

Social Entrepreneurship in Selected Areas: The “AITHIKOS” Project in Greece

Trigkas Marios

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Papadopoulos Ioannis

Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly, Greece

Karagouni Glykeria

Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly, Greece

Lazaridou Dimitra

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 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. 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. 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. 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. During the last years, the factors that enhance or weaken entrepreneurship in rural areas have been

analysed 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. 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 fulfilment 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. The methodology of the research proposal takes under consideration similar international research projects" by using methodological tools-approaches and innovative methodologies. 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. 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.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, social economy, mountainous areas, rural entrepreneurship, mechanism for social economy, aithikos

Acknowledgments: *The research leading to these results has received funding from the [EEA] Mechanism 2009-2014 under Project Contract n° 3580 - «AITHIKOS - Establishment of a Supporting Mechanism for the Development and Promotion of Social Entrepreneurship for Populations of Mountainous Areas».*