

**BESSH -16****Social Economy and Entrepreneurship in Mountain Areas: The Case of the Municipality of Pyli in Greece**Papadopoulos Ioannisa<sup>1\*</sup>, Karagouni Glykeriab<sup>2</sup>, Trigkas Mariosc<sup>3</sup>, Nakos Christosd<sup>4</sup>, Bekou Konstantinae<sup>5</sup><sup>1, 2</sup>*Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly, Greece*<sup>3</sup>*Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece*<sup>4, 5</sup>*Municipality of Pyli – Trikala Prefecture, Alderman, Greece*

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**Abstract**

The concept of “social entrepreneurship” is becoming more and more popular. However, it appears that it still means different things to different people. Therefore, in spite the fact that the phenomenon seems to be well suited to the crisis framework –especially the one in Greece nowadays – practical efforts fail because of low level of familiarization, and ambiguity of all-agreed targets, expectations and ways to implement social entrepreneurship. The time is certainly ripe for a bottom-up approach of the phenomenon against social problems. Social entrepreneurs are certainly needed but they have to be consciously involved in order to avoid inefficient and ineffective efforts. The present research purports to shed light into the potential of social entrepreneurship in Greece and more precisely in the Municipality of Pyli, a mountainous area in Central Greece. It builds on a well-structured questionnaire using 1-5 Likert scale for the majority of the questions. The data were recorded, processed and analyzed via the statistical package SPSSWIN ver 20.0 and the appropriate tests needed. Results indicate that social entrepreneurship can act as a solution or as a valid option against the crisis if people get well informed on the concept, its potential, its type of application and the relevant institutional framework.

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*Keywords*— Social Entrepreneurship, Social Economy, Mountainous areas, Sustainable development, Market Research

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**Introduction**

Almost twenty years ago, in 1998, Dees stated that “the idea of “social entrepreneurship” has struck a responsive chord”. Since then, social entrepreneurship is emerging as an active area of research. However, even today, scholars agree only on the fact that social entrepreneurship constitutes a rather contested concept generating a variety of competing definitions and relevant conceptual frameworks. Consequently, even after almost two decades, research on the concept is still considered to be in its infancy (Choi and Majumdar, 2014). Several researchers have attempted to record the different meanings and logics behind the developed conceptions, while practitioners encounter similar problems since it is quite unclear to public what social entrepreneurship stands for. Though the concept of “social entrepreneurship” is becoming more popular, it appears that it means different things to different people. Therefore, in spite the fact that the phenomenon seems to be well suited to the crisis framework –especially the one in Greece nowadays – practical efforts fail because of the lack of all-agreed targets, expectations and ways to implement social entrepreneurship. The time is certainly ripe for a bottom-up approach of the phenomenon against social problems. Social entrepreneurs are certainly needed but they have to be consciously involved in order to avoid inefficient and ineffective efforts.

The present research purports to shed light into the potential of social entrepreneurship in Greece; whether it can act as a solution or as a valid option against the crisis. The next section of this work attempts a short description of social entrepreneurship and social economy, their scope and mission. A brief reference in categories and criteria will establish the theoretical background of the research. The empirical part will outline the perceptions and views regarding social entrepreneurship in a specific Greek mountainous area in Greece (Pyli, Region of Thessaly) within the current and long-lasting crisis framework. Statistical data will be discussed in order to produce useful insights about the evaluation of factors regarding the phenomenon under investigation and its future in Greece. The concluding section includes future research, limitations and some policy recommendations.

**Literature review**

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### *Social Entrepreneurship and Social Economy*

Social entrepreneurship regards the process of using market-based methods in order to address social problems (Grimes et al., 2013). The relevant theory seems to be of growing attention; academics, practitioners and policy makers appear to place great emphasis on social entrepreneurship and its various aspects. However, the phenomenon still remains poorly understood. Researchers continue to debate on its definitions and antecedents, as well as the solutions and benefits it offers, and its penetration to ordinary people (Arend, 2013; Miller, Grimes, McMullen, & Vogus, 2012).

Social entrepreneurship emerged within the framework of social economy; a collective term which describes that part of the economy that can be considered both privately and publicly controlled; non-profit organizations, co-operatives and associations belong to social economy. Among them, social enterprises, these hybrid organizations are of quite distinctive nature since they present a different approach of strategic goals, innovation and trade (Chell et al., 2016), challenging actually the sufficiency of terms and theories regarding entrepreneurship.

To date the principal focus concerning the role of the social economy has been its ability to generate jobs and permit the creation or acquisition of goods and services, while social entrepreneurship regards the nature, the quite differentiated logic and the actual role of its enterprises (Borgaza et al., 2011). Theoretically, such models might be embraced by people to function and to be supported to work effectively. Especially when economies lie within recession, these types of entrepreneurship form a vehicle to “provide ready solutions to economic woes” (Chell, 2007). These solutions imply that such innovative actions offer products and services of special social value

According to existing literature, research has focused so far on case studies, success stories (e.g. Sharir and Lerner, 2006) and theoretical efforts for concrete definitions of the phenomenon. On the other hand, it appears that there is scarce empirical analysis on the real appeal of the phenomenon, the individual drivers, pros and contras of the antecedents of social entrepreneurship (Lepoutre et al., 2013).

### *Current perspectives, Roles and Measures of Social Entrepreneurship*

Social entrepreneurship appears to confuse people even after many decades. Trexler (2008) had stated that it is a “simple term with a complex range of meanings”; his saying is still very popular among both theorists and practitioners. Perhaps the main characteristic concerns its difference with regular entrepreneurship; although “economic value creation is seen as a necessary condition to ensure financial viability” (Mair and Marti’ 2006, p. 38), social entrepreneurs prioritize the creation of social value. Therefore, social entrepreneurship targets are usually set to be social cohesion, job creation, reduction of unemployment, and the improvement of the economy in general.

Yet, literature so far appears to add criteria regarding the term such as the existence of innovation and even the creation of new organizations (e.g. Mair and Marti’ 2006). It appears though that the social entrepreneurship phenomenon is not well perceived by plain citizens either. As a consequence, different interpretations have been already mapped around the globe (Lepoutre et al., 2013).

Which organizations can be characterized as social ones then? Within the notion of social economy, this was quite clear; popular associations and cooperatives constituted historically its backbones. Within the market and economy, social economy relates to the principle of democratic organization promoting social cohesion, the principles of social solidarity and social inclusion. According to Trixopoulou and Magoulios (2012), social economy structures support sustainable and local development, as well as maintain the democratic structures.

However, things are more complicated with social entrepreneurship. Scholars have tried different categorizations such as Zahra et al. (2009) who provided their own perception on the different kinds of social ventures and the motivations of social entrepreneurs. According to Lepoutre et al. (2013), there are three main social entrepreneurship categories: for profit, hybrid and NGOs. Hybrid enterprises combine both market-based and social logics; for-profit social enterprises exhibit high attention to social and environmental objectives; and NGOs are not the traditional ones but those that combine their social mission with an innovative approach in achieving their goals. The authors include traditional NGOs in social entrepreneurship too.

### *Social Entrepreneurship in Greece*

Social enterprises have been related to the development and have been considered as innovative alternatives to social problems (Shaw and Carter, 2004). Several studies have highlighted the importance of the phenomenon around the globe (e.g. Seelos and Mail, 2005; Lundstrom et al., 2013). However, social entrepreneurship does not appear to be popular in Greece (Trixopoulou and Magoulios, 2012). Following the above categorization and according to Ioannidis et al (2010), there were 8 typical NGOs, 48 non-profit organizations, 24 hybrid ones and around 16 profit – oriented in Greece until 2009. This was the smallest percentage of social enterprises among the 15-member states of European Union. On the other hand at the same time, there were more than 8000 cooperatives and around 2000 voluntary organizations. The phenomenon appears to gain attention among young, educated people and due to the

delineation of the relevant institutional framework (Trixopoulou and Magoulios, 2012). According to Zikou et al. (2011), almost half of the social entrepreneurs in Greece think that they act in niche markets or that they offer novel products to markets. Furthermore, 70% of them combine social entrepreneurship with working for an employer at the same time. The authors state that Greek social enterprises are still very small ones. However, they conclude that the on-going severe Greek crisis results in a rapid increase of social entrepreneurship against unemployment and social exclusion.

## Empirical Part

### *The Area Under Investigation*

This paper reports a quantitative research in the Municipality of Pyli, at Trikala Prefecture in the Region of Thessaly, Greece. Municipality of Pyli lies on a "geographical zone" in the southwestern part of Trikala Prefecture. The area includes highlands and lowlands (dynamic) local districts, according to Directive 75/268/EEC. In total, the area includes 43 out of 146 local and community districts of Trikala Prefecture, while 33 of them are characterized as highlands and 10 are characterized as dynamic (lowlands).

According to the data of the 2001 and 2011 census of the Hellenic Statistical Service (EL.STAT), a depopulation of the area by 10.55% is observed over the last decade. The high dependency ratio (0.61) is considered to be evidence of unsatisfactory economic development perspective in the area. Furthermore, in regard of the ageing index in the area of 2001, the ratio is 1.65 (165 elderly for every 100 children) while the economically active population in 2001 is amounted to be 5.880 people, with 5.290 employed people (percentage 89.97%) and 590 unemployed people (percentage 10.03%). According to the data of EL.STAT, the percentage of the unemployed people by 18.17% and 34.17% in the last 10 and 20 years respectively.

Local economy and employment are mainly based in agriculture and its interdependence with the livestock production in the mountainous areas of the region, by creating a strong relationship for the productive sector of local economy. Forest exploitation in the area is limited to the production of forest products, especially timber and forage production. The manufacturing activity in the area focuses on the exploitation, processing and the utilization of the products of the primary sector, mainly with the production of dairy and wood-furniture products. There are a few small enterprises in the area, most of which are family enterprises. Because of their small size, the enterprises cannot achieve economies of scale which would make their products competitive not only among products from countries with low labor costs, but also among products from developed countries.

Tertiary sector constitutes the 43.8% of the employment in the Municipality of Pyli. There is a significant increase in tourist accommodation units in the last few years in the study area. Since 1992, there has been an increase (about 60%) in tourist accommodation units in the area.

### *Research Objective*

The research will try to investigate the major factors of social entrepreneurship (SE) development in this peripheral and mountainous area of Greece in order to produce a rather representative profile of the local SE knowledge and culture. In this paper, we follow the recommendation of several scholars (e.g. Zahra et al. 2009) and adopt a broad definition of social entrepreneurship that considers individuals or organizations engaged in entrepreneurial activities with a social goal.

The first part of the research explores the level of familiarization of local entrepreneurial actors with the concept of social entrepreneurship, their perceptions regarding social economy and the potential social role of entrepreneurship. The second part delves into the evaluation of factors regarding the phenomenon under investigation. More precisely, targets, benefits and sectors related are highlighted within the severe socioeconomic crisis in Greece and especially in a remote mountainous area. Research will shed light into the potential of social entrepreneurship in Greece; whether it can act as a solution or as a valid option against the crisis.

### *Methodological Approach*

The research followed the quantitative research approach under the positivistic research philosophy. Research was conducted in 2016 i.e. the seventh year of the severe socio-economic crisis. The area of investigation hosts around 300 enterprises as registered by the relevant authorities. The sample was chosen to include respondents of different background. In order to collect the necessary data, a structured questionnaire was prepared and random sampling was engaged. Questions are short, precise and easy to be understood by the majority of respondents. Likert scale was used for the majority of the questions.

At the beginning of the research, the researchers performed content validity of the questionnaire; this regarded an extensive literature review and several conversations with experts on the social entrepreneurship issue. A pilot research included a sample of 10 respondents. It actually led to gaps and needs for further specification of the questions. Thus, the final questionnaire was improved (Dillman, 2000).

The research was conducted by skilled researchers who addressed the entrepreneurs or executive members of the firms by personal face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire consisted by three groups and a total of 28 questions. The first group consisted of eight questions regarding the level of familiarization and information of respondents regarding the concepts of social economy and social entrepreneurship. The second group of seven questions investigated the factors that impact development and existence of social entrepreneurship in the mountainous area of Pyli. The third group of questions offered information about the respondents' profile such as age, sex, educational level, type of business and profession, income etc. This profile is presented in Table 1.

The data were recorded, processed and analyzed via the statistical package SPSSWIN ver 20.0 and the appropriate tests for frequency (Frequencies), descriptive statistics (Descriptives), variable comparison analysis (Crosstabs), and Correlation analysis (Person correlation) were conducted, in order to derive critical conclusions in regard of the issue under investigation.

Table 1:  
*The Profile of the Respondents in the Mountainous Area of Pyli*

Sex	Percentage	Studies	Percentage	Profession	Percentage
Male	69.7%	Postgraduate	4.7%	Civil Servant	37.5%
Female	30.3%	Bachelor	34.4%	Forest-worker	28.1%
Age	Percentage	IEK	7.8%	Freelancer	12.5%
21-40 years	35.4%	Secondary school	35.9%	Stock-breeded	7.8%
41-60 years	58.5%	Primary School	Unemployed	Unemployed	6.3%
>60 years	6.2%			Farmer	3.1%
Income (€/year)	Percentage	Population of place of residence (persons)	Percentage	Private Employee	1.6%
<5,000 €	33.9%	<100	21.9%	Entrepreneurs	1.6%
5-10,000 €	27.4%	101-500	20.3%	Housekeeping	1.6%
10-15,000 €	21.0%	501-1,000	14.1%		
15-20,000 €	12.9%	1,000-2,000	4.7%		
>20,000 €	4.8%	2,000-5,000	12.5%		
		>5,000	26.6%		

### *Results - Discussion*

#### *Level of Familiarization and Perspectives of Social Entrepreneurship*

The results indicate that the majority of the residents of the Pyli area are rather unfamiliar with the concepts of social entrepreneurship and social economy. A significant percentage of them (22.4%) were informed about the two concepts by the researchers that contacted the research. Almost half of the surveyed sample had a low knowledge of the concepts and only the rest 23.5% were really familiar with them. The respondents state that they lack knowledge on the issues (66.7%). Women appear to be more informed with a significant statistical relation (Pearson  $X^2 = 10.448$ , for a significance level  $>99.9\%$  Approx. Sig= 0.001). Most informed are entrepreneurs of the age 41-60 years (Pearson  $X^2 = 6.580$  for a significance level  $>95\%$  Approx. Sig= 0.037).

It is quite interesting that people of the lower income (below 10.000 €) seem to be the less informed about social entrepreneurship with a statistically significant relation (Pearson  $X^2 = 23.976$  for a significance level  $>99.9\%$  Approx. Sig= 0.0001). This group perceives the concept of social entrepreneurship as the creation of business where employees are paid in the usual way but part of the profit goes to society as a whole.

Those with as minimum to quite satisfactory knowledge on the social entrepreneurship concept claimed as their main sources local and regional institutes (36.7%), internet (16.3%) and mass media (10.2%). Word of mouth was the information media for only a 6.1%.

As expected, the 86.2% knew nothing about the institutional framework for social economy and social entrepreneurship in Greece or at global level. The rest 13.8% declared a rather low level of knowledge. However, the 70.8% of the respondents believes that social entrepreneurship in Greece must be supported by both public and private initiative. This percentage believes that social entrepreneurship needs more than 5 years to be well established in Greece. This can be attributed to the rather negative mood of the local residents and entrepreneurs due to the downgrading of the area the last seven years because of the severe and long-lasting economic recession.

*Social Entrepreneurship Activities*

Forms of social economy that exist in the area and are well recognized and positively evaluated (as significant and very significant) are the agricultural co-operatives (1.84), cultural organizations (2.42) and women’s associations (2.75) at a Likert 1-5 scale ( 1= very important).

The social targeted groups which deserve to be promoted and supported within the framework of social entrepreneurship initiatives are young and unemployed according to the respondents’ views (Fig 1). This is quite important if we consider the fact that young unemployed (younger than 24 years old) compose a percentage of 55% during the last seven years of recession (Statistics 2016).

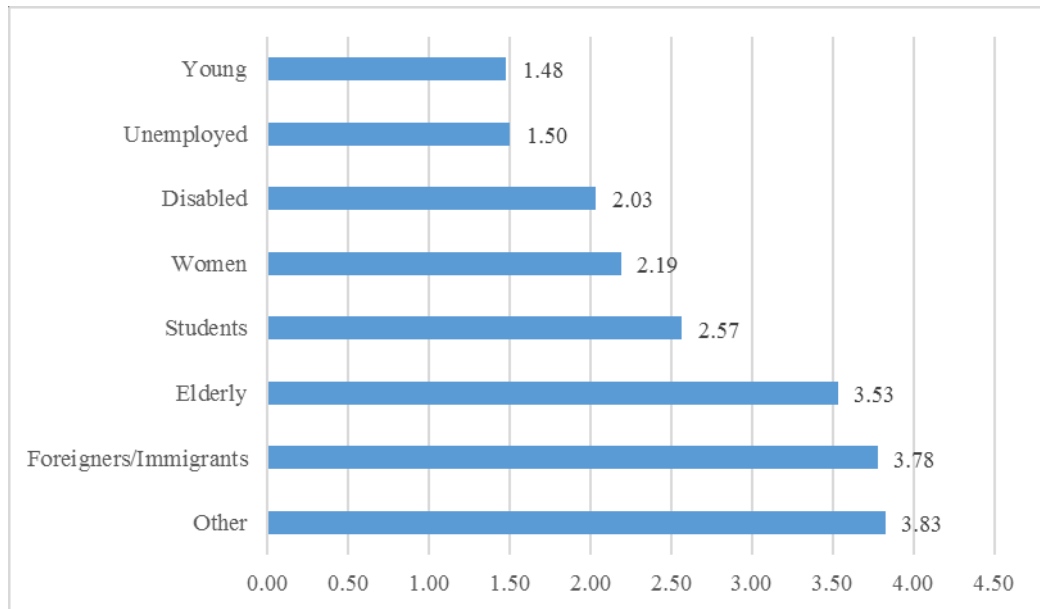


Figure 1: Social targeted groups which deserve to be promoted and supported within the framework of social entrepreneurship initiatives (1: very important ..... 5: non-important)

However, when informed, almost all respondents (96.9%) agree that social enterprises can definitely (44.6%) and almost definitely (52.3%) assist the local society in solving the significant problems of the area due to the severe recession. Quite the same percentages seem to be positive in participating in a social enterprise which targets social benefits (Fig. 2). Women stated in total that they are positive but also rather skeptical in the perspective of participating into the creation of a social enterprise. The total negative percentage belongs to males. Furthermore and according to crosstabs control, there is a significant statistical relations between the intention to participate in a social enterprise and age (Cramer’s V=0.301 for a significance level >95% Approx. Sig= 0.019). Actually, the bigger the age, the bigger the intention is. On the other hand, it appears that there is no significant statistical relation between the intention and the educational level or the yearly family income.

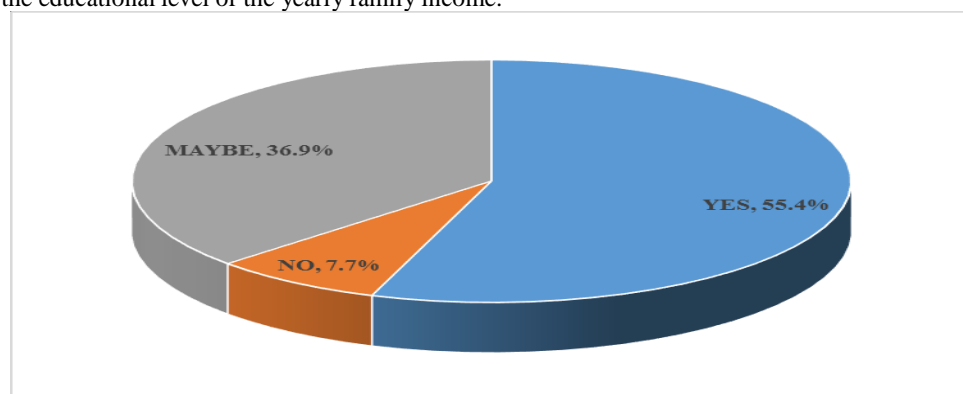


Figure 2: Intention of Participation in Social Enterprises for Social Benefit

The importance of social entrepreneurship development in the mountainous area of Pyli appears to be: the creation of jobs (1.42); the support of the financial support at local level (1.68) and the increase of income (1.69) using the 1-5 Linkert scale (1=very important) (Table 2)

Table 2: Importance of social entrepreneurship development in the mountainous area of Pyli (*Likert scale: 1-5; 1= very important*)

Factors	Means	Std. Deviation
Job creation – unemployment reduction	1.42	0.99
Strengthening of the economic activities at local level	1.68	0.86
Income increase	1.69	1.17
Local resources exploitation (human capital, knowledge, natural resources)	1.74	1.02
Environment protection	1.76	1.01
Introduction of new skills and knowledge in the market	1.81	1.18
Creation of innovation entrepreneurial environment	2.05	1.21
Development of cooperation culture	2.16	1.22
Transparency and social accountability of the entrepreneurial activities	2.22	1.37

The sectors more prone to social entrepreneurship at the area of research (Fig. 3), are: health services (1.3), livestock (1.42), forestry (1.45), tourism (1.47) as well as the socially vulnerable groups (1.48) using the Likert: 1-5 scale with 1 as very important.

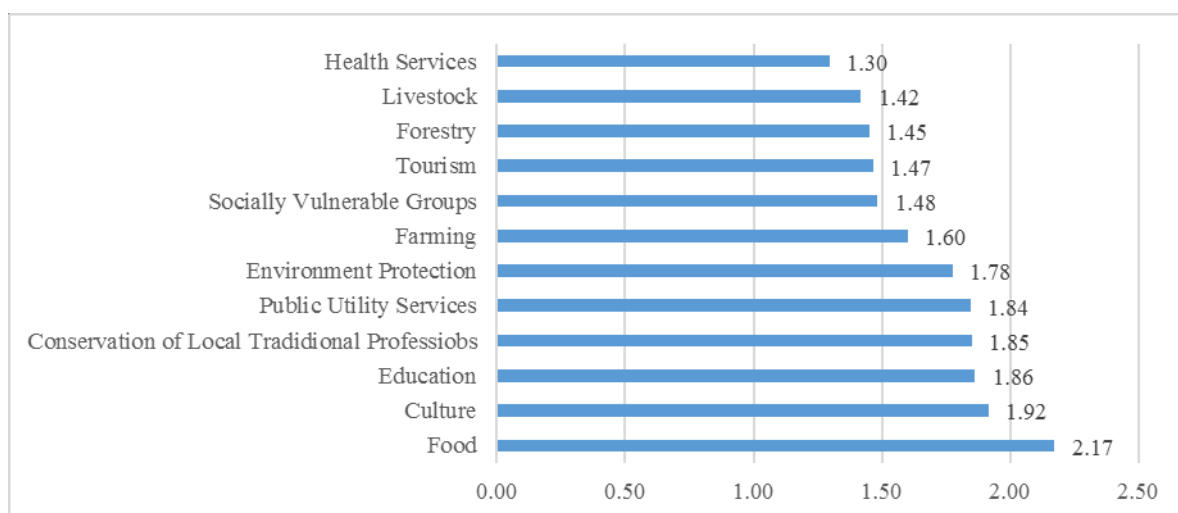


Figure 3: Sectors More Prone to Social Entrepreneurship at the Area of Research

The benefits that respondents expect from social entrepreneurship at Pyli area (Table 3) are according to results and using the 1-5 Linkert scale (1=very important): unemployment reduction (1.46) (unemployment has reached a percentage of 23.4% according to the Hellenic Statistical Service, 2016); the effort to keep people and more specifically the young at the area (1.52), the preservation of the local identity (1.66) and easier access to markets (1.92).

Table 3:

*Benefits which respondents expect from social entrepreneurship at Pyli area*

Rates	Means	(1) Extremely important	(2) Very important	(3) Quite important	(4) Somewhat important	(4) Unimportant	(1)+(2)
Unemployment reduction	1.46	77.8	9.5	6.3	1.6	4.8	87.3
The effort to keep people and more specifically the young at the area	1.52	66.1	22.6	8.1	0.0	3.2	88.7

Preservation of the local identity	1.66	61.3	16.1	17.7	4.8	0.0	77.4
Easier access to markets	1.92	48.4	27.4	9.7	12.9	1.6	75.8
Protection of cultural and natural environment	1.94	48.4	24.2	16.1	8.1	3.2	72.6
Support of social innovation	2.07	43.3	25.0	15.0	15.0	1.7	68.3
Remove of socio-economic exclusion of the area	2.18	41.0	23.0	21.3	6.6	8.2	64.0
Niche markets creation for innovative products	2.18	34.4	29.5	24.6	6.6	4.9	63.9
Competitiveness support	2.25	35.0	30.0	16.7	11.7	6.7	65.0
Reduction of the deficit of social acceptance regarding entrepreneurial activities	2.26	25.8	33.9	29.0	11.0	0.0	59.7
Development of cooperative culture	2.39	32.3	21.0	27.4	14.5	4.8	53.3
Mitigation of social inequalities	2.61	29.0	19.4	29.0	6.5	16.1	48.4
The efficiency of the use of resources	2.96	25.0	12.5	16.7	33.3	12.5	37.5

Since the thirteen factors of Table 2 seem to relate each other more or less, Pearson correlation coefficient (Pcc) was used. Results at a significance level of 0.01 indicate that the most important factors that appear to impact positively each other are the following:

- Unemployment reduction impacts positively the intention especially of young people to stay at the area of (Pcc = 0.647) while it impacts positively the protection of the natural and cultural environment (Pcc = 0.567).
- The creation of niche markets for innovative products that may be developed by social enterprises are strong reasons to keep young people at Pyli area (Pcc = 0.540), support the local identity (Pcc = 0.634), the development of co-operative culture (Pcc = 0.63) and of course enhance the easier access to markets (Pcc = 0.689).
- Social innovation is a crucial precondition for the creation of niche markets for them (Pcc = 0.678), as well as it may constitute a significant reason to develop a culture of collaboration (Pcc = 0.712). Of course it facilitates access to markets for both local products and services (Pcc = 0.787).
- Consequently, the more competitive the products and services of the area (Pcc = 0.630), the easier creation of niche markets for them since they can penetrate markets much easier (Pcc = 0.712). This supports further the reduction of the deficit of social acceptance regarding entrepreneurial activities (Pcc = 0.571).
- The development of collaborative culture appears that affects positively the remove of socio-economic exclusion of the area (Pcc = 0.734), while enhancing the social innovation potential (Pcc = 0.712). This, in turn, facilitates market access (Pcc = 0.787), as well as the much more efficient use of the local resources (Pcc = 0.773).

### Conclusions

Social entrepreneurship has been acknowledged as an important type of entrepreneurship that contributes to the rapid improvement of human lives and livelihoods. It has the potential to unleash innovation and to mobilize existing or create new resources which can offer solutions to significant problems and important issues that affect many, often underserved, groups of people, especially in disadvantaged areas in times of severe crisis like the one in Greece.

According to the findings, social entrepreneurship seems to be rather unknown to most Greeks while its nature and benefits are quite ambiguous. However, when explained, it seems to attract interest mainly among women. People perceive social enterprises as a solution especially for young and unemployed while it appears that all types of current activities of the area of Pyli are thought to provide chances for social enterprises. It is interesting that the quite sensitive sector of health services is considered to be the more important reflecting the inadequate existing system

especially for vulnerable groups within the severe crisis framework. The other sectors coincide with the core activities of the area; i.e. forestry, farming and livestock, which was rather expected.

The paper contributes to adding empirical support to both the growing number of theoretical work on the issue as well as the necessary background for the formation of policies and institutions regarding social entrepreneurship in Greece.

A very important practical contribution seems to be the fact that researchers who contacted the study informed a significant percentage of the area's population about the concept and the benefits of social entrepreneurship and raised interest on the issue as well as the institutional framework. Research actually appears to shed light into the potential of social entrepreneurship in Greece; whether it can act as a solution or as a valid option against the crisis.

The results of the research bear certain limitations. Firstly, the size of the sample and was the lack of sample diversity are significant drawbacks; the field study was limited to only one geographically bounded sample limiting the generalizability of the findings. However, this choice enabled the control for potential confounds due to cross-region differences, increased the internal validity and provided the main contribution of the study highlighting the significance of bottom-up approach of every single area of interest when regarding social entrepreneurship and policy making.

Consequently, further research could attempt to replicate similar analyses in bigger samples, different geographic, sectoral and territorial contexts, enrich the content of the questionnaire and explore further the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship.

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