

A Story in Memory of Panayis Psomopoulos

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Abstract

The purpose of this previously unpublished story is to present a personal experience of working with Panayis Psomopoulos, an acclaimed urban and regional planner in Greece who was also well-known worldwide. While working at Doxiadis Associates in the research team for the Regional Development Plan of Greece in the late 1970's and early 1980's. This story qualifies some judgments made at the time by Panayis in relation to the development of tourism in Greece, in light of the actual situation in the sector being experienced 42 years later.

Introduction

I was employed at Doxiadis Associates in July 1978, immediately after my return to Greece having completed my graduate studies, receiving an MSc degree in Transportation Planning (1976) and an MBA with specialisation in Transport Economics (1978), both from the University of California in Berkeley. My original degree had been in Civil Engineering from the National Technical University of Athens (1970-1975).

The projects I was involved in were in Greece and abroad. Among them, by far the most important project was the Regional Development Plan of Greece which was assigned to Doxiadis Associates before I had arrived at the company. It was completed in 1981 and was approved in July the following year. The final deliverable consisted of 8 volumes that were delivered officially in 200 copies, the last of which were submitted in June 1983.

In this article, I present a personal experience that has not been previously published in relation to the role of Panayis Psomopoulos as Project Manager and Urban and Regional Planner when this important project for Greece was being conducted.

Implementation of the Regional Development Plan of Greece and my experience working with Panayis Psomopoulos

The project was being implemented by a large group of specialised planners, engineers, economists, environmentalists, agricultural and industry specialists among others. It was under the management and supervision of Panayis Psomopoulos, an acknowledged regional and urban planner who was ranked in the company second only to Constantinos A. Doxiadis, the founder of the company. I was included in the team of experts as junior transport planner in 1978, and I still remember how we used to work as a team. Panayis was an unconventional planner who needed well justified arguments and realistic planning methods rather than a “wishful thinking” approach. For the development of a country like Greece, which, in the 1970's was considered a country under development, such an approach was necessary. The team was set-up as a surrogate for the

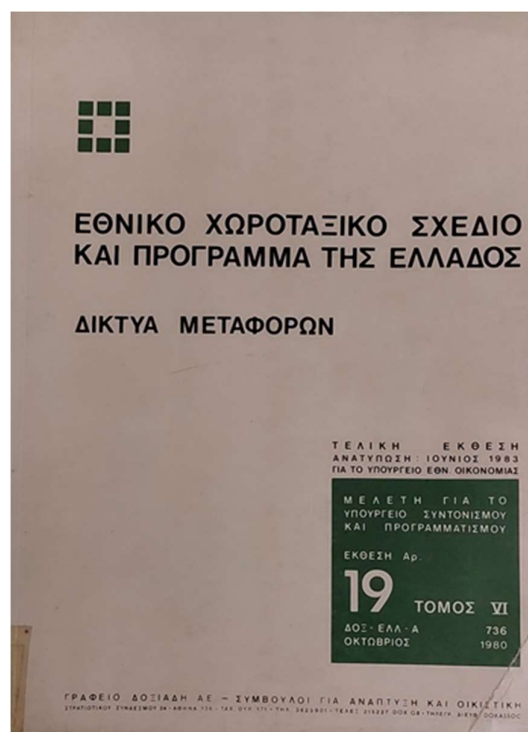


Fig.1: Front cover of the Regional Development Plan and Program for Greece, Vol. VI: Transport Networks, Doxiadis Associates, 1980. (Source: *Constantinos A. Doxiadis Archives* © *Constantinos and Emma Doxiadis Foundation*).

government in the making of decisions for the planning of all economic sectors in the country: Panayis Psomopoulos, who was the Director of Regional Planning Department of Doxiadis Associates, was acting as the Prime Minister and the experts were distributed to various “Ministries” under the guidance of the Ministry of Coordination and Planning, the Min. of Economy, Min. of Agriculture, Min. of Transport, Min. of Industry, Min. of Labour etc. It was a unique set-up that impressed me greatly, and it gave all of us representing the “Ministries” the floor to contribute to the decision-making process. For the forecasting of future indicators (population overall, by region and by city, GDP

and employment overall and by sector etc.) statistical analysis and the IDEA method (Identification of Dimensions and Elimination of Alternatives) that was developed in Doxiadis Associates were being used. An input-output model was also used to test the relevance of assumptions and forecasts being made. They all constituted important characteristics of the way the study team was organised and worked, systematically using quantitative rather than qualitative methods.

The representatives of the “Ministries” were meeting once a month and discussing the problems and prospects of development, the various proposals for investments, the macroeconomic and microeconomic scenarios, the regional politics influencing Greece, including competition from other countries. The plan concerned the evaluation of existing conditions and the forecasting of the development of Greece until the year 2000. I remember well some of our colleagues involved in the project who were employees of Doxiadis Associates: Dionysis Aliferis, Petros Kanas, Christos Kostis, Yannis Dokoumedzidis, Christoforos Andritsos, George Georgiadis, Alekos Thronos, Antonis Tortopidis, Yannis Sotiropoulos, Haris Politopoulos. The implementation of the project was monitored by experts from KEPE (the national Center for Planning and Economic Research) such as Loukis Athanasiou, Dimitra Katothianou, Theofilos Terrovitis and others. We were working together as a real team, each “Ministry” presenting its particular findings and proposals, which were then amalgamated into a set of reports covering the following topics/sectors in the 8 volumes mentioned earlier: Basic Indicators; Primary Sector; Secondary Sector; Tourism; Water Resources; Transport Networks; Energy; Systems of Settlements (in 3 more volumes).

The management style of Panayis was always enthusiastic but also to the point, demanding but also coaching; a good but tough listener who sought proper justifications to the proposals that were being made. The management style of Panayis was unique in my opinion, and certainly unusual when compared with many planning processes that, as a young planner, I was made to learn academically. When the specificities of Greek politics were discussed regarding the difficulties for the proper implementation of the development policies in Greece, he was very skeptical and critical, always referring to international best practices and benchmarks from European and other world economies.

Panayis could also become ironic and foul mouthed if the proposals of the “Ministries” were poorly justified or ill-founded or when he had different opinion. I still remember his strong belief that, while the primary and secondary sectors were very important, Greece was to develop as a service economy, mainly based on tourism for which the country had impeccable resources and opportunities. He used to say that Greece will be “selling” its beauties the same as prostitutes are doing in a brothel. But he added that, in his opinion, as it is unlikely that proper organization and management will be ever reached in Greece, even as a brothel our success in tourism will be limited. According to Panayis, Greece would become the “residence” of pensioners from western Europe, especially those from the then European Common Market. Greece was to become a member in 1981, and its members throughout Europe who enjoyed free circulation, goods and capital were considered to be of primary importance.

As a new planning professional who was by nature optimistic and hopeful for better days to come to our country, I participated in this rather “unusual” setting: an ambitious regional planning exercise listening in disbelief to his comments and particular thoughts on tourism, thinking that he was exaggerating or that he was overly pessimistic. When Panayis was making these comments, he was not only behaving as a mere “Prime Minister”. He was thinking of the human scale of development and of the ekistics concerns for settlements and the services that were to be provided in them for the benefit of the local population and wider society that included all local and visiting individuals (tourists), as well as those employed in this service sector. He was thinking of sustainability, resilience, and the environment, all in terms of anthropos / man, which stood at the center of ekistic thinking. Panayis was thus articulating these concepts in ways that were inconceivable then, as they had not yet even been defined.

A prophesy come true!

Today, more than 40 years after the above anecdotal experience, I would dare to say that Panayis was right. Indeed, Greece has reached unprecedented levels of tourist arrivals and development of tourism and hospitality related infrastructure and facilities. But indeed, the touristic development of Greece - particularly the record reached in 2019 and its replica in 2022 - is mostly geared to the needs of the private sector, with little planning from the side of the state or, most conspicuously, from the local authorities and administrations. Hence facilities like hotels, conference centers and tourist villages are developing at the expense of other sectors that are also important for sustainable development such as agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing, to name only a few. Over the years, state and local administrations have not taken the necessary actions for the development of sufficient supporting infrastructure (water supply, waste water and solid waste management, energy supply with an emphasis to renewable sources, ports and airports to reach destinations, urban and rural roads), not to mention the possibility of faulty implementation in a process that lacks proper land use management and social impact assessment. Islands like Mykonos, Santorini (for both of which Strategic Plans for Sustainable Development are under preparation) and Paros, known worldwide as major and “loud” tourist destinations are now being considered to have the biggest problems. Less known islands like Paxoi, Antiparos and Ios are “quietly” becoming equally criticized for extensive construction and inappropriate development.

Recently, the sustainability of this development is increasingly being questioned, while it is thought that the environmental maximum capacity of several touristic sites - in several islands like those mentioned here, but also in others - has been reached or even surpassed, reducing the quality of offered services. The resilience of several facilities to climate change is also being questioned, especially because of extensive illegal construction which is leading to increased risks. Last but not least, it is argued that the possibility of some facilities and sites becoming only affordable to tourists, thereby excluding the local population, is soon to be a reality.

All these problems make the foul mouthed “prophesy” of Panayis Psomopoulos even more relevant today. So, was

Panayis a “prophet” or is planning (regional, urban, environmental, transport, social) a still unfulfilled exercise in Greece?

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Note on the contributor

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