

**THE INSTITUTION OF LOCAL COUNCILS FOR CRIME PREVENTION IN  
GREECE: THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND  
IMPLEMENTATION IN PRACTICE<sup>1</sup>.**

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**ABSTRACT**

Crime prevention at the local level is essential for the effective implementation of participatory crime prevention policies, exemplified by the Local Councils for Crime Prevention. This study focuses on examining the functioning and implementation of these Councils in Greece, aiming to enhance the existing body of knowledge on the topic. After providing a brief overview of the historical developments that led to the adoption of this policy and a comprehensive reference of its implementation across Europe, the research presents qualitative findings from Municipalities in Attica where Local Councils for Crime Prevention have been established. Conducted through interviews with their representatives from February to March 2024, the research highlights both the gap between the institutional framework and its practical application, as well as the persistent challenges and obstacles faced. Moreover, it underscores the importance and benefits of supporting and strengthening this institution.

**Keywords:** prevention, participatory criminal policy, Local Councils for Crime Prevention, institutional framework, implementation of the institution in practice.

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## Introduction

Prevention<sup>3</sup>, as a strategy within criminal policy<sup>4</sup>, is increasingly recognized as a complex, multidimensional, and significant issue. This concern is gaining traction internationally, as interventions and measures must be implemented at the pre-criminal level - prior to the occurrence of crimes. Such efforts need to be customized to address the specific social needs, priorities, and crime-related problems of each community, thereby introducing a dynamic element to their design and implementation. This discussion presents and analyzes various types of crime prevention policies, categorized based on a comprehensive bibliographic review<sup>5</sup>. It examines applied measures, identifies emerging issues, and focuses on effectiveness, rational utilization (in accordance with proportionality), and compatibility with individual rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the guiding principles of democratic societies and the rule of law. In this light, since the 1970s, especially during the 1980s, modern societies - particularly in Europe<sup>6</sup> - have shifted towards a

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<sup>3</sup> Crime prevention has been a significant concern from Greek antiquity to contemporary societies, where it remains a primary objective of organized criminal policies who focuses on crime prevention at the local level (Farsedakis, 1990:19-20; Zarafonitou, 2003:9; Alexiadis, 2004:283). By “crime prevention” we refer to the array of strategies, programs, and measures designed and implemented to thwart the commission of crimes before they occur (Farsedakis, 2016:169).

<sup>4</sup> Criminal policy encompasses the principles that guide the state's decisions regarding the strategies and measures deemed suitable for effectively reducing crime. These approaches are informed by insights gained about crime, offenders, criminal behavior, and victims (Alexiadis, Pitsela, 2018:67).

<sup>5</sup> It has been emphasized that the most effective approach to addressing small and medium severity crime, involves the enactment of a long-term policy focused on social prevention within local communities. This entails implementing preventive social measures at a decentralized level (Karagiannidis, 2022:4). In contrast, “situational prevention” practices emphasize the state's role in implementing appropriate preventive interventions and measures tailored to specific circumstances. This includes the establishment of both physical and non-physical barriers, the deployment of technical security systems, and the encouragement of community initiatives, where residents collectively monitor their neighborhoods. A notable example of this approach is the application of technical measures, such as thoughtfully designed architecture in neighborhoods and apartment buildings that facilitates oversight of individual apartments and shared spaces. Additionally, it involves the installation of artificial barriers between properties, such as railings and fencing, as well as the use of natural boundaries (Tonry M., Farrington D. P., 1995).

<sup>6</sup> In the Greek context, criminal policy has traditionally focused on criminal prevention through stricter penalties, rather than the social prevention of crime. Several key obstacles hinder the adoption of a social criminal policy and particularly its practical implementation through social-participatory approaches, including: a) the erosion and diminishing role of the social welfare state, b) destabilizing socio-economic factors such as economic recession, decreased national economic independence, stringent austerity measures, rising unemployment, and significant population mobility, c) political upheavals, d) a tendency among various governments to reinforce criminal-repressive mechanisms as

new approach to crime prevention<sup>7</sup>. This involves developing a holistic, participatory social crime prevention policy that emphasizes the importance of activation and enhancement of local community initiatives (referred to as “community prevention”<sup>8</sup>) and the promotion of public participation<sup>9</sup>. In recent years, policies directed at crime prevention, have evolved beyond the short-term goals of traditional state-centered models. There is now a stronger emphasis on long-term strategies (in the general context of “interpartenariat”), that foster partnerships, shared responsibility, and collaborative management (Papatheodorou, 2021:92). This approach actively encourages the participation and cooperation of local governments, social services, community organizations, and citizens, who are most attuned to the crime-related problems in their respective areas - whether cities, districts, or neighborhoods (Karagiannidis, 2023)<sup>10</sup>.

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part of their short-term strategies to maintain order and security, often referred to as the “law and order maintenance model” which seeks immediate results, and e) limited funding for preventive measures in general (Karagiannidis, 2011: 5-6).

<sup>7</sup> Sporadic in the 1980s and more systematically in the 1990s, a shift occurred. A particularly significant influence at that time was the policy enacted by France, which adopted a strategy of social prevention at the local level. Emphasizing collectivity, mutual understanding, and collaborative effort, France established the Local Councils for Crime Prevention in the early 1980s. This initiative, considered a modern tool for its time, continued to guide subsequent efforts in the same direction. (Karagiannidis, 2011:37).

<sup>8</sup> Community crime prevention has garnered significant attention in recent years. It first emerged in the United States during the 1970s and subsequently spread to Europe, with Great Britain being the first to adopt it. The aim is to foster a collaborative relationship between citizens and the police, encouraging individuals to take on certain responsibilities (Zarafonitou, 2022: 36).

<sup>9</sup> It is an emerging complex - a network of coordinated practices and discussions - aimed primarily at fostering community participation, establishing interpartenariat arrangements, and facilitating agreements for action and cooperation among services dedicated to promoting crime prevention and enhancing security. A noteworthy aspect of this practice is that it transcends the boundaries between public and private sectors, serving as a vital link that broadens the framework of officially coordinated crime control beyond the institutional confines of the state (Crawford, 1999). The recommendation of public participation marked the first time at the European level that active involvement of local communities and citizens was identified as essential for developing effective criminal strategies focused on crime prevention (Alexiadis, 2006: 159). Subsequent related recommendations from the Council of Europe include: No. R (87) 19, No. R (87) 21, No. R (96) 8, and No. R (2003) 21. Additionally, it has been emphasized that preventive measures can be more effective when they are tailored to the unique local circumstances and implemented with community involvement, as highlighted by Professor Zarafonitou (Zarafonitou, 2003: 13-15).

<sup>10</sup> Criminal policy cannot be solely the responsibility of the state; rather, it must involve all citizens. This is because it is directly related to the extent of the freedoms and fundamental rights afforded to individuals, and more broadly, to the overall quality of life they experience each day, as noted Manoledakis (Karagiannidis, 2011: 4). In this context, it has become increasingly important to engage the entire "social body," particularly local communities and governments at the micro-level, to address the criminal phenomenon that has traditionally been the sole responsibility of the state. This

Through the presentation and analysis of dominant trends in criminal policy, state-centered and participatory<sup>11</sup>, the latter, grounded in the principle of communitarianism - emphasizing actions rooted within the community (community centered/development model) - stands in stark contrast to the state-centered model and is recognized for embodying the essential elements necessary to achieve its goals. In striving to activate and implement participatory criminal policy, various prevention institutions have been established. A defining characteristic of these institutions, is the active engagement of the local community and its residents, as demonstrated through initiatives like community policing and the measure of the neighbourhood police officer. However, several challenges persist, including the inability to respond effectively and holistically tackle specific types of crime, the excessive expansion of community policing - which has shifted from “proximity policing”, transforming to a concept of “police proximity” - issues such as potential crime displacement and the need for collaboration with other relevant agencies, emphasized the necessity for a more comprehensive strategy. These factors serve as the justification basis and motivation for the development of a crime prevention policy, that emerges from the community itself (known as a “bottom-up policy”). This entails the creation and establishment of specialized prevention institutions, such as Local Councils for Crime Prevention, that are well-equipped to address the evolving aspirations, needs, goals, and expectations of the community<sup>12</sup>.

This institution serves a crucial role as a “counterbalance” to the state's monopolistic approach to managing crime and delinquent behavior. It exemplifies the

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engagement should, of course, be carried out with careful planning and organization (Delmas-Marty, 2002: 28).

<sup>11</sup> Participatory criminal policy emphasizes the importance of actions initiated by the local community (community centered/development model) in formulating and implementing strategies for managing crime. This approach encourages the active and responsible involvement of informed citizens in identifying the priorities and challenges within their neighborhoods. Additionally, it encourages responsible collaboration with local institutions and governing bodies, such as Local Councils for Crime Prevention, local police and social organizations. Such cooperation is vital for implementing primarily crime-preventive actions within communities (Pitsela, Karagiannidis, 2020: 15; Karagiannidis, 2011: 182 & Courakis, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> This policy emphasizes “partnership” and advocates for realistic cooperation and the strengthening of relationships among the state, local communities, and citizens at the city, regional, and neighborhood levels. Its primary aim is to manage small and medium severity crime more effectively and to alleviate the fear of crime and insecurity, through co-management. This approach recognizes that the official mechanisms of the criminal justice system - whether operating preventively or punitively - are insufficient to provide substantial protection to citizens against the rising crime rates and the emergence of new and dynamic forms of criminal activity (Karagiannidis, 2011: 183).

“golden mean” because it operates purely preventively within the local area of citizens daily interactions, functioning outside the “field of administration” of the police and closer to the community. By distancing itself from the police’s administrative oversight and engaging more directly with the community, it effectively reduces any concerns surrounding cooperation. Additionally, this institution acts as a coordinator and "umbrella" under which the local community, social organizations, public and private services, and official crime control agencies collaborate. The common goal shared by all these entities is the co-management and addressing of minor and medium-severity crimes.

### **The emergence and development of Local Councils for Crime Prevention in Europe**

Local Councils for Crime Prevention began to emerge and gradually expand across various European countries from the 1980s onward, following the implementation of pilot initiatives<sup>13</sup>. Although these councils have taken on different forms of organization, structure, and dynamics, their foundational philosophy, core principles, mission, and objectives remain consistently aligned in the same direction and context. Essentially, they function as local self-governing institutions with an advisory role (submission of proposals to the central administration), aimed at supporting and implementing participatory criminal policies. This approach promotes broader citizen engagement and fosters the development of collaborations through an interdisciplinary and multi-level framework (“interpartenariat”). The Councils focus on creating and implementing plans and programs for the prevention and management of petty crime - at the local decentralized level - such as theft, burglary, drug trafficking, vandalism, and various forms of fraud.

Particular emphasis is placed on crimes and delinquent behaviors that significantly impact citizens' daily lives and society's orderly functioning. These include domestic violence, juvenile delinquency and victimization, and cybercrime (which highlights the need for safe online navigation). Additionally, efforts are made to alleviate citizens' feelings of insecurity. At the European level, a bibliographic

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<sup>13</sup> They emerged dynamically in France in 1983 and expanded more intensively during the 1990s and beyond - manifesting in various forms, dynamics, and organizational structures - in other European countries. Their programmatic objective has been to prevent crime (Karagiannidis, 2018:991). For a comprehensive examination of application models within an international context (Zarafonitou, 2003).

review indicates that Local Councils for Crime Prevention have been established and are operational in 14 out of the 27 member countries of the European Union<sup>14</sup>, representing 52% of all member states. A notable response to the implementation of these specialized “prevention tools” has been observed primarily in Western, Southwestern, and Southeastern European countries. Specifically, the establishment and operation of Local Councils have been documented in Finland, Sweden, Germany, Austria, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Croatia, Slovenia, Estonia, and Greece. Sweden and Germany stand out as exemplary cases for other countries, given that, in Sweden, by 2009, Local Councils had been established in 88% of the municipalities (Afifi, Larsson, 2023), while in Germany a total of over 2.000 Local Councils have been established and are operating across the country (Karagiannidis, 2022: 72-83).

### **The emergence of Local Councils for Crime Prevention in Greece**

Greece is one of the last countries to adopt this particular institution of participatory criminal policy. Although the current legislative framework has been in place since 1999<sup>15</sup>, it has undergone subsequent additions<sup>16</sup> aimed at both strengthening and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Local Councils and additionally reflects the state's commitment to these "maximalist" improvements, while keeping the institution in the public eye. Scientific research conducted periodically (Spinelli, Tsinas, 2002: 330, 333; Karagiannidis, 2022: 289, 292, 295-298, 299-321; Pitsela, Karagiannidis, 2020: 400; Zarafonitou, 2018, 2019: 48) to assess the institution's operation over time, to identify emerging needs, and evaluate implementation and effectiveness in the field, and additionally, an earlier relevant report from the Central

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<sup>14</sup> The majority of EU member states without a Local Council, implement local criminal policy plans, including: Belgium, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, and Slovakia, based on the types of crime they aim to address (Karagiannidis, 2011:248, 2022:47-58, 105-108, 135-138, 166-175, 181-184).

<sup>15</sup> Law 2713/1999 serves as the primary legislative framework for establishing Local Councils for Crime Prevention in Greece. This law facilitated the creation of Local Councils, aligning with European standards that have been in effect since the 1980s, as well as the relevant recommendations from the Council of Europe. For the first time, specific responsibilities related to crime prevention policy were assigned to local governments, at the municipal and community levels (Zarafonitou, 2003: 160-161). This legislative structure is a crucial element in integrating the participatory criminal policies that have been implemented in various European countries into the “Greek legislative framework” (Karagiannidis, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> See article 13 of Law 3387/2005 “Center for Security Studies (KEMEA) and other provisions” and Law 3463/2006 “Code of Municipalities and Communities”.

Council for Crime Prevention (Karagiannidis, 2011: 330, 333)<sup>17</sup> (dating back to 2009, while it was still active), revealed a low response and lack of interest from municipalities across the country regarding the establishment of these Councils, recording a decreasing trend over the years.

Regarding the operation of the established Local Councils for Crime Prevention, the primary challenges and obstacles identified, include: the insufficient participation of specialized personnel, particularly criminologists, as well as limitations in logistical infrastructure and funding for the planned actions and programs. This deficiency extends to spatial and environmental interventions, collaboration and coordination with other municipalities, agencies, services and organizations engaged in crime prevention. Furthermore, effective communication with citizens regarding the current crime situation and the criminal policies being implemented, as well as the evaluation of undertaken actions, is crucial.

Furthermore, the re-establishment and operational revival of the Central Council for Crime Prevention, which has been inactive for nearly a decade, is crucial for giving directions, motivating and educating municipalities on the importance and advantages of creating Local Councils for Crime Prevention in their respective areas. This involves designing, coordinating, and providing guidance, as well as scientific direction and support when required. It is essential to have a central body functioning “as an umbrella” similar to the National Councils for the Prevention of Crime found in other European countries.

### **Subject of study and purpose of the research**

To examine the implementation and operational effectiveness of the Local Councils for Crime Prevention in practice, an empirical study was conducted approximately twenty five (25) years after the enactment of the initial legislative framework for its establishment (Law 2713/1999). This study involved a qualitative investigation in

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<sup>17</sup> The Central Council for Crime Prevention was composed of criminologists, social workers, sociologists, representatives from the Ministry of Public Order (currently Ministry of Citizen Protection), the Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece (KEDKE), and various municipalities across the country, along with scientists possessing specialized expertise in crime prevention issues, as outlined in Article 13 of Law 3387/2005.

Municipalities of Attica, where a significant portion of the nation's population resides and where, in recent years, the majority of the overall crime rate has been recorded<sup>18</sup>.

The research was carried out through interviews with representatives of the Local Councils, aiming to uncover the structure and document the activities of these institutions, within the context of participatory criminal policies designed to fulfill their mission. This involved capturing the work conducted by the Local Councils, including collaborations, programs, and policies-strategies developed, as well as the obstacles and challenges they face in implementing their objectives. Additionally, this initiative aimed to summarize and further enhance the existing knowledge derived from previous research findings. Furthermore, the opinions and suggestions of the interviewees from the Local Councils were gathered, regarding the sustainability and necessity of maintaining the institution.

### **Research methodology**

This pilot research project employs a qualitative research methodology<sup>19</sup>, characterized by a focus on the experiences and perspectives of the participants. It emphasizes interaction communication between the interviewer and the respondent, allowing for a deeper understanding and interpretation of the subject matter<sup>20</sup>.

The research population was selected based on the presence of established and active Local Councils for Crime Prevention within the region of Attica. The data collection occurred in February 2024, following the recent municipal elections in October 2023 and the subsequent assumption of duties by the new Mayors. The

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<sup>18</sup> According to the statistical data provided by the Hellenic Police (statistical yearbooks), over the past decade (2014-2023), crimes of minor and medium severity - particularly those affecting property, such as thefts, burglaries, and robberies - have been occurring at a higher rate in Attica. Specifically, for the General Police Directorate of Attica (GADA), the percentage of crimes committed within its jurisdiction over the years, is as follows: 59% (2014), 59% (2015), 59% (2016), 58% (2017), 60% (2018), 60% (2019), 58% (2020), 58% (2021), 60% (2022), and 60% (2023). This data has been sourced from the official website of the Hellenic Police - Statistical Yearbooks, accessible at: <https://www.astynomia.gr/statistik-es-petirides/>.

<sup>19</sup> The key factor in selecting the most suitable research method is the nature of the research questions. Essential stages in the process include formulating research hypotheses, collecting and producing data, processing and analyzing that data, and ultimately drawing conclusions (Zarafonitou, 2023: 8-16, Tsiolis, 2014: 54).

<sup>20</sup> The objective of the social researcher is not merely to conduct external observations or to quantitatively measure and record the phenomena and fields under study. Instead, it is to explore these phenomena "from the inside" delving into the perspectives, experiences, and narratives of the individuals involved, as noted by Tsiolis (Tsiolis, 2014: 29).



search was conducted using the official websites of the 66 Municipalities in Attica, as well as the “Diavgeia” program's website. A search conducted on the websites of various Municipalities revealed the existence of Local Councils in eight (8) locations: Ilioupoli, Moschato-Tavros, Piraeus, Metamorfosi, Papagou-Xolargou, Penteli, Ilion, and Dionysos, while an examination of official decisions posted on “Diavgeia”, emerged two (2) additional Municipalities: Alimos and Kifisia, where Local Councils had been established and formed. Combining these findings, indicates that Local Councils for Crime Prevention have been established and are operational in ten (10) Municipalities within Attica, which accounts for only 15% of all Municipalities in the region.

For this research, an interview method<sup>21</sup> was employed to gather insights from representatives of the Local Councils, who have firsthand knowledge and experience, due to their involvement in the operations of the institution<sup>22</sup>. Specifically, Local Councils that have been both established and are active in Attica were targeted, as their previous actions - evidenced by information available on the official websites of the Municipalities - suggest they would provide valuable data for this investigation.

During the research design, criteria for selecting the sampling frame also included factors such as accessibility, responsiveness of the information sources, and the practical limitations related to available financial resources and constrained time for conducting the research and analyzing the data. Consequently, the research sample consisted of the Municipalities of Metamorfosi, Moschato-Tavros, Piraeus, and Papagou-Cholargou<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Oral communication is a vital component of human interaction, aimed at transmitting information from the respondent to the researcher. The method employed varies depending on the type of interview, which can offer different levels of flexibility. These include: interviews with free responses, interviews with open questions and interviews with closed questions. The primary goal of the interview is to gather information that enables the researcher to explore the subject more deeply, focusing on the respondent both as a social actor and as a source of information and experiences (Thanopoulou, 2015: 293-295).

<sup>22</sup> The information gathered during the qualitative interview forms part of the individual and collective memory and experience that the respondent recalls for the purposes of the interview (Thanopoulou, 2015: 308).

<sup>23</sup> The Metamorphosis Local Council was established in 2019 and has been continuously active since then. The Moschato-Tavros Council originated in the early years following the institution's legislative provision, specifically in 2003, and has also been in continuous operation since that time. Similarly, the Piraeus Council was founded in the 2000s and later re-established within the framework of the Be Secure Feel Secure Program. Additionally, the Papagou-Cholargou Council was first established in 2015.

All legal procedures were meticulously followed, and ethical considerations were duly addressed. Consequently, initial requests were sent (via electronic mail) to the Presidents of the Local Councils included in the sample. These requests aimed to schedule meetings for interviews, or, if unable to meet, to connect with a designated representative of the Councils. These requests were promptly approved and the interviews took place from February to March 2024, within the City Halls' premises. Prior to the interviews, each participant received an “Information-Consent Form for Participation in the Research”. This document outlined that the interviews would be conducted anonymously, ensuring the confidentiality of personal data. The processing of this data complied with the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation and relevant legislation. Participants were also asked to provide signed consent for the recording of the interviews (Zarafonitou, Tsiganou , 2020: 98-101).

The semi-structured interview (combines a pre-determined set of open questions), was selected as the most appropriate method for this research. This approach involves a partially defined discussion framework facilitated by a common interview guide, which aims to ensure a degree of homogeneity in the data collected across all interviews, while also maintaining methodological guarantee for potential replication by other researchers. The guide comprises structured sections filled with open questions, which serve a dual purpose: to gather information aligned with the research objectives and to allow for the exploration of additional topics that could provide further insights and enrich the study. The Interview Guide was specifically designed with common questions for all participants, taking into account the characteristics of the research population in vocational training and education. This ensures that the qualitative data collected will lend itself to analysis and the derivation of comparable results<sup>24</sup>.

Initially, the questionnaire includes inquiries about the respondents' demographic data, such as gender, age, and educational background. It then transitions to more complex questions that invite interviewees to express their views on issues such as: crime within their municipality's jurisdiction, the implementation of crime prevention programs and initiatives, the existence and development of

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<sup>24</sup> The questions were grouped, allowing interviewees to gradually delve deeper into individual issues, but also to express themselves outside the prescribed framework of the research design.

collaborations and information sharing within institutions and the challenges and obstacles faced in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Additionally, participants were encouraged to share their opinions regarding the utility and sustainability of the Local Councils overall.

For the analysis and interpretive approach to the research data “content analysis”<sup>25</sup> was employed as a qualitative research method. In this context, the data were systematically analyzed, classified, and grouped to form distinct categories relevant to the research questions outlined in the interview guide<sup>26</sup>. After thoroughly analyzing all the interview data, conclusions were drawn to verify the initial research questions and to propose potential improvements or solutions to the issues faced by the institution of Local Councils.

### **Interviews with representatives of the Local Councils for Crime Prevention. A qualitative data analysis**

The analysis of the research data, highlights the necessity of establishing the Local Councils for Crime Prevention to address petty crime rather than serious offenses and organized crime and especially crimes and delinquent behaviors that impact the everyday lives of residents, affecting their quality of life and, more broadly, the effective functioning of the local community, such as: juvenile delinquency and the victimization of minors, domestic violence, theft and burglary in homes and businesses, the theft of small items in public spaces, drug trafficking, and vandalism in public areas and facilities such as parks and playgrounds.

In terms of the constitution of the Local Councils, participation has predominantly come from individuals in the social sciences, including lawyers, sociologists, and psychologists, as well as local police officers. Notably,

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<sup>25</sup> This is a secondary analysis method (subsequent processing of primary material), which seeks to deconstruct and then reconstruct the material collected through the interviews. It combines, in other words, the inductive logic (of theory creation) with a deductive management of the material, while it is one of the basic tools of the so-called “grounded theory” (an inductive method for the collection and analysis of empirical material, with the aim of creating a theoretical framework for the explanation of the collected material). The basic characteristics of this method are the use of categories and the associated coding systems of the material, with the aim of a deeper understanding of the content and the meanings contained therein (Tsiganou, 2015: 245-246).

<sup>26</sup> Through this technique, a large number of words in the text are condensed and grouped into categories/thematic units, followed by a comparative (identification of common trends, as well as differences between the answers), critical and in-depth analysis of the answers per question.

criminologists were involved in two of these initiatives (Moschatos-Tavros and Piraeus). This indicates that the majority of Local Councils are composed of members with diverse specialties to ensure an interdisciplinary approach to the complex issues they face. The size of the Councils typically consists of 9 to 11 members, however, as aptly suggested by the representative of the Local Council of Piraeus, it is essential to be supported with additional human resources and include “inspirer”<sup>27</sup>, whose involvement would greatly enhance the execution of the planned initiatives.

The communication and information dissemination regarding this institution (its purpose and operational role) is facilitated through Council meetings and the use of technology, particularly via municipal websites and social media, due to the low operating costs, but also because it enhances engagement with a broad audience, especially young people. Two Local Councils (Metamorfosis and Moschato-Tavros) noted the distribution of printed informational materials, such as brochures, indicating that the economic aspect is quantifiable. A commendable practice that could serve as a template for other Councils is the use of municipal radio by the Local Council of Piraeus to broadcast messages (“spots”) related to the Council's work and crime prevention. Additionally, there is an intention of this Council to create a logo to enhance visibility and improve public recognition.

In terms of informing Local Authorities about crime trends and hotspots, all participating Local Councils achieved this through organizing seminars, speeches, and events. However, there was limited activity and initiatives focused on conducting research - which is essential for gathering useful data and drawing conclusions to improve proposed measures and practices and inter-partnership agreements between Local Councils and relevant ministries (Zarafonitou, 2019: 45). Notably, the only collaboration established among nearly all the Local Councils in the research

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<sup>27</sup> Professor Courakis suggests that the role of the “inspirer” should be filled by a social scientist - such as a social worker, sociologist, or psychologist- from the Municipality's Social Service. This individual would serve as an assistant in executing the initiatives of the Local Councils and in providing information about the social issues that arise, which necessitate a graduated response to mitigate their potential impact on delinquent behavior. Cooperation with the Municipality's Social Service, municipal authorities, police, the prosecutor's office, and other relevant bodies and services is essential for this effort. To enhance the effectiveness of these duties, it is recommended that the “inspirer” be supported by a group of volunteers. Depending on their specialization and experience, these volunteers could offer valuable services, acting as advisors to students and parents in schools, assisting individuals from vulnerable groups in finding employment, and even serving as mediators to facilitate communication between perpetrators and victims in cases handled on an individual basis (Courakis, 2022:15-16).

(Moschato-Tavros<sup>28</sup>, Piraeus, and Papagos-Cholargos) was with the Laboratory of Urban Criminology Panteion University (EAstE)<sup>29</sup>.

The adopted crime prevention policy focuses on planning and implementing actions and programs to address minor and medium-severity crimes mentioned above, aiming to reduce citizen victimization, through information, raising awareness, and encouraging community participation in prevention efforts. Additionally, the Councils emphasize the importance of fostering communication and collaboration with various local and non-local institutions, organizations, and centers dedicated to crime prevention and related issues, such as: police services, the educational community, the Center for the Treatment of Addicted Persons (KETHEA), “The Smile of the Child” (a voluntary, non-profit child welfare organization), Parent and Guardian Associations, the Center for Research on Equality Issues (KETHI) and the Victims of Crime Information Unit of the Municipality of Piraeus, Commercial and Bar Association. However, a notable drawback is the lack of procedures or mechanisms to monitor the actions implemented, also lack of assessment which is essential for ensuring continuous improvement, readjustment, and necessary corrective measures for the effective operation of the Local Councils.

The concept of spatial interventions and measures to enhance living environments, such as improving lighting, renovating playgrounds, and securing abandoned buildings that are often used as shelters by individuals engaged in criminal activities, has been widely accepted within the framework of crime prevention policy of the Local Councils of the research<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> The distinctive dynamism of the Moschato – Tavros Local Council can be attributed to its former President, the late Professor Farsedakis J.. Throughout his tenure, he consistently emphasized the significance of participatory/social crime prevention.

<sup>29</sup> The Laboratory was founded within the Criminology Section of the Department of Sociology of Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences. It is directed by Professor Ch. Zarafonitou and engages in extensive research related to crime prevention policies in urban settings, conducts research programs, organizes scientific events, and produces various publications. The Laboratory actively seeks collaboration with both Greek and international academic institutions, research centers, public services, local government organizations, and other scientific and social entities to explore and analyze issues pertinent to its field of study. For more detailed information about the Laboratory's research and study, see its website: <https://easte.panteion.gr/>.

<sup>30</sup> The characteristics of different areas, such as residential construction, spatial planning, and spatial architecture, along with the quality of the residential environment (including neighborhood aesthetics, street lighting, and recreational spaces) are key elements in the field of “Environmental Criminology”. These factors are closely linked to efforts aimed at reducing crime and alleviating the fear of

At the central level, there is a lack of support for the institution and its designated responsibilities, which is evidenced by the fact that the Central Council for Crime Prevention has remained inactive for nearly a decade, while interviewees collectively identify ongoing challenges and difficulties that hinder the Councils in fulfilling their mission, including: a) the necessity for scientific expertise and adequate training for the members participating in the Councils, b) time-consuming and bureaucratic processes involved in obtaining the necessary permits for implementing planned actions, even within the municipality and among its various services, c) insufficient financial resources to facilitate operations, address essential needs, fulfill the mission, and ensure sustainability, d) the absence of systems and mechanisms for monitoring the actions and programs enacted, along with the absence of relevant evaluation indicators, which would enable corrective measures and improvements, e) distrust among citizens stemming from political ideologies that differ from the institution's operational philosophy and its relationship with law enforcement, as well as negative perceptions held by some Parents and Guardians Associations (this includes beliefs that schools, parents, and students are specifically stigmatized as facing crime issues), f) lastly, there is a notable absence of a culture that promotes the effective functioning of decentralized bodies, within the domain of participatory crime prevention.

The proposed measures to effectively address the aforementioned problems-difficulties and enhance the operation of the Local Councils for Crime Prevention and to achieve sustainability, concerns: a) raising awareness, improving public communication, and actively engaging as many citizens as possible in Council meetings and crime prevention initiatives, b) fostering regular collaborations with organizations, services, and bodies (inter-partnership) at both local and broader levels, ultimately aiming to achieve European networking and harnessing “best practices” in this field from across Europe, to combat the noted issues of insularity, c) identifying financial resources and funding opportunities, including integration into European programs, to support the implementation of additional actions, d) ensuring the consistent presence and participation of Local Councils members in meetings, as well

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victimization. Consequently, they should be carefully considered in the planning and implementation of local prevention measures (Tonry M. & Farrington D. P., 1995: 9).

as in the planning and execution of initiatives, e) strengthening the Councils with additional human resources and incorporating volunteers as “inspirer” in their efforts, f) reorganizing the Central Council for Crime Prevention to provide essential support, coordination, guidance, and dissemination of "best practices" and achievements of the active Local Councils, while also enabling the networking and alignment of their previously fragmented activities.

Based on the research data, the public's attitude toward the institution is generally perceived as positive. Interviewees express that the role and mission of this particular community institution primarily focus on benefiting the local community through targeted, supportive, and supplementary interventions aimed at crime prevention and addressing delinquent behaviors. Furthermore, it contributes to the promotion of prosperity and security, necessary for fostering and sustaining economic and social development.

In conclusion, the Local Councils for Crime Prevention involved in this research, although recognized for their significant efforts, especially the Council of Piraeus, appear to be operating at low levels compared to the potential actions permitted by the legislative framework. They have presented limited reports on their activities and faced challenges related to the absence of a clear timetable, evaluation indicators, and political support, especially in the lack of the Central Council, which is disappointing.

### **Conclusions**

An analysis of both of the institutional framework and its implementation highlights the significant value of Local Councils for Crime Prevention. Established and increasingly implemented successfully across various European countries since the 1980s, and introduced in Greece in the late 1990s, these councils serve as flexible, self-governing institutions that foster synergy, partnership, and communication between the state and local civil society and promise for achieving visible results in urban crime prevention. However, for these institutions to operate effectively, it is essential not only the legislative provisions - which in the Greek context are considered adequate (in an organizational and institutional context) - but it is also necessary to break away from occasional and/or ephemeral formation/operation of the Local Councils and fragmentary actions. These often arise from reactive, case-by-case

interactions of a communicative nature, characterized as merely “superficial” criminal policies, as noted by acknowledged Professors.

The conclusions drawn from various research approaches regarding the Local Councils for Crime Prevention in Greece, reveal persistent issues that have remained prevalent over the approximately 25 years since the institution's legislative establishment. These challenges primarily relate to the structure, organization, and operation of the councils, and include: a) insufficient public awareness of the institution's role, operations, work, and mission, b) the limited number of established and active Councils across the country as compared to European standards (indicating that many Councils exist merely on paper), c) a lack of specialized personnel with the scientific knowledge and expertise needed for crime prevention and management, d) inadequate adherence to necessary preliminary steps, such as: conducting surveys to gauge crime levels, fear, and insecurity among residents, e) insufficient reporting of actions taken, f) a lack of funding and financial support for both logistical infrastructure and the implementation of planned actions and programs, g) and a complete absence of monitoring and evaluation systems for implemented projects, as well as limited collaboration with other active Councils.

A particularly discouraging aspect noted in this research is the negative reactions and attitudes exhibited by certain social actors, stemming from perceptions of "stigmatization" associated with the area designated for the establishment of the Councils. Additionally, there are concerns regarding interactions with law enforcement that deviate from the institutional framework. Crucially, there is a lack of support, guidance, and coordination at a central level from the relevant authority, Central Council for Crime Prevention, which has remained inactive for nearly a decade. This inactivity further underscores the researchers' assertion that the institution has not received adequate attention from the State.

The proposals for improving the quality and effectiveness of active Local Councils move within the same framework and have been endorsed by prominent researchers involved in the field of crime prevention. These proposals have also been reported through various research studies conducted on the institution of Local Councils, including the current one. It is essential for municipalities to understand that preventing and addressing crime is a collective responsibility that impacts all aspects of daily life, including family, education, work, and community interactions.



Therefore, the establishment and effective functioning of Local Councils should concern entire municipalities rather than being addressed on a case-by-case basis, driven solely by recorded crime levels. This must be considered alongside specific factors and the characteristics of each area, such as tourism, seasonal population needs, severity of crime, etc.). This comprehensive approach is vital to mitigate the risk of crime shifting to municipalities without established Councils. Ultimately, Local Councils are vital tools key pillars in achieving a holistic approach to citizen safety. This requires a concerted effort from local governments, municipalities (by integrating the establishment of Councils into their socio-political agendas), as well as active participation from citizens. Simultaneously, strong political will and support are crucial to ensure that the institution remains effective and does not merely serve as a "decorative" element, as well as, to highlight the effective work, best practices and successful initiatives undertaken by active Councils.

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