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34 Εξαμηνιαία Επιστημονική Επιθεώρηση, Φθινόπωρο 2022, τόμος 18ος, τεύχος 2

ARTICLES
Άρθρα

Antigone Lyberaki, Platon Tinios, Thomas Georgiadis, Living through two crises: A preliminary investigation of resilience among older Europeans

Antonios Kostas, Social Entrepreneurship and Local Development. Case study of the Limited Liability Social Cooperative of Kavala

Marianthi Kotea, Municipal welfare in 19th century Greece

Costas Passas, A contribution to the economic and historical debate on social classes: an empirical investigation of the productive and unproductive labour categories in Greece from 1987 to 2020

RESEARCH
Έρευνα

Ensuring Continuity in Education for Refugee - Continugee – A report of the 2nd Learning Teaching Training Activity (**Stavros Pantazopoulos, Yiannis Roussakis**)

BOOK REVIEWS
Βιβλιοκριτικές

Χρίστος Παπαθεοδώρου & Θεόδωρος Σακελλαρόπουλος, *Τα οικονομικά της κοινωνικής πολιτικής (Κώστας Πασσάς)*, Δουρκούνος Γιώργος, *Η εκπαιδευτική πολιτική για τη διά βίου μάθηση: Εξευρωπαϊσμός και (ανα)παραγωγή κοινωνικών ανισοτήτων (Ελένη Πρόκου)*

ΕΚΔΟΣΕΙΣ ΔΙΟΝΙΚΟΣ

Social entrepreneurship and local development. Case study of the Limited Liability Social Cooperative of Kavala

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Social entrepreneurship and local development. Case study of the Limited Liability Social Cooperative of Kavala

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Κοινωνική Επιχειρηματικότητα και τοπική ανάπτυξη. Μελέτη περίπτωσης του Κοινωνικού Συνεταιρισμού Περιορισμένης Ευθύνης Καβάλας

Αντώνιος Κώστας, Διεθνές Πανεπιστήμιο της Ελλάδος

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to present, in summary, the nature and contribution of the social entrepreneurship on local scale in Greece, particularly on the level of experience, opportunities, problems, obstacles, accomplishments and good practices (of projects, actions, and programmes), through the examination of the example of the Limited Liability Social Cooperative of Kavala (Kavala's LLC). For this purpose, the implementation of qualitative research was decided on the basis of the focus group interviews technique. The study is structured on the description of the mentioned research methodology, the presentation of the research findings and results, as well as of the discussion and conclusions on the good practices and proposals for the development of social entrepreneurship at local scale in Greece in order to fulfill the social, economic and employability goals for beneficiaries belonging to susceptible and vulnerable social groups.

KEY WORDS: Social entrepreneurship; local development; Limited Liability; Social Cooperative (LLSC); Kavala's LLC.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Το αντικείμενο του άρθρου είναι να παρουσιάσει, συνοπτικά, το ρόλο, τη συμβολή και τη σημασία της κοινωνικής επιχειρηματικότητας σε τοπική διάσταση στην Ελλάδα, μέσα από τη διερεύνηση της εμπειρίας, των ευκαιριών, των προβλημάτων, των εμποδίων, των επιτυχιών και των καλών πρακτικών (έργα, δράσεις και προγράμματα) του παραδείγματος του Κοινωνικού Συνεταιρισμού Περιορισμένης Ευθύνης Καβάλας (ΚοιΣΠΕ Καβάλας). Για το σκοπό αυτό επιλέχθηκε η διεξαγωγή ποιοτικής έρευνας χρησιμοποιώντας τη μέθοδο των ομαδικά εστιασμένων συνεντεύξεων. Η εργασία αποτελείται από την περιγραφή της συγκεκριμένης ερευνητικής μεθοδολογίας, την παρουσίαση των ευρημάτων και των αποτελεσμάτων της έρευνας καθώς και από τη συζήτηση και τα συμπεράσματα σχετικά με τις καλές πρακτικές και τις προτάσεις για την ανάπτυξη της κοινωνικής επιχειρηματικότητας σε τοπική διάσταση στην Ελλάδα προκειμένου να επιτευχθούν κοινωνικοί, οικονομικοί και εργασιακοί στόχοι για ωφελούμενους που ανήκουν σε ευπαθείς και σε εύλωτες κοινωνικά ομάδες.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ: Κοινωνική επιχειρηματικότητα, τοπική ανάπτυξη, Κοινωνικός Συνεταιρισμός Περιορισμένης Ευθύνης (ΚοιΣΠΕ), ΚοιΣΠΕ Καβάλας.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to serve as an account of the role, contribution and value of the social entrepreneurship, and to cast light on issues related to experience, possibilities, opportunities, problems, threats, successfulness and good practices (of projects, actions and programmes) at local level in Greece, through the study of a social enterprise case¹. The selected example to be examined as a case study, is that of the Limited Liability Social Cooperative of Kavala (Kavala's LLSC), an institution/entity which has been a key player in the development of social economy activities as well as in the implementation of social entrepreneurship schemes and programmes on local scale in Greece, particularly in the Regional Unit of Kavala and Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace in Greece, over the past five (5) years.

The main questions and the specific objectives set by this study has been the recording-reporting of indicative actions and effective operational practices of Kavala's LLSC positioned as a Social Cooperative Enterprise (SCE) for Integration. The aim has been to illustrate findings and to analyse results, procedures and techniques for the designing and implementation of special projects and programmes, which would contribute to the support of social entrepreneurship for the benefit of social enterprises, local community, local authorities and public entities alike. To elaborate on the latter, social impact is interpreted particularly with reference to enhancing social policies, reinforcing social protection and social coherence, assisting healthcare and social insurance, tackling unemployment and social isolation, boosting entrepreneurship and employability, preserving the environment and caring for people who belong to susceptible and vulnerable social groups; last but not least, the social impact is also contextualised in terms of local economy development and community support in Greece, mostly during the socioeconomic crisis period (Chrisakis et al., 2002; Sakellaropoulos and Economou, 2007; Adam and Papatheodorou, 2010; Kostas, 2013; Ioannides, 2016; Kostas et al., 2017, Geormas and Kostas, 2018; Adam, 2020; Skamnakis, 2020; Skamnakis and Kostas, 2020).

The number of studies reflecting upon the operation, function, difficulties, obstacles, accomplishments, development, and, generally, the experience yielded from Limited Liability Social Cooperatives (LLSCs) in Greece at local level are limited. Thus, having detected the lack of qualitative research for the relationship between LLSCs, local authorities and public entities at local level in Greece, the present study intends to add knowledge and input to the field, by bridging this gap.

Social entrepreneurship incurs social value and promotes collective work, "fresh" ideas, innovative proposals, and makes good use of resources in order to create favourable conditions for life within the community, while resolving issues on the basis of societal problems (unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, etc.). In recent years, social entrepreneurship has expanded its scope to a range of social, economic and environmental issues, and interventions with an emphasis on social impact and reinvestment of economic surplus and the cooperative nature of its enterprises mainly to support the local community and upgrade local development. In this context, social entrepreneurship promotes "smart" business plans and suggests that people should be allowed access and participation-involvement to a series of consistent socioeconomic actions based on humanitarian ideals such as democracy, justice, equality, solidarity, collectivity, etc. As a major aspect of social entrepreneurship, social enterprises are the result of entrepreneurship initiatives by citizens, to aid to the benefit of their members and of the local community, by enhancing employment through the creation of new jobs, while the prospect of financial interest (individual profit) is limited. Also, they build new entrepreneurial opportunities for people, especially for susceptible and vulnerable social groups who are unable to enter the labour mar-

ket in any other way. In general, social enterprises entails the social, the entrepreneurial and the governance dimension and they are characterised by the participation of members and volunteers in the production and provision of goods and services, their autonomous operation, the development of new flexible forms of employment, their competitiveness and their continuous social mission and economic activity (Borzaga and Maiello, 1998; Campbell, 1999; Defourny and Develtere, 1999; Borzaga and Defourny, 2001; Defourny, 2001; Amin, Cameron and Hudson, 2002; Boschee and McClurg, 2003; Evers and Laville, 2004; Moulaert and Ailenel, 2005; Anheier and Salamon, 2006; Hulgård, 2006; Laville, Lemaitre and Nyssens, 2006; Mair and Marti, 2006; Nyssens, 2006; European Commission, 2013, 2015, 2020; Mair, 2020; Kostas, Tsoukalidis and Karasavoglou, 2022).

According to Galliano (2000:15-18), in the context of the European Union, local development is embedded in every action plan, while priority is also given to social entrepreneurship, which is viewed as a means to generate and promote local employment initiatives. What is more, in the framework of the European Employment Strategies, an array of actions, initiatives and programmes has been designed for local development as well as for the reinforcement of the social economy sector and its institutions, particularly of the social enterprises. Adam (2012:50-51) argues that Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) and the local development can “co-exist”, adding that it is important for the public sector to encourage social entrepreneurship activities locally, as well as to boost citizens’ networks and relations among social economy entities on local scale.

The activity of social enterprises for local development in Greece is greatly in line with the European Union policies and programmes, and does not follow societal norms. More often than not, though, administrative deficiencies of the state and the lack of specialised staff at regional level, raise obstacles to the development of local actions of social entrepreneurship (Kostas, 2014:286). Nevertheless, noteworthy ventures have been and are being realised through various schemes, partnerships and synergies with local authorities, private institutions, groups of enterprises and social associations, although in such cases the role of social enterprises in social development locally is hard to define. The majority of such collaborations in Greece intend to increase employment rates, aiming at social inclusion of social groups with specific difficulties and they are funded to a large extent by the European Union and its Organisations (Sakellaropoulos, 2006:130-131).

In Greece, Limited Liability Social Cooperatives (LLSCs) are legal entities under private law with a dual function, both as Social Cooperative Enterprise and Mental Health Unit. Their action plan and strategic framework are subject to Law 2716/1999 and Law 4430/2016. According to Law 2716/1999 (Development and modernisation of mental health services and other provisions), Article 12, the members of the LLSCs are divided into three (3) categories: i. people over the age of 15 who have psychosocial problems (at least 35% of the total); ii. mental health professionals/workers/employees in the mental health sector (up to 45% of the total); iii. community organisations, municipalities, and other natural and/or legal persons of public or private law (up to 20% of the total). The key objectives of the LLSCs are: a) socio-economic inclusion; b) employment integration and re-integration; and c) catering for the needs for the first (1st) category of members in the LLSCs (i.e., people with psychosocial problems and users of mental healthcare services). Law 2716/1999, Article 12, refers to the creation of a network for mental healthcare services which can deal with the increasing social needs of people with psychosocial difficulties and mental illnesses through post-hospital care predominantly in “post-asylum adjustment” cases, while also contributing to their therapeutic rehabilitation. Practically, these aims could be succeeded with

the help of independent amenities and facilities catering for the community members' mental and social re-integration via re-inclusion mechanisms. As it mentioned earlier on, the scope of LLSCs covers the aspect of social, economic and occupational assimilation of individuals having serious mental issues, to enable them to be financially self-sufficient, while at the same time, facilitating their recovery (Kostas et al. 2021). Since LLSCs also provide medical services as mental healthcare units, they are subject to monitoring, via the Department of Mental Health on behalf of the Ministry of Health. It is noted that, based on SSE Law 4430/2016 (Social and Solidarity Economy and development of its entities and other provisions) in Greece, LLSCs function as Social Cooperative Enterprises (SCEs) for Integration in accordance with Article 12 of Law 2716/1999. Thus, people with disabilities, vulnerable and underprivileged social groups are also included in the first (1st) category of LLSCs members.

The Limited Liability Social Cooperative of Kavala (Kavala's LLSC), having commenced its activity in 2011, is the first institutionalised entity in the social economy sector, especially in the field of social entrepreneurship in the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (in Greece), and several sustainable and successful entrepreneurial projects have been implemented by it over time. Kavala's LLSC designs and implements social economy programmes and granting significant advantages to beneficiaries, in terms of employability and psychosocial assistance. Furthermore, it executes developmental projects both nationally and locally. Lastly, it may also function as personnel recruiter and cater for diverse service areas, by facilitating the provision of supporting and upgrading employment, social services, welfare, healthcare, cleanliness, environmental, administrative, financial, food-related, educational, or other services of public interest.

The subsequent parts of this article demonstrate the research methodology (focus group interviews) and present the findings and results in accordance. Finally, the study concludes with the discussion and remarks on the good practices of social entrepreneurship at local level in Greece, drawing from the case of Kavala's LLSC. Conclusions are formulated around the case per se, its good practices, the achievement of socio-economic targets both in terms of employment inclusion and psychosocial support of its employees and beneficiaries, as well as in light of the need to fortify and enhance the services and activities carried out by local public entities within the given area (Regional Unit of Kavala and Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace in Greece).

2. Research Methodology

The adopted qualitative research approach is based on the focus group interviews technique, which according to Krueger (1988), is a well-organised team conversation that intends to deduce underlying perceptions and convictions on a specific issue under investigation within an eloquent and unobstructed environment. This interactive process, can be either "vertical", that is between the researcher(s) and the participants, or "horizontal", that is among the members themselves (Wilkinson, 1998). The interaction among team members reduces the researcher's control over this research method and stresses the significance of the participants' own responses (Frey and Fontana 1993). Thus, the focus group methodology itself sets out an environment for lively interaction and discussion among participants (Kitzinger, 1994), a fact which is highlighted in this study and being the main reason for choosing this technique.

The focus group methodology entails a process that evolves through steps, which have to be implemented and abided by accordingly, so as to incur the best possible results and lead to the generation of findings based on the questions posed by the researcher(s) initially (Weare, 2013).

In order to carry out this qualitative research, the researcher ought to possess a robust knowledge of the subject, should be able to create a warm, supportive and comfortable atmosphere among the research participants so as to enable open and honest dialogue, be helpful to the interviewees, and create a climate of coziness which would encourage the exchange of information (Nyumba et al. 2017).

According to Isari and Pourkos (2015), in most cases, focus group methodology ideally requires a number of 5 to 15 participants and, if it is necessary, more than one 'focus group' team can be employed for a research project. In the context of the present study, two (2) separate targeted focus groups were conducted at two (2) different periods of time (June 2020 and June 2021). The participant interviewees in the first focus group (June 2020) were seven (7) individuals, representatives/members of Kavala's LLSC Board of Directors, while those of the second focus group interviews (June 2021) were eight (8) executives, employees and external partners of Kavala's LLSC. In both cases, the participant interviewees were engaged in an extensive and in-depth conversation guided by a well-defined research tool (i.e., a questionnaire with 10 specified key questions). The analysis led to really enlightening findings and results which fulfilled the aims determined by the initial research hypothesis as well as by the sub-questions of the qualitative research. At that point, research variables were taken into consideration, namely: a) the focus group interviewees had to communicate efficiently and be confident about their answers; b) through a set of differentiated tasks the representatives (Board of Directors), the executives and members of staff of Kavala's LLSC were asked about their opinion, view and appreciation of their contribution/work; c) information was extracted via interactive and guided discussion (and via provided additional printed material); d) the researcher kept notes on the key points mentioned among the partakers of the focus group interviews.

Preceding the actual execution of the two (2) focus groups interviews, telephone communication had taken place in order to make arrangements with regards to the venue, dates and hours for the implementation of the research. In this primary contact, survey participants were informed about the research purpose and objectives as well as about the estimated duration of the interviews process. Also, brief reference was made to the questions, so as to allow preparation in advance and hence clarify possible queries that the interviewees might have had beforehand. All invited representative members of the Board of Directors, executives and administrative employees of Kavala's LLSC that invited to participate in focus groups interviews, agreed to take part in the survey.

The first targeted focus group interview took place on 24/06/2020 in Kavala's LLSC headquarters and lasted for about three (3) hours (all health safety measures for protection against the COVID-19 pandemic were strictly observed). It was realised with the participation of seven (7) representatives/members of Kavala's LLSC Board of Directors (made up of 4 men and 3 women) namely of the president, the vice president, the secretary general, the treasurer, and the three (3) full members of the Board (including 1st category members of Kavala's LLSC), all being responsible of managing, overseeing, handling, monitoring and coordinating Kavala's LLSC operations. The second targeted focus group survey was conducted on 02/06/2021, again at Kavala's LLSC central office, with a duration of approximately four (4) hours (also, all health safety measures for protection against the COVID-19 pandemic were strictly observed). This focus group involved the following eight (8) participants (executives, workers and external partners of the Kavala's LLSC, made up of 6 men and 2 women, including 1st category beneficiaries): the programme manager, the finance director, the staff manager, the accountant

executive, the development consultant and the two (2) accountants, who were in charge of the secretarial, administrative, financial, economic, corporate, consultive and developmental duties. The selection of the sample for the two (2) targeted focus groups reflected a high degree of representation since all of Kavala's LLSC Board of Directors and all of the administrative and managerial personnel took part in it; as a result, the interviewees' own qualities had been sufficient enough to produce basic and reliable results and offer a satisfactory approach to the initial research plan estimation as well as to the initial research hypothesis, thus demonstrating altogether the successfulness of the research illustrated in this study.

The questionnaire which was designed to facilitate discussion among the survey participants comprised of ten (10) complete questions. In both targeted focus groups, the theme topics of the questions concerned ten (10) areas of common interest, to allow appropriate and corresponding discussion and exchange compatible with the interviewees' position, specialisation, duties and responsibilities. As the interview survey unfolded, the leading role was that of its participants, who were providing answers to the questions asked by the interviewers-researcher, testifying their own awareness, feedback, experiences, knowledge and expertise, while at the same time stating their own view and opinion without hesitation or imposed constraints but with credibility. Consequently, important findings, results and conclusions were elicited through this qualitative research process.

Content-wise, the ten (10) thematic questions of the interviews questionnaire pertain to: 1) the mission, aims, scope and "vision" of Kavala's LLSC; 2) an account of the activities, projects and programmes implemented by the Kavala's LLSC in light of the ten years' crisis and amidst the current health crisis caused by the pandemic COVID-19; 3) an overview of the experience gained through Kavala's LLSC with the aim to develop the SSE and the social entrepreneurship across the Regional Unit of Kavala and the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace in Greece; 4) the procedures, means and tools for sponsorship, funding, allowances and overall financial aid for Kavala's LLSC to support its mission; 5) determining the extent to which the Kavala's LLSC acts in favour of employment inclusion and re-inclusion of its unemployed members, especially of people belonging to the first category of their members; 6) defining the extent to which Kavala's LLSC actively contributes to services, projects and actions conducted by the local authorities and other public entities on local and regional scale; 7) investigating the experience, data, results, criteria, characteristics and good practices of the work and schemes implemented by Kavala's LLSC locally and regionally; 8) examining the active involvement of Kavala's LLSC in the implementation of European, national and community programmes for local development and employment strengthening, within the framework of SSE and social entrepreneurship; 9) identifying issues, obstacles and difficulties which Kavala's LLSC has faced with regards to its operation and activities; 10) the dynamics, opportunities and parameters for the development of SSE and social entrepreneurship in the Regional Unit of Kavala and across the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace in Greece, to boost entrepreneurship and employment and to assist community progress.

The interactive conversation offered an in-depth perspective of the ten (10) thematic questions, while the participants' own narration revealed significant qualitative data associated with Kavala's LLSC daily operation and activities for the support and protection of susceptible and vulnerable social groups, particularly of Kavala's LLSC 1st category members. During the two (2) focus groups interviews, the researcher-interviewer was keeping notes, while the participants had already provided additional printed material to be studied, processed, reviewed-commented and analysed (copyright permission granted by the Board of Kavala's LLSC). Together with the

feedback notes and key points from the discussion, this material was decoded and used as primary data, producing information and results which contributed to the success of the research.

The limitations of this qualitative research using the focus group interviews technique, mainly arise in relation to the investigation and examination of the administration, management, implementation and development of projects, actions and programmes in collaboration with local authorities and other public entities, both locally and regionally of the Kavala Regional Unit as well as the in the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, on the part of the representatives, executives and employees ("top-down"), including the first category of Kavala's LLSC members, who administrate, coordinate and manage Kavala's LLSC projects. Consequently, the portion of employees engaged in the implementation of all Kavala's LLSC projects ("down-top"), including also the first category of Kavala's LLSC members, did not participate in these two (2) focus groups interviews, and hence may not be indicative of Kavala's LLSC operations on the whole.

3. Findings and Results

Through the specific qualitative research methodology (focus groups interviews technique), viewpoints, ways of expression, chunks of information, concerns and proposals by the research participants gave birth to statements and results, justified on the basis of the ten (10) main questions (as mentioned above), which are presented below.

In an attempt to encapsulate the main purpose, objectives, orientation, aspirations and visions of Kavala's LLSC, through dialogue with the research participants of the two (2) focus groups, it has been proved that: a) in accordance with the relevant legislative framework (Laws 2716/1999 and 4430/2016), Kavala's LLSC serves a dual purpose for/in the city of Kavala, by functioning/operating both as a Social Cooperative Enterprise and a Mental Health Unit; b) since 2011, Kavala's LLSC, which is made up of both individual members and legal entities (i.e. the Municipality of Kavala, the Holy Diocese of Philippi, Neapolis and Thasos, the General Hospital of Kavala, the Association of People with Disabilities of Kavala's Prefecture and several other major institutional and civil welfare bodies in the area), has been effectively implementing specialised projects, programmes, schemes and initiatives in the field of social entrepreneurship across the Kavala Regional Unit as well as the in the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, with considerable occupational, beneficial, local, developmental and social impact; c) Kavala's LLSC is the first structured form of SSE Sector in the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, implementing sustainable entrepreneurial activities since 2013; d) Kavala's LLSC is made up of 120 members divided into three (3) categories: i. users of mental healthcare services, people with disabilities, vulnerable and underprivileged social groups. ii. mental health professionals and social scientists. iii. public bodies, private and non-profit organisations; e) Kavala's LLSC key objectives include: i. socioeconomic inclusion, ii. employment (re-)inclusion, and iii. contribution to the treatment and the social needs of the members of the 1st category of Kavala's LLSC; f) the exact objectives of Kavala's LLSC can be distinguished into three (3) categories: i. long-term and lucrative economic activity. ii. operational activities based on social responsibility and ensuring that it always acts in the best interest of the public. iii. development through job creation, with a focus on the employment of its members; g) Kavala's LLSC actions are governed by three (3) principles: i. social responsibility, ii. social solidarity, and iii. a long-term vision of viability, sustainability, growth, and job creation that is aiming to the various demands and economic needs of the 1st category of its members.

To the question which required a description of its recent and current state and, more particularly, Kavala's LLSC plan of action in relation to the ten-year financial crisis, but also in light of the current health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, replies of the dialogue from the survey participants are indicated below.

In the present period of time (June 2021 - answers from the second focus group), Kavala's LLSC is undertaking seven (7) projects and schemes, in partnership with the General Hospital of Kavala, the Physical and Rehabilitative Medicine Centre Chrysoupolis, the General Hospital of Komotini, the Emergency Medical Service of Kavala, Drama and Serres, the National Organisation for Health Care Services (branch of Kavala, Drama, Xanthi), the Municipality of Kavala (and its legal bodies). These projects include the cleanliness of outdoor and indoor spaces, laundry services, general duty services, services of storage and distribution of goods from the social grocery to vulnerable social groups, as well as the delivery of specialised services to the public by members of staff. Also, these schemes offered employment to thirty (30) people, twelve (12) of whom belong to the 1st category of beneficiaries of Kavala's LLSC. For the implementation, coordination and management of the above mentioned projects, two (2) extra persons were further employed, the first as an administrative assistant and the second as an accountant.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been and it still is a serious threat to the operation and the activities of Kavala's LLSC. During the pandemic phase, the Kavala's LLSC has dealt with the suspension of contracts for employees belonging to vulnerable and susceptible social groups, or even with cases of employees quitting their job voluntarily. For such reasons, Kavala's LLSC has got security personnel at its disposal, which can replace workers who, due to impediments caused by the pandemic, might have to be absent from work or terminate their contract what so ever, and so to safeguard the functioning of the undertaken obligations. In addition, Kavala's LLSC has been practicing all health safety and protection measures against COVID-19, and has been making available all necessary means such as masks and single-use gloves, antiseptics, cleansers, as well as, everything else that its workers and partners may be in need of, so as to ensure their protection from the coronavirus. What is more, the health and safety expert of Kavala's LLSC has been running frequent checks to confirm control of the situation, to monitor and ensure that the hygiene safety regulations against COVID-19 are followed by all employees.

To the synthesis of the two (2) questions aiming to explore the processes, ways and methods of financing, grants, subsidisation and overall financial aid to Kavala's LLSC in order to achieve its objectives as much as to examine Kavala's LLSC active involvement in the execution of european, national and local employment support programmes in the framework of SSE and social entrepreneurship, below is an account of the elicited responses of the conversation.

Kavala's LLSC received grants from the Ministry of Health twice, with the purpose to broaden its spectrum of activities as a mental health unit. That funding (with a 4 years total span of implementation; 2017-2020) has proved to be very important for the growth of the Kavala's LLSC, in general, being associated with successful programmes and action with social, occupational, inclusive and therapeutic objectives, not least to mention the attainment of its viability and financial targets based on its criteria of social corporate responsibility and contribution to the common good. As a result, the creation of new job opportunities was achieved promoting work at mental health-related positions as well as employment for people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups (1st category members of Kavala's LLSC beneficiaries). The implementation of activities funded by the Ministry of Health first began in the years 2017 and 2018 with the next ones to be realised through the years, 2018, 2019 and 2020. It is worth noting that these series of actions opened vacancies

of two (2) and three (3) posts respectively and scientific personnel was recruited to contribute to various levels of operation, namely administrative, managerial, economic, secretarial, technical, consultative, business-wise and psychological, not only to the completion of tasks envisaged in the grant contracts with the Ministry of Health, but also supplementarily to other activities performed by Kavala's LLSC permanent human resources. With the assistance of that financial aid, also, useful technical equipment for the projects was purchased; specialised certifications and permissions were obtained together with necessary material for publicity purposes, all of which were vital and crucial for Kavala's LLSC majority of actions. Moreover, with the funding by the Ministry of Health, Kavala's LLSC accomplished to increase its total revenue, and also that of its particular actions, as it also managed to raise the number of people employed both from the general population and from 1st category members of Kavala's LLSC beneficiaries.

At this point, it is worth noting that one of the great achievements, which added value to Kavala's LLSC reputation, producing tangible experience, whilst facilitating progress and securing the establishment and viability of the social corporate structure at local level, has been the implementation of the "Kavala's School Meals project" under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity in conjunction with the National Bank of Greece. In detail, Kavala's LLSC rented facilities, equipment and transit vehicles for the preparation, production and distribution of ready-made food with sides through the operation of a kitchen-workshop for the school year 2016-17 "Kavala's School Meals project", a project which was carried out with huge success (crowdfunding conducted via the electronic platform Act4Greece facilitated via the National Bank of Greece). During the implementation of that specific project, more than 90.000 meals were provided to students of nine (9) day-care primary schools, in the city of Kavala. On a daily basis, approximately 1.150 students were offered fresh healthy meals with complementary sides (i.e., salad, bread, feta cheese, etc.), free-of-charge. The food provision scheme incorporated the mediterranean diet (with the assistance of the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition of the Agricultural University of Athens), while hygiene and quality standards for the preparation, production and actual distribution of food were approved and verified by the Hellenic Food Authority. For the realisation of the "Kavala's School Meals project", there was demand for eleven (11) new job positions in Kavala's LLSC, out of which six (6) involved persons falling into the 1st category members of Kavala's LLSC beneficiaries.

To the question which addresses the general problems, obstacles and difficulties that Kavala's LLSC has faced and is facing in relation to its day-to-day operations, the survey participants reported (via conversation and dialogue) that, ever since its formation, these have been: a) the relatively insufficient legislation on institutional protection and support as well as on tax incentives; b) the inability to find resources for growth due to lack of financial tools and subsidised programmes; c) the difficulties in the collaboration of the Kavala's LLSC with public or private entities, owed to lack of knowledge transmission about the SSE sector; d) the inexistence of updated methods to assess and measure the LLSCs' social impact; e) the growing bureaucracy among the collaborating public bodies; f) the scarcity of skilled and specialised professionals in the LLSCs' administration and management, and so forth.

The following detailed, combinatorial and synthetic analysis of the conversation, dialogue and answers (but also with the use of printed material given to us for study), attempts to assess the gained experience for the development of the SSE and social entrepreneurship via the Kavala's LLSC, across the Kavala Regional Unit and the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace in Greece. Also, there is an effort to evaluate the extent to which Kavala's LLSC actively supports

the services, actions and projects of local authorities and other public entities, both locally and regionally. Finally, the analysis includes issues related to the experience, criteria, features and good practices of the activities and schemes implemented by Kavala's LLSC in cooperation with local authorities and other public bodies, locally and regionally.

A truly valuable "institutional tool" for Kavala's LLSC is the special provision of Law 4412/2016 entitled: "Public procurement of works, procurement and services" and, in particular, Article 20: "Contracts assigned upon exclusivity". Pursuant to this article of law, contracting authorities (public entities, local authorities, etc.) may exclusively enable the participation of SCEs for Integration and LLCs in public procurement procedures, besides other relevant entities, since, based on their statutes, their mission and purpose is the employment and social inclusion of people with disabilities, people with psychosocial problems, users of mental healthcare services, vulnerable social groups, etc, on the condition that more than 30% of the employees belong at these categories.

With the provisions of the Law 4412/2016, Article 20, Kavala's LLSC completed from December 2018 to April 2021, the following five (5) projects, programmes and actions: 1) the project "Provision of services at primary school units" in partnership with the Legal Entity of Municipal Social Solidarity Body - Department of Primary Education of Kavala; 2) the project "Provision of administrative support services to the Municipal Enterprise for Water Supply and Sewage Disposal of Kavala"; 3) the project "Provision of services for the internal transportation of patients of General Hospital of Komotini" in cooperation with the "Sismanoglio" General Hospital of Komotini; 4) the project "Provision of services for the internal transportation of patients of General Hospital of Kavala", conducted in partnership with the General Hospital of Kavala; 5) the scheme "Provision of services for the protection of health and hygiene in the outposts facilities in Orestias, Alexandroupolis, Drama (Paranesti) and Xanthi of the Asylum Office" of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum.

In parallel, based also on Law 4412/2016, Article 20, Kavala's LLSC implements the following seven (7) programmes and actions (on-going projects, most of which are renewed in recent years due to the excellent cooperation with the collaborating institutions): 1) the project "Provision of cleaning services at the premises of the headquarters and of the regional offices of the Greek National Health Service Organisation"; 2) the project "Provision of cleaning services at the premises of the National Emergency Center in Kavala, Drama and Serres"; 3) the project "Provision of cleaning services to Physical and Medical Rehabilitation Center of Chrysoupolis". 4) the project "Provision of washing, dry-cleaning, and ironing services at the General Hospital of Komotini"; 5) the project "Provision of services via LLSC: a telephone operator, a clerk, a patients' guard and an economist", in partnership with the General Hospital of Kavala; 6) a contract with the Municipal Enterprise for Water Supply and Sewage Disposal of Kavala; 7) the project "Assigning of packaging services and distribution of sensitive and non-sensitive products in the framework of the Programme of the Greek Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived- FEAD/TEBA 2020".

Examining the degree to which Kavala's LLSC contributes to the increases of employment and reintegration of its unemployed members over the last five (5) years, and especially of people of the first category of their, and according to the Analytical Periodical Statements (APS) of the Kavala's LLSC, over the last five (5) years, 193 jobs were created and / or maintained (full or part-time with contracts of specified duration), from which 69 were allotted to 1st category members (i.e. people with psychosocial problems, users of mental healthcare services, people with disabilities, vulnerable and underprivileged social groups). This percentage (35.75%) is in accordance with the provisions of the Law 2716/1999: Article 12 and Law 4430/2016: Article 14,

Par 2: "Social Cooperative Enterprises (SCEs) for Integration, and specifically SCEs for Integration of vulnerable groups (including LLSCs of Article 12 of Law 2716/1999 as automatically considered SCE for Integration by the Law 4430/2016), which seek the integration into the economic and social life of individuals belonging to vulnerable social groups where it is provided that at least 30% of the members and employees in these companies necessarily belong to these categories. Thereafter, Kavala's LLSC employees - members of the 1st category of beneficiaries, observe and cover the limit of 30% of all employees. It is noted that a significant benefit for SCEs for Integration and LLSCs is the fact that employees who belong to vulnerable social groups and already receive welfare or reintegration benefit or pension as indirectly insured, or any form of hospitalisation or benefit, will continue to receive these benefits at the same time as their remuneration, according to Law 4430/2016, after their recruitment in new job positions.

It should also be stated that for upholding, evolving and making these particular actions viable, and especially for the administrative, managerial, economic, secretarial, technical, consultative, business-wise, as well as for the psychosocial assistance of its beneficiaries and employees, plans have been made, on human resources level, so as to recruit: a programmes manager, a finance director, a staff manager, an accountant executive and a psychologist. Moreover, supplementary scientific personnel (Kavala's LLSC members) with expertise in the field of healthcare, contributes voluntarily to the smooth and effective operation of the above stated business activities of the Kavala's LLSC, with their own role (i.e., psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, etc.). The key objective in the future will be the capitalisation of the know-how and hands-on experience gained through the above-mentioned activities during the implementation phase of Kavala's LLSC schemes and programmes by developing similar and/or improved actions and projects.

In conclusion, for the recording of the possibilities, opportunities and development forces of SSE and social entrepreneurship in the Regional Unit of Kavala and Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace in Greece, for the stimulation of entrepreneurship and employment as well as for the development of the local economy and the support of the local community, the interviewees agreed that Kavala's LLSC, in operation for about ten (10) years, has implemented successful programmes and initiatives, with a substantial impact on professional and psychological support for the end-beneficiaries. Also, Kavala's LLSC implements national or local development programmes to assist public bodies' human resources as well as various social, health, nutrition, educational, environmental, administrative, financial, and other services. Moreover, the major objectives of the Kavala's LLSC have been reached and attained since the implementation of projects and programmes by its cooperation with local authorities and public entities at local and regional level. These are: a) the contribution to the recruitment and labour (re-) integration of people with mental disorders and people of the general community; b) the psychiatry reform goals; c) promoting of social economy and social entrepreneurship; d) resolving vulnerable social groups of people's unemployment and providing work opportunities, and e) combating discrimination and promoting equality. Thus, as a significant result, employees of Kavala's LLSC have acquired knowledge and skills necessary for social and labour inclusion through their daily work and, in particular, through specialised professional training. To conclude, the success of Kavala's LLSC relationship with local authorities and public entities at local and regional level, based on operational and sustainability criteria, is a completely novel approach in terms of: i. promoting the notion of SSE and social entrepreneurship; ii. addressing unemployment among the most vulnerable people, and iii. supporting and strengthening local healthcare services while effectively eliminating discrimination and promoting equality.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

On the one hand, a social enterprise's corporate features are associated with the manufacture of commodities and the provision of services, while also acknowledging the fact that social enterprises are financially autonomous units, something which, in turn, implies a higher level of economic and operational risk. The social aspect of a social enterprise, on the other hand, is linked to its ultimate mission/vision for the sake of the "common good" and in favor of the members of the society. In this sense, it also represents an "activity of the citizens, for the citizens", with decisions being taken by each participant member through democratic processes independent of capital share and subject to limitations on profit distribution (which is often inexistence whatsoever).

As soon as the two (2) focus groups interviews were completed, the researcher studied, examined, decoded, analysed and summarised the results and findings of the qualitative research that led to the following conclusions.

Firstly, Kavala's LLSC has managed to fulfill its main aim of achieving its social, economic, occupational, employment, therapeutic and psychological objectives for its members as well as in developmental terms, at local and regional level; of course, this was succeeded through certain projects and actions. Secondly, in the current period, despite the financial crisis and the current health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kavala's LLSC is constantly developing new projects and innovative programmes in collaboration with local authorities and public entities, thus offering occupational opportunities to its members (from which unemployed people within the community can also benefit); at the same time, it also provides support to local institutions and organisations, services and agencies through its activities and the implementation of projects. Thirdly, the experience gained through Kavala's LLSC example for the local and regional development of the SSE and social entrepreneurship is of high standards and overall value, as shown by the amount of implemented programmes and its widespread recognition among the community. Fourthly, Kavala's LLSC has received revenues via its participation in tender processes and has executed funded projects with positive social, economic, therapeutic and local impact and outcome. Fifthly, Kavala's LLSC has promoted professional and reintegration possibilities for its unemployed members, especially for people belonging to the first category (i.e., people with psychosocial problems, users of mental healthcare services, people with disabilities, vulnerable and underprivileged social groups).

Furthermore, a sixth point to mention, is that the Kavala's LLSC has been offering its seamless assistance to the actions and services of local authorities and other public entities, both locally and regionally, over the recent years. Indeed, the accomplishments and viability of its inventory do continue to grow and expand. To list another (7th) point, the requirements and practices of Kavala's LLSC joint projects with local and regional stakeholders basically refer to cases of contracts assigned upon exclusivity (under Article 20 of Law 4412/2016). Additionally (8th), Kavala's LLSC has been demonstrating an active role in the implementation of European, national and local employment support programmes within the SSE and social entrepreneurship throughout the previous five (5) years. Indeed, the demand for such projects, as the ones mentioned above, is constantly increasing with the purpose to seek employment for members of the 1st category of Kavala's LLSC beneficiaries, as well as, with the aim to support local stakeholders and their services for the needs of the local community. Ninthly, Kavala's LLSC, occasionally and over the past few years, has faced many problems and difficulties, mainly financial, fiscal and institutional (also bureaucratic ones, owed to failure to raise awareness of its dynamics and potential among public stakeholders). However, the Kavala's LLSC has managed to gradually overcome such obstacles, presently continuing its work on the implementation of sustainable projects, in a smooth way.

Tently, the implemented projects are part of the real economy, they are not subsidies, and the cost for their implementation is less than it would be the respective cost for a company of the private sector, for providing the same services. On the whole (11th remark), research evidence proves the stimulation of entrepreneurship, the boost of employment as well as the reinforcement of local development, by the Kavala's LLSC, through SSE and social entrepreneurship actions, in the Kavala Regional Unit and the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, in Greece.

Based on the study and research carried out, Kavala's LLSC main objectives have been met, especially in relation to: (a) the recruitment and employment reintegration of socially susceptible persons; (b) the goals for change on psychiatric level; (c) the targets of SSE and social entrepreneurship, and (d) the aid to vulnerable social groups of people, by effectively eliminating discrimination and supporting a spirit of equality. What is more, as the participants' own feedback has shown, the achievements of the synergy between the Kavala's LLSC and public stakeholders at local and regional level, with the application of operational and sustainability criteria, is a pioneering approach which fosters the notion of social entrepreneurship; this is particularly evidenced by the mitigation of unemployment among vulnerable social groups.

The case of the Kavala's LLSC should definitely be acknowledged and underlined as an example of 'good practice'. Following this example, the team of local stakeholders could form synergies to seek solutions to social issues, by assisting in the work of civil welfare services at community level. Ultimately, Kavala's LLSC encapsulates the partner relationship between public and social entrepreneurship stakeholders, with beneficial outcomes, such as the handling of social isolation of vulnerable social groups, the strengthening of local economy and reinforcement of local policies, through the establishment of a solidarity ecosystem within the community.

On the whole, the idea of enabling socially vulnerable individuals to perform high-quality service tasks, on behalf of public sector entities and organisations is generally promoted, whilst it is also interpreted as a key feature of social justice and solidarity (particularly in cases where the average cost for such services does not exceed that of similar types of private contractors providing such services). Supporting employment integration interventions for the underprivileged and the deprived would shape a better understanding of these persons' abilities and open an avenue for other decision-making stakeholders of the public sector to re-orient their action plans and tactics around their socio-economic policies, by forming partnerships with LLSCs and SSE entities.

Besides the success factors that shape the culture underlying Kavala's LLSC's projects, it is also important to create a favourable setting with the cooperation of the multiple stakeholders, including the public and private entities, as well as to establish honest relationships based on equity and realism. On the one hand, securing a peaceful environment is almost imperative for specific target groups to appease the harsh feeling of competition, which they often encounter in the "classic" (private) labour market. In other words, whenever the appropriate conditions apply, developmental activities on behalf of the SCEs for Integration for vulnerable social groups of the community can occur. Thus, a SCE for Integration or/and a LLSC could handle social issues and create opportunities at local level and within the social policy framework, addressing a variety of real issues in an efficient and cost-effective way. Finally, for the implementation of social policies through SSE, social entrepreneurship and synergies among the multiple stakeholders, at local level, the opportunities must be at least equal to other possibilities and also low in cost, so as not to be confronted with impediments.

The formulation of policies of the SCEs for Integration and the LLSCs is not merely a policy for the "weak", according to the welfare philosophy, but rather an essential intervention for the development and support of local economies. Today, more than ever, social problems have exac-

erbated, particularly during the recent economic crisis in Greece and the current global health crisis, too, afflicting more the weakest members of society. The existence of a legal framework for the SSE that would allow tax and insurance incentives and open prospects such as the ones documented in this article is an urgent request. Still, much more needs to be done beyond that. It is necessary to design a holistic approach, with the cooperation of every interested party, which shall take advantage of all possibilities-opportunities and invest in strategic action plans with a significant social and economic impact on local development.

Therefore, the main proposals of our qualitative research and its results to the representatives and executives of local government bodies, public entities and the state in general, in collaboration with LLCs, SCEs for Integration and SSE entities generally, are the following: 1. building trust and ever-lasting collaborative relations among the SSE-public-private-sector with the aim to tackle poverty, unemployment and social exclusion; 2. creating more and better jobs and new opportunities for vulnerable social groups; 3. improving the capacity of local stakeholders in implementing joint SSE programmes and thus enhancing the quality of social services; 4. enhancing citizenship for the future generations and local networks of cooperation; 5. improving representation and active participation of the vulnerable groups in developing, shaping and implementing social and economic policies and initiatives at local level; 6. gaining social and economic integration through employment for the promotion of solidarity; 7. applying best practices-initiatives to address societal and economic challenges through the implementation of a local joint SSE initiatives; 8. having active participation and mobilisation of citizens - users in designing and providing social services; 9. establishing productive collaboration by making good use of limited number of resources to improve the quality of life within the community; 10. introducing/launching SSE initiative and innovation programmes to local community centers, that function under the "umbrella" of the public sector, also with the support of SSE agents and/or volunteers in order to maximize their multiplier effects; 11. good use and consolidation of synergies (best practices) within the community which could be expanded further through training and familiarisation; 12. interaction and cooperation among public servants, SSE agents and mainstream economic operators for the delivery of social services, with the ultimate purpose to improve each stakeholder's capabilities as well as the quality in the provision of social services.

Last but not least, the desideratum should always remain to promote social entrepreneurship, ready to address existing and new social issues for vulnerable social groups and to facilitate the development of employment opportunities, with the ultimate purpose to eliminate discrimination and to foster solidarity and equality among the local community and society at large. Social enterprises could combine interventions for a variety of subjects, e.g. the production of goods, providing the desired social services, boosting the creation of job opportunities, supporting the (social) entrepreneurs, enhancing the local economy, promotion of local production, cultivation of arts and cultural thinking, and consideration for people belonging to vulnerable and susceptible social groups such as people with disabilities, people with psychosocial difficulties and mental illnesses, (ex-)drug users, (ex-)convicts, immigrants, long-term unemployed, young and/or elderly unemployed, unemployed women, low-skilled unemployed, single parent families, NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training young persons), etc. Therefore, as proven in the examined case study, the social enterprises could be change makers, as they possess typical characteristics of enterprises, while they also have a social mission and create social value, through their model of operation and the implementation of projects that contribute to the local development.

Note

1. The specific article based on the postdoctoral research titled "Social Entrepreneurship and Local Development. The example of the Limited Liability Social Cooperative of Kavala", which was prepared by Dr. Antonios Kostas under the supervision of Professor Dr. Alexis Ioannidis for the Department of Social Policy of the Democritus University of Thrace.

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