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## Green Policies in Public Administration: Insights from the Greek Case

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### Abstract

*The transition to a green economy represents one of the most significant policy challenges of the 21st century, especially for countries like Greece, facing structural constraints in the public sector, high levels of pollutant emissions, and limited fiscal space. This article explores the role of public administration in promoting green policies, with a focus on the Greek case. Specifically, it analyzes the institutional, administrative, and educational dimensions of sustainability-related reforms, highlighting both the progress achieved and the remaining challenges. Drawing on reports from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Commission, and national strategic documents, the article examines Greece's efforts to integrate environmental criteria into public procurement, strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration and promote the training of civil servants in sustainability issues. The findings indicate that, despite the adoption of the National Action Plan for Green Public Procurement and the inclusion of green skills in the educational framework of the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government, implementation remains fragmented and at an early stage. The article argues that public administration can serve as a key driver of the green transition, provided that three critical factors are met: sustained political will, institutional stability and active citizen participation. The analysis underscores the need for coordinated action among ministries, local authorities and other public bodies, as well as the development of monitoring mechanisms and the strengthening of administrative capacities. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of mainstreaming sustainability as a cross-cutting principle across all stages of public policy design and implementation. Beyond assessing the current situation, the article proposes specific policy directions tailored to the Greek context. These include the universal application of green public procurement, the establishment of evaluation frameworks, the enhancement of cross-sectoral governance and the expansion of educational programs with a focus on environmental awareness and sustainable resource management. Finally, the article highlights directions for future research, such as investigating citizen participation in the green public administration process, evaluating the effectiveness of civil servant training programs and conducting comparative analyses among EU member states to identify best practices and assess Greece's position within the European framework.*

**Keywords:** Greece, green policies, public administration, sustainability

## 1. Introduction

Sustainable development constitutes a central challenge in our era, driven by the vast global economy, which has triggered a profound environmental crisis that threatens the lives and well-being of billions of people, as well as the survival of millions of other species on the planet. As a guiding paradigm, it offers the potential for a dignified life by combining economic growth, social inclusion and environmental integrity. Emphasizing the interconnections between economic, social, and environmental dimensions can accelerate progress toward ending extreme poverty and addressing climate change as an existential threat (Sachs, 2015). Although the concept of sustainable development has become a cornerstone of environmental research, it is also applied across other sectors such as business, agriculture, industry, urban development, the circular economy and the green economy (Ruggerio, 2021). Within this framework, the role of governments has shifted from a traditionally bureaucratic structure to a more environmentally conscious approach, resulting in the integration of environmental parameters into nearly all public administration activities. International and regional treaties and agreements on green public administration play a pivotal role in this shift, offering governments a structured framework and technical support tools for establishing standards for sustainable practices (Vértesy et al., 2024).

The role of public administration in developing and promoting sustainability is of vital importance. Public institutions and local governments play a central role in implementing sustainable practices and effective public administration can contribute to tackling complex issues such as poverty, gender equality, affordable energy, climate change and environmental degradation (Caldatto et al., 2020; Githui & Njuru, 2024). In the Greek context, the country's unique characteristics - such as abundant sunlight, wind potential, and biodiversity - have positioned green development as one of the core pillars of national growth. Accordingly, it is one of the five pillars of the National Development Program (2021–2025), with specific goals focused on transitioning to a circular economy, protecting the environment and addressing climate change. These goals can be achieved through emphasis on energy efficiency, waste management, fossil fuel independence and green entrepreneurship (Ministry of National Economy and Finance, 2021). However, Greece faces challenges that hinder the effective implementation of sustainable development, including prolonged fiscal constraints due to the economic crisis, inefficient public administration, urban congestion and overcentralization, geographic complexity, lack of strategic planning and limited technical expertise - particularly at the local level (Meleti, 2021). As a result, Greece presents a complex governance landscape shaped by economic limitations, regional disparities and evolving environmental priorities, alongside efforts to align with European sustainability frameworks. This article aims to investigate the mechanisms through which green policies are integrated into public administration practices in Greece, while also identifying key obstacles encountered throughout the process, to assess the effectiveness and adaptability of Greek public administration in promoting sustainability. The study is based on a structured literature review methodology, aiming to synthesize existing academic research and policy analysis related to green public policies within the framework of Greek public administration.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The concept of sustainable public administration has emerged over recent decades as a critical factor in the transformation of state institutions, propelled by growing global concern over the environmental crisis and the need for accountability. In developed countries in particular, sustainable administration is associated with the integration of environmental, social and economic parameters into the design and implementation of public policies, aiming for long-term prosperity and organizational resilience in the public sector (Lafferty & Meadowcroft, 2000; Meadowcroft, 2007). In recent years, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), agreed upon by 193 UN member states in September 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, have played a significant role in shaping public administration policies. Public administration can contribute to achieving the SDGs through institutional adaptation, professional management of transformative processes and the strengthening of administrative capacity (Heinrichs & Laws, 2021). Nonetheless, implementing sustainable development remains a challenge for public administration. Therefore, new approaches are emerging to more effectively embed sustainability into administrative practices, policies and even training programs (Rădulescu et al., 2023).

As a result, several sustainability-related concepts are increasingly used in public administration - such as green governance, sustainable public administration and green public service - reflecting a shift toward a more environmentally conscious model. In the literature on public administration, green governance refers to a form of governance that embraces sustainable development and environmental protection through policy design, execution and evaluation (Vértesy et al., 2024). Moreover, sustainable public administration involves building institutional capacity for professionally managing transformation processes toward sustainability (Heinrichs & Laws, 2021) and green public service focuses on designing and delivering public services with priority given to ecological sustainability, energy efficiency and environmental protection, contributing to the achievement of the SDGs (Megawati et al., 2024).

The emphasis on sustainability in public administration across most countries appears logical, given the frameworks and models developed by supranational and international organizations, which significantly influence national government policies. For example, the OECD has developed the Green Public Administration model as part of its "Governing for the Green Transition" strategy. This model offers a framework for governments to develop innovative institutions and integrate environmental sustainability into public policy design and implementation, through the establishment of a clear institutional framework, enhanced policy implementation capacity and consensus-building with stakeholders (OECD, 2025a). Similarly, the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN) provides, through its studies, a framework for evaluating and implementing green policies at national and local levels, addressing issues such as climate resilience, social equity and innovation (Vértesy et al., 2024). The European Commission has also documented best practices for the public sector, including energy efficiency in public buildings, sustainable mobility, the use of renewable energy sources and the integration of environmental criteria into public procurement (European Commission, 2025b).

## 3. European Context

The European Union (EU), of which Greece is a member, is a supranational organization that significantly influences the country's public policy landscape. The role of the EU is crucial in

shaping and implementing public policies in Greece. This influence stems not only from the European institutional and regulatory framework, which often requires policy alignment, but also from the EU's strategic choices, policy initiatives, funding mechanisms, investment tools and governance structures that effectively guide national priorities. In the specific domain of sustainable development and green policies, the European Union launched the European Green Deal in 2019, aiming for climate neutrality by 2050. This commitment entails addressing climate and environmental challenges while transforming society into one that is fair, prosperous and inclusive, supported by a modern, competitive and resource-efficient economy. The goal is to eliminate net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and decouple economic growth from resource use. Ultimately, the Green Deal seeks to protect, preserve and enhance the EU's natural capital, as well as safeguard citizens' health and well-being from environmental risks and impacts (European Commission, 2019). Moreover, the European Union is a leading global partner in integrating the 17 SDGs, established in 2015 by the international community as part of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These goals aim to eradicate poverty and promote inclusive and sustainable development solutions that uphold human rights (European Commission, n.d.).

This strategic orientation of the EU toward sustainability and green policies directly influences the policy directions of its member states. Within this framework, member states have committed to reducing net emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. They also pledge to uphold the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and to assess legislative initiatives based on their impact on the rights of vulnerable groups (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2025). As a result, member states have undertaken a series of social, economic and technological reforms driven by the Green Deal, which acts as a catalyst for implementing the SDGs across Europe. These climate-related reforms include Clean and Affordable Energy, Sustainable Production and Consumption, Sustainable Agriculture and Food, Green Transport, Green Cities and Infrastructure and Social Justice and Equality (Koundouri et al., 2023). These developments underscore the need for a capable public administration and strong, transparent public institutions (Council of Europe, 2023). This, in turn, requires a cultural shift, staff training, institutional strengthening of public administration, adoption of best practices from other countries and multi-level governance and institutional cooperation (European Parliament, 2019; Vértesy et al., 2024).

#### 4. The Greek Experience

Greece has largely incorporated EU directives regarding green policy. This is evident in the national strategies that have established a coherent framework aligned with the broader European agenda on climate neutrality and sustainable development. Specifically, the National Action Plan for Green Public Procurement is already being implemented. Its aim is for public authorities to contract goods, services and works with lower environmental impacts throughout their life cycle, compared to conventional alternatives fulfilling the same function. Given that contracting authorities and entities are the largest purchasers of goods, services and works, public procurement serves as a powerful tool for implementing environmental, social and economic policies. Public authorities thereby contribute at local, regional and national levels to achieving both national and

international sustainability and environmental goals. More concretely, this includes reducing energy and ecological footprints, minimizing environmental harm, promoting efficient resource and energy use, fostering innovation and competitiveness, saving public funds, stimulating demand for secondary materials and raising public awareness on environmental protection. The most recent Action Plan for Green Public Procurement was approved in 2021 for the period 2021–2023 and revised in 2024 (Ministry of Development, n.d.).

Another long-term initiative is the green development pillar within the National Development Program 2021–2025. This identifies green development as a core growth objective, broken down into three specific goals: a) transition to a circular economy, b) environmental protection and c) climate change mitigation. To achieve these, the following priorities have been outlined:

- Energy efficiency
- Support for renewable energy sources (including cogeneration of electricity and heat)
- Fossil fuel phase-out
- Risk prevention and management
- Development of protective infrastructure
- Provision of drinking water and water management
- Management of solid and liquid waste
- Support for environmentally friendly production processes and efficient resource use
- Protection and utilization of natural heritage
- Green entrepreneurship and green cities.

These interventions are expected to yield substantial economic and environmental benefits through the creation of green financial instruments and funds to promote the circular economy, green entrepreneurship and energy transformation (National Development Programme 2021–2025, n.d.).

Additionally, the National Energy and Climate Plan, ratified in 2024 by Decision No. 3/18.12.2024 of the Government Council for Economic Policy, serves as a strategic roadmap with priorities and policy measures to achieve specific energy and climate targets by 2030. It also includes the Long-Term Strategy for 2050 on Climate and Energy, reflecting Greece's commitment to the EU-wide goal of transitioning to a climate-neutral economy by 2050 (Ministry of Environment and Energy, n.d.). This plan outlines national objectives and aspirations, as well as the measures and policies related to emissions reduction, penetration of renewable energy sources, alternative and climate-neutral fuels, energy efficiency improvements, energy supply security, the internal electricity market, critical raw materials, climate adaptation and research, innovation, and competitiveness (Ministry of Environment and Energy, 2024).

However, implementing green policies in Greece presents certain particularities. Reviewing the aforementioned strategies reveals challenges due to the complexity of the institutional framework, the need for coordination among stakeholders, limited resources and funding, underutilization of public purchasing power for sustainable procurement and low ecological awareness among citizens. Specifically, the evaluation of the Green Public Procurement Action Plan highlights fragmented responsibilities and coordination difficulties among ministries, local authorities, and other public entities, lack of funding and technical support, the need for training and mindset shifts within public administration

and the absence of effective progress monitoring mechanisms (Ministry of Development and Investments, 2021). Furthermore, the interim implementation report of the National Development Program 2021–2025 documents the complexity of management and control systems, the need to enhance effectiveness through output indicators and revisions and the necessity for flexibility in response to unforeseen conditions requiring crisis-specific programs (General Secretariat for Public Investments and National Development Programme, 2024).

The National Energy and Climate Plan also faces coordination challenges among multiple actors, making unified monitoring and implementation difficult. There is institutional complexity, uneven utilization of EU funds due to varying administrative capacities and a lack of robust evaluation mechanisms to assess progress across sectors. Flexibility and adaptability remain essential, especially in light of shifting external conditions such as the recent energy crisis (Ministry of Environment and Energy, 2019).

Taken together, the three national plans outlined above reflect Greece's strategic approach to the green transition of public administration. Several indicators have been published to illustrate this momentum. For example:

- In 2022, approximately 25% of the public procurement budget was allocated to green projects (TenderAlpha, 2022)
- 38% of the total budget of the National Recovery Plan for 2021–2025 is dedicated to green development actions supporting climate goals (European Commission, 2025b)
- The share of lignite in electricity generation dropped to 5.2%, the lowest level in the past decade (The Green Tank, 2025).

These indicative statistics suggest that progress has been made in implementing green policies in Greece, though critical challenges remain and must be addressed.

## 5. Challenges and Limitations

The integration of green policies fundamentally depends on the effectiveness of public administration - namely, administrative capacity. In Greece's case, identifying the challenges facing national public administration and subsequently addressing these obstacles are key prerequisites toward increasing the implementation of green policies and, by extension, achieving sustainable development. However, the Greek public sector faces significant administrative barriers that hinder the effective execution of development policies. The most prominent among these are legal fragmentation, the absence of unified information systems, an uncoordinated digital transition, lack of coordinated state intervention, insufficient monitoring mechanisms and overlapping legislative regulations (National Transparency Authority, 2022; Rekkas, 2022). Supporting this view, the Supreme Administration of Public Servants' Unions argues that the Greek public sector suffers from low efficiency and limited strategic planning capacity due to excessive centralization and lack of interoperability among its services. It often functions as a procedural executor rather than a strategic actor and is vulnerable to political interference (ADEDY, 2021).

Another major category of challenges and constraints in implementing green policies in Greece lies at the political and societal level. There is widespread skepticism and distrust regarding green policy implementation, particularly in local

communities, where such measures are perceived as threats to economic activity and daily life. The lack of citizen participation in policy design further exacerbates this distrust (Apostolopoulou, 2009). Consequently, political leadership does not treat green policy as an immediate priority, resulting in its limited integration into the state's development agenda. Observed delays, infrastructure deficiencies and the absence of coordinated management across various environmental policy domains highlight the urgent need for mobilization to achieve sustainable development and comply with European legislation (European Commission, 2025a).

A third critical barrier lies in the limited training of public servants in green governance, which hampers the adoption of innovative practices and impedes the structured implementation of policies supporting the green transition. Indeed, the reduced administrative capacity and technical expertise of civil servants are cited in the European Commission's report on environmental policy implementation in Greece as key factors impeding the effective enforcement of environmental legislation and EU directives (European Commission, 2022). For this reason, the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government - the primary institution for training Greek public servants - has recognized the need to strengthen civil servants' skills in both green and digital competencies. This is reflected in the recent introduction of training programs focused on developing capacities such as environmental awareness, sustainable resource management and participation in green public procurement (National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government, n.d.). Through these efforts, public administration seeks to address the issue of fragmented training that fails to meet modern demands, particularly in areas such as green governance (Nasios, 2022).

## 6. Policy Recommendations for Greece

Recognizing the need to transition Greek public administration toward a sustainable and green model has led to the introduction of institutional and administrative interventions by both national and supranational bodies. Experts from the OECD highlight that the shift to a green economy is one of the greatest policy challenges of the coming decades. In Greece's case, factors such as limited fiscal resources, lack of private financing and high emissions intensity complicate this transition. The Organization recommends a green restructuring of the energy system through increased utilization of renewable energy sources and adaptation of energy-consuming sectors. This can be achieved through policies such as carbon pricing, public investment in infrastructure, stricter energy efficiency standards, financial support for vulnerable households, development of insurance coverage to protect citizens and businesses from the effects of global warming, thereby reducing pressure on the state budget and active participation of all stakeholders to build social consensus (Leidecker, 2023).

Additionally, the Organization proposes strengthening administrative capacity by upgrading environmental governance and enhancing collaboration among public entities. It also recommends integrating climate adaptation into sectors such as agriculture, tourism and water management, revising tax incentives to promote the green economy and reduce polluting activities, accelerating lignite phase-out by 2028 and improving interconnections with the islands (OECD, 2020).

Additional institutional proposals advocate for the universal implementation of green public procurement through the

systematic integration of environmental criteria at all stages of public contracts for goods and services. Key measures include training and certifying procurement officers, establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms via the Central Electronic Registry of Public Contracts, updating the National Action Plan every three years to reflect market and environmental policy developments and strengthening cross-sectoral coordination within the broader public sector (Ministry of Development, n.d.).

In particular, regarding the lack of cross-sectoral collaboration among stakeholders in Greece, it is recommended to institutionalize coordination mechanisms between ministries (especially Environment and Energy, Development, and Interior), local authorities, and supervised entities. This includes setting joint operational goals, investing in training infrastructure for involved personnel and creating interdepartmental working groups to facilitate data exchange and develop shared monitoring and evaluation tools (OECD, 2025b). Given the lack of technical expertise among civil servants in implementing green policies, it is further proposed that staff receive systematic training in sustainability topics and that cross-sectoral educational mechanisms be established to enhance administrative capacity (Leidecker et al., 2023). These proposed policies encompass both short-term and long-term dimensions, requiring immediate action as well as strategic planning for the future.

## 7. Conclusions

Greek public administration faces institutional, administrative and educational challenges in its effort to integrate the principles of sustainability and green policies. Despite notable initiatives in recent years - such as the establishment of green public procurement, the strengthening of the institutional framework and the implementation of training programs for public sector personnel - Greece must advance its efforts toward implementing a coherent and cross-cutting strategy for green governance. This, of course, presupposes the existence of political will for sustained and long-term reform implementation, institutional stability that enables effective coordination among stakeholders and active societal participation. To achieve these goals, it is crucial to strengthen intersectoral collaboration, systematically train public sector personnel and strategically leverage European funding instruments. It goes without saying that the integration of sustainability as a horizontal principle in the design, evaluation and implementation of public policies is essential for meeting both national and European objectives.

Further scholarly inquiry is essential, particularly in areas such as activating and meaningfully involving citizens in the process of green public administration (e.g., through mechanisms for consultation, accountability and co-creation of policy), conducting comparative analyses among EU member states to identify best practices and assess Greece's relative performance and evaluating the effectiveness of training interventions for public sector personnel, with emphasis on developing green skills and enhancing administrative capacity.

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