

Risk versus National Pride: Conflicting Discourses over the Construction of a High Voltage Power Station in the Athens Metropolitan Area for Demands of the 2004 Olympics^{1,2}

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Abstract

This paper first explores the conflictual discourses employed by government agencies, citizens' initiatives, and environmental organizations over the construction of a High Voltage Power Station (KYT) for demands of the 2004 Olympic Games, as presented in media reports and movement literature over a period of one year. Having in mind recent criticisms targeting the lack of empirical evidence in Ulrich Beck's risk theorization, this exploration is of distinct importance. Secondly, it takes into account that both the defensive character of societal action and mistrust to expert authorities have been confirmed as prevalent characteristics of both the Greek and the general risk social context. The paper attempts to re-evaluate and/or complement existing perspectives of societal activism in general and environmental mobilizations in particular within the confines of the Greek social context. As a tentative conclusion, it is suggested that the risk perspective offers a novel prism for the examination of societal activism without confining it to the characteristics of individual national contexts.

Keywords: *mega-events, 'deep'/'light' green, new social movements, environmental mobilizations, civil society*

Introduction

This paper examines the opposition of local residents in two Athens municipalities to the construction and subsequent operation of a High Voltage Power Station (KYT) due to the perceived risks that such a project entailed for the local environment and their physical health. The promoted linkage of the project to the preparations for the Athens 2004 Olympic Games has led us to adopt a combination of perspectives from the literature on mega-events and the more explicitly linked sociologies of risk and environmental mobilisations. The main focus of this exploration is on the impact of risk and 'national pride,' in direct opposition to one another, on the character of environmental mobilizations in the Greek social context. The purpose is not to make more than a periph-

eral contribution on the growing literature on mega-events.

As such, the paper starts with a brief, albeit elucidating, presentation of key aspects of the literature on Olympic Games as mega-events. The multi-dimensional social character of Olympic Games is the centrepiece of the discussion here. Emphasis is given to the national and international impact that Olympic Games tend to have. With reference to the Greek social context and the international discourses employed by the International Olympic Committee we set the parameters for the discussion that follows.

This is followed by a presentation of key aspects of Ulrich Beck's 'risk society' that sets the framework for the presentation and analysis of the struggle against KYT that immediately follows. Contrary to Beck's warning that the mobilized challengers are destined to lose with the slight acceptance of scientific reasoning, the events surrounding this particular struggle show that, in the face of scientific evidence, the authorities were only able to respond with the use of coercion to the risks posed by the project. Lastly, we connect Beck's risk theorization to recent scholarship about environmental mobilizations in Greece and qualify the claim that Greek civil society has been showing signs of strengthening since the 1990s.

Background Information

The plan for construction of a High Voltage Power Station (KYT) at the slopes of Mount Imittos, in an area adjacent to the Athens municipalities of Argyroupolis and Elioupolis, can be traced back to 1996 when the Public Electricity Corporation (DEI) requested the amendment of the protection status of Imittos, awarded by presidential decree in 1978, for the construction of the station. Notwithstanding, a negative resolution by the Council of the State (StE) in 1998 argued that the project '...violates the constitutional article [article 24] for the protection of the environment.' The construction of KYT was incorporated in the special law of 2001 for 'Core Olympic Projects.' Right from the outset the residents of both municipalities passionately resisted the construction of the project as they considered it a detrimental development

for the health of the local residents and the local environment. Their active opposition to the project took various forms and shapes ranging from lawsuits, petitions to StE, citizen assemblies, protests, and attempts to physically obstruct the project. All of these found support among politicians of various colourings and political allegiances of both local and national standing.

Olympics as Mega-events

According to Roche (2000, 8) mega-events are “multi-dimensional social processes, simultaneously exhibiting three main sets of characteristics. They are “modern”/ “non-modern,” “national”/ “non-national,” and “local”/ “non-local” (or “urban”/ “mediated”).” For the purposes of this paper, we have focused our attention on the “national”/ “non-national” dimension of mega-events with emphasis on Olympic Games.

An Issue of National Importance

Olympic Games represent a showcase for the host country for future international investment (Burbank et al. 2001), an opportunity for urban renewal and social development, but also an opportunity for national elites to reinforce their status through the promotion of the official ‘invented tradition’ (Roche 2000, 9), always characterised by attempts to disguise the existing ethnic, gender and class divisions and ‘engineer consensus among residents by all elites’ (Hiller 2000b, 187). Furthermore, appeals to national unity, pride and references to past achievements are utilised to quell dissenting voices by presenting them as unpatriotic elements. The utilisation of discourses of this kind has not been missed in existing case studies (see for example Hargreaves 2000; Lenskyj 2000, 2002; Hiller 2000a, 453).

In the Greek case, the ‘national’ dimension of Olympic Games acquires a distinctive importance. Greece, as the birthplace of the Olympic Games, has been a central reference point in the pageantry and ceremonialism associated with the Games. It is undisputable that Athens was selected as a host to the 2004 Games mainly due to its historical claim to them. Indeed, the bulk of the Athens’ bid to host the Games was based on an emotional appeal highlighting ‘the debt of the international community and the Olympic movement’ to the country of their birth (Pyrgiotis 2002, 39). The fact that Greece is the only country of its size and economic clout to be awarded hosting the event since the 1952 Helsinki Olympics supports the aforementioned points. Most important for the purposes of this paper is the place occupied by the games in the ‘imaginative construction’ of Greek national identity. Space restrictions do not allow for a deep analy-

sis of all of the contours of Modern Greek national consciousness. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that modern Greeks have a strong conviction about the linear and uninterrupted continuity of Greek culture throughout the eons. In this context, the success of the bid to host the 2004 Olympics was perceived, without exaggeration, as the fulfilment of a national destiny, another Great Idea (Megali Idea) aiming to give back to Greece its ‘rightful place’ among the leading nations of the world.

...The Olympic Games are the new ‘Megali Idea’ of the nation... 2004 must become the new vision after the EMU (Economic and Monetary Union).

(Costas Laliotis, government minister, Eleftherotypia Daily, 11/19/2000, cited in Totsikas 2004, 110).

The discourse of the Hellene-Christian civilization, so much adored by the dictatorships of the past, has continued unabated to form much of the Greek national consciousness, giving, more often than not, legitimacy to some of the most authoritarian and xenophobic elements of Greek society. This is such a powerful discourse that even a simplistic and seemingly educated observation that increasingly corporate sponsored Olympic Games have little to nothing in common with the spirit of their ancient “forefathers,” is bound to receive the label of an unpatriotic, if not outright anti-Greek, sentiment.⁴ With that in mind, it is extremely interesting to see the interplay between risk perceptions and the demand of unity and restraint toward fulfilling a “national goal.”

Olympics and Environmental Sustainability

On the other side of the dichotomy, Olympic Games represent, at least rhetorically, current expressions of universal worldviews, such as human rights and environmentalism (Roche 2000, 198). Nevertheless, as Andranovich, Burbank and Heying (Andranovich et al. 2001; Burbank et al. 2001) have shown in their comparative study of mega-event politics among three U.S. Olympic cities, notwithstanding the rhetoric of the Olympic movement, the preparation by host cities has been notable for the absence of citizen participation and the lack of general democratic accountability of the decision making process.⁵ On a similar note, although Atlanta based a great part of its claims to the human rights ideals of the Olympic Movement “through its claim to being the international human rights capital of the world” (Rutheiser 1996, 229) the spatial re-organisation of the city or what Rutheiser (1996; 1999) calls ‘imagineering’ by the Atlanta Committee for the Organization of the Games (ACOG) was performed in a way that was aimed at the minimization of any potential opposition to projects resulting in a mass displacement of peo-

ple (see Rutheiser 1999, 332). Before we are accused of presenting the disparity between the human rights rhetoric of the Olympic movement and the lack of democratic accountability in the preparation of the host cities as an exclusively American affair, we should highlight that in comparison to Atlanta, the displacements that took place in preparation for the 1988 Seoul and 1992 Barcelona Olympics were of a much higher scale (Rutheiser 1996, 282). Hiller (2000b, 198) has argued that the planning and implementation of projects related to mega-events “have fixed completion dates that must follow a tight schedule which, on the one hand, ensures results rather than unending deliberation but, on the other hand, may produce autocracy against which opposition may arise.” This is useful to bear in mind in relation to the response of the authorities to the citizens of Argypolis and Elioupolis legitimate concerns about the construction of KYT.

Considering that the rise of environmental concern among western publics is traced back to the 1960s and 1970s, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has been extremely slow in adapting its procedures regarding the award of the Games to that growing concern. Public referenda held in Denver, Colorado turned down the IOC’s offer to host the 1976 Winter Games on the basis of environmentally destructive practices. Environmental organizations and citizen groups were instrumental in launching campaigns against the Olympic bids of Toronto and Rome for the Summer Games of 1996 and 2004 (Lenskyj 2000, 157-58). The beginning of change by the IOC in relation to the environmental impact of the Games, an issue increasingly affecting its legitimacy, can be traced back to the 1994 Winter Games of Lillehammer.⁶ A combination of grassroots activists’ opposition to projects associated with the Games and a need for the Norwegian government to highlight its commitment to the principles outlined by Gro Harlem Brundtland — the Norwegian prime minister — in the 1987 UN commission for the environment report, *Our Common Future*, led to Lillehammer becoming a paradigmatic case for the organization of the Games along the principles of sustainable development (Lesjø 2000, 290-93). In a move that can be perceived by sceptics as an attempt to co-opt the growing concern about the environmental sustainability of the Games, IOC invited the then head of the coalition of environmental organizations of Lillehammer to draft its environmental policy and action plan (Lenskyj 2000, 158). The result was the IOC’s *Manual on Sport and the Environment and the Environmental Requirements for the Candidate Cities*.⁷ It is worth having a closer look at some of these requirements in order to facilitate the analysis that will follow. The following are three of the requirements that have to be fulfilled by the candidate city according to the IOC:

Prepare charts and explain briefly the system of natural resource and environmental management

put in place by the public authorities and their responsibilities towards the Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG).

Provide an overview, including maps and tables, if possible, of the local situation with respect to the state of the environment, protected areas, cultural monuments and potential natural risks.

Obtain from the competent authorities an official guarantee confirming that all work needed to stage the Games will comply with local, regional and national legislation and rules as well as international agreements and protocols on town and county planning, construction and protection of the environment.

Indeed, the subsequent Sydney 2000 bid for the Games “was the promise of a Green Games, with Olympic facilities designed according to environmentally sustainable development (ESD) principles” and it boasted “Greenpeace endorsement of (part of) the Sydney 2000 design” (Lenskyj 2002, 20-21). Greenpeace went even further by participating in the bid for the design of the Olympic village and subsequently collaborating with four other firms in the remaining stages of its construction. That did not stop Greenpeace from organising its often spectacular protest events against projects that fell short of the green promise of the Olympic Organising Committee. The latter responded by accusing Greenpeace for committing ‘unpatriotic’ acts (Lenskyj 2000, 166-67). Although both the environmental requirements of the IOC and their implementation during the Sydney 2000 Olympics fell short of the demands of the ‘dark’ green sectors of the environmental movement, they nevertheless conformed to a ‘light’ green perspective⁸ that was perceived as an extremely positive step, outlining the basics for best practice toward the future conduct of green Olympic Games. This is a view maintained to this day by Greenpeace and other environmental organizations.⁹

Athens 2004 and the Environment

A close inspection of the file submitted by the “Athens 2004” Olympic Bid Committee (1996) suggests that the Committee put forward a very strong case for Athens becoming a capable inheritor of Lillehammer and Sydney in terms of environmental sustainability. Nine crucial points, standing out from the file as a whole, were committing the organizers, among other things, to conduct Environmental Impact Assessment Studies prior to the approval of any project related to the games, take measure of the protection of the fauna and flora in close proximity to assigned project areas, make the minimum required use of free spaces by utilising existing infrastructure, use environmentally-friendly technology and

most importantly inform the public about the preparation of the Games. In addition, the Greek government announced measures to increase green spaces in Athens by planting thousands of trees.¹⁰ At a more general level, the PASOK (Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement) led government at the time, under the leadership of Costas Simitis, was promoting the increased participation of civil society organizations in the decision-making process through the new discursive device of 'modernization.' After the re-election of PASOK in 2000, a number of prominent environmentalists, including the former director of the Greek branch of Greenpeace, Elias Efthymiopoulos, accepted the invitation by the new government to occupy posts in YPEHODE (Ministry of Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works) (see Kousis 2002, 106).¹¹ Similar to earlier discursive devices deployed by PASOK, 'modernization' proved to be just another rhetorical schema. In 2000, in a move that could be perceived as an attempt by the Greek government to strip the environmental movement of its most potent weapon against environmentally destructive Olympic projects, the government initiated a revision process of the Constitution that led to the downgrading of forest protection under article 24 and thus a significant curtailing of the power of StE to block these projects. It is probably not an exaggeration to argue that the Greek government, faced with the IOC requirement for Olympic cities to respect the local, national and international environmental legislation in their planning for the Games (see above), decided to change the existing legal framework.

Considering the general lethargy of the public when it comes to opposing environmentally destructive projects not directly harmful to its health and economic wellbeing, the aforementioned development was extremely detrimental to the activities of environmental organizations and citizen initiatives opposing certain Olympic projects. Indeed, the eco-centric ('dark' green) discourse characterising the opposition to the construction of the Olympic Village on the slopes of Mount Parnitha, the Olympic Rowing Stadium at the Natura 2000 protected wetland of Schinias and the Olympic Marathon route was not strong enough to attract an uninterrupted base of citizen support.¹² Arguments identifying positive aspects of these projects have come more recently into the fore under the guise of a rationalist logic paying attention to the real and important problems associated with city planning in Greece by sectors originally opposed to them (see Economou 2002), highlighting for once more in this way the difference between 'dark' green/ecocentric and 'light' green perspectives. In contrast to these cases, opposition to the construction of KYT increased in potency and citizen support throughout the duration of the mobilizations. The risk associated with the project did not give much chance to arguments of national unity and greatness.

Ulrich Beck's Risk Society Thesis

The perspectives offered by Ulrich Beck (1992; 1995), in his famous 'risk society,' have provided the framework for the main analysis of the discourses employed by mobilizers against the construction of KYT. According to him, the current era, which he calls 'late modern' or 'industrial risk society,' is characterised by the proliferation of risks that, contrary to earlier stages of modernity, are of larger scale, not tied to individually made decisions, with numerous effects that are often politically explosive, rendering questionable the principles of calculability, and precaution characterising the rationale of modernity. In the context of the 'risk society,' emergent 'subcultures' challenge scientific rationality and the unquestionable trust of expert authorities, opening, in that way, the road for the emergence of a 'new politics' that proliferates and amplifies the meaning of the political. In this context, modernity experiences a 'bifurcation' between a rational side based on the monopoly of scientific and economic expertise and social forces seeking to challenge it by demanding to have a say. At this point, it is important to highlight that students of environmental movements have always acknowledged that the environmental movement as a whole does not restrict its arguments to ethics and emotional appeals but it also uses hard-backed scientific evidence (see Yearly 1992; 2005). Nevertheless, for Beck (1995, 127) the training and research undertaken by natural scientists is like the ideological indoctrination that allowed Stalinist cadres to explain and justify some of the worst atrocities of the Stalinist era in the Soviet Union. He qualifies this point as follows:

Scientific calculations of risks remain locked in a circle of technological mastery. The abstractness of the calculation in relation to particular technologies guarantees that technologies can be compared; comparison with accepted technologies in turn guarantees calculability, which must for that very reason be unverifiably, circularly presupposed, compelling the denial of what can never be excluded: dogmatism.

The assumption of technological mastery turns into technological irrationality, in the face of hazards which cannot be technically excluded but minimized (Beck 1995, 126).

There is no doubt that Beck's views are based on his subscription to a particular political viewpoint that in 'detailed clearer conceptions of the social reality in which people acquire and create interpretations of "hazards" as "risks"' (Wilkinson 2001, 2). By perceiving the critical side of the 'bifurcated' modernity as rejecting any form of scientific back up, he restricts his view of the emerging 'new politics'

to the most radical sectors of the environmental movement, thus failing to fully appreciate the tactics employed by some of the best known environmental organizations and ad hoc citizens' mobilizations.¹³ That has not been missed by McKechnie and Welsh (2002, 296-301) who have argued that Beck's perception of the 'new politics' parallels the 'New Social Movement' (NSM) thesis as it has been expressed in the works of Melucci (1985), Offe (1985) and Touraine (1985). The NSM thesis argues that new social movements are organized around qualitative issues and are highly suspicious of scientific rationality and established hierarchies of expertise and authority. They challenge existing codes by organizing in a horizontal fashion and instead of attempting to capture state power, like earlier social movements, they insist on remaining part of the civil society. Like Beck, the proponents of the NSM thesis are focusing their attention on the most radical sectors of movements organizing around environmental, women's rights and other post-industrial issues. In light of the above, we proceed to an account of the arguments employed by the citizens' initiatives mobilized against the construction of KYT.

Risk in the Construction of KYT

The Arguments of The Challengers

The examination of the discourses involved in the struggle against the construction of KYT is based on relevant articles and reports collected from the daily *Eleftherotipia*¹⁴ over a period of one year and publications by the Inter-municipal Struggle Committee against the construction of KYT, a coalition of over 40 Athens Based citizens' groups (Available on <http://dimotika.snn.gr>).

The arguments employed by the Struggle Committee castigated the illegality of the project, the lack of consultation and democratic accountability, and the risks that the operation of KYT in the municipalities of Argyroupolis and Elioupolis entailed for the local physical environment and the health of the local inhabitants. According to Presidential Decree 544 of 1978, the designated area for the construction of KYT falls within zone B for the protection of Imittos. The struggle committee seldom missed the opportunity in its communiqués to remind citizens of the fact that the last attempt to violate the status of the area took place in 1969 during the days of the military Junta. This argument served as a reminder to the government of the participation of some of its prominent cadres in the resistance against the dictatorship and that with its actions it was essentially completing "a crime that begun with the Junta approximately 30 years ago" (Autonomous Citizens' Intervention of Argyroupolis 2002). Furthermore, the Struggle Committee castigated the decision of YPEHODE to award a construction permit to DEI for the

project, irrespective of the fact that the approval of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the project was rejected by the Athens Prefectural Council and had been cancelled by StE (2275/2000), as a blatant violation of constitutional legality and the institutions underpinning it. In addition, the Struggle Committee reminded the government of its obligation as a signatory of article 174 of the EU Treaty, which under the 'precautionary principle' that in cases of scientific uncertainty, actions should be taken for hazard prevention even if that has not been proven (Votsis 2002).

In terms of environmental degradation, the Struggle Committee continuously brought up the aforementioned violation of the existing status of the B zone of Imittos. Furthermore, they argued that the materials used by DEI in its transformers represented a great risk in case of fire, that the electric switches will cause noise pollution, that the attraction of polluting substances by the power cables will increase atmospheric pollution, that flora will be reduced further, and that the status of Imittos will be progressively downgraded from that of a forested area to an industrial zone.

In terms of risks for the health of the local inhabitants, the Struggle Committee reminded the government about the report produced by the Central Health Council (KESY) in 1994 where, among other things, it was argued that a) many aspects regarding the affects of non-ionised electromagnetic radiation on human health remain unknown and that b) the available experience has shown that, in a matter of few decades the safety limits have been reduced. A constant rallying cry for the mobilizers was the adverse health effects, including the risk of leukaemia to the hundreds of children attending schools and sporting facilities located in close proximity to the site of KYT after prolonged exposure to an electromagnetic field that would be 30 times stronger than the one identified by international epidemiological studies as being responsible for incidences of leukaemia and brain tumours.¹⁵

The Response of the Authorities

The response of the authorities to the opposition to the construction of KYT can be divided into three phases. The first phase consisted of an attempt to highlight the importance of the project for the extensive power needs during the Olympic Games. The second phase consisted of an attempt to pacify the mobilizers with false promises of cancelling the project and the third phase consisted of the use of repression.

The argument of the Olympic Games was used extensively at the beginning of the mobilizations. When the Minister of YPEHODE, Vaso Papatandreou, was confronted in the Greek parliament by MPs highlighting the legitimate concerns of the Struggle Committee her response was sharp and to the point: "Do you want Olympics or not?" (Votsis 2002).

The statement produced by experts sent by IOC to examine the progress of the construction projects associated with the Olympic Games arguing that the construction of KYT is a 'priority project' was extensively promoted. At the same time DEI asked for the intervention of the District attorney to stop the blockade of the construction site by locals by arguing that 'in case that the project is not completed, DEI cannot be held accountable for the problems that may occur, namely a general black out of Attica during the Olympic Games of 2004...' (Eleftherotypia 2/26/2003). These clumsy attempts to appeal to the 'patriotism' of the protesters, by highlighting the importance of national unity for the fulfilment of a 'national' commitment and to avoid international embarrassment (a general black out during the Games), by promoting the assessment report of the IOC experts at a time that the international press was highlighting the delays in the construction of core sport venues and doubting the preparedness of Athens to host the Olympics is an example of the utilisation of 'national pride' as a medium for neutralising dissent. Probably a successful approach in many cases, but not, as the case of KYT shows, when on the antipode of 'national pride' are real or perceived environmental and health risks. Indeed, not only was the determination of the mobilizers not quelled, but protest activities increased in potency and participation (see appendix). Different tactics had to be used by the authorities for the project to be put back on track.

In March 2003 the government announced the halting of the project, which was welcomed by many of the locals with enthusiasm and was perceived as a prelude for the forthcoming complete cancellation of the project (Eleftherotypia 3/13/2003). Nevertheless, the local protesters, in a paradigmatic show of cautiousness, did not interrupt their blockade of the construction site.

The patience of the government, however, did not last very long. Less than two months after the announcement of the halting of the project (5/2/2003) the inhabitants of Argypolis and Elioupolis started their day by witnessing what approximated an occupied city by a foreign invader. No less than 25 platoons of riot police were used to reclaim the construction site for DEI and stop any attempts of resistance (Eleftherotypia 5/3/2003). The subsequent mobilizations to re-occupy the site were met by violence and extensive use of tear gas. Nevertheless, at a time that protest had subsided in potency and determination something unexpected happened. In a move that can only be explained by the realities of Greek politics, namely loss of electoral support for the opposition parties at an important electoral constituency for the ruling party, the minister of Development, Akis Tsohatzopoulos, announced the cancellation of the project (6/14/2003). The only reported protest gathering after this announcement took place in front of KYT on 10/14/2003. Recently, two years

after the filing of an application to StE for the cancellation of the project by the municipal authorities of Argypolis and concerned citizens, the plenary session of StE decided in their favour by cancelling the ministerial decision to approve the environmental conditions for the construction of KYT (6/3/2005). Still DEI is adamant about the necessity of the completion of the project. In one of its recent reports, published by a Greek daily (Kathimerini, 6/19/05) it highlighted the importance of the KYT of Argypolis/Elioupolis for the general good functioning of the Greek electricity network. In essence, a repetition of earlier arguments but without, of course, any reference to the Olympic Games. This is important for two reasons: a) it confirms that the incorporation of KYT in the core Olympic projects was a way of lending some sort of legitimacy to an issue that was bound to be contentious and b) it suggests that the story of the Argypolis/Elioupolis KYT is not over yet.

Locating the case of KYT in 'Risk Society'

The conflict over the construction of KYT and the use of science by both sides (in the case of DEI, I am referring to the EIAs conducted and their subsequent cancellation by StE) fits very well with Beck's core arguments, namely the emergence of societal challenges over issues that, in earlier stages of modernity, were the exclusive terrain of unchallenged expert authorities. There was not a clear polarity between authorities using scientific rationality and a challenger putting forward a case based solely on emotional appeals that was bound to be eventually undermined by the slightest acceptance of scientific reasoning due to the inability of scientists to escape the claws of the promethean logic underpinning their training. The Struggle Committee used scientific expertise extensively while authorities moved from an appeal based on the new Megali Idea of the Olympic Games, and when that did not work, to outright lying and, in the end, coercion. Prior to the recent resolution by StE it appeared that the mobilizers had lost but their defeat was not from the world of scientific 'dogmatism' but from extensive use of the coercive state apparatus.

'Risk Society': A Novel Prism for the Examination of Environmental Mobilizations in Greece?

It is quite early to draw strong general conclusions about the current character of Greek civil society from a limited analysis of a single case study. Nevertheless, we can situate the analysis that this paper has engaged with in recent works produced by students of environmental mobilizations in Greece and qualify some of their proposals.

One of the main arguments produced by the study of the

struggle against the construction of KYT is that when risk comes in confrontation with 'national pride' the latter is likely to lose its appeal. If we set aside the specificities of the construction of the Greek national idea and the special place occupied by the Olympic Games in it, there is nothing particularly outstanding about the character of the mobilizations and arguments employed against KYT. The general European experience informs that whether 'national pride' is expressed through the construction of extensive motorway networks or nuclear reactors, citizens have seldom reduced their Nimby (Not In My Back Yard) opposition to projects that they perceive as degrading to their local surroundings and posing serious risks to their health. Projects have gone through in most cases due to the utilisation of the coercive state apparatus. What, however, is quite different in the case of KYT from the recent European experience is that the Greek government made little effort, except its appeal on the new Megali Idea of the Olympics, to lend any legitimacy to the project in question. Although a great deal of scepticism has been expressed about the legitimising mechanisms employed across Europe, for example, Public Inquiries in the UK and EIAs (see Wynne 1982), what is of great importance here, and in an intimate relationship with the findings of the mega-event literature, is that the Greek authorities not only violated their own institutional framework, but they essentially failed to engage the public even in the most rudimentary form of debate and consultation. This fact forces us to re-evaluate recent claims based on the upgrading of Environmental Movement Organizations (ESMOs) as official discussants with state authorities, deregulation leading to an increased autonomy of prefectural councils, and the re-activation of StE during the mid-1990s that the environmental problematic has led to the strengthening of the Greek civil society (Close 1999a, 1999b). The environmental record of the Greek state during its preparation for the Games in general, and the case of KYT in particular, just goes to show that the opening of intermediary structures signifies absolutely nothing if the state decides to make them defunct. Nevertheless, exception might be taken for StE, since its recent resolution suggests that, notwithstanding its usually prolonged procedures to reach a resolution and the downgrading of Constitutional Article 24, it still has the capacity to act as a potent medium when utilised by citizens and ESMOs.

There is however a general challenge by students of Greek environmental politics of the well established position arguing that associationalism in Greece is extremely weak (Kousis 2001; Kousis et al. 2001). This challenging perspective emanates from evidence produced by detailed studies of environmental protest in Greece showing that the frequency of environmental protest compares favourably with other European nations. Nevertheless, the high incidence of protest

activity, instead of suggesting a strengthening of the civil society, being the last resort that it is, suggests that civil society has failed to fulfil its main function, namely to act as an interlocutor between society and the state. It may be the case that Greece has low membership levels of environmental organizations but at the same time there is little hesitation by the Greeks to associate with one another on an ad hoc basis when their interests are perceived to be under threat. As we have argued elsewhere (Karamichas 2003) this conforms to what Mouzelis (1980, 262-64) has called a "weak but defensive civil society." This qualification of the above mentioned perspectives does not in any way dismiss their value. In fact, we believe that they have made an immense contribution by making dormant; hopefully, the infamous Mediterranean Syndrome (see La Spina and Sciortino 1993) at least as far as environmental mobilizations are concerned. In addition, one cannot dismiss the fact that their challenge is very well informed of the general European experience. Local environmental mobilizations across Europe are of a defensive character. Moreover, opposition to expert authorities in the context of Beck's 'risk society' is 'defensive' (Elliot 2002). This identified commonality of defensiveness is what, we believe, led to the challenge of well entrenched views about the character of Greek civil society via the examination of environmental mobilizations.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has attempted to examine the mobilizations against the construction of a project that was presented to the Greek public as imperative for the smooth running of the Athens Olympic Games. We combined perspectives from the literature on mega-events (in which the Olympic Games are a paradigmatic case), Ulrich Beck's theorisation on the 'risk society,' and environmental mobilizations.

Like in earlier Olympic Games, the case of KYT as a project linked to the Athens Olympics confirms Hiller's assertion that pressures for the completion of projects can produce 'autocracy' and competes comfortably with other studies highlighting the lack of democratic accountability and public consultation in this process. All in all, the IOC's professed commitment to human rights and environmental sustainability appears to have been a rhetorical schema with little practical implementation. Still it remains to be seen whether more extensive studies of the 2004 Olympic Games by social scientists will confirm the tentative conclusions of this study.

Although according to studies employing a historical perspective, mistrust towards authorities and defensive reactions against them have been ever-present features of Greek society, in the context of Beck's 'risk society' they are no longer confined to specific national contexts. One may wish

to argue, in that respect, that there is a Mediterranzation of northern Europe. Nevertheless, in a more cautious fashion, we can probably argue that it is time for the examination of environmental mobilizations (and other types of societal activism) in Europe to abandon the cultural determinism entailed in the adoption of north-south divides.

Endnotes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the international conference "Nature, Science and Social Movements," University of the Aegean, Mytilene, 25-28 June 2004. The financial assistance awarded to me to attend the conference by the British Sociological Association is gratefully acknowledged.
2. I am grateful to Dr. David Close (Flinders University, Australia), Dr. Leonidas Louloudis (Agricultural University of Athens, Greece) and an anonymous referee for their comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.
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4. We should note here that, as it happens with most major international events, the Athens 2004 Olympics encouraged a noticeable publication output. Most noticeable amongst them were a number of works deconstructing the idealistic image, we have, of the ancient Olympics (among others, see Katsikas and Nikolaidou 2003; Perrotet 2004; Spivey 2004). Still it is important to bear in mind that the imaginatively constructed image of a Games driven by a spirit of noble emulation and fair play is still in action and widespread among the general public. This imaginary view of the ancient Games is in direct opposition to the reality of the modern Games and to highlight it as a clear past/present practice is a powerful critique, albeit with little leverage, in the face of the powerful economic interests involved.
5. Note that recent literature has reached the same conclusion about the democratic credentials of megaprojects as well (see Flyvbjerg et al. 2003; Altshuller and Luberoff 2003).
6. It is interesting to note that environmental opposition to winter Olympics such as that in Denver and Lillehammer has different characteristics from environmental related opposition to its summer counterparts. Mountain environmentalism has the preservation of wilderness as its epicentre while urban environmentalism seeks to improve or to stop the further deterioration of an already overused environment.
7. See the IOC website:
http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/commissions/environment/games_uk.asp
8. Dobson (1995, 1-11) equates the 'dark' green perspective with ecologism and the 'light' green perspective with environmentalism. The 'rough and ready' distinction between the two that he adopts is as follows: 'Environmentalism argues for a managerial approach to environmental problems, secure in the belief that they can be solved without fundamental changes in present values or patterns of production and consumption, while ecologism holds that a sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life' (Dobson 1995, 1). Moreover the 'dark' green perspective is unequivocal about the intrinsic value of nature, as such is uncompromising about its preservation when compared to the 'light' green perspective and its characteristic willingness to find a compromise with developmental and economic interests.
9. See Greenpeace (2003) and WWF-Greece (2004).
10. Like the earlier candidature of Athens to host the Olympic Games of 1996, the file included the promise that the physical environment of Athens not only will be protected but will also be improved. The file had to take into account the environmental legacy of Sydney and the competing candidature of Stockholm, the capital of a country with well known environmental credentials and advanced environmental consciousness among its citizenry (Telloglou 2004, 33).
11. See also interview with Efthymiopoulos in To Vima (10/19/2000) where the prominent environmentalist outlined his view of PASOK's project of 'modernization' as compatible with ecology.
12. Notwithstanding, these negative developments, the coalition against the Games, anti2004, as well as Greenpeace (2003) and WWF-Greece (2004) have remained adamant about the righteousness of their opposition to these projects. Note that anti2004 maintained a very well designed webpage, www.anti2004.net, which now of course is out of action. Nevertheless, a good collection of communiqués and pamphlets published by this group can be found in Tot-sikas (2004).
13. We simply do not know whether the use of scientific evidence challenging planned projects as environmentally harmful ultimately puts the challengers in a weaker situation.
14. See Kousis (1999, 181-83) for the rationale behind the selection of Eleftherotypia as a primary source for the collection of data related to environmental protest in Greece.
15. The campaign was supported by Taxiarchis Papadopoulos, Professor of Applied Geophysics at the University of Athens, who challenged the EIA conducted by DEI and its assigned safety distance of 10KV/m by arguing with reference to the international bibliography that even a safety distance of 5KV/m is capable of producing adverse health effects. An extensive study produced by a research team at the University of Iowa supporting these claims was also extensively cited by other scientific experts in favour of the mobilizations (see Tot-sikas 2003).

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Appendix

Table 1. Chronicle of Events and Mobilizations.

Date	Event/Mobilization
April 2002	Start of construction work within the grounds of KYT by DEI. First collection of signatures by citizens of Argyroupolis. The Town Planning Department of Argyroupolis orders the temporary halts of all works within KYT after the demand of local citizens.
June 2002	Filing of application for the cancellation of the conditions and limitation of the construction of KYT as approved by YPEHODE to StE by the "Citizens' Initiative for the Protection of Imittos" and the Municipal Council of Argyroupolis
July 2002	Construction work starts again. Open municipal council meeting within the grounds of KYT with limited citizens' participations. Minister of YPEHODE grants licence for the continuation of the works [29365/25.7.02].
September 2002	Protest gathering within the ground of KYT after a public call by the Mayor of Argyroupolis.
October 2002	Beginning of the construction of a new pylon in very close proximity to schools of Elioupolis. The potential hazard is now visible to the citizens of Elioupolis.
Oct. 18th	Hanging of protest banner by residents of Elioupolis.
Oct. 20th	Foundation of the Citizens' of Elioupolis Initiative and subsequent linkage with Inter-municipal Committee.
Oct. 21st	Protest gathering outside the local nursery in close proximity to KYT.
Oct. 23rd	Around 1000 people demonstrate in front of KYT. Demonstration ends with the symbolic destruction of parts of the fencing around the construction site in front of police officers who do not take any action to stop it.
Oct. 25th	Protest gathering by locals (including pupils from the 3rd Lyceum of Elioupolis in close proximity to KYT) outside KYT. Protest march to the town hall where a meeting between the mayor of Elioupolis and DEI is taking place. The protesters interrupt the meeting and scaffoldings erupt between the protesters and police officers in civilian attire. The busy Katehaki avenue is blockaded by protesters for many hours.
Oct. 28th	Women of the Inter-municipal Struggle Committee enter the annual 28th October parade in Argyroupolis holding a banner against KYT. In Elioupolis around 100 residents of various age groups enter the local parade dressed in black and ignore the stand with dignitaries by characteristically turning their phases to the opposite direction.
Oct. 29th	Protest gathering organized by the Inter-municipal Struggle Committee at the town hall of Argyroupolis.
Nov. 1st	Around 100 residents of Elioupolis gather at a local open air theatre to organize the local struggle committee. The local council workers union agrees to assist in the occupation/blockade of the entrance to the construction site with refuge collection vans.
Nov. 4th	The occupation/blockade of the entrance of KYT begins.
Nov. 10th	10/11: Open discussion gathering in front of KYT with the participation of 300 locals.
Nov. 13th	13/10: Protest march of 4000-5000 people composed by local residents of the two municipalities and representatives of local parties and other local associations.
Nov. 14th	14/10: Beginning of a 4 day occupation of 3rd Lyceum of Elioupolis by its pupils.
Nov. 15th	15/11: 4 academic professors present the arguments regarding the implications from the operation of KYT at the open theatre of Elioupolis.
Nov. 20th	20/11: Pupils of the 3rd Lyceum of Elioupolis gather at the feet of Imittos with the intention of destroying the building site. Groups of local residents and local council workers succeed to hold them back.
Dec. 19th	400 residents of the two municipalities march at the centre of Athens in front of the parliament and YPEHODE.
January 2003	
Jan. 23rd	Open gathering organized by the Alternative Movement Intervention in Athens and Attica and the Residents' Intervention of Elioupolis.
Feb. 2nd	45 MPs from opposition New Democracy party side with the mobilizers and bring the issue for parliamentary discussion.
March 13th	The government announces the cancellation of the project.
May 2nd	25 platoons of riot police re-occupy the construction site.
May 15th	Around 500 demonstrators are met by the clubs of riot police and extensive use of tear gas. Demonstrators throw eggs and red paint to the town hall of Elioupolis expressing in this way their discontent with the local mayor.
June 14th	New cancellation announcement by minister for development Akis Tsohatzopoulos.

Sources: Eleftherotypia and <http://dimotika.snn.gr>.