

**Contextual parameters for promoting social sustainability.  
The case of Athens**

Paper submitted to the journal *CITY* for publication

**Thomas Maloutas**

Κείμενα Εργασίας 2003/5  
Working Papers 2003/5



**ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
NATIONAL CENTRE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH**

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Απαγορεύεται η ανατύπωση, η μετάφραση, η αντιγραφή, μερική ή ολική, η παρουσίαση και η προβολή του παρόντος από οποιοδήποτε οπτικοακουστικό μέσον χωρίς, την έγγραφη άδεια του εκδότη και του συγγραφέα.

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Υπεύθυνος έκδοσης: ΕΚΚΕ, Διεύθυνση Επιστημονικής Πληροφόρησης και Εκδόσεων

Τυπογραφική Επιμέλεια: Βαγγέλης Ζουρίδης

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Οι απόψεις που εκφράζονται στην έκδοση αυτή είναι του συγγραφέα και μόνο και δεν εκφράζουν αναγκαστικά τις απόψεις του Εθνικού Κέντρου Κοινωνικών Ερευνών.

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**Abstract**

This paper focuses on difficulties in promoting social sustainability in Athens that are related both to a range of factors impeding the exacerbation and visibility of social inequality and to features of the Greek political culture, and namely of the traditional populism and clientalism, that also impede the development of action on a social concern basis. This focus follows a discussion of the content of sustainability as a political project and its context dependency, the latter being illustrated by the problems for its implementation in the Greek context.

**Key words:** sustainability, social sustainability, context dependency, political culture, Athens, Greece

# **Contextual parameters for promoting social sustainability The case of Athens \***

**Thomas Maloutas**

## **Introduction**

In this paper I am first trying to show the context dependent character of sustainability and then to investigate particular socio-economic characteristics as well as features of the political culture differentiating the Greek from the wider European context and eventually impeding the promotion of social sustainability.

Sustainable development literature and politics originated in the confrontation of environmental problems accumulated and exacerbated by unregulated economic growth. Although these problems seem-and to a large extent they are-ecumenical, they are also socially and geographically divisible and divided in terms of their mechanisms of production and of their impact as well as in terms of the ways they are perceived and of the political projects that are devised to combat them<sup>1</sup>. The dominant interpretation of sustainable development reflects a First World type of concern, which has become an important regeneration element for the European Social Democrat political project. Although this concern is definitely preferable to a certain neo-liberal absence of concern-trusting that technology will eventually produce the required answers without any need for coercive regulation (Houghton and Hunter, 1994: 19)-, it remains limited, particularly in terms of the scope of action for promoting social sustainability.

Moreover, this limited version of concern about sustainability, dominant in the European Union, has some inherent difficulties in its dissemination throughout Europe because of its context dependent character. Greece is one of the less developed regions of the European Union, where the debate on sustainability did not spring endogenously and where relative initiatives-and particularly those concerning social sustainability-originated almost exclusively in the context of wider European programs that have more or less imposed their rationale for social action through the specific canalisation of funds.

## **Sustainability: context dependency and de-contextualisation**

Sustainable development is a rather recent concept that originated in the environmental sphere, gained credibility since the publication of the Brundtland report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) and was enriched with economic, social and cultural dimensions in subsequent occasions such as the Rio Summit, the Local Agenda 21 or the World Summit in Copenhagen (European Foundation for the Improvement of the Living and Working Conditions, 1997: 6-7, Hall and Pfeiffer, 2000: 16-18). Sustainable development is defined as the one that does not compromise the foundations for future development and should be achieved through economic activity that does not impede the regeneration of natural resources as well as through the development of social equity, since inequity is argued to be detrimental for the sound

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<sup>1</sup> See for example A. Atkinson (1996) about the different issues raised by sustainable development in the cities of the North and the South.

management of natural and human resources by corroding social cohesion and solidarity (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, Hall and Pfeiffer, 2000: 16-18, Houghton and Hunter, 1994: 17-18).

The wide acceptance of sustainability as a development objective is either attributed to its self-evident validity in the context of managerial approaches or, in a more critical perspective (Harvey, 1996: 148-9, 176-7, 390), to its very flexible content that can accommodate many different meanings. Ideas, concepts, objectives and slogans need to be relatively loosely defined in order to be accepted and endorsed by different and often oppositely positioned social groups. The looseness of such concepts is then limited through their interpretation in different realms following the *rapports des forces* they create as stakes<sup>2</sup>. However, a relatively fuzzy content is certainly not enough for creating consensus around a concept. It is therefore interesting to investigate what makes of sustainability a political success.

The political success of sustainability is based on a dual process of “de-socialisation” and “re-socialisation” of its content. The dreaded exhaustion of natural resources stands as the legitimating cornerstone for a development model that seeks to avoid such a doomsday perspective. Thus, social relations and references are overwritten by relations to nature, and although the latter are first of all social relations (Houghton and Hunter, 1994: 20)<sup>3</sup>, the legitimacy of sustainability is heavily dependent on the prominence of relations to nature in the widely accepted form of the need to preserve natural resources. Pursuing a goal that appears of an evident importance for humankind, sustainability loses its socially conflictual character by the de-legitimation of any (social) goal that can be successfully treated as unsustainable<sup>4</sup>. In this “de-socialisation” process of the content of sustainability what happens in fact is an inversion between society and nature. The emphasis is withdrawn from social goals per se where nature would stand as a wide set of contextual parameters and placed instead on the preservation of nature standing as a socially invariable benefit. Following this inversion, social objectives are reintroduced, but as subordinate to the prime goal, which they must serve<sup>5</sup>. The limited “re-socialisation” of the content of sustainability is a product of this subordination: promoting social equity is justified as a means to a more sustainable resource management rather than as an end in itself<sup>6</sup>.

2. According to Harvey the meaning of sustainability is affected in the process of dealing with power, where it has to be measured in terms of cost in order to prove its economic rationality and feasibility (1996: 151-2). In this sense the sustainability debate incorporates capitalistic values (ibid, 148-9) and in the process the meaning of the concept loses part of its looseness.

3. Harvey claims that “environmental discussion is nothing more than a covert way of introducing particular social and political projects by raising the spectre of an ecological crisis or of legitimizing solutions by appeal to the authority of nature-imposed necessity” (1996: 182).

4. This process becomes strikingly evident in the de-legitimation of unsustainable development options in Third World countries, a situation that A. Atkinson qualifies as ‘ironic and even ideologically disruptive’ (1996: 7).

5. This double process of de-socialisation / re-socialisation of environmental concern and sustainability is part of the wider dialectical relation between society and nature, which became antithetical since the modernist envisioning of human progress as an ongoing process of victory over nature versus its sequel in the (equally modernist) romantic idea of a ‘pure nature, unsullied by humanity and in need of protection’ (see Franklin (2002) for a discussion of the latter in respect to the boundaries between humanity and nature in theoretical accounts as well as in everyday life).

6. The European Commission (1996: 42) for example, justifies the effort towards more social equity arguing that the very inequitable distribution of wealth induces behaviour that does not promote sustainability and makes this behaviour more difficult to change.

The limited “re-socialisation” of the sustainability issue runs parallel to the general withdrawal from radical objectives relative to social equality and justice in favor of the less ambitious objectives of social cohesion, solidarity and inclusion<sup>7</sup>, which are justified by their positive role in sustainable growth<sup>8</sup>. In fact their justification is negative, since it is their lack, which is feared to be an impediment to growth<sup>9</sup>.

This general withdrawal is obviously related to the impact of the 70s crisis and the ensuing economic restructuring through their successful political and ideological handling by the neo-liberal discourse versus the chronic inability of the Left to articulate a feasible new radicalism. Moreover, the limited reintegration of social concern to the sustainability issue is context dependent as its essence is reduced to the confrontation of the social impact of economic restructuring in the post-industrial world and particularly in the post-industrial city. In a rather paradoxical way, the dominant theoretical work on the trends concerning the urban social structure has unintentionally contributed to legitimating this withdrawal. Both the social polarisation thesis<sup>10</sup> and the underclass debate<sup>11</sup> have created powerful metaphors of divided cities and societies that were consequently emancipated from the analysis of their generating mechanisms. This emancipation has contributed in legitimating the treatment of symptoms rather than causes and in putting the stress on the social margin, displacing the attention from the broader mechanisms producing inequality and eventually social margins. This is happening because theory is context dependent in the sense of being relevant to the context from which it has emerged-but not necessarily context confined, since it can be projected and eclectically linked to different realities. The thesis on social polarisation is definitely context dependent, since its rationale emerges from the analysis of structural change in the global city and namely the decline of industrial activities providing jobs in the middle of the social hierarchy with average revenues and their replacement by the development of much more polarised jobs in the service sector (Sassen, 1991). Regardless of its origins, this thesis has created a dominant way of seeing urban society extending much further off the global city context.

Therefore, although sustainability is a context dependent concept, it has been strongly de-contextualised through the aforementioned processes of “de-socialisation” and “re-socialisation” of its content. This de-contextualisation is obviously responsible for its elusive content, which has been however a precondition of its political success.

## **Sustainability as a political project**

Sustainability acquires a more precise content through the specific political and economic projects in which its discourse is incorporated. The content of sustainability is more a stake rather than a given body of ideas, arguments and instructions. Consequently, “strong” or “light” interpretations (Houghton and Hunter, 1994: 20), dominate depending on the power of the social groups and political formations that specify its content through the particular use they make of it.

7. M. Harloe (2001) has extensively commented on this reduction.

8. See Harvey (1996: 144) for a discussion of the difference / contradiction between sustainability and sustainable growth.

9. “... organise access to the benefit of increased productivity and competitiveness in a fair way and reduce social exclusion and improve safety; exclusion blights the lives of those involved and threatens social integration, competitiveness and sustainability of towns and cities” (European Commission, 1998: 8). There is generally an important discount between the inflated discourse on social principles that should characterise sustainable development (social equity, etc.) and the much more reduced practical measures that should implement them.

10. See, for example, Sassen (1991) and Mollenkopf and Castells (1991). This thesis has been criticised on its relevance to the reality of European global cities, such as London and Paris (Hamnett, 1994 and 1996, Preteceille, 1995).

11. For a recent discussion, see Mingione (1996).

Although the content of social sustainability remains rather evasive, its dominant interpretation constitutes a discourse, and a program, which has been developed in compatibility with the profile of the European Social Democracy as well as to that of the bureaucracy of the European Union<sup>12</sup>. The ecological movement has gained political momentum through coalition and merging with social democratic parties that also paved the way for its infiltration to the European bureaucracy. There are several characteristics of this dominant interpretation marking its suitability to the broader European Social Democrat political profile / project:

- First of all, sustainability legitimates public intervention. Sustainability needs planning and, in this sense, it promotes and legitimates public intervention. Legitimation of public intervention has been needed by the Left discourse since the traditional welfare provision approach was effectively discredited by the neo-liberal critique as ineffective and authoritarian. Sustainability can thus figure as an alternative to traditional forms of public intervention legitimation.

- Second, it legitimates and promotes a kind of European development model. Public intervention is legitimated as a means against the perverse environmental and social effects of uncontrolled market mechanisms. Thus it remains in the broad Social Democrat tradition and, at the same time, it becomes “un-American” in not letting the market to do its kind of reintegration of the social margin. Thus it offers a distinctive trait for the European pole of the globalising world, a kind of compensation for its reduced economic competitiveness, political cohesion and military power.

- Third, it is an element that can create new types of socio-political consensus contained in the social democrat political space. Sustainability is often accompanied by an inflated discourse, which is reduced however by the scope of the social objectives to be implemented. This reduction is performed through the perception of social ills as the effects of a particular conjuncture (economic restructuring leading to unemployment through the mismatch of labor demand and supply) and through the exclusive focus on the most acute expression of its impact (social exclusion). The reduction in scope creates a large space for sociopolitical consensus, as reformism usually did, and as catchall parties’ survival requires.

- Fourth, it can be socially and politically mobilizing and it can run against destabilisation that could result from the challenges to traditional and unsustainable forms of governance<sup>13</sup>. Sustainable development demands a participatory attitude. Participation enhances legitimacy and political efficiency, and reduces the social cost of action through the mobilisation of inert socio-political resources, especially among the targeted groups. Promoting the new forms of governance required in times when ‘tax and spend’ models become problematic, legitimate rather than challenge or compromise the power and efficiency of traditional governing parties.

However, sustainability is not a Machiavellian device. Its dominant form is the outcome of the adoption and adaptation of ideas and concepts related to sustainable development by specific social and political forces in more or less specific contexts. This does not imply a definitive appropriation of these ideas and concepts by the specific forces, since the former retain a certain

12. R. Atkinson is stressing the link between the development of policies to combat social exclusion by the European Union—a cornerstone of the dominant perception of social sustainability—and the French Republican ethos of the Delors administration (2000: 1039-40).

13. There is an affinity between governance and sustainability, since the debate on the former (Rhodes, 1997, Pierre, 2000) is in fact predominantly seeking alternatives and transformations in the traditional forms of the society-steering role of the state that became increasingly unsustainable under the pressure of its fiscal crisis.

autonomy and a mobilizing power that can eventually transgress and reshape their current political meanings<sup>14</sup>. Although this creates conditions for a possible further de-contextualisation, it remains that sustainability has originated as a context dependent concept, and retains this context-dependency to a large degree in terms of its implementation as a political project.

## Sustainability in Greece

The central question in this section is the interpretation of the reception of sustainability, and social sustainability in particular, in Greece. I will try to illustrate this point by referring to the difficulties in implementing sustainable development projects for Greek cities (with Athens as the example) and by stressing some substantial contextual socio-economic specificities as well as specificities in terms of political culture.

The discussion on sustainable development has been weakly developed in Greece and only among small groups of environmental activists and academics. But even this low level of awareness has not been endogenous, since most of these groups were related to some international organisation, like Greenpeace, and most of their leading members had international experience in these matters. Today the green movement in Greece is much more institutionalised, with one minister from the ranks of the former activists-who incidentally lost his post in the previous reshuffling-and the Ministry of Public Works formally dealing with the environment and having been re-titled accordingly (Ministry of the Environment, Planning and Public Works). However, it is the highest administrative Court which seems to be following the hard line for environmental protection against a more lenient government policy and a rather indifferent society. Public awareness remains reduced as witnessed by the quasi absence of organised concern about the quality of the urban and rural environment, the limited exposure of subjects like the genetically modified alimentary products, the low mobilisation on themes of consumer health and safety, the comparatively low percentage of land devoted to green agriculture and the rather low demand for its products etc. A certain kind of environmental concern can be detected in the dominant suburban housing model and in the proliferation of second homes, under the form of seeking an environmentally upgraded residential or holiday / recreation area. However, this concern-mainly but not exclusively concerning upper and middle social strata-remains individualistic and contradictory since it is generally implemented through housing patterns detrimental to both the urban and the rural environment.

The area in which the discussion on sustainable development is almost untouched is social sustainability (Getimis, Kafkalas, 2001: 9)<sup>15</sup>. Sensitisation in these matters originates exclusively outside Greek institutions and movements. European programs to combat social exclusion are the main vehicles bringing social sustainability to the fore, but they are perceived more as a chance for increased European funding and/or as an obligation to comply to European models and rules in order to accede to more European funds, rather than as responses to real local prob-

14. The more striking examples of such transgression are found in more or less successful pro-sustainability organisation and practice in contexts where these are least expected; see for example A. Atkinson (2001) on such attempts in Indonesia. Generally, the autonomy and mobilising power of sustainability should be understood as the combination of the socially diverse interpretations of its content with its inherently positive social meaning, in analogy with the way social rationality and social justice are understood as mobilizing by Harvey (1992) in spite of their restricted and restricting dominant interpretation. This means that de-contextualisation is at the core of the ongoing reinterpretation process of the sustainability concept, with the outcome being dependent on both the concept's positive social meaning and on the differential capacity of diverse socio-political forces to promote their interpretations as dominant or at least as powerful ones.

15. A recent collective volume on sustainability and the urban context (Modinos, Efthimiopoulos, 2000) contains some reference to social issues and Modinos discusses ethics and ecology (1997) and nature and society (2001) in ways building an introductory framework for developing a social sustainability concern. On the other hand, the 1997 legislation on the sustainable development of cities and other agglomerations (Law 2508/97) makes only indirect reference to social issues in its introductory clause, indicating the need to upgrade problematic areas by providing adequate social services and infrastructure.

lems. A number of such programs have been clumsily received / implemented as a result. Job re-training and re-orientation programs from the European Social Fund have painstakingly found some alternative uses after a lot of ineffective spending, since the problem of the Greek urban labor market was not that of a mass of jobless industrial workers with unemployable skills. The URBAN initiative (aiming at the regeneration of deprived areas after de-industrialisation) equally met with the problem of difficulty in finding such areas in Greek cities that would present an over-accumulation of all possible social ills. The areas that were finally chosen were deprived, but mostly for different reasons than those implied by the program and their revitalisation will probably not be effective through the dominant kind of “best practices”<sup>16</sup>. The METREX program, focusing on sustainable metropolitan development for a network of a large number of European cities, has induced the Organisation for Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens (public institution responsible for the city’s Master Plan) to seek analyses and data about the city’s social condition in order to be able to cope with the agenda of the program’s sequel focusing on social sustainability, the SocioMETREX.

This mismatch is somehow complicated, since it refers both to contextual differences and to their very broad and often implied analysis and interpretation. Social sustainability efforts aim at confronting problems related to social polarisation and eventually to marginalisation and exclusion. Although the vast majority of European cities cannot pretend to be global cities, social polarisation looks plausible for most West European ones because of the impact of de-industrialisation on their social structure and especially on its lower segments. Polarisation, in this case, is not understood *stricto sensu* as the dual process of increasing numbers in both ends of the social spectrum through the parallel concentration of high-end producer services offering high profile and income jobs and the proliferation of unskilled jobs in consumer and personal services, both replacing the disappearing middle of industrial employment. A lighter and confuse version of the polarisation thesis, more linked to the metaphor of the divided city than to the analysis itself and using elements from the underclass debate, recognises polarisation wherever there is accumulation of problems and entrapment of people in the lower echelons of the social scale. The impact of economic restructuring on the post-industrial city of Western Europe offers some recognizable elements under this broad view (loss of employment and redundancy in the labor market followed by a cohort of problems for the victims and their families), that are perceived as endangering the cohesion of the social fabric and thus as socially unsustainable.

The situation in Athens does not seem to comply with either the model of the global city or with that of the (simply) de-industrialised city. In respect to the former, Athens does not present any significant accumulation of high-end producer services-since it is not one of the global or even regional management centers of the world economy-and subsequently the growth of the upper professional pole is relatively reduced, while the growth of the lower pole is almost uniquely attributable to the inflow of foreign immigrants<sup>17</sup>. In respect to de-industrialisation, Athens has undergone a rather quick phase of industrial development during the post war period that never made of industrial employment the backbone of its occupational profile<sup>18</sup>, since it predominantly contained unskilled jobs held by very recent rural migrants with no working-class

16. Relative failure in this program (Georgantas, 2001) is partly at least due to contextual difference.

17. The important growth of the higher professional categories between 1981 and 1991 was not fuelled by managerial jobs, but mainly from non-salaried jobs in liberal professions (calculations based on 3-digit professional categories by professional status from the 1981 and 1991 censuses). The origin of this type of growth seems to be related to the impact of the rapidly improving education level on the geometry of professional hierarchy rather than to some important structural change of the city’s role in the world or the regional economy. The lower categories have been shrinking during the same period, and presumably presented an important growth during the ‘90s (the social data from the 2001 census are not yet available) due to the important incoming immigration wave, which is of course related to changes in the political and economic situation of the broader Balkan region.

18. Industrial and artisanal employment in Greater Athens has remained rather stable as a percentage of the active population in the post-war period: 30,4% in 1951, 28,8% in 1961, 29,8% in 1971, 27,0% in 1983 (Tsoukalas, 1997: 236) and 23,7% in 1992 (NSSG, 1996: 49).

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tradition, and it started losing out to service employment before it became an established and long reproduced social reality. An equally important characteristic of the Athenian industry was the very small average size of its units as well as their dependence on the local market that have led to a gradual decline rather than to an abrupt crisis<sup>19</sup>. During the 70s and the 80s industrial employment in Athens stagnated rather than slumped<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, the profile of industrial employment (predominantly unskilled or semi-skilled with low job stability and remuneration) has never placed it in the middle but rather at the bottom of the social and the income scale.

Problems at the lower part of the social scale in Athens were, therefore, not due to a destitute work force following de-industrialisation but to the reduced level of general economic development, reflected in the non competitive and steadily shrinking primary sector-fueling internal and external migration-as well as in the belated and limited industrial development using part of the work force recently liberated from the primary sector. In this sense, it was poverty rather than polarisation, marginalisation or any other form of social destitution that mainly characterised any quantitatively significant segment of the Athenian society.

However, poverty can be perceived as destitution and marginalisation if it appears to be permanent for the groups that experience it while the rest of society is progressively distanced. In post-war Athens there were a number of reasons that prevented poverty from appearing inescapable and socially delimited, and therefore reduced the visibility of problems related to social sustainability:

- First, the high social mobility. In the post-war years an important upward mobility trend in the Greek society was produced by the transformation of large numbers of rural migrants to urban homeowners with the feasible aspiration, at least for their offspring, to escape from manual labor and salaried work, unless the latter was in the public sector<sup>21</sup>. The positive and feasible mobility perspective made poverty appear as an interim rather than a permanent situation<sup>22</sup>, while the move from rural areas to the city was experienced-and in fact was-a move towards increased opportunity.

- Second, the exclusion from mobility chances for certain groups was politically organised rather than inflicted by market mechanisms. Following the civil war (1946-49) and for a long period, an important part of the population was restricted from access to employment in the public sector, from having a passport or a driver's license, from obtaining the required papers to put up a business etc. on the grounds of political belief or of belonging to a potentially "dangerous" ethnic minority. This type of authoritarian regulation of mobility chances never led to the victims' permanent exclusion-except for minorities. It led rather to massive derogatory exceptions through the clientelist / populist political system, since the governing parties were unable to do without the electoral support of the politically dangerous and their families, and the latter opted massively for trading their electoral support against increased mobility chances. The major outcome was therefore not the exclusion of the social groups at point, but the loss of legitimacy of the state and the party system, combined with the development of a sense of complicity in the wider society that entered massively in this kind of transaction<sup>23</sup>.

19. This kind of industrial development-small size units primarily turned to and dependent on the burgeoning housing sector during the very rapid post-war urbanisation-had apparently no relation with fordism and, according to Lipietz (1987) can barely qualify as what he has termed peripheral fordism that denotes a lighter form of the fordist model which has been present in other parts of Southern Europe.

20. Between 1971 and 1981 industrial and artisanal employment in Greater Athens had a positive balance of 15.000 jobs and another 14.000 between 1981 and 1991, whereas gains in service employment were of 153.000 and 247.000 jobs respectively (calculation from data in Leontidou, 1986 and NSSG, 1996).

21. Greece presents the highest percentage between the OECD countries for the non-salaried in the active population. The cumulative percentage of the employers and the self-employed in Athens was nearly 30% in 1991 (NSSG, 1996). These numerous independent positions, although not necessarily corresponding to non-manual work, represented an upward move for people with elementary educational skills that would otherwise be confined to lower status salaried jobs.

22. See Mingione (1996: 9-11) for a discussion of old and new forms of poverty and the feeling in the 50s and 60s that poverty was a transitory price / investment for a future development whose positive impact would be socially diffused.

23. This complicity and compromise became generalised with the massive transposition of the Left vote (which reached 28% in 1958) towards the Centre in the early 60s, leading to the formation of a second governmental party, that was able to operate in the clientelist mode from which the Left was excluded due to its very reduced access to state resources.

- Third, the limited development of the welfare state in relation to the role of the family in social reproduction. The post-war development model did not consist of a fordist profile neither on the production nor on the consumption side. Not facing a mass of working class jobs in big and spatially organised units, but rather a multitude of petty employers, self-employed and salaried workers in small units with family ties and resources, and with rural mentality and reflexes, the state opted gradually for a lighter version of welfare provision. This version entailed the mobilisation of family resources in order to circumvent the shortcomings of state provision, the development of quasi entrepreneurial skills and often the use of illegality (in housing production for instance) in order to organise the self-provision of the required services at a lower cost. The state encouraged this public fund saving form of self-regulation in social reproduction by tolerating (and often rewarding) illegality-through the clientelist / populist system-and thus reinforced the derogatory and individualistic aspirations as well as the sense of complicity with a delegitimated state (Maloutas and Defner, 2001).

These factors have attenuated pressures that would lead large social groups to marginalisation and bring poverty and social division to the fore, but their effect is progressively reduced. Athens is actively taking part in the globalising world. Being in the EU and organizing the 2004 Olympic Games reinforce the pressure inflicted on its social structure leading-if not to polarisation in the strict meaning of the term-to more social division and inequality. New, or relatively new, phenomena and mechanisms of that order are:

- First, the important inflow migration of the late 80s and 90s, reversing the 50s and 60s situation when Greeks migrated en masse to the labor markets of Western Europe. This inflow, mainly from neighbouring Balkan countries, is still comparatively low (5% - 6% in the metropolitan region of Athens). It is, however, important since it represents a very rapid change affecting dramatically the homogeneity and balance of the city's socio-cultural structure, especially in the areas where it is highly concentrated<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, this inflow differs substantially from the flows of the early post-war decades to the fordist labor markets of Western Europe, where an organised labor demand instigated the supply while today it is an overflowing supply that eventually instigates new labor demand. The more or less unexpected and unorganised inflow resulted in ex-post initiatives to regularise the immigrants' situation<sup>25</sup> after the accumulation of several hundreds of thousands of illegal and unprotected workers fuelling the lower ranks of employment and income hierarchies as well as the black economy.

- Second, the progressive retreat of the family centered social reproduction model. Family networks acted as substitutes for insufficiencies in state welfare provision, developing a kind of solidarity<sup>26</sup> that represented a safety net for the more vulnerable of their members. The wide diffusion of family networks left few individuals completely unprotected. Progressively, however, family protection has started to wane: household structures are becoming less family invested<sup>27</sup>, family strategies become increasingly defensive (Maloutas, forthcoming), burden on time and money budgets grows under the pressure of an aging population<sup>28</sup>, family solidarity becomes increasingly a socially divided practice and there are growing numbers of people either out of protective family networks or partaking in networks with very few resources.

24. There is an evident unequal spatial distribution, which is not yet thoroughly studied. Nevertheless, in a recent survey (DEPOS-MRC, 1998) the percentage of immigrants in the central area of the city was found to be the double of its average in the whole metropolitan area (reported by Emmanuel in Maloutas et al., 2000: 55-57).

25. Immigration from neighbouring countries, and especially from Albania, started in 1989 and continued through the 90s. The first operation for the regularisation of their status was carried out in 1998, affecting some 375.000 people in the whole country (Kavounides, Hatzaki, 1999). A second and almost equal wave of immigrants has taken part in regularisation procedures in the summer of 2001.

26. See Maloutas (forthcoming) for a critical discussion of the romanticised connotations of family solidarity in the South European context.

27. Single person and other forms of non-family households increase, although the situation is still quite different of the West and North European one (Allen et al., forthcoming).

28. The percentage of people over 64 years old in Greece has increased from 8% in 1961 to 14% in 1991 (NSSG, 1997: 55).

• Third, the increasing urban segregation. The post-war urbanisation of Athens followed a model of rapid and unplanned growth<sup>29</sup> that resulted in a rather mixed urban tissue, primarily in terms of land use and secondarily in terms of social residential patterns (Leontidou, 1990). The latter were largely determined by the housing provision system which initially did not favor segregation (Maloutas, 1993, Maloutas and Karadimitriou, 2001) resulting however in reinforcing the gradient and long established broad division between the more affluent central and eastern part of the city and the working-class part in the western periphery. The transformation of the housing provision system, with the increasing importance of market mechanisms both in production and in access to housing, as well as the growing problems of the urban environment, especially at and around the city center, have initiated new social residential patterns that are increasingly segregated. The change was mainly brought about by a substantial wave of middle-class suburbanisation since the mid 70s that has created socially quite homogeneous suburban areas, has put several overbuilt areas around the centre in a path of quickly declining social status (Maloutas and Karadimitriou, 2001), while the working-class periphery of the city remained stagnating<sup>30</sup>. Two main types of segregated areas were created, as a result of these processes, in degraded areas around the centre and at the outer working-class periphery (Maloutas et al., 2000) with negative effects for the population entrapped and reproduced under the low standards they offer. On the other hand, the important and precipitated growth of the city's infrastructure, related to the preparation for the Olympic Games, is recasting the socio-spatial hierarchy in a context increasingly shaped by market mechanisms against a background of an urban tissue whose social structuration was primarily based on family networks, as well as against a total absence of anti-segregation policies.

The above-mentioned phenomena and processes are added to a number of other problems, inherited from the post-war urban growth model, that are obstructing the city's sustainable development. Such problems include the accumulated lack of infrastructure, especially in transport<sup>31</sup>, that has largely contributed to the overwhelming supremacy of the car leading to traffic / parking problems and air pollution; the overbuilding of most areas around the center that has literally destroyed the much lighter pre-war building stock as well as the urban landscape and replaced it with congested low standard condominium buildings whose divided ownership, combined with the dropping or stagnating property values, render their replacement improbable and their maintenance very difficult; the unplanned expansion outside the city limits that has been severely detrimental to agricultural land and forests; the very limited public space in the city that complicates the effort and rises the cost for constructing the lacking infrastructure and the physical supports for the provision of the insufficiently developed social services etc.

Athens is therefore a city with serious impediments to its socially and environmentally sustainable development. In this sense, even if the concept of sustainability was generated in a different context, there would be no serious obstacle in applying its principles to the Athenian context, provided that symptoms-and their generating mechanisms-were sufficiently analyzed in order to avoid inappropriate measures.

29. In 1961 only 25% of the city's population was born in Athens. Population growth has been very important between 1951 and 1971 (1.150.000 persons) with approximately 35% increase in each decade; during the '70s it has decreased in percentage (19%) but not in absolute numbers (500.000 persons), and has almost stopped in the '80s (1% increase) (Kotzamanis, 1997).

30. The stagnating population trend for most of the working-class periphery appeared in a period when rates of population growth for Athens were substantially reduced, since population increase in working-class areas has always been provoked by the inflow of new population and not from internal redistribution. During the '90s building has taken a new impetus in this part of the city with new condominiums destined to the upwardly mobile part of the local new generation, creating segregation patterns at the micro scale between old and new housing (Maloutas et al., 2002).

31. The impressive amount of new infrastructure under construction in view of the 2004 Olympic Games (peripheral highway, new airport, underground extension, tramway, regional train etc.) is a witness of this accumulated lack in modern infrastructure.

However, a major obstacle in promoting sustainability, and social sustainability in particular, in the Greek context stems from characteristics deeply embedded in the local political culture. Sustainability being a political project, the odds for the city's future depend on the political forces that will embrace such a project and on the social forces that will support it. The moderniser and Europe oriented segments of the two major political parties (the PASOK [socialist] and the New Democracy [conservative]) are favorable to the general concept and to the principles of sustainability. Nevertheless, their sensitivity is limited by traditional populist and clientelist reflexes and practices, that used to guarantee political support to their parties during the post-war period. The main problem, however, does not lie with the sensitivity of the political personnel, but with the limited awareness of sustainability issues and the individualistic approach to social problems that impedes society at large to reflect and act in terms of social (and environmental) concern.

Post-war Athens has seen the formation of a "society of inhabitants" and not one of citizens (Tsoukalas, 1994) following the rapid internal migration of the 50s and 60s. The new inhabitants did not develop the feeling of belonging to the city, neither did they feel that the city belonged to them. They never cut off their link to political networks in their place of origin, since it was through these attachments that they tried to solve problems related to their integration to urban society. The city's political framework was too impersonal for the recreation of practices in the traditional rural-clientelist mode, where the role of families and politicians was mutually reinforced through the exchange of derogatory favors for electoral support. A large part of the Athenian population continues to vote in their native villages (or those of their parents) and the Greater Athens Area continues to be seriously under-represented in the Greek parliament. The subsidiary role of a modern political system, affected by clientelist practice and morals, has not been able to alter the self-centered family interest characterizing the Greek political culture (Pantelidou, 1990)<sup>32</sup>. Following this mentality and its corollary in familist structures of social reproduction, the city has evolved as the outcome of a multitude of uncoordinated individual choices and actions without any broader social concern and coordination: the poor rural immigrants of the 50s and 60s used illegal construction as a way to solve their housing problems in complicity with the state and with the moral excuse of the absence of alternative solutions<sup>33</sup>; the large masses of petty urban landowners used the opportunity of enrichment and improvement of their housing conditions in the 60s and 70s by overbuilding the areas around the city centre following incentives given by the state<sup>34</sup>; the upper and upper-middle social strata chose to escape from the overbuilt and congested areas of the city centre in the 70s and 80s to secure a better living in the suburbs, damaging however progressively large parts of the suburban and peri-urban environment.

Although these choices seem collective, they are not but the aggregation of individual and individualistic options. There has never been a socio-political framework where individual options would be taking in account the wider social interest. On the contrary, since many options were illegal or illegitimate, and for that matter derogatory becoming possible with the complicity of a clientelist state of reduced legitimacy, the dominant mentality was individualism against the wider social interest, since one should secure opportunities before someone else did. A long apprenticeship in antisocial individualism is definitely not a positive asset for the city's sustainable future.

32. Concerning the historical origins of the Greek political culture, see Diamandouros (1983) and concerning some of its important contemporary aspects, see Diamandouros (2000).

33. During this period the population of the western working-class suburbs increased by some 500.000 inhabitants mostly through self-promotion and very often through illegal self-promotion. A large part of the popular small individual housing of the first post-war decades was built without legal authorisation. Leontidou refers to a total of 140.000 houses built in such conditions between 1940 and 1970, and estimates that a total of 570.000 people were housed in that way, a figure equal to 35% of the city's population growth during that period (1990: 149). Previous estimates refer to 320 - 380.000 people (Romanos, 1970) but Leontidou, based on unpublished information from the Ministry of Public Works, claims that these lower estimates are probably due to an underestimation of illegal housing during and immediately after the civil war.

34. The central municipality of the metropolitan area, which was the main recipient of this process of condominium building has witnessed as a result a population increase of 250.000 inhabitants-or 40%-during the '60s (Maloutas and Karadimitriou, 2001).

## **Conclusion**

*The difficulties in implementing social sustainability initiatives in Greek urban areas, and in Athens in particular, are related to the limited visibility of socially unsustainable situations, since the dominant shape of social unsustainability in the post-industrial city of the advanced capitalist countries (divided/dual city, social exclusion) and its interpretation (polarisation thesis, underclass) are not easily recognizable in the Athenian context. This low visibility is due both to certain important local socioeconomic characteristics-and primarily to the relatively belated and reduced industrial development-as well as to the dominant political culture whose individualist/familist character impedes the perception of social problems in terms of social concern and the development of participatory attitudes out of such concern. In spite of their low visibility, social problems increase at least in the sense of more inequality and segregation, and challenging them-even with relatively low expectations-cannot do without their serious analysis and the development of a wider social awareness.*

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