

Procuring Socially Responsible Services: A Sustainability-Driven Case from Thessaloniki, Greece

Abstract

Purpose

This descriptive exploratory case study reveals the current state of an innovative municipal services' design for public procurement tenders, as well as its sustainability and socially responsible findings.

Design/methodology/approach

A mixed-method approach enabled the collection of rich, contextual information from the 60 participating organisations that contributed to the 3-step design of this SRPP framework. All participants, within a period of three years (2013-2016), went through two periods of structured questionnaires and interviews. Data were analysed using bivariate analysis against the different research variables.

Findings

Findings indicate an individual notion of strongly correlated procuring public services, involving traditional and digital communication approaches. They lead to dynamic public private socioeconomic synergies in supply chain management (SCM), as well as the reestablishment of the city's social and environmental profile.

Practical implications

Growing implications in the Greek public and private sectors link the role of social responsibility (SR) to sustainable supply chain management practices (SSCM). Therefore, as of 2012, the Municipality of Thessaloniki, initiated on-going, project-based tenders reflecting on the existing SRPP framework's design, procuring services for the city's growth and sustainable development.

Social implications

An increasing interest from international, regional, public and private stakeholders to create and implement a socially impactful procurement design, thereby benefiting local society as well as EU social networking.

Originality/value

In a European post-financial-crisis era where budgets are limited, this study contributes to: i) a European sustainability procurement design for socially responsible services; ii) digital marketing approaches and EU-wide institutional networking to reform a city's growth strategy; and iii) lessons learned from the participating actors of a SRPP design, setting a valuable SSCM example for other European counties.

Keywords: Sustainability, SRPP, socially responsible, public procurement, EU, supply chain management

Paper category: Descriptive Exploratory Case Study

Abbreviations:

CEEC, Central and Eastern European countries; CSF, Critical Success Factors, Public Private Partnerships, PPP; Gross Domestic Product, GDP; European Union, EU; Non-Governmental Organisations, NGOs; Soft Budget Constraints, SBC; Small and Medium Enterprises, SMEs; Social Networking, SN; Supply Chain Management, SCM; Sustainable Supply Chain Management, SSCM; Socially Responsible, SR; Socially Responsible Public Procurement, SRPP; Sustainability-focused Development, SD; and Sustainable Procurement, SP; Thessaloniki Metropolitan Development Agency S.A., TMDA S.A.; State-Owned Enterprises, SOEs.

1. Introduction

The procurement of public goods and services represents approximately 14% of the European Union (EU) gross domestic product (GDP). Public procurement is defined as the process where central, regional and local governments and public authorities, governed by public law and regulations, purchase and commission services, public works and associated goods and materials (Uyarra and Flanagan, 2010). According to the European Commission (2016), in 2015, EU small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating in the 28 member states contributed to a value addition that grew by 3.3% and employment by 1.2%, while, in 2014, value addition grew by 1.6% and employment declined by 0.5%. Among the five key EU industry sectors, the 'business services' sector was the primary performer across all three SME performance indicators in the supply chain of services (e.g. regarding increase in employment, value addition and number of SMEs). Value addition in this sector grew by more than 5% in 2016. As the EU is currently undergoing economic recovery, this supply chain process through which the public authorities purchase work, goods or services from companies is very important (European Commission, 2016). Therefore, a Municipal procurement framework was initiated in 2012 according to a qualitative framework designed by the mayor's cabinet and led by a PPP steering committee involving public and private stakeholders (Gazzola and Colombo, 2013). The procurement methodology introduced a qualitative, SRPP framework, consisting of three thematic, consulting-related categories: i) the city's history; ii) social activities and culture; iii) environment and urban landscape. The tender participation and networking of national and international, private and public service institutions was significant. A public-procurement framework is considered a significant tool for stimulating growth and social networking (SN) for the business environment through transparent, fair and socially responsible (SR) value-added services. According to Chua and Wellman, (2015) a SR framework's significance lies in the "social construction", which may include kinship, social obligations and recognition of a place-identity. Therefore, SN is defined as "a set of nodes" (e.g. stakeholders, organisations) linked by a set of social relationships of a specified type (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In our case the sustainability and growth potential of the city of Thessaloniki. At the local level, this public-procurement tool is employed through the cities' municipalities based on a contemporary, decentralised, public governance model that is applied in Greece (Ladas, 2014). In 2012, Thessaloniki, a city located in northern Greece, was preparing for its centenary celebration of contemporary history. Thus, it initiated ongoing, public, tender-procuring, consulting and promotion-related services in an effort to rebrand the city's social profile. These services still maintain social responsibility as a focal point, complementing the city's SSCM and sustainable procurement (SP) strategy (Amann, Roehrich, Eßig and Harland, 2014; Melissen 2012; DEFRA, 2005; Donia and Sirsly, 2016). SP strategy is considered

the procurement that in our case is consistent with SSCM, ensuring transparency and accountability in a society, living within environmental limits, and promoting good governance (Walker and Brammer, 2009; Anastasiades et al., 2012; Papagiannis et al., 2018).

Although a diverse and wide variety of procurement tools are available in scholarly research, there are still many challenges to be addressed for embedding the role of SR in a procurement framework (Andersen et al., 2009; De La Cuesta and Martinez, 2004). In Greece, the new EU rule on procurement (Rule 4281/2014), which balances key, quality- performance indicators with the price of the goods and services offered in public tenders has not yet been fully embraced in the Greek public-procurement system (Eleftheriades and Papamichopoulos, 2016; Kidalov, 2011). Thus, designing and implementing an SR procurement-tool for consulting services and especially branding services is a complex objective (Adam, 2008, United Nations, 2009). A procurement tool should dynamically engage diverse, often conflicting, stakeholders into a sustainable strategic framework (Crane, 2013). At the local level, it is imperative to create a flexible, friendly and measurable framework of SR factors, as most of the local companies that form the economic backbone of the domestic economy are SMEs (Clermont and Fionda, 2016; Angelidou and Psaltoglou, 2017).

Historically, in Greece, local SMEs conceive of public-procurement services as rigid, time consuming, and expensive. These public-procurement services primarily aim to comply with newly introduced EU legalities, a task that becomes rather difficult due to the bureaucratic and electronically outdated, public-procurement system in Greece (Ladidas, 2014). Thus, rather than creating flexible frameworks for adapting quality-oriented indicators into procurement tools, EU legal harmonisation in fact expands the procurement bureaucracy, a situation which actually hampers any innovations (Edquist et al., 2015). As a result, SR procurement-designs and applications in Greece are in their infancy. The city residents, who are the primary stakeholders and ultimate recipients of these public services, are usually disappointed, as public services lack a SR orientation. Thus, Greece currently shows a decline in social impact and SCM quality-performance indicators (European Commission, 2016).

Therefore, this study contributes in different ways to the SCM literature by: i) analysing empirical evidence from environmental and SRPP strategy; ii) increasing the limited research on the use of public procurement tools and iii) advancing previous research by illuminating contemporary procurement practices and legalities of an EU member state. Specifically, the aim of this study is to present and critically analyse the dynamic, ongoing application and development of a procurement tool that was initiated in 2012. Its novel design is still attracting value-added, SR practices and promotion-related services for rebranding the city's profile (Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou, 2014). The diptych of the social and economic role of this framework is revealed due to the valuable empiricism gained. The role of this diptych is crucial for institutional and public-procurement law, public-tender practices and public-procurement management (Preuss, 2009). It presents the logic of the social and economic indicators that possess varying roles depending on the products or services procured, the level of government authority and the place of implementation of the public service contract (Oldroyd et al., 2011). The study's objectives are to engender a lively discussion concerning the application and development of major ways in which local public procurement successfully engages key performance indicators and prominent stakeholders for the provision of efficient and effective SR public services (Gordon, 2009). On the one hand, a decade now,

SR has been a catalyst in several public-procurement cases, dispelling social and economic misconceptions. On the other hand, there is a social trend towards co-optation of protest by the business community for lack of social engagement from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and public private partnerships (Burchell et al., 2013).

As a result, the analysis in this study exhibits the major ways according to which local public institutions are designing and developing public-procurement consulting and promotional-related services. These services are relevant to: i) the development of SR factors that potentially apply to any institution seeking to participate in public tenders; ii) the EU member state cooperation practices, which exist between public and private institutions; and iii) the dynamic interaction between the SRPP framework and the engaging actors for the development of a sustainable growth strategy in EU. The findings of this study reveal a strong association between traditional and digital communication approaches towards the tender's formulation design as well as its successful implementation. An active interaction among diverse groups of stakeholders requires transparent and socially responsible (SR) support and methods of communication to be interlinked. Finally, a holistic SCM approach to various CSFs' is required for a sustainable tender design.

2. Public procurement practices: The case of Thessaloniki

In 2012, there was a complex legal and managerial system for procuring public products and services at the municipal level in Greece (Cohen et al., 2017). At that time, almost all of the procurement selection criteria were based on a series of administrative burdens, primarily focusing on economic figures. The prominent success factor for public procurement was and still is, in many cases, the principle of the lowest bid (Yu et al., 2012; Albert, 2010). For many years, the lowest offer won the tender, often undermining the qualitative level of the offer. Qualitative criteria were placed second in the SCM decision-making hierarchy, as they were analytically disclosed in the technical specifications of the public tender documents (OECD, 2014). In this case, we create, formulate and implement an alternative, legal, economic and managerial design that could overcome the existing administrative propensities.

The definition of the municipal procurement process as a procuring-product process rather than a procuring-services process is legally coded on the European public budget structure. Therefore, if there is a municipal procurement process in which the budget for the items procured is less than 50% of the total municipal procurement budget for these items, then such a procurement process is defined as a service procurement process. Such a distinction between the procurement of products and services is rather important as the procurement of services provides more managerial flexibility for the procurement framework in effect. Procuring public services is more complex than procuring public products for which the technical specifications are recognisable upon the delivery of the product or service (European Commission Report, 2015; Perner et al., 2018). At the same time, the sole principle of the lowest bid could not be the prominent filter when procuring novel and innovative services (Edquist et al., 2015).

As a result, this unilateral budget allocation practices preserve unsustainable centralization processes, stifling rather than empowering local socioeconomic enactment in the CEECs, including Greece (Furlong, 2012; Metzger et al., 2013; Metzger et al., 2017). Thus, a future, public-procurement, qualitative framework had to

be designed in Thessaloniki to overcome the existing obstacles (Cabras, 2011). A three-step, alternative process was designed for an efficient and potentially effective, SR procurement framework. Three steps were nominated for implementation before the initiation of Thessaloniki's municipal tender. It is worth mentioning that this innovative approach was rather risky, as the results of such an approach were uncertain. The steps that were taken for designing the new procurement framework were the following:

- Step 1. Public-Private Partnership Engagement. The first step was the creation of a public-private type of collaboration between the municipality of Thessaloniki and a developmental agency (Thessaloniki Metropolitan Development Agency S.A., TMDA S.A.) for the provision of the necessary designing support.
- Step 2. Stakeholders' engagement and design of a socially responsible, procurement framework. This step analyses the designing process as well as the engaging actors for creating and developing the framework design.
- Step 3. The actual implementation and then the development of the procurement framework, which reveals the challenges encountered.

These methodological steps are analysed explicitly to further exhibit the design and implementation methodology, as well as the results of this venture.

2.1 Step 1. Public Private Partnership Engagement.

Due to this complex public-procurement system at the municipal level, a public private partnership (PPP) cooperation type of model was selected. According to Preuss (2009), EU and government policy documentation (e.g. IDEA, 2003) emphasises on the role of public-private relationships and collaborations in realising SRPP. Consequently, TMDA S.A. – a state-owned enterprise – was selected as the municipal partner for the procurement process. According to EU legislation, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), have to be financed (for at least 50%) by the state, regional or local authorities (Alexius and Cisneros, 2015). The president of the board of directors of such legal entities is usually the city mayor. Members of the board are usually the mayors of the neighbouring municipalities of the greater metropolitan area. Public entities or SOEs in Greece are eligible to procure services for the social and economic benefit of their related stakeholders. These entities are fully complied by the rules of public-procurement legislation (Eleftheriades and Papamichopoulos, 2016). They embrace the Greek state, regional and local authorities (e.g. the Municipality of Thessaloniki), state-owned enterprises, and associations formed by one or more of such authorities. Therefore, TMDA S.A. has the mayor of Thessaloniki as its president. TMDA S.A. is an agency that aims to socioeconomic growth and development of the greater metropolitan area of Thessaloniki through national and international strategic networking, primarily on the tourism and other service-oriented industries. The role of TMDA S.A. in our case was to filter all services procured through SR qualitative factors, before examining their price sensitivity. Thus, in cooperation with the municipality of Thessaloniki, it procured the consulting services for branding the city's profile. TMDA S.A. is also in compliance with the Greek procurement law as a facilitator of such consulting services, based on municipal budget code-restrictions. TMDA S.A. role was to legally procure the consulting and promotion-related services for Thessaloniki's centenary celebration, purchasing social, cultural and touristic consulting (www.thessaloniki.gr). These purchases were filtered through this SRPP framework, which was designed to

assist the economic constraints of the municipal soft budget constraints (SBC). SBC issues arise whenever a funding source (e.g. central government) struggles to ring-fence a municipality with a fixed budget (Maskin and Xu, 2001). In our case, current regional public procurement practices reveal that the higher the subjective probability of externally covered additional variable costs (e.g. funds coming from the central government budget, in Athens), the softer the regional budget constraints (e.g. funds received from Thessaloniki, in Macedonian region) (Kornai, 1986). Politically biased budget management reveals a uniform hierarchical budget dispersal, perpetuating publicly centralized economic policies. A socioeconomic procurement infrastructure, focusing on transparent diffusion of public economic resources, requires a well-balanced, sustainability framework. The epitome of such a procurement design should be a balanced budget diffusion, focused on the city's critical success factors (CSFs). Current SBC distort accountable and transparent procurement processing. As a result, an on-going unsustainable economic development based on subjective, politically tinged, fiscal constraints excludes regional, socially responsible procurement and planning (Stanley et al., 2015) "Why supply chain collaboration fails: the socio-structural view of resistance to relational strategies", *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 20 Issue: 6, pp.648-663, <https://doi.org/10.1108/SCM-08-2015-0331>. Therefore, the PPP type of collaboration scheme was the first essential step in order to facilitate a novel procurement design, abstaining from current inflexible and politically opaque public arteriosclerosis.

2.2 Step 2: Stakeholders' engagement and design of a SR procurement framework.

These services were attracted through a balanced framework of CSFs and key performance indicators (KPIs). This novel framework design balances CSFs with social, economic and environmental qualitatively-focused KPIs. Therefore, this "triple bottom line" (e.g. social, economic, environmental) approach empowers a sustainability focused procurement design (Wilshusen and MacDonald, 2017). As a result, the unbalanced and monolithic public practices that focus solely on price indicator are placed under examination. Thus, this sustainability framework design is balanced towards the qualitative socially responsible impact and environmentally-friendly practices, as the economic parameter of our "triple bottom" line is restricted by the municipal SBC practices (Kaiser and Taugourdeau, 2013). Consequently, once the procurement offers are meeting the economic criteria, they have to be filtered through the designed SRPP framework.

CSF1: Thessaloniki's Promotion of Pull Attributes. SRPP framework's first CSF (CSF1) was the services' offer relation to the city's pull attributes and social profile. Pull attributes for a city are defined as the attributes, which are attracting tourists to the destination (e.g. culture, history, climate, service and product prices etc.) (Borodako, 2014). Thus, the relevance to the thematic pillars was a prerequisite for a successful service offer. There were three thematic categories for the procurement of the services (e.g. historical consulting and promotion services, social activities and culture services, environment and urban landscape services), which were selected to support CSF1. All of the proposals had to be submitted under a specific pillar. The organisational campaign's pillars procured were thematically analysed. They were based on the centenary programme's conception of the city's profile, pull attributes and social parameters (Truong and King, 2009). It was decided by the mayor's cabinet that it was important to design a procurement framework encompassing the

city's pull attributes as they are the main factors for attracting visitors. Thus, these pillars acted as social economic and environmental KPIs to these important promotional pull attributes. These KPIs measured the relevance of each proposal to the following thematic pillars: i) History: This socially impactful pillar supported the remembrance of the important events in the lives of the previous three generations of Thessalonians and the experiences of ancestors that have profoundly influenced the lives and behaviour of modern residents. ii) Arts and Culture: This is another socially oriented pillar, which upholds the promotion of the historic and emblematic city monuments, marking Thessaloniki's multicultural character and whose history relates to the city's contemporary history. iii) Environment and Urban Landscape: The purpose of this pillar was to create "green" awareness about urban environmental issues and engage city residents in discussions that help to shape the preservation and sustainable development of the city's surrounding natural environment (Sajjad et al., 2015).

The prominent stakeholders and collaborators of this procurement framework at a national and international level were invited to participate. For a long period, approximately 5 years, the city of Thessaloniki was open to proposals, relating to the city's rebranding for its centenarian celebration. A series of diverse proposals were coming primarily from private and public organisations in the tourist, history and arts, as well as urban design industries. An indicative list of such organisations includes national museums, social corporations, non-governmental organisations, architectural and constructing corporations, and others. The inclusion of the local communities, government stakeholders and business partners, as members of the tender committee evaluation, was also considered valuable for the successful framework design. Influential business leaders and cultural personalities, distinct professionals and dynamic entrepreneurs contributed with their expert advice to the tender committee, towards the design of a SRPP framework. Thus, stakeholders' engagement was necessary for signalling the second KPI of this CSF1, KPI2 (Mella and Gazzola, 2018). An open and transparent social communication network between internal and external stakeholders assures the tender's visibility, encouraging social empowerment and legitimisation for such initiatives (Colombo and Gazzola, 2014). A common way for public disclosure is digital data dissemination, as SOEs are legally obliged to communicate their actions and results to external stakeholders (Saxton and Guo, 2011). Therefore, these polymorphous stakeholders' appointments were considered important for the project's success, as they were providing valuable technical consultation for the consulting offers. These groups of stakeholders included: i) The city residents, volunteers and the city's youth; these groups were providing valuable social advice and support (<https://elqr.facebook.com/thessaloniki2012>). ii) The Ministry of Culture and Sports (www.culture.gr) in collaboration with the "sister" cities of Thessaloniki including Ankara, Bucharest, Sofia, Tirana, etc. (www.balcinet.org). These collaborating city-networks are contributing to international SN focusing on global citizenship and awareness (Düvell, 2018). iii) The organisation Visit Greece and its European-funded programme of 'cultural crossroads' (www.visitgreece.gr). Finally, iv) the National Tourism Organisation (NTO) in coalition with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, supporting participating local SMEs (www.ebeth.gr).

These national and international stakeholders and their valuable collaboration assisted TMDA S.A. procurement organising committee in designing and delivering a public-procurement tool which maximises the SR benefits of all engaging parties. At the same time, these novel procurement-design initiatives minimise the negative effects of the ongoing Greek financial crisis (Papagiannis, 2016; Boin et al., 2008).

The public tender for these socially and environmentally balanced sustainability services commenced in 2012. The PPP cooperation model selected provided the necessary flexibility for embedding several qualitative CSFs and KPIs to the process. Research reveals that such dynamic collaborations among diverse institutions in relation to their CSR activities is important, especially for the arts-oriented thematic pillar of this CSF (Wilhelmina and Zijlmans, 2019). Thus, the TMDA S.A. organising committee filtered its public-procurement decisions through this SRPP framework with four CSFs which embraced specific KPIs. The related KPIs of this CSF1 are graphically presented in Figure1.

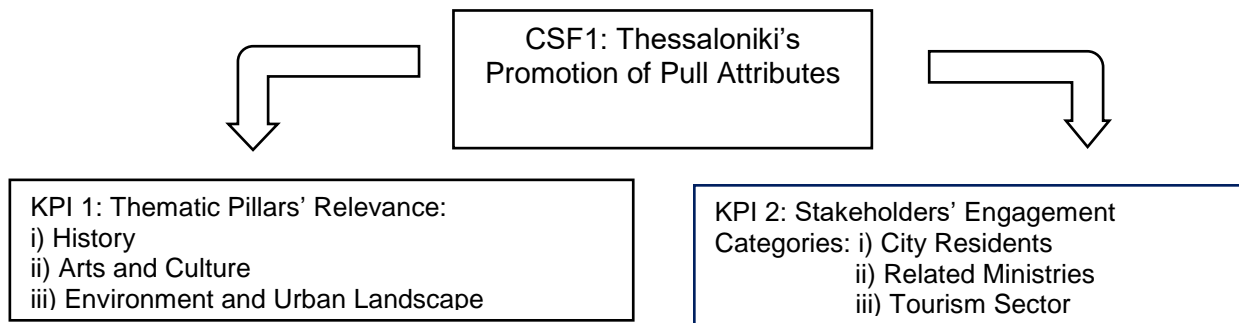


Figure1. CSF1 and its related KPIs

Following is the second factor (CSF2) of the SRPP framework, which focuses on the city's SR orientation.

CSF2: Promotion of Thessaloniki's social activities. In an EU era of post-financial crisis, the introduction of socially oriented factors to a procurement-framework design is critical (Nikolaou and Loizou, 2015; Palazzo and Richter, 2005). Such dynamic socioeconomic designs further complement and address the needs of the engaging stakeholders, as analysed in CSF1. The designing philosophy of this SCF2 is relating to the need of several managers and business collaborators to obtain essential information from personal ties and SN, and in their absence, organisations are constrained to rely on close collaborators (Cai and Yang, 2014). Therefore, there were three KPIs in this CSF: KPI1) entrepreneurial initiative; KPI2) youth friendliness; KPI3) unemployment rate. All of these KPIs measure the SR orientation of this CSF2. The unemployment rate (KPI3) is socially important as the ongoing financial crisis in Thessaloniki is accountable for the city's youth unemployment rate of 52% and an overall unemployment figure in its residents of 25% (Eurostat, 2016). The entrepreneurial initiative (KPI1) is another socially responsible factor as it catalytically therapizes the unemployment figures by creating new SMEs (Angelidou and Psaltoglou, 2017). The city's youth was also invited to participate voluntarily in the procured events by assisting in several ways (e.g. internships, volunteer work, etc.). Youth participation in the procured services and their related activities (e.g. professional and scientific conferences, thematic conferences and symposiums, presentations etc.) provided the opportunity for the youths to create valuable contacts and accumulate experience with the participating institutions. Consequently, a youth-friendly proposal strengthened KPI2. The related KPIs of this CSF are graphically presented in Figure 2.

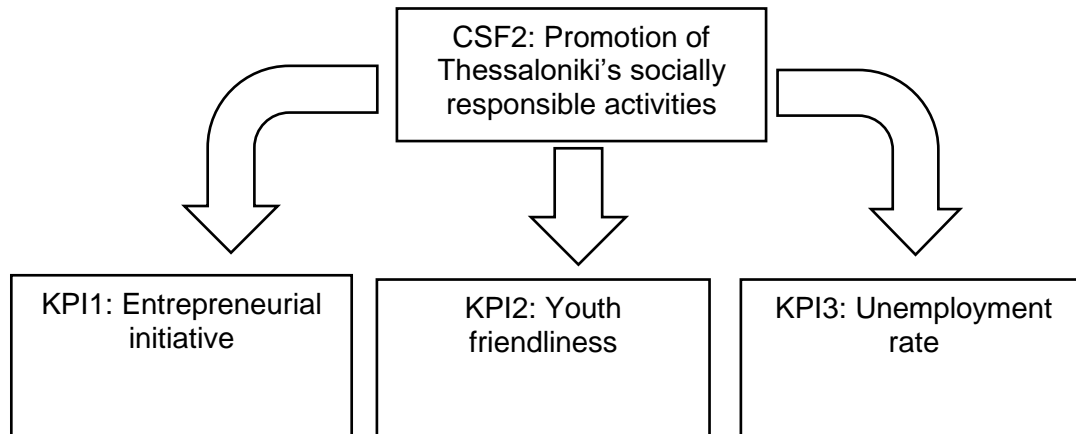


Figure 2. CSF2 and its related KPIs

Following is the third factor (CSF3) of the SRPP framework, which focuses on the city's quality of life and SN.

CSF3: Promotion of the city's social networking (SN) and quality of life. Adherence to the Greek public services social value is an EU legal rule (e.g. legal rule: article 3 P.D. 186/1992) in relation to public procurement (Ladías, 2014). Specifically, the compliance with the relevant EU legislation practices ensures that all national or international businesses and SMES can bid for the procured tender (e.g. the three principles of transparency, equality and publicity). There are two KPIs supporting this CSF: KPI1 Close cooperation with all the suppliers, including SMEs; and KPI2: Consideration of the participants' quality certifications and environmental documentations. KPI1 supports all the suppliers, including the SMEs, which expressed their interest in submitting an offer under one of the three tender pillars procured. The assistance towards SMEs for a qualitative proposal and the facilitation for tailor-made services was necessary for successful delivery. SMEs lack resources and expertise in relation to public tender processes. As public tenders in Greece tend to be daedal, time consuming and opaque, very few SMEs participate to such socially impactful initiatives (Tsouhluou and Mylonakis, 2011). The role of digital marketing of the project was a priority. There is an ongoing attitude in Greek society that these public tenders are limited to specific, preselected suppliers, due to lack of equality, transparency and especially the lack of publicity (Arvanitis et al., 2013). For an SME, with limited resources, it is important to inform and market the procured service in order to stimulate interest and participation (Glas and Eßig, 2018). Therefore, municipality of Thessaloniki and the organising institution (TMDA S.A) with the PPP type of formation designed this SRPP framework, overriding the questionable past practices. The press release publications of a tender are important for publicity but the contribution of digital marketing implemented through a series of social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) activities is necessary for confirming publicity of the tender to the SMEs (European Commission, 2015) (Van Zoonen et al., 2017) . This approach was adopted in the case of Thessaloniki in order to ensure

the quality of the tender process. KPI2 considers the participants' environmental documentations and quality certifications which have to be referenced. The two main reference schemes for this KPI are the international standard ISO 14001 and the European standard EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) (Petrosillo et al., 2012; Testa et al., 2012). The related KPIs of this CSF are graphically presented in Figure 3.

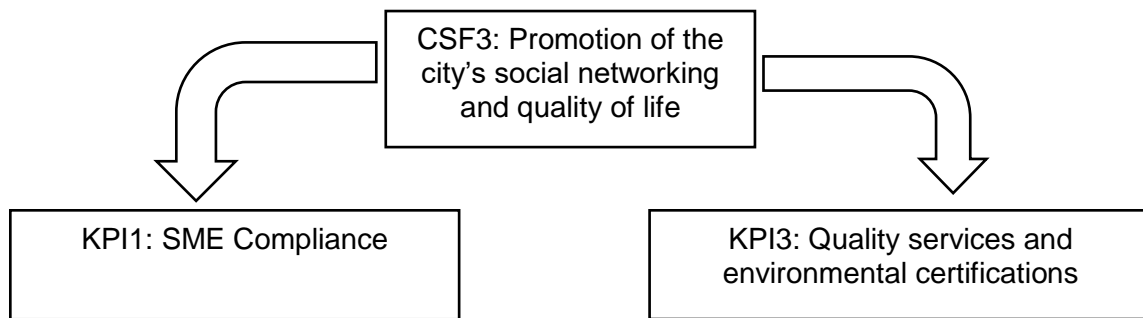


Figure 3. CSF3 and its related KPIs

The complete SRPP framework design, as it was delivered and implemented by the TMDA S.A. is hierarchically and thematically synopsised in Figure 4.

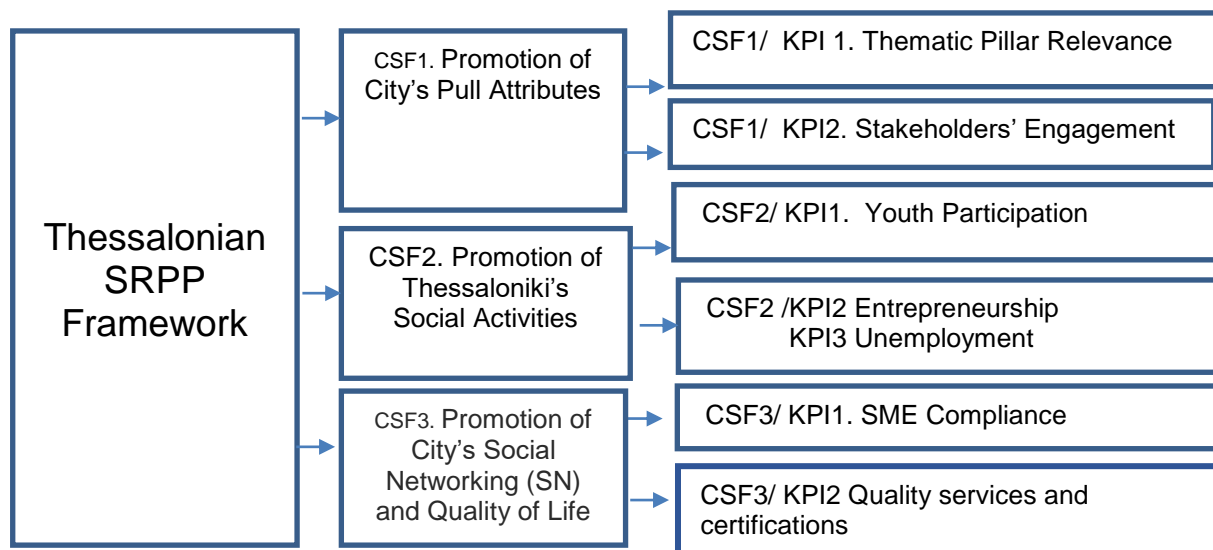


Figure 4: The design of the SRPP framework

2.3 Step 3: Implementation of the procurement framework and the projects procured.

The municipal procurement framework was implemented according to the design presented in Figure 4 and led by a PPP steering committee through TDMA S.A. The interest was high, signifying a successful tender procedure and accumulated 285 proposals, which were economically compatible. Based on the presented qualitative framework 60 proposals were selected, as bidding winners for implementation. These selected institutions received services contracts averaging 35,000 euros in

three different thematic pillars. More than 50% of those were SMEs which were in compliance with the required quality indicators and environmental certifications.

Thematically oriented services procured projects included scientific conferences aiming to present and inform the city stakeholders, the contemporary streams in historiography, as well as all other related social sciences, such as social anthropology, international relations and other history-related fields of study. Other procured projects included small exhibitions about the history of and everyday life in Thessaloniki during the last 100 years. Such exhibitions informed city stakeholders and tourists of the special historic meaning and significance of the city's features. They provided significant knowledge related to themes such as: Thessaloniki of Our Fathers (1912-1962), in which the city's history without nostalgia was introduced to make city's stakeholders aware of the city's profile. Exhibitions of photographs, video and documentaries presented the events of the first 50 years after the city's liberation. These were important events lived by the previous three generations of Thessalonians, ancestors' experiences that have influenced the behavior of modern residents, few of which are known by modern Thessalonians. Other historical exhibitions were realigned to themes such as: Thessaloniki of Our Memory (1962-2012). These projects sought to refresh the memories of the city's stakeholders by taking into consideration the urban environment and presenting contemporary recollections of the city's landscape. Consequently, Thessalonians of all ages were invited to share and exchange memories and discuss the recomposition of their images of the city through evidence from the past. Other culturally related projects procured exhibited changes in the city's environment, in neighborhoods, in habits and traditions by considering major city streets. Most of these procured services were supported through municipal volunteers, primarily young people, creating a pole of attraction for young people. Simultaneously, these services provided valuable social support with working positions for the city residents especially young people (Papagiannis et al., 2018). Once the procurement design and implementation was completed according to the methodology steps analysed, a research project for evaluating the impact of procured services was initiated. It aimed to provide information and insights relating to the procurement's design, administration and implementation. The evaluation process initiated on 2013, providing significant information for the application and development of the SRPP design.

3. Research methodology

A mixed method approach was utilised for the evaluation of the procurement framework's design, administration and implementation. The collection of rich data assists in the understanding of the key benefits of a SR procurement as well as in the examination of the stakeholder levels of satisfaction. This mixed-method approach enables the collection of rich, contextual information from the participating corporations and also undertakes statistical testing of structured data. Participating corporations are considered those which were successfully selected to implement the procured SR services, based on the designed procurement framework. The whole research methodology, both qualitative and quantitative (Bryman and Bell, 2015), was supported by TDMA S.A. administration staff.

The data collection lasted almost two and half years, and was completed on June 2015. A response rate of 98% was achieved, as 59 organisations out of 60 were able to complete the evaluation process through the structured questionnaire and interviews. Qualitative data was collected through a mix of one to one interviews

lasting up to 30 minutes. Interviews were conducted with all the participating corporations. They were selected to provide a detailed insight, based on the framework's design of CSFs and KPIs relating to procuring SR services for the city of Thessaloniki. The three thematic categories were identified from the qualitative dataset by utilising content analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

For quantitative data, interview participants were also recipients of hard copy questionnaires, which were utilised as the most effective tool for collecting data and administering a wide sample group of corporations (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Saunders et al, 2015). Questionnaires were focused upon the levels of satisfaction regarding the procurement-process services provided by the TDMA S.A., the availability of support and administrative services relating to the projects' promotion during implementation and most importantly the usage of digital media streams throughout the procurement's methodology steps. The questions were designed to ensure simple, straightforward responses. This approach was undertaken in a bid to ensure increased response rates as well as reduce chances of incorrect completion. It is important to note that, for the purposes of this study, only verified and authenticated responses were collected. A 5-point Likert scale was utilised. The findings of this primary research reveal an SR procurement of municipal services that provides valuable empirical data for an alternative and innovative framework of public procurement. Interviews were undertaken with all 60 organisational stakeholders that participated in this interactive communication effort, although 59 completed the whole process. There were communicated to provide an in-depth and detailed insight into the different issues and benefits delivered by the project to the city of Thessaloniki, based on the questionnaire's research orientation. These organisations were public or private institutions, national or international which participated with an event or project or a series of events or projects (e.g. Museums, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), multinational corporations (MNCs) etc.). Respondents were also informed about the confidentiality of their responses. The confidentiality of this study's findings were then reiterated to this project's political leaders and stakeholders to formally consent to their publication. Another lengthy process that lasted another six months, terminating this project's phase at the beginning of 2016.

4. Findings and results

The findings suggest strong levels of satisfaction across both printed and digital materials used in the SRPP framework according to the CSF3 employed. Similarly, the combined usage of traditional and digital promotion tools was also found to be useful, according to CSF1 and CSF2 employed. The overall levels of satisfaction across the different elements related to KPIs of the CSFs are high, with digital marketing tools employed throughout the procurement services returning the highest score of 3.6. Such an unexpectedly high result indicates the value of the CSF3 in relation to SN transparency in public procurement (Loader, 2007; European Commission Report, 2015). In CSF3, modern forms of public procurement interspersed with the need for traditional ones create a balance in terms of moving forward with innovative procurement approaches while still providing appropriate traditional access for organisations and individuals. Figure 5 exhibits these findings, in which digital promotional activities, related to the quality of services and to SMEs' services compliance (CSF3) seem to be perceived as the most useful, scoring 3.6. The red line in Figure 5 signifies the neutral satisfaction score of 3.

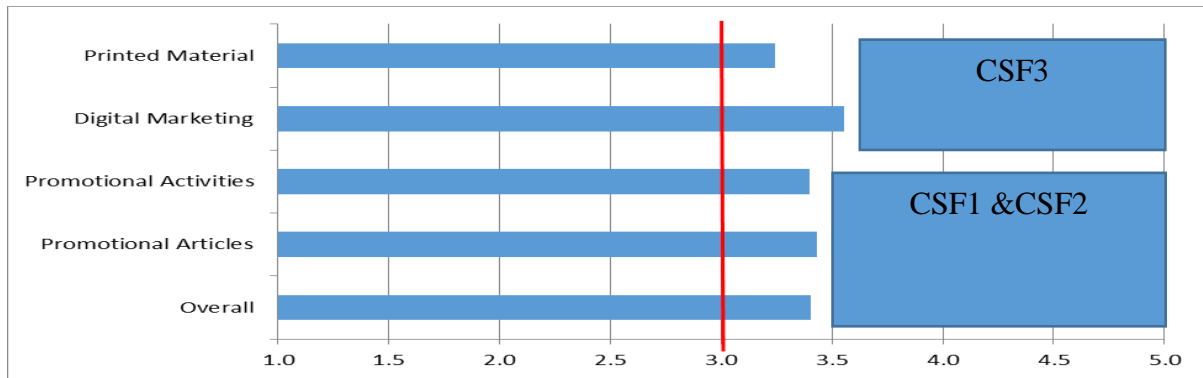


Figure 5: CSFs' level of satisfaction among their related KPIs

Therefore, taking into consideration the effects of the above three CSFs it is clearly visible that the impact of the digital procurement policies, especially in communication and marketing practices of the tender, is rather significant. In addition, KPIs integrating transparency through publicly disclosed printed material, as well as equality and publicity through a series promotional activity was important, as all these KPIs scored well above the average of 3 out of 5. Indeed, these results are also reflected in the bivariate analysis undertaken against these different variables.

The individual notions of procuring public services through printed media, digital media alongside promotional activities in traditional and digital approaches are all strongly correlated. The results indicate a positive correlation between all four variables, which suggests the synergy and importance of these elements working in tandem. As such, it could be argued that in its current guise, there would be difficulty separating and applying digital or traditional approaches without utilising both in tandem. Indeed the success of Thessaloniki's SRPP framework could be a product of the utilisation of both rather than a dominant focus upon one medium.

Table 1 exhibits the three CSFs employed for the procurement process. The table presents the correlation of all CSFs to: i) CF1 (see Figure 1) the promotional documents present the pull attributes of Thessaloniki; ii) CSF2 (see Figure 2) the socially responsible activities of Thessaloniki; iii) CSF3 (see Figure 3) the promotion of the city's social networking (SN) and quality of life as marketed through digital tools and printed material. Due to the innovative nature of the digital marketing services introduced, these CSF-related questions were separated into these two categories presented in Table 1. According to this table, the correlation among different categories of procuring activities are considered the strongest positive outcome (Romero and Molina, 2011) for CSF3-innovative services of the digital promotion, a fact which confirm the satisfaction level exhibited in Figure 5.

Correlations	CSF1: Promotion of Thematic Documents	CSF2: Promotion of SR Activities	CSF3: SN & quality of life: Digital Marketing	CSF3: SN & quality of life: Printed Material
CSF1: Promotion of Thematic Pillar Documents	1			
CSF2: Promotion of SR Activities	.840**	1		
CSF3: SN & quality of life: Digital Marketing	.866**	.791**	1	
CSF3: SN & quality of life: Printed Material	.681**	.623**	.733**	1
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 1. The correlation among different CSFs

Another bivariate test was undertaken (see Table 2) on the collapsed mean scores of CSFs alongside individual KPIs to identify if there were similar correlations in summative results. There is also a strong correlation revealed between the summative means of CSF2/KPI2 and CSF2/KPI3 of the social networking (SN) against socially responsible (SR) communications of different forms (e.g. digital or printed) and other communications focusing on the city's pull attributes (Karjalainen, and Kemppainen, 2008). This result suggests not only a strong association between traditional and digital approaches, e.g. (SN), but also a clear need for socially responsible (SR) support and methods of communication to be interlinked (Testa et al., 2016). Thus, Table 2 underlines the holistic value of the SRPP framework design. It reveals that the CSFs along their KPIs do work in tandem and supplement each other, providing a sustainable addition to this framework design. Therefore, findings provide: i) horizontal multilateral flexibility and transparency in regional SCM and governance; ii) potential SN policy-making among regional stakeholders; iii) balanced regional well-being; iv) transferability potential to similar EU cities that lack multi-level, collaborative governance culture.

Correlations	CSF1/KP1: Promotion of Thematic Documents	CSF1/KPI2: Stakeholder promotion of pull activities	CSF3/KPI 1& KPI2: SN/ Digital Marketing	CSF3/KPI1 & KPI2: SN/Printed Material	CSF2/KPI2 & KPI3: SR employment / volunteers & Youth	CSF2/KPI1 SR promotion & entrepreneurship
CSF1/KPI1: Promotion of Thematic Documents	1					
CSF1/KPI2: Stakeholder promotion of pull activities	.840**	1				
CSF3/KPI1& KPI2: SN/ Digital Marketing	.866**	.791**	1			
CSF3/KPI1& KPI2: SN/Printed Material	.681**	.623**	.733**	1		
CSF2/KPI2 & KPI3: SR employment/ volunteers & youth	.961**	.957**	.866**	.686**	1	
CSF2/KPI1 SR promotion & entrepreneurship	.828**	.751**	.927**	.934**	.831**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Collapsed mean scores of CSFs and their related KPIs

Overall, we also secure: i) an EU place-based social procurement that respects the regional differentiation; and ii) prioritization ability as a leading indicator for multi-level governance and regional well-being.

5. Conclusions

This case study reveals the designing efforts and the lessons learned, in an EU post-financial-crisis era, from the creation and application of an innovative SRPP framework. Currently, complex legal and managerial, municipal-procurement processes fail to provide value-added services to the local communities, as the public procurement-system is primarily restricted to budget constraints (McKevitt et al., 2014; Eriksson, 2007). Paradoxically, the procurement of socially responsible,

value-added, municipal services in Greece is vital to its economic survival. In a European country with a complex public-procurement system in which unemployment and especially youth unemployment reaches almost 45%, this SR procurement framework is a valuable tool to the local community and its engaging stakeholders (European Commission, 2016). It creates a social network that stimulates value-added growth for SMEs through transparent, fair and socially responsible services. Thus, this study provides not only an innovative, municipal-procurement approach for the economic stimulation of the local community and the engaging SMEs, but also a necessary condition for European SCM legal and administrative harmonisation (Elder, and Georghiou, 2007; Dimitriadis and Koh, 2005).

It also reveals empirical evidence for the dynamic creation of a novel SRPP design that successfully attracted 285 proposals. The innovative approach of the procured services attracted these proposals through a balanced framework of CSFs and KPIs. The framework's design balances CSFs and qualitative KPIs with the price of the offering services in a public tender. Thus, it contributes to the triple bottom line for the synergetic development of social (e.g. SR, SN) and environmental factors (e.g. EMAS) with the economic ones (e.g. price-sensitivity). Procuring SR price-sensitive services provides an efficient and eventually effective procurement design in an EU member state (Flynn, 2015; Bals and Turkulainen, 2017). The rich data collected, averaging a 3.3 out of 5 satisfaction level (see Figure 5) from the 59 participating contractors, values the framework's design as effective. Based on specified thematic pillars for the bidding process (e.g. CSF1/KPI1) and together with the use of technology (e.g. CSF3/KPI1 and KPI2) this procurement design performs effectively according to the positive evaluation outcome of the participating actors. Thus, the extensive use of digital communication and SN seems to minimize the high cost of competitive bidding for all engaging stakeholders (e.g. CSF1/KPI2). It also seems to improve the transparency levels and cost levels of municipal-procuring practices. Therefore, the SMEs that are offered a tender avoid high bidding cost practices, which currently apply not only to Greece but also to other CEECs (Arvanitis et al., 2013). Simultaneously, the public sector upgrades its tendering process by controlling public spending through a diverse set of place-based selected performance indicators and success factors. These explicit design features remain an absolute necessity for attracting SMEs to a public bidding process, especially in times of financial crisis (Kastanioti et al, 2013; Vasile et al., 2011).

The legal dynamics behind the procurement-design structure are also interesting, as they form a pole of attraction for SMEs (Borga et al., 2009). Current legal practices, especially for smaller tender offers, in our case averaging 35,000 euros, are not subject to EU regulations. As a result, small tender offers in EU are lacking transparency (European Commission Report, 2015). Thus, current municipal practices in EU fail to comply with the revealed philosophy of this SRPP design. Despite the aforementioned fact, SMEs and especially entrepreneurial start-ups are lacking financial resources to undertake the high costs of an extensive tender-offer research. Consequently, publicity factor is another factor of prominent importance for entrepreneurs interested in smaller value public contracts. As a result, these SMEs do not enter public tenders for both small and large contracts, as they have to deal with unclear technical specifications and lack of transparent communication. SOEs (e.g. TDMA S.A) managed under a PPP form provide the ability to contribute to sustaining value pluralism and social responsibility in the public sector. The PPP-collaboration-form, which was employed in the case of

Thessaloniki, enhances transparency in public procurement and provides: i) strong association between traditional and digital procurement approaches; and ii) clear need of interlinked socially responsible support and methods of communication. Thus, as evaluation findings reveal, PPP-collaboration-forms allow the necessary legal and administrative flexibility that circumvents rigid and expensive, time-consuming bidding currently in effect in several municipalities in Greece.

This case also provides a significant contribution to further understanding the relationship between SMEs and SRPP, at municipal level (Harrington et al, 2016; Moore, 2003). It concludes that the current use of the lowest-price bid should not be the main criterion for SRPP. The lowest-price criterion, if solely used, is a major barrier for economic growth and directs contracts only to large and experienced tenderers. Thus, this criterion eliminates high satisfaction levels, which are achieved with the employment of CSFs and KPIs (see Figure 5) together with price. Simultaneously, SR and transparency (e.g. CSF3) could improve the access and eventually the result of the public procurement of services through thematic disclosure (e.g. CSF1), SR publication of critical factors (e.g. CSF2) and dissemination of SR services that provide an effective SN (e.g. CSF3) with the engaging stakeholders.

Although, this SRPP framework is limited to the discovered qualitative factors (CSFs), which were examined and analysed in relation to their impact (see table 1), it concludes that procuring SR services is not a one-stream supply chain process. It is rather a dynamic and interactive cross-functional process, engaging with a diverse number of vital administrative, managerial and legal considerations. SRPP framework's implications are impactful to the European SSCM business practices and legalities due to its assimilation and synergetic application of mutually balanced factors. The findings and results of this case study are outlining the broad EU SCM-related technical issues that should be considered when procuring products and services.

Finally, the complexity associated with the framework's design and evaluation of its procurement processing, results to further studies on SRPP practices for an ongoing city effort to grow in sustainable manner. These studies do not necessarily have to promote the discussions relating to a city's profile, but rather to enhance the quality of its resident's everyday living. According to Thessaloniki Hotels Association, (2017) similar business endeavors are currently expanding to an extent that Thessaloniki is now a major pole of attraction that benefits all of the participating stakeholders.

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