

**FROM THE “APPLICATION BY TELEPHONE”
TO THE “CITIZENS CENTERS”:
AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM FOR PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY -
THE GREEK EXPERIENCE**

by

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The situation of the Greek Public Administration a few years ago, was characterized by the following negative points:

- Citizens’ dissatisfaction with the way their needs and concerns were being dealt with. That means waiting many hours to be served and queuing at different counters. It took a long time to deal with one request.
- Employees’ dissatisfaction since they neither saw the connection between their own jobs and those of their colleagues nor did they feel responsible for what they did. Moreover they were confronted with the prejudice of the “typical civil servant” (lazy, unfriendly, uncooperative).
- Seniors’ administrator dissatisfaction, because this kind of administration was not only inefficient but was not motivating for the employees or able to satisfy the citizens’ needs.

Moreover:

- Greece is characterized by a large number of islands and mountains, most of them which are inhabited. In both cases the problem for the citizens, is the difficulty of access to the administrative centers, especially during the months of the winter, when the weather is very bad. That creates a lot of problems to the citizen who have to travel, in order to handle an administrative case.
- In the capital of Greece Athens and in the other big cities of the country, the majority of the population lives. The result is that the citizens, when they have to travel, in order to have access to the public services, confront a serious problem: heavy traffic.

The main measures and the changes taken for the confronting of this situation, in the framework of an Integrated System for Public Service Delivery are:

- Telephone application
- Citizens' centers and
- Call center of administrative information

Application by telephone

Simultaneously, a call center is operated for the application by telephone, to serve citizens who don't desire to spend time for visiting civil services, in order to ask a document.

So a work group made up of experts from the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization and the Greek Telecommunication Organization designed the telephone applications system, which initially dealt with the five most frequently requested certificates.

These documents are:

- The birth certificate
- An extract from birth, death and marital status certificate
- The military status certificate
- The criminal record and
- The tax observance

For the application by telephone system, there is in operation a telephone center in Athens (number fifteen o two 1502), that citizens may call from anywhere in Greece.

In this center, thirty employees are employed, working on computers which contain the forms of the different kinds of application, concerning the corresponding certificates.

The citizens declare their personal data and the way that they desire to obtain the document (by mail or by visiting in person the competent service.

The telephone application is transmitted immediately by fax to the competent civil service, which issues the document and sends it to the citizen's postal address by registered letter.

The words "telephone application" are clearly written on the envelope, in order to inform the mail personnel regarding the cost of the mail service.

The letter must be registered and is delivered only after the correct identity card has been presented, in order to protect personal data.

The telephone call cost is two euro twenty (2,20e) and the mail cost is two euro (2e).

We must point out that the Ministry has made special agreements with the Greek Organization of Telecommunication and the Greek Postal Services, in order for these prices to be lower than the usual prices.

In this way citizens are encouraged to submit applications by telephone.

At the same time in order to facilitate this procedure, a special arrangement abolished the obligation to stick stamps on certain documents.

It is possible to extend this system for other certificates, following the issue of a ministerial decision.

At present, citizens can request up to fifty eight (58) different certificates by telephone application.

These documents are issued from nearly all the State services, local government organizations and other legal entities of public law.

From the start, this measure had proved to be a great success and both citizens and media have reacted positively.

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From the year nineteen ninety eight (1998), until the end of September two thousand and three (2003), the call center 1502 received more than two million eight hundred and sixty thousand (2.860.000) telephone calls while the total number of application was one million four hundred and thirty thousand (1.430.000), as people call not only to ask for a certificate, but also to be informed about procedure.

So 1502 functions as an one call shop and also as an information center, from eight (8) in the morning, until eight (8) in the evening

Benefits from the function of this system are great.

They include:

- Reduction of the citizen's time which is taken for the issue and the receipt of the administrative certificates, because it isn't necessary to visit the competent service.
- Improvement of the waiting conditions of the citizen's in public services, as queuing is minimized.
- Reduction in traffic in big cities, as the citizen doesn't have to move to and from the civil services.
- Habitants of islands and mountainous areas, are more facilitated.
- Also disabled people are better served, as they don't need to move to the civil services.

The National Center of Public Administration has carried out research on the measurement of user's satisfaction of this system. The main conclusions of this research are:

- 82% of the users are satisfied with the delivery time
- 95% of the users expressed the opinion that the measure was of great usefulness.
- 88% of the users expressed their complete satisfaction with the system's operation.

- 98,2% of the users expressed the intention to use this system again.
- 94% of the users received the document requested.

CITIZENS' CENTERS

The system of application by telephone is a good way for citizens to take certificates for the issuing of which we need only an application. But for more complicated procedures it isn't very functional. So the Greek administration established citizens' centers. The idea behind on citizens' centers is the "one stop shop" logic and the most important and most frequent tasks of them are:

- Certification of original documents.
- Certification of signature's authenticity.
- Disposal of solemn statement forms and sale of stamps.
- Immediate provision of some simple administrative procedure and direct issuance of the relevant certificates or other public documents.
- Mediation through the use of contemporary electronic and telecommunications means of more than 800 different certificates, licenses or other documents. By the cutting out of a certain number of supporting documents or the replacement of others by a solemn statement, these administrative procedures have been more simplified and the needed time for their expediting is now shorter than the past.

The citizens have easy accessibility to these units, because they are housed in a bright and spacious open offices on the ground floor of buildings. These centers are open to the public from 8 o'clock in the morning to 8 o'clock in the evening.

The establishment of about 1000 citizens' centers, until the end of this year, in all the local authorities of the country, is the first priority in the administration reform program of our country and the first integrated effort, in a political and administrative level, to create a network of public services in Greece. Right now there are in operation almost 750 (seven hundred and fifty) citizens' centers and from April to September 2003, about two million two hundred and seventy thousand (2.270.000) citizens were served. Almost seventeen thousand (17.000) citizens per day and the 20% of the Greek population in whole. Citizens' centers issue of more than 800 (eight hundred) different certificates, licenses or other documents. Our target is to increase this number gradually, until the end of this year, to cover all the crucial citizens administrative cases (we are talking about 1000 cases). These services are going to intervene between the classic public services and the citizens, aiming at the improvement of the services provided, and in the long run, at the change of the state - citizens relations, driven by a different and innovative philosophy from the traditional public administration.

Call Center of Administrative Information:

The next measure that also help to the system of application by telephone and the citizens' centers effectiveness, is the call center administrative information. The Greek Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation, has implemented the measure for the operation of a 24 hours telephone center, which responds to citizens' enquires concerning administrative issues as well on personnel recruitment in the public sector (e.g. what is needed to get a passport or for employment in public sector). After that, it could be said that the reconstruction of citizens-state relationships is fulfilled through an integrated policy.

So, with these measures for public service delivery, the Greek Public Administration continues its efforts to improve and offer better services to citizens.

Thus, from the picture of the exasperated citizen queuing we have arrived to the picture of smiling citizens.