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Social Economy, Entrepreneurship and local development: the case of 'Arcturos' environmental centre

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Dr. Georgia Charitoudi¹ & Margarita Triikka²

“Social Economy, Entrepreneurship and local development: the case of “Arcturos” environmental centre”

The concept and the activities of social economy are not particularly developed in Greece. Several institutions have made some attempts to change that during the past few years but they failed due to the lack of the proper and flexible institutional frame that would administratively and financially support the initiatives.

The domain of Social Economy in Greece has not been acknowledged as such, even though there is a considerable number of institutions that operate under its roof. Generally, the Greek society tends to attach to such initiatives a notion of “charity”.

There are three main advantages of the social enterprises, according to the literature and the European experience:

- Support of local development
- New products and services offered
- Employment for people that face difficulties

Research on the third system has proved that its approach present a number of advantages compared to the public or private profit-oriented domain. It also has a positive impact on employment and on the important aspects of social and economic life. This is true especially on a local level as it improves the quality of life, it develops new economic factors, it enhances the social bonds and the social unity and it boosts creativeness and innovativeness.

In order to examine the role and contribution of social enterprises in the local development, an empirical research was realized in November 2012. The field of the research was the Municipality of Amyntaio, where the social enterprise “ARCTUROS Environmental Centre” is situated. ARCTUROS is a Greek, non-governmental organization seeking to enhance biodiversity and sustainability in the Greek rural areas. ARCTUROS implements cross-border projects in order to protect mountainous ecosystems, with an emphasis on bears and large mammals, aiming at the integrated management of protected mountainous regions and the provision of expertise for natural environment interventions. ARCTUROS

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Environmental Center resolved the problem of captive bears and wolves in Greece and raised public awareness about large mammals. ARCTUROS is a non-profit civil partnership that lobbies to protect nature by developing actions of public awareness, environmental education and volunteerism.

The research was realized through structured questionnaires the examination of which, leads us to interesting conclusions about the impact of a social enterprise on remote and disadvantaged areas.

Keywords: Social Economy, Social entrepreneurship, local development, “Arcturos”, Greece

1. The social economy in Greece

The social economy sector in Greece has not been recognized as a distinct sector, although it operates a significant number of actors who are part of the third sector, such as women's associations, cooperative banks, voluntary organizations, nonprofit organizations, other legal forms of enterprises with social purposes.

More generally, the Greek society as a whole continues to integrate this type of initiatives in a "charity" approach. This is also confirmed by the fact that the sector does not appear in any of the official statistics as a separate category.

While in Greece there is a significant gap in social services and offer broader services relating to quality of life and therefore a great need for services that could be offered by the social economy sector, this sector has not developed as the European Union, notably due to lack of information and indifference of Greek society, lack of institutional and financial framework, involving non-recognition, non-certified and non-funding of the social economy of the state, which simply observes and served by voluntary action, because it is produced uninsured and unpaid work. (E.TH.D. 2005).

Exception was the 4th Community Support Framework, which, according to the guidelines of the European Commission and after pushing competent social economy, including actions to support social enterprises. Despite these shortcomings and the sector in Greece the last twenty years have seen intense activity in the field of social economy.

Generally and in Greece, as in all of Europe and the international community, there is a pleasant bloom activities of the Third sector, social purposes (offer social, environmental, cultural and productive work), which are job creation and local development contribution (guide product and service launches Women Cooperatives and Social Enterprises, 2005).

2. The contribution of the Third Sector in employment and social cohesion

The third segment is a highly promising area for dealing with problems arising from recent changes in social and economic systems. International experience has shown that social economy organizations are able to provide "intelligent" solutions to social and other needs on a local or national level, which are not covered by the state or the market. In all countries in which it operates as the social economy primarily serves individuals seeking practical and immediate answers to the difficulties of everyday life, with which they are confronted (employment, food, health, environment, economic uncertainty, shelter etc.).

Moreover, in a period of crisis in the labor market, the third sector is a potential source of employment, particularly for people who are or at risk of social exclusion and labor (E.T.H.D. 2005).

Since create the appropriate conditions for the development of the third sector, the positive results and impact of third sector jobs, growth and social cohesion are important. According to the literature and the European experience, identifies three key objectives and thus results for the third sector initiatives.

- Integration into the labor market of people who face difficulties
- Placing on the market of new goods or services
- Promoting local development (EE 2003)

Most organizations of the third sector address simultaneously all three goals, and if their primary goal is the integration of vulnerable groups in the labor market. This emphasis on vocational integration be the trend that characterizes the development of the social economy in the last three decades, the effort that the social economy to tackle high unemployment. Effort supported by the Community institutions and the European Employment Strategy.

The relevant studies have been done for the third system, showing that the approach of the third system presents a number of advantages compared to public or private for-profit sector and "produce" a series of positive results both in terms of employment, and other important aspects of social and economic life primarily at local level, such as the development of new

economic sectors, local development, improve the quality of life of local people, strengthening social ties and social cohesion, stimulate creativity and innovation.

Specifically, the third system has some significant advantages compared to the public sector and for-profit businesses and creates the following positive effects:

- Provides jobs to vulnerable groups and disadvantaged persons who face great difficulty in accessing employment.
- Contributes to local development, strengthening local institutions, to use various resources to finding innovative tools and practices to achieve its objectives.
- Local needs that are not covered by the public or the private profit sector, providing services that are often regarded as non-profit and does not attract the interest of the private sector.
- Mobilize and utilize voluntary work and this reduces the cost of activities for the community.
- They are close to the users, are not regulated by bureaucratic and are not required to maximize profits and thus develop relationships of trust with the local population.
- contribute significantly to improving the quality of life of the local population
- Contributes to promote innovation, by finding innovative tools and practices to achieve its objectives. (Ketzetsopoulou M., 2005, ECOTEC, 2001, E. E. 2003, Cambell M., 1999, Borgaza C., Olabe A. & Greffe X., 1999).

3. The case study: The Environmental Center “ARCTUROS”

ARCTUROS are non-governmental, non-profit environmental organization founded in 1992 to protect the wildlife and natural environment, research field, scientific study, public awareness, environmental education and volunteerism for the protection of wildlife, enhance biodiversity and sustainability in Greece and abroad. ARCTUROS exerts political pressure to protect nature by developing public awareness, environmental education and volunteerism

The operation of the Environmental Centre ARCTUROS the prefecture of Florina has solved the problem of captive bears and wolves, and to inform the public of large mammals. Reproduction of Greek collie and the free disposal of farmers in mountain areas from harmonious coexistence between man and wildlife.

In 20 years of operation (1992-2012) ARKTOYROS:

- ending the phenomenon of the dancing bear
- contributed to an operating ban circuses with animals in Greece
- Operational models wildlife sanctuaries for former captive bears and wolves in the Nymphaeum and Agrapidia Florina
- operates centers of public information for the bear and the wolf
- reproduce and distribute to farmers free Greek herding dogs in an effort to deal with traditional and effective way losses can cause the bears and wolves in humans
- intervene in the development of major roads and the construction of large projects for environmental protection
- has established and maintains the National Register Bear with samples germplasm Bear (hairs) collected by special trichopagides mounted on power poles.
- participates in Mediterranean program to address the use of illegal poisoned baits (poison)
- resumes and animates mountain trails
- upgrades degraded forest areas by planting trees (so far 150,000)
- Emergency Response Team works to protect wildlife
- cooperate with players from around the world on environmental issues in our country
- Communicate the national and international press environmental news and issues
- is the most recognizable and reliable Greek environmental organization (Awareness and Social Behavior Index, 2012, Meda).

The actions of Arcturos include: Reintegration in nature, Environmental Education, circuses without animals, Scientific Research, Breeding Greek collie, forest protection, captive animals, Observatory accidents, emergency teams, support innovation, veterinary center, Interventions in construction & Life against poison.

Human resources, today, consists of 18 employees with defined skills and competencies.

Volunteering: Actions ARCTUROS implemented with the help and offer volunteers working for the protection and management of wildlife and the natural environment and contribute to the common effort. Every year dozens of volunteers contribute significantly to protect the environment and wildlife. ARCTUROS also coordinates volunteer exchange programs in cooperation with the General Secretariat for Youth and the European Voluntary Service EVS.

Relationships with agencies nationwide: Greek Society of Nature Protection Society Prespa EKBY (exchange of information), Greek Wildlife Hospital (Nursing species of wildlife, carnivorous wolf-bear) & Forestry service (Bear-wolf)

4. The empirical research

4.1. The research methodology

In order to study the role and contribution of social enterprises in local development, in November 2012, held an empirical investigation. As a field of research was selected in the Municipality Amynteon where based social enterprise "Environmental Center ARKTOYROS."

For the purpose of research prepared a questionnaire addressed to institutional representatives of the area (Presidents of local municipal councils, representatives of professional bodies and associations), a total of 15 questionnaires. The questionnaire is structured in three sections. The first module in our local networking and collaboration, with four questions, the second chapter three questions record the assessments of the benefits arising from the operation of ARCTUROS the local community and local economy. The third section, with two questions reflects the business climate and inhibitors for further development of cooperation.

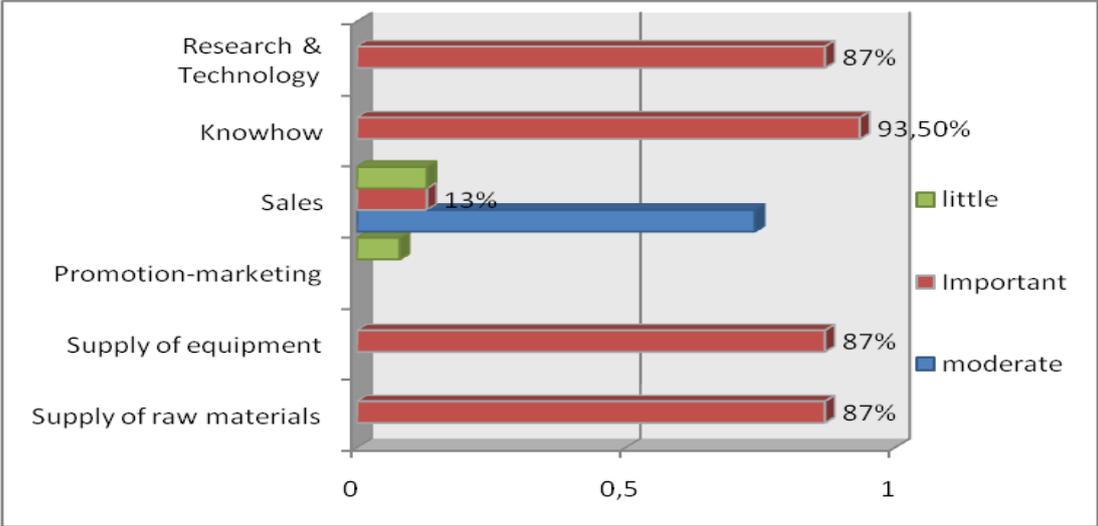
4.2. The research findings

Arcturus has a positive and supportive attitude to networking and developing partnerships. Participate in local initiatives have been developed and active role. Specifically:

- Develop cooperation in all degrees of local government on the level of local community (Nymfeou eagle Agripidis) to the regional level and the Decentralized Administration
- Develop cooperation with departments and public bodies such as forest and veterinary services
- He is a member companies and networks with other agencies and non-governmental organizations in the Region.

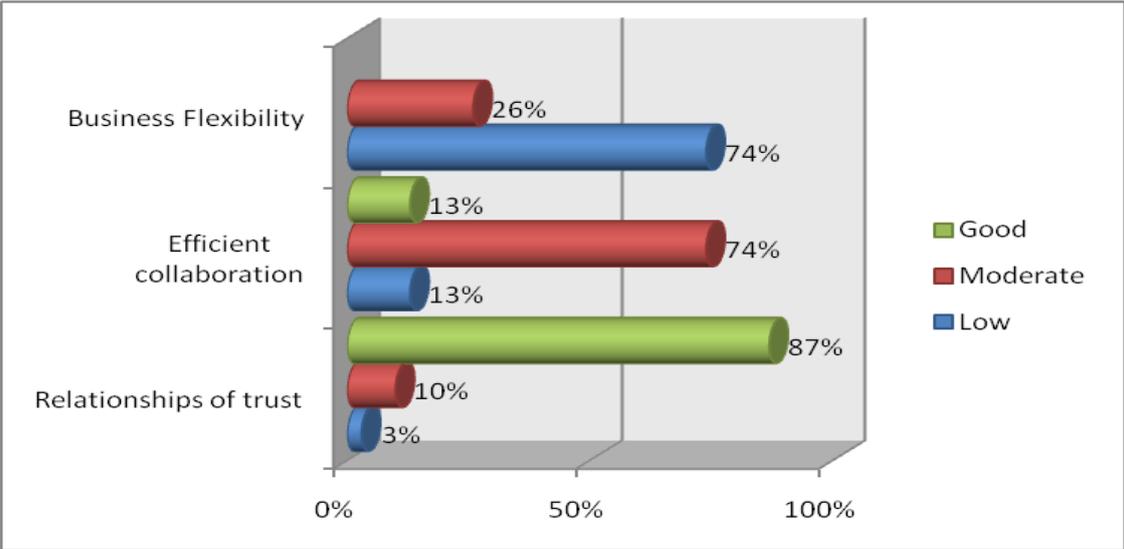
Fields and intensity of cooperation has developed "ARCTUROS" with local businesses related to: Significant and lasting is cooperation in the field of sourcing, supplying equipment, know-how and research and development. Fair is cooperation in the field of marketing and mood-selling products. Fields and intensity of cooperation is reflected in the following chart.

Graph 1: Sectors & intensity of cooperation with local businesses

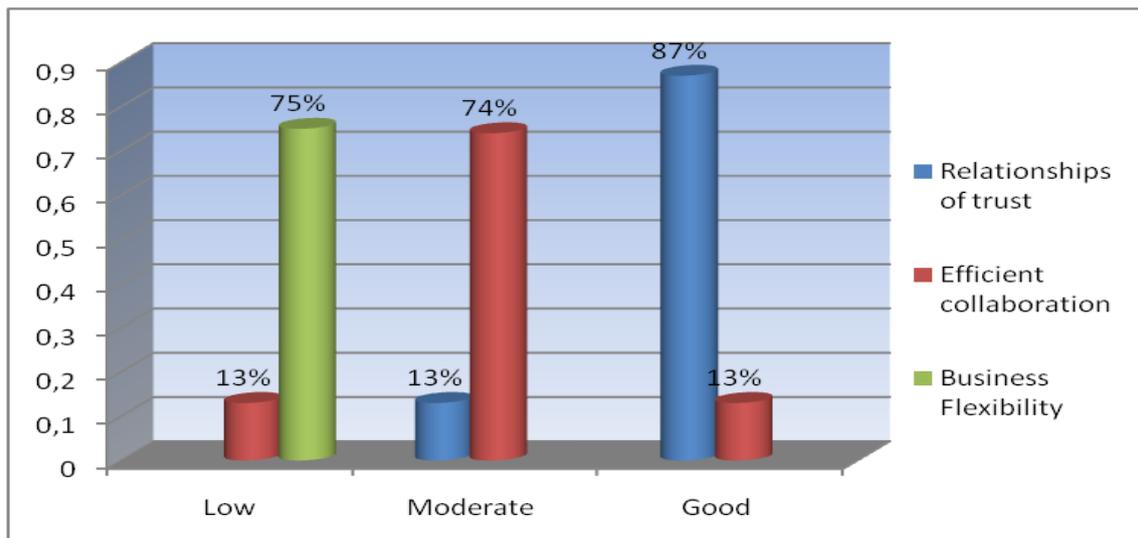


The level of relationship that has developed ARKTOYROS with local businesses related to trust (good level of 87%) to the effective cooperation (average 74%) and low (74%) in business agility. Per parameter estimates are shown in the graph below

Graph 2: Level relationships with local businesses



Graph 3: Level relations with local institutions



The impact and benefits created for the local economy since the establishment, development and operation of the Environmental Centre ARCTUROS in the borough Amynteon appreciated by the vast majority of participants (100%) in the survey as very important in the fields:

- ✓ Develop and diversify the local economy by making better use of resources
- ✓ Develop a single and unique positive "destination image" and reputation
- ✓ Increase the number of visitors and financial resources
- ✓ Environmental Protection
- ✓ Promotion of natural resources
- ✓ New jobs
- ✓ Pulling new and repeat tourists
- ✓ Extend the season
- ✓ Establishment of new business

The benefits generated for society of the region with the establishment, development and operation of the Environmental Centre ARCTUROS in the borough Amynteon appreciated by the vast majority of participants (100%) in the survey as very important areas:

- ✓ Development of communication, expanding the relationship and the horizon of knowledge, changing attitudes
- ✓ attraction of new investment, boost entrepreneurship and employment
- ✓ Development of new products and services (restaurants, shops, etc.)
- ✓ Strengthen the pride of the local communities and creating

The contribution ARCTUROS the development of alternative forms of tourism in the region varies according to the estimates of the participants at the rate of 90 to 100%, been a low level of competition between firms in the region and good relations of cooperation.

Finally, a deterrent to further develop relationships with local businesses ARCTUROS is introversion business.

5. Summary-Conclusion

The third segment is a highly promising area for dealing with problems arising from recent changes in social and economic systems. International experience has shown that social economy organizations are able to provide "intelligent" solutions to social and other needs on a local or national level, which are not covered by the state or the market.

The development of the third sector presents a number of advantages compared to public or private for-profit sector and "produce" a series of positive results both in terms of employment, and other important aspects of social and economic life mainly at local level such as the development of new economic sectors, local development, improve the quality of life of local people, strengthening social ties and social cohesion, fostering creativity and innovation.

The activities of the third sector is not very developed in Greece and any efforts made in recent years by various bodies up against each other, the lack of an adequate and flexible framework for institutional, administrative and financial support for initiatives taken f being sector.

The social economy sector in Greece has not been recognized as a distinct sector, although it operates a significant number of candidates. More generally, the Greek society as a whole continues to integrate this type of initiatives in a "charity" approach.

Greece is predominantly mountainous country. The mountainous regions of Greece, except in a few cases, were for years objective, a completely neglected area of interest, the relevant planning, financing and activities and a high incidence of desolation.

Result of policy changes and development programs are the mountainous regions of Greece to show, especially in recent years, significant developments. These developments are different for each region because of different overall growth potential, but also political choices affect sectors of the economy and social structure, but affected by major structural changes in agriculture, animal husbandry, tourism. Also affected by initiatives and the establishment and successful operation of these third sector actors of the economy, such as non-governmental organization ARCTUROS one of the most mountainous and declining regions.

The operation of the Environmental Centre ARCTUROS the prefecture of Florina has solved the problem of captive bears and wolves, and to inform the public of large mammals, Reproduction of Greek collie and the free disposal of farmers in mountain areas from harmonious coexistence between man and wildlife.

In 20 years of operation (1992-2012) ARKTOYROS shows excellent results in many areas relating to the protection of nature, wildlife, research, innovation and development of educational material and managed to be the most recognizable and reliable Greek environmental organization.

Formed the nucleus for the development of alternative forms of the region and the important & rapid increase in traffic in the area, Created jobs, attracted sponsors, foundations strong relationships with the media nationwide, created partnerships with specialized and developed volunteering.

Local has a significant presence with a positive attitude to networking and developing partnerships between institutions and participate in local initiatives have been developed with the active role, Associated with local agencies to trust and fruitful cooperation.

They have developed a partnership with local businesses in its supply of raw materials, supply of equipment, know-how and research and development. Also, it has developed with local businesses trust and fruitful cooperation.

The impact and benefits created for the local economy since the establishment, development and operation of the Environmental Centre ARCTUROS in the borough Amynteon assessed as very important areas: Development and diversification of the local economy by making

better use of resources, develop a uniform and unique positive "destination image" and reputation, increase the number of visitors and financial resources, protection of the environment, promotion of natural resources, new jobs, attraction of new and repeat tourists, enlargement of the season and creation new businesses

The benefits generated for society in the region are estimated as very important areas: Development of communication, expanding the relationship and the horizon of knowledge, changing attitudes, attraction of new investment, boost entrepreneurship and employment, develop new products and services (restaurants, shops, etc.) & Strengthening of pride for local communities

Deterrent to further develop relationships with local businesses ARCTUROS is introversion business Ms. reduced business agility.

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