NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN GREECE GONE VIRTUAL

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Abstract

The aim of this research work is to evaluate the penetration of Web 2.0 technologies into Non Governmental Organizations in Greece. For this, we have chosen 56 NGOs and evaluated them using a set of 81 criteria divided into subsets. Each subset of criteria evaluates a different aspect of NGO, i.e. dissemination of ideas, interconnection with other NGOs, members' interaction etc. but is always under the prism of the effective use of Web technologies. The selected sample comprises mainly Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) and Environmental NGOs that act in a national level and have a web presence. The details of the sample are also discussed in this work. The aim of this work is bi-fold: first, to present the current state of NGOs in Greece as far as it concerns the exploitation of Web and Web 2.0 technologies and second, to provide an extended set of criteria that can be used for evaluating the effective use of Web technologies and can be utilized by NGOs to ameliorate their Web presence and support their aims.

1   INTRODUCTION

The Globalisation trend that dominated the second part of the 20th century gave rise to the importance of NGOs especially during the last two decades. As a counterbalance to the International treaties and organizations, such as the World Trade Organization that focused on the interests of enterprises, Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) emphasised on humanitarian issues, developmental aid and sustainable development.

Gerard Clark (Clark, 1998) defines NGOs as "…private, non profit, professional organizations with a distinctive legal character, concerned with public welfare goals." NGOs have not been established by governments or agreements among governments and comprise individuals and private associations, rather than states. They develop a wide range of initiatives and actions in local, national, or international level. Especially, when governments are not able to provide fundamental social services, such as health or education, due to economic, social, geographical or political reasons, NGOs attempt to fill these gaps. They increase public awareness on a particular cause or set of causes and contribute to democracy through challenging governments and promoting social interests. In several cases, they supplement governmental efforts and they seek assistance from government or private organizations. They respond with greater ease and flexibility to local needs, since they are close to grass-root community structures and their participation in the decision making process is necessary. It is obvious, from the above, that they play a substantial role in the democratization of society.

Apart from recreational associations, philanthropic groups or relief organizations that address emergencies, an important category of NGOs are the "transformational NGOs" (Stromquist, 2008) that aim in advancing democracy, providing social justice and constituting a better world in general. Transformational NGOs, which are the subject of this research, have shown the ability to set agendas, negotiate outcomes, confer legitimacy, and implement solutions (Simmons, 1998).

Non Governmental Organizations found in Web a powerful new tool for recruiting volunteers, disseminating information and building awareness. Grace to the advances in Information and Communication Technology, NGOs have less place and time barriers and are able to expand their activities worldwide and increase their impact on population. By going virtual, NGOs can enhance and improve their activities and formulate their networks of collaboration at local, regional and international levels. The low cost and world-wide coverage of the Web together with the collaborative nature of Web 2.0 technologies makes them a perfect solution for the dissemination of ideas and the promotion of NGOs' activities. Using the new social media, they are in position of providing a new civil agenda. More and more NGOs' websites comprise: news updates concerning activities taken by individuals or assemblies, forums and chat rooms for face-to-face discussions, articles written by known journalists and political analysts that contribute to the public opinion, information about the current debates and social conflicts.

NGOs in Greece comprise a dynamic and considerable part of the Civil Society. Their presence is notable and their activities are intense due to the large financing from both the Greek state and the European Union and their constitutional consolidation. Nevertheless, cooperation and communication between NGOs and among members is still problematic. Greek NGOs don't have any tradition of collaboration and working collectively. They rarely fashioned any form of civic networks and it is only recently that they began to exchange information and resources. According to Grigoriou (Grigoriou, 2007) Greek NGOs, nearly to their whole, lack in sustaining satisfactory bonding mechanisms.

Despite the huge number of NGOs in Greece and world-wide and the great publicity of Web and Web 2.0 services, there are not currently any studies on the web presence of NGOs. The current research examines whether Greek NGOs make effective use of the new media. Specifically, it goes one step beyond the simple online presence and investigates in what degree NGOs establish a web based communication with their members. Apart from the typical accessibility and usability tests we measure the effectiveness of NGOs' services and the members' satisfaction and contribution. The critical question to be answered from this thorough examination is whether the Greek NGOs use the internet and the web only as a passive tool for promotion and dissemination of information, or as an active instrument for interactive communication. The contributions of this work include among others: a) a detailed set of criteria for evaluating the web presence of NGOs and other organizations that require members' participation, b) an evaluation of a subset of Greek NGOs that can be characterized as "transformational". Such NGOs participate in everyday local life and contribute in ways in which individuals produce and improve civil society (Hauss, 2003).

The following section gives a short introduction on NGOs and an overview of related work in evaluating the web presence of organizations. Section 3 summarizes the state of NGOs in Greece, the criteria we employed in our evaluation and the specific features of our sample dataset. Section 4, illustrates and discusses the outcomes of this research work and section 5 concludes and gives useful suggestions for future work on this area.

2 RELATED WORK

The term "non governmental organizations" first appeared in article 71 of the UN Charter (1945), which recognized the "consultative status" of national and international NGOs. Recently it also appeared in Greek legislation: in laws N. 2731/1999 on international aid (articles 10 to 17) and N. 2646/1998 on the development of a national system for social welfare (article 12).

2.1 NGO types

According to Stromquist (Stromquist, 1998), NGOs comprise of non governmental, volunteer organizations of civil society, which provide services to weak social groups or individuals, develop support programs for local societies and mediate for sustainable development in co-operation with the state or other agents. The NGO global network (www.ngo.org) defines NGOs as volunteer non profit

associations, independent from the state and political parties which work for the public good and allow participation of all individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, religion and gender. Thus, any independent, non politically affiliated, non profit organization, characterized by its volunteer participation, which aims at providing information services, social support and knowledge, with a well defined social orientation can be characterized as NGO. It is important to note, that the term "non governmental" refers to all possible forms of governance and not just the state government, such as local, regional and national government but transnational (such as the EU institutions) and international through regional and international organizations.

Several research works have attempted to classify NGOs using different criteria. For example, Michael O'Neill (O'Neill, 1990) organized NGOs in 9 groups according to their thematic orientation: religion, research, pharmaceutics, culture, society, law, world aid, medical prevention, and promotion. He suggested more classification schemes based on the geographical field, the legal status and the type of membership. William Cousins (Cousins, 1991) organized NGOs based on their orientation (charity, service providing, cooperation, public awareness), or their level of impact (from community to international NGOs). A review work by Giannis (Giannis, 2004) resulted on 4 quantitative: geographic area, legal status, membership type, work field and 5 qualitative criteria: impact, openness, organization and resources, subject and intervention role.

Due to the multitude of NGOs and the intrinsic differences in aims and operation it is infeasible to perform an evaluation of all NGOs. For this reason, our research focuses on a specific category of NGOs. The NGOs of our sample operate in National level, are self funded, open to volunteers and mid-sized in terms of financial and human resources. Their main orientation is to increase public awareness and they intervene in the operation of the society. According to Stromquist (2008) these NGOs are called transformational NGOs and are central to everyday local and global life, for they contribute to the ways in which individuals produce and improve civil society.

A proper sample must be evaluated using the proper and complete set of criteria. In order to justify the selection of criteria used in our evaluation, we present evaluation works in related fields.

2.2 Evaluation of web presence

Broadly speaking, the NGO evaluation's criteria were adapted from those used to evaluate general internet resources, in much the same way as criteria used to evaluate internet resources had been adapted from those used for print material. The more quantitative studies undertaken by Gibson and Ward (2000) and Norris (2001) provide a method for making comparisons between NGOs and therefore have been used, with minor adaptation, in this study. Apart from Gibson και Ward, there are also other ways to categorize and evaluate a political site like for example the Conway & Dorner (2004) research or the seven general criteria of the Hiser Group. Gibson and Ward's study was designed to evaluate two central aspects of political party websites: their purpose and function, and their effectiveness in delivering these functions. These researchers used a coding scheme that measured fifty different criteria numerically, thereby providing for objective evaluation and comparison.

There are numerous works that evaluate web presence for educational (Jin and Yoo, 2004), governmental, healthcare (Zaphiris and Kurniawan, 2001), non-profit or professional organizations (Loiacono and McCoy, 2006). Works of this type present useful tools and metrics for the evaluation of accessibility and usability issues. However, these methodologies are not sufficient to evaluate the social part of web sites, which is defined by publicity and participation (Christou, 2007). The works of (Gibson and Ward, 2002), (Gibson et al.2003), (Korsten and Bothma, 2005) or that of (Stieglitz et al, 2008) that compares the impact of social software on NGOs' members can be more useful in this direction.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample selection

Although the exact number of Greek NGOs is not officially known, they are estimated to be thousands. Their number and the publicity they enjoy have significantly increased the last decade; however the absence of a transparent institutional framework is obvious. A full mapmaking of the NGO landscape is imperative and urgent. The first step should be to gather and merge the records kept by the Greek ministries (e.g. EKKE environmental group, 2001) into one complete list (Papaioannou, 2000). The gathering of all the necessary data that was required for this research consisted primarily of the contents of Greek NGO's sites that share a common characteristic: through their program of actions they actively try to formulate with the help of the state the political decisions of our country. Therefore, the NGOs in our sample are the key players that don't stay at words or theoretical approaches but act as leaders in their specific section. Using a three element selection criteria, the study focused on non-profit civil society organizations that: 1) were institutionally independent from both State and private enterprise, 2) promote innovative forms of collective action, and 3) use ICTs and the Internet (either through their own websites or e-mail). Traditional organizations such as neighborhood clubs, churches, school cooperatives, political parties, elderly people day centers were excluded, from our research.

The complete list of NGOs we evaluated is available in Appendix A.

3.2 Criteria selection

As far as it concerns the evaluation, based on the work of Ward and Norris, we conclude on 6 groups of criteria: a) Descriptive information, b) Structure, c) Content, d) Navigation, e) Morphology, f) Participation.

The first group includes the site's descriptive information: who is the webmaster or/and the administrator, who updates the content, how users communicate their issues, which is the site's purpose and if it is well served, etc. The second group of criteria targets the site's structure, the effectiveness of the site's functions and the way the information is presented. The third group is about the usefulness, adequacy, credibility and validity of the content that is used. The fourth group focuses on the functions and the services that define the way the user navigate through the site. The fifth group examines the technical data and prescriptions. Finally, the last group of criteria focuses on the website's reputation, credibility, trust and value as well as in the participation of NGOs members in the site's content. The techniques we employed for measuring reputation are backlinks (Yan and Zhu, 2008) provided by Google and traffic rankings (Malacinski et al., 2001) provided by Alexa. We also measured members' participation in blogs, forums and other open discussion services provided by the NGO website.

To synchronize data gathering activities for the different methodologies, all activities were scheduled to take place within the same period (01-25 January 2009). Care was taken that data gathering did not take place over a period where heightened interest in the Web site could have influenced frequency of user visits or satisfaction with information on the site.

The complete list of criteria can be found in Appendix B.

4 RESULTS

In order to give a clearer view on the web presence of NGOs, we decided to present partial summaries of our results for each group of criteria. Of course a quantification of the results must be performed. Such quantifications are common in web site evaluation (Zaphiris and Kurniawan, 2001) and help in the presentation and analysis of results. Therefore, we decide to give 1 point for each criterion that is satisfied and 0 for not satisfied criteria. In the case of complete absence of information for a criterion we decide to punish the NGO with a negative mark (-1). In the criteria that are already quantified (e.g.

number of broken links, number of script errors) several thresholds are used to define the positive or negative marks. Consequently, we sum up the score in each sub-group of criteria for every NGO and map scores into a 5-level scale: High is for NGOs that satisfy more than 80% of the criteria of the sub-group, good is for those NGOs that satisfy the 60-80% of the criteria, average for 40-60%, low for 20-40% and very low when less than 20% of the criteria are matched. Finally, we present the percentage of NGOs in each level for the 6 different criteria sub-groups in the charts of Figure 1.

The quantification performed is simple and is mainly done for presentation reasons. In order to allow a different quantification of results in the future, we make available the detailed evaluation scores in appendix C.
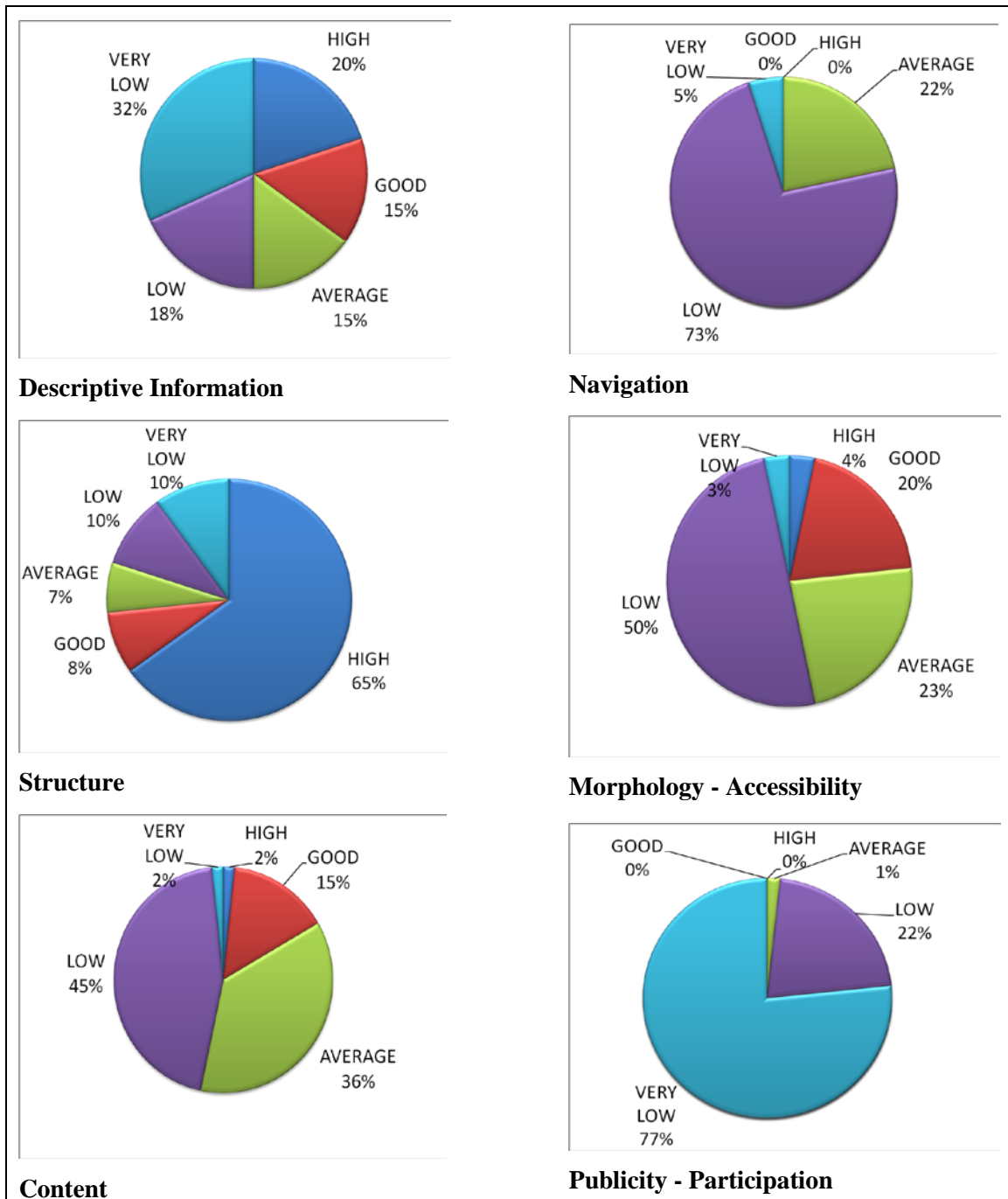

Descriptive Information

Navigation

Structure

Morphology - Accessibility

Content

Publicity - Participation

Figure 1. Summary of the NGOs' performance on the different set of criteria

From the results presented in Figure 1, it is obvious that many NGOs' websites are well structured and provide sufficient descriptive information. As far as it concerns the appropriateness of content and the publicity of the site, only half of the NGOs are above average (47% and 53% respectively). The results are more disappointing in terms of navigation and accessibility, which are neglected (scores are low or very low) from 3 out of 4 NGOs in average.

In a second step, we attempted to depict the response of Greek NGOs to the Web 2.0 trend by measuring the community services they offer to their members. Criteria 49-58 check whether the website offers a particular Web 2.0 service or not. The results, in Table 1, concerning the penetration of Web 2.0 services into NGO websites are very disappointing. Forums, RSS feeds, and E-votings are the most popular services among NGOs, but still are available in less than 10% of the sites. Given the fact that the NGOs of the sample are strongly connected with public awareness and people's participation in decision making and in acting in common, the results are even more disappointing.

Web 2.0 service	NGOs offering the service
Forum	10%
Blog	3%
Podcasting	0%
Wiki	0%
RSS Feed	7%
e-Magazine	7%
Citizens' Panel	0%
e-Voting	12%
e-Poll	3%
e-Petition	0%

Table 1. Percentage of NGOs offering a particular Web 2.0 service

In total, a large 74% of the sites completely ignore Web 2.0 services, 18% of the sites offer only one of the above services and 8% of them offer more than one services.

These poor results aren't only a Greek phenomenon. The low usage of web 2.0 is a phenomenon that characterizes all the developing countries. Both political parties and political organisations of any kind through the whole world suffer from the same illnesses: their solitary objectives and actions. Nevertheless, in every rule there is an exception. Nicolas' Sarkozy political office in Second Life, Angela's Merkel and David's Cameron weblogs and the latest victory of Obama which was based on the virtual social networks are indeed notable examples. In our country the volunteered based virtual communities showed their will and strength in rather few occasions, with the most notable the cases of a teenager that was shot by a policeman and the fire in Peloponnesus two years ago.

Compared to sites from NGOs that act internationally like for example Greenpeace or Doctors Without Frontiers, our sample -and subsequently political organizations on the whole- fall short as far as the usage of web 2.0 is concerned. But of course we have to keep in mind that this is rather expected, due to the enormous differences between them -target group, financing methods, etc. Things are very different, though, when we examine corporations or even small companies, because they tend to use more effectively the most of the web 2.0 tools. Of course this is far from our point of research, due to the fact that the necessary volunteered character is absent, since content of these blogs, forums, etc is updated by an employee.

As it has already mentioned before, the aim of this research was not only to deliver a thorough analysis of the use of web 2.0 technologies in NGOs in Greece, but to specify a set of criteria that can be used on future works and apply not only on Greek transformational NGOs, but on other types of organizations with active virtual presence as well. In other words, this was only a start for the next steps, because further research is needed, if we want to fully enhance the understanding in this area.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This research attempted to assess NGOs' websites in terms of usability of design and content and in practicability of services. The use of Web 2.0 social tools in the service of NGO members has been also studied. The research has been focused on a subset of Greek NGOs, which capitalize on members' participation and contribution and on the immediate dissemination of news and events, since we had the intuition that they would have invested more in the Web as a communication and collaboration medium. We employed a significant set of criteria that cover all possible usability and sociability aspects and carefully assessed our sample. The analysis involved both descriptive and inferential features and revealed that the websites were used mainly as static promotional tools instead of promoting members' participation. Although, the results are not very encouraging, as far as it concerns the virtualization of NGOs through the use of new media, we believe that it is still place for Greek NGOs to expand and adapt to the new technologies. It is on our next plans to expand this research to more NGOs that have different features and orientation. It would also be very interesting to re-evaluate our sample after a period of time and evaluate the comparative results.

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APPENDIX A - NGO LIST

1. ΑΓΟΡΑΙΔΕΩΝ: www.agoraideon.eu
2. Αναπτυξιακή Συνεργασία και Αλληλεγγύη: www.dcsngo.org.gr
3. Αντιπυρηνικό Παρατηρητήριο Μεσογείου: http://www.manw.org
4. Ατλαντική-Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση: http://gaaec.org
5. Γέφυρες Επικοινωνίας: http://www.noimatiki-ge.gr
6. Γραφείο της Κοινωνίας των Πολιτών: http://www.civilsociety.gr
7. Διεθνές Αναπτυξιακό Κέντρο: http://www.dak.gr
8. Διεθνής Οργάνωση Βιοπολιτικής: http://www.biopolitics.gr
9. Διεθνής Διαφάνεια Ελλάς: http://www.transparency.gr
10. Διεπιστημονικό Ινστιτούτο Περιβαλλοντικών Ερευνών (ΔΙΠΕ): http://www.dipe.gr/indexgr.htm
11. Εθνικό Κέντρο Περιβάλλοντος και Αειφόρου Ανάπτυξης: http://www.ekpaa.gr
12. Εθνικό Συμβούλιο Νεολαίας: http://www.esyn.gr
13. Ελληνική Επιτροπή ΜΚΟ για την Ανάπτυξη: http://www.dev-ngos.gr
14. Ελληνική Επιτροπή Διεθνούς Δημοκρατικής Αλληλεγγύης: http://www.eedda.gr
15. Ελληνική Εταιρεία για την Προστασία του Περιβάλλοντος και της Πολιτιστικής Κληρονομιάς: http://www.ellinikietairia.gr
16. Ελληνική Εταιρία Διοικήσεως Επιχειρήσεων: www.eede.gr
17. Ελληνικό Ινστιτούτο Ανάπτυξης και Συνεργασίας: http://www.entre.gr
18. Ελληνικό Ινστιτούτο Επικοινωνίας: http://www.hli.gr
19. Ελληνικό Κέντρο Ευρωπαϊκών Μελετών και Ερευνών: http://www.ekeme.gr
20. Ελληνικό Κέντρο Προώθησης του Εθελοντισμού: http://www.anthropos.gr
21. Ελληνικός Κόμβος Επαγρύπνησης για ένα Ασφαλέστερο Διαδίκτυο: http://www.saferinternet.gr
22. Ελληνικό Παρατηρητήριο των Συμφωνιών του Ελσίνκι (ΕΠΣΕ): http://cm.greekhelsinki.gr
23. Ελληνικό Περιφερειακό Αναπτυξιακό Κέντρο: http://www.hrdc.org.gr
24. Ένωση Πολιτών για την Παρέμβαση: http://www.paremvassi.gr
25. Ένωση SD-MED: http://www.sd-med.org
26. Ευρωπαϊκή Έκφραση: http://www.ekfrasi.gr
27. Ευρωπαϊκή Κινητικότητα: http://www.geniusmobility.eu
28. Ευρωπαϊκή Προοπτική: www.europers.gr
29. Ευρωπαϊκό Κέντρο Δημοσίου Δικαίου: www.eplc.gr
30. Ευρωπαϊκό Πολιτιστικό και Ερευνητικό Κέντρο Αθηνών: http://www.epeka.gr
31. Ευρωπαϊκό Forum Εθελοντικών Οργανώσεων: http://www.olimazi.eu
32. Έργο Πολιτών: http://www.ergopoliton.gr
33. Ινστιτούτο Μεταναστευτικής Πολιτικής (ΙΜΕΠΟ): http://www.imepo.gr
34. Κέντρο Διάδοσης Νέων Τεχνολογιών Magnum Opus: http://www.magnumopus.gr
35. Κέντρο Έρευνας και Δράσης για την Ειρήνη (ΚΕΔΕ): http://www.kede.org
36. Κέντρο Ερευνών Ρίζες: http://www.roots-research-center.gr
37. Κίνηση Πολιτών: http://www.kinisipoliton.gr
38. Ομοσπονδία Εθελοντικών Μη Κυβερνητικών Οργανώσεων Ελλάδος: http://www.ngofederation.gr
39. Περιφερειακό Κέντρο Πληροφόρησης του ΟΗΕ (UNRIC): http://www.unric.org
40. Πρότυπη Πόλη: http://www.protypipoli.gr
41. Σύλλογος Νέων για τα Ηνωμένα Εθνη – Ελλάδα: http://www.ysun-greece.org
42. Access2democracy: http://www.access2democracy.org
43. ANCE: http://www.ance-hellas.org
44. Ecocity: http://www.ecocity.gr
45. Ecumenica: http://www.ecumenica.net
46. ECOWEEK: http://www.ecoweek.gr
47. EURONET: http://www.euronet.org.gr
48. Euroscience: http://www.euroscience.gr
49. Fair Trade Hellas: http://www.fairtrade.gr
50. Gov2u: http://www.gov2u.org
51. Inten-Synergy: http://www.intensynergy.org

APPENDIX B – CRITERIA

Axis 1: Descriptive Information
1. Is it clear who maintains the site?
2. Is it clear who the site administrator is?
3. Is it clear who updates the content?
4. Is there any report about when the site was created?
5. Is there any report about the last update?
6. Is it clear who the site sponsor is?

Axis 2: Structure
7. Can the users express their opinion and leave a comment?
8. Is the information of the home page well organized?
9. Is the site's information well organized?
10. Are the site's functions well organized?
11. Is the site's representation well organized?

Axis 3: Content
12. Is there a logo on the home page?
13. Can the user read the articles of association?
14. Can the user read the organization chart of the NGO?
15. Can the user read the biographies of the members?
16. Is the program of actions posted?
17. Is there any description of these actions?
18. Is there any description of how these actions will be achieved?
19. Are the sources of information noted?
20. Are there any written speeches or interviews?
21. Are there any audio speeches or interviews?
22. Are there any video speeches or interviews?
23. Are there any links with similar Greek sites?
24. Are there any links with similar non Greek sites?
25. Are there any links with non similar Greek sites?
26. Are there any links with non similar non Greek sites?
27. Is there a wallboard?
28. Are there any pictures?
29. Are there any graphic files?
30. Are there any video files?
31. Is 3D animation used?
32. Is information labelling used?
33. Can you subscribe to a newsletter?
34. Are there any commercials?

Axis 4: Navigation
35. Are there any menus?
36. Do the links open in the same window?
37. Do the links open in a new window?
38. Is there a sitemap?
39. Is the menus' function effective?
40. Is there an internal search engine?
41. Is the internal search engine's function effective?
42. Is there an external search engine?
43. Is the external search engine's function effective?
44. Can you go back to the homepage at anytime?
45. Are the blind and deaf users supported?
46. Is obsolete technology supported?
47. Can the user change the site's language?
48. How many languages are available?
49. Is there a forum?
50. Is there a blog?
51. Is there any podcast broadcasting?
52. Is there a wiki?

53. Is there a RSS feed?
54. Is there an e-magazine?
55. Is there a citizens' panel?
56. Is there an e-voting?
57. Is there an e-poll?
58. Is there an e- petition?

Axis 5: Morphology - Accessibility
59. Can the user communicate with the NGO in conventional ways (tel., fax, mail) ways?
60. Can the user communicate with the NGO in non conventional ways (chat) ways?
61. Is the transfer's speed from one page to another satisfactory?
62. Is the loading time of the multimedia files satisfactory?
63. Is the sitemap's function effective?
64. How many are the broken and the dead links?
65. Can the user change the size of the fonts?1
66. Does the user have to scroll vertically or horizontally?
67. Is there any interactivity?
68. Is there the printer friendly view available?
69. Are there any picture thumbnails?
70. Can the user download the files in a pdf or a .doc?
71. Does the site functions as a portal?
72. How many are the script's errors?

Axis 6: Publicity - Participation
73. How many are the posts?
74. How many are the messages?
75. How many users visit the site on a daily base?
76. How many are the Google's backlinks?
77. Is there a reference on the Greek version of the Wikipedia?
78. How many are the NGO's members?
79. Is there a profile in Facebook?
80. How many are the visitors?
81. Which is the site's traffic rank by Alexa?

APPENDIX C – DETAILED RESULTS