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MAPPING AND INTERPRETING THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN GREECE

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ABSTRACT

This article extends further the research in social enterprises by providing insights into their evolution in a developing national context like Greece. In particular, in this article, we investigated the types, dynamics, regional distribution and the main field of activities of Greek social enterprises. We also delineated further the critical institutional issues and difficulties for their development. Our findings demonstrate that social entrepreneurship in Greece is still in its infancy, illustrating an incremental growth rate over time.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship; Social Economy; Ecosystem;
Greece

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship is a novel research field that has attracted much attention from many scholars, practitioners and policymakers across Europe, including Greece (e.g., Graikioti et al., 2020; Loukopoulos & Papadimitriou, 2022). Within this article, we focus on a specific element of this research field, that of social enterprises, and we start to explore their evolution in Greece from the issue year of the first law, i.e. 2011, until 2022.

Despite their rapid increase after the initiation of the first law, Greek social enterprises are still considered to be in an embryonic condition compared to other European countries (European Commission, 2019). Social enterprises in Greece have various legal forms and a broad spectrum of activities after enacting the first law in 2011 and its amendment in 2016. In particular, they activate in multiple fields providing a great range of services in all sectors of the economy, including, among others, social, care and work integration services (European Commission, 2019).

Our present empirical study tries to depict and interpret the evolution of social enterprises in Greece. It is based mainly on the relevant literature and quantitative data obtained from the National Registry of Social and Solidarity Economy (NRSSE) and the annual reports of the Directorate of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) of the Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Social Entrepreneurship in Greece and Categories of Social Enterprises

Social entrepreneurship scholars borrow various concepts from traditional market-based commercial entrepreneurship to non-profit literature to study and define social enterprises (Rawhouser et al., 2019; Defourny & Nyssens, 2008). The extant literature broadly referred to social enterprises as hybrid organisations with economic and social goals. For instance, Alter (2007) advocated that a social enterprise is *“any business venture created for a social purpose—mitigating/reducing a social problem or a market failure—and to generate social value while operating with the financial discipline, innovation and determination of a private sector business”* (p. 12). Although not legally defined in many countries, social enterprises are highlighted at national levels with different terms such as *“social-economic enterprises”* in Austria, *“socially-aimed enterprises”* in Belgium, *“cooperatives with social aims”* in Spain, and *“social cooperatives”* in Italy and Portugal (Borzaga & Defourny, 2001). According to the European Commission (2019), a social enterprise is defined as *“an undertaking: (a) whose primary objective is to achieve social impact rather than generating profit for*

owners and shareholders; (b) which uses its surpluses mainly to achieve these social goals; (c) which is managed in an accountable, transparent and innovative way, in particular by involving workers, customers and stakeholders affected by its business activity” (p. 28). Thus, a social enterprise constitutes a combination of a three-fold structure: entrepreneurial, social, and governmental.

Social entrepreneurship in Greece is a brand-new entrepreneurial form that was first introduced in the Greek economy in 2011 and was later addressed under the concept of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in 2016 by law 4430/2016 (Kornilakis, 2017). The legal form of Greek social enterprises complies with the above definition of the European Commission. Nevertheless, compared with other European countries, the Greek social entrepreneurship sector has yet to develop to a maximum level, as the repercussions of the global economic recession and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic are still significant impediments. Greek social enterprises consist of Social Cooperative Enterprises, Workers’ Cooperatives, and other social entities that meet the criteria of SSE (Kornilakis, 2017). Many other social entities also belong to the Greek third sector, such as associations, foundations, non-profit enterprises, and other civic cooperatives, that operate under a differentiated institutional environment. To track all these different types of social initiatives, at the beginning of February 2018, the Greek Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs implemented a new digital tool called the National Registry of Social and Solidarity Economy (NRSSE) (Graikioti et al., 2020).

The main types of organisations that are registered in the Greek NRSSE and considered to belong to SSE are the following:

- 1) *Social Cooperative Enterprises (SCEs)*. They are civic cooperatives that aim for social and collective benefits and develop entrepreneurial activities. They are managed horizontally according to the principle of one member/one vote. They do not distribute profits to their members but only to employees (35%) and reinvest any surplus. They are divided into two sub-categories related to their purpose: a) Integration SCEs (KoinSep Entaxis), which involve the integration of vulnerable and special groups in social and economical life; and b) SCEs for collective and social benefit purposes (KoinSep Syllogikis & Koinonikis Ofeleias), which involve a great extent of activities.
- 2) *Workers’ Cooperatives*. They pursue the common satisfaction of their members’ needs by creating secure and decent workplaces based on equality and solidarity. They can participate in all kinds of activities and

consist of at least three individuals. They employ democratic decision-making processes, and their profit distribution should not exceed 35% of the total profit.

- 3) *Limited liability cooperatives (KoiSPEs)*. They promote partnership and equal participation of individuals with mental problems, employees in psychiatric units and community institutions, and people from marginalised groups or other disabilities. They are also mental health units overseen by the Greek Ministry of Health.

Table 1: Registered Greek Social Enterprises in the NRSSE

Category	Registered	Deleted	Active
Agricultural Cooperatives	2	0	2
Civic enterprises	80	2	78
Civic Cooperatives	8	0	8
Limited liability cooperatives	29	0	29
SCEs for the integration of special groups	18	1	17
SCEs for the integration of vulnerable groups	46	4	42
SCEs for collective and social benefit purposes	1970	383	1587
Other legal forms	7	0	7
Workers' cooperatives	31	11	20
Associations	22	0	22
Total	2213	401	1812

Source: Greek National Registry of Social and Solidarity Economy (NRSSE)

Other types of organisations, such as civil cooperatives, agricultural cooperatives, womens' associations, and non-profit civil companies, can be considered social enterprises if they meet the following criteria set by law 4430/2016: (a) have a social aim based on the concepts of sustainable development and social services for general interests; (b) are governed by democratic procedures; (c) distribute their profit for reserves (5%), to the employees (35%) and for new job positions and reinvestment; (d) apply a system of converging labour remuneration; (e) seek to develop through horizontal networking with other social enterprises; (f) haven't been formed and governed

by a public legal entity. However, a limited number of these types have been registered in the Greek NRSSE since their registration is optional.

Table 1 summarises the categories of Greek social enterprises registered/deleted in the Greek NRSSE according to the most recent keeping completed in August 2022. Most registered social enterprises are SCEs for collective and social benefit purposes.

The further analysis of this study is focused on the three dominant types: SCEs, Workers' cooperatives and Limited liability cooperatives since, for their establishment, enrolment in the NRSSE is compulsory.

The Evolution of the Greek Social Enterprises

The first law, 4019/2011, regarding the social economy and social entrepreneurship, was launched in Greece in 2011, and it was a critical point for the development of Greek social enterprises. At the same time, several groups of Greek citizens assume responsibilities hitherto ignored or not adequately dealt with by the public bodies in charge and provide new services to Greek society. This bottom-up approach, followed by Greek citizens, set the roots for the development of social enterprises in Greece (European Commission, 2020).

Table 2 summarises Greek social enterprises' establishments from 2012 until August 2022. An incremental rate of the establishments of Greek social enterprises was pointed out between 2012 and 2016, while the number of new establishments increased considerably in 2017 and 2018. From 2019 until August 2022, a gradual decrease in Greek social enterprises' establishments was also pinpointed.

The noticeably high number of new establishments in 2017 and 2018 might be attributed to the benefits that the new law 4430/2016 has foreseen for social enterprises. This legislation institutionalized for the first time the opportunity for support measures to be tailored-made for social enterprises as part of the strategic planning of the socioeconomic restructuring of the Greek country (European Commission, 2019). At the same time, the launch of various programs related to educational services, incubation support, awareness-raising mechanisms, and advisory services provided by private initiatives supported the development of social enterprises' growth in the country (European Commission, 2019). Additionally, the official registration in the NRSSE was promoted as a prerequisite for social enterprises to access the social economy fund and other forms of support provided by public policies and financing (Kornilakis, 2017).

Table 2: Greek Social Enterprises' Establishments per Year (2012-August 2022)

Category	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Limited liability cooperatives	1	4	5	4	2	5	4	2	0	0	0
SCEs for the integration of special groups	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	3	3	6	2
SCEs for the integration of vulnerable groups	2	1	3	3	2	2	9	3	7	7	1
SCEs for collective and social benefit purposes	33	74	112	134	178	277	354	299	227	196	83
Workers' cooperatives	0	1	0	2	1	9	0	4	1	1	1
Total	36	80	121	143	183	294	370	311	238	210	87
Rate of Change (ROC) (%)	-	122,22	51,25	18,18	27,9%	60,66	25,85	-15,95	-23,47	-11,76	-58,57

Source: National Registry of Social and Solidarity Economy (NRSSE)

The proliferation of “*SCEs for collective and social benefit purposes*” was more intensive for two reasons. First, due to the explosion of the social problems that the global economic recession brought upon Greek society, and second because this type of social enterprise was an excellent opportunity for the rapid integration of unemployed people into the labour market (Adam, 2016). Additionally, many unemployed people chose to establish this type of social enterprise as, in this way, they didn’t lose any unemployment subsidies or be obliged to pay public insurance fees as members, as predicted by the law (Nasioulas & Mavroeidis, 2013).

“*SCEs for the integration of special groups*” and “*Workers’ cooperatives*” do not demonstrate a significant change in numbers. “*SCEs for the integration of special groups*”, even though they can play an essential role in the integration of vulnerable groups into the labour market and society in Greece, have yet to be thoroughly exploited. The attractiveness of “*Workers’ cooperatives*” establishments is relatively low, following a slow growth pattern. “*Workers’ cooperatives*” is a new legal type of social enterprise officially introduced by law 4430/2016. Some concerns related to social security issues of their members currently prevent their further development. The high number of “*Workers’ cooperatives*” in 2017 was the outcome of the enactment of the new law and the transition process that followed in which some SCEs for collective and social benefit purposes chose to be transformed into Workers’ cooperatives.

A less pleasant finding was from 2018 to 2021, when the data analysis demonstrated a gradual decrease in the establishment of social enterprises in Greece. By that time, many announced support measures eventually remained inactive; thus, social enterprises were left with limited access to finance (European Commission, 2019). This decrease might also have been because Greece failed to fulfil the requirements of the EU funding operational program “*Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning*” for 2014-2020 (Terziev & Georgiev, 2019). This initiative was put forward to establish socially innovative initiatives to tackle unemployment, create quality education opportunities, upgrade skills, offer sustainable employment for all, and enhance social cohesion (Plimakis et al., 2021). In Greece, the obsolete, bureaucratic, and generally ineffectual public administration falls flat to make these new and competitive social entities within the social entrepreneurship sector (Huliaras & Petropoulos, 2016; Plimakis et al., 2021). Finally, another reason social enterprises stopped gradually being established in Greece was the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. As in any other country, social enterprises in Greece have encountered unprecedented challenges related to their survival and operation during the pandemic (Loukopoulos & Papadimitriou, 2022). Table 3 depicts the

Table 3: Greek Social Enterprises' Establishments per Geographic Region¹

Category	Less developed Regions	Transition Regions	More developed Regions
Limited liability cooperatives	11	9	9
SCEs for the integration of special groups	5	2	11
SCEs for the integration of vulnerable groups	11	10	25
SCEs for collective and social benefit purposes	680	469	821
Workers' cooperatives	10	6	15
Total	717	496	881

Note: Less Developed Regions: Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Western Greece, Epirus, Thessaly, Central Macedonia. Transition Regions: Central Greece, Crete, Ionian Islands, North Aegean, Peloponnese, Western Macedonia. More developed Regions: Attica, South Aegean.

Source: National Registry of Social and Solidarity Economy (NRSSE). Greek social enterprises' establishments per geographic region until August 2022.

Most of the registered social enterprises in the NRSSE were established in more developed areas of Greece (i.e., Attica), while the minority were located in transition regions. The existence of more social enterprises in the most advanced areas of the country is related to their increased population. The region of Attica, which holds more than one-third of the Greek people, is part of the developed regions. Furthermore, this result might be attributed to the dynamics of the supportive ecosystem formed in this region and particularly to the fact that access to finance, grants, and information is more evident in the region of Attica than in the other areas where support measures remain inactive (European Commission, 2019). However, a notable exception is the region of Thessaly.

¹ The classification of regions is based on NUTS classification. Less developed regions: GDP per inhabitant is less than 75 % of the EU-27 average. Transition regions: GDP per inhabitant is between 75 % and 90 % of the EU-27 average. More developed regions: GDP per inhabitant is more than 90 % of the EU-27 average.

Despite its low population and the fact that it belongs to less developed areas, many social enterprises are established there due to the existence of a robust cooperative tradition and the function of a solid supportive local ecosystem (European Commission, 2019).

This finding illustrates that more social entrepreneurs choose to establish their social initiative where there is an extent of resource endowment and/or an increased general development rate (Malecki, 1993). Additionally, more developed regions offer local actors and institutions the opportunity to cooperate, belong to networks, combine existing resources, share knowledge, and create additional wealth (Haugh, 2005). Transition regions receive less funding than less developed regions but more funding than more developed regions (OECD, 2020). Thus, the lack of funding and subsidies and the low number of organised networks indicate that social enterprises' creation in these regions is hindered (Cooke, 2011).

Table 4: Total Number of Greek Social Enterprises' Members

Category	1-4	5	6-7	8-10	11-20	21-50	More than 50
Limited liability cooperatives			2			2	10
SCEs for the integration of special groups			2	6	1		
SCEs for the integration of vulnerable groups			10	14	4	2	
SCEs for collective and social benefit purposes		936	351	103	73	19	4
Workers' cooperatives	15	4	6	2			
Total	15	940	371	125	78	23	14

Source: National Registry of Social and Solidarity Economy (NRSSE)

“SCEs for integration of special and vulnerable groups” are primarily located in large urban centres such as Athens and integrated into more developed regions (Directorate of Social and Solidarity Economy, 2020). The more access to institutional and market-based information and activities' development provided in big cities could explain this choice. At the same time, the needs to offer services to special and vulnerable groups are more intensive in urban space. “Limited liability cooperatives” are distributed in all regions because the Ministry of Health, which has the legal authority to make decisions about their establishment, makes approvals based on geographical criteria.

As presented in Table 4, most social enterprises established until April 2022 have five members, while a minority have more than 50 members. Some SCEs with a minimum number of partners might conceal hidden family businesses (Adam, 2016; Sotiropoulou et al., 2019) since a minimum of five members is requested by Greek law to establish a SCE for collective and social benefit purposes. In the Greek social enterprises' context, the vast majority of employees and/or volunteers are also members of SCEs (Glaveli & Geormas, 2018). The small number of members might also be attributed to the transparency issues and the absence of extroversion of Greek social cooperatives. The Greek culture is characterised by a lack of collaboration which has also been acknowledged as an essential obstacle to the development of social enterprises (European Commission, 2020).

As shown in Table 5, most of the social enterprises in Greece were active in the tertiary sector until August 2022. This result concurs with Julià et al.'s (2012), who advocated that social enterprises and different forms of social entities have primarily developed their economic activity in the tertiary sector providing services that benefit societies and citizens.

Table 5: Greek Social Enterprises' Establishments per Sector

Category	Primary sector	Secondary sector	Tertiary sector
Limited liability cooperatives	3		26
SCEs for the integration of special groups		1	16
SCEs for the integration of vulnerable groups	2	6	30
SCEs for collective and social benefit purposes	67	169	1503
Workers' cooperatives	1	2	22
Total	73	178	1597

Source: National Registry of Social and Solidarity Economy (NRSSE)

The activity sectors of social enterprises, as shown in Table 6, varied widely. The most common activities of Greek social enterprises until August 2022 were enclosed in the fields of "*Wholesale and Retail Trade*", "*Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities*", "*Administrative and Support Service Activities*", "*Education*", "*Human Health and Social Work Activities*", "*Arts, Entertainment and Recreation*" and "*Other Service Activities*".

Table 6: Greek Social Enterprises' Establishments per Field Activity

Category²	Limited liability cooperatives	SCEs for the integration of special groups	SCEs for the integration of vulnerable groups	SCEs for collective and social benefit purposes	Workers' cooperatives
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3		2	67	1
Mining and Quarrying				0	
Manufacturing			6	97	1
Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning Supply				3	
Water Supply; Sewerage, Waste Management and Remediation Activities				42	
Construction		1		27	1
Wholesale and Retail Trade	2	1	2	168	1
Transportation and Storage				12	
Accommodation and Food Service Activities	3	2	7	102	7
Information and Communication		2	2	109	3
Financial and Insurance Activities				2	
Real Estate Activities				10	1

² The distribution of the activities in categories was based on the statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community (NACE 2).

Category²	Limited liability cooperatives	SCEs for the integration of special groups	SCEs for the integration of vulnerable groups	SCEs for collective and social benefit purposes	Workers' cooperatives
Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities				149	2
Administrative and Support Service Activities	12	4	8	163	3
Public Administration and Defence; Compulsory Social Security	1			17	
Education		1	1	175	3
Human Health and Social Work Activities	6	2	5	161	
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation				183	
Other Service Activities	2	4	5	252	2
Total	29	17	38	1739	25

Source: National Registry of Social and Solidarity Economy (NRSSE)

The results showed that the activities of social enterprises spread across several sectors of the economy. It could be said that this broad scheme of activities for all economic sectors has been institutionally supported. Law 4430/2016 has set a new ground for the development of social enterprises. The meaning of the “social aim” has been vastly extended to include economic activities not being exclusively focused on vulnerable and/or special social groups (European Commission, 2019). Thus, most social enterprises created under this scheme emphasised not so much the “social aim” but tackling unemployment by getting involved in productive activities with a collective aim (Adam, 2016).

Table 7 depicts the annual turnover of the registered Greek social enterprises in 2018 according to the most recent report of the Directorate of Social and Solidarity Economy (2020). Most social enterprises had less than €10.000 (37%) annual turnover, while only 14% had more than €50.001. These low turnover outcomes of Greek social enterprises might be attributed to the lack of motivation of the social entrepreneurs related to “achievement” (Sotiropoulou et al., 2019). In particular, “achievement” is the motivational basis that leads to competent performance and generates the necessary resources for organisations to reach their objectives (Schwartz, 2012). The short period of operation of the most recently established bodies of SSE (legislation after 2016) and the fact that they had been waiting for a subsidy programme to start their activities might finally explain this result (Geormas & Glaveli, 2019).

Table 7: Annual Turnover of the Greek Social Enterprises (2018)

Annual Turnover (€)	Number	Percentage (%)
0	128	20
1 to 10.000	238	37
10.001 to 20.000	89	14
20.001 to 30.000	44	7
30.001 to 40.000	31	5
40.001 to 50.000	21	3
>50.001	92	14
Total	643	100

Source: Directorate of Social and Solidarity Economy (2020)

Conclusions

This study aimed to explore and interpret the evolution of social enterprises in Greece over the last decade and since the enactment of the first law. The results revealed that social enterprises in Greece were boosted by the 4019/2011 and 4430/2016 laws and the partial development of their supportive ecosystem. They also reflected, in general, the embryonic stage of the Greek social enterprise ecosystem.

In Greece, in many cases, social enterprises were conceptualized as an entrepreneurial form for tackling unemployment (Adam, 2016). The majority are social enterprises for work integration with a productive orientation rather than serving specific social aims or offering a social welfare service. At the same time, there is evidence that some social enterprises are hidden forms of very small or family businesses (Adam, 2016; Sotiropoulou et al., 2019). Despite their

productive focus, most have a precise social dimension in their objectives (European Commission, 2020). Even though most of them are product-oriented, their outcomes are still falling behind. Their sources of income are usually inadequate concerning their needs, and many Greek social enterprises are new social entities at an early developmental stage that require financial support.

Financial support is one of the most critical factors for the sustainability of the Greek social enterprise ecosystem, as European funding is still pending (Graikioti et al., 2020). Social enterprises' social and commercial aspects should be balanced to alleviate this financial support problem (Glaveli & Geomas, 2018). A few crucial social enterprises' support measures have already been institutionalized and activated in Greece, but most of them have since been suspended despite being announced. For example, the existing Greek legislation for SSE regarding the financial support of social enterprises provides for the creation of an independent SSE's Fund (Social Enterprise Pre-start Grant Fund) (British Council, 2018). This aims to finance programs and actions to support social entities of SSE and its resources come from the Public Investment Budget (national and/or co-financed part), as well as from other sources of funding. In addition, it will provide grants to help individuals or groups to start a test and pilot their actions; it could help encourage a greater wave of start-ups and start-ups before they take legal form (as this in itself is an obstacle). Ideally, this financial support would be accompanied by coaching and/or mentoring and could only be provided on the basis of a short business or project plan. To date, this Fund has not been established.

Apart from the lack of financial resources specifically for social enterprises, there are more adversities that Greek social enterprises have to face. For example, the lack of effective advocacy for the social enterprises' community and stakeholders, the lack of adequate networking and partnership arrangements, the lack of social entrepreneurship education initiatives and the poor governance, i.e. coordination between Ministries, stakeholder partnerships, monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, the Greek social enterprise ecosystem requires a much more considered approach from public agencies, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The survival and sustainability of these organisations also depend on the adoption of an open management culture, which is strongly supported by a sustainable social enterprises' ecosystem and a broad environment of common beliefs which underpin strong cooperation among public agencies, social entrepreneurs, beneficiaries, and citizens (Plimakis et al., 2021).

As the key political actor concerning social enterprises in Greece, the Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has, until now, as its primary purpose to make SSE a sustainable source of national revenues. In particular, the foundation of the Support Centers of SSE by the Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in 2019 was a successful action that should be continued because they helped many social entities overcome various institutional barriers and be developed within this complicated national context. Other vital ongoing priorities of the Greek Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs should be to update the digital tools used by the Greek social entrepreneurs; make a series of improvements in the NRSSE to become more functional and easily used by the Greek social entrepreneurs; draw up an action plan using the positive initiatives taking place at European level; ensure a favourable institutional framework for social entrepreneurship and workers' cooperatives; create and support a promising business environment; develop a collective and cooperative culture and finally promote the contribution of social entrepreneurship to the local development and social cohesion (Directorate of Social and Solidarity Economy, 2020).

In conclusion, Greece is a European country that, through radical actions with a positive social impact, should reform and implement the institutional and legal framework as soon as possible to develop the ecosystem of its social economy.

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