
Analysis of Key Obstacles and Problems Faced by Municipalities and Their Citizens: An Empirical Investigation in the Municipalities of Greece

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Abstract:

The primary aim of this research is to investigate and observe phenomena and views related to issues concerning Greek municipalities, such as the problems they face and how they tackle them. So this study presents the descriptive measures of questions in a questionnaire that was sent to the entire sample of Greek municipalities – characterized in this way with considerable heterogeneity - and an attempt is made to locate differences as well as similarities between them. The questionnaire used to collect data is made up of closed-ended questions. More specifically, the questionnaire examined the views of Mayors in each Municipality as regards: (a) the biggest problems faced by the citizens in their Municipality, (b) the biggest personnel problems faced by their Municipality, and (c) the biggest administrative problems faced by their Municipality. The aim of the empirical analyses carried out is to draw useful and representative conclusions on issues concerning deficiencies and problems in municipalities.

Key Words: *Municipalities, Social Cohesion, Empirical Investigation, Greece*

JEL Classification:

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1. Introduction

Ever since the beginning of the '80s, the modernization of Local Government has been on the agenda in most European states. This reform was facilitated by the need for Local Authorities to become a part of the economy and operate as instruments of the «new services in the market». In Greece, the institutional framework surrounding Local Authorities prevented them from playing an essential role, due to their limited responsibilities and economic means. Within this framework three key questions emerge, which constitute the main line of research:

- (a) the biggest problems faced by citizens in their Municipality,
- (b) the biggest personnel problems faced by their Municipality,
- (c) the biggest administrative problems faced by their Municipality.

At a research level, the survey questions referring to a sample greater than the one we will examine, in other words to all municipalities in the Greek State, have not been evaluated. The next chapter presents the methodology used with a description of the sampling and data collecting processes, the definition of the population, the determination of the sampling frame, the definition of the sampling unit, etc. In the third chapter, results of the methodological approach will be set out, while in the fourth chapter data analysis results will be presented. Finally, in the fifth chapter the overall results of the study will be given.

2. Methodology

2.1 General

This chapter presents the research methodology adopted in conducting this empirical project. More specifically, it includes:

- (a) the definition of population and the study sample,
- (b) the data collecting method,
- (c) the response to the survey and the characteristics of Municipalities participating,
- (d) the process whereby the research tool used to collect data was created (structured questionnaire) and its analytical presentation.

2.2 Sampling and Data Collection Process

The process of choosing the sample and collecting data is complex and includes six stages (Stathakopoulos, 2001).

- Definition of population
- Determination of the sampling frame
- Definition of sampling unit
- Determination of sample size
- Implementation

From this process the total number of respondents that will participate in the survey emerges.

2.3 Definition of Population

The first and most important step in the primary data collection process is to define characteristics on the basis of which the population to be examined will be defined (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2002). The full definition of the population requires the inclusion of four basic parameters: the item, the sampling unit, the extent of the sampling and the time (Parasuraman et al., 2004). The item and sampling unit in this survey are defined as the Municipalities of Greece, the extent of sampling concerned the whole of the Greek state and the time it was conducted was from 10 June 2010 up to 30 September 2010. Communities in Greece were excluded from the population in the survey due to their small size and different needs in relation to the Municipalities. So in the end, the survey population was defined as being the 914 Greek Municipalities throughout the state, as recorded in the inventory of the National Statistical Service (2001).

2.4 Determination of the Sampling Frame

The next step, after defining the population to be examined, is to locate a sampling frame which must be composed of the fullest and most accurate inventory possible of members of the population to be examined (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2002). The sampling frame used in this survey was the most recent inventory of the National Statistical Service (2001) which includes the census of the population of Greece based on geographical Districts, Prefectures, Municipalities and Communities.

2.5 Definition of the Sampling Unit

The sampling units were defined as being the Greek Municipalities. As regards the respondents from whom survey data was collected, the «key informant method» was used, meaning the person in the survey unit (Municipality of Greece) who had the greatest knowledge of the subject of the survey. This method reduces to a satisfactory degree any concerns regarding the reliability of answers given by respondents, as the respondent chosen in each unit is the best available person with knowledge of the data that must be collected through the survey (Phillips, 1981, Kumar, Stern and Anderson, 1993). In this survey the key informant was chosen to be the Mayor in each Municipality examined.

2.6 Choice of Sampling Method

Sampling methods considerably affect the possibility of generalizing the results. In order that the results emerging in the sample might be generalized throughout the total population, a probability sample must be used (Kinnear and Taylor, 1996) in which each unit in the sample has an equal chance of being selected from the population. The safest way of producing a probability sample is the population census and the definition of the total census as a sample in the survey (Stathakopoulos, 2001). This method was followed in this survey, ensuring the generalization of results.

2.7 Determination of Sample Size

As a result of the census method, the size of the sample coincides with the size of the population in the 914 municipalities recorded in the inventory of the National Statistical Service (2001).

2.8 Implementation

With reference to conducting the survey, the two following sub-paragraphs explain the method of contact with the respondents and the reasons they were finally chosen, as well as the results of the method.

2.9 Method of Contact

Completion and collection of questionnaires was carried out during the period from 10 June 2010 to 30 September 2010 in one phase with the use of self-completion questionnaires. The sample in the survey (which coincides with the population in the survey) is characterized by considerable heterogeneity, as it has been specified that it will be all the Municipalities in Greece. The choice of such a kind of sample contributes to the chance of generalizing the results of the survey, as in order for the results of a survey to be generally applicable, heterogeneous samples are preferred (Hooley, Lynch and Shephard, 1990, Kohli and Jaworski, 1990, Narver and Slater 1990, Ruekert, 1992).

In order for the sampling units (Municipalities of Greece) to be approached as a sampling frame, the inventory of Municipalities from the National Statistical Service was used. One of the most common problems appearing during the use of inventories is the level to which they have been updated. The inventory used had been drawn up in 2001 and is the most recent. During the time the survey was being conducted, no cases occurred in which a Municipality could not be approached due to a wrong entry in the inventory.

Sampling units were approached by mail. This took the form of the delivery of the questionnaire along with an accompanying letter to each Municipality, for the attention of the Mayor, by mail, email or fax, which explained to the recipient the purpose of the survey. This was preceded by telephone contact regarding the dates the questionnaire would be delivered and handed back. This method obliges the respondent to respond within a fixed time (Stathakopoulos, 2001). Respondents returned the completed questionnaires using the same method, via mail, email or fax, on the dates specified.

The choice of only one respondent from each sampling unit (key-informant) involves the risk of collecting information that bears no relation to reality, but reflects his personal views. However, the achievement of research objectives required that the respondent be the Mayor in each Municipality so he was in a position to speak about them accurately and in detail.

3. Research Results

The method of collecting data that was used, in the end brought about the collection of questionnaires from 299 Municipalities out of the total of 914 that had been specified as the sample population. This result provides a response percentage of 33% which is considered quite satisfactory, on the basis of the method adopted (Kinneer and Taylor, 1987). As described in table 1.1 the 299 Municipalities that responded to the survey represent the total population as there was good stratification and representation from all Prefectures in Greece with fairly satisfactory response percentages in each Prefecture. The Greek Municipalities that finally answered the questionnaire represent all the Municipalities in Greece as there was no Prefecture in which the individual response percentage was not satisfactory. Out of the 299 questionnaires collected, 41 were excluded from the analyses due to a large number of answers to questions that would have reduced the statistical reliability of the findings. Additionally in these 41 excluded questionnaires, cases were observed in which the respondents misinterpreted the hierarchical questions. In the end out of the 299 questionnaires 258 exploitable ones were taken into account in the survey (87%), a number which is statistically acceptable (eg. Hooley, Lynch and Shephard, 1990, Kohli and Jaworski, 1990, Narver and Slater 1990, Ruekert, 1992).

3.1 Measurement Tools

This paragraph presents the process of creating the survey tool (structured questionnaire), as well as the result of this process – in other words, the questionnaire used in this survey to collect data.

During the preparation of the questionnaire that was finally used, a logical flow of questions had to be achieved. The questions have to be easy to understand, easy to answer and arouse the interest of the respondent with the aim of gradually involving him in the survey.

In following questionnaire design practices (Kinneer and Taylor, 1987, Tull and Hawkins, 1987, Churchill, 1991), an attempt was made to avoid leading questions that would perhaps direct the respondent to specific answers. Before the questionnaire took on its final form, pretesting was carried out twice. Initially, the questionnaire was tested by three independent teachers. Following the incorporation

of their observations and prior to the start of data collection, the questionnaire was pretested a second time so as to ensure that the questions it contained were clear and easy for the respondents to understand.

In the second pretesting a total of 10 Mayors took part from both large and small, urban and regional municipalities, with each of whom lengthy discussions were held regarding the content, type and flow of questions, as well as the arrangement of the sections based on the instructions in the relative article by Reynolds, Diamantopoulos and Schlegelmilch, (1993). Following the evaluation of observations made by participants in the pilot study, certain questions were rejected and others recomposed, after consultation with the academics that had initially tested the questionnaire.

In the end, the questionnaire used to collect data is made up of closed-ended questions. More specifically, the questionnaire examines the views of Mayors in each Municipality concerning:

- (a) the biggest problems faced by citizens in their Municipality,
- (b) the biggest administrative problems faced by citizens in their Municipality,
- (c) the biggest personnel problems faced by citizens in their Municipality.

In the questions a hierarchical scale was used, as the respondents had to grade specific factors given to them from the most important to the most insignificant.

Table 1.1. Respondents per Prefecture

Geographical Districts	Prefectures	Municipalities Participation (number)	Total Number of Municipalities	Response	Municipalities Participation (population)	Total Population of Municipalities	Response
Attica	Athens	24	48	50%	1.111.093	2.664.776	42%
	Eastern Attica	9	26	35%	212.327	365.731	58%
	Western Attica	5	12	42%	115.702	150.847	77%
	Piraeus	9	16	56%	319.164	540.540	59%
Subtotal		47	102	46,07 %	1.758.286	3.721.894	47,24 %

Rest of Central Greece and Euboea	Etoloakarnania	7	29	24%	75.881	224.429	33,81 %
	Boeotia	7	18	39%	68.524	125.681	54,52 %
	Euboea	9	25	36%	31.968	212.993	15,01 %
	Evrytania	5	11	45%	12.542	32.053	39,13 %
	Fthiotida	9	23	39%	42.466	177.631	23,91 %
	Fokida	4	12	33%	15.190	48.284	31,46 %
Subtotal		41	118	34,74 %	246.571	821.071	30,03 %
Peloponnese	Argolida	6	14	43%	52.326	104.323	50,16 %
	Arcadia	7	22	32%	28.055	101.444	27,66 %
	Achaia	7	21	33%	27.611	321.389	8,59%
	Iliia	5	22	23%	7.849	193.288	4,06%
	Corinthia	6	15	40%	87.142	154.624	56,36 %
	Laconia	9	20	45%	32.404	97.966	33,08 %
	Messinia	6	29	21%	72.767	175.213	41,53 %
Subtotal		46	143	32,16 %	308.154	1.148.247	26,84 %
Ionian Islands	Zakinthos	2	6	33%	16.475	39.015	42,23 %
	Corfu	4	13	31%	18.279	110.317	16,57 %
	Cefalonia	4	8	50%	14.448	38.435	37,59 %
	Lefkada	2	6	33%	4.444	21.843	20,35 %
Subtotal		12	33	36,36 %	53.646	209.610	25,59 %
Epirus	Arta	2	13	15%	9.126	75.634	12,07 %
	Thesprotia	2	8	25%	9.527	43.071	22,12 %
	Ioannina	10	28	36%	25.967	165.500	15,69 %
	Preveza	2	8	25%	14.385	58.304	24,67 %
Subtotal		16	57	28,07 %	59.005	342.509	17,23 %
	Karditsa	6	20	30%	32.286	127.774	25,27 %

Thessaly	Larissa	9	28	32%	173.782	272.966	63,66 %
	Magnesia	8	22	36%	22.214	202.632	10,96 %
	Trikala	7	23	30%	64.352	134.963	47,68 %
Subtotal		30	93	32,25 %	292.634	738.335	39,63 %
Macedonia	Grevena	4	8	50%	17.273	35.255	48,99 %
	Drama	2	8	25%	11.215	103.545	10,83 %
	Imathia	4	12	33%	52.620	143.618	36,64 %
	Thessaloniki	14	45	31%	263.496	1.057.825	24,91 %
	Kavala	4	11	36%	89.436	145.054	61,66 %
	Kastoria	2	12	17%	6.117	52.063	11,75 %
	Kilkis	4	11	36%	35.481	88.654	40,02 %
	Kozani	6	16	38%	75.182	152.138	49,42 %
	Pella	3	11	27%	51.276	145.797	35,17 %
	Pieria	3	13	23%	21.074	129.846	16,23 %
	Serres	5	22	23%	88.768	197.774	44,88 %
	Florina	2	8	25%	17.267	51.770	33,35 %
Chalkidiki	3	14	21%	14.166	104.894	13,51 %	
Subtotal		56	191	29,31 %	743.371	2.408.233	30,87 %
Thrace	Evros	4	13	31%	26.207	149.354	17,55 %
	Xanthi	2	7	29%	52.270	97.525	53,60 %
	Rodopi	4	9	44%	62.770	104.854	59,86 %
Subtotal		10	29	34,48 %	141.247	351.733	40,16 %
Aegean	Dodecanese	7	25	28%	89.869	189.152	47,51 %
	Cyclades	8	20	40%	35.824	106.836	33,53 %

	Lesvos	4	17	24%	23.231	108.747	21,36 %
	Samos	2	8	25%	14.622	43.595	33,54 %
	Chios	2	10	20%	2.920	53.408	5,47%
Subtotal		23	80	28,75 %	166.466	501.738	33,18 %
Crete	Iraklio	7	26	27%	171.971	292.489	58,80 %
	Lassithi	3	8	38%	45.683	74.613	61,23 %
	Rethymnon	4	11	36%	10.456	82.956	12,60 %
	Chania	4	23	17%	22.400	149.703	14,96 %
Subtotal		18	68	26,47 %	250.510	599.761	41,77 %
Total		299	914	32,71 %	4.019.890	10.843.131	37,07 %

Source: Pallis, 2011

4. Data Analysis

The field survey being conducted in this study is of an investigative type. The key objective of the survey underway is to investigate and observe phenomena and viewpoints on important issues in Greek municipalities. So this chapter presents the descriptive measures in all the questions in the questionnaire in the entire sample and attempts to pinpoint differences between Greek municipalities. The purpose of this group of analyses is to draw useful conclusions on the most important issues that occupied the field survey.

4.1 Main Citizens Problems

The aim of this question is to explore the most important problems faced by citizens in the municipalities. Taking into account that the respondents were the Mayors and not the citizens, the answers cannot be considered completely objective. Yet according to existing bibliography (eg. Podsakoff et al., 2003), obtaining information from a key informant, such as the Mayor of a city, gives satisfactory objectivity to the questions. So the respondents were called upon to grade on the basis of their importance, three key problems faced by their citizens: the lack of infrastructure, inadequate services for households, and inadequate services for businesses. The frequencies of answers on these issues are analytically presented in

the form of tables as well as in corresponding pie charts. As can be seen, the "lack of infrastructure" is ranked as the biggest problem in their municipalities.

Table 1.2: Lack of Infrastructure

Ranking	Frequency	Percentage %
3	82	32,3
2	12	4,7
1	160	63,0
Total	254	100,0

Source: Pallis, 2011

Table 1.3: Inadequate Services for Households

Ranking	Frequency	Percentage %
3	42	17,0
2	175	70,9
1	30	12,1
Total	247	100,0

Source: Pallis, 2011

Table 1.4: Inadequate Services for Businesses

Ranking	Frequency	Percentage %
3	123	49,8
2	60	24,3
1	64	25,9
Total	247	100,0

Source: Pallis, 2011

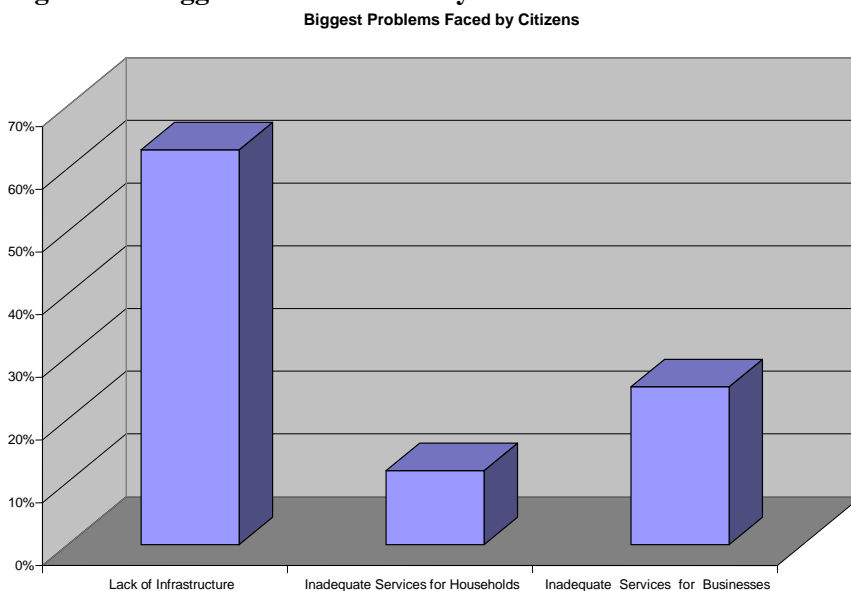
As shown in Table 1.2 the majority of respondents consider the lack of infrastructure as the most serious problem faced by their citizens. More specifically 160 Mayors (63%) assessed the lack of infrastructure as the most significant of the three aforementioned problems, 12 (4.7%) consider it the second biggest problem and 82 (32.3%) the least important of the three. These results show a tendency for the lack of infrastructure to be considered either the most important, for the most part, or the least important, probably in accordance with the needs and priorities existing in each municipality. As regards the issue of inadequate services for households, 70.9% of the sample (170 Mayors) ranked it second in importance, 17% as third in importance (42 Mayors), while just 12.1% (30 Mayors) consider it the most important of all the problems. In this case, there is a clear tendency among the respondents to grade inadequate services as the second biggest problem for their citizens. Finally, regarding the problem of inadequate services for businesses, according to the sample collected, 64 Mayors consider this problem the most important (25.9%), 60 (24.3%) grade it as second biggest and 123 (49.8%) as the least important of the three. The results in this case are clearly more uniformly distributed than in the two previous problems, but there is a tendency among the respondents to consider inadequate services for businesses as the least important problem in their municipalities. In order that a better picture might be formed of the order of importance among the three problems, the percentage of respondents that described each problem as the most important are presented collectively (Table 1.5). As seen, the overwhelming majority of Mayors (63%) considers the biggest problem faced by citizens in the municipality to be the lack of infrastructure, a smaller percentage (25%), inadequate services for businesses and just 12% inadequate services for households. These percentages clearly indicate that, according to the Mayors, the biggest problem by far faced by citizens is the lack of infrastructure.

Table 1.5: Biggest Problem faced by Citizens

Citizens' Problems	Frequency	Percentage %
Lack of Infrastructure	160	63%
Inadequate Services for Households	30	12%
Inadequate Services for Businesses	64	25%
Total	254	100%

Source: Pallis, 2011

Figure 1.1: Biggest Problem faced by Citizens



Source: Pallis, 2011

4.2 Main Municipality Personnel Problems

Another key objective of the survey is to explore the overall quality of existing administrative policies and practices concerning personnel in Greek municipalities. For this reason an attempt was made in this survey to verify the biggest problems faced by municipalities in personnel management. More specifically, the survey questionnaire contained a hierarchical question in which respondents were called upon to grade three key problems in personnel management, based on the criteria of their importance for the municipality. The three problems were: the inefficient administrative structure, the inadequate number of personnel, and the lack of specialized personnel.

Table 1.6: Inefficient Administrative Structure

Ranking	Frequency	Percentage %
3	78	30,8
2	111	43,9
1	64	25,3
Total	253	100,0

Source: Pallis, 2011

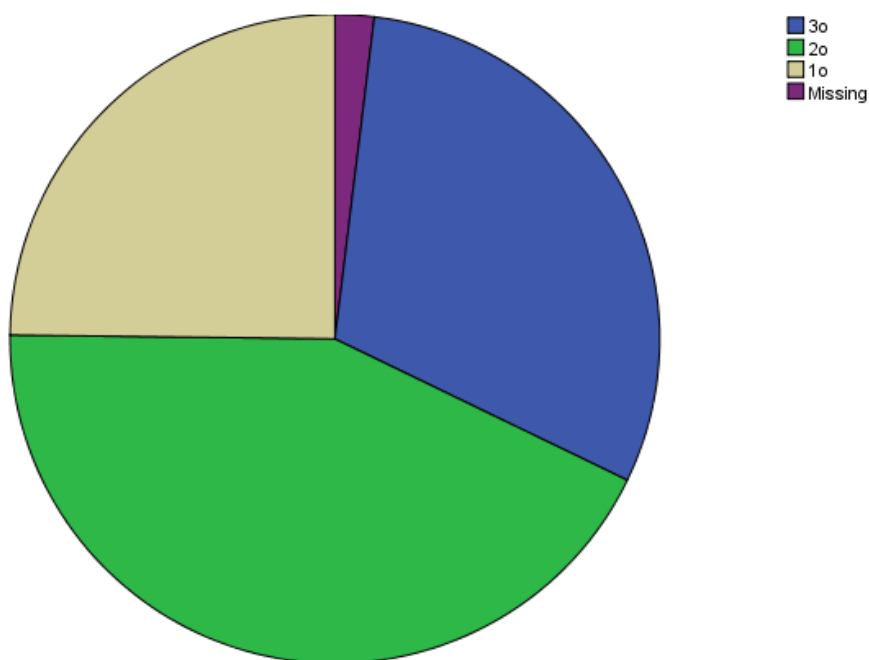


Table 1.7: Inadequate Number of Personnel

Ranking	Frequency	Percentage %
3o	118	46,6
2o	82	32,4
1o	53	20,9
Total	253	100,0

Source: Pallis, 2011

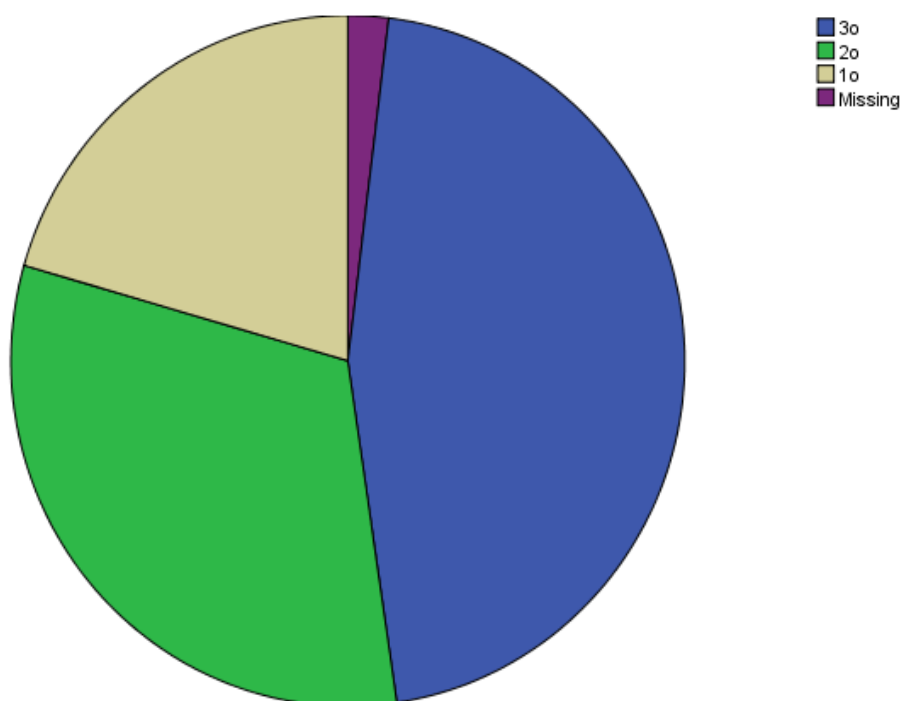
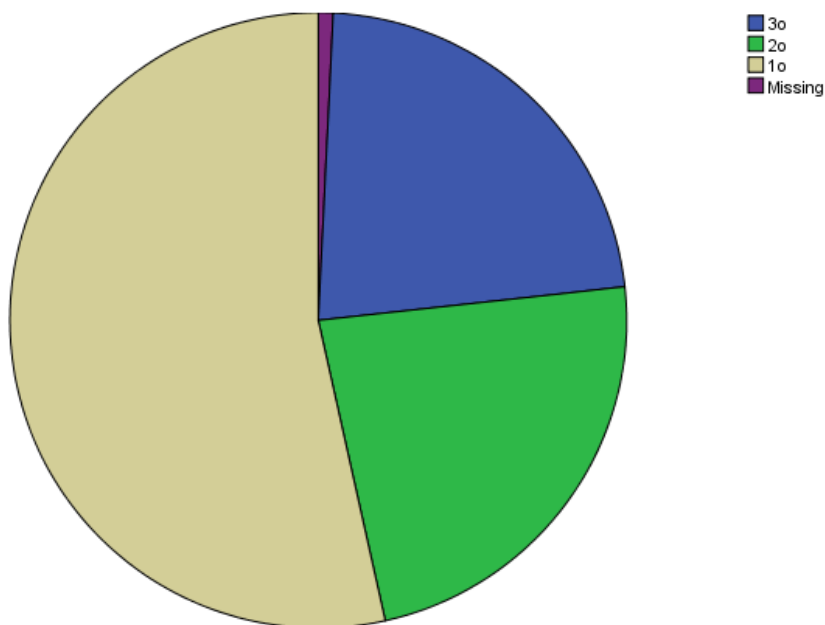


Table 1.8: Lack of Specialized Personnel

Ranking	Frequency	Percentage %
3	58	22,7
2	60	23,4
1	138	53,9
Total	256	100,0

Source: Pallis, 2011



In general terms, by observing the answers given by the Mayors to this question, one can acquire a relatively clear picture of their view on the problems they face in the management of their personnel. As far as inefficiency in administrative structure is concerned, the great majority (43.9%) consider it the second most important problem, 78 respondents (30.8%) the third most important, while just 64 respondents

(25.3%) describe it as the biggest problem they face. On the contrary, the inadequate amount of human resources is considered by the majority of Mayors to be the least important problem, as 118 of them (46.6%) place it third in order of importance, 82 Mayors (32.4%) describe this problem as second in importance and only 53 (20.9%) as the biggest problem they face. In observing Table 1.8, it is apparent that from the Mayors' answers, the most serious problem they face in personnel management is the lack of specialized personnel. More specifically, 53.9% of respondents (138 Mayors) consider the lack of specialized personnel as the most crucial of the three, 23.4% (60 Mayors) describe the problem as the second biggest issue and 22.7% (58 Mayors) as the third most important. It therefore becomes clear that this problem is considered to be the most crucial issue in personnel management. Below the percentages of respondents who consider each problem as most important are presented collectively (Table 1.9) along with the corresponding bar chart of relative frequencies. As can be seen, the overwhelming majority (54%) of respondents considers the lack of specialized personnel as the biggest problem in their municipality, this is followed by inefficiency in administrative structure (25% of the sample), whilst the minority of respondents (21%) considers the biggest problem to be the inadequate number of personnel in the municipality.

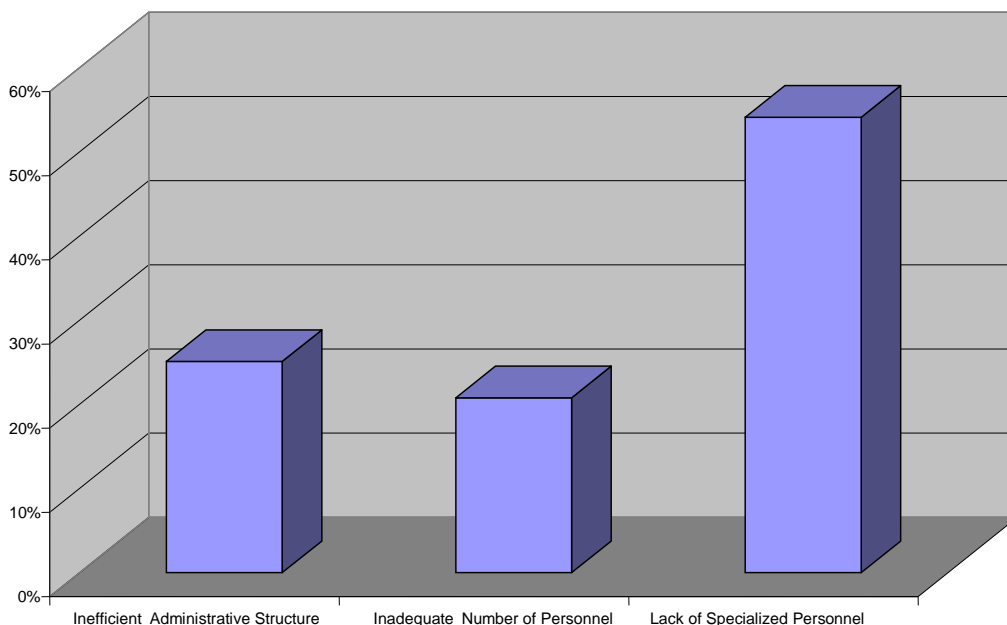
Table 1.9: Biggest Problems faced by Municipalities in Personnel Management

Municipalities' Problems	Frequency	Percentage %
Inefficient Administrative Structure	64	25%
Inadequate Number of Personnel	53	21%
Lack of Specialized Personnel	138	54%
Total	255	100%

Source: Pallis, 2011

Figure 1.2: Biggest Problems faced by Municipalities in Personnel Management

Biggest Problems faced by Municipalities in Personnel Management



Source: Pallis, 2011

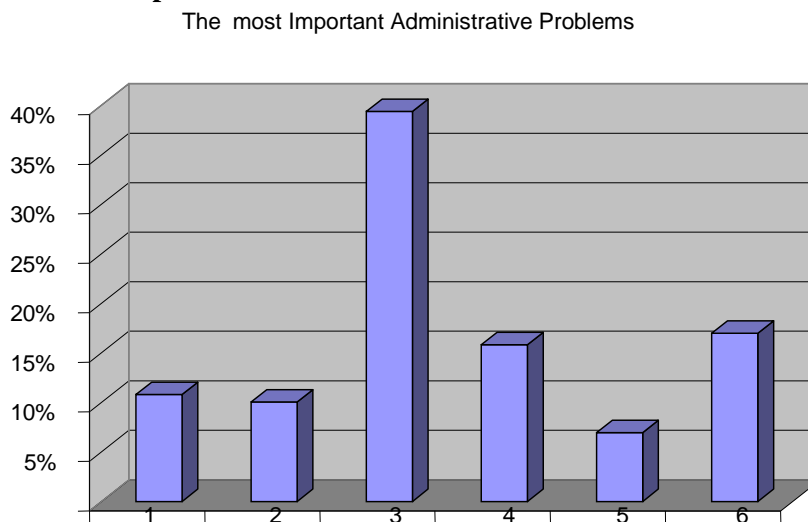
4.3 The Most Important Administrative Problems In Municipalities.

The next important issue examined in this survey is the method of administration in Greek municipalities and the Mayors' views on this. In connection with this the respondents were requested to give their opinion by grading six likely problems in administration, on the basis of their importance for their municipality. The six main problems given to them are: inefficiency in administrative structure, a lack of personnel, a lack of financial resources, a lack of financial independence and flexibility, a lack of administrative autonomy and overlapping of responsibilities, and the size of the municipality (based on area and population). For each of these problems the number of Mayors rating it as the most important of all was calculated. Below is the table of frequencies and relative frequencies (table 1.10) as well as the corresponding bar chart.

Table 1.10: The Most Important Administrative Problems

Administrative Problems	Frequency	Percentage %
Inefficiency in administrative structure (1)	28	11%
Lack of personnel (2)	26	10%
Lack of financial resources (3)	102	39%
Lack of financial independence and flexibility (4)	41	16%
Lack of administrative autonomy and overlapping of responsibilities (5)	18	7%
Size of the municipality (based on area and population) (6)	44	17%
Total	259	100%

Source: Pallis, 2011

Figure 1.3: The most Important Administrative Problems

Source: Pallis, 2011

According to the answers of those participating in the survey, the most important administrative problem faced by Greek municipalities is a lack of financial resources. More specifically, 39% of the sample (102 Mayors) graded this issue as the most important of all, a percentage much greater than any other in this question. In second place is the size of the municipality, as 17% of the sample (44 Mayors) assessed it as the biggest problem. 16% of the mayors placed in first position the lack of financial independence and flexibility, 11% the inefficient administrative structure, 10% the lack of personnel and just 7% the lack of administrative autonomy. It can be deduced from these results that many Greek municipalities have limited finances, a fact which proves an obstacle to effective administrative organization.

5. Conclusion

Given that the respondents were mayors and not citizens, the answers cannot be considered completely objective. Yet, according to existing bibliography (e.g. Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003, Thalassinos *et al.*, 2010), information drawn from a key informant, as is the Mayor of a city, brings a satisfactory level of objectivity to the answers. So, the respondents were called upon to grade according to their

importance, three basic problems faced by their citizens: the lack of infrastructure, inadequate services for households and inadequate services for businesses. As observed, the «lack of infrastructure» is ranked as the biggest problem in their municipalities. As regards the issue of inadequate services for households, a clear tendency appears among respondents to grade this lack of services as the second biggest problem for their citizens. Finally, as regards the issue of inadequate services for businesses, according to the sample collected, the respondents tended to consider inadequate services for businesses as the least important problem in their municipalities.

Another key objective of the survey is to explore the overall quality of existing administrative policies and practices concerning personnel in Greek municipalities. For this reason an attempt was made in this survey to verify the biggest problems faced by municipalities in personnel management. The three problems were: the inefficient administrative structure, the inadequate number of personnel, and the lack of specialized personnel. Generally speaking, by observing the Mayors' answers to this question, a relatively clear picture emerges of their opinion on the problems they face in personnel management. As far as the ineffectiveness of the administrative structure is concerned, the great majority considered it the second biggest problem. As opposed to this, the inadequate number of personnel is considered by most Mayors to be the least important problem. The most serious problem they face in personnel management is the lack of specialized personnel.

The next important issue examined in this survey is the method of administration in Greek municipalities and the Mayors' views on this. In connection with this the respondents were requested to give their opinion by grading six likely problems in administration, on the basis of their importance for the municipality. The six main problems given to them are: inefficiency in administrative structure, a lack of personnel, a lack of financial resources, a lack of financial independence and flexibility, a lack of administrative autonomy and overlapping of responsibilities, and the size of the municipality (based on area and population). According to the answers given by those participating in the survey, the most serious administrative problem facing Greek municipalities is the lack of financial resources. More specifically, 39% of the sample (102 Mayors) graded this issue as the most important of all, a percentage much greater than any other for this question. In second place is the size of the municipality, as 17% of the sample (44 Mayors) assessed it as the biggest problem. It can be deduced from these results that many

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