

GREECE

Repercussions of the Economic Crisis on the Cultural Heritage Sector

The crisis experienced in Greece over the past three years has spread beyond the economy to all facets of social and cultural life. Health, national education and culture are the sectors facing the most significant pressure and losses regarding their personnel and budget. More specifically, in the sector of culture and the protection of cultural heritage, important delays can be noted in the execution of research as well as of programmed works.

This situation was aggravated when around the end 2011 dozens of experienced and specialized scientists, employees of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, were forced to retire from the central and peripheral services of the Ministry of Culture. ICOMOS Hellenic denounced this situation, asking for our colleagues' solidarity during the 17th General Assembly of ICOMOS in November 2011.

This decision caused delays in approximately 578 projects with over 3000 employees and a budget of 707 million euros in the framework of the National Strategic Reference Program, allocating European Union Funds at a national level for the period of 2007 – 2013. The funding is aimed at protecting monuments and at developing Greece in cultural and tourist matters. These projects have opened up job opportunities and provided work to a great number of employees, many of whom fall under the enforcements of the new legislation. Therefore all these projects are threatened to be delayed or even terminated.

But austerity did not end there. Recently, and despite the protest by ICOMOS Hellenic, the Association of Archaeologists and other non-governmental institutions, the number of seasonal employees was significantly limited. They are the ones undertaking excavation and restoration work during the summer and they also operate the archaeological sites and museums during the tourist season.

Culture is a capital developmental asset for Greece, from a qualitative but also from a quantitative point of view. It is estimated that its broader sector occupies more than 100,000 employees and it accounts for 2.8% of the Gross National Product, according to the 2011 data. The Greek people respect and love their tradition and culture, which give great added value to their country. Unfortunately however, the last years' crisis is bringing to light some increasingly worrying phenomena, timely denounced through letters to the competent bodies by ICOMOS Hellenic. Some of these issues are the following:

- Vandalisms and destruction of historic buildings, as those burnt in the historic centre of Athens at the beginning of 2012 and which await some action of restoration;
- Thefts from the National Gallery and the Museum of Ancient Olympia, which occurred quite possibly due to insufficient safeguarding;

- Procedures for the sale of national estates, often included in the list of natural and cultural monuments, as in the case of the temple of Apollo Zostiras included in the Astir resort tourist complex in Attica.

Nevertheless, the issue troubling us most is the proposed law for the new Organization Chart of the General Secretariat of Culture, made public on February 5, 2012.

As the economic crisis progressed, the erstwhile autonomous Ministry of Culture was finally abolished in 2009. Recently, it was incorporated into the newly established Ministry of Education, Religion, Culture and Sports as a simple General Secretariat of Culture. Within the general framework of governmental reorganization, a new organization plan of the General Secretariat's structure has been drafted and is on its way to be voted for in Parliament. The draft of this new organization plan will dramatically reduce, by up to 51.5%, the organizational structures and units of the culture-related Public Services, as well as detach vital Directorates, such as the Directorates of Administration and Finances.

The plan calls for the merging of non-related departments which perform very different scientific and administrative duties. In addition, several other Directorates of the General Secretariat of Culture, with significant responsibilities, will be eliminated or reduced drastically. It is evident that if the New Organization Plan of the General Secretariat of Culture is voted for and put into effect, it will fundamentally weaken the Greek state's ability to cope with the enormous task of protecting and enhancing Greece's cultural heritage.

The drafting and discussion excluded the Ministry's service bodies, employees and associations; neither did it include bodies active in the protection of cultural heritage, such as ICOMOS Hellenic, the National Association of Architects, the Technical Chamber of Greece, ICOM, TICCIH, etc.

The Hellenic section of ICOMOS estimates that the aforementioned development actually leads to the dissolution of the cultural Technical Services, at a central and peripheral level, while administrative incompatibilities emerge in some cases, leading to malfunction in services. It has become obvious that the preliminary plan (with its elements publicized so far) does not constitute the result of a substantial assessment and evaluation of structures and people; nor does it take into consideration the actual administrative needs in this sector. On the contrary, the aim of this plan seems to be the shrinking of the public sector, through the impoverishment of its developmental character and finally the devaluation of culture itself.

By making its documents public, the Hellenic National Committee of ICOMOS calls the political leadership to withdraw and to refute, if it disagrees with the proposed Organization Chart and to start a substantial dialogue, aiming at a modern, functional and effective organization; not at devaluing but at strengthening culture and its services.

Athens, May 27, 2013
ICOMOS Hellenic

Archaeological Finds in Thessalonica at Risk due to Metro Construction

In the centre of Greece's second largest city, Thessalonica, digging carried out for the construction of the city's metro unearthed rich archaeological finds dating back to late Antiquity. It turned out that these metro construction works exposed part of the historic Via Egnatia, an antique road connecting the Adriatic with the Bosphorus.

According to an article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of July 2, 2013 these finds resulted in a controversial discussion what ought

to be done with them. While archaeologists were thrilled about what they had found in the ground and demanded that the finds be left where they were, the construction companies and even the State Office of Antiquities in Athens were determined that the metro construction works be taken up again as soon as possible and that the antique finds be removed and transported to an interim depot on the outskirts. The latter parties seem to have won the "battle": Apparently, the finds have now been removed and will be displayed in the future metro stations "Agia Sophia" and "Eleftherios Venizelos".

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Thessalonica, archaeological remains discovered during metro construction (photos: www.thehistoryblog.com)