



**ELECTRYONE**  
ΗΛΕΚΤΡΥΩΝΗ

ISSN 2241-4061



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## THE ARISTOTLE PERSPECTIVE OF "THE POLIS" IN TODAY'S WORLD SOCIETY.

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper aims to understanding perspectives of the Aristotelian *Polis* in today's society. As the modern world becomes increasingly globalized, digitalized, "virtual" etc, it is important to concentrate on the basic unit at which Aristotle's political philosophy were intended to operate under the *Polis*, the city –state of the ancient Greece. Looking closer at how the *Polis* is referred in Aristotle's *Politics*, it appears that the *Polis* was both a geographical particular location (*Oikismos*) and actively participated citizens (*polites*) in their community through moral and virtual political involvement (*Politeia*). The *Polis* was defined as a political ensemble of participated citizens, and one *Polis* differs from another by its *Politeia*. The *Polis* was by nature and Men also were by nature inclined to the *Polis* because they are by nature inclined to *eudaimonia*, to happiness. The *Polis* was the only human institution that can allow men to be real happy living a virtuous good life. The *Polis* exists for the common good life and we must rethink about the common political moral conceptions of the happiness, the freedom, the self-sufficient, real democracy. Today, the modern conception of a world nation-state or of local authorities' institutions differs dramatically from that of the *Polis*. The Aristotelian *Polis* can be restart in a way to aim to restore the ideas of the virtual life and the ultimate happiness to our urban planning attitudes. But it would be very difficult to incorporate the Aristotelian

thought in relation to the present society as the world state is concerned with the external economic evaluation of the society. So it is necessary to incorporate the Aristotelian idea of the *Polis* by strengthening the sense of the virtual and moral way of life and the local community identity, engaging more people to participate at a local level politic life, by making real democratic political activity personal rather than a mere matter of statistics and digital icons. Finally, Aristotle should still remain an important thinker for today urban society. The *Polis* can demonstrate again the importance of sharing an integrated and common democratic political relationship between men - citizens and urban society.

**KETWORDS:** Aristotle, Politics, Polis, Good Life, Urban Society

### **Introduction.**

The main question, which is to be explored in this paper, concerns the perspective of Aristotle's Political Philosophy about "*the Polis*", in modern urban reality.

The Aristotelian approach of the "*Polis*" came back today, after a long silence, as Aristotle began to raise interest in issues related to the possibility of strengthening the local community identity and widening the civic political participation, the "common good" of the urban society, for a better and more quality and happy everyday life. As urban reality is global, communicative, potential / digital, virtual, etc., Aristotle's questions about the creation of a natural good and happy "*Polis*" for the good, free and prosperous human life in it, lead us to study, once again, his Political work. (Grint 2007, 231-246).

First of all, it is a serious challenge to present this paper to the demanding audience of the Athens Philosophical School at the 2400th anniversary conference of Aristotle. It is certain that the study and understanding of the Political Philosophy of the great Philosopher is not an easy argument for the Greek researcher, as the broader commentary on his work on the *Polis* is almost absent in Greek Language, while it is available in German, English and other languages, Stanford Encyclopedia (2011). At the same time, the ancient city-state of Athens of the 4th century BC, with the democratic *Politeia*, which radically differentiated it from the barbarian cities, with

the brilliant public space and the famous Schools, is absent from modern Greek thought. On the contrary the today's inhabitants of the city of Athens lives without the sense of "belonging" to it, do not participate in a rational and creative way in the decisions and capabilities of civilian rule for the purpose of a good and happy urban life. The overthrow of the middle and the dominance of the extremes lead to the absence of citizenship, to the residential deterioration and social decline of the city. Political life and participation is based on communication data and not on real needs of citizens. These findings make it necessary to study again the Aristotle's Politics in order to understating better his proposals for urban life, citizen and good life. The paper argue that the Aristotelian conception of the *Polis* continue to be important to today's society

The structure of this paper in three parts discuss the Aristotelian *Polis* and its perspective to modern urban world.

In part one discuss the issues about methodological approaches of the theoretical investigation of the Aristotle perspectives about "*Polis*" and explain that the most recent references about political philosophy are in the German and English language, Habermas (2003) 92-156.

In part two discuss the issues about the *Polis* as a complete, natural composition of a location of the city - *oikismos* and a city-state – *Politeia* for the purpose of the good urban life and the common happiness. And, also, about the *Polis* – *oikismos* as a spatial- social interaction and a relation between the center *and* the country.

In part three discuss the issues about the Polis in relation with the citizen, the citizens participation, the common virtues and the education

In conclusions this paper argue that in the first decades of the 21st century, a number of conferences, events and publications, make certain the revival of interest in the great Greek philosopher, Aristotle and give the serious prospects of his Political thinking in the contemporary urban reality.

## **I. The methodological approach of this paper.**

We have already mentioned the translational deficiencies regarding Aristotle's Political thinking of the *Polis* in the modern literature. Also, the bibliographic

absence of more of the work of Aristotle's Byzantine and post-Byzantine Greek translators and commentators has to be noted. It is a unknown work that is particularly thoughtful and important in Greek, accessible only to a highly specialized audience, but not to the average and prominent today's researcher

Despite this difficulties, we will try to comment on the political thought of Aristotle's Politics and to give the perspectives of the "*Polis*" in today's urban reality.

In this paper for the Aristotelian political thought important elements learned from recent works, without the older ideological rigidity Wolff (1995) 11-41, Kullmann (2003) 13-38, Kalfas (2014) 133-137 and 141-149, Staikos (2015) 184-208.

From the more general literature works about the life of Aristotle, the paper chose to focus on some texts of Cauguellin (2006) 7 -ff, Barnes (2006) 1-16 and 172- 178, Ross (1991) all. Also, on some new Greek translations of Aristotle's Political works, such as the older ones of the Fexi and Papyrus Libraries, and the most recent ones Zitroos (2006), de Agostini (2005), Nisos (2015).

This paper argue tha the role of Alexander the Great, the most famous student of Aristotle, was dominating of the universal expansion of the model of the Greek *Polis* and the Greek Public Space. Alexander established in all corners of the Empire a series of Hellenic *Polis*. The most notably was the Alexandria of Egypt, with the Hellenic School, the Museum and the Library, taking care to keep Aristotle's philosophy in all aspects of Mediterranean Greek Culture, Mustafa Al Apapati (1998) 77-162. From Alexandrian culture, Aristotle moved to the Arab East, Andalusia, Byzantium, Medieval Europe, Ziakas (2007) 49-220 and Gugenheim (2008) 113-134. Also, in post Byzantium and Turkish occupied Greece, flourished the spiritual movement of Neo Aristotelianism, with very important personalities and works, like Theophilos Korydaleas the Athenian philosophy and his students Eugenios Giannoulis the Aitolian and Ioannis Karyofyllis the Fanariotis. Perhaps, without the Neo Aristotelian works, there was no modern Greek philosophical thought and, also, the new physical sciences had not developed in the post byzantine Greek education system. So, this paper can be devoted to the great masters Th. Korydaleas, Eug. Giannoulis and I. Karyofillis, who founded new Greek Schools and Libraries in the dark and unknown period of the Greek History, Robbed (1988) 173-186.

## **II.1. "The *Polis*" as a complete, natural, composition of a city location – Oikismos and a city state- *Politeia* for the purpose of a good and happy urban life.**

The engraved *Hellenic Polis*, the City -State of the 4th and 3rd centuries BC, particularly the example of Athens, was a real archetype for the Western City and the Urban Democracy. For a long time of 2400 years, the Ancient Greek City and the City Public Space has been studied and presented to a great extent to date Karydas (2004, Ph.D). 94-108.

According to existing sources, in the 8th century a new way of free social coexistence was preceded, in a certain ancestral place, with common memories, sanctuaries and laws, with a separate constitution, the City - State.

It followed, in the 6th century, on the coasts of Ionia and Athens, began the free and critical, logical, thought, with freely questions about the world, society and man, the Philosophy.

It was the Greek City – State and the City Public Space, the *Polis* which created the conditions of free philosophical thought and the constitution of a free urban society, of the City - State. In this context was formed Political Philosophy, which studies population gatherings in a place, cohabitation and learning of people living and participating in local communities with common values, culture and political aspirations. The achievement of the ultimate goal was the well-being, the "common good" of the urban society, the *Polis*, while it should not be avoided that the Philosophical thought of Metaphysics and Theology, was very important. The ancient Greek society was developed in direct relationship with the Oracle of Delphi and the Mysteries of the Eleusis, as well as with many other sanctuaries of the antiquity.

According to Aristotle, the *Polis* differs substantially from alliances, generations, homes (households, families, which are the cells of economic life, economy), tribes (breed members), villages, groups of religious beliefs, other ethical complexes and floats, co-scholars, traveling companions, expatriates, etc. The *Polis* was supposed to assemble all the smaller societies: villages, generations, tribes , families and others. The *Polis* had to have around the necessary rural countryside that would ensure its food and energy sufficiency, but also a first level of defense zone against the multiple dangers of 4th century BC .

Thus, in his definition of the *Polis*, Aristotle does not include the simple - primitive combinations of people, the family, the village etc but civilized human assemblies that participate in the commons, with all kinds of human relations, with bonds of friendship - solidarity, with ancestral bonds of memory and history, with common interests and common political purposes, forming a common Constitution, a City-State. a *Politeia*.

The *Polis* is approached here double as a special place – *oikismos* and as a particular constitution, a City State - *Politeia*, a political society of rational, free and civilized men. But the possibility of political participation in the commons of the urban community, does not extend the concept of the political participation to all the inhabitants of the city, like slaves, women etc..

The real goal of Aristotelian purpose of an Ideal *Polis* was to build a virtuous society of happiness, good, perfect and self-sufficient, an urban creative society of perfect life and self-sufficiency and not a mere survival of a multitude of inhabitants.

The final purpose was the educational cultivation, the high education, the Schools and the Libraries, the cultivation of the middle and the virtues leads to the political participation of rational, free and self-sufficient citizens for the common good of all urban society,.

## **II.2. The *Polis* - *Oikismos*, as a spatial -social interaction and as a relation between the Center and the Country.**

Every *Polis*, in the ancient Greek thought, occupied a particular location, an *oikismos* where a society of people dwelt, a multitude of people with a common culture, separated into sub-groups of citizens who lived differently but all shared the common purpose of good and virtuous everyday life. From the residential aspect the cultivation of the citizens led to a functional *eurythmia*, the aesthetic and artistic performance of the public buildings and spaces, the order of the inhabitants of the place in their private life and their homes, **Aristotle Politics 1274 b. 39**, as well as

overall, physical, economic and developmental self-sufficiency and artistic creativity in the *Polis*.

The *Polis* here is defined as an integrated organic social, cultural and political totality, which, like the nature, works effectively with the middle way of salvation / development, without the extreme situations of lack and exaggeration that lead in decline and wear of the society. The *Polis* was the final destination and integration of the previous human societies, homes, tribus, villages, etc, a political system, which is superior to all and includes all previous, in order to create and maintain the common moral conception of the supreme good and to a greater number of the urban population than any other. So, the *Polis* is a local human political institution of free people, of which some people are fully involved, others to a lesser extent and others at all and never. This process was that created political groupings and that led to the formation of different constitutions – states, democracies and empires. As the philosopher said “for as each set of people pursues participation in happiness in a different manner of life and by different means they make for themselves different modes of life and different constitutions”, **Aristotle Politics 1328 b**.

The future development of the *Polis* as an *oikismos* was defined by three quantitative variables and four qualitative variables that aimed the *Polis* to be a complete, natural, entity and man as a social and political animal, also by its nature. The development of the *Polis* was towards the good, free and self-lived. Through this approach it was a natural-systemic process similar to biological development, while the citizens *were defined* by the degree of participation in its urban commons. The *Polis* existed in nature which aimed at the social well-being, a spatial-social-organization in a functional or organizing manner.

The description of the ideal city, built to serve the purpose of the best life, Aristotle Politics, book VII, included the following urban planning indicators:

- The population, in multiples of ten thousand inhabitants, with its demographic and social characteristics.
- The extent of both the urban- center and the peri-urban area, the countryside, that created a single housing system.
- The port and the sea front, which almost existed in all Greek cities.

- Urban planning arrangements in public, private, sanctuary and natural (aliens, parks etc).

Aristotle's special reference was made in Hippodamus and the Hippodamian planning system, which organized the cities of Miletus and Piraeus.. Aristotle, also, knew the plans of Alexander the Great and the great mathematician-urban planner Denokratis, who designed Alexandria, the leading city of Hellenistic Antiquity, as well as many other Alexandrias in the East, in its expansion to India.

Aristotle in his stay in Mieza and in Athens Lyceum, organized student work groups to capture the most important cities of his time, possibly to help Alexander in his expansion. As a result of this effort, the "City State Constitutions – City Synagogues", a huge collections of books of descriptions and analyzes of almost 160 Greek and some barbaric cities. From this work, which was known in Byzantium philosophers, unfortunately only the Athenian City State was found, at the end of the 19th century, in a completely unexpected way. Today, an effort is made to gather the available data for the other city states, Staikos (2015) 110-118, while the names of the cities of the relevant list are known (among others Aetolian, Akarnanan, Epirus, Ilia, Thetals, Great Greece, Cyprus, etc.)

The top public building in Aristotle's public dwelling was the School and the Library, along with the surrounding dome and sacred temple dedicated to a local god's patron saint of the School. The archaeological excavations revealed the form and the functions of the Athenian Lyceum will be presented in the near future, while the Library and the Museum of Hellenistic Alexandria have provoked the strong global interest and many efforts have been made for its complete digital representation as well as the city as whole.

In all cases, Aristotle conceived the *Polis* as an integral residential, social and political system, a spatio-political system, a social-urban multiplicity and not just a unified and homogeneous social equality of heterogeneous and conflicting groups. *The Polis* was the place where the rational participation in the free city - state could be achieved, whenever the constitution was changed, the *Polis* changed and sometimes it decreased, and sometimes it is saved and progressing.



The *Polis* as a self-sufficient society does not need many equal and uniform people, but many unequal people, who participate in the common good of the *Polis* depending on their reasonable potential.

This political purpose of this sophisticated and civilized urban human society, of the *Polis*, need specific legislative, urban planning arrangements, free citizens, with commonly accepted laws and social rules. Polis was not, of course, a simple livelihood, but above all the perspective of the good life, of the common good of the urban society.

In this context, the rule of the law is right and good when the leadership is exercised for the sake of the common interest, while it is delinquent and bad when the power is exercised by one or a few or many in their own interest, **Aristotle Politics 1279 a.**

### **III. The *Polis* – *Politeia* as citizen participation, cultivation of common virtues and education**

Aristotle, from the outset, puts forward the prospect of "the *Polis*", as a reasonable way of political life for the sake of well-being, of the ultimate happiness. Aristotle purpose that "the men who is going to make a suitable investigation of the best form of constitution must necessarily decide first of all what is the most desirable mode of life ... since it is to be expected that the people that have the best form of government available under their given conditions...Hence we must first agree what life is most desirable both for the community and for the individual, or a different one", **Aristotle Politics 1323a .**

Aristotle, also states that "all people like to learn in a reasonable way" **Aristotle Metaphysics I** But the rational element of the human soul, the logical and critical thinking, coexist with irrational impulses, emotions and animal instincts. The intensity of the conflict between the rational and the irrational psychic and social forces can only be solved through the continuous cultivation of virtues, achieved through appropriate education in the schools within the *Polis*. The social priority for setting up and achieving the best goals of the *Polis* was the proper and effective education for young people in the *Polis*. Only through education could the necessary

knowledge be acquired, but also the necessary cultivation of common virtues and above all, the virtue of wisdom, the deep knowledge of actual everyday life.

In total, in Aristotle Ethics, there were four virtues necessary for the well-being: Wisdom, Bravery, Sofia, Justice. These virtues were connected with the Aristotelian approach of the middle, the suitability of the social medium, in relation to the lack and exaggeration, which were the social extremes. Aristotle reduces the middle to a general rule in the *Polis*. The citizens are impossible to be all the same, they are dissimilar, while the social virtue is the middle. In the *Polis*, according to Politics, the middle is the best for the society because wealth, or poverty, raises moral corruption and leads to behaviors contrary to the common interests of the *Polis*. Instead, we see as excesses wealth, money, power, glory, etc, which do not lead to the prosperous life and the happiness, to society as a whole, or to man as a citizen of the *Polis*.

Together with the principal virtues, the accompanying virtues, such as freedom (or contrary slavery), self-sufficiency (or contrary enslavement), development (or vice versa), autonomy and salvation are cultivated.

Thus, the *Polis*, in the political thought of Aristotle, was meant a kind of sophisticated and happiness human society, which constitutes a political society, a city – state, a *Politeia* that differs radically from barbaric empire society and its constitutions.

Thus, the *Polis* was meant a kind of sophisticated and happiness human society, which constitutes a political society, a city – state, a *Politeia* that differs radically from barbaric empire society and its constitutions.

The criteria of political evaluation, which Aristotle applies to deciding whether a good or bad, is the middle, in contrary to the two extremes, the rich despair and the poor despair. Similarly, a community of free people divided into two enemy classes, the upper and the lowest one, which one exasperates the other, is not a political society

Finally, it was the citizen participation in the Constitution of the *Polis*, the *Politeia*, as face-to-face coexistence, the relations of individuals and groups, for the sake of well-being, political freedom, perfecting the laws, self-sufficiency, cultural creativity and the happiness which allows a social cohabitation to be called *Polis*. In this approach

man was, by nature (as the *Polis* was natural), a political animal. An outsider - because of physical or social reasons - was superior or inferior to man.

In the case of the Greek *Polis*, the question of citizens' leadership and governance was also highlighted for the sake of well-being and happiness of the society. The issues of the Government and the Leadership and also the issues of Justice and Education, were very important in the political philosophy of Aristotle.

The leader and the citizens were shaped by the relevant educational system, which gives him all the "virtuous" features mentioned above, but further analysis goes beyond the narrow limits of this suggestion

The *Polis* finally is defined in Aristotelian *Politics* as an organized place, an Oikismos and a City-State, a *Politeia*, which evolved historically and sometimes falls and sometimes grows, in a process that depends on urban leadership but, above all, on the level of citizen participation in the city's public common well being and happiness.

As the result the *Polis* was the basis of a free, democratic, bourgeois society, with a higher level of logic, critique, thought and self-consciousness society, with the common goal of the well-being and happiness. The common good was the ultimate cause which, according to Aristotle, allowed the communal sense of "belonging", the building of a practical / prudent local identity, that shaping all the residential historical reality. This self-sufficient and free *Polis* was opposed to the extreme examples of the barbarian empires and slave -societies of ancient times

## Conclusions.

2400 years ago, Aristotle asserted to the *Politics* that *Polis*, as an oikismos and as a city -state, *Politeia*, would achieve its destination only if the leaders and the citizens would follow the path of the middle, the cultivation of the virtues, the self-sufficiency, the freedom, the common good, the achievement of the eternal life.

When the Athenians or the Alexandrians ignored the proposals of Aristotelian Political Philosophy, the results were disastrous for their cities. When they decided they did not want to give to the *Polis*, but the *Polis* gave it to them, their freedom and their autonomy collapsed and the cities were destroyed.

Aristotle in Politics has demonstrated that the citizen to be free and prosperous must use his knowledge and strengths for the common good, to cover - previously - the needs and priorities of the local community, which surrounds him and in which he lives, his *Polis*.

Thus, the path of the self - development of the ancient Greek men was necessarily passed by the *Polis* and the cultivation - through an education system- of the common virtues for the common benefit constituted the necessary precondition of the developed and civilized society.

The approach of the Aristotelian *Polis* as a well-structured, rational, interactive system of a men - society - culture - leadership and education, for the common good, the happiness is of great interest and is a top priority for urban reality in the early 21st century

Aristotle's philosophical proposal for a moral, free and self-sufficient democratic urban society is a criterion for modern urban sustainability, a rapidly growing, global, digital and natural, urban environment.

The Modern Western Culture of today's, lost in countless and diffuse networks, in communication and information technology, in unnecessary accumulated and specialized theoretical knowledge, in disastrous human and environmental practical sciences and political practices and aspirations, tries to find a way to re-design and govern the world urban reality.

According this paper conclude by arguing that the Aristotle's thought of the "*Polis*" will still remain very important for today's society and can demonstrate once again the importance of a sharing common moral, free, self-sufficient and democratic destination for the contemporary global urban world. .

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