

THE KIVOTOS INITIATIVE: A CASE STUDY



ANTIGONE

Information & Documentation Centre on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non Violence

RAXEN National Focal Point

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Focal Points were requested to provide the EUMC with two studies of cases that “*have exemplary character to understand the situation of minority groups in the country*”. This is the first study conducted by the Greek National Focal Point and presented as a “good practice” example combating racism, discrimination and intolerance.

The study concerns the establishment and operation of the **Youth Centre *Kivotos***, a local volunteer initiative of the Agios Georgios Parish at Akadimia Platonos in Kolonos, Athens.

Like many other volunteer efforts the establishment of the Youth Centre was a spontaneous reaction to local problems by an individual, the priest of the local Parish, Father Antonios Papanikolaou and a small group of people who volunteered to help him. Relying solely on the local community for material support and without any form of funding by national or local authorities this initiative created at the level of the parish the necessary social welfare structures in order to improve social conditions for the children and young people of the area regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, religion or culture.

The particular area of Akadimia Platonos in Kolonos is situated very close to the commercial city centre and has during the past ten years received a large number of internal (Roma and Muslim Turks and Pomaks from Thrace) and foreign migrants, and asylum seekers, who chose the area because of the low cost of accommodation and its proximity to a multitude of small enterprises operating on the fringes of the informal economy and thus offering work opportunities to largely unskilled and mostly undocumented migrant workers.

The rapid change in the social composition of the area especially during the last decade resulted in a rapid deterioration of the social conditions characterised by deprivation and social exclusion in an atmosphere of mistrust, suspicion and prejudice towards and among the different ethnic groups.

The social group affected most adversely by this situation are young people of all ethnic groups whose life chances are dramatically reduced in an environment that provides very little, if any, social support, but ample opportunities for the development of delinquent and deviant life styles.

The absence of public (national or municipal) social support structures in the area is characteristic of the largely underdeveloped and under funded welfare state in Greece.

The rising crime rate, but most importantly the increase in incidents of racial violence and abuse, although not formally recorded due to the absence of relevant monitoring structures and provisions, affect in practice seriously the daily lives and the conditions of existence of all ethnic groups. These are important early warning signs that should be further scrutinised and acted upon by the competent authorities.

In response to these conditions Father Antonios Papanikolaou engaged himself and a small, but dedicated group of volunteers, since his placement at the Parish in 1997 in an effort

to provide the basic welfare and support structures for the young through the establishment of a Youth Centre providing a protected and controlled space where children and young people from all ethnic groups would be able to meet, play, learn and develop their personalities.

Five years later, the Youth Centre caters today successfully for the needs of 350 children and young people providing them with regular meals, health care, psychological support, educational and vocational assistance and guidance, cultural and athletic activities, job placement, but most importantly with the sense of belonging to a community that has forged strong social bonds among all of its members regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity or religion.

It is astounding to witness the zeal and energy of both volunteers and beneficiaries who carry out a wide variety of educational and cultural activities in a space of 70m² that is constantly rearranged to allow a multitude of activities to take place. The main room is transformed in minutes from a dining room to a theatre stage and then to an art workshop and later to a classroom. It is also moving especially to those accustomed to “properly funded” initiatives to see what important use is made of “obsolete” material collected sometimes even from the refuge of more affluent neighbourhoods. The patchwork style of the furniture and decoration of the Youth Centre is a further testimony of the sense of ownership and belonging created by the small community of *Kivotos*.

In our interviews and informal discussions with all the key actors we were impressed by the extent of their commitment to the work done by Youth Centre and the visible effects on all young people and children from the regular participation in the activities of the Centre.

Despite its success, however, *Kivotos*, a prime example of successful civil society activism, cannot replace the necessary regular public welfare structures that must be set in place by national and local authorities in order to deal with the growing problems of deprivation and social exclusion.

Furthermore, such volunteer initiatives should be actively supported and adequately funded as they constitute a fundamental contribution to the struggle against racism and intolerance by creating new multicultural and multiethnic communities of young people to eventually become model communities of tolerant adults.

2. Kivotos: a multi-ethnic Youth Centre

a. Presenting the Parish Youth Centre “Kivotos”

“Kivotos”, is the multi-ethnic Youth Centre of the Agios Georgios Parish of Akadimia Platonos in Kolonos an area adjacent to the city centre of Athens. The Centre was established¹ in this “rough” neighbourhood, where Greeks, foreign migrants, Muslims from Thrace and Roma have come to coexist uneasily for almost a decade in 1997 by parish priest Father Antonios, a 30-year-old Christian Orthodox priest. His aim was to create a “safe haven” for the hundreds of children with different ethnic backgrounds, religions, languages and cultures. He achieved it within a few years with the help of his wife and several volunteers; in Kivotos children find food and shelter, participate in games and sports, get school help from volunteer teachers and receive vocational guidance and some training. *Kivotos*, however, has a wider impact beyond catering to the children’s physical and educational needs by preventing actively and systematically the marginalisation of a vulnerable multi-ethnic social group through the provision of social support and positive spiritual guidance.

b. Reasons for choosing “Kivotos” as a good practice example

We discovered the *Kivotos* initiative during the RAXEN1 mapping exercise. Since then we came to learn more about its strong impact upon the local community and became more interested. The choice of *Kivotos* as a RAXEN case study was not easy for two reasons: Firstly, we hesitated to focus on a Church project, since members of the Orthodox clergy have often been criticised for setting up and using philanthropic and social support structures in order to achieve conversions to Christianity². Secondly, we were apprehensive to start a study that would require extensive fieldwork and therefore a high cost (or a lot of volunteer work), since there is no available documentation or any research material on this project.

However, after careful consideration we decided to propose the *Kivotos* project to the EUMC, not only because of its evident success, but most importantly because it epitomises the adolescence of civil society in Greece, in the field of social support services and structures which are largely still neglected by public authorities. Created solely by the efforts of a visionary young priest, *Kivotos*, embraced by the local community, cajoled by the media and blessed – but not funded – by the Greek Orthodox Church is a prime example of voluntarism and social co-operation fighting deprivation and social exclusion as well as racism and intolerance.

¹ The growth of the Centre was gradual: in 1997 Father Antonios started contacting families and children in need as well as volunteers offering school support and meals to a small number of children. Gradually, as the number of children grew, separate and more facilities were used and more activities were added.

² The Orthodox Church often makes distinctions in its provision of social support on the basis of religion. For example it provides a financial supplement to Christian families in the Thrace Muslim minority region as a “fertility incentive” of approximately €117 monthly for every child beyond the second with the long term goal of changing the demographic composition of the population, but with the short term effect of creating an additional income inequality among the two religious groups.

Our main guide in proposing the project were the EUMC guidelines stating that the case study should focus on:

- ***where one can learn from the analysis and end up with deeper understanding;***

We believe that our analysis of the Youth Centre *Kivotos* provides the reader with an important insight into the structure and function of a unique in Greece volunteer initiative; furthermore the methodology used helps in understanding the motives and attitudes of those involved.

- ***where the situation in the Member State can be characterized;***

The initiative is implemented in an area with similar social and spatial characteristics to others where migrants settle. Therefore the problems of lack of public social support and welfare services, deprivation, social exclusion, criminality and racial harassment described are characteristic for all such areas in the urban centres of Greece, although similar initiatives to *Kivotos* do not exist - to the best of our knowledge - anywhere else.

- ***where strengths and weaknesses can be demonstrated in dealing with ethnic discrimination – violence and in preventing it in its particular cultural – political – social – economic contexts;***

Kivotos was set up with the aim of preventing violence, criminality, deprivation and ethnic discrimination from negatively influencing the lives and future prospects of young people.

- ***where the main actors – players can be identified, the obstacles they face and the assistance they get, and by whom;***

Despite the absence of any other studies or reports of this initiative and the general lack of data we tried to carry out a limited primary research project – in the context of the severe time limitations – using sociological qualitative research tools.

- ***where recommendations can be given on what the actors could do better in fighting racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, on a national, regional or European level***

The example of *Kivotos* can provide policy makers with an important insight into the potential of local volunteer initiatives and guide them on the one hand in supporting them and on the other in setting up or restructuring existing social support and welfare provisions so that they correspond to the constantly changing needs of the vulnerable social groups.

c. Structure and Methodology of the case study

This is the first case study undertaken by the National Focal Points. Therefore we decided to follow in the presentation the EUMC guidelines as closely as possible in order to achieve comparability with the work produced by the other NFPs.

This particular initiative has not been studied or reported before. Therefore, our study relied on primary research involving 47 days of full time fieldwork carried out by one expert (Daphne Mavrommati, PhD candidate and applied linguist with experience in interviewing techniques) working with the help and under the supervision of the NFP Director, Ioannis Dimitrakopoulos, sociologist with experience in anthropological fieldwork and particularly the

methodology of participant observation. The resulting data could not be fully analysed with the rigour that would be expected of a scientific investigation in the context of the present study, as this would require considerably more time and additional bibliographical research.

METHODOLOGY:

After EUMC approval of our proposal to study *Kivotos* as the first RAXEN3 case study (end of July 2002), we were initially faced with the problem of the school summer holidays. Since *Kivotos* works primarily with school children its main activities are suspended during the summer holidays (in Greece June 15 – September 11), when most children are taken in groups of 20-25 to a summerhouse (kindly offered by a volunteer) by the sea for a 10 day holiday. Therefore, although we visited *Kivotos* at its “summer location” the time at our disposal for field work that had to be carried out at the Centre was very limited.

As we already mentioned, the case study relied exclusively on field work based on:

- semi-structured individual and focus group in depth interviews of key players;
- examination of the existing public (state and municipal) social services available to the local community;
- participation in several activities of the Centre as guests.

Individual interviews ranged from 40 – 120 minutes and focus group interviews from 90 – 120 minutes. All interviews were openly taped with the explicit approval of those interviewed; the tapes were then transcribed and analysed. The data collected may be used at a later stage for further analysis.

Seven individual interviews and seven focus group interviews with a total of twenty-six persons were carried out. The questions³ focused on:

- understanding of and attitudes towards the local social conditions,
- attitudes towards public authorities and services,
- attitudes towards *Kivotos*,
- description of involvement in *Kivotos*,
- thoughts and ideas on the aim, philosophy, problems and local impact of *Kivotos*.

Focus group interviews:

- 5 Girls age 8 - 12;
- 4 Boys age 8 -11;
- 3 Adolescents age 15 - 20;
- 2 Volunteer cooks;
- 2 Volunteer teachers;
- Kolonos Police Precinct: Chief, Mr. Papargyris, Dep. Chief Mr. Tsingos, Chief of Security Mr. Nikolaou.
- 4 Parents (Mothers - 2 Greek, 1 Albanian, 1 Kurd)

³ The interviews were semi-structured: a set of key questions constituted the basis for the development of a wider discussion.

Individual interviews:

- Youth Bureau of the Orthodox Church of Greece, Director Father Antonios Kalligerkis;
- Vocational Training Centre (IEKEP), Director Mrs. Penelope Stathakopoulou;
- Neighbour of Kivotos;
- Director of the local Gymnasium (Junior High School), Mr. K. Verykios;
- Director of the Lyceum (Senior High School), Mrs L. Paraskevakou;
- Father Antonios Papanikolaou;
- Stamatia Papanikolaou, wife of Father Antonios.

Additional information was also collected from several open discussions with staff of the local schools, trainers from IEKEP, volunteers, neighbours and other residents of the area, newspaper articles, the official web site of the Orthodox Church of Greece and data already collected by the National Focal Point during its routine data collecting activity.

PROBLEMS:

The fieldwork proved to be a daunting task, especially in view of the time limitations. A number of scheduled interviews with teachers and directors of schools could not be carried out, as they could not allocate time to us due to the enrolment of students during the time of the study (25/08 – 15/09) and after that because of the problems associated with the start of the school year.

It was also very difficult to contact parents since most worked until very late and had very little time to devote to a lengthy interview. Similarly it proved very difficult to arrange for a common meeting for a focus group interview. The available space for the interviews with volunteers and children was not suitable as it was open and the interview often interrupted.

Schools were also very hesitant in releasing data concerning the number of Muslim or foreign students to us without written authorization⁴ from the Ministry of Education. The data referred to in this text concerning the percentage of foreign students in local schools have been given to us by the schools without allowing us access to the school records and can therefore not be substantiated.

The police also could not release specific data on arrests and crime rates without a similar written authorization from the Ministry of Public Order, but they described the situation in qualitative terms.

The analysis relies on systematic participant observation carried out during a period of 45 days which is not sufficient to allow a deeper understanding of the interactive processes, motives, attitudes and social behaviour of the key actors. More time would allow a more rigorous treatment and analysis of both the social situation in the area and the unfolding integration dynamics at the Centre.

⁴ Authorization by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is a legal requirement for research requiring entry to schools, interviews of staff and/or access to school documents or data. Applications for such authorization are examined by a special committee whose decision has to be ratified by the Minister; the process lasts 4-6 months.

PRESENTATION:

The case study is presented in eight chapters:

- [Chapter 1](#) presents a brief executive summary.
- [Chapter 2](#) contains a brief description of *Kivotos* explaining the reasons behind its choice as a good practice example and giving details on the structure and methodology followed in its investigation and presentation.
- [Chapter 3](#) examines in detail the social, political and cultural context.
- [Chapter 4](#) discusses the key actors of *Kivotos* by examining their activities, motives and obstacles and explores the social interaction processes.
- [Chapter 5](#) comments on the impact of the initiative on the local community.
- [Chapter 6](#) examines media reports.
- [Chapter 7](#) presents the final conclusions and recommendations to policy makers.

3. THE CONTEXT: DEMOGRAPHY & SOCIAL SERVICES

Demographic changes affecting the locality

In stark contrast to the data that characterised past decades, the first preliminary results from the 2001 Census, published in May 2002 by the National Statistical Service, presented a demographic picture of Greece strongly affected by immigration⁵:

In Greece the number of recorded non nationals has reached a total of **797,093⁶** (7,3%) of a total population of **10,964,080**.

In the Athens Metropolitan Area the recorded non nationals are **376.732 (10%)** in a total population of **3.761.810**.⁷

These figures should be considered conservative because of the large number of undocumented migrants that various sources estimate to exceed 300,000 at present.

Data from the two migrant registration processes in 1998 and 2001 can also be used as important additional indicators of the number of migrants in Greece. In 1998 **371,641⁸** migrants registered for residence and work permits with the National Manpower and Employment Organization⁹ (OAED). The National Institute of Labour (EIE)¹⁰ estimates that more than **150,000** did not register in 1998 for a variety of reasons, but usually either because they could not secure the necessary documentation or because were prevented by their employers under threat of dismissal. Official data concerning the 2nd registration process (2001) are not yet available, but the Ministry of the Interior¹¹ announced in December 2001 that approximately **351,000** migrants applied for residence and work permits some of whom may have applied unsuccessfully during the earlier period. Thus a total figure of about **900,000** documented¹² and undocumented¹³ migrants roughly corresponds to the findings of the 2001 Census taking into account that many undocumented migrants preferred not to participate in the Census for a variety of reasons, mainly fear of deportation. The migrant population constitutes, then, approximately **8,5% - 9%** of the total population of Greece.

These sudden demographic changes affected particularly poor areas, such as Kolonos, by transforming their demographic composition rapidly. During the 1990s, Kolonos gradually became a migrant “ghetto”, attracting criminality and prostitution. Furthermore, the

⁵ The data do not include ethnic Greek repatriates from the NIS most of whom were granted Greek citizenship through a special rapid procedure. For more information please refer to the other EUMC reports from the Greek NFP, particularly the “Analytical Study on Racial violence”.

⁶ Including refugees and asylum seekers. In relation to economic migrants the number of refugees and asylum seekers is very small. UNHCR data show that since 1980 and until 2001 Greece awarded refugee status to a total of 6,460 persons with a refusal rate of over 90%.

⁷ National Statistical Service, Census 2001 Data (published May 2002), available at [http://www.statistics.gr/new_site/Hellenic/gr_tables/S1100_SAP_1_pinakas1b_i.HTM?code=\(12/05/2002\)](http://www.statistics.gr/new_site/Hellenic/gr_tables/S1100_SAP_1_pinakas1b_i.HTM?code=(12/05/2002))

⁸ “Alien applications for Residence and Work Permits”, by Jenny Kavounidis and Loukia Hatzaki, National Institute of Labour, March 2000, Second revised edition, available in Greek only at http://www.eie.org.gr/Greek/contents_keimena_ergasias2.htm (12/05/2002)

⁹ More information in Greek on the website www.oaed.gr (03/03/2002)

¹⁰ More information in Greek mostly on the website www.eie.org.gr (03/03/2002)

¹¹ The Ministry of the Interior has replaced the Ministry of Labour and the National Manpower and Employment Organization as competent authority according to Law 2910/2001.

¹² approximately 720,000.

¹³ approximately 200,000 – 300,000.

area was also affected by internal migration waves as Muslims from Thrace¹⁴ also settled there during the same period.

These demographic changes affected not only the ethnic and religious composition of the local population, but also its age structure. Migrants are forming families characterized by high fertility in contrast to the Greek population. Although the National Statistical Service cannot provide accurate demographic age distribution data from the 2001 Census yet, local primary school records¹⁵ from the area under consideration showed that more than 50% of students are foreign nationals, predominantly Albanian and Eastern European, while secondary school records¹⁶ reveal a foreign student population in excess of 40%. In addition to these an unidentified, but probably significant number of students are ethnic Greek migrants from Albania, ethnic Greek repatriates from the NIS, Greek Roma and Muslims¹⁷.

The parish of Agios Georgios and the area of Kolonos

The **Kivotos Youth Centre** caters primarily for children and youngsters of the parish of Agios Georgios, Akadimia Platonos situated in the area of Kolonos, the 4th Sector of the Municipality of Athens, that lies very near the city centre as can be seen on the map. A traditional working class residential area it was transformed during the 1970's with the establishment of several light manufacturing and repair SMEs¹⁸. Its proximity and gradual merging with the industrial zone of Athens that led to a growing problem of severe air pollution coupled with the relative abandonment of the area by the local authority led those who could afford it to move in search of better housing conditions.

During the 1990's many among the hundreds of thousands of migrants who came to Athens settled in this area, because of the inexpensive accommodation and its proximity to the industrial zone. The effects of this development can perhaps best be explained in terms of the "concentric zone"¹⁹ model. The new residents of the area, migrants from different ethnic and cultural groups, barely capable of communicating with each other in a common language,

¹⁴ For the situation concerning the autochthonous Muslim minority in Greece please refer to the NFP's contribution to the "EUMC Annual Report 2001", the "Data Collection Report 2001", the "Analytical Study on Racism in Employment" and the "Analytical Study on Racial Violence", EUMC (2002).

¹⁵ Please see footnote 7.

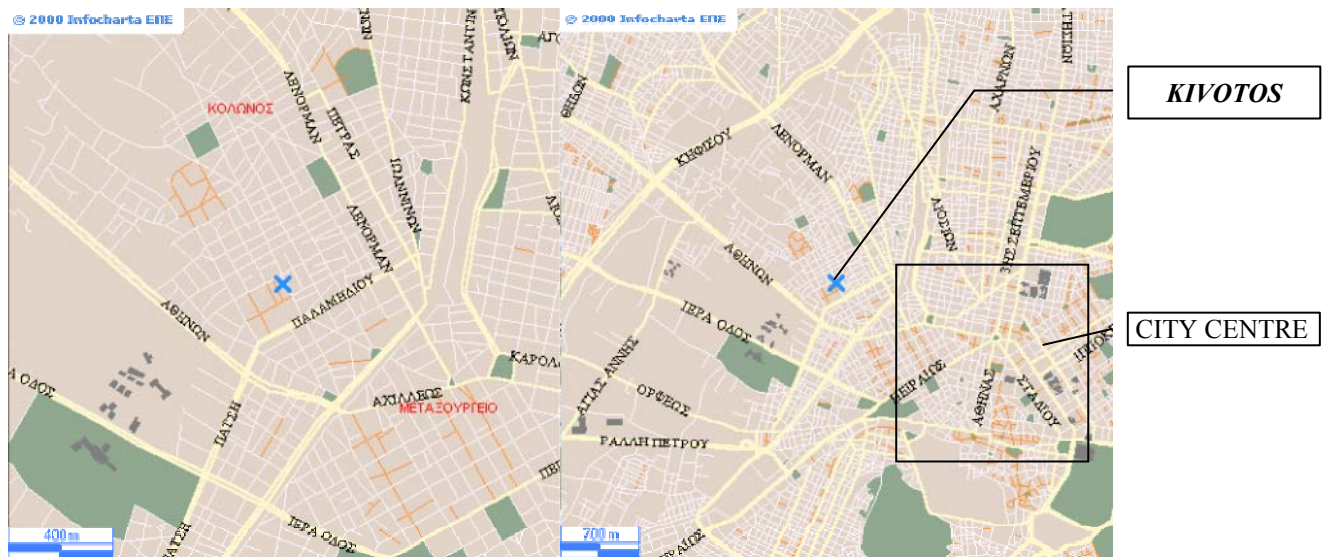
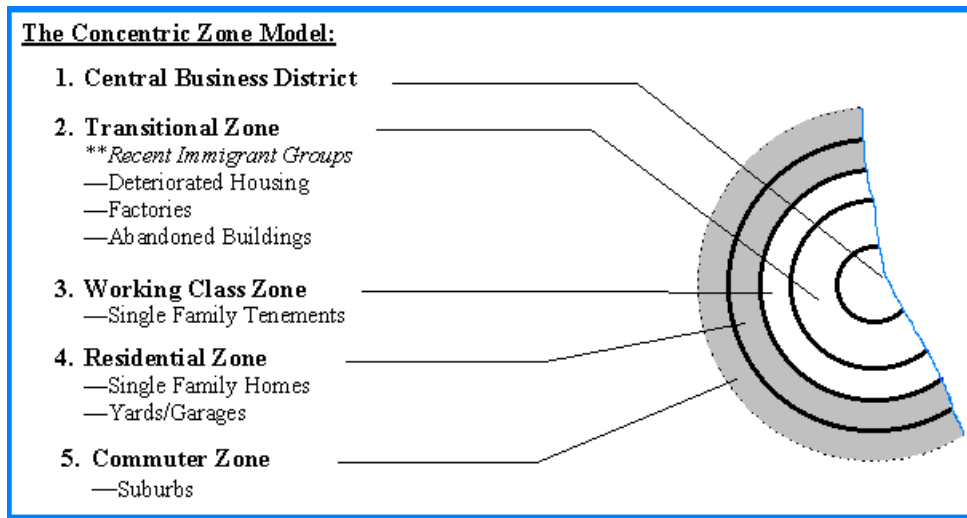
¹⁶ Please see footnote 7.

¹⁷ Data on these groups were not released to us.

¹⁸ Small and Medium sized Enterprises. The majority of enterprises in the area are small family owned and run establishments (auto repair, textile/clothing subcontractors, machine shops, etc).

¹⁹ The "Urban Model" was introduced by E. W. Burgess in 1927, based on his studies on Chicago in order to explain the escalating rate of deviance in specific areas. He saw Chicago as a city in an industrialized country, expanding radically from its centre in a series of concentric zones. He suggested that the expansion and the formation of these concentric zones were created by succession and invasion, as the occupiers of each inner zone, seeking what they saw as more agreeable locations, moved outwards to colonize the next outer zone. From the centre outwards he identified the concentric zones as: 1 the inner Central Business District; 2 a transition zone (Inner City) with residential areas invaded by business and industry from the core, **the run-down dwellings being subdivided and overcrowded and inhabited by poor immigrants, especially ethnic minorities**; 3 a low-income residential zone with second generation immigrant dwellings; 4 a middle-income residential zone with one family dwellings; 5 an outer commuting zone with higher income dwellings in suburban areas and satellite towns. He acknowledged that the general, simplified pattern would be modified, if applied to other cities (e.g. by terrain, routes and other constraints); but he suggested that radial expansion along a broad front, stimulated by invasion and succession, was a dominant process in the shaping of the pattern of a city with far reaching social consequences. (Park, Robert E., Ernest W. Burgess, and R. D. McKenzie. *The City*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 1925).

Greek, could not develop the essential social bonds that indirectly control strife and conflict creating thus, an alienated social environment which constitutes a breeding ground for delinquency and criminal activity. By the mid 1990s the area was characterised by a rising crime rate focused particularly on drug dealing and prostitution that seriously affected, as will be discussed further, children and young people from all ethnic groups, particularly though Roma and young migrants from Albania. The police unable to apply its traditional community policing methods relying on a strong web of local “informants”, since most locals had already moved out of the area, resorted, unsuccessfully, to “military policing”²⁰ methods for which it was ill equipped and understaffed estranging itself from these groups who identified the police as their main persecutor.



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²⁰ “Military policing” is a term used to describe policing actions such as “random stop and search”, car patrols and generally methods which do not involve the local community (community policing).

Social support structures in Greece

The social welfare state is still largely underdeveloped in Greece in comparison to the northern European member states²¹. In a society characterised until recently by the predominance of small tightly knit communities and families relying almost exclusively on their members for social assistance and support there was little space for state intervention. It was only in the 1970s that structural transformations of social institutions, such as the family and local communities, brought about by the modernisation of Greek society began to exert growing pressure upon public authorities which, a decade and more later, started setting up some basic social support structures.

Due to the social and political development of the modern Greek state, Greeks had, and to some degree still have, "...difficulty in accepting the pattern of western individualism characterised by impersonal yet collective social organisation and responsibility. In Greece, individual mobilisation predominates, which obeys and identifies with rules that are constructed within (extended) family solidarity. Commitments of individuals are personal, responsibilities and values relate primarily to solidarity between family members and relatives. Social integration takes place through the family, which in many cases takes on the role of the deficiently functioning welfare state, taking on the activities of an enterprise group and consequently lays down strategic plans for the future of its various members, particularly for the young. Finally, it shapes the social needs and the cultural values of its members."²²

The Greek family functions internally as a cohesive, co-operative group, while competing fiercely with other families in a society dominated by the idea of social mobility. Although many studies seem to agree that this basic family ideology is the dominant cause for the underdevelopment of the welfare state, it may be possible that it is rather its effect. Whatever the case may be, however, since social solidarity "...rarely expresses itself in the public sphere, the development of notions of social responsibility or social solidarity encounter enormous obstacles. Thus, the creation of a sustainable ideological base for expanding the residual welfare state in Greece is weak. In this context, it can be argued that the ideological assumption which characterises welfare arrangements in Greece is that 'the family' operates as the primary provider of welfare support."²³

In the context of the family it is almost exclusively women who provide the necessary social support structures, which undermines their potential to work independently. This view can be supported by examining the Greek female activity rate²⁴. Greece still has one of the

²¹ For detailed comparative information see Bradshaw J., Ditch J., Holmes H., Whiteford P. (1993), "Support for Children: a comparison of arrangements in fifteen countries", London: HMSO, pp. 30 - 36. The research project was undertaken by the Department of Social Policy and Social Work and the Social Policy Research Unit (SPRU) of the University of York. It was funded by the Department of Social Security (UK). Countries studied include all the EU members states and Norway, Australia and the USA.

²² Panagiotopoulou, R. "The notion of voluntarism in modern Greek society and the challenge of the Olympic Games", (National and Capodistrian University of Athens) available at <http://www.blues.uab.es/olympic.studies/volunteers/panagiotopoulou.html> (26/09/2002)

²³ Papadopoulos T.N. (1996) "Family', State and Social Policies for Children in Greece" in Brannen J. and O'Brien M. (eds.) Children and Families: Research and Policy, London: Falmer Press, p.180

²⁴ Female activity rate is calculated as the proportion of women aged 20-59 employed and registered unemployed to the total number of women of this age.

lowest female activity rates in Europe, 41.2% compared with 54.8% which is the average for the European Union²⁵: Therefore “...the inaction of Greek family policy results in reinforcing the role of women as the sole carers of children by nurturing, reproducing and legitimising their dependency on men, a reality observed by several Greek researchers (Stassinopoulou, 1993; Labropoulou, 1990; Maloutas, 1988). Thus, a shift from private to public patriarchy (Walby, 1990: Ch.8) has not yet occurred in Greece. Similar to Ireland (Mahon, 1994), the residual family policy of the Greek welfare state reproduces the structure of private patriarchy.”²⁶

It is not sufficient for public welfare structures²⁷ to exist, they must be accessible to and used by their target groups. This is not the case as far as the Greek Roma and Muslim populations are concerned. Unfortunately there are no data concerning the use of public services by different social groups, neither has any relevant study been carried out. However, our own research and contacts with their organisations indicate that Greek Roma and Muslims prefer, as far as they can, to avoid any contact with public authorities since most of their experience in dealing with them are negative (police, courts, tax authorities, etc). Social welfare agencies have never on their part attempted to engage in information or awareness raising campaigns aimed at these social groups.

Until the summer of 2001, when the new Immigration Law 2910/2001²⁸ was passed the majority of migrants who were unregistered, were not allowed access to any social welfare, housing, health or education services²⁹.

i. Education

Primary education is compulsory and free in Greece lasting six years (6-12 years of age). The Greek educational system is highly centralised: curricula and timetables are determined by the Ministry of Education and text books are printed and distributed gratis. Teachers must follow strictly the detailed curriculum designed for the average Greek student. All primary schools operate from 8:00 to 13:15, Monday to Friday. However, in certain (poor) areas, such as Kolonos, there is a shortage of available classrooms and two schools are required to share the same building operating also in the afternoon from 14:00 to 19:15 – the so-called “second shift” (in some schools, like in the area of Kolonos shortage of classrooms is so acute that there is also a third night shift).

²⁵ EUROSTAT (2002), “Labour Force Survey principal results 2001”, available at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/Public/dashop/print-product/EN?catalogue=Eurostat&product=KS-NK-02-019--N-EN&mode=download> (19/09/2002)

²⁶ Papadopoulos T.N. (1996) “Family', State and Social Policies for Children in Greece” in Brannen J. and O'Brien M. (eds.) Children and Families: Research and Policy, London: Falmer Press, p.181

²⁷ For more details on the latest overview of existing public welfare structures and legislation consult the analysis of the Greek model of social services provided in: Amitsis, G. (2001), “Principles of Organisation and Function of the System of Social Welfare”, Athens: Papazisi Editions

²⁸ Greece, N. 2910/2001 (02/05/2001) amended by Law N. 3013/2002 (10/05/2002)

²⁹ Hospitals have always treated unregistered migrants in violation of the law on humanitarian grounds. Schools have also generally enrolled migrant children, whatever their registration status, again in violation of the law on humanitarian grounds.

Since 1996 the Ministry of Education has taken some steps to cater for the needs of non Greek speaking students (particularly repatriated ethnic Greeks from the NIS and returning expatriates from the USA, Canada, Australia and European countries) by creating special curricula for schools with a majority of such students (intercultural schools). During 2001, 26 such intercultural schools operated in Greece, a number that is obviously totally insufficient to cover the needs of the migrant student population. Furthermore, the Ministry also initiated special language classes, but only a small number of schools have actually implemented them for a variety of reasons linked to the bureaucratic and ineffective logistics of the school system³⁰. Finally, since 2000 the Ministry has initiated a pilot project entitled “all-day schools”; participating schools operate from 7:00 to 16:30 allowing working parents time to bring their children to and collect them from school. Meals are not provided by the school.

Kolonos has no “all-day” schools; Parents are thus required to bring their children at 8:00 and collect them at 13:15. Greek families normally arrange for grandparents or other relatives to send and collect children, but in the case of migrants this is not possible, since their extended family is in their country of origin. Single parent families also face serious difficulties in sending their children to school. Consequently a significant proportion of children sooner or later abandon primary school, since they cannot practically attend them.

The area has no intercultural schools and the existing Greek schools do not operate any special language or other courses for non native speakers.

The situation described above applies also to the Junior High School (Gymnasion) that is also part of compulsory education (6 – 15 years of age).

The General Senior High School (Geniko Lykeion) attended by 15 – 18 year old students is also structured in the same way. The graduation certificate (Apolytirion) awarded after extremely competitive public general examinations entitles the graduate to enter the Greek Higher Education Institutes provided that he has achieved the minimum grades required by the different University Faculties.

Alternatively a student may choose vocational education and attend a vocational High School (TEE) or Institute (IEK). In this case it is not possible to enter the university qualifying examinations.

ii. Health and social welfare

General health and dental care services are provided at primary level free by IKA, the State National Social Security Foundation. The relatively small number of doctors employed by IKA, however, results in extended waiting periods in long queues. Consequently working parents find it often very difficult to bring their children for examinations. At secondary level hospital care is provided free by public hospitals.

Health services are also provided free by NGOs like Medecin Sans Frontier, Medecin de Monde, the Hellenic Red Cross Training Health Centres, located in three areas of Athens –none near Kolonos, however–, offering primary health care services.

³⁰ Schools have no financial autonomy. All expenses from pencils to heating oil and teachers salaries are centrally administered resulting in obvious dysfunctions and problems.

The public school system does not provide children with meals, nor does any other public body, unless it is emergency meals, e.g. for the homeless. Schoolchildren are expected to eat at home after school (13:15), but in many families where both parents work this is not possible; this is also frequently the case with single-parent families. In both cases children are left before or after school with the task of coping with meals on their own. According to Father Antonios and other volunteers at the Centre many children in *Kivotos* face numerous health problems, particularly stomach and dental ailments, due to bad dietary habits and even under- or malnourishment.

Access to the public health care system is provided to a child through the social security of his/ her parent/s. Emergency health care in hospitals is provided regardless of legal status and contributions to the social security system. Schools are legally required to have a nurse or a teacher trained in first aid, to deal with minor health problems, however, in practice we have never come across a school that fulfilled either of these provisions. Regarding psychological health care and support, there is a legal provision for school districts to employ a school psychologist, but again none of the districts that we have contacted had one.

In Kolonos we visited all the schools and the local Direction of Education. None had any of the support personnel prescribed by law. However, the schools informed us that if necessary they can cooperate as they have done in the past with social workers from the Social Welfare Department of the Municipality of Athens.

iii. Training and employment

After the completion of compulsory education at the age of 15 young people may seek employment, continue their general education in the Senior High School with a view to participating in the University entrance examinations or seek further vocational training at various levels either in public or in private education establishments.

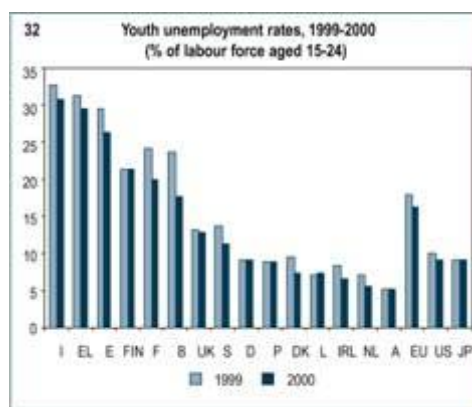
Recent studies from the Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education indicate that the drop out rate of Greek students³¹ is similar to the EU average. However, more careful scrutiny of the available data reveals that, apart from most rural areas, certain urban areas, especially those with a high concentration of migrant students, show a far higher drop out rate indicating that the social background and the social and family environment may be influential in the decision to opt out of the educational system. Failing to receive adequate vocational training will seriously affect the life chances of these young people who are more likely to be unemployed leading to further marginalisation and social exclusion.

Vocational training is offered by the public or private Technical High Schools (TEE) and Institutes of Vocational Training (IEK). Furthermore, the Manpower Organisation (OAED) and a large number of private and municipal Centres for Vocational Training (KEK) run various specific vocational training courses, some targeting specific vulnerable social groups.

³¹ The studies do not distinguish students according to either religion or nationality. In fact there is no study at present of the educational attainment of students belonging to different ethnic and religious groups.

Through the joint efforts of IEKEP, a local KEK which cooperates with *Kivotos*, and OAED, roughly one hundred young people from the Centre *received* training and found jobs.

Unemployment in Greece is relatively high running consistently at around 11% in 2001 and 2002. However, as can be seen in the tables, youth unemployment rates are particularly high and more so for those without vocational or other educational qualifications.



Source: Eurostat. Harmonised series on unemployment

Key employment indicators Greece										
All	1991	1992	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Q1	Q2
1. Total population (000)	9918	9974	10238	10255	10269	10292	10310	*10325	10321	10321
2. Population aged 15-64	6628	6651	6772	6788	6812	6924	6922	*6878	6887	6875
3. Total employment (000)	3659	3696	3820	3805	3792	3921	3929	*3920	3893	3943
4. Population in employment aged 15-64	3538	3570	3702	3732	3753	3841	3830	*3822	3794	3840
5. Employment rate (% pop. aged 15-64)	53.4	53.7	54.7	55	55.1	55.5	55.3	*55.6	55.1	55.9
6. Employment rate (% pop. aged 15-24)	29.1	28.3	26.3	25.3	25.3	28	28.8	*26.8	26.4	26.9
7. Employment rate (% pop. aged 25-54)	66.9	67.6	68.9	69.5	69.7	69.7	69.6	*69.5	69.1	70.2
8. Employment rate (% pop. aged 55-64)	39.7	39.8	41	41.2	41	39	39.1	*39.2	38.9	39
9. FTE employment rate (% pop. aged 15-64)	52.1	53.7	54.2	54.6	54.4	55	54.5	55.3	:	:
10. Self-employed (% total employment)	46.7	46.9	45.8	45.7	45.4	45.1	44.4	*44.0	44.3	43.8
11. Part-time employment (% total employment)	3.9	4.5	4.8	5	4.8	5.6	5.8	*4.3	4.6	4.6
12. Fixed term contracts (% total employment)	6.8	5.1	5.1	5.5	5.6	6.7	6.7	*7.0	6.4	7.4
13. Employment in Services (% total employment)	51.8	52.8	55.9	56	56.9	57.3	57.5	*58.0	57.7	58.3
14. Employment in Industry (% total employment)	26.8	26.3	24.5	24.7	24.2	24.2	23.7	*23.3	23.7	23.4
15. Employment in Agriculture (% total employment)	21.4	20.9	19.6	19.4	18.9	18.5	18.9	*18.7	18.6	18.3
16. Activity rate (% pop. aged 15-64)	58	58.5	60.4	61	61.3	62.6	63	*62.9	62.8	63
17. Total unemployment (000)	276	317	386	411	421	483	515	493	:	491
18. Unemployment rate (% labour force 15+)	7	7.9	9.2	9.6	9.8	10.9	11.6	11.1	:	11.1
19. Youth unemployment rate (% labour force 15-24)	22.9	25.1	28.5	31	30.8	30.1	31.3	29.6	:	29.5
20. Long term unemployment rate (% labour force)	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
21. Youth unemployment ratio (% pop. aged 15-24)	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Male										
1. Total population (000)	4815	4830	4928	4928	4943	5006	4998	*4998	4986	4997
2. Population aged 15-64	3205	3204	3255	3259	3276	3374	3368	*3336	3339	3339

Employment in Europe 2001, Recent Trends and Prospects
 Employment and European Social Fund
European Commission
 Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, Unit EMPL/A.1
 Manuscript completed in July 2001

iv. The police

In areas, such as Kolonos, characterised by high delinquency rates, the police would be expected to function more as a welfare agency, preventing delinquent activities and treating young offenders with a view to reforming rather than seeking to punish them. At the same time the police also has to contain crime by using its repressive mechanism. The successful performance of such a dual role requires a professional and well trained police.

The Greek Police, like most police forces, is a conservative organisation, resistant to change, but also understaffed and under funded for the tasks it is called to perform. The training provided in the Police Academies is focused on the repressive function of the police and there is little concern for its social role.

However, in all our interviews with both high and low ranking police officers in the area we found that they were aware of the shortcomings of their present repressive practices realising that a closer cooperation with the local population, who may be both potential victims and perpetrators of crimes, is needed.

Two important steps in this direction were, according to Police Chief Mr. Papargyris, the employment of a psychologist and the organisation of seminars on discrimination issues. The psychologist employed at the police station was on a short-term contract to be renewed in September 2002. He worked from 07:00 to 15:00 and dealt mostly with family issues and conflicts. However, in respect to the anti-discrimination seminars, the Chief explained that only two officers from his Precinct could participate every year and suggested that this number should be increased along with the frequency of the seminars. Moreover, the Deputy Chief Mr. Tsingos observed that close cooperation with other bodies, such as schools, youth centres and the Church, would be especially welcome, implying that such cooperation did not exist, a fact later confirmed by Father Antonios and the school directors.

v. The Greek Orthodox Church³²

All religions and Christian denominations, to a greater or lesser extent, assist the poor and disadvantaged through a multitude of projects and activities and have thus become key players in the area of social support services.

The tradition of the Orthodox Church does not attribute particular importance to the welfare function of the Church considering spiritual concerns as its primal duty. Apart from a relatively small number of philanthropic and charitable institutions and activities the Orthodox Church did not develop the impressive array of social support structures developed by other denominations. The historical location of the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate in the context of organised empires (Byzantine and Ottoman) with a strong tradition in the provision of state welfare did not provide the social space for more active Church involvement in this area. The Greek Orthodox Church was administratively separated from the Patriarchate in the 19th century, but largely followed its practices and traditions.

The Greek Orthodox Church has recently developed a Youth Bureau dealing primarily with the organisation of Sunday schools, summer camps and various support classes. All of these activities are in principle open to young people of all religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds and according to a recent Church circular, the participation of members of other religions must not be used as a proselytising tool, since “young people must feel free to adopt or reject the religious teaching offered”³³. Although the truth of this statement or the effective possibility of rejecting the faith while using the services provided by its representatives can and should be questioned, it is not within the scope of this case study to do so. The issue is consequently open to further investigation.

In our interview with Father Antonios Kalligerkis, Director of the Church’s Youth Bureau, the Greek Church’s relative under-involvement in social welfare was explained in terms of the nature of the recent transformation of Greek society. According to the Director the Church has only just “opened its eyes in surprise”³⁴ to the changing fabric of Greek

³² For more information on the Greek Orthodox Church consult its website at www.ecclesia.gr

³³ The circular was shown to us, but since it is an internal document we were not allowed to photocopy it without due authorisation.

³⁴ Transcript from the interview.

society, its new multicultural form and the new needs stemming from it. Consequently, it is now in the process of trying to find ways of dealing with this new reality.

A different explanation for the Church's inactivity, however, was offered by Father Antonios who expressed his bitterness not only for the evident lack of support by the Church, but also for the strong opposition by members of the Church to his project. In fact they were so critical of both his project and the target group that "his priesthood was in danger, for opening the Church's doors to non-Orthodox and non-Greek children"³⁵.

Meanwhile, however, the Church has officially acknowledged and approved his work through a symbolic formal visit to the Centre by Archbishop Christodoulos. Accordingly, *Kivotos* received the official blessing of the Church characterised as a "move of love", while Father Antonio's method was characterised by the Archbishop during his visit as a "new pastoral method". It is consequently hoped by Father Antonios that effective social care of the kind offered by *Kivotos*, will, if not copied by other parish priests, at least become accepted as a good practice by all members of the Church.

vi. Civil society and voluntarism

Voluntarism as part of "civil society"³⁶ developed in Greece only during the last two decades as it presupposes an acceptance of common goals and the common implementation of activities; both aspects alien to a society composed of small groupings (small communities or extended families) fiercely competitive towards each other.

During the last two decades structural transformations within Greek society led to the realisation that "civil" activity can legitimately extend beyond the direct involvement in clientelist politics with the ultimate purpose of personal gain. At the same time the obvious inability of the public services to deal practically with the multitude of problems faced by disadvantaged social groups led to the gradual formation of voluntary associations mainly in the form of non governmental organisations. The real growth of NGOs came during the 1990s largely fuelled by the plight of migrants and refugees and in response to the inability and unwillingness of public authorities to act.

According to the VOLMED research undertaken under commission from the EU in the Mediterranean countries in 1996, 60.3% of all volunteer organisations in Greece were founded after 1980. More specifically, during the five year period from 1991-1996, more than a quarter of all the functioning volunteer organisations were created. Today it is estimated that the number of volunteer organisations offering services in Greece reaches approximately 1200. The general tendency is thus towards the strengthening of voluntarism and civil society.

³⁵ Transcript from the interview.

³⁶ Characteristically the term "civil society" can only be translated as "society of citizens", as the word *civil* does not have a corresponding term in Modern Greek.

4. Kivotos through the eyes of key actors

1. The realization of the vision of a young priest

In 1997 Father Antonios, a 25-year-old priest, was given the responsibility of the youth section in the Ag. Georgios Parish of Akadimia Platonos in the area of Kolonos. The task was relatively easy, since it basically entailed little more than running a weekly Sunday school with few if any students attending.

The young priest noticed as he arrived that the parish was near one of the central bus stations of Athens, and also near the central train station. Many migrants arrive and settle, despite the heavy atmospheric pollution, in old –sometimes abandoned or derelict– apartment buildings dating back to the 1960s with no gardens or playgrounds. Many of these buildings house small manufacturing and other enterprises, like machine shops, auto repair, paint shops, warehouses etc..

From the altar to the local square

Father Antonios soon realised that the social conditions in his new neighbourhood were exceptionally bad with very high levels of poverty, unemployment, youth delinquency and an expanding drug trade. In fact, as older locals informed him, Kolonos as a traditional working class area had a long history of poverty and crime and an old culture of drug use. Since the beginning of the century illicit *hashish houses –teke–* could be found here. However, the use of drugs was not widespread and was contained within a non expanding subculture until the 1980s.

The gradual social decomposition of the area led many of the newly arrived young migrants to develop a new drug and delinquency subculture. Criminal activities also became more common among the young and “gangs” appeared stealing everyday objects needed for their survival: clothes, shoes, money. Characteristically, criminal activity is largely carried out within the area and perpetrators frequently also become the victims. In addition, the area now hosts a large number of unofficial³⁷ brothels and several cases of child prostitution were reported: driven by extreme poverty and with the lack of effective social support, children often fall victim to sexual exploitation.

In response to these conditions Father Antonios decided to act moving as he stated “from the altar to the local square”. This particular square, frequently mentioned during all our interviews, surrounds the Agios Georgios church; it is in this square and around it that most illicit activities like drug dealing and prostitution take place. It has thus become a symbol of the delinquency, drug abuse, prostitution, crime, poverty and desolation that characterise the entire neighbourhood. It is the place where “immorality reigns, where God is absent, where the temptations are strong and the power of will weak.”³⁸

³⁷ Prostitution and brothels are legal in Greece and prostitutes are required by law to register with the police and submit to frequent health examinations. Many prostitutes, however, especially trafficked women, do not register.

³⁸ Transcript from the interview.



Father Antonios decided that since it was this square, rather than the church where his flock congregated, he should also join in its social interaction. Through his knowledge of music, basketball, football and table tennis he gradually managed to engage the interest of youngsters without preaching to them. A priest in black robes playing basketball with them and discussing football matches was a novelty which soon became accepted by the young people frequenting the square. Gradually discussions became more intimate and children and young people shared their daily problems worries, expectations and experiences with the young priest.

The priest soon realised soon that a main cause for the frustration of most young people were their bleak future prospects: most had dropped out of school and lacking any vocational or educational qualifications could not find employment and were forced to resort to any including illegal activities in order to earn a living³⁹. Younger schoolchildren on the other hand also frequented the square “hanging out” and learning from other adolescents gradually entering the culture of delinquency: as the school finished early these children had nowhere to go until their parent/s return from work; home work, as is traditionally the case in the Greek educational system, is difficult to complete without adult assistance and in the case of migrants (almost half the student population) language was an additional problem that the school did not address.

Father Antonios became seriously preoccupied about ways in which he could help children with nowhere to go and nothing to do after school, if they had attended school that day⁴⁰; or those children who had dropped out of school, sometimes working, more often doing nothing; children who had already traumatic experiences; children with very limited life chances and no hope for a better future. Although he was advised by other members of the clergy that as a priest his concern is the spiritual well being of his parishioners, he decided that he must be the “bell that would bring his flock back to the Church”⁴¹, and become more active in support of his parishioners needs.

³⁹ Greece provides unemployment benefit for 12 months only to those who have worked for at least 6 months during the period immediately before registering as unemployed. Therefore, young people who have never worked and long term unemployed receive no benefits.

⁴⁰ Absenteeism rates according to school records were very high, even in primary schools.

⁴¹ Transcript from the interview.

From the square to Kivotos

Father Antonios became intent on keeping the young people and especially the children he related to in the square away from trouble. The spatial organisation of social interaction was very important in this respect, as he was trying to control their activities. Gradually he managed to establish a small “designated” area in front of the church entrance that became a playground, but other parishioners complained about the “noisy kids”, so another space had to be found.

Finally he managed to secure a 70m² space used for memorial services and owned by the Church’s Poor Relief Fund. The Fund hesitated to offer the space, for as the priest mentioned “youth does not generate funds, it requires one to give away funds”. In addition to the financial issues other more serious problems had developed, as other priests complained for the young delinquents frequenting the church and frightening old parishioners stressing that many of these youngsters were not even Greek and some not even Christians and thus had no place in Greek Orthodox church.



The fact that an Orthodox priest was involved in active social work was not seen positively. Father Antonios explained to us that social work is seen sometimes suspiciously for in the very texture of Orthodox theology it is spiritual struggle that is important, and that struggle is what the priest must help the faithful with. Concern about temporal affairs is therefore seen as a possible sign of dereliction of duty: Nevertheless Father Antonios was convinced that “...before a child is led to a spiritual struggle to become virtuous it must be healthy, fed, clothed and educated” and concentrated his efforts to creating a safe space for “his” children and youngsters.

Finally the memorial service space was given to him and with a lot of personal hard work in was transformed into a Youth Centre with multi-purpose rooms for children and young people. A table tennis table was installed; chairs and tables donated by locals; books and toys were offered by the inhabitants of the area, computers by a company that was upgrading its system, small desks for studying. A few square meters were turned into a kitchen and electric and gas appliances were offered by other donors. The space is very limited and the use and purpose of the rooms change constantly: they become dining rooms, study rooms, playrooms, sometimes even meeting rooms, then back again to dining rooms, study rooms and so on interminably. This requires discipline and obedience, both acquired with difficulty through a long period of adjusting social interaction patterns both on the part of the priest and his volunteers and the beneficiaries. The pavement outside the Youth Centre becomes part of the complex too, to the annoyance of some neighbours as children sometimes become noisy.

Determining needs and organising activities

Father Antonios realized from the start that the Youth Centre would have to respond to all of its beneficiaries interrelated needs. The minimal resources at his disposal and the absence of funding meant that the project could only be successful, if a large number of dedicated volunteers could be found to operate the multiple activities offered at the Centre.



Experience suggested that a central concern linked to the other problems youngsters faced was education: Dropping out of school meant no employment prospects and a significantly increased possibility of engagement in delinquent and possibly criminal activities with serious consequences for the future; being able to attend school, however, required the provision of basic support in the form meals, health care and parental or adult control of absenteeism; furthermore, the value of schooling had to be

“proved” to the youngsters by the successful vocational guidance and placement in employment of graduates; finally, free time had to be occupied productively by developing and sustaining suitable leisure activities, while an effort had to be made to combat through counselling and guidance any tendencies to engage in criminal or delinquent activities; and finally parents had to be also persuaded not only to consent, but to support the activities of the Centre actively as far as they could.

a. School support classes

Through his discussions both with youngsters and teachers in local schools Father Antonios established that one of the main reason for dropping out of school was the lack of school support; the Greek educational system always relied heavily on school support provided by the family that is expected to both discipline and assist schoolchildren with homework. Most migrant and poor families, however, lacked the time or education to provide such a support and soon students performed so poorly that eventually they were discouraged and discontinued school.

Father Antonios started classes at the Centre by assisting junior-high and senior high school students after school with the subjects he was familiar with, Ancient Greek and History. Later he was joined by a growing number of volunteer teachers assisting primary and secondary school students with a variety of other subjects such as Chemistry, Physics, English, IT, etc.



Today a group of 20 volunteer teachers assists on a daily basis all students aged 6-18 with their homework, thus filling an enormous gap left by public school timetables and parent unavailability. Volunteer teachers prepare in the morning the group of children that goes to school in the afternoon, while in the afternoon, another group of volunteer teachers helps the morning school group with its homework. A different group of volunteer teachers helps the junior and senior high school children with school assignments and prepares them for the competitive university entrance examinations. This intensive study group which has become a model for the others meets in a separate space that has been rented for this purpose. The rent, however, is paid through ad hoc donations, and consequently its use cannot be assured for the future.

b. Extracurricular courses and activities

Extracurricular activities have only recently been formally introduced into Greek schools and very few schools apart from expensive private institutions actually run them.

However, such activities were organised from the start at the Centre as they were considered a crucial pedagogical element. Volunteer teachers are currently running regular piano classes, an art course and a drama course; a drama, a dance group and a choir have also been set up performing both at the Centre and elsewhere on various occasions. From time to time short courses on various other subjects are run depending on the availability of volunteers.

c. Meals and Health Care

One of the immediate concerns of the Centre is the state of the youngsters' health. Medical examinations carried out initially revealed several health problems, especially dental, primarily due to malnutrition. *Kivotos* was thus obliged to take up two more tasks: providing regular meals for children that need it and organising regular medical and dental examinations and treatment. Approximately 80 children are given a full lunch daily, cooked by a volunteer cook, while a smaller number may also have breakfast and/or dinner. Groceries are provided by neighbours, friends and occasionally food companies⁴², but often Father Antonios has to pay himself or ask for extended "charity credit" from local shops. Medical and dental examinations are carried out by a network of volunteer doctors at hospitals or private practices, while other volunteers accompany the children on these medical visits. The NGOs *Medecin de Monde* and *Medicin sans Frontier* also visit occasionally for vaccinations and other medical examinations. Below are photos of the kitchen and dining area.



d. Vocational training and labour market integration

Unemployment is a serious problem in Kolonos: unskilled young people find it increasingly difficult to find a job in an economy increasingly dominated by an advanced service sector demanding relatively high levels of skill. Many such youngsters also have psychological problems, such as low self-esteem and a general sense of futility that affect their employment prospects.

The issue of employability is one of the Centre's main priorities. Father Antonios started a rigorous program of visits to local employers to persuade them to employ those of "his" youngsters that had some vocational training and skills.

⁴² The dairy company FAGE offers 140 bottles of milk per week.



The next step was to contact a number of Vocational Training Centres (KEK) and secure places in their training programmes. Finally, a close working relationship with one of these Centres, “IEKEP”⁴³ was established. Since 1999, 100 young people participated in vocational training programmes co-funded by the Manpower Organisation (OAED) and the EU and found work. During the interview with Mrs Stathakopoulou, director of IEKEP Father Antonios was described as an “enlightened man” and the work at the centre “focused and particularly effective”.

In order to improve the effectiveness of counselling carried out within *Kivotos* Father Antonios and some of the volunteers were trained in job counselling through a LEONARDO project realised by IEKEP.

e. Counselling and psychological support

Dealing with the sense of futility, failure and the lack of motivation felt by many young people in the area is considered by Father Antonios’ as his personal and most important task. From his first contacts with youth in the square it became obvious that deprivation and exclusion was not only affecting young people’s life chances in practical ways, but emotionally as well. He decided therefore to devote a considerable part of his time and effort to provide youngsters with emotional support on a number of levels:

On a personal level he always encourages young people and children to talk to him about their problems. His status as a priest encourages others to talk openly knowing that he will never divulge the content of their conversation with any others.

On a collective level, he encourages them to help one another, in the same way that each one of them was helped individually by him. An especially eloquent example of this can be witnessed when new children come to the centre. The newcomers are always welcomed by the older children, who explain the rules and regulations of the centre and the reasons behind them, and assist them until they adapt to the new environment. The children are also encouraged to help people outside the youth centre. An example of this we experienced at first hand during the flooding in July 2002 in Athens that left many poor people living in basement flats near the river Kifisos homeless. Father Antonios, who had just received a donation of 200 used blankets and sheets from a hotel that was being renovated, committed a group of children to distribute them to the areas homeless. The assignment was a big success both in practical and symbolic terms, since the children felt enormous satisfaction, responsibility and pride in being in a position to offer help instead of accepting it.

The Centre tried to engage the services of volunteer professional counsellors running a project concerning the formation of a “parents’ school”, but , most parents proved unable and/or unwilling to participate after work in a project that required too much effort on their part.

⁴³ For more information <http://www.iekep.gr> (19/09/2002)

f. Sport activities: a valuable tool for developing tolerance and co-operation

Father Antonios had used basketball in his initial efforts to approach young people. Gradually, random playing in the square became more organised and a basketball team was formed, followed by a football and a table tennis team. Participation in sports proved to be a particularly valuable tool for the improvement of self-esteem and the development of a sense of purpose in life. The *Kivotos* teams enhance creativity, motivation and self confidence. Today there are 9 sports teams representing *Kivotos*: a children's team, an adolescents' team and a men's team for each of the three sports. According to the young priest being part of a team and competing in sports tournaments has supported significantly the social integration of youngsters by improving their social behaviour and teaching them to function less individualistically and more as members of a group.

A very important feature of these teams is their multi-cultural, multi-ethnic composition; players with different ethnic backgrounds and religious affiliations form strong, cohesive groups, playing together in the same team as “children of *Kivotos*”; this experience promotes successfully the development of a sense of unity, tolerance and solidarity among them. Below is a photo of Father Antonios (right) in action.



g. Ecumenical catechism: “Agiografia”

A more controversial part of *Kivotos* activities is what is called “*agiografia*” – *icon painting* – that stands for catechism. In the evenings Father Antonios talks about the Orthodox Christian religion, but only to those children that are interested. He explains the beliefs of Orthodox Christianity and answers questions. He recounts the life of the Saints, and explains the Bible. It is also during these talks that the core values of the *Kivotos* community, such as the need to accept and love one another regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and handicap are discussed, sometimes challenged and elaborated upon. All the children expressed great enthusiasm about these gatherings during the interviews. *Agiografia* brings them together and gives them the feeling of belonging to a big family that loves and protects them.

Although, as far as we were able to ascertain no pressure is exercised on the children to participate in these meetings nor to embrace the Orthodox faith, it would be legitimate to fear that *Kivotos* does have a latent, unintended, proselytizing effect: up till today some 100 children have been baptised by Father Antonios, rejecting the religion of their parents. Strangely enough we established that most parents, especially Albanians did not seem to mind their children's conversion perhaps interpreting it also as an essential part of social integration in a predominantly Orthodox society. Religious affiliation on a real or imaginary level becomes an important asset for acceptance by the dominant majority.

Some volunteers openly expressed their desire to see all children embrace the Orthodox faith. However, Father Antonios himself has expressed no such desire or intention, maintaining that the Centre must at all costs retain its strict policy of religious tolerance.

h. Crime: Drug addiction and prostitution

The Centre soon faced the open hostility of certain criminal elements in the area who saw in Father Antonios an open challenge to their authority, especially since he assisted a number of children in escaping drug and prostitution rings. Gradually, with the co-operation of certain locals and the police Father Antonios managed to achieve a status of "immunity" for the Centre, its volunteers and youngsters. However, since this is still a sensitive issue both the police and Father Antonios have requested us to refrain from elaborating further.

i. Combating racism and intolerance

As we have already stated combating racism and intolerance does not constitute a separate activity at the Centre, but is rather embedded within all social interactions. In our interviews we discussed the problem of racism particularly with adolescents. They all recalled past negative experiences of racist incidents, either as victims or as perpetrators, and explained to us why and how their attitudes changed when they joined the Centre. Father Antonios explained to us that there is not much that can be done about racial harassment in the neighbourhood, since the police does not consider it a serious matter, so he has resorted in teaching children and particularly adolescents how use stress management techniques to control their anger and frustration.

A 15 year old Albanian boy described how he is often harassed by Greeks using his nationality as a humiliating adjective. Before coming to *Kivotos* he responded to racial harassment either with resignation or fighting his way out of the humiliation he felt depending on the strength and number of his opponents. Now he has learned to deal with the problem and avoids trouble convinced that it is the person insulting him that has a problem rather than him.

A 16 year old Greek boy admitted to feeling insecure as the number of foreigners increased; he occasionally harassed them by calling them names or bullying them. After joining the Centre he understood his misconceptions by talking to other migrant youngsters and now tries to influence other Greek boys. His approach is to introduce them to some of his

foreign friends and discuss their ethnic and cultural differences, but also their social similarities. In this way the others “don’t have to take my word for it... they can see for themselves that things are not as some racists make them out to be, that they (migrants) came here to steal our jobs and harm us...” Is the approach successful? Not always “but it makes them think, that is the most important thing for me, that it makes them think”.

Father Antonios and the school directors cited in our interviews several cases of racial violence and harassment. These incidents, however, are not recorded since there is no such provision either in school or police procedures and regulations. They all expressed fears that the situation will deteriorate in the future as the social conditions deteriorate and unemployment rises particularly among the young and insisted that the authorities must take active measures both to improve the social conditions and combat racism and discrimination.

j. Disseminating information

To ensure the effective dissemination of all its activities *Kivotos* publishes its own monthly newsletter. The newsletter consists of four A4 pages and is printed in black and white. It contains articles written by volunteers, on subjects of interest to the community: interviews with volunteers, coverage of important events taking place in the area or at the Centre etc.

A journalist helps in editing and publishing of the newsletter. It is then distributed to subscribers and sold for 3 euros. The proceeds from selling the newsletter are negligible. However, the process of writing and publishing the newsletter forms an integral part of the activities of *Kivotos*. Young volunteers are responsible for researching the subjects and interviewing people, composing the pieces and sending them to their outside helper. It is an activity that fills them with pride and boosts their self-esteem. It is also an activity that ties the group together, since everybody’s input is encouraged. In this sense it functions both as an internal and as an external communication tool.

2. Volunteers and donors: becoming part of the vision

Through his sermons and the numerous contacts he systematically developed to promote the case of *Kivotos*, Father Antonios gradually managed to gather around him a large number of people who help in the daily management and operation of the Youth Centre.

Volunteers

Volunteers are those persons who offer their skills free of charge to the Centre. Volunteering, as was mentioned before, is a relatively new activity in Greek society. In one of the focus group interviews two volunteers disagreed on the meaning of the word “volunteer”, confusing it with the word “donor”. The relative novelty of volunteering as a form of actively participating in the day to day organisation of the community, however, entails not only misunderstandings in the use of the term, but also of the significance and consequences of the volunteer’s commitment. As a result *Kivotos* often faces the problem of volunteers

abandoning an activity suddenly and having to replace them or abolish the activity. Such was the case of the art class, which had to be stopped due to the departure of the art teacher who was appointed to a position in the Byzantine Museum.

Most volunteers take up specific tasks: there are volunteer teachers; volunteer cooks; volunteer drivers; volunteer doctors; a volunteer dentist and a volunteer editor for the monthly news bulletin. In addition to the volunteers with specific tasks throughout the year, there are also several ad hoc volunteers who perform a specific task. Such was the volunteer social worker who organised the “parents’ school” project mentioned earlier.

All volunteers are Greeks and some are locals, like the cooks. They are aware of the social conditions prevailing in the area and express their support to the efforts to improve the situation for the younger generation by participating regularly in its activities. In the interviews they described the area as a “slum”; complained of the drug trade and prostitution rings and noted the arrival of migrants as one of the reasons, but not the main one, for the social conditions prevailing in the area.

The motives of the volunteers differ: some stated that they simply wished to be of service to the community; others that they were attracted by the priest’s personal charisma; some were persuaded by their children, who are themselves beneficiaries of *Kivotos*, to volunteer. They obviously support the project and believe firmly in the values of self-help and tolerance. They all stated that they admire and respect Father Antonios and consider him a person of “special quality”.

We investigated the volunteers’ attitudes towards the multicultural and multiethnic aspects of the Youth Centre, and their attitudes towards religion. The two “kick-off” questions of the semi-structured interview were formulated in the following way:

“Does the fact that there are children from different cultural, religious, ethnic and racial backgrounds in the centre attract, repel or leave you indifferent?”

“*Kivotos* is a project for social integration, which is not however undertaken by social workers or psychologists, but by a member of the Orthodox clergy. Is that something that attracts, annoys or leaves you indifferent?”

The answers to these questions were quite similar :

The first question was answered by most volunteers in the same way: they found the multiplicity of cultures and ethnicities attractive; some declared that it was not a problem for them, i.e. the issue was of no concern to them, while one presented a more elaborate explanation for her answer suggesting that tolerance is henceforth a social necessity, since Athens has already become a multicultural and multiethnic city. Another volunteer reminded us of the teachings of the Church, which call for all humans to feel like brothers and sisters. A young woman mentioned her initial surprise when she saw youngsters flirting and making friends cross-culturally, cross-ethnically and cross-racially, adding that she now feels very positive towards this situation.

The second question was also answered by most volunteers in the same way: none was disturbed by the fact that social services were offered by a priest; most were glad to see

a member of the clergy acting positively to help others in practical ways. One volunteer, who very recently became a priest himself, considered *Kivotos* as “the very essence of Christianity”; finally all mentioned with pleasure and admiration that many children were baptised, stressing that this was a choice made “of their own will”. Everyone considered baptism as a positive step to integration through assimilation. This, of course, leaves a number of very significant issues open to further investigation: to what extent is it possible to distinguish between integration achieved through assimilation, even if it is achieved voluntarily, and integration that recognises and respects cultural and religious difference?

Furthermore, is it at all possible for any community to be so tolerant as to accept individuals with widely different cultural values and norms or should the drive to assimilate be considered as an expected “natural” response?

Donors

Donors are those who offer help in the form of objects or funds. It was not possible to interview donors in the time frame allotted, but they were often mentioned in the interviews. Donors are usually approached directly or indirectly by Father Antonios: he called for donations during his sermons and also through the media. He also approached people he knew had something to offer, such as local shopkeepers – particularly the local butcher. The Centre naturally prefers donations in cash, but these are rare.

As a consequence, a large part of the Centre’s needs are covered through donations in kind. Foodstuffs such as rice, legumes, tinned meat and fish, are brought in by neighbours. Meat is occasionally offered by the local butcher. Milk is offered by a dairy factory. In September 2002 Father Antonios petitioned the Municipality for 100 daily portions of food from the Municipal Homeless Foundation, but he has as yet (30/09/2002) received no answer.

Donors also bring in clothes. Clothes are categorised by the children themselves and stored in cupboards. They are distributed according to each child’s needs when such needs arise. Clothing and shoes are also distributed to other needy people. Kurd asylum seekers in the neighbourhood had been given clothes by the children themselves.

The entire furniture of the Centre consists of donations: chairs, tables, desks, computers, bookcases, books and toys, electric appliances, etc. In mid-September 2002 a local auto-repair shop in a most impressive move repaired and donated a passenger van.

However, the most important, though not yet realised, donation was the fundraising made by the Greek Red Cross through a morning TV show in order to buy for *Kivotos* a large old building, where it could move its activities and additionally create an emergency youth hostel. The money was successfully raised and the house was bought. However, by September 2002 it had not yet been given to the Centre after claims by the Church Youth Bureau that ownership of the building should be transferred to them rather than the Centre. The Red Cross refused to do so and the issue remains as yet unresolved.

3. Beneficiaries: Children and parents in need of assistance and vision

Children

Apart from the first small group that joined Father Antonios since the beginning of *Kivotos* the others joined the Centre in a variety of ways; some were brought in by friends; others came with their brothers and sisters, who worked as volunteers or were beneficiaries of its services; some were contacted by volunteers who happened to know of their situation; others came through the Sunday School.

For all children and youngsters though, *Kivotos*, has become an integral part of their daily lives and Father Antonios has gradually become a respected father figure, representing or substituting in many cases, the father that either does not exist or is not always there for them.

There are about 350 children participating at any given moment in the activities of *Kivotos*. Exact figures are not available since no one bothers to actually record or register the children and youngsters. However, during the interviews we asked all the volunteers about the number of participating children and the figures they gave us -without consulting each other- were similar. About 60 of the children are from Albania, 30 are ethnic Greeks from the NIS, 15 from Kurdistan, 12 from Iraq, 2 from Bulgaria, 7 from Rumania, 4 are Roma (we believe there are more Roma who do not wish to disclose it) and 5 are ethnic Turks from Northern Greece (Thrace). The focus groups of boys and girls aged 8-12 and adolescents aged 15 to 20 revealed that most foreign children and youngsters had lived in Greece for at least five years.

The language spoken mostly at the Centre is Greek, but we frequently heard children speak Albanian, Russian and Romani. For the few children who do not speak Greek when they enter the Centre, language courses are offered by volunteer teachers.

During one of our visits to the Centre we saw one Kurdish boy who had just arrived and did not speak Greek. He was brought in by other Greek children who had seen him drifting in the streets. Despite using an awkward "sign language" to request clothes for his mother the other children responded at once and with a warmth that astounded us. We were assured by the priest and other volunteers that the other children would take care of him and soon he would be able to communicate with ease.

All the children of *Kivotos* attend school. The priest is in constant touch with the school authorities and is immediately notified in cases of truancy. The school directors confirmed that the children from the Centre have shown a marked improvement both in their educational performance and their social behaviour.

A small number of children who have dropped out of school are strongly encouraged to go back. Encouragement takes the form of both psychological and practical support:

Psychological support is usually offered by Father Antonios and focuses on efforts to improve the child's self-esteem. In most cases children and youngsters, who drop out of school after failing to keep up academically with the rest of their class, are disillusioned by the

school and angry with teachers. Most dropouts will eventually join gangs to substitute for their school's rejection. Gang membership is strictly forbidden to anyone who participates in the activities of the Centre.

Practical support consists in contacting those people who can help by giving the child a second chance, such as teachers and school directors. Indeed, both school directors interviewed stressed the importance of the close working relationship between the Centre and their schools, which results in regular attendance and marked improvement in academic performance.

Children spend most of their free time at the Centre. Primary school pupils come here after school (or before, if they belong to the afternoon school group) to eat lunch and study with volunteer teachers. They finish at five in the afternoon and then they will either go home for a couple of hours and then come back again for a while before retiring to bed, or they will stay on until parent/s come looking for them. Secondary school children have evening classes at the Centre starting at around 6 pm. They will additionally spend time participating in sports activities, taking part in the "*agiografiko*" gathering, or simply help around.

Questioned about their activities before joining the Centre all children said that they spent most of their time in the public square; younger children playing in the municipal playground situated in the square and older children just hanging out.

The "square" seems to have a special symbolic meaning to the children representing all that is defined as "bad" by the Centre's small community: delinquent or criminal behaviour, racial bigotry, drug abuse, prostitution. *Kivotos* on the other hand has come to represent all that is "good": solidarity, compassion, understanding, generosity, tolerance.

These values were linked to Christianity, especially during the sessions of "*agiografico*". Younger children did not comment on these values and seemed to take them for granted. Adolescents on the other hand were very verbal on the subject of values and religion. One 15 year old Albanian boy who had been baptised Christian against the will of his parents said that "the most important thing he (Father Antonios) told us was that here (in *Kivotos*) we would discover ourselves". A 20 year old Greek said that Father Antonios "showed them a different way of living and thinking".

Parent/s

The interviews created the impression that many of the neighbourhood's parents showed neglect for their children ranging from lack of school support to criminal negligence in the case of the little migrant boy who arrived at the centre with a serious skin disease. His mother had not taken him to the hospital and he was escorted there by volunteers from the Centre. Largely, however, the neglect is not intentional as most parents had to work long hours and were frequently away from home for most of the day.

In our interviews with the children we tried to establish the quality of the relationship with their parents: almost half of the children interviewed belonged to large families with more than four children; parents, especially migrants, work on average 12 hours per day and

commute for an additional hour or two; therefore, most see their parents only briefly in the evening while watching TV or eating.

All parents thought very highly of the Centre and considered the work done as crucially important for their children's future. Additionally they commented favourably on the climate of solidarity and tolerance noting that it seems to have had an impact upon the social behaviour of the children within the family. However, one Muslim parent was reportedly irritated by the possibility that his child may be converted to Christianity, although he still wanted him to attend the Centre valuing its educational contribution.

4. Relations with the Greek Orthodox Church and the neighbourhood

As an organisation providing social support services to the children and young people of Kolonos, *Kivotos* is part of the local community affecting it and in turn affected by it. All its key actors interact daily with the rest of the community trying to retain good relationships and influence others positively. On the other hand the Centre belongs to the Church and is run by a member of the clergy. Therefore, it is also imperative to retain good relationships with the Church and create a positive image of the Centre according to its expectations.

a. Relations with the Greek Orthodox Church

Initially the work of Father Antonios was met with suspicion and resistance both by lay members of his parish and other priests. As we mentioned earlier the Eastern Orthodox Church does not have a history of social involvement and such activities are considered at best an obstacle to the spiritual function of a priest and at worst a heretical imitation of Protestantism.

In fact the very idea of a Parish Youth Centre was in itself a new concept for the Church and its operation had to be approved by the Archbishop of the Greek Church himself. Father Antonios met with several problems in his relationship with his superiors before the Archbishop Christodoulos himself, elected in 1998 and known for his interest in young people visited *Kivotos*. His description of *Kivotos* as a "movement of love" and Father Antonios' activity as "a new pastoral method" were publicised by the media. The Archbishop's approval of the activity seems to have provided some shelter from attacks from within the Church, although obstacles of that nature have not completely ceased.

b. Relations with the neighbourhood

Our interviews and informal discussions with many neighbours paint a rather bleak picture: Many of those interviewed resented the Centre for a variety of reasons, but mostly because it collected "foreigners" and noisy, dangerous children: "The priest has no business renting this place and collecting all these foreigners and hooligans... they are dangerous and the police should deal with them... the priest should be in his church..."

Father Antonios recalls a number of occasions when he had to argue with neighbours and locals in support of his project: "...Albanian children would walk by and they would hear

people shouting and cursing me that I have gathered here the Albanians, the blacks, without ever seeing that now these children are role models in comparison to the Greek children outside who have a family, who do not have to struggle...” One of the adolescents at the Centre told us: “I don’t think the problem is that there are Albanians here, it’s just that neighbours don’t understand, and because they have heard so much about Albanians, Iraqis, they consider them hooligans, they have considered us bums in the past, even people who we never expected to think that way...”

Some of the neighbours interviewed on the other hand were enthusiastic about the project: “*Kivotos* is very good, very good for the children here. Since the priests can help... the whole business is around money, if there is no money nothing can be done. The Church with its money can do a lot of good...”, and “...They may make some noise, but they are protected here... from problems and they also get a plate of food. Some of them don’t even have a plate of food”.

It is beyond the scope of this study to present an analysis of the attitudes of the local community towards migrants and different ethnic or religious groups. However, our experience during fieldwork, allowed us to establish that the level of intolerance in the particular neighbourhood was quite high which explains the increased number of racist harassment and bullying incidents reported to us by several persons during the interviews.

5. Commenting on the impact of *Kivotos*

The *Kivotos* volunteer initiative combines a number of interesting features:

- Its **manifest function** is the support of children in need⁴⁴: by assisting them with their school work and thus ensuring that they will not drop out; by enhancing their learning potential; by providing them with English language and computer skills; by creating a positive emotional and learning environment; and by engaging them in various cultural and sports activities.
- Its **latent function** is the social integration of children belonging to disadvantaged social groups, particularly from the migrant, Roma and Muslim communities resident in the area, achieved largely through the creation of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural environment that opposes racism, prejudice and intolerance. In Father Antonio's words "...we see only children in need of assistance; their religion, colour or ethnic descent are not issues that concern us"⁴⁵. Thus, social integration and opposition to racism and intolerance, instead of being the explicit aim, become the context of a variety of activities and are in this sense "naturalised" as children learn to live in a social environment where their cultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic "difference" is both taken for granted and accepted as "natural".
- It is a **rare example of voluntary action** by civil society responding to needs that are not provided for by public (state or municipal) services⁴⁶. In this way its integrative effect is multiplied as the local community participates through volunteers and donors in the Centre's activities.
- It has achieved a **wide dissemination** of its activities through media coverage resulting not from any conscious efforts, but simply from its success.

Finally, we should add that the project is a tempting mix of practical solutions to real everyday problems, awareness-raising in issues of discrimination, and spiritual explorations on the basis of the most tolerant, ecumenical interpretation of Christianity.

It is therefore difficult to evaluate objectively the impact and effects of this initiative because on the one hand it is unique and therefore not comparable to any other such project in Greece and on the other hand there are very few data concerning its operation. Nevertheless, we will briefly attempt to comment on the success and impact of the *Kivotos* initiative, mainly on the basis of the interviews, by reference to its main activities:

a. Education

Regarding education there was, during the interviews with the various actors, complete agreement as to the beneficial impact of the Centre. Both school directors and teachers stated that the Centre helped students improve academic performance significantly.

⁴⁴ Due to family or any other problem.

⁴⁵ A number of problems liable to stem from this approach will be examined later.

⁴⁶ The deficiencies and dysfunctions of the public social services will be examined in detail later.

None of the children and youngsters participating in *Kivotos* dropped out of school and there has been a marked increase in the number of students opting to continue general education aiming to participate in the university entrance examinations. In addition the extracurricular activities enrich further the educational support provided by the Centre.

b. Vocational training and employment

The director of IEKEP, the Vocational Training Centre cooperated very successfully with the Centre in various projects of vocational training and labour market integration. Through the personal efforts of Father Antonios all of the Centre's students who received vocational training (more than one hundred until now) are employed. A particularly good example of success is a social enterprise, the ethnic restaurant "*Poli Polis*", established with the help of IEKEP and the Manpower Organisation as a pilot project in young people's entrepreneurship. The restaurant is successfully run by 6 migrant and Greek youngsters from *Kivotos*. We also spoke informally to some other employers of the Centre's former students who commented favourably on their behaviour and work performance.

c. Food and Health care

Parents, teachers and volunteer doctors praised the difficult task to provide meals for the children. Although the cooking facilities are cramped and ill-equipped for the number of children they cater for, all the children who need it may have meals –breakfast, lunch or dinner, although most only had lunch. The improved diet has also had beneficial effects upon the children's health. Volunteer doctors and parents also commented favourably upon the practice of arranging regular visits to hospitals and the dental care clinic.

d. Shelter from crime

The police and teachers noted that one of the significant effects of the Centre was the reduction in juvenile delinquency as many youngsters participating in the Centre's activities changed their social behaviour. The police also feels that the reduction in the number of idle youngsters frequenting the squares has also led to a reduction in the general crime rate, although this is difficult to substantiate quantitatively as crime records refer to the entire area covered by the police precinct that is far greater than the neighbourhood of Akadimia Platonos where the Centre is situated.

The police also commented favourably on what they described as the integration effect of the Centre as they consider that the incidents of racial violence will be reduced as migrants become more fully integrated into Greek society.

e. Psychological Support

In the context of the specific neighbourhood it could be said that the most important service provided by *Kivotos* is the psychological support that empowers youngsters to fight successfully to overcome their problems. Both for younger children and adolescents the

psychological support and guidance offered by Father Antonios himself is the necessary precondition for participating in other activities especially school or vocational training. For non Greeks psychological support is essential also because it helps them overcome the traumas created by racial discrimination and harassment.

f. Combatting racism, intolerance and discrimination

All those interviewed commented positively on the contribution of the Centre in the improvement of ethnic relations and the creation of an environment of mutual understanding and solidarity among the different ethnic and religious groups among the participating youngsters.

Our impression is, however, that this impact does not extend much further beyond the community of the Centre itself. Father Antonios agreed suggesting that while it would certainly be positive to involve the local community more in awareness raising on issues of racism, he also feared that a direct “didactic” approach could be met with suspicion and possibly even hostility by some and thus influence the work of the Centre as a whole. Furthermore, without additional support the human and material resources of the Centre are already stressed to the limit and do not allow the “luxury” of additional activities for the benefit of the larger community. Therefore, as things are he prefers issues of anti-racism, anti-discrimination and tolerance to be disseminated indirectly through the actions and activities of *Kivotos* preferring a “teaching by example” rather than a more direct approach.

Our investigation showed that this may well be a good strategy to follow in the context of both the resources available and the specific target group addressed⁴⁷, as it builds upon claims to equality and tolerance that are already legitimated in people’s conscience though the teachings of Christianity as it presented and preached by Father Antonios.

⁴⁷ Working class relatively low educated Greeks.

6. Kivotos in the Media

Publicity is very important for all volunteer initiatives, as it increases the flow of donations and attracts more volunteers, but most importantly because it promotes its activities and disseminates its ideas to the wider public.

The media focused on Kivotos during and after the Archbishop's visit as it is strange, and therefore newsworthy, for a priest to be active in social welfare particularly when he leads an unfunded volunteer effort addressing different ethnic and religious groups. For a few days newspapers and TV covered the work of the Centre generating interest which resulted in an increase in donations (in kind) and voluntary work.

a. Newspapers

Several newspapers reported on the *Kivotos* initiative. The articles focus on the personality of Father Antonios praising the effort to care for "children from around the world". The multicultural and multiethnic character of the initiative is always highlighted and presented as one of the most important aspects of the Centre. All articles note that financial difficulties are the centre's main obstacle, and call on their readers to contribute in money, kind or work. Some of the articles were also critical of the lack of public welfare facilities.

b. Television

Kivotos was presented in the evening news (3' – 5' reports) by all major networks during the Archbishop's visit and when some Muslim children were baptised. After the Archbishop's visit at least five special reports on Kivotos of 30' – 45' duration were broadcast in all national networks. They all followed a similar format with a discussion between the presenter and Father Antonios interrupted by short films of the Centre and its activities. Some children and volunteers are shortly interviewed and the Centre's choir sings a few songs.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION: The state of affairs

It is during the last decade that Greece has seriously begun the formation of a welfare state. Public funds for the social protection sector as a whole have been growing from 1993 onwards at an increasing rate. A recent report⁴⁸ indicates that yearly change rates climbed from -1,9% and -1,8% in 1991 and 1992, to 2,2% in 1993, 4,1% in 1995 and 7,2% in 1998. Social protection expenditure was in 1998 24,3% of GNP compared with 28,7% for the European Union as a whole and 21,9% for the cohesion countries. However, the largest part of these funds are directed to income benefits rather than personal services and, of course, in absolute terms social protection expenditure is substantially lower compared with the rest of the European Union.

With respect to resources at the level of provision of basic social support services, in spite of overall increases in funding for social protection, the same report found that “the services examined were found to be run on a shoestring with respect to staff numbers and pay levels, whilst conditions of employment were very poor...”, while specifically services for the young unemployed “the lack of prior experience and the absence of a pool of professionals in the labour market with the necessary skills combined with lack of training for those employed in the new services, affects adversely quality... Skills and professionalisation are not important only for staff commitment and morale; they are also important for other key facets of service provision such as integration and user empowerment.” It was also found that welfare service integration was “very difficult given the impersonal and bureaucratic character of most public services in Greece.” Furthermore, service evaluation was found to be virtually absent representing the most problematic issue identified, since “in Greece there is not as yet a tradition of programme and policy evaluation and no strong professional standards in social public service provision.

Voluntarism constitutes an important dimension of civil society. In Greece social voluntarism⁴⁹ developed in the last decade, because of the growing social needs and the inability of the state to provide them, replacing philanthropy by unselfish solidarity. Genuine voluntarism then constitutes a form of civil participation and social solidarity on behalf of sensitized citizens. It is a dynamic process that actively promotes social interaction and communication as well as participation and produces sustainable networks of social support.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Our study indicates that there is an urgent need for the improvement of public – state and local authority – social welfare provisions, institutions and services. Furthermore there is an equally urgent need to support practically, politically and morally activities of voluntary

⁴⁸ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, (2000) Report by Varelidis N., Prisma Consultants, Athens, “Social Public Services”, available at <http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/files/EF0096EN.pdf> (29/09/2002), p.1

⁴⁹ Providing social support services to vulnerable groups.

organisations and local communities that combat racism and discrimination and provide social support.

Therefore we believe that a combined action on these two levels will effectively both improve the social situation of vulnerable social groups and combat racism, discrimination and intolerance.

- **The Ministry of Health and Welfare** (competent state authority for social welfare) in co-operation with local authorities should establish at the level of the municipality “Social Care and Support” centres staffed with the necessary professional personnel (counselling psychologist/s, social worker/s, qualified nurse/s). Furthermore, these Centres in co-operation with local schools should record all cases of families suffering from deprivation and social exclusion and monitor their children’s school attendance and academic progress.
- **The Ministry of Education** (competent state authority for general and technical education, and religious affairs) in co-operation with local authorities should prioritize the construction of adequate schooling facilities in order to eliminate the schools operating “two” or “three” shifts and extend the system of “all day” school especially in deprived areas. Furthermore, it should create the necessary infrastructure in “all day” schools for the provision of meals. In addition, it should increase the number of “intercultural” schools and improve their effectiveness by reforming the syllabus, hiring teachers who can speak the languages of migrant students and providing additional incentives for students from vulnerable social groups who continue beyond the level of compulsory education. Finally, it should fill all vacancies of counselling psychologists at the local Education Directorates.
- **The Ministry of Labour and Social Securities** (competent state authority for vocational education) in co-operation with the Manpower Organisation (OAED), local authorities and private Centres for Vocational Education should plan and implement on a large scale vocational training and counselling programmes catering specifically for the needs of vulnerable social groups.
- **The Ministry of the Interior** in co-operation with local authorities should establish a system of regular and supervised funding of voluntary organisations with a proven track record in providing social support structures that either supplement existing public services or make up for their absence.
- **The Greek Police** should develop in deprived areas with large numbers of neglected children and adolescents special sections dealing specifically with these groups and staffed with trained personnel. Furthermore, in co-operation with schools it should initiate “familiarisation programmes” aimed at improving interaction and communication between the police and the local community especially the young. Finally, it should develop plans for community policing and avoid as far as possible aggressive military policing in deprived areas.

“In this way voluntary organisations and foundations continue, as they have always done, not just to provide the seed bed or "gene pool" from which future social and other policies may eventually grow but also the political, social and intellectual climate in which change comes to be seen as desirable on a wider scale.⁵⁰



⁵⁰ “COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION on PROMOTING THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS IN EUROPE” available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/library/lib-social_economy/orgfd_en.pdf (29/09/2002)