

## **Social enterprise and community resilience: examining a Greek response to turbulent times**

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### **Abstract**

Using community resilience and institutional entrepreneurship as conceptual lens, the paper explores whether support for social enterprises in non-metropolitan Greece has led to resilient social systems. Whilst drawing on narratives of enabling a bottom-up response to market failure, rather than radical or reformist adaptation, social enterprise may have produced a reluctant and state reliant response which may weaken the resilience of communities to survive continued austerity. The research selected and interviewed 30 social enterprises operating within non-metropolitan Greece during 2016. It contributes to knowledge through a novel framing, which clarifies that social enterprise in Greece remains a top-down governance process which fails to deliver transformative forms of community resilience.

**Keywords:** Social Enterprise, Crisis, Greece, Resilience, institutional entrepreneurship

## 1. Introduction

The paper explores social entrepreneurship and the key theme of community resilience within Greek non-metropolitan areas. Perceived rural resilience is a key issue in social science (Robinson and Carson, 2016; Scott, 2013) and following previous research into various transformations as a result of the Greek crisis (Gkartzios *et al.*, 2017), this paper addresses an important area. Through our conceptualisation of community resilience and institutional entrepreneurship as lens to explore social enterprise, we highlight critical governance issues that evidence a lacuna in post-crisis non-metropolitan services.

In the face of perceived state failure (Blackburn and Ram, 2006) and in the context of a neo-liberal grand-narrative (Dey and Steyaert, 2010), social enterprise has increasingly been valorised as a way to leverage the efficiency of the market mechanism (Zahra *et al.*, 2009) to meet the challenge of globalisation (Teasdale, 2011). Business is regarded as holding the power to create fundamental social change (Dey and Steyaert, 2010) and modernise public services in the process (Brady, 2003). This is a response to a contemporary fixation with business ideology, where social programmes and initiatives must harness the power of the market to appear as legitimate (Dart, 2004).

However, social enterprise has also been depicted as an emerging field that has yet to 'achieve paradigmatic consensus' (Nicholls, 2010: 611) and whose legitimacy is defined and controlled by various and powerful actors. Such legitimacy is contested within the neo-liberal philosophy, where a heroic entrepreneurial discourse competes with one of communitarian values and social justice (Nicholls, 2010). Whilst social enterprise is increasingly regarded as an appropriate organisational form to support areas that experience state-failure (Teasdale, 2011), the dominant and driving discourse is that of the

transformative and radical power of the market to reform, whilst the operational day-to-day discourse is one focused on social values.

In the context of Greece, the state has scaled back public service provision as part of an austerity programme. Here economic crisis has dictated the creation of social enterprises as a 'quick fix' response, similar to what we later discuss as bounce-back resilience, and social enterprise has been legislated for and supported since 2010. Within a problematic policy context, businesses with social goals and an entrepreneurial spirit (Papaoikonomou et al., 2009) have been presented as a radical alternative (Zografos, 2007) to state or charitable provision, being a vehicle for driving reform, where catalytic social entrepreneurs may introduce 'dynamic private sector values to disrupt social sector systems' (Chalmers and Balan-Vnuk, 2012: 787). However, the theory of institutional entrepreneurship suggests that whilst entrepreneurs may fulfil their proposed role and generate social value, if the conditions are wrong, they may destroy social value (Baumol, 1990).

This paper examines the emergence of social enterprise in the Greek provinces as a response to the sovereign debt crisis. In particular, we explore their impact on the social economy and potential for development with reference to reformist approaches to resilience. To frame the research, the paper combines two conceptual approaches: community resilience and institutional entrepreneurship. Both draw on the concepts of homeostasis and systems of equilibrium to describe dynamic systems in transition and have developed from rational choice origins (see for instance Holling, 1996 *cf.* von Mises, 1949) to incorporate broader perspectives that are accommodating of socially complex phenomena.

Given a top-down attempt by the Greek government to impose a process that seeks to deliver a bottom-up response, we argue that neither approach is sufficient. A community

resilience approach foregrounds the importance of institutions and structures, but neglects the importance of individual agency, whilst an entrepreneurship approach over-emphasizes the agency of the individual. Given the commonalities inherent in a systems of equilibrium foundation, this paper draws on concepts from both areas to critique the efficacy of a social enterprise solution to the social welfare element of the Greek crisis.

## **2. Framing resilience and social enterprise in provincial Greece**

### **2.1 Resilience in the Greek crisis context**

Original conceptualisations of resilience can be found in physical and biological sciences (i.e. Holling 1973; 1996), but the concept of resilience is becoming increasingly relevant to social scientists, particularly in the current contexts of economic and environmental crises (see for example: Davoudi et al., 2013; Reggiani et al. 2002; Wrigley and Dolega, 2011) and in disciplines such as organisational and management studies (see Annarelli and, Nonino, 2015; Vogus and Sutcliffe). For Adger (2000), resilience refers to:

*“the ability of communities to withstand external shocks to their social infrastructure. This is particularly apposite for resource-dependent communities where they are subject to external stresses and shocks, both in the form of environmental variability (such as agricultural pests or the impacts of climatic extremes), as well as in the form of social, economic and political upheaval (associated with the variability of world markets for primary commodities, or with rapid changes in property laws or state interventions)”* (Adger, 2000: 361).

Debates on the usefulness of the concept of resilience in development studies are abundant (Stumpp, 2013) and are also found in rural studies (Skerratt, 2013; Scott, 2013; Scott and

Gkartzios, 2014). We recognise that there are numerous typologies of resilience. Dealing with a spatial phenomenon (i.e. social enterprise in non-metropolitan contexts), we have chosen conceptualisations of resilience within the economic geography and planning literature, although we highlight similar approaches drawing from other disciplines too. Martin (2012) for example distinguishes between three approaches to resilience, and the focus placed on returning, achieving (or imagining) a new state of equilibrium (see also Norris et al. 2008).

*The engineering approach* or equilibrium or 'bounce-back' resilience, refers to the original meaning of resilience (i.e. to spring back) conceptualised within natural sciences. In this context, this rational choice approach assumes the need of a system to return to a well-defined point of equilibrium after external shocks and crises (for example buildings hit by earthquakes). This resembles some resilience thinking in organisational and management studies, with a difference regarding how much some of these shocks can be anticipated or not (Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2007). In particular, the Austrian school of economics positions the entrepreneur as the agent that enables a return to equilibrium as they exploit a temporary imbalance (von Mises, 1949). Following Adam Smith, this is not a conscious process by the entrepreneur, rather they are an instrumental agent that, through their exploitation of an opportunity (whether for profit or other value), removes an imbalance in the system, irrespective of motive. *The ecological approach* refers to 'the ability of a system, when pushed beyond its 'elasticity threshold', to move quickly to a new stable configuration or path' (Martin, 2012: 7). It further develops the engineering approach in that there is not one assumed state of equilibrium, but, instead, multiple, allowing a system to best react in shocks by both 'bouncing backwards' and 'forward' (see also Holling, 1996). Schumpeter's

definition of entrepreneurship parallels this approach, with the entrepreneur's exploitation of innovation destroying the old to create a new equilibrium (Frank, 1998).

A reformist approach, sometimes called *evolutionary resilience*, was developed after a series of criticisms (see also Scott, 2013) regarding the 'translation' of resilience thinking from natural to social sciences. Fundamentally, it is argued that the equilibrium approach does not allow for transformation as a response to crisis, largely ignoring distributional and normative concerns in favour of aligning with or reinforcing existing power structures and relations. In conceptualising evolutionary resilience, social scientists have debated whether returning to a past and defined state of equilibrium is the preferred option for a system in crisis (Davidson, 2010), given that such equilibriums in social contexts can be socially constructed, contradicted and heavily contested, characterised for example by housing bubbles and market distortions as well as inequality and wide wealth disparities (Davoudi and Porter, 2012). This goes beyond a rational choice conceptualisation of the entrepreneur as economic agent, where they are the unwitting agent of change, and implies that a level of intentionality is required. The focus here is seeing and allowing the transformative nature of resilience, ideas that are found also in some conceptualisations within the organisation and management studies: for example Hamel and Välikangas (2003) make a point about *strategic resilience* referring to "the capacity to change before the case for change becomes desperately obvious". This implies that resilience is not about acting upon a crisis, but actually in advance. The crisis itself might not be external to the 'normal system', but maybe in fact co-produced by the system itself as in the case of the financial system, and underpinned by socio-spatial inequities, as revealed by the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans whereby vulnerability to disaster was defined based on class and race (Forester, 2009; Rumbach, 2009). To further illustrate this, Davoudi and Porter (2012) argue:

*“Why would we want to return to ‘normal’ when what has come to be normalised (over inflated housing markets, predatory lending practices, gross wealth disparities) is so absolutely dysfunctional?” (2012: 332).*

In this context, resilience both suggests and imagines a state of transformation and intentionality within the system. As an example, regarding London’s climate change and adaptation strategy, Davoudi et al. (2013) observe that the London strategy reinforces elements of resilience (associated with the persistence to endure physical and institutional infrastructure), whereby a normal state is achieved by ‘bouncing back’. Instead, the authors highlight the lack of conceptualising resilience that imagines a new equilibrium, drawing not only on institutional infrastructure responses, but also on transformations that will draw on people’s memories, stories, networks and cooperative relationships (see also Norris et al., 2008 on the role of local culture and mores in community resilience). Similarly, in business studies, resilience refers to this continuous transformation, “a capacity for continuous reconstruction” or “constant morphing” according to Hamel and Välikangas (2013). In this context we argue, that the policy context of social enterprises developed in Greece since 2010 provided a ‘quick fix’ response to deal with the damage to the social economy (‘bounce-back resilience), lacking the transformative and continuous reshaping responses envisaged in the context of an evolutionary response (‘bounce forward resilience’).

We argue that resilience thinking situated in economic geography and planning literature is important in considering entrepreneurship, as implicit in these approaches are issues of agency and governance (i.e. whose responsibility resilience is, and what actors or institutions can best perform it), suggesting a shift of power to communities and a parallel constant

transformation of community governance, which are fundamental aspects in the discussion of social enterprises due to their community functions.

## **2.2 Institutional theory and the legitimacy of reformist social enterprise**

From a contemporary economics perspective, the agent of transformation is regarded as the entrepreneur. However, beyond definitions as an economic agent, the entrepreneur has been described in terms of an ability to produce social value (Baumol, 1990). Here a productive entrepreneur has the potential to generate social value, whether at a modest level that results in minor disturbance to the social economy (within a bounce-back form of resilience) or at a more 'heroic' level – in keeping with the dominant entrepreneurial discourse – that has the potential to disrupt the equilibrium at an ecological level (within a bounce-forward form of resilience). Similarly, an unproductive entrepreneur has the potential to displace social value, whilst a destructive entrepreneur may destroy social value. Here the importance of an entrepreneur to community resilience becomes clear as their potential to support new equilibrium modes of resilience (both bounce-forward and evolutionary resilience). However, they have the potential to disrupt and destroy equilibrium too, thus undermining resilience.

Here the tension lies between the agency of the entrepreneur and the institutional structures that dictate whether such entrepreneurial action can result in net gains of social value. Whilst the response of the Greek government was to substitute withdrawn state support with bottom-up and market driven entrepreneurial action, the existing institutions may inhibit or destroy the intended social value rather than create it. Bringing together the typology of resilience with an institutional entrepreneurship perspective is useful as whilst



the focus is on the agency of the entrepreneur, it comes with the understanding that this agency is bounded by institutional structures, which in turn underpin resilience.

### **3. Crisis and Social Enterprise in Greece**

Greece continues to experience a severe crisis, with a recession that has been compared to the Great Recession of the early 1930s. Unemployment has increased dramatically (by 23.2% as of February 2017) and this is especially so for the younger population (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2017). Gross Domestic Product contracted by 25% in the first 4 years of the crisis and the macroeconomic indicators for inequality and poverty worsened significantly. In this context Greek researchers have discussed the somewhat resilient qualities of the countryside:

*Both quantitative and qualitative evidence, however, suggest that agriculture and rural areas 'resist' better than other sectors of the economy and are increasingly turned into a 'refuge and laboratory' of ideas and initiatives for a large part of urban dwellers directed towards the countryside and agriculture by either necessity or choice (Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2013: 281)*

This social construction of a more resilient countryside does not mean that the Greek countryside is not going through significant stress or that it presents an unproblematic solution to the economic crisis, with Anthopoulou et al. highlighting that:

*It should not be forgotten that the Greek countryside too is affected by the general socioeconomic crisis (e.g. contraction of educational and health services in rural areas, unemployment, poverty) as well as by the crisis of productive structures in farming. (2017: 9).*

It does, however, represent an emerging set of values and expectations associated with rural areas and, wider, non-metropolitan settlements as observed more recently in mobility studies (Remoundou et al., 2016; Gkartzios et al., 2017; Pratsinakis et al., 2017) and as evidenced by the growth of social enterprises outside metropolitan areas. Anthopoulou et al. (2017) are particularly critical of how this discourse of 'rural resilience' has been adopted and co-constructed by politicians and media in Greece in the context of the collapse of the welfare provision in crisis-hit Greece<sup>1</sup>.

In contrast with a European tradition of developing a social economy, the Greek social entrepreneurship context flourished only after legislation was introduced during 2010<sup>2</sup>. From a resilience perspective, this creates a 'resilience tautology': social enterprises were both a creation of and solution to the crisis, hence creating the institutional structures with little regard to the agents that interact, interpret and implement actions within them.

Before the economic crisis, legislation on the social economy was limited to farming co-operatives (Nasioulas, 2012). These co-operatives were regarded as a beneficial organisational response to prolonged crisis within an agricultural sector experiencing commoditisation of prices, providing economies-of-scale and power in collective negotiation (Anthopoulou et al. 2017). In common with much of Europe (Defourny and Nyssens, 2008), a co-operative framework was used as the basis for developing the social economy.

As a reaction to the austerity-led collapse of the public social service sector, in 2010, new legislation set out a framework for social entrepreneurship, with three main cross-sectoral categories: (1) integration; (2) social care; and (3) collective and productive purposes. The

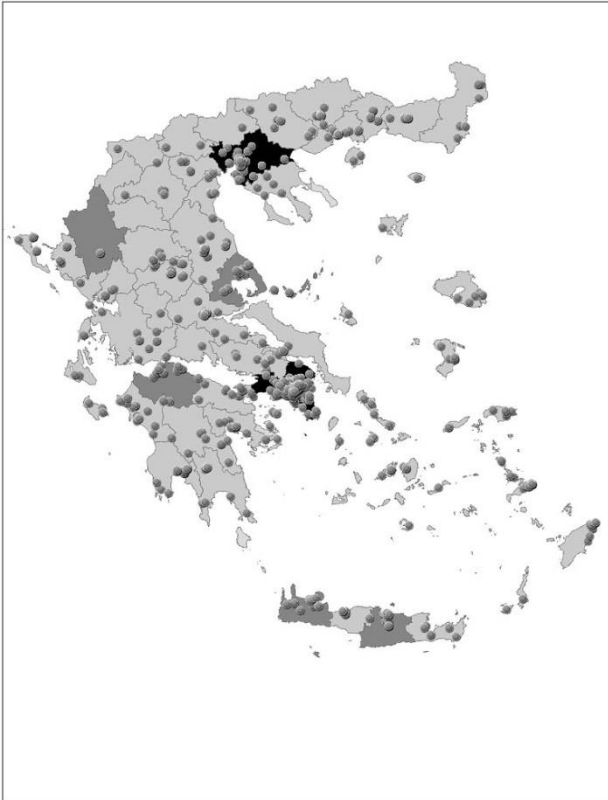
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<sup>1</sup> For further reading on the Greek institutional context during this period of crisis see Papadopoulos and Roumpakis, (2013)

<sup>2</sup> The 4019/2011 Statute on Social Economy and Social Entrepreneurship (Official Government Gazette A 216/11)

first category included social enterprises that focused on vulnerable people, where 40% of the employees should be from among vulnerable social groups. The main aim was to support people belonging to socially excluded groups. The second category included activities which aimed to support sectors of the population that need social care support such as the elderly. The third category included activities that aim to support local and regional growth, such as culture and tourism or the promotion of local products.

**Figure 1 Registered social enterprise in Greece during 2016**



(Authors, 2017)

OECD urban / rural classification adopted to identify non-metropolitan social enterprises - Light grey: Rural areas / Dark grey: Intermediate areas / Black: Urban areas

In order to operate, it is mandatory for Greek social enterprises to register with the National Registry of Social Entrepreneurship. This was created in 2011 and by 2017, it listed 1,148 social enterprises. The two main metropolitan areas of Greece, Athens and Thessaloniki, had

attracted 425 and 131 social enterprises respectively, whilst the remaining 592 social enterprises were registered in the Greek provinces.

In parallel with the introduction of the 2010 legislation, the Greek Government and European Union co-funded initiatives that aimed to support social entrepreneurship in the provinces<sup>3</sup>. Social enterprises were the main partners in these funding initiatives and they were required for implementation. Subsequently, in 2014 an initiative was launched to support social enterprise through the creation of regional networks and partnerships. Figure 1 identifies registered social enterprises across Greece in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas during 2016.

Given this context and the positioning of social enterprise as a reforming institution this paper explores whether this top-down initiative led to the realisation of resilient social systems and, if so, what form they took. It does this through examining the type of resilience that manifested, alongside an exploration of how entrepreneurial action interacted with the process. Through this exploration the paper assesses the resilience characteristics of Greek social enterprises, and its potential development from a 'quick fix' to the economic crisis to a sector that demonstrate transformative qualities (within the bounce-forward frame). Based on the different framings of resilience and an institutional entrepreneurship framing of agency, we ask the following questions: How does social enterprise manifest in the context of resilience? How does entrepreneurial action interact with the development of social enterprise during crisis? And, how does the interaction between institutions and entrepreneurial action lead to resilient social systems?

#### **4. Research methodology**

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<sup>3</sup> *Local Actions for Social Inclusion of vulnerable groups ('TOP-EKO')* and *Local Plans for Employment ('TOPSA')*.

#### 4.1 Research methods

This research focuses on social enterprises in non-metropolitan Greece through interviews exploring the motivations and institutional challenges of social entrepreneurs and their enterprises. As the legal framework of the Greek social economy has developed since 2010 amid a period of severe economic recession and crisis, social enterprises that are registered on the National Registry of Social Enterprises were selected following a request to the director of strategic planning. This registry comprises 1,100 social enterprises. Prior to the interviews, an interview guide was piloted with one social enterprise, and discussed with a local coordinator of social entrepreneurship initiatives in the provinces. The social enterprises were selected purposively in order to target non-metropolitan areas throughout Greece and to identify a range of social enterprises operating across the social sectors (see Table 1).

The selection was made based on the population and density criteria of the OECD's rural typology. At NUTS 3 level, the OECD classifies the Greek regions as having: (1) two urban areas; (2) three intermediate regions; and (3) 45 rural areas. We recognise that Greek socio-cultural and national descriptive definitions of rurality are very different than the OECD typology, and for this reason we specifically make a point by avoiding the term 'rural' (a problematic term in Greek when used in relation to non-agricultural settlements and services) and refer to social enterprises 'in the provinces' (translating from the Greek term 'επαρχία' that is used to refer to life outside the metropolises, encompassing villages, agricultural settlements and also small and medium-sized regional towns) in line with other social scientists who have used this term in rural studies (Gkartzios and Scott, 2015; Kasimis and Zografakis, 2012; Bada, 2008). What constitutes Greek rurality is not the focus of this

paper (see however discussions in: Damianakos, 1997; Gkartzios et al., 2017; Zacoboulou, 2008). We purposefully used the term 'provinces' because some of our social enterprises would not be necessarily regarded as located in 'rural areas' by the social entrepreneurs themselves, as the term 'rural' in Greece refers to very small settlements below 2000 inhabitants. Thus, the OECD definition provided a useful descriptive framework to classify the geography of non-metropolitan social enterprises. The selected social enterprises can be allocated to 21 different, non-metropolitan geographical areas. In doing so, the sample covers a satisfactory geographical distribution for the analysis. All social enterprises acquired legal identity during the period 2011-2016.

#### **4.2 Data collection and analysis**

The semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face through site visits and via telephone calls. A purposive sample of 30 social enterprises was deemed satisfactory following other studies of social enterprise with similar size of samples (Steiner and Atterton, 2015; Ruebottom, 2010; Farmer and Kilpatrick, 2009). On first contact, the aim and purpose of the research was explained and a short discussion regarding the social enterprise was held. The websites and social media of the social enterprises in the provinces were scrutinised prior to the interviews to explore the aim and objectives of the social enterprise. This facilitated the interviews at a second stage and stimulated discussion, providing an in-depth understanding of the phenomena (as suggested by Denzil, 1978). Each interview lasted between 35-60 minutes, a duration common within other studies of social enterprise (Ruebottom, 2010; Farmer and Kilpatrick, 2009). Following good practice, field notes were taken to support the analysis of interviews (Steiner and Atterton, 2015). The interviews followed a semi-structured mode to facilitate a discussion. The interviews aimed to uncover

knowledge relating to 4 thematic areas of interest in the process of establishing a social enterprise: 1. The entrepreneurial motive and experience; 2. The influence of formal institutions; 3. The influence of social norms; and 4. The influence of the local community.

Table 1 presents the sector of the social enterprises in the provinces and the number of the selected enterprises in each sector. We used the National Registry of Social Enterprises to help select our sample by a quota aligned with the sectors. In order to holistically explore social enterprise in non-metropolitan Greece, the sample of this research is comprised from social enterprises operating in various sectors, following similar practice in the field by Ruebottom (2010) and Steiner and Atterton (2015).

Table 1 Social enterprises and sector

<b>Number of social enterprises</b>	<b>Sector</b>
<b>8</b>	Health/healthcare/rehabilitation
<b>5</b>	Education
<b>3</b>	Environment and Recycling
<b>5</b>	Tourism and Culture
<b>5</b>	Production of Local Products
<b>4</b>	Other commercial activities with social impact

In the Greek case, the legal framework actively promotes multiple founders. The social enterprises follow a more collectivist mode comprised from “partnership between individuals” (Defourny and Nyssens, 2008, p. 14). Law 4019/2011 defines that in order for a social enterprise of “collective and productive purposes” or “social care” to be legally created, five members (founders) are needed (seven members are the legal requirement, if the social enterprises belong to the category of social enterprises for integration). The interviews were conducted with one of the founders as selected by availability. The interviews show an age range from 22 - 40 years. The age range of the respondents may be

explained by the relative newness of the concept of social enterprise in Greece and by the particularly high unemployment rate of the younger generation.

Table 2 Interviewee social enterprise descriptive data

Interview No.	Gender	Number of inhabitants	Area of operations	Sector	Category on register I=Integration S=Social care C=Collective and productive purposes
1	M	4000-50000	Social rehabilitation of vulnerable social groups	Health/healthcare/rehabilitation	I
2	F	4000-50000	Social rehabilitation of vulnerable social groups	Health/healthcare/rehabilitation	I
3	F	4000-50000	Social rehabilitation of vulnerable social groups	Health/healthcare/rehabilitation	I
4	F	Less than 4000	Social healthcare services	Health/healthcare/rehabilitation	S
5	M	4000-50000	Providing social care to elderly people and children	Health/healthcare/rehabilitation	S
6	F	4000-50000	Providing social care to elderly people and children	Health/healthcare/rehabilitation	S
7	F	4000-50000	Providing social care to elderly people and children	Health/healthcare/rehabilitation	S
8	F	4000-50000	Providing social care to elderly people and children	Health/healthcare/rehabilitation	S
9	M	4000-50000	Information on physical health	Education	S
10	F	Less than 4000	Information on physical health	Education	S
11	M	4000-50000	Information on physical health and mental health of vulnerable social groups	Education	S
12	M	4000-50000	Training of unemployed people	Education	S
13	F	4000-50000	Services of education to children	Education	S
14	F	4000-50000	Recycling and waste management	Environment and recycling	C
15	M	Less than 4000	Environmental protection	Environment and recycling	C
16	M	4000-50000	Recycling and waste management	Environment and recycling	C
17	F	4000-50000	Organization of cultural events	Tourism and culture	C
18	F	Less than 4000	Organization of cultural events	Tourism and culture	C
19	M	4000-50000	Activities of tourism and culture	Tourism and culture	C
20	M	Less than 4000	Activities of tourism and culture; Production of advertising material	Tourism and culture	C
21	F	Less than 4000	Activities of promoting culture and services of developing growth and entrepreneurship	Tourism and culture	C
22	F	Less than 4000	Production and trade of agricultural products	Production of local products	C
23	M	Less than 4000	Local agricultural products	Production of local products	C
24	F	4000-50000	Production and trade of local products	Production of local products	C
25	M	Less than 4000	Production and trade of organic local products	Production of local products	C
26	M	Less than 4000	Production and trade of local products	Production of local products	C
27	F	4000-50000	Social grocery	Other commercial activities with social impact	C
28	F	4000-50000	Social grocery	Other commercial activities with social impact	C
29	M	4000-50000	Social café	Other commercial activities with social impact	C
30	M	4000-50000	Transportation services and home refurbishment	Other commercial activities with	C



		services	social impact	
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Table 2 describes key information from the interviews, including sector, population level, area of operations and category on the National Register. Considering the multiple ownership of these enterprises, it was difficult to categorise these entrepreneurs either as counterurbanisers or locals (Gkartzios, 2013). However, we did observe that in many cases our interviewees have been very familiar with these locations through family connections, as expected due to Greece's well established networks across metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas (Zacopoulou, 2008).

Following the data collection, the interviews were scrutinised individually in an inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) before being cross compared (Creswell, 2005) to finalise the thematic analysis (Yin, 1994). The transcripts were examined and coded around five emergent themes (see Table 3 for the themes, sub-themes and a summary of findings).

Table 3 Analytical themes, categories and summary

	Emergent themes	Sub-themes	Summary
1	Performance of resilience	Direct contribution Indirect contribution	Social enterprises support community resilience through provision of employment, supporting vulnerable groups and providing services cut by the state.
2	Survival and motives	Unemployment Entrepreneurial opportunity	Social entrepreneurs are reluctant agents of transformation pursuing opportunities from a limited range of choices.
3	Institutional resistance	Independent Dependent	Supportive of bounce-back with potential for transformative resilience, but undermined by a regulative framework slow to align with a new institutional landscape. Expectations of a tax-break for provincial social enterprise not realised.
4	Competition with other organisations	Public sector Private sector	The development of a social enterprise ecosystem is undermined through competition with others for state funding and contracts.
5	Networks, collaborations and fractures	Acceptance Suspicion Collaboration	Community support has been difficult to establish, with local people suspicious of the founders motives, but there is evidence of acceptance and social enterprises are forming peer-led collaborations to

			provide support.
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This strategy facilitated comparisons between the different areas (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Finally, “back translation” was applied as effective process (Brislin, 1986) and translation from Greek to English and from English to Greek was conducted by two bi-lingual researchers confirming the accuracy of the translation. The following section presents the findings of the interviews, themed by the emerged analytic areas and supported by illustrative quotes.

## **5. Findings**

In the literature it was highlighted that there is a key tension using a top-down mechanism to support bottom-up entrepreneurial agency. The different forms that resilience may take were discussed and the potential role of entrepreneurial action in this formation. The findings explore this tension and are structured according to the emergent themes.

### ***5.1 Performing resilience***

The social entrepreneurs in the sample were performing community resilience that reflected the ‘bounce-back’ mode identified in the literature. This was most directly evidenced through the provision of employment, through the support of vulnerable social groups and provision of community services that would have been supported by the state prior to the crisis.

For some the employment of vulnerable people from within the community was regarded as a key objective:

*All the employees were socially vulnerable during the economic crisis and we are trying to support them as much as we can ... for example I offered employment to a person who is a drug addict and no one wanted to hire him. (24)*

This impact is explicit in the legislation for social entrepreneurship, which defines vulnerable population groups that are unemployed to include youth, women, over 50s, one parent families, immigrants, refugees and people in marginal areas. Within our sample of social enterprises operating within remote and island areas, social enterprises directly supported some of these groups as founders and as employees, for instance:

*We were all women and unemployed and we decided to start a social enterprise in order to have an income and survive. (7)*

In our sample, social enterprises supported social care, health, environmental protection, tourism and culture, and local production of goods. Other direct impacts relate to developing community assets:

*Traditional private companies are not willing to exploit the community building and the forest as it doesn't produce the expected profits, only a social enterprise like ours can exploit the existing building and forest resources for the local community to benefit (19)*

Going beyond the substitution of services previously provided by the state, the social enterprises contributed to the growth of the local area through varied activity, such as through local purchasing, promotion of the area to visitors and tourists and support for vulnerable groups, for instance:

*We buy only local products which are produced by enterprises which are based on our region (28)*

This provides evidence that the social enterprises may go beyond bounce-back resilience to provide something more transformative.

## **5.2 Survival and motives**

The research suggested that our social entrepreneurs are unlikely agents of transformation, pursuing opportunities from a limited range of choices. Nevertheless, the provision of a social enterprise route through legislation and funding appears to be supporting a bounce-back mode of resilience, with the potential for more.

The assumption that social entrepreneurs will be innovators that will shake-up the accepted way of doing business is common in the literature (Dey and Steyaert, 2010; Zahra et al., 2009; Zografos, 2007). The underlying supposition is that these entrepreneurs are motivated by an opportunity that presents itself and that they can choose between this and other options for the best future outcome. In this view, our social entrepreneurs are positioned as the disruptive agents that will support a change to a new equilibrium.

Prior to the social enterprise, all our interviewees were either unemployed or in precarious temporary employment working occasionally due to the economic crisis and, with limited alternative options, were attracted to a funding opportunity through a need to survive. This challenges the possibility of setting out with any intentionality for transformative systems change. However, the social enterprises performed aspects of resilience in the context of economic crisis and increased unemployment levels:

*We created the social enterprise as a solution to our unemployment problem ... our aim is to have a profitable social enterprise but mostly [it] is to cover our expenses and earn a salary (2)*

Within these 'crisis' circumstances, the research might regard these as necessity entrepreneurs (Acs, 2006), where they are not pursuing an opportunity as a better choice, but rather as the only choice. The legislation and funding for social enterprise created a specific opportunity for those willing to take the risk.

*We found an entrepreneurial opportunity to make profit through a EU funding initiative promoting social enterprises for local growth and we developed a social enterprise (6)*

This suggests that supported social entrepreneurs may potentially contribute to a bounce-forward resilience. Indeed, a few of the interviewees had identified ideas new to the area, with intentions supportive of this, for instance:

*There were no other enterprise recycling materials in the region (14)*

Others identified gaps in provision that would usually be within the remit of the state:

*The local council and authorities didn't promote the growth of the local area and this is the reason why we launched this social enterprise (5)*

In this context, and in line with conceptualisations of resilience that draw on Adger (2000), these enterprises performed functions that aimed at recovery of the community. It is worth noting how this reliance results from the inability of local authorities to provide certain services in the context of crisis ('bounce back'):

*The local council, due to the economic crisis, couldn't invest in the community building and the natural recourses surrounding it and a social enterprise was the only way to do this (19)*

Despite the mixed motivations for starting a social enterprise, there was a recognition that this was not a simple choice and one that goes beyond that of the rational economic agent:

*Social entrepreneurs must have the same skills and traits as any other entrepreneur but social concerns must be an important priority. [We must] never forget the social goals of the enterprise (3)*

And indeed comes with added responsibility:

*A social enterprise demands sacrifice and selflessness, it demands more than usual (1)*

### **5.3 Institutional resistance**

This suggests that the social enterprises may go beyond bounce-back resilience to provide something more transformative. Whilst there is evidence that social enterprise is supporting a bounce-back resilience with potential for a more transformative resilience, it was clear that, despite the legislative changes and funding, the regulative framework was undermining the development of a resilient social system.

The expectation was for incentives and support for social enterprise across Greece that encompassed funding, taxation and legal framework. However, the follow-ons to initial EU funding<sup>4</sup> have been slow in materialising, making survival for some of the social enterprises an issue, suggesting that even a bounce-back resilience was a fragile equilibrium:

*Our motive for starting this [social enterprise] was a funding programme ... We created this social enterprise through a funding initiative one and half years ago and we are still waiting for the funds and we are not able to operate properly ... (12)*

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<sup>4</sup> Regional mechanisms of rural social enterprise

Here the expectation of funding may be an obstacle to social enterprise supporting resilience, with some participants unable to see how they can survive. A minority however see funding as the obstacle that prevents their peers from achieving transformative resilience:

*The successful social enterprises are those that were created within the legal framework of the new law but with private initiative ... public sector must stay away from the social enterprises (6)*

Social entrepreneurs were also expecting a legal framework which would allow their enterprises to flourish and expand. Their expectations were focused around three categories. The first expectation was that the taxation of social enterprises would be lower than for traditional enterprises.

*We are trying to offer some services but the high taxation minimises our ability to do more (8)*

Their perspective was that the focus on social added value and actions would inevitably lead to a lack of competitive advantage in comparison with the traditional enterprises.

*We don't want any relationship with the state through funding programmes from EU, we just want tax relief and not to create obstacles for social enterprise (26)*

The Government taxes all social enterprises through a flat-rate tax. However, a recently abandoned tax reduction, operating for all businesses operating in settlements with fewer than 3,000 inhabitants, may have influenced an expectation for a tax-break for provincial social enterprise.

*Social enterprises in more rural areas should enjoy a more friendly taxation than social enterprises in cities, as we have limited access to resources in comparison with the urban ones...moreover we are trying to keep our families in our villages. (26)*

The next expectation relates to the unsupportive legal framework:

*I am affected negatively by the policies of the authorities ... the future of the social enterprises is uncertain and difficult unless they change the framework (3)*

In Greece, responsibility for social enterprises is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labour, however other forms of enterprise are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Development. This means that social enterprises are excluded from initiatives which aim to support SME survival and growth in general. Regional authorities have been given the responsibility to manage EU structural funding for social enterprise and as result of the crisis, they have limited capacity to develop and implement local support programmes:

*[The] social enterprises do not have yet the expected social footprint because the framework of the social economy hasn't completed yet as the actions that the law of the social economy haven't implemented in practically (19)*

The third expectation related to the allocation of the public procurement and contracts. Here they expected to be given priority in open calls for products or services to survive and provide a social return. This was attempted by offering priority to social enterprise with relevant social scope to gain the public procurement, but gained negative publicity as being a non-transparent process where local councils and authorities could set unfair barriers for traditional businesses. The economic recession also meant that the ability of the public sector to fund these contacts became increasingly limited. Whereas social enterprises were



promoted as an antidote of the crisis, as replacements for public services they suffered directly from the chronic underfunding of the state.

*I was expecting that [National Government] keep their promise to help us; instead of that, they excluded us from the recent programme giving support to hire employees ...*  
(26)

Social entrepreneurship appears to have been developed as a 'quick fix' by the Ministry of Labour which has no jurisdiction within entrepreneurship and there is an ongoing debate at policy level as to whether the social entrepreneurship policy portfolio should be transferred to the Ministry of Development which has responsibility for entrepreneurship, industry and competition. This suggests that despite attempts to align with other EU member states and create a social economy, the Greek government has continued to conceptualise social enterprise as a policy tool for creating employment, rather than as a tool for socio-economic growth. As such, what is sometimes presented as a lack of entrepreneurial spirit within Greek social enterprises (European Commission, 2014), may be a lack of institutional support for long-term development strategies that nurture social enterprises.

#### ***5.4 Competition with other organisations***

This lack of coherence in the social enterprise ecosystem is further evidenced by competition for funding and customers. The concept of competition underpins the rational choice approaches to entrepreneurship, where talented entrepreneurs are expected to exploit the opportunity. However, whilst this free-market system is clearly favoured by the Greek state, the balance between a liberalised market and a state managed market appears uneven.

Competition for both funding and for service contracts from NGOs was observed in our data and this was regarded as unproductive and unfair:

*the government gives huge amounts to one or two large NGOs instead with the same money to support 30 social enterprises; the government doesn't share the money equally (19)*

There was also evidence of local councils setting up in direct competition to social enterprises.

*When we started the enterprise in recycling the local authorities couldn't offer any services in this sector, however the local authorities have just started their own recycling programme ... (14)*

This may be due to a lack of understanding of social enterprise at local government level:

*Even the public servants in the local council and authorities haven't understood what a social enterprise is about and this creates us a lot of problems (5)*

This highlights a chaotic institutional landscape and supports a sense that initial support from the state is not being sustained. Thus, the social enterprises are not regarded as a long-term solution by the respondents themselves. Whilst they regard themselves as entrepreneurs, they also see themselves as victims of the crisis - so whilst social enterprise is filling a gap in social needs, their clients have less money because of the crisis, with higher taxes and unemployment and less money available overall. This makes for an exceptionally difficult environment for a new business of any kind.

*It was supposed that we will have the support from the state to cope with social problems but we are struggling to survive and act in this environment. (8)*

### **5.5 Networks, collaborations and fractures**

According to Scott (2008), the most embedded institutional resistance is cultural, where taken-for-granted behaviour is not challenged. Perhaps for this reason, community support has been difficult to establish, with community suspicion that new social enterprises have a hidden agenda:

*The people are suspicious and think that there are some hidden activities and it is difficult for the local people to capture the concept (8)*

In turn, this leads to a lack of support:

*The local community didn't support at all my social enterprise and how we will survive without its support (10)*

Support from the local communities is a fundamental aspect to ecological resilience thinking. For some this resistance was a temporary barrier that could be overcome with persistence:

*The local community was very suspicious at the beginning but when local people saw that we are really doing what we promised, there was a change in their behaviour and they are supporting us (5)*

Indeed, according to Powley (2009), a community spirit may be enhanced by these economic activities. However, an active role by the state may be necessary to undertake evolutionary resilience:

*We should ask from the Ministry and its public servants to inform everyone about the social enterprises and their purpose in order the public opinion to understand the importance (7)*

Despite mixed support from formal and informal institutions, there have been attempts to provide their own institutional support through collaboration with peers:

*We don't cooperate with NGOs but only with other social enterprise (7)*

Although these have not always been successful:

*We tried to develop a network with other social enterprises but we didn't manage to develop a common ground for cooperation in practice (4)*

More formal schemes, such as a Government / EU supported programme in 2014, have also been attempted:

*We participate in a regional network of social enterprise and this is important as we can collectively gain access to funding initiatives (19)*

Whilst the EU regard such networks as important to support knowledge and best-practice exchange (European Union, 2014), participation by Greek social enterprises appears limited. Respondents stress the lack of support and opportunities compared to their European counterparts and would like to see a support infrastructure like that provided in the rest of Europe.

*I am exploring the possibility to join a European social entrepreneurship network as these networks are well-developed in other European countries and social enterprises have more opportunities (26)*

Recognising fewer opportunities and lower levels of support compared to traditional firms, the social enterprises view the development of cooperation with other local organisations as something that should be built on further:

*The social enterprises can survive long term if they collaborate between each other and interact with the local communities (2)*

Hence a lack of institutional support has led to some collaboration between social enterprises, however these appear to require sustained support to develop a stable new equilibrium.

## **6. Discussion**

The lack of access in health and social services that rural communities often suffer from (Bosworth and Glasgow, 2012; Steiner and Atterton, 2015) was magnified in the Greek provinces due to the economic crisis and weakened public sector. Following a discourse of a modernising social enterprise that has the power to create fundamental social change (Brady, 2003; Dey and Steyaert, 2010) and the potential of social enterprise to support social services (Roy *et al.*, 2014), it was the aim of new legislation to enable social enterprise to replace this missing public sector provision.

Rather than reformist or radical social entrepreneurs, in our sample we find more reluctant social entrepreneurs, where non metropolitan areas provide more of a 'refuge' than the 'laboratory of ideas' (Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2013). They were driven to social enterprise out of a necessity enforced by the crisis, but once they had taken on the role, social values appear to have been accepted and incorporated into personal narratives. The majority then fit within a 'bounce-back' resilience discourse, where the social enterprise is regarded as a substitute for an institutional gap that would, under normal circumstances, be filled by the state. As such, they continue to rely on funding and perform this role to the best of their ability with increased frustration over promised state support that has not materialised. A chaotic paternalistic relationship with the state prevails, with competition

observed between local agents that undermines their community role and threatens their ability to support even a bounce-back resilience. The social enterprises continue to suffer from the chronic funding shortages that led to the withdrawal of services by the state. They understand and have eventually taken ownership of the responsibilities that come with being a social entrepreneur, although construct these in somewhat negative and absolute terms, such as the *demands* for sacrifice and understanding that social concerns *must be* a priority.

A minority demonstrate a more radical or 'bounce-forward' resilience discourse, where the social enterprise is regarded as transformative, adding something new to the area. Here social innovations may be sector focused, such as material recycling, or driven by a social-agenda, such as a focus on unemployed women. Within this discourse, entrepreneurs regard state funding as an obstacle that interferes with the market and where the social enterprises performing bounce-back resilience reliant on funding, damage the reputation and role of social enterprise. This is despite their initial reliance on funding to enable their own operation. All, however agree that the current legal framework is not supportive of social enterprise.

Within our research, social enterprise demonstrably performs functions of resilience through the provision of employment opportunities, social inclusion of vulnerable and self-selected groups and by promoting the local area. As these social enterprises were created during a period of crisis, a dominant 'bounce back' resilience heavily reliant on state support is evident that undermines the social enterprises themselves. Opportunities for transformative resilience are limited, as evidenced by the administrative mismatch, the lack of overall strategic development of social enterprises, and the top-down legislative framework that is

not able to respond to the dynamic of crisis or the intrinsic conditions of rurality faced by most entrepreneurs. Some of these administrative and financial barriers have been recognised by the European Commission, who note that poor information and delays in support obstruct the operations of social enterprise (European Commission, 2004).

Further, it seems that most transformative functions are limited because the governance of these enterprises is particularly top-down. Vulnerable groups for example are defined *per se* rather than allowing the community to support certain groups based on their own needs or taking into account any particular local differentiation.

From a resilience perspective (Scott, 2013) a transformative social entrepreneurship sector would have agency in moving the local community forward. Drawing on Davoudi et al. (2013) this need not only refer to the administrative restructuring much needed in the Greek case. It particularly needs to consider the ongoing relationship that these social enterprises have with the local communities, a relationship that sometimes is undermined due to the state-driven creation of these enterprises in a period of crisis. This would require bottom-up initiatives towards development strategies that deal with issues of mistrust, nepotism and corruption regarding state resource allocation as well as greater opportunities for networks across social enterprises, other NGOs and local authorities. The social entrepreneurs show that, despite initial motivations driven largely by employment, they often accept a social obligation that is supportive of transformative resilience. However, evolutionary resilience thinking cannot be achieved without continuous restructuring of local community governance and an institutional landscape that supports the aspirations and talents of its social entrepreneurs.

In exploring the role of social enterprise through an institutional and community resilience lens, we examine complex interactions between structure and agency and we argue that these are critical insights for conceptualisations of resilience particularly in organisational and management studies in agreement with Hamel and Välikangas (2003). The entrepreneurial agents have the potential to perform roles as the arbiters of systems in disequilibrium back to equilibrium (Shane, 2000), be it a 'bounce-back' (Martin, 2012) to a previous and failed, or 'bounce-forward' (Davidson, 2010) to a new or imagined equilibrium (Frank, 1998). As identified within the community resilience and institutional entrepreneurship literature, the need for evolutionary resilience suggests a 'transformative' change within the system that involves multiple actors and implies enhanced governance that is not evidenced in our fieldwork material. Although these social enterprises performed some aspects of resilience, largely this was done through a particularly narrow-framed legislative context to deal with the collapse of welfare system in Greece in the face of the economic crisis, rather than an organic movement with genuine appetite for social change. So the approach we observe has been reactionary, resembling bounce-back resilience thinking. The opportunities they exploit are limited by the institutions they operate within. The rules-of-the-game dictate an unproductive entrepreneurship fixed in a paternalistic relationship with the state that does not create social value and may at times undermine it as seen through rivalry across social enterprises, other NGOs and local authorities. This creates a troublesome 'resilience tautology', evidenced also by the quick-fix legislation for social enterprise which was created as a result of the crisis, to deal with the crisis.

Without a wider transformation of the social enterprise sector in Greece that targets the identified institutions operating in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, it is difficult to see how a productive social entrepreneurship can be established. Changes at state level, such as a



move of the social enterprise portfolio to the Ministry of Development, creation of social enterprise stakeholder feedback groups and networks that aim to deal explicitly with issues of community trust, and co-funding initiatives from the Greek Government and EU Structural Funds, could potentially promote the development of a resilient and productive social enterprise ecosystem.

## **7. Conclusion**

The research contributes to our knowledge of social enterprise operating within contemporary society by: a. exploring how community resilience and institutional entrepreneurship lens may be used to conceptualise social enterprise in periods of economic crisis; b. clarifying that social enterprise in Greece remains a top-down process in terms of governance, being encouraged as a result of public sector cuts, rather than through an entrepreneurial response to market failure; and c. by showing that there is a role for the state in facilitating the agency of social entrepreneurs that has the potential for transformative resilience.

Our findings also contribute to policy by highlighting key areas necessary to support a productive institutional framework that supports resilient communities beyond the metropolises responding to turbulent economic times. Future research may extend and develop this approach through a focus on other regions suffering from crisis, be they economic, social, environmental or combined.

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