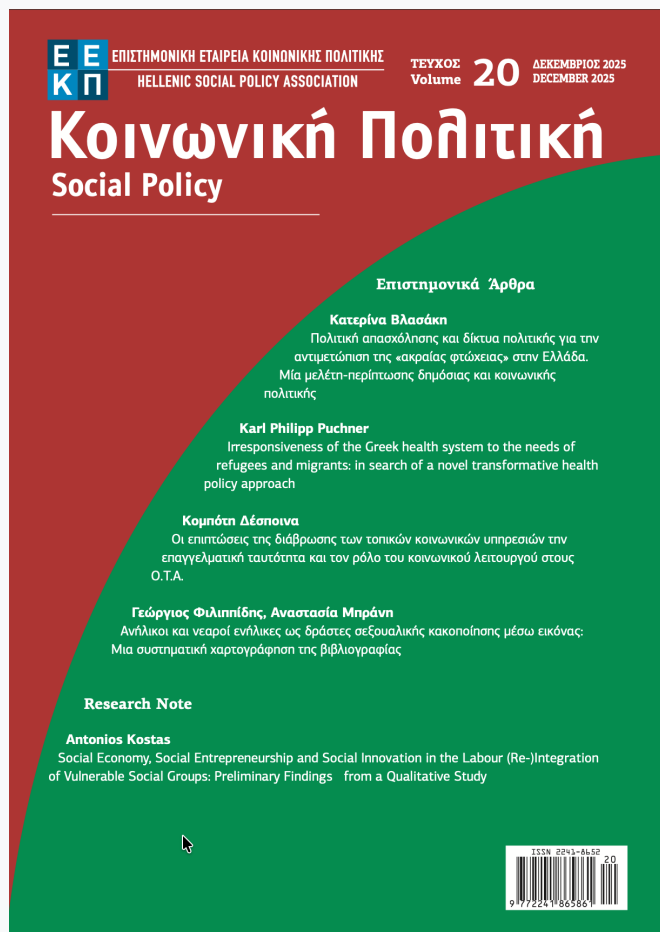


Κοινωνική Πολιτική

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Social Economy, Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation in the Labour (Re-)Integration of Vulnerable Social Groups: Preliminary Findings from a Qualitative Study

Antonios Kostas

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Κοινωνική Πολιτική

Social Policy

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Research Note

Antonios Kostas

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Antonios Kostas

Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Accounting and Finance, Democritus University of Thrace.

Abstract

This research note presents, in a highly condensed format, the methodology and preliminary findings of the research activity “Social Economy, Social Entrepreneurship, and Social Innovation in the labour (re-)integration of vulnerable social groups”. Centered on the Limited Liability Social Cooperative (LLSC) of Kavala, the study employs qualitative focus groups to investigate how a Work Integration Social Enterprise, specifically a Social Integration Cooperative Enterprise for Vulnerable Groups, operationalises labour inclusion in conjunction with therapeutic support. Preliminary findings identify a resilient hybrid model that effectively synthesises therapeutic objectives with labour-market activity, bridging systemic welfare gaps, driving sustainable labour integration, and fostering clinical and therapeutic success. The analysis contributes toward fostering a strategic “Social Policy Roadmap” for sustainable labour (re-)integration and socio-economic autonomy, grounded in the principles of Social Economy, Social Entrepreneurship, and Social Innovation.

Keywords: Social economy, social entrepreneurship, social innovation, labour (re-)integration, qualitative study.

Introduction

The subject and purpose of this research activity is to examine the role and contribution of the Social Economy, Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation in the labour inclusion of vulnerable social groups (Amin *et al.*, 2002; Borzaga & Defourny, 2001; Cajasanta, 2014; Defourny & Nyssens, 2008; European Commission, 2013; Galera & Borzaga, 2009; Mair & Martí, 2006; Monzón & Chaves, 2008; Moolaert & Ailenei, 2005; Murray *et al.*, 2010; Nyssens, 2006; Phillips *et al.*, 2015). To achieve the objectives of this research, which commenced in 2025, a

qualitative research approach was selected, employing focus groups as the primary data collection method to capture multidimensional perspectives (Frey & Fontana, 1991; Kitzinger, 1994; Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1996; Wilkinson, 1998). In total, two (2) focus groups were conducted, each comprising seven (7) participants affiliated with the Limited Liability Social Cooperative of Kavala - Kavala's LLSC/KoiSPE.

Methodology

To ensure the reliability of the findings, purposive sampling was employed to draw participants from two distinct member categories of Kavala's LLSC (Kostas, 2022): (a) mental health services users, persons with disabilities, and individuals belonging to other vulnerable social groups, and (b) mental health professionals (psychiatrists, social workers and psychologists) and other social scientists. The results of this study provide a significant insight into how LLSCs in Greece operationalise labour (re-)integration through a hybrid approach of social entrepreneurship and social innovation.

The qualitative research was structured around carefully selected thematic axes in order to investigate participants' operational experiences, perceived opportunities, challenges, and systemic barriers, alongside examples of good practices and initiatives implemented by Kavala's LLSC within the Social Economy sector. Particular emphasis was placed on assessing how these practices contribute to the attainment of socio-economic autonomy and employment-related objectives for individuals from vulnerable groups, specifically for mental health service users. The study sought to analyse the nature of collaboration and institutional support provided by local and regional public authorities in relation to the activities and services of Kavala's LLSC for the reintegration of vulnerable social groups in labour. Due to the nature of this research note, the following preliminary findings are presented in a highly condensed format.

Preliminary Findings

The Limited Liability Social Cooperative (LLSC/KoiSPE) of Kavala, established under Greek Law 2716/1999, constitutes the first Work Integration Social Enterprise (WISE) established within the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, and according to Greek Law 4430/2016, is institutionally recognised as a Social Integration Cooperative Enterprise for Vulnerable Groups. Kavala's LLSC was founded in 2011 and its headquarters are located in the city of Kavala, Greece. Kavala's LLSC comprises approximately 140 members, including 130 natural persons and 10 legal entities, which are distinguished into three (3) categories: (A) mental health services users and other vulnerable social groups; (B) mental health professionals and social scientists; and (C) public and private legal entities.

Kavala's LLSC operates across the Regional Unit of Kavala through the implementation of a wide range of successful projects aimed at promoting work inclusion and psychosocial rehabilitation. These activities are complemented by the provision of targeted support services, primarily

through the strategic deployment of human resources to public entities. Over the past twelve (12) years, the LLSC has demonstrated significant operational capacity, implementing more than 50 projects and programmes, which have resulted in the creation of over 450 employment contracts. Notably, more than 180 of these job positions have been allocated to mental health services users and other vulnerable social groups, with a strategic focus on their vocational integration, therapeutic support, and the achievement of financial self-sufficiency.

Furthermore, Kavala's LLSC has successfully participated in public and dedicated procurement tenders issued by central government and regional authorities. Through these mechanisms, the LLSC has implemented projects generating measurable social and economic impact, fulfilling key professional and therapeutic objectives for its members, while simultaneously achieving entrepreneurial and developmental goals at the local level. By utilising its accumulated expertise and targeted initiatives, Kavala's LLSC provides continuous support to public institutions and health-related bodies. In parallel, the organisation has demonstrated an active role in the implementation of European, national and local programmes for the strengthening of employment within the framework of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE).

Conclusion

The case of Kavala's LLSC exemplifies a transformative intervention promoting social cohesion and social justice at multiple governance levels. It offers empirically grounded practices and policy-relevant proposals for strengthening the interface between the Social Economy and public institutions. These synergies generate positive outcomes in: (a) addressing unemployment and social exclusion of disadvantaged social groups; (b) delivering therapeutic interventions for psychosocial rehabilitation; and (c) advancing a community-based ecosystem grounded in the principles of social solidarity. In conclusion, the added value of the findings of this study lies in its capacity to document and systematise social entrepreneurial interventions that support labour (re-)integration and psychosocial support. By enhancing the understanding of participants' capacities, the research contributes to the formulation of a strategic "Social Policy Roadmap" focused on advancing integrated actions within the domains of Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation for the benefit of vulnerable social groups.

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