

BESSH -16**Social Economy Policies. The Case of “AITHIKOS”, A Supporting Mechanism for Social Entrepreneurship in Mountainous Regions of Greece**Trigkas Mariosa^{1*}, Karagouni Glykeria², Papadopoulos Ioannis³, Lazaridou Dimitra⁴^{1, 4}*Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Greece*^{2, 3}*Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly, Greece*

Abstract

Social Economy can play an important role in the development of social innovation in many policy areas, such as addressing the unemployment and the environmental protection, while it can combine profitability through solidarity and new job creation. European Commission places particular emphasis on the Social Economy sector during the current programming period (2014-2020). In mountainous areas, the need for economic differentiation and integrated development is even more intense since the topography, the remoteness of these areas, the environmental constraints and the social and economic structure of the population, reduce the number of job opportunities. On the other hand, many opportunities are presented. Main related policies focus to the promotion of the local and common interest, creation of new jobs, the enhancement of social cohesion and local and regional development by showing a particular emphasis on young unemployed people of mountainous areas. This form of social entrepreneurship could deal with the production of goods and services in sectors such as: culture, environment, ecology, education, public utility, local products, preservation of traditional activities and professions. The paper presents a proposed supporting mechanism, under the name “AITHIKOS” for social entrepreneurship in mountainous areas of Greece. The mechanism takes into account all these characteristics and needs of mountainous areas, as well as their combination through the need for taking initiatives to exploit the opportunities that exist, for creating new forms of entrepreneurial activity and occupation positions, along with targeted entrepreneurial support from Universities and local authorities. It is a unique research effort and policy proposal in Greece.

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Introduction

Although there are differences both in institutional frameworks and in the terminology about Social Economy among countries, they are getting inspired by common values and mainly by the fact that the participants are not aiming to profit, but the profits are reinvested for the benefit of the enterprise and the society. European Commission places particular emphasis on the Social Economy sector during the current programming period (2014-2020), through the initiatives provided by the Social Business Initiative. Social Economy can play an important role in the development of social innovation in many policy areas, such as addressing the unemployment and the environmental protection, while it can combine profitability through solidarity, new job creation, enhancement of social cohesion, active participation and empowerment of local communities and generally, the development of an economy with democratic values, by giving priority to the people.

Based on the available data, it is estimated that social economy in Europe employs more than 14.5 million people, representing the 6,5% of the active population of the EU-27 and around 7,4% of the active population of the EU-15 (EU, 2013). It is noteworthy that social economy has achieved disproportionate growth between 2002-03 and 2009-10, since it increased from 6% to 6,5% of the total European wage employment and from 11 million to 14,5 million job positions (E. E., 2013). According to the data regarding the cooperatives published in the recent World Cooperative Monitor of Euricse and International Cooperative Union ([www. monitor.coop](http://www.monitor.coop)), this phenomenon is not limited to Europe, but it is amplified throughout the world.

Focusing in Greece, because of the long lasting economic crisis, it also observed in a very intense way, the downwards social mobility phenomena. This is translated by the loss of thousands of occupation positions and minimization of the existing standard of living for major social groups of the country. The availability of at least some

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social mobility can be important in providing pathways to greater equality in societies with high social inequality. Specific policies launch, will give this opportunity to the communities and especially to the younger ones, in order to confront to this negative reality and to achieve an upwards social mobility.

It can be argued that Social Entrepreneurship is an emerging alternative form of entrepreneurship based on the Social Economy. Recently, a new legal form of entrepreneurship, the Social Cooperative Enterprise (SCE), has been instituted in Greece (Law 4019/2011) by setting the operating framework for these types of enterprises. The profit of this new form of entrepreneurship comes from the activities that serve the social welfare. The majority of revenues is reinvested aiming to create new jobs, because the entrepreneurial activity is been emphasized and not the profit.

According to the Strategic Plan regarding the Development of the Social Entrepreneurship Sector of the Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Welfare (2013), the successful development of the Social Economy requires an approach that relies primarily on the local social dynamics and mechanisms which will play the central role for the manifestation of this dynamic. At the same time, the local dynamics can arise efficiently by utilizing the European experience in the field of Social Economy and encouraging transnational cooperation initiatives. The concept of such a policy, is based on the systematic development of the Social Economy sector, focusing on the mountainous areas of Greece. Social Economy sector can provide important solutions for creating job opportunities and promoting social cohesion, which is threatened due to the adverse economic environment, by contributing to the preservation of the natural environment and the cultural heritage of these areas.

Literature Review

The Need for Supporting Policies for Social Entrepreneurship in Mountainous Areas

Social entrepreneurs and social enterprises, like any new entrepreneur and every small enterprise, need entrepreneurial support. However, the directly involved authorities and organizations (Central Government, Regional authorities, Municipalities etc.) have realized that information, consulting or mentoring services should be specialized and should deal with all the aspects of management, in order to help the social enterprises to fulfill their social mission and achieve economic viability (Y.E.K.A.P., 2013).

Main related policies focus to the promotion of the local and common interest, creation of new jobs, the enhancement of social cohesion and local and regional development by showing a particular emphasis on young unemployed people of mountainous areas (Bristow, 2000; Busch. and Juska, 1997). This form of social entrepreneurship could deal with the production of goods and services in sectors such as: culture, environment, ecology, education, public utility, local products, preservation of traditional activities and professions. Furthermore, taking under consideration that the funding for the enterprises is limited, leads to the fact that even their standard activities are hindered. These restrictive financing conditions can be faced with development initiatives in the sectors of social entrepreneurship that absorb unemployed people and workers threatened with the possibility of unemployment, by providing new products and services.

Mountains are an important source of vital ecosystem services and have a significant role in economic development, environmental protection, ecological sustainability, and human wellbeing. The demand for goods and services from mountains is growing steadily. These pressures create new challenges and threats for mountain ecosystems and local people (Gundimeda, 2011). The impacts in the mountains also have serious economic, environmental, and social implications for large human populations living in the mountainous and remote areas. The green economy may bring new opportunities for investment in ecosystem services and products, renewable energy, and creation of jobs, it also creates challenges. It must be pursued with a balanced approach of economic, environmental, and social development and appropriate policy and institutional measures to avoid increasing pressure on an already fragile environment and scarce resources (Stamou, 1985). Mountain ecosystems are important for national, regional, and global economic growth and human wellbeing. Mountain communities bear a large part of the opportunity cost of providing essential ecosystem services to society at large, yet they receive inadequate incentives for conservation of mountain resources. This lack of compensation has accelerated unsustainable exploitation and rapid degradation of the mountains' natural assets. Although some models exist in developed countries, appropriate economic frameworks and mechanisms for providing adequate incentives to mountain communities need to be established (FAO, 2013; Hunzai et al., 2010).

A significant percentage of the Greek population is living in mountainous areas and depends on mountains for fresh water, clean energy, irrigation water, flood control, minerals, timber and non-timber forest products, recreation, and genetic resources. Mountains are also a source of cultural, spiritual, and recreational resources for urban populations. Furthermore, markets for mountain niche products are growing. However, complex rules and regulations, precise measurements, and rigorous verification requirements at different stages bar mountain communities managing small entrepreneurial schemes in the mountainous areas, enjoying the benefits of this growing market. Mountain goods and products such as medicinal and aromatic plants and other non-timber forest products, mountain crafts, and ecotourism/agro tourism, hold special values and have niche markets. Enabling policies and supporting rules and regulations for marketing mountain products can benefit mountain regions and population and help them get value for their products and efforts.

On the other hand, livelihoods in mountain areas are considerably more susceptible to environmental and economic changes because of rough topography, remoteness, and poor socioeconomic infrastructure. The incidence and severity of poverty and vulnerability are disproportionately high in many mountain regions of the world. Poverty reduction rates are also lower in mountain regions (Hunzai et al. 2010, Salman and Zain, 2011). According to FAO (2003), only about 22% of mountain lands are suitable for agriculture. Hardships in the mountains, along with low economic opportunities in rural areas, have driven large-scale outmigration from mountain areas (Banerjee et al. 2011). Economic deprivation, long negligence, and isolation have contributed to the alienation of mountain communities from mainstream societies. Economic growth and equity in mountains are prerequisites for job creation and treatment of isolation. By linking natural resource based livelihoods to production of ecosystem services, the green economy can help reduce poverty and enhance environmental sustainability.

However, sustainable mountain development has remained marginal in the international development agenda and in national and sectoral policies (MA 2005; Jodha 2008). Mountain communities and their environments are still vulnerable to growing demand for natural resources, expanding tourism and the pressures of industry, mining, and agriculture. To promote sustainable development in mountain regions these challenges will need to be addressed in the green economy framework. This framework can be integrated by adapting innovative entrepreneurial schemes for the population of these regions, based to their tangible and intangible needs, such as social entrepreneurship, giving simultaneously the opportunity for job creation, social cohesion and mitigation of isolation phenomena.

The Greek Mountain Economy

Focusing on the case of Greece, it is noticed that Greece is a country with significant mountainous areas, while faces the major problem of the isolation and remoteness of these areas from the main transport system and from the large urban centers, with direct effects on their economic and social development. The role of the primary sector in mountainous areas is very important, taking under consideration that the 61.7% of all the employed people in the primary sector of the country lives in these areas. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the agricultural goods are produced in these areas. The main weaknesses for the development of mountainous areas in Greece, comparing with other prefectures, are due to a combination of (Sergaki and Iliopoulos, 2010): a) Intrinsic geomorphic conditions, b) Structural problems of local economy and institutional and organizational weaknesses, by affecting negatively the competitiveness of these areas. The mountainous topography and the spatial distribution of natural resources define the structure and location of manufacturing activity as well (Kiritsis and Tampakis, 2004). Thus, the structural problems of local economy are summarized as follows: the ageing of the primary sector's workforce, the infrastructure deficiencies of the secondary sector, the inadequate use of natural resources, the increase of part time-employment and the decrease in competitiveness of locally produced goods and services, the rural depopulation, the lack of investments, the low level of manufacturing and the high dependence of rural income on subsidies (Papadopoulos and Liarikos, 2003; Karanikolas and Martinos, 1999, Vakoufari, 2009).

Combining the Needs for Social Entrepreneurship in Mountainous Areas

In mountainous areas, the need for economic differentiation and integrated development is even more intense since the topography, the remoteness of these areas, the environmental constraints and the social and economic structure of the population, reduce the number of job opportunities. On the other hand, many opportunities are presented including the increased demand for recreational activities, for quality food products or for renewable energy sources etc. Furthermore, some mountainous areas are experiencing significant inflows of new residents. This

migration consists mainly of pensioners and entrepreneurs who are attracted by the conditions of the local environment, their personal choices, the prospect of better living standards, but also from younger people who are looking for new job opportunities mainly in the primary sector, as a result of the economic crisis and the unemployment that occurred on the available forms of work in Greece (Trigkas et al., 2012, 2014).

Efforts should be made to maintain the existing jobs in those areas, as the sharp economic downturn affects the economic activities of residents and leads to the loss of job positions. The population movements in these rural communities create the conditions for new investment projects and an increased income, since the new inhabitants are carrying significant entrepreneurial experience, capital and knowledge.

On the other hand, the traditional approaches concerning the development of mountainous rural areas have focused on the discovery of factors that lead to isolation by providing the conventional development tools (Efstratoglou and Psaltopoulos, 1999). The creation of competitive Small-Medium Enterprises (SMEs) constitutes a desirable solution to the existing problems. The mobilization of local resources so as to enhance the competitive advantage, local entrepreneurship and innovation, constitutes some of the development strategies that should be under serious investigation (Karlsson et al. 2002a; 2002b, Pezzini, 2001; Lowe and Talbot, 2000). Rural areas provide an innovative and entrepreneurial environment where the entrepreneurs may either prosper and grow or face very serious difficulties. The features of mountainous areas are considered major leaders not only regarding the opportunities for local entrepreneurship and innovation, but also for the weaknesses of the business process, forming a dense, complex and dynamic network of mutual interactions (Mitchell, 1998).

In particular, in the mountainous regions of Greece, it is observed that isolation exists from the markets and access to the consumers, the suppliers, the information sources and the institutions. The transportation cost of inputs/outputs is a very high and at the same time, adverse effects in information dissemination are observed. It is a major disadvantage since it impedes the function of the economies of scale and the diffusion of new technology, leading to non-competitive costs of business and finally, restricting the workforce mobility. The existence of significant natural resources and the climatic conditions of an area combining with the overall landscape can affect entrepreneurial activities, providing opportunities for the optimal use of those resources. Remoteness and isolation have favored the preservation of the natural environment, the unique landscapes and basic traditional production methods. Furthermore, in the less developed mountainous areas, cultural traditions can be found, while social trust, solidarity rules, cooperation networks and support mechanisms are absent. Therefore, it is of major necessity to develop mechanisms, to support and promote such networks based on the social economy and entrepreneurship. Among other things, social economy organizations promote effectively entrepreneurship and enterprises creation in various ways, through directing the economic activity in neglected areas due to low profitability and high cost of production, as is the case of Greece regarding mountainous areas and especially in the study area.

Moreover, local capacity utilization has been limited to the use of local added value through local varieties, local products, special environmental conditions or even inputs of workers and knowledge. Ray's argument (1998) for the need for commercialization of local culture is a dynamic strategy for the development of innovation and entrepreneurship in rural areas. Furthermore, many researchers have highlighted that a possible development strategy for rural areas exists in the product quality markets (AEIDL, 2000; Barham, 2003; Ilbery and Kneafsey, 1998). A possible strategy as part of the broader product quality market could be the promotion of products with local or regional identity. By linking products with the "culture markets - culture economies" or local scenes such as cultural traditions and heritage, the value of the product increases because the consumers matches specific areas with specific products.

Goodman (2003) claims that in Europe, the switch towards the quality of diet has offered significant opportunities for entrepreneurial activity in a new economic environment, more capable of withstanding the forces of globalization. Concurrent use of opportunities offered by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) will gradually set the boundaries of local markets and will expose the economic activity to a greater competition (Grimes, 2001; Hetland and Meier-Dallach, 1998). Therefore, cognitive skills of local people will increase as access to the information will be improved (Grimes, 2000). The limited scale and sphere of influence of local markets, forces local entrepreneurs to develop innovative products and efficient marketing strategies (Papadopoulos et al., 2010, 2012) in order to compete with their counterparts in urban areas (Smallbone et al. 1999). On the contrary, the areas that fail to

participate in the adoption and growth of the technological risks are facing the danger of exclusion from markets (Gibbs and Tanner, 1997).

Regarding the development of the proposed mechanism, it takes into account all these characteristics and needs of mountainous areas, as well as their combination through the need for taking initiatives to exploit the opportunities that exist, for creating new forms of entrepreneurial activity and occupation positions.

Empirical Part

Research Objective

During the last years, the factors that enhance or weaken entrepreneurship in rural areas have been analyzed very carefully (Jack and Anderson, 2002) but the scientific research on rural entrepreneurship is considered to be relatively poor. Therefore, a “deeper” knowledge of the procedures that either promote or hinder the entrepreneurship will bridge this research gap.

Choi and MajumdarIt (2014) agree that social entrepreneurship is a contested concept. To date many competing definitions of the concept exist and no unifying conceptual framework of social entrepreneurship has yet emerged. Consequently, even after more than two decades, research on the concept is still considered to be in its infancy with minimal progress in theory development. As some researchers have noted, in the face of the ongoing contestation of social entrepreneurship and the lack of a unifying framework, it will remain difficult to conduct progressive research and to establish its legitimacy as a research field. According to Wiguna and Manzilati (2014), socio-entrepreneurship started from the economic system of Europe. It has its main orientation to process and behavior, putting its effort to create social improvement.

Regarding social entrepreneurship in mountainous areas specifically, a scarce research exists. Skouras et al. (2000), have studied the nature of future entrepreneurial instruments within an integrated local and rural development strategy, regarding mountainous and remote areas in several countries of the European south, using empirical data and case studies from the specific areas. Based to their results, one indication leads to the argument that a variety of processes of human capital and knowledge accumulation are case study specific. Education and training are a very important component of success for entrepreneurs in the Greek, Italian and Spanish case study areas. A second example revealing the locality-specific effects of entrepreneurial human capital accumulation on business growth is derived from the effects of management experience on business growth. The accumulation of knowledge acquired through managing a business increases risk aversion for entrepreneurs in Greece and Italy, but it assists entrepreneurs in Spain to reduce perceived risk. This may be attributed to a wide range of factors that are basically idiosyncratic, rooted in the entrepreneurs’ personality and the surrounding social environment.

Another indication derived from this work is that human capital accumulation processes leading to the acquisition of mainly codified knowledge (education and training), or to the acquisition of both codified and tacit knowledge (work and managerial experience), still play the prime role in predicting successful businesses. In contrast, human capital accumulation processes leading to the acquisition of mainly tacit knowledge (being raised in an entrepreneurial environment and being a native of the area) do not contribute that much, and the importance that has been assigned to them may be questioned. However, the multiplicity of human capital accumulation pathways and their differential effect on business growth calls for locally designed and implemented human capital support instruments. There is evidence that central institutions have neither the resource to administer flexible support instruments nor the local knowledge and expertise necessary to understand the precise types of entrepreneurial support required in each area (Skuras et al., 2003). Thus, entrepreneurial human capital support programs should be de-centralized (devolution of entrepreneurial policies) in order to become more flexible and selective, and suit local idiosyncrasies and needs.

Entrepreneurial human capital support policies can only be dealt with at a local and regional level and should be territorially defined, embracing both ‘people development’ and ‘place development’ (Skuras et al., 2000). In the most remote rural and mountainous areas of Southern Europe, the task of creating or enforcing the local institutional framework, a vital factor strengthening localized learning, represents a large political and administrative investment. Another research of Koutsou et al., (2009), focusing to young farmers’ social capital in rural areas in Greece, concludes that public institutions should help and encourage local actors “from above” to mobilize “from below”,

since society is the only actor capable of generating social capital especially in times like those that rural areas are nowadays facing in Greece, during which the social dimension of an overall economic development cannot be ignored.

In addition, according to Sergaki and Iliopoulos (2010), using empirical data from mountainous and less-favored areas, where farming activities are not usually competitive regarding their cost, concludes that local entrepreneurship plays an important role in employment opportunities provision and increase of local income. Therefore, the strategies designed to enhance and support the entrepreneurship should provide more flexible and suitable supporting measures which will clarify and promote the existing and new business opportunities, support the business networking function and enhance the local innovation, so that the business opportunities will evolve to successful and prosperous business. The institutional support to the rural enterprises should be provided through various tools-measures except the conventional ones, which are already used. The policy for the development of small businesses should have a decentralized character, so that it will be more flexible, selective and cover the local needs and requirements.

On the other hand, the availability of at least some social mobility can be important in providing pathways to greater equality in societies with high social inequality, such as the project's targeting in a mountainous region of Greece. Social mobility is highly dependent on the overall structure of social statuses and occupations in a given society (Grusky et al., 1984). The extent of differing social positions and the manner in which they fit together or overlap provides the overall social structure of such positions. While it is generally accepted that some level of mobility in society is desirable, there is no consensus agreement upon "how much" social mobility is "good" or "bad" for a society (Causa et al., 2011). Thus, there is no international benchmark of social mobility, though one can compare measures of mobility across regions or countries or within a given area over time. While cross-cultural studies comparing differing types of economies are possible, comparing economies of similar type usually yields more comparable data (Birdsall and Szekely, 1999; Blanden et al., 2005).

Regarding the operation and the effects by the development of mechanisms that support and promote social entrepreneurship, scientific research will help the planning and the implementation of future development policies which will enable the use of more flexible tools under this context. The present project, known as "AITHIKOS" project, specializes this mechanism of developing, implementing and promoting this new form of entrepreneurship for the mountainous populations in Greece, as a viable alternative for addressing unemployment in these areas and mitigating the effects of marginalization of local communities, protecting simultaneously the natural environment and the cultural heritage, by using the local social dynamics, through innovations in products and services and the establishment of networks for the common welfare. The proposed mechanism contributes to the development of social innovation in the area, by creating incentives for new products and services to meet social needs, which is a unique feature of collaborative research effort for Greece.

Methodological Approach

The present case, deals with a targeted initiative which contribute to the establishment of a mechanism for the provision of «combinatorial support» of Social Entrepreneurship and Economy in mountainous areas, which includes both general business support and specialized support by the involved Universities /Research Institutes and Local Authorities, for the fulfillment of the needs of local people and of the target group. Furthermore, ensures the participatory of all local stakeholders and resources and the interdisciplinary and transnational approach of Social Economy. These goals are achieved through the careful planning of partnerships. This ensure a balanced development of a multidisciplinary research collaboration based on the needs of the region, as it is presented in the figure.



Figure 1: The Concept of AITHIKOS

The methodology of the research proposal takes under consideration similar international research projects' by using methodological tools-approaches and innovative methodologies, as they are presented in the following working packages description. These include:

- Collection of primary data with specifically structured questionnaires and appropriate statistical analysis methods
- Case studies
- Development of lifelong learning and networking activities for improving entrepreneurial culture based on social economy and achieving upward social mobility
- Creation of a tailored mechanism for Social Entrepreneurship in the area based on local characteristics and needs of the local people and the target group.
- Creation of special supporting structures for social economy and entrepreneurship
- Development of bilateral relations
- Specific policy recommendations for Social Entrepreneurship in the study area.

Results - Discussion

The aim of such a policy proposal is binary regarding the undertaking of immediate initiatives, in confronting unemployment and isolation phenomena for the mountainous people and in developing an entrepreneurial culture based to social economy in the specific areas, by activating entrepreneurial and other types of dynamics in the area, under the context of a pilot planning of Social Entrepreneurship. Furthermore, a basic result of the specific initiative is the cultivation of the social entrepreneurial culture and the acquisition of knowledge and skills of the target group and the participants in general, which will contribute towards an upwards social mobility (from unemployment towards employment and occupation opportunities).

Other partial results are:

Addressing unemployment by creating new job opportunities while maintain the existing ones, especially for young people

Mitigation of the effects of isolation for local communities and create channels to markets

Information, motivation and support for building local collaborative partnerships under the context of the development of Social Entrepreneurship

Consulting and training services, as well as incubator and one stop shop services to local entrepreneurial partnerships
Enhancement of business activity of existing Social Enterprises by promoting cooperation agreements at local and regional level between Social Enterprises and private enterprises, agencies, etc.
Achievement of Knowledge Transfer and best practices from abroad
Building relationships based on mutual trust and cooperation among all the stakeholders and development of networks at local and regional level
Establishment of cooperation among Universities, research institutions, etc. for the creation of a think tank, capable of supporting R&D activities regarding under the context of Social Entrepreneurship in the area
Emerging of new innovative products and value added services, expanding the objectives of business activities and creation of job opportunities, wherever the market cannot achieve it
Identification of sustainable funding and investors to support social enterprises from the seed stage to their mature stage
Protection and promotion of the natural and cultural environment in the region and utilization of competitive advantages of the area, as a resource and at the same time as a recipient, of the social entrepreneurial activity.
It stands as an integrated policy proposal to boost entrepreneurship in mountainous areas of Greece.

The expected benefits of the project for the society and the economy of the interesting area and in generally, as they are specialized through the objectives that the research proposal achieves, could be classified into:

Promotion and strengthen of networks and partnerships among population, enterprises, research organizations etc. in mountainous regions. The participating regional public and national and international research organizations could facilitate transfer of knowledge and experience as well as capacity building for key mountain entrepreneurship institutions.
Creation and strengthen of value chains to benefit mountain communities, for example through branding of specific goods and services.
Strengthen the information and knowledge base on sustainable mountain development and make it accessible to all stakeholders.
Promotion of markets for mountain services and products.
Encouraging the private sector through appropriate policy and regulatory support so that the market can become an option for financing mountain ecosystem management and protection, providing adequate financing targeted to the specific regions.
Developing policies for institutionalizing motivation for the specific areas services, and make ecosystem conservation central to economic decision making and economic activity in related areas.
Modifying and correcting policy, institutional, and market failures related to undervaluation of mountain communities' services and products or failure to recognize them in national economic decision making.
Investing in mountainous regions to unlock their potential in a green economy and sustainable development, e.g., for energy, high-quality mountain agricultural products, nature-based and organic products, culture, tourism etc. generating long-term benefits and high welfare gains regionally and nationally; they can be an important source of revenue for the local communities helping towards their social incorporation and treatment of unemployment.
Enhance international and regional cooperation on mountain areas issues.
Supporting technology transfer and capacity building for institutions engaged in development of entrepreneurship in mountain regions.
Strengthen and expand alliances of mountain regions stakeholders to lead and undertake the process of sustainable development and job creation.
Strengthen national and international support for R&D activities on relevant issues.

Through specific activities, which such a supporting mechanism takes into account, methodological and technological tools for the gradual establishment and networking of information and knowledge sources, could be developed and implemented, that deal with the evolution of the Social Entrepreneurship in the area and the leverage of the needs of local people and entrepreneurs, constituting the basis for the future development of Social Entrepreneurship actions in the region. Furthermore, the contact with the research and education institutions and the dissemination of the results will support scaling imparting value to the project and thus, the maintenance of the results. In particular, the project results that contribute to the sustainability of R&D activities in the field of Social Entrepreneurship in the area and in the wider region and have direct benefits for the target groups and relative stakeholders, deal with the following fields, as they are further analyzed.

Firstly, the mechanism serves the complex task of human resources mobilization and networking of all the stakeholders - citizens, consumers, professionals, producers, social agencies and Local Authorities. At the same time,

it contributes to the motivation of all social economy factors in the area, by contributing to the constitution of social capital, the accumulation of investment capital and contributing to knowledge dissemination, aiming finally at the enhancement of social entrepreneurship. Furthermore, competitive advantages in the area can be highlighted and motivations to emerge, for social entrepreneurship in fields that till today remain inactive. On the other hand, the enterprises have to become knowledge hives, providing a department or an activity that deals with knowledge and know how management. Since the enterprises in the area are small and very small in size and cannot develop such activities by their own, they will be able to achieve this goal through the cooperation with the participating research institutions. So, the creation of knowledge and entrepreneurship hives will be achieved through the initiative and the care of the local enterprises themselves with the contribution of local people. Knowledge is deemed to be the main resource for the development of social economy. For this reason, the supporting mechanism will be able to contribute further in creating a knowledge generator and management mechanism, the organization of knowledge creation and consequently, knowledge dissemination. Furthermore, the participation of research institutions and the local authorities in the proposed project, secures the creation of a favorable environment for the development of Social Entrepreneurship in the area, the coordination and mobilization of all stakeholders and the addressing of any problems that may occur in similar initiatives, because of the organizational knowledge deficit.

The participation of research institutions and local authorities, also creates the appropriate conditions for the design and development of specialized structures in the area that can contribute to the accumulation and management of social, intellectual capital and investment capital in the area. This constitutes an institutional innovation of the mechanism, i.e. the connection of the proposed social business network with a management system of knowledge and technocratic tools for provision of services regarding the development of Social Entrepreneurship in the area. Thus, access in this knowledge management system for the local people will be in the future achieved, based on specific emerging needs and fields for entrepreneurial activity, through the provision and utilization of Basic and Applied Research data. Furthermore, the contribution of the research/academic institutions is important in establishing lifelong learning structures, as one of the basic mechanism's axis. The training packages, meet the structuring of explicit knowledge about social entrepreneurship and will create knowledge hives to the prolonged supporting structures. It also contributes actively to socialization of knowledge and know how in specific fields, aiming simultaneously to knowledge dissemination through cooperation and networking among stakeholders.

Conclusions

The policy proposal lies in the fact that through the mechanism that will be developed, a multidisciplinary approach will be recommended, with emphasis on the target group needs, the adoption of best practices and knowledge that have been developed in Greece and internationally and finally, the adjustment of the mechanism to the specificities of the mountainous populations and of the related economic activities, by proposing an integrated support mechanism of Social Entrepreneurship for mountainous areas and local communities, contributing to positive social mobility. Another distinguished field of policy promoted by the mechanism, is the setting the framework of the requirements for more extensive and better research in this field in Greece, having as a starting point the systematic collection of data. A better building capacity for social economy organizations could derive by improving related research studies (EU, 2013). The mechanism provides exactly this possibility through mapping activities of entrepreneurial, social and other productive dynamics of the area, the specialized market research and the activities of networking, measuring social capital and monitoring of Social Entrepreneurship in the area, in order to set the directions for similar research studies and to create a framework for the development and promotion of Social Entrepreneurship in several social groups and areas.

The proposed mechanism, by its nature, constitutes an innovative service for the development and promotion of entrepreneurship in the study area and in the future, it may be applied in similar areas and communities, not only nationally but also internationally. As previously mentioned, the main features that make the mechanism innovative as a service are the following:

The project contributes to the development of social innovation in the area, through creating incentives for new products and services to meet explicit and tacit social needs.

It is a unique service as a result of collaborative research effort for Greece and the communities of these specific areas.

It constitutes a proposal for the design and the development of an institutional innovation regarding the link

between the proposed social entrepreneurial network with a knowledge management system and technocratic tools that provide services for the development of Social Entrepreneurship in the area.

It contributes to the development of Basic and Applied Research on entrepreneurship in mountainous areas and generally in rural areas.

It will develop a mechanism for the exchange of best practices and know-how with other countries, acting as a catalyst and accelerator for related initiatives nationally and internationally with multiple benefits.

As discussed so far, the research proposal has a wide appeal regarding the social and economic challenges generally in our country and internationally, and more specifically in mountainous areas. In particular:

Highlights a pattern for growth, based on smart, sustainable and with no exclusions development, boosting also, the intelligent behavior of enterprises.

The focus on the environmental and social sustainability, as well as on the maximization of the benefits for the wider community, of entrepreneurial activity in the area, holds a key role in the design and targeting of the research proposal.

It could be potentially a driver of growth and treatment of unemployment in similar areas, nationally and internationally.

It enhances society inclusiveness in entrepreneurial activity resulting in more frequent and qualitative innovation of greater efficiency.

It introduces a new business ethics in the area giving priority to human and common welfare and not in profits.

It could constitute the basis for the establishment of common educational programs among the partner institution based on related cognitive and scientific fields.

It constitutes part of implementation initiatives of the broader national and European strategy to enhance the role of Social Economy aiming to reverse the main negative trends existed before the economic crisis, such as the increase of inequalities, the lack of social responsibility from the part of markets, aiming at a smart sustainable and with no exclusions economy, with high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.

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