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The Influence of Political Ideologies in the Organization and Development of Sport in Greece

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THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES IN THE
ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF SPORT IN GREECE

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The Influence of Political Ideologies in the Organization and Development of Sport in Greece.

Since sporting events appeal and influence thousands of people, its affairs is, in many countries of the world, regulated and supported by the State. Greece is no exception. This presentation will provide an overview of how sport is influenced by the State in Greece and how the different political parties perceive sport as part of their political agendas.

I. The Organization of Sport in Greece: A Political Affair

Greece is a Presidential Parliamentary Republic, with a president as the head of the republic and a prime minister as the head of the national government. The governmental involvement with sport, is mandated by the Greek constitution, where it is mentioned that sport is under the supervision of the State (The Constitution of Greece, 1975). The corresponding sport legislation governing the sport in Greece, sets the general framework and provides the guidelines for the entire Greek sport system. However, the legislation provides the underpinnings by which the Deputy Minister of Sport can propose further regulations which will be authorized later by a Presidential Order. Among the several ministries the Culture, Interior, Education, and National Defense are primarily involved with the organization of sport in Greece (Figure 1).
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| MINISTRIES |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| To the Presidency | Public Order |
| **Culture**      | Northern Greece |
| Foreign Affairs  | Aegean |
| **Interior**     | Agriculture |
| National Economy | Environment & Public Work |
| Health & National Insurance | Employment |
| Justice          | Industry, Energy & Technology |
| **Education**    | Transportation & Communication |
| **National Defense** | Merchant Marine |
| Finance          | (Brademas, 1986) |

Figure 1. National Government Structure of Greece.

Ministry of Culture. According to the Law 75, (1975), sport in Greece is run by elected and appointed officials through sport clubs, unions, federations and other sport-related organizations (Law 75, 1975). Greek citizens may exercise their constitutional right to elect, be elected, or enter into partnerships (The Constitution of Greece, 1975), to form sport clubs; elect the board of directors; apply for membership to sport federations; register athletes to participate in officially organized events; and (with the exception of professional soccer) after few years of trial membership, they are eligible to take part in the elections of the sport federation's board of directors. Later, a board member will represent the sport federation in the election of the National Olympic Committee's (N.O.C.) board of directors (Figure 2).

The Greek sport administration system was originally set up this way, in order to insure its independence and prevent any direct state or political influence. However, as it is often the case, those who run for office in the sport administration, are also members or affiliated to a political party.
Furthermore, the sport clubs, their unions and federations are entitled by the Greek Constitution to receive State financial assistance, in order to balance their budgets. Financial support is allocated by the Ministry of Culture through its Secretariat General of Sport (SGS), which reserves the right to audit the sport organizations’ budgets, and, by extension to monitor their programming.

Soccer is the only sport with a professional league in Greece (basketball is just starting). Professional soccer clubs are corporations owned by shareholders, and the professional soccer league is run by a committee representing the club-owners. Currently, the professional soccer league is linked to the non-professional clubs. The soccer teams at the highest national divisions can become professional, by allowing private investors to purchase the club’s title (name) from the non-professional sport club. As a result, almost all professional soccer teams play at arenas and stadiums that are state-owned since they were given for use to the amateur clubs. This fact makes the SGS, along with the non-professional soccer federation, decision-makers affecting many aspects of the professional soccer league.
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At the governmental level, all sport decision-makers are politically appointed. The Deputy Minister of Sport is usually peoples’ representative in Parliament, who is elected as a member of the governing party. The Secretary General of Sport is usually a high-ranking member of the political party currently in government. The SGS's directors and departmental managers are also appointed. They are career civil servants, usually of the same ideological orientation as the reigning party. Administrative positions in other sport organizations such as the PRO-PO soccer lottery, the horse race betting organization, sport centers, etc. are politically appointed as well.

**Ministry of Interior.** Recreational sport is primarily implemented by local government civil servants, sport offices or city/community sport organizations. All the major decision-makers are politically appointed by either the mayor or the city/community council (Figure 3).

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**Figure 3.** Organizational Chart of Recreational Sport.
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The SGS also offers recreational sport opportunities in sport centers throughout the country, administered by political appointees.

**Ministry of Education.** School sport is regulated by a different set of laws under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and administered mainly by career physical education teachers. However, at the top administrative levels and the major decision-making positions, officials are politically appointed by the minister, deputy minister or the secretary general of education (Figure 4).

![Organizational Chart of School Sport](image)

**Ministry of National Defense.** Military sport is administered by the General Board of National Defense, superseding the Supreme Council of Military Sport (Figure 5). This is the part of the Greek sport organization that is less susceptible to direct political intervention. However, the Minister of National Defense is a parliamentary representative of the political party in power and appointments through promotions, early retirements and reassignment of
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duties at different military positions, follow every change of government as a common practice.

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

GENERAL BOARD OF NATIONAL DEFENSE

SUPREME COUNCIL OF MILITARY SPORT

ARMY, NAVY, AIR-FORCE, POLICE, COAST GUARD, AND FIRE DEPARTMENT

Figure 5. Organizational Chart of Military Sport.

Political appointments of major decision-making positions pervasive throughout the entire Greek sport system, is justified by the argument that since political parties view the organization of sport somewhat differently, when they come into power they need decision-makers with the same ideological orientation in order to implement their sport agenda. For this reason, the major Greek political parties maintain, within their organization, sport committees with members in hierarchical positions. These party members are responsible for the development of the party's sport agenda and, when the party comes to power, they are the ones appointed to implement it.

II. Sport as Seen Through the “Eyes” of the Major Greek Political Parties

During the country's national elections of June 18, 1989, there were several political parties and independent candidates who took part. Four parties and one independent representative actually shared the 300 parliamentary seats: the New Democracy (conservatives), the Panhellenic Socialistic Movement (the party in power at that time),
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the Coalition of the Left and the Progress (socialists/communists), the Democratic Renewal (conservatives), and the independent candidates (Moslems) (Table. 1).

Table 1. Final Results of the 1989 Greek Parliamentary Elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Parties</th>
<th>Parliamentary Seats</th>
<th>% of Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Democracy</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>44.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panhellenic Socialistic Movement (PASOK)</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>39.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Renewal (DEANA)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Candidates (Moslems)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Free Press, 1989)

Due of the Government’s involvement, it is necessary for political parties to include sport in their pre-election political agendas, explaining their views on the provision of sport as a social service. The three major Greek political parties, presented extensive sport programs. The New Democracy, PASOK, and the Coalition political party published their positions on sport in separate booklets and the third in a flyer. The rest of the parties that participated in the elections either made no mention to sport or reduced their views to one sentence within their general political agendas.

The following is a presentation of the major Greek political parties’ sport orientations, in relation to their general socio-economic ideologies, based primarily on the 1989 pre-election promotional material.
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A. New Democracy

General Socio-economic Ideology: Economic growth is based on free enterprise, through sound marketplace competition; the privatization of the state-owned companies; and a smaller Government that better supports the individual initiatives through incentives (New Democracy, c).

General Sport Orientation: The New Democracy Party's sport program is based on its socio-economic ideology (New Democracy, b). Specifically, the proposed sport development is pursued through:

"... policies free from the influence of any political party... the freeing of the peoples' creative forces, the encouragement of team initiatives and the limitation of the Government to its principle functions... [i.e., sport] planning and development in coordination with the local governments; the provision of the equipment [and a] technical base necessary for sport development, and the provision of equal opportunities for everyone..." (New Democracy. b, pp. 7-8).

B. Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK)

General Socio-Economic Ideology: Social growth should parallel economic and political growth as opposed to the ideology of conservative parties, where economic growth is sought first (George Genimatas, 6/28/88). The socialist parties promote clear social processes, public participation, and public audits (Akis Tsohatzopoulos, 7/8/1989).

General Sport Orientation: The Panhellenic Socialist Movement perceives that the state should be involved in sport planning, organization and administration in order to secure public participation as well as the implementation of its sport agenda, which claims that sport is: "A right of the... people [of all ages] and an obligation of the State" (PSM, a, ib).

C. Coalition of the Left and Progress

General Socio-economic Ideology: The Coalition's political agenda promotes limited governmental control and direct democratic administration of the country via the Parliament ("Coalition," a). It supports the private sector of the economy and private investment with intend to promote economic growth with a view to "securing the
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participation of the workforce and the community involvement at the decision-making centers [of all business organizations]" ("Coalition," e, p. 5).

The Coalition's social agenda is based on the "democratic principles of decentralization, team effort, . . . representation and self-structure" ("Coalition," c, p. 3).

**General Sport Orientation:** The Coalition perceives sport as a social need and as an alternative way of improving the people's quality of life ("Coalition," b, p. 1). It seeks to develop sport by facilitating the participation of the public in sport administration; and through the development of school physical education, public-mass sport programs, and club sport ("Coalition," b). Furthermore, the Coalition Party believes that "Young people . . . [should determine themselves] what they want to listen to and see, the way they want to be entertained and with what to fill their free time" ("Coalition," d, p. 5).

D. **Democratic Renewal**

**General Socio-economic Ideology:** The Democratic Renewal "aims toward a just society which rewards the able and protects the unable" (Democratic Renewal, p. 3). It believes that a modern state is "obligated to create an environment of equal opportunities for all citizens" (Democratic Renewal, p. 2). Specifically, the Democratic Renewal envisions a free market economy with "the participation of the workforce in the administration and the sharing of business' profits . . . " (Democratic Renewal, p. 2), through the right of the workforce to become shareholders in the companies for which they work.

**General Sport Orientation:** The Democratic Renewal Party's aim in sport is to facilitate the participation of the young people in cultural/sport events and creative recreation, in combination with the efficient fight against drugs or any form of youthful antisocial behavior such as hooliganism (Democratic Renewal).
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III. Comparison of the Major Political Parties’ Sport Agendas

Since only three major Greek political parties have published a detailed description of their sport agendas, the following analysis is based on printed promotional material made available during the 1989 pre-election period.

The Similarities

The three major political parties in Greece:

- base their views on the organization of sport on their general socio-economic ideology
- agree that sport is a social service that the Greek state must provide to all of its citizens
- agree on the current structure of the Greek sport system which promotes sport clubs as a socially-beneficial, non-profit, state-funded organizations led by democratically elected members
- agree on the general principle that sport development is based on the development of: Sport for All, School Sport and Club Sport
- agree that the SGS should be a national strategic-planning sport organization, rather than an administration-oriented sport entity
- agree that the State's economic assistance to sport clubs and federations should be objectively allocated
- agree on the provision of Sport for All programs by the local governments
- agree on the need for extensive development of sport facilities
- agree on the need to control drug use by all athletes
- agree that Sport for All programs should be organized in schools as well

The Differences

The following points represent the main areas of differences in the major parliamentary parties' sport agendas:
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A. State’s Involvement in the Administration of Sport Organizations.

The Conservative Party favors the administration of sport independent of any political intervention, operating within the general guidelines set by the State and legislation (New Democracy, b). Furthermore, it views the role of SGS as purely one of national strategic sport planning entity: an organization that drafts the general sport policies within which the several sport organizations perform freely their functions (New Democracy, b).

The Socialistic Party promotes state intervention in sport (PSM, d). It perceives SGS as the national strategic-planning sport organization that plans and implements programs, budgets, etc., in a joint effort with other sport organizations (PSM, d).

The Coalition Party favors an open and direct participation in the administration of sport by both the athletes and other interested community members ("Coalition," b). It argues that the involvement of the SGS in the strategic development of sport should be limited, and that the individual sport federations should be solely responsible for it (Coalition, d).

B. Club Sport.

The Conservative Party proposes a comprehensive sport agenda. The following are some of its main objectives concerning club sport (New Democracy, b):

1. Club sport should operate without any outside political influence. The State should determine the national sport policy, insure its implementation, build sport facilities and support the sport organizations in order to accomplish their goals.

2. Sport arbitration (justice) should be separated from civilian and administrative legal systems.

3. The professional soccer league should be completely separate from the non-professional league.

4. Sport-medicine units should be established in all prefectures around the country.

5. The administrative and programming expenses of non-professional sport, should be financed exclusively by the sport lotteries.
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6. Violence in sport events should be combatted by education, incentives for sportsmanship and the involvement of all interested parties in problem-solving.

- Sport administration activities should be decentralized and administered at the prefecture level.

- A new sport organization, to be called the Sport Confederation, should be founded to draft the year- and multi-year-long programming of the sport federations and to coordinate the related aspects of its implementation. This sport organization will be administered by elected representatives of each sport federation, in order to regulate legal actions within the sport community as well as arbitrate disputes; conduct continuing education programs for the coaches, umpires and referees; The handling of other aspects related to club sport, that currently administered by the SGS, should be delegated to the sport confederation as well.

The Socialistic Party's club-sport agenda, includes the following major points:

1. The yearly function of each sport federation should be determined by a joint effort with the SGS (State), which then will provide the budget to cover it.

2. Sport arbitration (justice) should be separated from the civilian legal system and should be linked to the administrative legal system.

3. The professional soccer clubs will maintain their status as corporations. However, the professional soccer league should run by the non-professional soccer federation.

4. The current biomedical sport-research center should be expanded.

5. Sport lotteries should finance administrative/programming expenses of not only sport but also other youth-related programs.

6. Different approaches to control the problem of violence in sport events, will be recommended by an advisory committee of experts.

- State sport administrative functions should be decentralized at the prefecture level.

- Priority should be given to popular sport and those sport that best suit to the way of life, the environment and the temperament of the Greek people, without prejudice to the development of other sport.

- Scouting for athletic talents should begin at the elementary schools level (PSM, d).
The Coalition Party's club-sport agenda includes the following main points:

1. "sport . . . [should be] administratively independent" from any governmental intervention ("Coalition" a, p. 19). Athletes and sportsmen should participate "in the administration of sport clubs and higher sport organizations ("Coalition," b).

2. Sport arbitration (justice) should be linked to the civilian legal system.

3. Professional soccer [should be administered] . . . by a committee of club owners' representatives, who should function within the non-professional soccer federation.

4. "Sport-medicine units [should be established] in all big hospitals throughout the country" ("Coalition," b, p. 3).

5. All sport functions should be financed by the State budget.

6. The State should establish the work position of a civil-servant observer, to monitor violence in sport events.

- The development of each sport should be prioritized based on logical criteria.

C. Sport (Exercise) for All (SfA)

The Conservative Party seeks to develop SfA through the establishment of new national-planning oriented SfA organization. This entity will help local governments to provide sport participation opportunities to the public (facilities, equipment, and sport-activities leaders). "The aim is to help Greek citizens to exercise in their schools, workplaces, residences, parks, mountains and sea." (New Democracy. b, p. 8.)

The Socialistic Party favors the development of public mass-sport participation opportunities by the SGS, in the form of programs for target populations, i.e., children, women, senior citizens, the handicapped, etc. The local governments will then be called upon to implement these programs in their communities (PSM, d).

The Coalition Party states that it will support the initiatives of local governments and employee unions, for public mass-sport participation events in their neighborhoods, the
workplace, the army and in schools. The Coalition will also declare local governments as the basic agencies responsible for [providing] mass athletics". ("Coalition," a, p. 19)

D. School Sport. The Conservative Party believes that sport in schools should be developed at all levels, from elementary schools to universities through:

- establishing a new national school-sport organization with members from both the SGS and the Ministry of Education;

- establishing special sport-oriented schools.

- sport activities and championships;

- the distribution of sport equipment to schools by the SGS;

- a complete health insurance of the student-athletes;

- a system of rewards to promote excellence in sport competition;

- building feasible sport facilities in every school setting, and fully-equipped sport centers in every university offering physical education courses;

The Socialists envision schools as being the basic means by which to develop sport through:

- special programs for student athletes who are trained by physical educators/coaches in neighborhood sport facilities as part of their secondary education curriculum;

- special athletic-talent scouting programs;

The Coalition Party's program mentions that school sport will be developed by:

- comprehensive programs including specific curriculums;

- provision of the means for better teaching;

- intramural sport; ("Coalition," d)
IV. Examples of Potential Implications of Political Involvement with Sport

As indicated above, political ideologies play a major role in Greek sport with a dual outcome. On one hand, the importance of sport in Greek society is recognized by the Constitution, and therefore, the State is obligated to provide feasible support. On the other hand, since political parties have different ideological orientations, governmental changes bring organizational changes which often cause uncertainty, disorganization and an interruption of sport programming.

This was evident in a conference organized in Greece related to local government Sport for All (SfA) programs. There, a sport club administrator said: "What happens . . . [is that] after four years the government changes and everything change" (in Afthinos, 1993, p. 146). Furthermore, in a pilot study that was also conducted in Greece, the same point was further illustrated by a local government SfA manager who said, "Every mayor puts his own person into office responsible [for the SfA programs]." (Afthinos, 1993, p. 146)

According to the same study, unless the appointee is incompetent, political appointments may not necessarily constitute a problem. Two SfA managers provided examples regarding this point. A national-level sport manager said:

There are certain phenomena of sport administrators who come and go. [These are people] without any competence who [nevertheless] have ambitions. They are probably members of the political party in the administration. [These individuals] . . . are ridiculous (Afthinos, 1993, p. 146).

Another manager from a medium-sized municipality stated:
 " . . . [supervisors] are individuals unfamiliar with sport . . . they are [municipal] administrative staff members without knowledge of sport." (Afthinos, 1993, p. 146.)

Furthermore, there are indications in the Afthinos' study that the political candidates for office in local government keep themselves at a distance from the civil service organizations, which will carry out their agenda later. In the case of local sport organizations, an SfA manager provided the following insight:
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The two political parties [municipal candidates for office] . . . announced their sport program--the party that won the elections and the party that lost the elections . . . Neither of those visited the municipal sport office . . . to request data on which to base their sport program, but both announced their program [anyway] which was ridiculous. (Afthinos, 1993, p. 147.)

In addition, Afthinos reported that politics may also have a negative effect on SfA managers' efforts to perform their duties. During an interview, a local SfA manager provided an example when he said: "You might have an idea [about a sport program] that it is right and can show that it is right, [but] you can't put it to work, because it is not politically right for someone else" (Afthinos, 1993, p. 147). Another local SfA manager in the same study, gave an example of how local politics can affect the SfA:

The [municipality] is an elected entity . . . when you have to deal with an elected administration, whatever [service] you offer should appeal to the voters. [Furthermore], an elected municipal council is not just one mayor. It is [also] 24 municipal council members. What does such a council mean? It means a number of voters. It also means their own personal exposure, which means that the voters can be [members of local sport] clubs. [Those voters] who can go to their councilman and say: . . . build a play field there for us. The councilman can then go to the mayor and lobby to build [an installation] in that location. (Afthinos, 1993, p. 147)

Based on the above presentation of the current sport organization in Greece, i.e., the general ideology, sport orientation as well as the political agenda of each major Greek parliamentary political party; and some potential implications of the political involvement with sport, the following conclusions can be made:

- The Greek constitution promotes both free enterprise and State intervention in the organization of sport.

- Almost all decision makers in Greek sport are politically active.

- Greek political parties maintain a pool of members for
appointments to sport decision-making positions upon rising to power.

- The less chance a party has to play a major role in the administration of the country, the more its agenda tends to be socio-political with little or no reference to sport.

- Greek political parties perceive the organization of sport differently, based on their socio-economic ideology.

- The current differences exceed the similarities among the sport agendas of the major Greek political parties.

- The main differences among the sport agendas of the major parliamentary political parties, are related to the degree of social and State participation in the organization and administration of sport, as well as in the presentation of some unique programs offered by each political party.

- Political change in either the national or local government has the potential to affect sport programming negatively.

As a final conclusion, politics play a major role in the organization and administration of Greek sport. In Greece, it can be said that when it comes to sport, form follows a political function, inasmuch as it is the reflection of an individual party. The diverse political ideologies provide Greek sport with a proliferation of ideas and approaches, that if used constructively could be of great advantage. However, different ideologies can be disadvantageous when they become a political showcase of proving which political party has the single right approach to a perfect sport system. Therefore, it appears that a bipartisan approach to setting a common national sport development policy in Greece, may result in commitment among the major political parties to expand rather than replace features and staff members of an existing sport system, when they rise to power and therefore accelerate the development process of Greek Sport.
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