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SOCIAL ECONOMY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GREEK CRISIS: TRAJECTORIES AND CONSTRAINTS

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The present special issue recognizes that social economy (SE) and social enterprises are not built and developed in vacuum but rather within a given historical, political, cultural and economic context. Its trajectories and constraints are strongly linked to this context.

During the last two decades, the SE is located at the intersection between the objectives, practices and priorities of the organizations composing it, and the policies - invested by specific interests - favorable to its development as a response to the problems arising from the economic crisis, namely the exacerbation of structural difficulties due to massive unemployment and the withdrawal of the welfare State. The institutional framework, including the values and norms that guide actors' action, and the contradictions due to the implementation of exogenous institutional forms (e.g., those defined at the level of the European Union) or to the poor local governance are also important elements to take into account. Based on these assumptions the collection of the papers incorporated in the current issue seeks to provide the reader with an

overview of the developments of the SE and social enterprises in Greece. More precisely, the selected contributions emphasize the specificities of the Greek case and the obstacles on the evolution of the SE ecosystem in the country, as well as the SE actors' potential to thrive, effectively tackle unmet social needs and boost sustainable development at the local level. Therefore, the work published in vol. XXV- 2022, No 1 of the East-West Journal of Economics and Business provides researchers, practitioners and local and national stakeholder with lessons learned and directions for interventions to boost the economic effectiveness and social/environmental footprint of productive social initiatives in Greece. More precisely:

Thomakis and Daskalopoulou contribute to the special issue a critical reflection on the role and value-added prospects for sustainable development of the two main types of initiatives of the SE paradigm in Greece namely agricultural cooperatives (ACs) and social purpose enterprises (SPEs). The authors suggest that the viability of both initiatives in the agricultural sector depends not only on the introduction of radical institutional changes to provide formal support to the productive social actors in the sector, but also on cultivating a culture of cooperation, the alignment of the initiatives' values and goals with those of the society, the presence of qualitative institutions to monitor and support the operation of such cooperative organizations and the stock of positive social capital. Moreover, the present study provides qualitative evidence of the bonding (in-group) and bridging (out-of-group) stock of social capital as observed in a sample of Greek ACs and SPEs in Crete. The results point out that to differences in the out-of-group social capital that ACs and SPEs hold and highlight the bonding and bridging effects of this stock.

Initially, Nikolaidis argues that SE went through three historical phases set on the basis of two criteria: the economic-social problems of each period with the evolution of the welfare state. Following, the author focuses on the development of SE in Greece during the 2nd decade of the 21st century and attempts to highlight the reasons behind the partial failure of the Greek SE to effectively address unmet social needs. Two main intercorrelated factors are identified. First the Greek specificities regarding the economy and society, which is structured and functions under the condition of a less developed welfare state. Second the deep and prolonged recession, which undermined the conditions for undertaking collective economic activities and resulted in the failure of the state's efforts for an indirect commercialization of social services through SE. The paper concludes with lessons learned from the development of the Greek SE in the 2010s that could be useful for uncovering its full potential in the future.

European Union's initiatives on social entrepreneurship seem to have guided the developments of SE in Greece. Nonetheless, Geormas and Glaveli argue that the "Europeanization" of strategy/policies and legal framework in the Greek national context did not, as in the case of other EU countries, nurture a strong and robust SE sector in the country. To illuminate this paradox, the authors critically uncover and discuss the parallel legislative developments in the field of SE and social entrepreneurship in the EU and the Greek context. The analysis points out facilitators, as well as inhibitory factors for the sustainable development of SE in Greece. More precisely, it is indicated that the landmark national legal frameworks (Law 4019/2011 and Law 4430/2016) on SE and social entrepreneurship were introduced amidst a severe economic crisis, posing therefore barriers to the development of SE in terms of sectors of activity, levels and types of employment, financing, scalability/profitability and the development of a genuine social vision, a clear corporate identity, and visibility. Also, an implementation gap is identified. Additionally, SE initiatives seem to have been triggered from a top-down process of governmental initiative, a misunderstanding of the concept of SE and necessity, rather than a genuine belief, regarding the value of social enterprises. According to the authors, the future calls for structural barriers to be removed and a comprehensive program for the Social and Solidarity Economy to be designed which will combine support policies with diversified intervention programs. Specifically, the European Action Plan on SE and its full implementation at the national level, the adequate and effective use of the resources from the European Social Fund, as well as new public institutions such as the Directorate General on SE and social entrepreneurship are of crucial importance for the development of the sector.

Based mainly on the relevant literature and secondary 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, Loukopoulos, Sotiropoulos and Kontonasiou depict and interpret the evolution of social enterprises in Greece. In detail, the researchers investigate the types, dynamics, regional distribution and the main field of activities of Greek social enterprises. Additionally, the research findings demonstrate that social entrepreneurship in Greece is still in an embryonic state compared to other European countries and illustrate an incremental growth rate over time. According to the authors, these outcomes relate to critical institutional issues and obstacles that need to be tackled for the development of an effective SE ecosystem such as: lack of understanding the concept and purpose of a social enterprise (i.e., a vehicle of social innovation, change, cohesion and sustainable local development), need for financial support to scale up, ineffective advocacy for the social enterprises' community and

stakeholders, inadequate networking and partnership arrangements, need for social entrepreneurship education initiatives and poor governance, i.e. lack of coordination between Ministries, stakeholder partnerships and monitoring/evaluation agencies.