

Challenges and Perspectives on Metropolitan Governance in Athens

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Introduction

According to an old saying, “there is not one Athens but many”. One could add that throughout the world, big cities are not one city but many. In the case of Athens, however, a polycentric urban structure has been combined with civic disintegration, excessive administrative fragmentation, a confused urban development and sectoralised urban policies. After decades of rapid growth, Athens region seemed hopeless in front of a multifaceted crisis that was manifested in industrial decline, obsolete infrastructures, traffic congestion, environmental disaster, touristic downgrading and a continuous decrease of life quality.

By the early nineties, however, the fall of communist regimes in neighboring countries and the upcoming globalization, combined with new possibilities offered by European integration seemed to change the perspectives of the city. Within this new framework, an open-minded, visionary and cosmopolitan part of the Athenian socio-economic elite drew attention to opportunities offered by a mega-event and especially by the Olympics. In fact the idea of organizing the Olympics in Greece had already been propagated by the former Prime-Minister Konstantin Karamanlis by the early eighties, pointing at the boycotts of Moscow and L.Angelos Olympics at that time. Karamanlis had proposed the permanent organization of Olympic Games in a neutral zone within Greek territory (in the near of the site of ancient Olympia). After the collapse of communism in Europe this plan was not fashionable, but organizing the Olympics once more in Greece just one hundred years after the first modern Olympics in Athens (1896) became a quite popular idea. Such a mega-event could create the impetus that was necessary in order to overcome the Athenian malaise. A first attempt failed in 1991 and Atlanta has been nominated for organizing the Olympics of 1996. Bearing in mind that historic arguments were not enough, a second, much better organized candidature for the Olympics of 2004 has been successful.

Sometimes, organizing mega-events such as the Olympics is compared to war: An unprecedented extensive mobilization, acceleration of innovation, rapid transformation of inefficient structures and a strong vision that is setting social cleavages aside and fosters unity, are some of the effects caused by war and, fairly, also by such mega-events. In the case of Athens, the objective of becoming a major center in the eastern Mediterranean region (I.) could decisively be promoted through the Olympics. The existing fragmentation of administration and civil society (II.), combined with the long-established “sectoral federalism” (III.) seemed to seriously threaten the success of the Games. Due to the “Olympic pressure”, several issue- and project- based mechanisms of coordination have been established, in most cases including social and private organisations as partners (IV.). The mega-event of the Games, seemed to function as a “school of governance” (IV.). The newly built arena of metropolitan policies and politics had a time and a scope limit: The Olympics of 2004. The impressive success of the Games (that surprised a great part of the persistently mistrusting opinion makers in

W.Europe and N. America) was certainly combined with precious experience, different kinds of knowledge that has been gained and an unprecedented accumulation of social capital¹. After the Games, the main question that arises is whether (and why) the astonishing success of this mega-event could (or could not), in the case of Athens, act as catalyst for metropolitan integration through new forms of governance (V. and VI).

I. The emergence of a major center in the eastern Mediterranean region?

During the second half of the past century, the population of Athens tripled. In 2001, the population of the region was 3.764.348 people, making up a significant percentage (35%) of the country's population and an even higher percentage of industrial, commercial and banking activities. One should not leave out the role of Athens for the Greek Diaspora and its lively cultural scene, furthermore its importance for international shipping. The economic competitiveness of this region is a crucial factor for the economic development of the whole country. Then, it is not surprising why nearly every major metropolitan issue could be regarded as a matter of national interest.

In addition, a significant factor for the agglomeration of economic activities in the area is the fact that the bulk of national government offices and organisations are situated here. The increasing percentage of employment in the tertiary sector of the metropolitan region in comparison with that of the rest of the country demonstrates the dominance of Athens region in the whole country (Getimis/Hlepas 2005).

This dynamism of the tertiary sector comes along with an increasing effort to invest more in research and development and to boost the technological innovation of the region through stronger networks between universities and entrepreneurs (ROP of Attica: 2000-2006). Most of the important universities and research institutions of the country are settled in Attica. The majority of workforce employed in the area has higher professional qualifications (high-skilled personnel) in comparison with the rest of the country.

Consequently, the metropolitan Athens concentrates a number of conditions for being not only a national developmental and cultural center but also an international one (economic growth, flexible high skilled personnel, cultural heritage, infrastructure). In the context of the European Enlargement to the Eastern Europe, Athens presents significant opportunities to become the main metropolitan centre of Southeastern Europe. Athens scores far more high in terms of capita per head and labor productivity compared with the other Balkan capitals. The role of the Attica region across the major Eastern Mediterranean region is also strategic as it demonstrates better standards of life, ongoing development and a stable political environment.

However, this relative success initially should go along with a responsive public sector, effective public-private partnerships, a concept of metropolitan governance, which still are pending. The endogenous potentials of this metropolitan area together with the opportunities arisen from exogenous factors (process of europeanisation, political stability, global economic development) are threatened from the lack of effective public policies carried out by adequate, well-organized administrative structures (state and local).

¹ A great part of the organization success of the Games was due to the unprecedented mobilization of civil society in Athens, including the unmatched numbers of the "Olympic volunteers" (s. www.Athens2004.com)

II. Fragmentation of administration and civil society

Throughout the post-war era, the driving force within the metropolitan area has been the private initiative that kept destroying the environment and had overtaken housing (through small scale building activities), a great part of health and educational services, as well as a major part of transport activities. Most of private business had been state-dependent within a strong protectionist framework that survived up to the late seventies at the threshold of EC-membership. Even after Greece-accession in the EC (1981) most of private business remained small and medium scaled, still national-market oriented and state-dependent. At the same time, a plethora of state-controlled entities and agencies have been engaged for water and sewage, public transport (13 different entities), civil protection and spatial planing. These entities still are integrated in the respective administrative sectors (ministries or independent institutions), being supervised by the responsible Minister. The lack of trans-sectoral coordination, complementarity and synergy has been pointed out since many years, but a consequent effort to change this situation would affect the core of politics within the central government, which are sector-bound, top-down, inflexible and strictly regulatory. In 1985 a law introduced a strategic “regulatory plan” that included the whole metropolitan territory of Attica, while a specialized planning entity has been established. The results of this attempt were far from being satisfactory, since this new entity deprived the necessary resources, but also the adequate institutional tools in order to put into effect the accurate implementation of this strategic plan for Attica.

It should be pointed out that several plans and policies for the metropolitan area have often been frustrated through local blockades: Until today, Local Government structures are extremely fragmented in the Region of Attica. The first tier consists of 116 Municipalities, but furthermore it should be taken into account that important municipal responsibilities are undertaken by not less than 150 municipal enterprises and ca. 400 municipal public entities. Several issue-based associations of municipalities try to cope with local problems, while the “unified association of municipalities of the Attica Region” (“ESDKNA”, 89 municipalities-members) is the oldest, established at 1970, institutional agency for planing and management of waste in Attica. During the last decade, however, this “unified association” faced vehement local reactions and failed several times to build and operate the waste disposal units that had been planed in close cooperation with the central government.

A second tier of local government has been established in 1994. The Attica Region, subdivided since 1970 in four prefectures, included three second-level local government agencies. The Athens-Piraeus “Unified Prefecture” has been established in order to cover a major part of the metropolitan area, where nearly 80% of the population and an even higher percentage of the socioeconomic activities of the region are concentrated. Although the territorial borders of this “Unified Prefecture” have been criticized for being too narrow (making up only 12% of the total surface of the Attica Region), the directly elected prefect of Athens/Piraeus could play, theoretically, a crucial role as a local leader, if this new entity would have obtained some important metropolitan responsibilities and, of course, the necessary resources; But neither happened. The 1994-reformers built up the subdivisions of this “unified prefecture”, the so-called “sub-prefectural departments”,

which became stronger than the prefectural level. No resources, no metropolitan responsibilities have been delegated to this new entity. It seems that neither the responsible Ministers, nor the country's political elite in general would be willing to allow the emergence of a new pole of political power within the over-sized center of an extremely centralist country.

Despite of being a deconcentrated unit of state administration, even the Attica Region has been deprived of a series of responsibilities (especially in the sectors of physical planning and transport), which are exercised, in the rest of the country, by the regional administration. Furthermore, the indirectly elected "Regional Council" mainly consists of representatives of several local authorities and some corporate interests, it does have a certain influence on development planning but it is not accountable and visible enough to become an arena for transparent public deliberation on metropolitan strategies (Hlepas: 2003). This is an important deficit, since no other institutionalized bodies and forums of public deliberation through and for Athens exist, for the time being.

The highly fragmented administrative and political structures of Attica obviously impede the creation of a metropolitan political identity among the citizenry, while the constituencies for parliamentary elections (which, in most parts of the country, constitute a solid base for local identity and political bargaining) are, in the case of Attica, both too many and too big to serve as a groundwork for building up a metropolitan political identity (Hlepas: 2002). Finally one should not leave out the fact that the citizenry is, to a great part, of rural origin and is rather mobilized for the problems of its place of origin (as it is indicated by the numerous and influential associations of Cretan, Peloponnesian etc "compatriots") than for the ones of Athens (Tsoukalas: 1996). Younger Athenian families that do tend to develop a kind of "imaginary identification" with the city, fluctuate to the suburbs, while foreign immigrants, deprived of voting rights, take their place within the central city boroughs (Hlepas: 2002). Social segregation (Maloutas/Economou: 1992) is not worse than in west-European metropolitan areas, although recent trends indicate an increase of social inequalities.

It should be pointed out, that such discrepancies emerge in nearly all local communities of Athens within the boundaries of one and the same local authority. This phenomenon is due to the fact that existing urban planning and regulations are not being strictly implemented, giving space not only to neighboring of incompatible land uses but also to a mixture of very different social groups and incomes within a narrow territory: Expensive villas or middle-class housing coexist side-by-side with squatter housing and deprived neighbors. This type of social segregation creates contradictory pressures to the local administration, which acts through fragmented and ad hoc policy measures, trying to cope partially with contradictory needs.

Administrative fragmentation, growing social segregation (Maloutas/ Economou: 1992; Häussermann/Siebel: 2001) and historical boundaries (Goldsmith: 1995) constitute some of the main obstacles for any kind of metropolitan integration (Göschel, 2001), intended by a new scheme of metropolitan governance. In fact, the lack of a metropolitan identity and orientation in Athens does not only concern the political elite or the wider public but also several pressure groups (trade unions etc.), even the bigger part of the business community. It should be pointed out, that private interests are shaped through the features of small-scaled investments and petty bourgeois land property structures. Civil Society remains fragmented (most activities are local-or sector-oriented) and weak, depending on

a plethora of divergent pressure groups (Mavrogordatos 2001, 252, Terizakis 2005, 196, 276). Lack of institutional structures enabling transparent public deliberation, negotiation and bargaining which results in fragmented, partly contradictory demands and pressures towards the state. Pressure groups that are not satisfied with the outcome of relevant political decisions turn to litigation (at the supreme administrative court or even the European courts) that leads to blockades or to postponement of final decision. In several cases the supreme administrative court has created patterns and conditions for political decision-making.

Local Government could be expected to integrate divergent pressures towards political decision-makers. However, even the empowerment of the traditionally input-oriented local government in Greece (“Franco-group”, according to Hesse/Sharpe: 1991) during the last decades seems to further enhance the nimby-syndrom and spatially fragmented claims to the central administration. Traditional centralist structures and decision-making seem to offer ad-hoc solutions without long-term perspectives. Under these circumstances, a kind of governance that would simply incorporate stakeholders would simply lead to further fragmentation and increase the possibilities of conflicts that would paralyze the system.

III. Sectoral Federalism within a centralist state

The traditional “sectoral federalism” within the central government, combined with the fragmentation of local government structures, of democratic legitimacy and political responsibility do not allow the formulation of coherent policies for the metropolitan area (Makrydimitris 1994). Policy networks traditionally used to be rather “closed” in Athens, while the respective corporate interests, party mechanisms and also a part of the business community kept privileges of informal access, depending on organizational and bargaining skills, party politics and personal relations. Persistent institutional weakness, traditional personalization of politics and bargaining have been further enhanced, as recent surveys have shown while the role of the party system remains decisive (Getimis/Hlepas forthcoming).

In cases where concrete policy options have been agreed among major stakeholders and promoted by the government and some specialized entities, there was lack of visible democratic legitimacy and broad citizen’s participation. In this way, strong local resistance could emerge and, finally, frustrate major projects (such as the introduction of a new, rational system for waste management in Attica) through litigation (in national or/and European courts) and radical forms of protest. In the case of Athens, higher efficiency would come to dead-end, if the “social acceptance” of concrete policy options would not be backed-up by democratic legitimacy, accountability of decision makers, citizen’s control and broader participation.

Several policy studies of metropolitan reforms pointed out the need for strategic planning as a core aspect of reform policy (Oikonomou 1998; Getimis & Kafkalas 2003; Giannakourou 2003). The aforementioned institutional and administrative fragmentation, regulatory inflation, weak coordination and synergy, the lack of systematic documentation and information sharing, a culture of clientelist, sectoral and corporate approach within the administration, some extremely intricate distributive alliances seem to block or to frustrate, up to now, a strategic approach. Furthermore, it should be pointed

out that business sector and especially the construction industry remain small-scaled with weak capital accumulation (the growing stock market has been heavily damaged by the crash in 2000) that is not able to push forwards a strong pressure for strategic planning. On the contrary, private businesses tend to seek ad hoc and fragmented regulations through non-transparent bargaining with political decision makers.

However, the need for territorial democratic legitimacy should not lead to the idea that structures and functions should be strictly homogenized across the various sectors of metropolitan policy. Empirical research has shown (Getimis/ Kafkalas, 2003) that patterns and modalities of metropolitan strategic planning, coordination, regulation, control mechanisms, policy implementation and service delivery have to be adjusted to the peculiarities of each one of the six main policy sectors: Urban development and economic activities, spatial planning, social policy, environment, transport, civil protection and emergency could not follow a single, unitary, trans-sectoral concept. In the field of social policy, for instance, there is a need for metropolitan regulation and control (in order to restrain clientelist or arbitrary practices) combined with local service delivery (in order to facilitate accessibility), while in the field of transport it is the other way round: policy implementation should not be decided at the local (municipal) level.

IV. A mega-project as a learning process for new forms of governance: The Olympic Games of Athens

Treated as a “hopeless case” by the major part of the Greek political elite, Athens gained international interest, after it’s nomination for the Olympics of 2004. Decision makers and stakeholders were faced with the unprecedented challenge of organizing the Olympic games in a quite chaotic major agglomeration of a small, not highly developed country. It has been agreed that, for the time being, no major territorial reforms would take place, and this was the main reason that the Region of Attica has been excluded from the ambitious National Program for the amalgamations of municipalities that reduced, in 1998, the number of municipalities from a total of 5.700 down to 1033 units in the whole country (Hlepas: 2003). The government did not either follow the advice of the international Olympic Committee, which suggested the establishment of a new Ministry for the Olympic games.

A new entity, named “Athens 2004” concentrated the main responsibility for coordination and the promotion of several projects. “Athens 2004” has been created as a special entity (using the form of a public limited company) that overtook responsibilities previously dispersed in several ministries, while it directly referred and had the active political support of the head of the government, the prime minister. Athens 2004 signed contracts (“memoranda of cooperation”) with several local authorities affected by the games. In Athens, the Olympic infrastructure has been dispersed throughout the whole metropolitan area of Attica aiming to the balanced upgrading and development of the entire region (especially concerning the transport infrastructure) corresponding also to fragmented local demands.

Athens 2004 functioned as a kind of junction point or knot for the development of horizontal and vertical problem solving networks. It is worth mentioning that new vertical relations have been shaped on the background of effectiveness due to the urgent pressure

of achieving concrete results. The traditional command and control techniques of a legalistic administration have been abandoned and new alliances have been formed on a win-win basis: For instance, the acceptance to abolish illegal buildings and change land uses that offered revenues and clientelistic resources to local authorities has been compensated by the perspective of post-Olympic assignment of Olympic infrastructure (combined to new revenues and new land uses) to local authorities. On the other hand, horizontal relations have been promoted in order to gain broad legitimacy. Implicating several actors and stakeholders created trust and social capital. However, it should be mentioned that private sector which initially was supposed to play an important active role unpredictably restrained, handing over the major part of the field to segmented state agencies, local authorities and NGO's.

Athens 2004 also coped with the major problem that could delay or even foil the construction of the Olympic infrastructure, namely the lack of strategic environmental planning: Referring to Olympic sites, strategic environmental impact assessments have been prepared, thus preventing long-lasting and costly litigation that could have jeopardized constructing activities. Furthermore, public dialogue with important actors has been activated in a way that reduced local reactions. Beginning of constructing activities had thus to be postponed in many cases, but acceleration of efforts during the last period led to accomplishment within the time limits. In few cases where remedies from environmental non-governmental organizations and activists had led to litigation, the Olympic vision that influenced perceptions throughout the political and the judiciary system, functioned as a catalyst of problem-solving.

Through the Olympics, public awareness in Athens for the metropolitan problems of the region has grown a lot, compared to the past. This is not only due to the Olympics as a mobilizing Mega-Project, but also to the fact that the implemented modes of metropolitan governance, although structured by single issues and projects associated with the Olympics, did promote ties among sectors and agencies but also between them and the citizens. Furthermore, the Olympic project seems to activate, within the region, several modernization efforts at all levels of governance. For instance, the "memoranda of cooperation" have been the result of negotiations of actors at the national ("Athens 2004", selected Ministries etc.) and at the local level (local authorities in which the Olympic sites were located). It is worth mentioning that these new forms of governance have tried to gain acceptance and mobilize a multi-actor scheme in which the central state, the local government, scientific and professional organizations as well as the private sector have been invited to join. Most of these actors responded but it should be pointed out that private sector self-restrained in its traditional role of constructing activities: The newly established scheme of public private partnerships (PPP) which had been successfully implemented in other major infrastructure projects (e.g. Athens International Airport, Attica Ring Highway) was supposed to be implemented in certain Olympic Sites (Olympic village, Olympic Hippodrome) but failed (due to litigation of frustrated competitors or long-lasting complicated procedures).

New forms of governance did not overtake a major role within the context of the Olympic project: Traditional forms of government (Committee of Ministers chaired by the Prime Minister, central entities such as single Ministries and "Athens 2004") exclusively using

public finance from the central government budget have been the dominant structures of decision making and implementation. Therefore, Athens has not taken full advantage of the Olympic mega-project that has been as a major chance of establishing new effective and legitimate institutions.

V. The perspectives of metropolitan integration through governance

Although new forms of governance did not play the major role within the context of the Olympic project, important knowledge has been gained that can be categorized in interrelated fields or forms of knowledge (Matthiesen, U.B./ Bürkner, H.-J.: 2004):

Expert and professional knowledge refers to scientific and disciplinary knowledge, it tends to refine professional practices and create innovation. The growing influence of this kind of knowledge is, however, bound with the danger of compartmentalization within closed expert milieus. The Olympic mega-project mobilized the existing expert capacities, while it brought in innovative expert knowledge from abroad concerning middle range and high technology (transport, telecommunication etc) as well as institutional structures and management techniques.

Steering and cooperation knowledge refers to formal and informal procedures of steering and cooperation. The knowledge that has been gained shows how communication, interaction and –especially horizontal- cooperation in networks can be promoted. Furthermore it includes the ability to access impacts and side effects of governing instruments in order to increase steering capacities and ameliorate leadership.

Task specific knowledge refers to forms related to concrete problem solving. The extremely complicated Olympic mega-project demanded the combination of contradictory tasks: The increased security needs (first Olympic Games after the terrorist attacks in N.York in a world of “asymmetric threats”) had to come together with olympic rituals of brotherhood and world-wide solidarity, as well as sport events that included many thousands of viewers and participants. Sustainability aspects had to be combined to the timely construction of Olympic sites and infrastructure.

Institutional knowledge refers to the functional and informal logic of institutions and organizations. Due to the Olympics an unprecedented mobilization of institutions and organizations under time pressure has taken place. The extremely complex nature of the Olympic mega-project increased dramatically the needs for inter- and intra-organizational/institutional communication and learning.

These different forms and fields of knowledge that have been gained because of and through the Olympics, can be missed through lack of Post-Olympic institutionalisation: Olympic institutional structures (such as “Athens 2004”) have been abolished, high-skilled experienced personnel has been dispersed and not hired in metropolitan institutions (i.e. metropolitan transport entities, Athens-Piraeus Unified Prefecture etc.). Furthermore, it should be once more pointed out, that most of recent policies and politics in and for Athens referred to concrete Olympic projects and not to Athens metropolitan area as a whole. After all, a great part of the “Olympic” investments in the region have been focused on high quality sporting infrastructure that soon proved to be extremely expensive to maintain. A lot of public and private capital has been locked up in projects connected to the Games, while important long-term needs (such as an underground

system covering the whole city) have been neglected. Furthermore, influential politicians and stakeholders from the province, especially from the “rival” metropolitan area of Thessaloniki, have loudly been protesting against “too much public spending for Athens” and were strongly demanding that “after the Olympics, the province should be favored”. In Athens itself, however, due to increased public awareness on metropolitan issues, the debate on a metropolitan reform ceased to be a merely academic issue and parts of the concerned political elite tried to position themselves. Ambitious local leaders (i.e. the Mayors of Athens and of some other major municipalities) claimed “new ideas” about this reform, but few leaders are eager to expose themselves with concrete plans in detail. Scientific expertise has been mobilized by some of the main debaters, namely the local association of Municipalities of Attica, the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Public Works, the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization and, after the Olympics, the National Association of Municipalities. The different approaches can be grouped around three major alternative scenarios concerning the future form of metropolitan governance in Athens. These scenarios are:

- a). The Establishment of a “Metropolitan Regional Authority” with appointed General Secretary and a directly elected Metropolitan Council (mixed form).
- b). The creation of “Metropolitan Local Government”, with elected Mayor and Council (second tier of local government).
- c). A strong “Metropolitan Association of Local Authorities”

These alternative scenarios are being discussed, mainly from a constitutional or a party-politics point of view, but many actors are not eager to expose themselves with a clear position. An unprecedented level of consensus will be, however, necessary during the next years, since the new institutional settings and territorial reforms need to be carefully planned, while especially the delegation of power and resources to the new metropolitan level will certainly take some time: The metropolitan reform will prove to be a long-lasting, continuous task of high difficulty that will have to be carried out by several actors in close cooperation with each other (Benz: 2001).

A new scheme of Metropolitan Governance should enable metropolitan leadership, political responsibility, efficiency and effectiveness while, at the same time, democratic legitimacy and citizen’s participation will be broadened. The emergence of a metropolitan civil society could be promoted by new forms of specific interest- or engagement- oriented participation that would offer new channels of political influence to the active citizen, which secure that their activation counts (Stoker G./ Mossberger, 1994). The existing state and market mechanisms will not be replaced (Getimis/Kafkalas, forthcoming) but complemented and partially (the state mechanisms) restructured; new governance arrangements (Lefevre: 1998) should lead to early conflict resolutions and face problems of governability, nowadays becoming mostly visible at the local level but sometimes originating from the regulatory inefficiency of the state and an unrestrained market.

New modes of governance will not impede the creation of a metropolitan political identity among the citizenry as long as governance is combined with forms of citizen participation based on universal suffrage and direct election or, in some cases, forms of direct democracy. If they do not decide by themselves, the citizens need visible and

accountable representatives who incorporate their “choice through voting” for the metropolitan area. A main task of a metropolitan reform should, therefore, be to build up, through participation and democratic legitimisation, a metropolitan political identity and foster the emergence of a metropolitan political elite.

Although the necessity of a metropolitan reform is generally recognized, it is obvious that neither the decision makers nor the Athenian public opinion realize the kind of changes that a new scheme of metropolitan governance would bring. After all, a new, metropolitan level of administration could mean less freedom, influence, blockading abilities etc. for a series of local, sectoral, corporate interests or other actors. Furthermore, the long centralist tradition of sectoral dependency and non-transparent bargaining, in conjunction with a majoritarian and non-consensual, representative and non-participatory political culture could undermine, in the near future, the success of a metropolitan reform. On the other hand, new chances of participation, public bargaining and strategic deliberation that could lead to transparent and coherent decision-making for the metropolitan area would possibly empower and mobilize a series of actors and stake holders that were disappointed and had simply “retreated” in the past. Especially if democratically legitimized organs will be introduced, an obvious improvement of the learning and the steering capacity at the metropolitan level could occur, that would attract additional support for the metropolitan reform. Furthermore, the institutionalization of new bodies of deliberation and bargaining (especially an “economic and social committee” from and for the metropolitan area) would systematize and make public, transparent and visible what nowadays only occasionally, informally and invisibly happens. A new scheme of metropolitan governance could visibly articulate policymaking and politics for the metropolitan area, foster socio-political integration and identification, improve knowledge and information sharing.

Concerning the metropolitan reform process, it seems that, for the time being, local government is taking the lead, while the liberal-conservative national government seems to hesitate in front of an unpredictable reform process. The national government is focusing on single problems and ad hoc solutions, it avoids the institutionalization of Olympic knowledge and Olympic socio-economic capital: It is characteristic that the government is trying to “get rid of” of costly Olympic infrastructure through privatization or renting. However, the process of metropolitan reform can be postponed but not stopped. Local government mobilization is connected to informal metropolitan networks shaped through the Olympic experience, which are still playing an important role. Furthermore, participatory governance became a main slogan of the major opposition party, namely the socialist party. What is still missing is visionary and strategic leadership that would foster reformatory alliances and bring together networks of local governments, the private sector (chambers of commerce, tourism etc.), civil society, leading staff of ministries and entities nowadays responsible for metropolitan functions that would envisage new perspectives of career and action.

VI. Conclusions

In the context of the European Enlargement to the Eastern Europe, Athens presented significant opportunities to become the main metropolitan centre of Southeastern Europe. Institutional and administrative fragmentation, regulatory inflation, weak coordination and synergy, the lack of systematic documentation and information sharing, a culture of clientelist, sectoral and corporate approach within the administration, some extremely intricate distributive alliances seem to block or to frustrate, up to now, a strategic approach. Organizing the mega-event of the Olympic Games could act as a catalyst for overall modernization and metropolitan integration through new forms of governance. In deed, horizontal and vertical problem solving networks have been developed, due to the “Olympic pressure”. The Olympic vision that influenced perceptions throughout the political and the judiciary system functioned as a catalyst of consensus. Furthermore, horizontal relations have been promoted in order to gain broad legitimacy. Implicating several actors and stakeholders reduced reactions; it created trust and social capital.

New forms of governance did not, however, overtake a major role within the context of the Olympic project: Traditional forms of government exclusively using public finance from the central government budget have been the dominant structures of decision making and implementation. Therefore, Athens has not taken full advantage of the Olympic mega-project that has been as a major chance of establishing new effective and legitimate institutions.

Although new forms of governance did not play the major role within the context of the Olympic project, important knowledge has been gained. But several forms and fields of knowledge that have been gained because of and through the Olympics, could be missed through lack of Post-Olympic institutionalisation. Although the necessity of a metropolitan reform is generally recognized, it is obvious that neither the decision makers nor the Athenian public opinion have a clear picture of changes that a new scheme of metropolitan governance could and should bring. An unprecedented level of consensus will be necessary during the next years, since the institutional and territorial reforms need to be carefully planned, while the delegation of power and resources to the new metropolitan level will take some time.

Concerning the metropolitan reform process, it seems that, for the time being, local government is taking the lead, while national government seems to hesitate in front of an unpredictable reform process. However, the process of metropolitan reform can be postponed but not stopped. What is pending, is the kind of visionary and strategic leadership that would foster the necessary reformatory alliances.

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