TEACHING POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING

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This paper describes a teaching activity, which aims at examining the flow of political decisions in the municipalities of Thessaloniki area. During their last academic year, students are able to work for a three-month period in local government institutions in order to familiarize themselves with the reality of Greek public services. The decision-making processes in the city council, the operation and the decision procedure of the Consultation Committee will be monitored and analyzed through advanced data analysis methods. The course aims to promote teamwork and collaboration. Students who work in public institutions and who have served as political personnel decision-making supporters will help political actors to deploy these ideas to increase efficiency and effectiveness, which are needed to put in place strategies that foster productivity, innovation and creativity.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, Greece is experiencing an intense and prolonged socio-economic crisis; the social life is becoming increasingly insecure and individualistic and problems plaguing the country for decades are highlighted. The increasing obsolescence of the political system and association, the hard, competitive working environment, extreme poverty for more and more citizens and targeting of immigrants as the main source of social problems from a significant part of the population creates an attitude of denial of active involvement and participation of citizens in public affairs.

In Greece, such as in other states, civil society remains weak and dependent on small groups that serve political purposes. Until the enactment of Law no. 3852/2010 "Kallikratis Program", the political decision processes, the stability and the effectiveness of municipal government were based on two power poles: the Mayor and the City Council. The bipolar power system (Mayor - City Council) has been replaced by a more complex system, which is multi-polar: Mayor, City Council, participatory institutions and civil society.

Decision-making by the public is based on rules and institutions and is structured into predefined procedures. The separation of the management of civil servants from political control means: less autonomy and less flexibility of public officials in decision making in relation to private companies.

There is an imperative need to modernize the public administration to improve efficiency and profitability of operations regardless of changes occurring at any time after the elections in central, regional or local level. The need is also imperative for the modernization of public administration.

The factionalism, which involved informal procedures of municipal elections but which were essential in the selection of candidates mayors, played an important role. Regarding the administrative capacities of the candidate mayors, they are not interested in the central government since until the 1980s local authorities did not carry much responsibility. Certificates and cleanliness were the main obligations of numerous OTA. Any administrative inefficiencies mayor was behind the complexity of the "Athens State".

By Law no. 3852/2010 statutes, OTA bodies are: The Mayor, the Aldermen, the Executive Committee, the City Council and of the Economic Commission Committees, the Commission Quality of Life, the Municipal Commission Consultation, the Supporter of the Citizen.

The Mayor is assisted longer (over the Mayoralty) by the Executive Committee. He/She is not obliged to respond in writing or orally to the questions submitted by the Municipal Council. In this context, the Mayor is constantly inspected and judged by the TAB institutional bodies. Transparency and consultation is a sine qua non legitimizing - institutional precondition for good governance in OTA in our country.

A rational bureaucracy normally executes commands of a democratically- legitimized political power. The employee has learned to perform a regulatory framework. The politician's task is not the task of civil service, but the birth of a new task; his/her options have the sense of political responsibility. The politician does not execute commands but is legitimized by people to exercise power.

The administrative elite are not entitled to the policy; they are rather based on the need of "translation" organizational techniques, which thrive on the free market of the organizational management of OTA shape. The public administrative elite differ in culture issues, responsibilities and structure of the corresponding private elite.

The result of the lack of administrative elite in Greek Municipalities, which are specialized and powerful, and are ones that form a part of the public sector, is the assignment of taking the technical decisions in politically defined contexts and are dependent on little experience in the internal procedures of the TABs. The accountability criterion of the legitimacy of an administration is virtually nonexistent when continuity management culture which ensures the continuous flow of knowledge management is not maintained.

Representative democracy is in crisis and constant questioning. Enabling direct and participatory democracy institutions, which are complementary and parallel to those of representation, could actually guarantee the overcoming of the crisis and the convincing response to the political system challenged.

The Law on Municipalities KALLIKRATIS introduced two new institutions: the municipal consultation committee and the supporter of citizens and companies. Two new institutions in a future positive reform of the institutional framework of government, responsibilities and procedures simplified, should remain after extended.

HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH DESIGN

To analyze how political decision processes "reach" civil society in the local societies and investigate the role of deliberative institutions in Municipalities, a research experiment has been designed. Students work in public services as consultants and supportive staff to the political leaders so they develop ideas and practices that will reinforce the application of strategies that strengthen productivity, innovation and creativity.

The lesson promotes teamwork and cooperation. It also promotes the monitoring of the decision-making process in the council and the functioning and decision-making process of consultation committees. In addition, the design and implementation of measures (such as social experiments) and activities of local participatory institutions (advisory bodies, electronic consultation, and deliberative bodies) are monitored. They also interview political and administrative personnel and civil society representatives who participate in deliberative institutions and networks.

The aim is to reveal the actors' opinions and as far as the problems are concerned, the existing and demanded policy for facing the difficulties due to the financial crisis, the recording of the views of the stakeholders and the functioning of political networks.

There will be three stages of data collection and analysis. At the first stage, students observe the function of the municipality council. They monitor the presence of political personnel, how often the political leaders suggest innovative issues, their reactions to the issues proposed by the mayor and the municipality government. Through this approach, using the appropriate statistical methods, the students will be able to learn and implement basic statistical methods i.e. descriptive statistics, mean, variance etc.

The second stage is about the function of the municipal consultation committee. The members of the committee complete a questionnaire concerning their experience in the committee, their opinion about its function, the outcomes and proposals they have for a better implementation. Using cluster analysis and correspondence analysis, students analyze the data and reach useful conclusions. They familiarize themselves with multivariate data analysis techniques.

The last stage concerns the civil society and its reactions to the political decisions. A social experiment about the new law concerning the domestic waste management gives the opportunity to the students to function as moderators and monitor the views of the citizens. Also using conjoint analysis in order to compute the effect of several factors involved such as motivation, financial

impacts and allocation plans for the waste collection points, the students are able to learn market research techniques and estimate critical factors for a real decision-making procedure, highlighting the good practices and formulating implementation proposals.

The aim is the teaching activity and the experience of the participant observation approach to examine the flow of political decisions. The expected results are the proposals and suggestions for a «road map» for planning, implementation and evaluation of deliberative actions that can be examples of «good practice».

Therefore, the hypotheses are the following:

H1: There is very weak communication between the actors of the three poles of the political decision process.

H2: The first pole (Mayor and the very limited political elite) has a strong role in the political decision process in the local society. The other two poles have less autonomy and less flexibility.

H3: Citizens participate in the deliberative institutions only when they have direct interest.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The conventional participatory institutions established by the local government reform of 2011 proved to be insufficient, due to lack of trust from the citizens and adequate support from political and administrative leaders. Political leaders and stakeholders attended once the committee's conferences and meetings, and are interested in social and technical issues or issues related to environment. They are almost satisfied with the way the committee is composed and the way it functions. After the qualitative and quantitative processing of the data, the following eight types of behavior arise:

1. There are those who do not participate and believe that there is no significance in such operating procedures.

2. The elected personnel declare that budget is not an important issue, there are no tensions between members of the committee, and they do not set any issues for discussion and do not have any prior knowledge about dialogue, positions and conflicts. They also do not know how they can improve their competencies.

3. Those who are often involved believe that there is intention about financial issues and pose technical issues for discussion. They declare they have benefit from influence and information and there is substantial dialogue and information.

4. Those who believe that migration is the most significant issue pose questions such as policy intensiveness, economic and action-policy and believe that there is a need to improve procedures.

5. Those who declare that budget, technical and environmental issues are important believe they have benefit from acquaintances. They believe that there is a consensus between the members and they achieve their objectives and goals. They find the establishment and operation very satisfying and do not respond on how the implementation will improved.

6. Stakeholders who only participated once declare that there is no importance in technical, environmental and migration issues, the dialogue and briefing are meaningful and they are not very satisfied about the setting and functioning of the committee. They believe there is a need for further discussion on financial and technical issues and for improvement of information and participation.

7. Citizens who declare that they have no benefit have also no objections to approving the views of the Municipality. They do not find the assembly or the mode of its operation satisfying.

8. Those who declare there is tension in environmental and technical issues believe that environment is a priority and that there are objections and conflicts between members. They also declare that the cooperation between members should improve.

Other conclusions are the following:

1. All respondents are divided into four groups [451, 452, 453, 454]. The first group [20%] consists of respondents who consider the topics A, B, C [budget, technical program, environmental and town planning], the second [14%] by those who consider D [migration] while the third [33%] does not consider the technical program, the environmental actions, the town-planning, and actions about migration and the fourth [33%] does not consider that budget is important.

2. All respondents are divided into three groups [285, 286, 287]. The first group [19%] consists of respondents who consider that they have a benefit [acquaintance / cooperation with others], the second [19%] of respondents who consider benefit [influence / intervention], third [25%] [information on problems / issues]. The fourth [37%] does not think there is any benefit from participating.

3. All respondents are divided into six groups [431, 462, 464, 465, 466, 467]. The first group [22%] and the fourth [24%] are composed of respondents who consider that there is essential dialogue and transparency, open access, and information. The second group [15%] believes that there is consensus among members. The third [10%] believes that members accept without objection the positions of the political leadership, while the fifth [15%] states that there are objections and there is a conflict of interests. The sixth group [9%] is composed of members who respond that they do not know about the dialogue / the acceptance of positions / the conflict of views. Finally, the 6% of respondents does not know / does not answer [322].

CONCLUSION

Thus, we can move from the guild society to civil society. Therefore, we can talk about participatory democracy in action. However, we are more confident when there is a positive pressure from both sides. Because, social reforms are achieved faster when the forces of the majority and the opposition are pushing in the same direction.

We are beginning a new era of assertion of civil society; a new hope is born but nothing we have achieved is permanently won, even if there are no confusions. So we must open the institutional dialogue portals for citizens and first of all in communication policy, for bidirectional communication without intermediaries.

The conventional participatory institutions established by the local government reform of 2011 proved to be insufficient, due to the lack of trust from the citizens and the inadequate support from political and administrative leaders.

The three hypotheses are confirmed by the findings.

Developing and enhancing statistical thinking of students can be achieved by using modern teaching methods. Students learn to coordinate team members and have successfully recorded processed and analyzed data. Additionally, this teaching method proves to be more efficient than conventional methods, since it cultivated interest in multivariable techniques and motivated students to explore the field. Therefore, multivariable techniques are more attractive to students who comprehend and implement quantitative methods at a higher rate than before (Chadjipadelis and Andreadis, 2006). Thus, students can evaluate data, access methods and implement suitable multivariable techniques.

In order to investigate the teaching outcomes, apart from the success rates and the workload that was analyzed at the pilot study, during the same academic year, data have been collected by students' evaluation over the core courses of the department of Political Sciences regarding learning difficulties, comprehension, teaching purposes, instructors' abilities, motivations etc. The evaluation was based on a questionnaire that was given to students before the courses' examination procedures.

Moreover, more than 50% of the students confirmed that they have attended more than 6 classes at the particular course, 30% 4-5 classes and 15% less than 4 classes. Half of the students attributed learning difficulties on this module and a percentage of 11% on the instructor.

Correspondences analysis of the evaluation sheets that students fill indicated that course efficiency and organization over the course's module correlated to interest cultivation and the course's correspondence criteria. In addition, teaching materials are correlated to raise questions about the field.

Students learn to conduct and analyze biographic narrative interviews of candidates or elected ones and exercised a research project of comparing and recording personal experiences throughout the biographical narrative interpretive method (BNIM). At the same time, students learn how to study and analyze the candidates' profile, manifestos and parties, in order to understand policies, evaluate the candidates' profile, record manifestos so as to make personal decisions and, generally speaking, become more efficient scientists and responsible citizens.

Furthermore, using mixed methods and implementing real data is what seems to hold students' interest. The teaching tools that are used, besides lectures, are focused on the monitoring of the function of the local government (municipal) boards. Therefore, students of Political Science can understand and interact with the concept of local democracy and procedures related to them. Students seem to be more confident about statistical reasoning applied to Social Sciences and can use more effectively SPSS and other software, because through the given tasks, acknowledge the meaning of using multivariable techniques and appreciate the unlimited applications of them in many aspects of Social Sciences. The teaching outcome is verified by students' success rates (Chadjipadelis, Sotiroglou & Gkouramani, 2017) on the grounds of team-based learning assignments and students' attitude towards statistics (Chadjipadelis, 1998).

Apart from that, the project incorporation and TBL (Chadjipadelis and Andreadis, 2006) allows a considerable and an effective management of a large number of students. Via the Course Management platform instructors can organize more effectively the teaching materials, provide instructions and information, and solve problems occurring from time limiting factors of conventional teaching environment and offer more freedom of choice to students concerning the subject of their research (Ledolter, 1995).

To conclude, giving students a real problem that needs to be solved with statistical treatment and offering the appropriate tools as well as creating an inspiring teaching environment, is more effective and can help students develop statistical thinking and use multivariable techniques properly.

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