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'Social Need' or 'Choice'? Greek Civil Society during the Economic Crisis

Abstract: The paper analyses the impact of the economic crisis on Greek civil society. It explores currents trends in the non-profit sector as well as the proliferation of new alternative networks. Academic research has documented that civil society's density has increased and its autonomy vis-à-vis the state has strengthened. These trends have led to an emerging academic consensus on the revitalisation of Greek civil society following the onset of the crisis. However, this revitalisation has taken place during a period of severe economic crisis with devastating social effects. The paper argues that the density of civil society may be a misleading indicator of its strength if abstracted from the broader political and economic context. Thus the rapid deterioration of the quality of citizenship during the crisis has seriously undermined the strength of civil society, despite the significant rise in associationism.

1. Introduction

This paper analyses the impact of the economic crisis on Greek civil society and links the findings to the broader academic debate on civil society. First the paper explores currents trends in the Greek non-profit sector. Next, it analyses the proliferation of new informal networks that link grassroots social welfare projects to

political activism. The paper then proceeds to a critical evaluation of the emerging academic consensus on the revitalisation of Greek civil society following the onset of the crisis. Research has indeed shown that the density of civil society has increased and its autonomy vis-à-vis the state has strengthened. This revitalisation, however, has taken place during a period of severe economic crisis with devastating social effects. Thus resurgent associational life has been coupled with a significant rise in the levels of poverty and social marginalisation. On the basis of the Greek case, the paper argues that the density of civil society may be a misleading indicator of its strength if abstracted from the broader political and economic context. Thus the rapid deterioration of the quality of citizenship during the crisis has seriously undermined the strength of civil society, despite the significant rise in associationism.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First the literature on civil society is briefly summarised and varying interpretations of civil society's strength are outlined. Then the impact of the economic crisis on European civil societies is presented. A brief account of the social consequences of the economic crisis in Greek society follows. Next, current trends in the NGO community as well as the rise of new informal solidarity networks are analysed. Finally, the challenges that the Greek case poses to current interpretations of civil society's strength are summarised.

The following analysis is based mainly on secondary sources and also on original data derived from six semi-structured interviews (with general managers and executive staff of NGOs), a member of Free Social Center Votanikos Kipos and a research associate of the Labour Institute of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (INE/GSEE-ADEDY), attendance at two workshops organised by solidarity networks and two festivals organised by collectivities engaged in diverse economies

and prefigurative activism.[1] Supplementary data has been provided by Internet resources (individual NGOs' sites and the online platforms: Enallaktikos.gr (http://www.enallaktikos.gr/), Iliosporoi (www.iliosporoi.net), Solidarity for all (http://www.solidarity4all.gr/), Omikron Project (www.omikronproject.gr) and Hackademy (http://english.hackademy.gr/)), as well as press monitoring during the period of 2013-2015.

2. Perspectives on Civil Society

Numerous definitions of civil society provide divergent interpretations of its actual scope, nature and norms. As J. Hofmann summarises civil society is defined simultaneously as a specific sphere, a mode of action, an observable reality, a regulative idea or an utopian concept (Hofmann, 2006). H. Anheier, L. Carlson, V. Heinrich and K. Naidoo suggest the following operational definition in order to enable empirical and cross-national analysis: "Civil society is the sphere of institutions, organisations and individuals located between the family, the state and

[1] Interviews: Papageorgiou, L. (President of the Pan-Hellenic Philanthropic Association *BREAD & ACTION*). Personal Interview, 20 February 2014, Athens. Thanou E. (former General Director at *Doctors of the World (Médecins du Monde)-Greece*). Personal Interview, 17 February 2014, Athens. Tzanetos, A. (Chairman of the non-profit organisation *Praksis*). Personal interview, 10 February 2014, Athens. Pantazidou M. (Lead Adviser Organisational Learning and Accountability, *International Amnesty*). Personal Interview, 19 December 2013, London. K.K., (member of free social center *Botanical Garden).* Personal Interview. 10 October 2015, Athens. Syriopoulos P. (Research Associate of *INE – GSEE*). Personal Interview, 12 February 2014, Athens. Workshops: "Institutions of solidarity: How are we going to stop society's impoverishment during the crisis?", 03 August 2013, *20th Camping Anti-Nazi zone – Youth against Racism in Europe (YRE),* Thasos (26 July - 4 August 2013). "Institutions and networks of applied social solidarity", 30 June 2013, 17th *Anti-racist Festival of Social Solidarity,* Athens (28-30 June 2013). Festivals: 'Common Fest 2015 – Φεστιβάλ για τα Κοινά' (15-17 May 2015), Athens. Degrowth Forum "Prosperity without growth", organised by *Research & Degrowth Greece* and *Iliosporoi*, 20-22 February 2015, Athens.

the market, in which people voluntarily associate to advance common interests" (Anheier, Carlson, Heinrich, Naidoo, 2001, p. 3).[2] Civil society, though, is not merely a bounded space between the state, the market and citizens. As N. Chandhoke argues, civil society may become "the staging ground for mounting a challenge to state-given notions of what is politically permissible" (Chandhoke, 2003, p. 38). M. Kohn adds that civil society is the "terrain where citizens can organize to contest", but also "defend the existing distribution of power" (Kohn, 2002, p. 297). Civil society represents, therefore, "a force through which citizens act" (Fowler, 2002, p. 6). This force may take diverse forms, such as professional associations, labour unions, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), informal voluntary networks and broader political movements. Civil society, therefore, "embraces a diversity of …actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power".[3]

Despite the different interpretations of civil society there is a broad academic consensus on the voluntary nature of associations in civil society (Edwards (2004); Walzer (2003); Keane (1988); Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995); Mouzelis (1995); Cohen, Arato (1992)). For instance, M. Walzer argues that "the words civil society name the space of uncoerced human association" (Walzer, 2003, p. 64). According to L. Diamond, J. Linz and S. Lipset, organised social life in the realm of civil society is voluntary and self-generating (Diamond, Linz, Lipset, 1995).

Following the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe the concept of civil society became increasingly prominent in academic debates. During the 1990s "[e]veryone, it seemed, saw a "strong civil society" as one of the

[2] For Charles Taylor civil society "is not so much a sphere outside political power; rather it penetrates deeply into this power, fragments and decentralises it" (Taylor, 2003, pp. 61-62).
[3] Definition of the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics. (Glasius, 2012, p. 305).

cornerstones of democracy… Civil society became…the magic ingredient that might correct generations of state and market 'failure' and resolve the tensions between social cohesion and capitalism" (Edwards, 2011, pp. 4-5). Within this context, civil society gradually became uncoupled from state institutions (Kumar, 1993). As a consequence, a zero-sum understanding of power distribution between civil society and the state prevailed. N. Uphoff and A Krishna question this understanding and argue that "[d]epending on the aims and performance of state institutions, their strength can contribute to what is thought of as civil society" (Uphoff, Krishna, 2004, 358). Similarly, J. Keane emphasises that the "power of civil society and the capacity of state institutions can increase together, in a positive-sum interaction, or they may also decline together, in a negative-sum way" (Keane, 1988, p. 61). G. Ekiert and J. Kubik conclude in their analysis that "the health, composition, and capacity of civil society" is based on the actions and inaction of states (Ekiert, Kubik, 2014, p. 50). The "state and its agencies define the public space by making laws, by building … institutions, by protecting … rights and liberties, and by implementing policies that either empower or constrain civil society organisations" (*ibid.*). According to M. Walzer civil society cannot dispense with the state for the additional reason that only the state redresses radical inequalities that civil society alone cannot challenge (Walzer, 2003). Since the state conditions associational life in civil society, a radical shift in the institutional capacity of the state during a period of severe economic crisis has an impact on the strength of civil society.

The academic literature usually assesses the strength of civil society on the basis of its size, resources and density, the civil society-state dynamic, the level of social capital, the presence of democratic political values and structures as well as the actual functions of civil society organizations (Salamon, Anheier (1998); Anheier,

Carlson, Finn, Naidoo (2001); Howard (2003); Uphoff, Krishna, (2004)). While scholars have extensively explored the political and cultural preconditions of a strong civil society, they have usually overlooked the impact of economic change on associational life in civil society. However, during severe economic crises, rising levels of social inequality and exclusion undermine citizens' "inclusion into systems of social recognition and formal or informal membership in the fields of civil society" (Heitzmann, Hofbauer, Mackerle-Bixa, Strunk, 2009, p. 284). Thus "inequality and social exclusion are obstacles to the development of civil society" *(ibid)*. While civil society's strength may decrease during an economic crisis, its density may actually increase. F. Moulaert and O. Ailenei argue that "when the economic growth engine starts to stutter, formal distribution mechanisms begin to fail…new social forces develop and give rise to alternative institutions and mechanisms of solidarity and redistribution as a means of addressing" the failures of official institutions (Moulaert, Ailenei, 2005, p. 2038). E. Obadare illustrates this point by analysing how the deterioration of economic and political conditions in Nigeria led to the proliferation of self-help groups as well as the radicalisation of civil associations (E. Obadare, 2005, p. 268). Similarly L. Bosi and L. Zamponi link the current proliferation of direct social action in Italian civil society to the economic crisis. Moreover, they claim that direct social action also proliferated during the political and economic crisis of the 70s. Hence increased mobilisation in civil society may signify an emergency response to an unprecedented rise in social needs. Moreover, a dense and vibrant civil society in the context of general economic security is of a different nature than a dense and vibrant civil society responding to urgent social needs. In the first case, civil society initiatives reflect the free choice of citizens to engage actively in associational life, while in the second 'necessity' may be the driving force of numerous new schemes.

Finally, the increased density of civil society during an economic crisis may be an ephemeral phenomenon, since emergency voluntary schemes may subside when economic security returns to a given society.

Academic scholars have recently shifted their attention to a more holistic understanding of civil society's external environment, including economic conditions. For instance L. Fioramonti and O. Kononykhina analyse the governance, socio-cultural and socio-economic environment that enables sustained and voluntary civic participation. (Fioramonti, Kononykhina, 2015). Their analysis makes a clear distinction between civic participation as an act of 'last resort' and regular, sustained participation. A strong civil society, they argue, presupposes the freedom or opportunity to attain specific objectives. By contrast, in cases of acts of 'last resort', structural conditions or external pressure impair citizens' capabilities of pursuing the most preferred course of action. Similarly, C. Malena and V. Heinrich acknowledge in their analysis that associational life in civil society is bound by existing socioeconomic conditions. They underline that "although not part of civil society itself, the environment for action by civil society is nonetheless crucial when assessing its status" (Malena, Heinrich, 2007, p. 342). They propose, therefore, a broad set of indicators for comparing the relative strength of civil society over space and time, which includes the socio-economic context in which a given civil society exists and functions (for instance the presence/absence of a severe economic, social crisis).

To summarise, even though "the quality and solidity of civil society depend on the amount of civic engagement" (Heitzmann, Hofbauer, Mackerle-Bixa, Strunk, 2009, p. 283), in order to understand whether a change in the density of civil society signifies a simultaneous increase in its strength, one must take into account not only

the enduring features of civil society, but also the radical disjunctions in the broader institutional and economic environment.

The following section explores the impact of the economic crisis on European civil societies, then evaluates current trends in Greek civil society

3. European civil societies and the economic crisis

The economic crisis and the austerity policies that were implemented triggered the mobilisation of civil society actors. Massive anti-austerity protests were coupled with new forms of political participation, such as occupations and neighbourhood assemblies. Collective mobilisations in 2011 and 2012 as well as the proliferation of political repertoires were not merely a response to the economic crisis. In a collaborative research project Mary Kaldor and S. Selchow record that political actors shared both opposition to austerity policies and extensive frustration with representative democracy as a practical political project (Kaldor, Selchow, 2013). Political actors engaged, therefore, in repertoires of direct action and alternative practices of 'prefigurative politics'.[4] Since 2011, as Ramón Feenstra notes, "political experimentation has become a common trend for civil society" (Feenstra, 2015, p. 243).

In regard to civil society's formal organisations,[5] an early global study by Eva-Maria Hanfstaengl documented the overall financial decline of civil society organisations (CSOs) during the period of 2008-2010 (Hanfstaengl, 2010). CSOs

[4] 'Prefigurative politics' refers to "a political action, practice, movement, moment or development in which certain political ideals are experimentally actualised in the 'here and now', rather than hoped to be realised in a distant future" (van de Sande, 2013, p. 230).

[5] Throughout this article, the terms 'civil society organisations', 'non-profit organisations', 'voluntary organisations' and 'nongovernmental organisations' are used interchangeably.

faced reductions in contributions by individual donors, private foundations, international institutions and governments. Many CSOs were forced to narrow the scope of their activities, reduce their staff or cut salaries. The negative impact of the economic crisis on CSOs has not been spread evenly across regions or clusters of organisations. For instance, the study records that CSOs in Eastern Europe have been hit harder by the crisis than those in Western Europe. Bigger CSOs were also less affected than smaller, local organisations. Finally, the study reported an increase in qualified volunteer staff in Western Europe.[6] Commenting on the voluntary sector financial crisis in Britain, P. Butler underlines that the impact of the crisis is more severe for local voluntary groups at the grassroots level (such as youth clubs, advice centers, refugee forums, church community projects) than for 'mega charities' delivering public services.[7] Similar findings have been recorded in a study by J. Shahin, A. Woodward, G. Terzis concerning the impact of the crisis on CSOs in the European Union (Shahin, Woodward, Terzis, 2013). The study verifies that the economic crisis has deepened the existing divide between large and small/locally-based organisations in the non-profit sector. The crisis has also reinforced the north/south divide in the non-profit sector. In Southern Europe CSOs face significant financial constraints, since they were traditionally dependent on government funds.

[6] Robert Rosenthal, director of communications at Volunteer Match in San Francisco, attributes increased volunteering during economic crises to greater social awareness on community problems, the networking opportunities that volunteering provides for the unemployed and finally the replacement of donations with volunteering by people who can no longer afford to donate money. Khan, H. (2008), *Nonprofits Challenged by Financial Crisis: A Decline in Donations and Investments Leads More Nonprofits to Rethink Strategies* (available at http://abcnews.go.com/Business/Economy/story?id=6123902&page=1-accessed on 17/09/2015).

[7] Butler, P. (2011), *Cuts: what does a voluntary sector financial crisis look like?* (available at http://www.theguardian.com/society/patrick-butler-cuts-blog/2011/mar/07/what-does-a-charity-financial-crisis-look-like -accessed on 17/09/2015).

Hence the severe cuts in government spending have affected them directly. Southern European CSOs have reacted to reduced public funding by expanding their collaborative networks (especially in the realm of social services) or turning to EU funds (by participating in projects) as a means to secure regular funding.

CSOs' policy input has also been affected by the crisis. Despite pressing social problems, the public policy focus on economic efficiency and budgetary cuts has marginalised CSOs' actual policy input. Public deliberation has diminished, since public institutions are primarily interested in engaging CSOs in service provision and delivery. In Southern Europe, where policy-makers' decision-making capacity has been severely reduced due to the austerity programmes now in force, CSOs influence on policy has decreased even further. Many southern European organisations argue, therefore, that they are listened to more on the European than on the national level.

During the crisis, pressure by governments and donors on CSOs to improve their economic efficiency and financial accountability has increased. The focus of donors on 'value for money' and measurable outcomes has affected the ability of CSOs to give effective voice and social support to the people most affected by the crisis.[8] In relation to citizens' engagement, the study recorded that even though most organisations have not experienced an increase in members, they have seen an increase in young, qualified volunteers. The study emphasises, however, that those who are hardest hit by the crisis do not actually engage in associational life. According to a member of the European Network against Racism (ENAR): "The

[8] According to Rebecca Rumbul, who studied distribution of European Social Funds (ESFs) to civil society organisations in Wales, there is some indication "that organisations dealing with beneficiaries that had higher than usual support needs were more likely to be excluded from the programmes due to their higher unit costs, their lack of structural embeddedness and their inability to guarantee a certain volume of outcomes" (Rumbul, 2013, p. 358).

same persons keep being active, but the extremely fragile ones, they just stay trying to survive…may be some people get activated but if you look at real minority people who feel they are targets, it does not transform into getting active on these issues." (Shahin, Woodward, Terzis, 2013, p. 30).

A short overview of the impact of the economic crisis on living conditions in Greek society follows in order to assess the reaction of civil society actors to the new socioeconomic conditions.

4. Social Impact of the Economic Crisis in Greece

The economic crisis precipitated a drastic change in the stratification of Greek society, intensifying social inequality, exacerbating the threat of poverty and creating a new class of outcasts in large urban centres. The cumulative shrinkage of GDP by 25% from 2008 to the end of 2013 led to a dramatic spike in unemployment (Bourikos, Sotiropoulos, 2014). "From 2009 to the second quarter of 2014… about 30 per cent of the working population (that is, 1 million people) lost their jobs" (Petmesidou, Guillén, 2015, p. 20). In July 2015, unemployment reached 25.0%, according to monthly figures released by the Workforce Survey of the Greek Statistical Authority.[9] During the crisis the highest rate of unemployment has been recorded among people aged 15-24. Youth unemployment rate reached an all time high of 60.5 percent in February of 2013.[10] The dearth of social assistance for the unemployed is reflected in the small percentage of the jobless who receive regular unemployment benefits. In 2013 that figure was 11.7% (Matsaganis, 2013).

[9] To Vima (2015) *ELSTAT documents a 25% rate of unemployment for July* (available athttp://www.tovima.gr/en/article/?aid=744255 – accessed on 09/11/2015).
[10] Trading Economics (2015) *Greece Youth Unemployment Rate 1998-2015* (available at http://www.tradingeconomics.com/greece/youth-unemployment-rate -accessed on 15/10/2015).

Economic crisis and fiscal austerity measures led to a dramatic deterioration in the living conditions of Greek households. Income data for 2013 released by the Greek Statistical Authority from the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) show that 22.1% of the total population fell below the poverty line.[11] An even higher percentage of the population (36.0%) was at risk of poverty and social exclusion, i.e. experiencing material deprivation or living in employment-deprived households. As for changes in the risk of poverty over time in absolute, rather than relative terms, the proportion of the population whose income in 2013 fell below the 2009 poverty line was over 45 per cent (Petmesidou, Guillén, 2015). The economic crisis also brought about changes in the composition of poverty in the population.[12] In 2011 the groups at the highest risk of poverty were single-parent households with at least one dependent child, the unemployed, households with two adults and three or more dependent children, economically inactive persons excluding pensioners (housewives, etc.), households living in rented accommodation and children of 0-17 years of age.[13] Thus during the crisis poverty shifted from the elderly towards younger couples with children and the unemployed. Similar trends can be traced in income data for 2013. The at-risk-of poverty rate for households residing in owned dwellings was 20.5%, while for households in rented dwellings it amounted to 28.5%. For employed persons the rate stood at 13.4%, while for the unemployed it

[11] Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) (2015(a)) *Risk of Poverty: 2014 Survey on Income and Living Conditions*, Press Release (available at http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/A0802/PressReleases/A0802_SFA10_DT_AN_00_2014_01_F_EN.pdf - accessed on 23/10/2015).

[12] See Bank of Greece (2014), *Έκθεση του Διοικητή για το έτος 2013*, Athens (available at http://www.bankofgreece.gr/BogEkdoseis/ekthdkth2013.pdf. - accessed on 09/11/2015).

[13] See Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) (2015(b)), *Material Deprivation & Living Conditions: 2014 Survey on Income and Living Conditions*, Press Release (available at http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/A0802/PressReleases/A0802_SFA10_DT_AN_00_2014_14_F_EN.pdf - accessed on 20/10/2015).

climbed to 45.9%. Finally, the rate was lower for persons aged 75 years and over than for persons aged less than 75 years old (16.1% and 22.7%. respectively).[14] However, since these poverty estimates are based on indicators of monetary income, they do not incorporate variables that are crucial to the living standards of the elderly, such as the quality of health care and expenditure on medicines (Matsaganis, Leventi, 2013). For instance, NGOs identify "retired persons with small pensions and healthcare problems" as one of the most vulnerable groups concerning access to healthcare services (Zafiropoulou, 2014, p. 32).[15]

The rise in low-paid jobs and flexible forms of work also increased the percentage of the working poor who cannot secure an income above the poverty line. (Balourdos, 2011). In 2013 the at risk-of-poverty rate for persons working full-time was 11.9%, while for part-time employed persons it rose to 27.9%.[16] The living standards of wage-earners have been further eroded by the informal practice of many businesses during the economic crisis of not paying earned wages on time (e.g. workers remain unpaid for months).

In Greece the immediate and extended family traditionally filled any gaps in social welfare provided by the state. During the economic crisis, however, there has been a significant shift of responsibility for social welfare away from the state and toward the institution of the family and private initiative. This shift leads to a greater lack of social welfare, as many families experience poverty and social exclusion, being unable to meet the needs of family members, while action taken in the realm of civil society inevitably takes the form of targeted assistance to the most vulnerable social groups.

[14] Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) (2015(a)), *op. cit*.
[15] The other groups are: "disabled persons…persons with chronic health conditions" and "cancer patients." (Zafiropoulou, 2014, p. 32)
[16] Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) (2015(a)), *op. cit*.

5. Greek Civil Society during the economic crisis

Greek civil society in the post-dictatorial period has traditionally been defined as a weak civil society due to a domineering state, the control of political parties over the associational sphere and the presence of powerful clientelist networks (Mouzelis (1995); Mouzelis, Pagoulatos (2002); Sotiropoulos (2014); Huliaras (2015)). Moreover, public surveys have persistently recorded the low level of formal volunteering and social trust in Greek society (Clarke (2015); Fragonikolopoulos, (2014)). Nevertheless, academic research has documented the broad scope of informal volunteering as well as the gradual disentanglement of civil society from state institutions and political parties (Sotiropoulos (2004); Sotiropoulos (2014)). Those two elements have become even stronger since the onset of the economic crisis. Thus a common proposition among researchers studying formal and informal schemes in Greek civil society is that a revitalisation of civil society has taken place following the onset of the crisis (Bourikos, Sotiropoulos (2014); Huliaras (2015); Boucas (2014); Loukidou (2014); Zambeta, Kolofousi (2014)).

Since the crisis began, a broad spectrum of state and non-state actors have mobilised to provide social support to the victims of the economic crisis. National and local government – in cooperation with civil society actors and private donors, left-wing political parties, professional organisations and unions (e.g. of teachers, doctors and pharmacists), NGOs, the Church of Greece, the Catholic Church, companies and business corporations, mass media companies, foreign embassies, local groups, cooperatives and alternative collectivities - have all engaged in providing services and creating new structures to tackle poverty (Kantzara, 2014(a)). Thus municipalities co-operated with non-profit organisations in setting up new social welfare structures (e.g.

social pharmacies, social grocery shops, social tuition centres, municipal vegetable gardens), while foundations launched funding of social welfare NGOs, the church expanded its welfare structures and a new generation of solidarity networks surfaced. Meanwhile, "there is an emerging trend towards *increased public participation in informal volunteerism at neighbourhood level and in the wider local community*" (Bourikos, 2013, p. 13). Accordingly, during the crisis, multiple actors with distinct, often conflicting identities and strategies have mobilised in Greek civil society to cover rising social needs.

A study conducted by K. Loukidou on 32 civil society associations (18 organisations with legal status and 14 informal-unofficial citizens' groups) in Thessaloniki (the second biggest city in Greece) during the period 2009-2013 records that 62.5% of the associations in the sample stated that they had been affected by the economic crisis. Specifically, 16 of them either expanded or redirected their field of action towards providing social services or goods, or creating solidarity economy structures, while four of them were set up in response to the economic crisis (Loukidou, 2013). In regard to formal CSOs, K. Loukidou documents a sudden decrease in the annual number of new CSOs in Thessaloniki during the period of 2010-2012 (Loukidou, 2014). Since that decrease took place in the context of a proliferation of informal solidarity networks, a shift from formal to informal associational repertoires in civil society can be assumed.

The following section explores current trends in the Greek NGO sector then presents the significant rise of informal social networks in civil society.

5.1.The Greek NGO sector

The presence of NGOs in Greek society expanded since the 1980s (Fragonikolopoulos, 2014). Estimates of their actual number vary significantly due to the lack of an official registry.[17] The Greek NGO sector is highly fragmented as organisations compete with each other for limited funds. Moreover, NGOs have had traditionally close relations with the state and political parties so as to secure funds (Afouxenidis, 2006). The effects of the economic crisis on the NGO community match the international trends that have been recorded in the academic literature. Research conducted by B. Pekka-Ekonomou, C. Bibitsos, N. Mylonas and E. Petridou on environmental NGOs documents the following effects: "Fewer memberships, suspension of public grants, decrease in private sponsorships, increase in requests for assistance with/participation in social solidarity action, growing distrust in the broader social action environment, inability to meet operational expenses, expressions of 'dissatisfaction' by some members." (Pekka-Ekonomou, Bibitsos, Mylonas, Petridou, 2013, p. 141). The strategies that the organisations adopted in order to address the new unfavourable circumstances were: "cutting back on operational costs, salaries, reducing costly public relations activities (emphasis on digital PR), putting emphasis on boosting volunteerism, building management capacity in order to participate in European programmes, adapting action to new social needs …" (*ibid*). Employment insecurity of permanent staff, wage cuts and organisations' emphasis on volunteering has also been reported in V. Arapoglou and K. Gounis' research of NGOs that provide social support to persons experiencing acute forms of poverty and homelessness (Arapoglou, Gounis, 2015). The magnitude of the financial difficulties confronting Greek NGOs is directly linked to the domain of each organisation. The crisis has

[17] According to D. Sotiropoulos, "the Greek Centre for the Promotion of Voluntarism claims to have counted 1,800 active NGOs in 25 different sectors" (Sotiropoulos, 2014, p. 12). A. Afouxenidis in his research records 201 active NGOs (Afouxenidis, 2015).

shifted the attention of the public and donors towards organisations that are active in the field of social welfare in Greece, while support has diminished for organisations that deal with different issues. The rise in racism during the financial crisis has also had a negative effect on organisations dealing with the rights and social needs of migrants and asylum seekers.[18] For instance, NGOs whose actions focus on or include the immigrant population have greater difficulty in securing private sponsorships and donations.[19]

Public funding cutbacks have boosted the role of foundations and of companies and business corporations in providing financial resources to the NGO community. Following the onset of the crisis "a reversal of the percentage of participation by the public and private sectors in funding organisations (in favour of the private sector)" has been recorded (Bourikos, Sotiropoulos, 2014, p. 84). Some NGOs argue that this shift has increased financial insecurity in the NGO sector due to the volatile preferences of donors and sponsors. Moreover, they claim that donors' preference for 'short-term' and 'in kind' forms of assistance does not correspond to the actual social needs of beneficiaries. Finally, small NGOs state that donors prefer large NGOs, with high public visibility (Arapoglou, Gounis, 2015).

The crisis has changed the nature of social needs, directly affecting the range and scope of Greek NGOs' activities. Thus during the crisis NGOs have steadily enlarged the scope of their activities beyond their traditional domain (e.g. school meals, health certificates for children, gynaecological check-ups, vaccinations) and have created mobile units to provide services nationwide. Most NGO action concerns

[18] The neo-Nazi party 'Golden Dawn' has tried to increase its political appeal by taking advantage of social needs during the economic crisis. It has undertaken free distribution of food to Greek citizens only. Beneficiaries had to show their identity card in order to receive the free food. See Kantzara (2014(a)); Rakopoulos (2014).
[19] *Interview* with E. Thanou, *op.cit.*

the provision of services or goods to individuals who are already living in a state of poverty or social exclusion. Hence preventive action is the exception.[20] Besides providing social goods and services, NGOs also act as hubs in collecting and distributing goods to bodies that provide social welfare. The role of mediator permits organisations that do not possess significant financial resources to be active in the field of social welfare.[21]

NGOs adopt different strategies for reintegrating individuals who have experienced economic and social exclusion. The larger NGOs emphasise the creation of parallel professional structures (such as polyclinics, youth support centres, guest houses, homeless day centres and food and goods banks). These structures are also vital tools for mapping ever-changing social needs. Other organisations focus on the development of a collective identity or on regular personal contact with aid recipients. A typical example is that of the NGO Artos-Drasi, which aims at aid recipients eventually becoming agents of social solidarity through regular contact with the organisation's actions. This shift, members of the organisation underline, is neither automatic nor inevitable. Similarly, the NGO Diogenes, which assists homeless and socially excluded persons to reintegrate into society, focuses on transforming subjective experiences of exclusion and isolation into feelings of belonging to a broader community.[22] However, few NGOs promote the formation of solidarity networks among beneficiaries. In their research on homelessness in Spain, A. Mario and J. Sanchez note that beneficiaries' modes and degrees of participation influence the quality of the services provided and most importantly the success of their

[20] An example of preventive action is the support services that the NGO Praksis provides to families at risk of becoming homeless (subsidies for rent, electricity and water bills, etc.). *Interview with* A. Tzanetos, *op.cit.*
[21] *Interview* with L. Papageorgiou, *op.cit.*
[22] **See *Σχεδία* (available at** http://www.shedia.gr/about-us/ **- accessed on 21/09/2015).**

reintegration (Mario, Sanchez, 2011). Likewise, G. Markus, in his analysis of the activities of Detroit Action Commonwealth (United States), a non-profit organisation with mostly low-income, indigent or homeless members, emphasises the significance of integrating beneficiaries into the decision-making process of the organisation (Markus, forthcoming). As A. Fowler emphasises "empowerment … is about facilitating the ability of individuals (and groups) to make their own decisions" (Fowler, 2002, p. 120). For P. Oxhorn "shared identities" and "the ability for self-organisation…are sources of power which can enable disadvantaged groups" to challenge social inequalities (Oxhorn, 1998, p. 7). The question of the effective self-organisation of the poor has been vigorously debated in the academic literature, since the conditions constituting poverty "are deprivations of the very requirements of successful organisation and of long-term thinking" (Allen, 2009, p. 289). In the Greek context, the massive and unforeseen upsurge in social needs impedes long term planning by NGOs while diminishing their capacity to offer adequate and effective social support. Thus emergency actions usually prevail.

During the crisis, co-operation among NGOs has been strengthened in order to deal more effectively with revenue constraints and the rising social needs. There is no record, however, of organisations consolidating effective long-term alliances that would lessen the fragmentation and asymmetries of the Greek NGO sector.[23] Furthermore, fragmentation and competition in the Greek NGO sector has been reinforced during the crisis by ad-hoc project-based provision of social services and competition for similar projects (Arapoglou, Gounis, 2015). According to Arapoglou and Gounis social services and support provided mainly takes the form "of very short-term provisions in kind to meet basic needs…of the poor… Project-led solutions

[23] For weak co-operation between Greek Food NGOs during the crisis see (Vathis, Huliaras, 2013).

increase uncertainty and fragmentation, contributing to the recycling of…. people without entitlements…who navigate the city neighbourhoods for food, shelter, clothing and medication" (Arapoglou, Gounis, 2015, p. 34). Within this context, some NGOs express concerns about the social and political impact of their actions. Apostolos Veizis, director of medical-operational support for Médecins Sans Frontières in Greece, "admits that he is uncomfortable about what the correct response should be, whether aid groups should even be providing such services if they let the government off the hook".[24] Some NGOs respond to this impasse by engaging in political advocacy (e.g**.** mobilising for a guaranteed minimum income or healthcare as a basic human right)**.**[25]

Since the onset of the crisis, close co-operation among NGOs and local authorities has been recorded**.**[26] On the other hand contacts between NGOs and the church, trade unions and social solidarity networks remain sketchy**.** NGOs are wary of some church activities, which they believe do not respect the dignity of the recipients.[27] The trade unions aim mainly to develop their own social support networks. They occasionally collect food, clothing or money, which they hand on to unions, NGOs and solidarity networks.[28] Relations between NGOs and social solidarity networks range from co-operation to mutual suspicion**.**[29] While the social solidarity networks point out the NGOs' lack of assertive action, the NGOs point out the networks' lack of expertise and experience.

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[24] Phillips, L. (2011), *Ordinary Greeks turning to NGOs as health system hit by austerity* (available at http://euobserver.com/social/113841-accessed on 20/09/2015).
[25] *Interview* with E. Thanou, *op.cit*.
[26] According to V. Kantzara "local government…has played a significant role in organising network 'structures'…and bringing together varied groups, such as church with medical doctors, or NGO's and local citizens' committees" (Kantzara, 2014(b), p. 82).
[27] *Interview* with E. Thanou, *op.cit; Interview* with A. Tzanetos, *op.cit.*
[28] *Interview* with P. Syriopoulos, *op.cit.*
[29] *Interview* with M. Pantazidou, *op.cit*; CONCORD, *op. cit*.

The NGO community encompasses organisations with diverse identities and priorities. Some NGOs are hybrid voluntary organisations combining the provision of social services with active participation in collective mobilisations.[30] For instance, in the study by K. Loukidou of formal civil society organisations in Thessaloniki, 25% of the NGOs she interviewed participated in the Greek Indignant Movement (Loukidou, 2014). Although numerous NGOs engage in political advocacy, there are generally differences between NGOs and solidarity networks. Decision-making in NGOs is mostly based on vertical organisational structures. Solidarity networks, on the other hand, tend to operate along the lines of direct democracy and horizontality. Collaborative frames usually prevail in the NGO community, while in alternative networks the overall frame of participation tends to be conflictual.[31] Finally, most large, professional NGOs act as outsiders of local communities, providing social support to the most vulnerable social groups, while alternative networks usually function as insiders of a larger community of political action and mobilisation.

5.2. Solidarity Networks - Autonomous Political/Economic Spaces

[30] D. Minkoff defines "hybrid organisations as those that combine features derived from distinct organisational forms—…advocacy and service provision" (Minkoff, 2002, p. 381). In his work he examines the emergence of new hybrid advocacy/service organisations in United States after the 1960s. These organisations incorporated both the political tradition of service provision for social change by women, racial and ethnic minorities as well as of the civil rights movement and protest politics of the 1960s.

[31] S. Ganesh and C. Stohl argue that collaborative frames of participation tend to prevail in forms of collective action that, while claiming the creation or maintenance of community or public goods, do not identify any particular opponents (Ganesh, Stohl, 2014).

Greek society has witnessed a significant rise in solidarity networks and a proliferation of autonomous political/economic spaces.[32] These trends are not merely an outcome of the economic crisis. Changes in the party system, developments in extra-institutional politics and the growing appeal of a new global paradigm of radical activism have contributed to the strong presence of alternative networks in Greek society.[33] For instance, social centres and neighbourhood assemblies multiplied following the widespread social unrest of December 2008 (Petropoulou, 2013). Neighbourhood assemblies and social solidarity networks also proliferated following the end of the Greek Indignant movement in 2011 (Triantafyllopoulou, Sayas (2012); Ishkanian, Glasius, Ali (2013); Rakopoulos (2014)). Moreover, the presence of numerous collaborative and self-managed schemes illustrates the growing influence of 'horizontal' vs. 'vertical' political logics in Greek society.[34] R. Day explains that contemporary radical activists seek radical change by dropping out, subverting, impeding existing institutions and at the same time prefiguring and constructing alternative communities (Day, 2005). In conclusion, alternative networks in Greek society are signs of a severe and enduring political crisis that has spilled over into the realm of civil society, generating alternative forms of political engagement. The economic crisis has channeled many of these initiatives into social support provision, while at the same time numerous new initiatives have surfaced as a direct response to

[32] The actual number of solidarity networks and autonomous political/economic spaces is difficult to trace. V. Kantzara mentions that during her research "several talked about more than 2.500 'initiatives'" (Kantzara, 2014(a), p. 273).
[33] The term 'alternative networks' that is used in the analysis incorporates both solidarity networks and autonomous political/economic spaces.
[34] 'Horizontal' political focus on establishing "zones of encounter, shared learning, solidarity, affiliation" and "...the ability to mobilise together and place pressure on the logic of the system until it falls." (Feenstra, 2015, p. 245). 'Vertical' political logics, on the other hand, favour the production of vertical political structures, such as political parties.

the economic crisis. Thus the economic crisis has deepened the foundations of alternative networks in Greek society.

Alternative networks share the principles of solidarity, horizontalism and decentralisation. Moreover, alternative networks adopt political repertoires of direct action in order to meet social needs.[35] Due to the multiple and diverse political orientations and actual practices of the schemes no clear classification can be created. However, some solidarity networks address their demands to the state or were supported by the left-wing party Syriza while it was in opposition. Other initiatives prioritise political autonomy. Despite cooperation among activists from different solidarity networks, commoning projects, autonomous zones, cooperatives and collectives, political friction and conflict have also been recorded.[36]

During the crisis, numerous alternative networks have set up solidarity institutions such as collective kitchens,[37] solidarity pharmacies, clinics, groceries and voluntary shadow education (social frontistiria),[38] neighbourhood assemblies, workers' clubs, citizen journalism outlets, anti-racist/anti-fascist networks, etc. (Boucas (2014); Kantzara (2014(a)); Rakopoulos (2014); Triantafyllopoulou, Sayas (2012); Kavoulakos, Gritzas (2015)). Support by alternative networks takes usually the form of provision of food, free medical services, drugs and vaccines, clothes, legal and accounting assistance, political support, alternative information, educational

[35] For instance solidarity networks mobilise to reconnect power to houses that are left without electricity, following the introduction of a new property tax by the Ministry of Finance. According to the law, those who fail to pay the new tax will have their electricity cut off. Disconnections began in January 2012 (Triantafyllopoulou, Sayas, 2012).
[36] Interview with K.K., op. cit.
[37] Collective kitchens are "communal events where citizens cook and eat together". See *Omikron Project* (available at www.omikronproject.gr - accessed on 12/10/2015).
[38] Social frontistiria provide free tuition to students who prepare for the university entrance examinations. They are either organised by local authorities, NGOs, the Church and parental associations or political activists. In all schemes participating teachers are volunteers (Zambeta, Kolofousi, 2014).

support, training programmes and workshops, cultural activities, promotion of open-source software, the exchange of seeds, etc.[39] For instance, Istos, an open social solidarity space in Chaidari, provides legal, accountancy and medical support, and tuition for high school students.[40] Istos' 'social solidarity' group supports vulnerable social groups; the 'social economy - self-sufficiency' group organizes self- educating seminars and practical workshops and the 're-action' group focuses on political thinking and reflection. Most alternative networks operate assemblies where decisions are taken collectively (Boucas, 2014). In many schemes recipients of social support participate in the general assembly and take active part in running the scheme. For example, the solidarity network of Neos Kosmos (Athens) is run by 35 to 40 volunteers (who contribute more financially to the network) and citizens (e.g. unemployed individuals) receiving social support.[41] However, there are also solidarity networks (in particular solidarity pharmacies, clinics and groceries) where reciprocal relations between providers and beneficiaries have not been established (Kavoulakos, Gritzas, 2015). Thus, their participatory governance structure is mainly limited to the activists who run the schemes.

Even though extensive empirical research has been conducted on the diversity and scope of alternative networks, such issues as the social identity of participants, the geographical dispersion of the schemes and their links to the surrounding communities remain underexplored.

[39] See the sites http://www.enallaktikos.gr/, www.omikronproject.gr, www.hackademy.gr/, www.iliosporoi.net - accessed on 12/10/2015.
[40] See *Istos* (available at https://istosxaidari.wordpress.com/- accessed on 10/11/2015).
[41] See *Λέσχη Αλληλεγγύης Νέου Κόσμου*, (available at http://hackademynewz1.blogspot.gr/2013/12/blog-post_9.html#more - accessed on 12/10/2015).

Many solidarity networks feel uneasy about their involvement in the distribution of resources or the provision of social services, since they used to dismiss these activities as mere 'philanthropy'.[42] They try, therefore, to improvise strategies that couple social support with political objectives. A significant challenge the solidarity networks face is the growing volume of requests for assistance. As a direct consequence, some networks are obliged to set an upper limit or certain criteria for social groups to whom they provide services (e.g. the poor, the uninsured), violating their principles of egalitarianism and solidarity.[43] Christos Giovannopoulos argues that "pressure and strain on resources is one of the biggest challenges the solidarity movement faces".[44] It affects "developing practices, ways and spaces, which foster the engagement and participation of all for all, setting up a different paradigm of social self-management, while responding to meeting the most immediate needs of the people".[45] Deprivation of financial, political or human resources also undermines efforts by schemes to scale up their activities.

Political activists often adopt a dual perspective, engaging in economic as well as political activities. They seek to establish public spaces that are both politically and economically autonomous. Accordingly, during the crisis social and solidarity economy schemes have also multiplied. "New co-operatives have been set up in agriculture, media (newspaper, publishing house), and consumption" (Kantzara,

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[42] "Institutions of solidarity: How are we going to stop society's impoverishment during the crisis?", *op. cit*. In Greek society the term 'philanthropy' is usually associated with individual 'charitable giving'. Philanthropy includes, besides individual giving, philanthropic institutions, corporate philanthropy and community philanthropy (Civicus, 2015).

[43] "Institutions and networks of applied social solidarity", *op. cit*.

[44] AnalyzeGreece! (2015), *Christos Giovannopoulos: Solidarity for All (S4A) - solidarity is peoples' power* (available at http://analysegreece.com/solidarity/item/162-christos-giovannopoulos-solidarity-for-all-s4a-solidarity-is-peoples-power - accessed on 9/10/2015).

[45] *Ibid.*

2014(a), p. 271). Exchange networks, free-exchange bazaars, free networks, parallel currencies (time banks, digital and virtual currencies) and alternative food networks have proliferated. According to K. Kavoulakos and G. Gritzas 58 anti-middlemen groups, 84 Time Banks, parallel currencies and exchange networks or free-exchange bazaars, 23 self-managed urban vegetable gardens, 38 cooperatives and 140 social cooperative enterprises operate in the broader Attica region (Kavoulakos, Gritzas, 2015). Various schemes (such as the Time Bank run by the Greek branch of the European Network of Women) predate the economic crisis; while others (such as the Logo-Timis and Dosse-Pare exchange networks and the parallel currencies Ovolos and TEM) emerged following the onset of the crisis (Sotiropoulou, 2011, p. 32). Some of the schemes were established to challenge directly neoliberal capitalism, while others were originally set up to address livelihood issues.[46] T. Rakopoulos in his ethnographic study describes how anti-middleman groups in Athens "started by addressing immediate issues of material livelihood" and "eventually came to address the wider solidarity economy" (Rakopoulos, 2014, p. 321).

Schemes in the social or solidarity economy do not belong to the realm of civil society, defined as a societal sphere separate from the market and the state. However, there is close co-operation among solidarity networks and collectivities in the social or solidarity economy. Moreover, solidarity networks develop activities in the social or solidarity economy (such as time banks). In both cases "grassroots social welfare

[46] For an overview of the alternative networks' relation to the market and the state see Kavoulakos, Gritzas (2015). Marco Aranda, questioning the practicability of refusing all forms of engagement with the state in contemporary neoliberal societies, illustrates how activists in the neozapatista movement in Germany break away from state institutions (e.g. establishing community kitchens, social centers, alternative distributions stores), while tactically maintaining some engagements with the state (e.g. accepting unemployment benefits, paying taxes on occupied buildings, using university facilities). He uses the term 'infrapolitics' to describe the fit between the means and the collective utopias in an adverse political environment (Aranda, 2015, p. 2-3).

projects" (Rakopoulos, 2014, p. 313) are organised and the development of a solidarity movement in Greece is actively supported.

A novel element of the multiple formal and informal initiatives and practices that have surfaced in Greek civil society during the crisis is that they often transcend binary divisions between formality/informality, legality/illegality.[47] For instance, local solidarity networks, lacking legal status, provide social support and engage in economic transactions by using the legal personality of formal organisations. Acting in co-operation with non-profit organisations and solidarity networks, doctors prescribe medication for uninsured individuals by adding it to medication prescribed for insured individuals. Municipal authorities tolerate occupations of public buildings and the creation of new autonomous political/economic spaces. During the crisis, therefore, clear-cut divisions between formality/informality, legality/illegality have become blurred as social and political actors devise new strategies to actualise social rights that have been suspended.

6. Conclusions

The economic crisis has had a direct impact on formal and informal civil society actors**.** In regard to civil society's formal organisations the crisis has undermined their financial viability and political influence while accentuating existing asymmetries in the non-profit sector. At the same time European civil societies have witnessed massive anti-austerity protests as well as the proliferation of new modes of political participation. In the Greek case, the economic crisis had an especially negative impact

[47] Information about these practices has been provided by interviewees. Since this information refers to acts that transcend legality, the interviewees who provided this information are not identified.

on formal civil society organisations. Greek NGOs have to struggle for their financial viability, while at the same time social needs multiply rapidly. Thus Greek NGOs strive to cover more needs with less economic resources. Still, the fact that they mobilise and provide social support in the face of extremely adverse economic and social conditions is a sign of organisational resilience**.** During the crisis many new alternative networks have emerged in Greek civil society. This development is not merely an outcome of the economic crisis. As in other European civil societies, collective mobilisations and the proliferation of new informal initiatives are clear signs of public dissatisfaction with representative democracy as a practical political project. In this respect, the proliferation of alternative networks in Greek society reflects both the choice to experiment with new forms of radical activism and the need to provide social support in the context of the crisis. Thus 'need' and 'choice' guide the activities of numerous new schemes in Greek civil society. These two elements do not always coexist in harmony, since the rising scale of social needs may circumscribe preferred political choices. Still, the numerous new alternative networks in Greek civil society are not simply remedial responses to the rising levels of poverty, but instead clear signs of a political radicalisation process.

The developments that have taken place in Greek civil society during the crisis are bound by existing socioeconomic conditions. Thus the organisational forms and repertoires of collective action that have prevailed in Greek civil society during the crisis correspond to ones that usually emerge in periods of severe economic crises. Accordingly, a shift from formal to informal associational repertoires in Greek civil society has been recorded, while the density of civil society has increased. These developments do not however signal the growing strength of civil society. During the crisis the reduced capacity of the state to provide the basic rights of citizens has led to

a rapid deterioration in the quality of citizenship. Thus social inequality and exclusion have undermined the strength of civil society. As the Greek case illustrates, increased associationism is a necessary precondition for a strong civil society, however during periods of severe economic and political crises it may be not be sufficient.