

"Social Activism":

Antidote to crisis and a lever of social development

Interview of Vassilis Taktikou,

Director of "Social Activism of Athens"

by Natasa Stamou, Journalist

Voluntary and social activism can act as a ditch in the expansion of the humanitarian, economic and environmental crisis? Can it make a decisive contribution to the creative exploitation and management of physical, material and human resources?

Following these questions, and following his previous interview, Mr. Vassilis Taktikos, Director of "Social Activism of Athens", analyzes the title of the newspaper and also what "social activism" means in practice, comments on the "solidarity houses" for helping and alleviating vulnerable social groups and explaining how horizontal co-operation between Local Government and Civil Society Organizations can catalyze the lifting of the decline phenomena that we all experience in our everyday life.

NB: The Social Activism of Athens already counts six very successful issues. From the Greek version of its title, it is obvious that it refers to "Social Activism" that develops or can be developed in general, but also more specifically in Athens and the Attica basin. Do you want to throw more light on this approach?

BT: The title of the newspaper, but also the newspaper itself, emerged from the need to mobilize human resources to address the major problems of social exclusion and vulnerable

social groups, especially the City of Athens being called this very crucial period to deal with: the impoverishment that is particularly observed in the Center of Athens, a city that has ended up as a "ghost town", as is the characterization that has been given by Mayor Kaminis himself. A Center occupied by socially abusive drug addicts, immigrants, homeless, needy and others. A center with shops "burned" and whole corners transformed into latrines. A ghost town with empty buildings, an extremely repulsive image for the visitors and the tourists. In front of all of this, the numerous Municipal Services and its structures seem helpless to respond to problems, seem inadequate to limit general misery. What can a Mayor with the best intentions do in front of all this, having only a bureaucracy of decay? Limited things are the answer. The only way out for the Mayor and the Local Government of the city is to mobilize the Civil Society Organizations, the Athenian Society. To mobilize state bureaucracy and officials, a great accomplice in this situation. The only allies that Mr. Kaminis and any Mayor who wants to awaken this town are social activists. And the only solution he can have is a partnership with all those who want and can fight to change the city. Hundreds of organizations offer practical help to the homeless, drug addicts, immigrants, and to all vulnerable social groups. These social activists must all be called and act as a movement to change the agenda and priorities of the city and also to stop the wastage of human resources but also the wastage of the Community resources of the European Social Fund, which are available and barely captured in the way the state bureaucracy is managed by them. The Local Authorities should seek in synergy with the Civil Society Organizations the immediate absorption of the available resources of the European Union by itself creating an intermediate Managing Authority.

N.S .: Do you think that the conditions for such a great initiative are mature, changing the facts and the very function of Local Government in Greece? Is this goal too exaggerated?

BT: The crisis makes these goals more realistic because the pressure of the need is strong, and many people are "unleashed". I think civil society organizations have also matured and can, with sufficient and relevant documentation, put issues of holistic approach and (comprehensive) response to this decadent phenomenon. Besides, with the proposals we make, we do not discover the wheel. On the contrary, these are practices that have been applied for many years in many European capitals. At this point, it should also be pointed out that Social Activism is, among other things, a basic parameter of participatory democracy in tackling the problems.

N.S : Do you think that where the co-operation of Local Government and State cannot always be expected, with a mechanism of employees and (sub) structures, can volunteer social activism bring about results?

BT: Volunteerism and activism have always been the story, in fact, participation in lifting or

improving a situation was the driving force of changes and radical upheavals. What "Social Activism" means: first of all awareness of the struggle and offer to change an undesirable situation. It means that one is willing to bear the cost of this process by offering either free time or money or know-how. It also means specialized knowledge and will to change things. And it is the only way to confront a society with established mentality and corruption of bureaucracy. It also means human rights, citizens' rights and the struggle to express themselves. In this sense, it is possible to mobilize human resources for good practices and to achieve their optimum exploitation under strict social control, because only one test can be more effective. He is neither the policeman nor the legal control of civil servants. The most fundamental control is the moral and social control of citizens, which leaves no room for escape to decadent functions. Therefore, effective human resource management at the level of Local Government can be achieved through synergies and horizontal co-operation of Local Government with Civil Society Organizations.

NG: Do you think that the horizontal co-operation of Local Authorities with Civil Society Organizations can dramatically improve the management of human resources?

BT: Of course. Horizontal co-operation can cause a creative redeployment of resources, giving meaning to the joint effort, offering the motivation and prospect to the participant to showcase its virtues and virtues based on the moral reward and also the prospect of a State that offers reciprocity in its offer. And that is what is missing today. The citizen does not believe that even doing something good, the State will repay it to him. On the contrary, he believes that the State distorts the values and rewards the faulty ones, the rapist and the cunning. And he says to you, "Why should I be the hardworking one? Why should I be the sucker and not enjoy the public interest?". Voluntary and social activism in this case can cause the reversal of the declining course of public affairs to reverse. They can awaken and activate society creatively. Moreover, historically this has been proven. After periods of great decline and crisis, the mobilization of society and volunteering, in the form of patriotism or other forms, caused a new creative period. In today's conjuncture, there is no lack of resources, physical, material, and human. Their creative use is missing.

NK: Do you want to tell us that with a concept of "money there is" and just bureaucratic bends lead or even allow their mismanagement?

BT: Once public servants are still paid, there are still bonuses for the unemployed, public service work (from the European Social Fund) is subsidized, of course we can say that resources still exist, but there are no resources to waste. And I do not see the reason why those people who are paid for their work do not perform accordingly. I do not see the reason why in

the public sector, by a large proportion of employees, work hours are still being breached today and their performance is minimal. I do not see the reason why some people still have the lost prosperity of the borrowers, the fancy economy, the bubble economy, and still claim privileges by causing correspondingly victims in sectors of the economy that do not enjoy the protection of the state and the multinationals. That is, the micro-entrepreneurs, the self-employed, the unemployed and so many others. For example, "money is there" in some tax havens, in the notorious lists, in the privileged state of the Public Servants and the State, and there are no socially and economically blocked neophytes. But to exist for them is obviously a prerequisite if not a social revolution or the so-called "Greek Spring" that comes, Social Activism for Social Justice.

NMS: Recently, a specific proposal has been made to address the issue of immigrants and socially vulnerable Greeks who are being tested by the economic crisis by the millionaire investor George Soros. It is the creation of "solidarity houses" in licensed public buildings that will be funded by institutions such as its own, and comes from a person who often disputed his goals and goals. What do you think of the 'solidarity houses'?

BT: I am one of those who do not believe in conspiracy theories that can hide behind a major humanitarian aid campaign. Possibly, if this happened in secret, with hidden sponsors and on a small scale it had a reasonable basis. But when it takes on the character of a large, open humanitarian aid that causes the European Union institutions to develop a long-standing policy on the issue of dealing with immigrants and neophytes, it cannot be blamed as a plot of conspiracy. Why should we indirectly blame the institutions too of the European Union when they give in to such initiatives and we have nothing better and more profitable on this planet at the level of social policy than the European Union institutions? Now if some rich, big investors such as Soros, Bill Gates, etc they are investing in their image and lag in humanitarian aid, it is not historically acceptable to try a protest. In this way, we should condemn all the national benefactors, Zappa, Syngro, Varvakis, Niarchos, Onassis and so many others, who made great fortunes as big merchants and capitalists, but in the end left important legacies for Greek state and social welfare. We often tell nationalists that Soros is not a Greek. And indeed they say he is a Jew and a supporter of the Open Society of Globalization. The substantive answer to this position can only be rational. Globalization exists and will evolve with Soros and without Soros. This is the objective direction of things and is not overturned by dressing Tsolia or Bouboulina, and on the other hand, to shout the lenders and anxiously wait for the next installment of them to pay the salaries of civil servants. So let's look at the issue, realistically. Solidarity firms should have been proposed by the Greek State, the Local Government, the Municipality of Athens, the Greek benefactors. Unfortunately, Soros has not just suggested it, but has the ability to offer it. We can deny this help by offering wood to immigrants and violating the human rights of the distressed and not only. We can deny this help and leave homeless, poor and devoted homeless people and feed their national pride. Let's choose.

NSC: From what you say, can you conclude that "Social Activism" is not in contradiction with what the Foundation "Open Society", which is managed by Mr. Soros, professes?

BT: It is obvious that social activism initiated by the citizens themselves presupposes open society, not closed, oligarchic political systems, which prohibit citizen's initiatives. An open society is conquered, widened and made more tolerant and solidarity through the free action of social activists through the possibility of horizontal organization and communication not only at national but also at transnational level. And we have to admit whether we have realized it or not, that we are operating within the institutions of a transnational entity, the European Union. Solidarity movements and campaigns do not have national boundaries. They can focus where there is a greater need but solidarity between the citizens of different countries is a move forward. Here too, we must remember that the larger solidarity movements were once an international character. Moreover, Christianity, as a solidarity movement in its early historical phase, found ground in the Roman Empire, known as a supranational entity.

NK: In your estimation, how and how to deal with the problems of a city, and especially of Athens, which accumulates a series of painful and insidious puzzles, can be, among other things, an ideological approach?

VT: It is clearly an issue of ideological approach. Ideologies can "push" things forward, improve conditions, or lead to regression. Ideologies affect, I would say, as well as technologies, in the evolution of a society. The ideological approach is related to the organizational culture of a State. And the organizational culture is related to the optimal or non-exploitation of human resources. A decadent consumer culture inevitably leads to the degradation of human resources, and that is exactly what we are today. An organizational culture with productive and creative values is the key to restarting not only the economy but also social development. These issues are posed by social activism in the city.

NSA: Can "Social Activism" Contribute to Addressing the Problem of Unemployment?

BT: The Interaction of Social Activism with the Social Economy and the maximization of the creativity of the citizens creates new opportunities for social enterprises, self-employment, and solidarity trade and thus contributes to tackling unemployment. Besides, we try to show similar practices through the "Social Activism of Athens".

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