in Greece, was never accompanied by the transfer of required funds resources, personnel, and equipment for the effective implementation of the policy. It should also be mentioned that the municipalities in Greece, with the exception of the municipalities of Athens and Thessaloniki, have designed separate strategic plans for urban resilience through their participation in the Urban Sustainability Initiative of the Rockefeller Foundation programs that still face devaluation problems. In addition, non-implementation of their actions have not introduced and imposed any specialized policies and strategies for urban resilience. Therefore, the urban resilience policy of municipalities is designed and implemented through the civil protection policy, a policy that covers only a very limited part of the urban resilience policy, limited to the prevention and response to natural disasters (ITA, 2020; Karkatsoulis, 2019, 2020). The civil protection policy in Greece is very ineffective since it was identified with policy failures such as the recent fire in the Mati region of Attica in 2018, the deadly floods in Mandra in 2017 and also in the Attica region, and the catastrophic fires in the summer of 2021 due to the failure of policy reform initiatives over the last fifteen years in the critical areas of decentralization of decisive responsibilities to local government, administrative clearance and

simplification of increased responsibilities, and strengthening of decentralized business and co-operation.

In this chaotic environment for the implementation of strategic planning and civil protection in Greek local government, municipalities have the power to design and implement local risk management plans / local civil protection plans which should be harmonized. They specialize at the local level, the directions, the performance standards, and the actions of prevention and confrontation of the national plan of civil protection Xenokratis, as well as with the regional plan of civil protection of their region (ITA, 2020). The harmonization and specialization of local civil protection plans with national and regional civil protection plans are problematic due to the presence of a number of determinants. Consequently, these factors include the problems of coordination and specialization of local civil protection plans due to the intense centralization of the Ministry of Civil Protection (until recently the State Department and not so long ago the General Secretariat) in terms of policy planning and implementation, limited involvement of local government and the strong presence of coordination problems, the lack of a common strategy and management culture between the 21 different public agencies involved in the design and specialization of the national civil protection plan, and the parallel implementation by the municipal authorities of three other national plans in civil protection areas (forest protection, earthquake management, and floods). The limited operational capacity of the municipalities in the implementation of the policy for civil protection is visible in terms of the compliance of the municipalities with their legal obligation to design specialized local civil protection action plans, where only 20% of the municipalities have a local action plan for civil protection. At the level of implementation and monitoring of action plans, this percentage, according to the results of the present empirical research, is further limited to less than 10%. However, urban resilience is a policy far beyond the important and narrow limits of civil protection. It is something that both national and local authorities in Greece often fail to understand, with obvious problems in terms of policy coherence and effectiveness (OECD, 2020; ITA, 2020). There is a gap in critical areas of urban resilience policy such as public health policy, social protection and social cohesion policy, local entrepreneurship policy, labor force and skills policy, and sustainable development policy coordination on the integration of these different and administratively fragmented public policies into policy for urban resilience and the development of a reciprocal and effective strategy (OECD, 2014, 2016; EU, 2021; UN, 2021).

In this context and beyond the narrow confines of civil protection, policy and strategic planning for urban resilience includes the national and regional plans for public health crisis management, the recently established national and regional plans for effective adaptation to climate change, the

operational programs of municipalities and regions which also include urban resilience actions, local waste management plans and municipal energy upgrade plans of municipal buildings. These are part of the environmental protection policy under the Sustainable Mobility Plans (SVAKs), Electric Vehicle Charging Plans (SFIOs), Integrated Spatial Investments (WPOs), Local Community-Initiated Local Development Programs (CLLDs), the Municipal and Regional Technical Program, and new urban planning and funding projects funded by the Recovery Fund. This also includes important actions for urban infrastructure and transport, local employment partnerships, the Food Aid Program (TEVA), which are also areas of urban resilience policy, and the initiatives and programs for the organizational and digital transformation of the municipalities and the simplification of the procedures. Furthermore, the administrative labyrinth of the policy for the urban resilience at the municipal level is revealed causing awe. Initiatives to promote strategic planning at the level of sectoral policies, although part of the urban sustainability policy is aimed at strengthening planning and decentralization of services at the municipal level, ultimately contributed to further increasing the complexity and barriers to effective implementation policy due to the different multiple and fragmented levels of planning that support their implementation, the maintenance of increased responsibilities both at the central level of action planning and local level of implementation, the presence of horizontal and cross-sectoral coordination problems between stakeholders, and the lack of eventual adoption of a politically binding and operationally implemented and evaluated policy to enhance the resilience of municipalities at the development, economic, social, and operational levels and in the face of ongoing challenges and threats they face (ITA, 2018; EE, 2018; Plymakis, 2019; Hlepas, 2020, 2021).

Local Government Resilience Under Attack: Evaluating Greek Municipal Government Strategy in Coping with COVID-19

Focusing on the COVID-19 crisis and according to research's results, several factors appeared to influence municipalities' urban resilience performance in Greece. Factors related to the problems of the limited and incomplete decentralization in policy areas include fiscal decentralization, public health, social policy, and entrepreneurship and to the limited administrative capacity of the municipalities in the areas of strategic planning and performance measurement. According to the research's results, centralism is the most important factor that negatively affects the effectiveness of local government in managing and dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Centralism and the failure of administrative reform in the critical policy area of public health, including the introduction of a primary health care system in Greece which would be performed in collaboration with the

municipalities, have limited the role and contribution of local government to public health management of the COVID-19 crisis. Centralization in public health policy and the lack of a well-performed, coherent, and expanded model of primary health care in Greece, although it was officially introduced in 2014 but does not actually work, has significantly affected the role of local government in dealing with the pandemic at regional and local level.

The primary healthcare system is a basic policy pillar for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic due to its connection with the local government and the coverage of the local health needs of the population to reduce the pressure on the hospitals (WHO, 2020; Capano, 2021; Linkov eds, 2021). This results to a policy failure in Greece with a negative impact on local government response to the COVID-19 crisis due to multi-years delays in policy's implementation, both in terms of infrastructures construction and equipment procurement of the primary public health units, as well as due to the reactions at the level of their staffing and the division of responsibilities between the primary health care units and the hospitals (OECD, 2020; Pсарides eds, 2020; WHO, 2020).

Apart from the public health policy, the effects of centralism in dealing with the effects of the pandemic were also negative in the policy area of spatial and urban planning. Centralism's impact on the completion and revision of the local spatial plans were visible during the COVID-19 crisis. This was seen in the absence of citizen's activities in municipalities of parks and open public spaces. Hence, multi-year delays, with an average time of 13.5 years, was experienced in the completion of the required audits and approvals. This was due to long-term and bureaucratic delays in the expropriation of the areas needed for the development of the open and green public spaces, especially the absence of a culture of green and open urban planning in the Greek local government. Such culture promotes friendly and sustainable urban mobility and the creation of free spaces for the citizens (OECD, 2020; EU, 2021; Eurocities, 2021; UN, 2021). Above all, the quality of citizen's life during the pandemic was also affected by centralism and the failure of the reforms in the public transportation policy. This policy area is critical to urban resilience, public health protection, and the safe transition of citizens in their workplace and home (OECD, 2020, 2021; World Bank, 2021). A policy area, contrary to international trends, helps local government in Greece to continue to have very limited responsibilities due to the lack of decentralization and the limited ownership and management role of the local government authorities. This is also combined with obstacles such as large shortages of transportation equipment and staff, especially in Athens and Thessaloniki urban areas. In addition, it has made the performance of public transport particularly problematic during the period of COVID-19 crisis.

The absence of substantial fiscal decentralization in the financing of the municipal authorities in Greece was another crucial factor that undermined their performance during COVID-19 crisis. The lack of fiscal decentralization and flexibility is one of the most important negative effects of centralism on municipalities' performance. Particularly, it has a negative effects on the provision of the necessary financial assistance to socially and financially vulnerable citizens and to the local businesses affected by the pandemic (OECD, 2020; Toshkov, 2021; Yang, 2020). The centralization in municipal financing, in combination with municipalities institutional obligation of enforced balanced municipal budgets and the lack of financial flexibility for the utilization of innovative financial products and tools as mezzanine bods, project bonds, and municipal bonds, deprive the municipalities of the necessary financial flexibility for the immediate and effective coverage of the emergency needs of the citizens and the support of entrepreneurship during the period of the COVID-19. A very high increase in citizen's emergency needs to be covered by local government, estimated at more than 380.000.000 euros, combined with a very significant decrease of municipal revenues up to 220.00.000 due to the limited receivability of local government taxes and fees and to local taxes exemptions for the vulnerable citizens and the closed and underperformed local enterprises, led to the financial suffocation of the local government authorities of more than 600.000.000 euros. In addition to this amount, based on the delays caused by public works and the implementation of ESRF-funded programs of the local government, the total financial impact of COVID-19 on the Greek local government is estimated to be more than 1.000.000 billion euros.

The negative impact of centralization on the COVID-19 response was also visible in Greece and in the employment and entrepreneurship policy sectors, which are two basic pillars of urban resilience policy (McKinsey, 2021; IMF, 2021; World Bank, 2021). However, despite the international trends, two important sectors for the urban resilience, the responsibilities and the administrative capacity of the municipalities, remains limited. Maintaining the central government's role and responsibilities in the design, financing, and implementation of the national public policies for the enterprises and the public workforce, including the policies and tools for the public subsidies, has limited the operational capacity and role of the local government authorities in designing and enforcing specialized policies for the support of the local enterprises, job seekers, and people who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 crisis. This has made local businesses and the local labor market even more vulnerable to the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Apart from centralization, the second category of factors that affected the urban resilience of municipalities in Greece and their response to the COVID-19 crisis was that of strategic planning capacity. The absence of a single and

coherent strategic planning model and the limited level of municipalities' compliance with the principles and the tools of strategic planning have affected their response to the pandemic negatively. The strategic planning of Greek local government demands that the municipalities should comply and be integrated into their organization and performance in the directions and the policies of different central government's agencies, more than 22 agencies, and the Regional Government, contributing to the absence of a single strategy to address the negative effects of COVID-19 at the local government level. Problems of strategic planning were further intensified by the lack of effective multi-level and horizontal coordination among the involved public sector stakeholders in the provision and financing of municipal services. Dealing with the effects of COVID-19 requires the coordination and cooperation of various public organizations operating at the local level such as the municipalities, the regional authorities, the various social policy and social protection public institutions, the public schools, the public health units, the police, and the various professional chambers. Thus, this shows their collaboration and the adoption of a common strategy, presented as highly problematic in Greece, due to the deficiencies of the horizontal policy coordination and the individualistic strategy that they adopt in terms of performance.

Along with the critical issues of coordination and cooperation between the municipalities and the public organizations involved in the implementation at the local level of the national-level policies and policies for coping with COVID-19, accessibility and the provision of municipal services are significant problems. The provision of municipal services in Greece is particularly problematic due to citizens' accessibility problems, arising from the limited degree of digital provision of municipal services and the limited adoption of tools such as remote provision and street-level provision, especially for social services. Accessibility problems are interconnected with the quality problems of the municipal services due to the organizational limitations on integrating citizens' needs, the design of data-driven municipal services, and the effective integration of innovative tools in the provision of municipal services. Additional constraints on the performance of the municipalities in the pandemic period were imposed by the very low degree of integration and utilization of municipal services performance assessment tools. Municipal services provision in Greece are not systemically evaluated according to performance indicators. This is due to the lack of effective performance oversight of the municipalities by the central government, the lack of a culture of strategic and participatory planning, and the evaluation between the organizations and the staff of the local government (OECD, 2013, 2019, 2020; EU, 2020, 2021).

Strategic planning adoption and implementation by the municipal authorities were further degraded due to the emergency conditions arising from the exploitation of the COVID-19 crisis and from the urgent public health, social and economic needs to be covered. Subsequently, the already problematic and limited implementation and evaluation of the progress of the municipal/regional operational plans of the local government authorities were almost annihilated due to the shift of interest to the management of the COVID-19 impact. The substantial downgrading of strategic planning as a decision-making tool to deal with the pandemic was also obvious in the absence of a national specialized crisis management strategy and plan for the response of the regional and municipal government to the pandemic. At the same time, it presented the problems of strategic planning in critical policy areas for urban resilience such as crisis management and natural disasters management, the maintenance of the critical urban infrastructures such as energy production, water supply and waste management, the urban planning and the municipal supply chain and logistics services to meet citizens' emergencies needs. Critical areas of strategic planning for urban resilience performance states that most municipalities lacked the design and implementation of a strategic crisis management/emergency plan. In almost all the municipalities in Greece, there was lack of an ex-ante, evidence and real-time data-based evaluation of the various and potential risks and threats faced by the municipality and the design of an integrated strategy to address them. At the same time, there was lack of adoption of a strategic crisis management plan between municipalities and the local stakeholders to address the risks at local, inter-municipal, and regional levels. There is also characteristic lack of planning and coordination in crisis management. It should also be mentioned that the existing regional and municipal civil protection plans were impossible to enforce without any added value for the management of the COVID-19 pandemic due to the lack of incorporation of specialized actions and tools for complex public health crisis (Boin, 2020; Yang, 2020; OECD, 2021; Toskov, 2021). The lack of strategic planning was also evident in the strategy adopted by the municipalities in order to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. This strategy did not cover all the important areas of urban resilience and was limited only to three policy areas: the digital provision of municipal services, the provision of food aid and assistance in basic goods to the beneficiaries of the municipal social services, and the provision of digital and phone information and steering to the citizens on COVID- 19 issues. In addition to these three pillars of strategy, a common strategy between the municipalities emerges but to a lesser extent in the field of conducting free COVID-19 tests for citizens. This strategy is enforced in cooperation with the Regional Authorities and the Ministry of Health which is in charge. The lack of coherent municipal strategic planning and a specialized

crisis and risk management plan has severely limited municipalities' operational capacity to effectively address the negative health issue. This has made the municipal government a captive of central state's policy centralism and red tape.

In relation to municipalities' strategic planning capacity, the effectiveness of the strategic planning and the overall management of the COVID-19 pandemic were both undermined by the lack of an evidence-based policy making at the municipal and central government level in Greece and the utilization of data in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the enforced policies and programs to address the negative effects of COVID-19 crisis. In this critical area of evidence-based policymaking, the previous technological backwardness of the Greek local government has affected the effectiveness of the enforced policies negatively. The lack of data, including data on services cost of provision, citizen's needs and views, and the incomplete and problematic integration and utilization of the different sources of municipal data in the planning and evaluation of the municipal services is identified as one of the main barriers to the efficiency and effectiveness of local government in Greece. At the same time, the empirical research shows that for important categories of data sources on urban resilience such as real-time data, risk assessment and vulnerability data, environmental quality and environmental protection data, quality of life, and local population's public health data, there appears to be a collection and utilization gap in Greek local government. The limited scale of data collection and utilization is a barrier to strategic planning performance and the effectiveness of the provided municipal services, including those that have been specialized or developed in the context of the municipal strategy to deal with the effects of COVID-19. Particularly, policy planning and the provision of municipal services to the citizens during the health crisis was unavailable in most of the municipalities of intelligent data and real-time data of social and economic activity at the municipal level. Consequently, the limited utilization of socioeconomic, demographic, and quality of life data in relation to the needs of citizens and the local businesses, geospatial data in relation to the location and operation of municipal, public and private agencies, as well as the location and quality of the local infrastructure has resulted in the inefficiency of the municipal strategic planning performance in tackling the pandemic locally, especially the citizens' emergency needs. The design of data-driven and evidence-based programs and actions has been identified as a critical factor in the success of good practices of international experience in the COVID-19 response. At the same time, it helps to strengthen the role of local government and further promotes decentralization. The limited development of evidence-based policy-making in the Greek municipal government is due to the appearance of a number of factors that negatively affected the performance of the

municipalities, including the limited integration of digital governance tools for the provision of municipal services. It further includes the problems of digital interoperability among the different databases and IT systems used by the local government authorities, the absence of a common digital database for all the local government authorities and services, the limited digital transformation of the municipalities, the outdated and problematic equipment, as well as the lack of digital skills of municipalities' workforce. The digital gap of the local government in Greece is due to the municipalities' unpreparedness to operate digitally and decentralize their operations. This has negatively affected the operational capacity of the municipalities to perform remotely during the first half of the pandemic.

The effectiveness of the strategic planning and the provision of the municipal services in relation to the urban resilience is also affected by the quality of the governance relations developed between the municipalities, the local stakeholders, and the citizens. The governance relationship between the municipal government, the local community, and the citizens in Greece are presented not only to promote networking, cooperation, and trust, but principles necessary in the prevention and response to crisis and disasters as that of the current pandemic. In Greek local government, the absence of a culture of public consultation and participatory management in the organization and performance of the municipalities, the failure of public consultation tools due to limited acceptance and participation from citizens and non-utilization by the municipal leadership, wider deficits of cooperation and citizens' trust in local government, and the existing governance relations have not contributed to the effective performance response to the crisis. Lack of trust and cooperation in the performance of municipalities and the provision of services to the citizens and the businesses have resulted in limited public consultation and participatory planning of the enforced national public policies based on the specific needs of the local society and the local economy. This is due to the problems of public consultation and lack of effective communication of local government with the citizens and the limited compliance of the citizens due to their limited trust in local government. In addition, the low degree of activation and functioning of civil society in Greek local government which appears to be missing from the COVID-19 crisis management has negatively affected the effectiveness of governance networks in dealing with the pandemic, especially in specific social groups of the local population such as the pupils, the youth, and the vulnerable social groups. Governance relations and in particular the quality of relations of trust developed between the local government, the citizens, the market and the utilization of participatory models for municipal service provision have been identified as one of the critical factors of local government effectiveness in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Day After the Storm: The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Future of Urban Resilience in Greece

Urban resilience policy implementation problems and fragmentations in municipal government in Greece point out that the reproduction and existence of significant structural deficits and pitfalls in municipal planning and decision-making affected municipalities' response and performance to the pandemic. Organizational problems and obstacles related to the current model of local government organization in Greece is intensely centralized and bureaucratic. This has provided important fragments on municipal services performance and the dominant administrative culture, which is characterized by a bilateral lack of trust between incenral–local government relations and public administration citizens relations (Ongaro, 2011; Kickert, 2011; Spanou & Sotiropoulos, 2011; Karkatsoulis, 2018; OECD, 2012; European Commission, 2012). In this adverse context for strategic planning and urban resilience, a series of reforms are required at the national level for the emergence of a new model of local government in Greece. On the core of these reforms stands the strengthening of the existing local government's audit and performance management model. This is according to the values and principles of the new steering state (Denhart, 2015; Osborne eds, 2012; Ongaro, 2017; Bouckaert & Pollitt, 2018; Kettl, 2015).

A new steering model in Greek local government requires the promotion of decentralization in the provision of public services to the citizens and the financing of the municipalities. The promotion of decentralization, combined with the parallel codification and recasting of local government's legal framework and the simplification of the existing processes and modes of municipal services provision, will provide municipalities with the necessary flexibility and the administrative capacity for the design and implementation of a coherent and effective urban resilience strategy (OECD, 2020; George, 2020; Holzer, 2021). A new model of municipal government performance assessment is based on the strengthening and enrichment of the existing supervision of municipal budgeting execution, with data on municipal services performance. There is need for structural reform on local government regulation and audit in Greece that will contribute to the improvement of municipalities performance through the relaunch of strategic planning and performance measurement at the core of their day-to-day management and the establishment of a new model of performance based on political and administrative accountability (George, 2020; Dooren, 2020).

The development of this new performance management model at the distinctive environment of the Greek local government and the implementation policy for the urban resilience needs to be supported by the coordination and simplification of the existing hybrid models of strategic planning and performance measurement. At the crucial level of policy

coordination, the existing multiple, overlapping, fragmented, and ineffective different levels and types of strategic planning and urban resilience strategies should be redesigned and unified at a single level of municipal government's strategic planning. It should also be included as one of its basic pillars of development and a horizontal principle of organizational design, policy areas, and the goals of urban resilience (Toshkov, 2020; Linkov eds, 2021; Ansell, 2020). At the municipal level, these reforms should be completed under the auspice and coordination of municipal operational plans, which should be unified with the municipal budget, the local different and fragment crisis management/civil protection plans, the public works program, and all the other permanent and ad-hoc categories of sectoral municipal planning, thus setting strategic planning at the core of municipal political leaderships' decision making and accountability (Ansell, 2020; Greer, 2020; Karkatsoulis, 2018; ITA, 2017; OECD, 2020). Furthermore, the effective implementation of the urban resilience strategy in municipal government requires strengthening collaborative governance models and networks at regional and local levels. Since the effectiveness of urban resilience depends on the quality of coordination, collaboration, and networking of the local stakeholders and the citizens, both the formulation and the implementation of the municipal urban resilience strategy and the overall municipal strategy should be transformed into a more participatory and interactive model of planning and policy-making (Steen, 2020; Ansell, 2020; OECD, 2020, 2021; ILCEI, 2019).

A significant reform to strengthen strategic planning and urban resilience in Greek local government will be a change at the existing municipal decision-making models and management culture (Hlepas eds, 2017; Bouckaert eds, 2017; Eurocities, 2021; EU, 2021). An evidence-based policy making reform, along with the strengthening of the evaluation and transparency in the provision of municipal services, will contribute to the replacement of the existing political, clientelist and irrational criteria of municipal decision-making through evidence-based criteria of strategic planning and the service evaluation data of the performance measurement. The exploitation of performance measurement data and results from municipalities' political leadership is a cultural reform that should be combined with the strengthening of municipal services performance assessment, the interconnection of municipal political leadership, quality decision making, management of effectiveness and public image with performance measurement results, and comparative performance of the municipality (George, 2020; Dooren, 2020; Yang, 2020). Furthermore, there is need for a new performance culture in Greek local government that links strategic planning and performance measurement results with the supervision of municipalities' performance from the central state and the public accountability and scrutiny from the citizens.

Municipalities' performance monitoring and assessing results should be regularly published and be fully accessible to the citizens. Also, transparency and accountability serve as tools for the promotion of strategic planning in municipal government (Holzer, 2020, 2021; Dooren, 2020). In order for the municipalities to deal with the challenges of urban resilience and performance management, the introduction of incentives and sanctions for strategic planning and performance measurement implementation should be supported by the upgrade and integration of existing e-government infrastructure and equipment, as well as the introduction of advanced data and analytics based decision support systems to strengthen and rationalize evidence-based municipal decision making (Ansell, 2020; Golan, 2020; Dooren, 2020; OECD, 2020, 2021). The collection and exploitation of different categories of advanced and real-time data will be the basis to strengthen the urban resilience strategy of the municipal authorities in Greece and the overall sustainable improvement of their performance. According to results, a new interactive model of evidence-based decision-making and performance assessment of municipal performance in Greece will be re-designed. It will specialise in changing local needs and threats and will strengthen the implementation of regional and municipal urban resilience plans and strategies.

No reform in local government can be successful without the participation of local government employees and the citizens, especially at the critical areas of strategic planning and urban resilience strategies and policy tools (Bouckaert eds, 2017; Ansell, 2020; Sharifi, 2020; Holzer, 2021). This engagement should be institutionally supported and become a part of the municipalities' daily management and decision making. Promoting the participation of municipal employees, citizens, and local stakeholders should be the focal point for the promotion and reform of urban resilience policy in Greece, as required in a new local governance model (Ansell, 2020; OECD, 2020; UN, 2020, 2021; Steen, 2020; Turini, 2020). A new model of participatory and evidence-based decision making in local government, existing at the opposite bank of the political clientelism and the capture of local government from specific interests, will lead to the creation of a new relationship of trust and cooperation in the provision of municipal services (Steen, 2020; Turniti, 2020; Ansell, 2020). This trust-based inter-governmental and state citizens relations will support urban resilience policies' performance and will improve the effectiveness of the municipal services and policies, thus enriching local government's role as a catalyst and pillar for the safeguarding of the national social and economic resilience and development.

Conclusion Implications and Prospects of Urban Resilience in Greek Local Government

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis was a moment of truth that revealed the structural and organizational problems and pitfalls that pre-existed in Greek municipal government. This was exacerbated by the substantial collapse of the existing municipal planning and service provision models, alongside the ineffectiveness of the emergency management policies at the national and local level. Therefore, this led to the urgency for the promotion of local government reform and the emergence of a new model of local planning (ITA, 2018; Plymakis, 2019; Hlepas, 2018, 2020). A policy reform of the existing and ineffective national model of local government is based on the strengthening of decentralization, strategic planning, and evaluation. However, the three basic conditions of municipal performance are absent from the enforced strategy to deal with the pandemic in Greece, especially at the local government level (Hlepas, 2021; OECD, 2021; EU, 2021). The Coronavirus crisis pointed to the negative impact on municipal performance arising from the lack of decentralization and fiscal decentralization, high levels of administrative overlaps, duplications in local government service provision, and the appearance of important problems and gaps in multi-level and horizontal coordination in municipal management. At the same time, the pandemic has demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the existing model of municipal strategic planning in providing services to the citizens in times of emergency. In other crucial areas of public policy and public administration resilience such as public health, local development, market regulation, provision of financial subsidies to local enterprises, and social benefits for the protection of vulnerable citizens, the absence of strategic planning competencies further blocked and limited the national initiatives for COVID-19 negative consequences and limitation. Strategic planning ineffectiveness was due to lack of coordination and policy focus institutionalization of additional bureaucratic levels of sectoral planning. This created strategy complexity, uncertainty, and administrative silos within the municipalities. However, the problems of non-compliance and false compliance of the agencies with their various overlapping levels of strategy and goals for achievement were put in check (ITA, 2018; Plymakis, 2019; Hlepas, 2020, 2021; OECD, 2021). Furthermore, the limited incorporation and actual failure of performance measurement and impact assessment on municipal planning, the lack of data on citizens' needs and use of municipal services and infrastructures, as well as quality of life and daily routine at municipal level, negatively affected the quality and effectiveness of COVID-19 effects and the support of the administrative, social, and economic resilience at the local level. Strategy coordination, enforcement pitfalls, and the limited use of data on

strategy design and implementation also undermined the enforcement and the effectiveness of the crisis and emergency management plans at local government level in crucial policy areas such as public health, social policy, public transportation, and social policy. This creates an environment of mistrust and controversy regarding the role and the added value of local government in managing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Problems and pitfalls in local government performance and emergency management present the necessity for the emergence of a new model of strategic planning, which are resilient and effective in the different policy serving local government areas and the various threats and crisis that require response. There is a new resilient model of local government organization and planning, co-formed from the solution of the existing important regulatory and management pitfalls and problems, which affects the efficiency and the effectiveness of the municipal performance. However, performance problems come from the incompleteness of the decentralization, the existence of increased levels of centralization and administrative overlaps in municipal government competencies, the ineffectiveness of multi-level coordination, and the limited adoption of strategic planning and performance measurement in municipal services design and provision. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a new strategy for the promotion of strategic planning and urban resilience in local government, which should be based on the simplification and consolidation of the existing levels of strategic planning, the promotion of public consultation and local government's staff participation in the planning processes, the fixing of the existing performance measurement gap in municipal services provision, and the introduction of a new model of local government performance benchmarking from the central state (ICLEI, 2021; Hart, 2021; UN, 2020, 2021; EU, 2021).

The crisis of strategic planning in light of COVID-19 can be the springboard for the re-interpretation and introduction of the concept and the role of strategy in the Greek local government. A new model of strategy, based on integrated and participatory strategic planning, and the provision of high quality and accessible services to the citizens, through innovative and collaborative models of provision and the adoption of new evidence-based model of management, should focus on achieving socially acceptable and mutually beneficial goals. This will promote local sustainable economic development, protect the environment, improve the quality of citizens' life, and strengthen the social role of the local state, which are the basic pillars of the new policy for urban resilience. Also, a new model of local government management based on participation, collaboration, and the evaluation of enforced policies and provided services significantly impacts urban resilience goals (ICLEI, 2021; OECD, 2021; EU, 2021). Enhancing the urban resilience of the Greek local government against the increasingly frequent, larger, and

often unpredictable threats and disasters requires the dedication and focus of the municipal management and strategic planning to urban resilience policy areas and goals. This should be the main level of planning at municipal level and in multi-level coordination with the regional and national policies for resilience in public administration, the economy, and the society. The effectiveness and resilience of a new model of strategic planning of local government in Greece is directly interdependent with the quality and the representativeness of its design, as well as the development of mutual trust and cooperation among the stakeholders for the participatory implementation of its actions. In addition, the emergence of a new model of sustainable and inclusive local governance is based on transparency, trust, and the cooperation of the local government, the society and the economy, which would foster the achievement of interconnected goals of local resilience.

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Appendix I. Factors Affecting Municipal Resilience in Greece (Empirical Survey Results Analysis)

| Urban Resilience Variables | Impact Analysis |
|--|------------------------|
| Trust in government | 0.53 |
| Trust in municipal government | 0.64 |
| Municipal governance performance | 0.46 |
| Municipal Institutional capacity | 0.42 |
| Municipal Preparation and response | 0.37 |
| Communication with the citizens | 0.78 |
| Strategic planning and performance measurement capacity | 0.32 |
| Regional/local stakeholders' coordination and collaboration | 0.54 |
| Evidence-based municipal policymaking | 0.22 |
| Municipal digital readiness and transformation | 0.64 |
| Risk identification | 0.31 |
| Risk identification and response strategy | 0.24 |
| Municipal Financial capacity | 0.51 |
| Government financing to municipal government | 0.59 |
| Municipal access to markets | 0.19 |
| Urban development and urban planning | 0.32 |
| Urban infrastructure and critical facilities robustness | 0.72 |
| Urban mobility | 0.41 |
| Water and energy supply | 0.89 |
| Natural ecosystem protection | 0.69 |
| Societal capacity and social protection and support | 0.82 |
| Civil society activation and support | 0.23 |
| Local/regional Business environment resilience | 0.39 |
| Supply chain mechanism | 0.58 |
| Local/regional enterprise's digital preparedness and performance | 0.33 |
| Complementary financing mechanisms – central government | 0.73 |
| Complementary financing mechanisms – municipal government | 0.49 |
| Urban resilience in development planning | 0.42 |
| Labor market flexibility and work | 0.32 |
| Labor market digital preparedness and digital skills | 0.39 |
| Labor market support and social security mechanisms | 0.77 |
| Access to public health | 0.62 |
| Public health system performance | 0.80 |