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YOUTH SOCIAL INNOVATION BROKERS
MOBIUS

MOBIUS EUROPEAN COUNTRY REPORT – GREECE



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1. Introduction

Social innovation in Greece has gained increasing importance, particularly in the wake of the socio-economic challenges that the country has faced since the 2008 financial crisis. Social innovation refers to the development and implementation of new ideas, services, and models that meet societal needs while fostering collaboration and sustainable development. For Greek youth, in particular, social innovation offers a vital platform to address pressing social issues, enhance their skills, and boost their employability and civic participation.

In response to these challenges, Greek civil society has evolved significantly, with a marked increase in collective action. Citizens have increasingly participated in informal groups and collectives aimed at preserving living standards and exercising their rights. This grassroots movement reflects a broader trend where civil society steps in to fill gaps left by the state, which has been constrained by financial limitations. These informal groups, formed by citizens and communities, have emerged as crucial players in addressing various social needs, effectively complementing government efforts.

Social innovation in Greece is promoted through various initiatives, including the formal recognition of the social economy, the introduction of social entrepreneurship courses, and the implementation of community-based projects. These efforts are particularly significant in the context of youth work, providing young people with opportunities to engage in meaningful activities that contribute to social cohesion and economic resilience.

However, the use of social innovation in youth work is not yet widespread, with significant potential for further development. Engaging young people in social innovation empowers them and also contributes to the creation of more inclusive and resilient communities, making it an essential component of Greece's broader social and economic strategy.



2. Analysis and Diagnosis of Existing Literature

Social innovation in Greece has been the subject of several key studies, each highlighting different aspects of the concept and its application. One of the most notable works is by Dr. Ioannis K. Nasioulas, who in his book "Greek Social Economy Revisited: Voluntary, Civic and Cooperative Challenges in the 21st Century," explores the historical and contemporary roles of cooperatives and civic initiatives in Greece. Nasioulas emphasizes the need for an independent third sector to drive social innovation, free from the constraints of political and economic interests. His work sheds light on the challenges faced by social enterprises in Greece, particularly in the context of over-regulation and political interference.

Another significant study is the CIRIEC report "The Social Economy in the European Union," which includes a comprehensive analysis of the social economy in Greece. The report highlights the contributions of cooperatives, mutual societies, and non-profit organizations to the Greek economy, identifying barriers to growth such as the lack of institutional support and financial sustainability.

The research by Koutsou, Partalidou, and Ragkos, titled "Young Farmers' Social Capital in Greece: Trust, Networks and Social Innovation," provides an insightful analysis of how young farmers leverage social capital and networks to drive social innovation. This study highlights the potential of rural youth to innovate by adapting traditional practices in new ways, which is critical for addressing the economic challenges faced by Greece's rural communities.

Educational Practices and Methodologies

Greece has seen the emergence of several innovative educational practices aimed at promoting social innovation among youth. A significant example is the integration of service-learning into university curricula, particularly at institutions like Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the University of Patras. These service-learning programs engage students in community-based projects, providing them with



practical experience in social innovation while fostering a strong sense of civic responsibility. This approach not only enhances students' academic learning but also prepares them to contribute meaningfully to society.

Social entrepreneurship courses have also gained popularity in Greek higher education institutions, with the Athens University of Economics and Business (AUEB) leading the way. These courses are designed to equip students with the skills necessary to start and manage social enterprises. Emphasizing real-world applications and practical training, these programs play a crucial role in empowering Greek youth to address social challenges through entrepreneurial solutions, thus directly linking education to social innovation.

Local institutions across Greece have been instrumental in fostering social innovation through a variety of educational methodologies. Many emphasize experiential learning, where participants engage directly in projects that address societal issues. This hands-on approach helps individuals develop critical skills and contributes to community development. Coupled with this, creative spaces like art museums and cultural centers organize interactive workshops, exhibitions, and seminars. These activities promote cultural heritage and serve as platforms for social learning, bringing together diverse groups and fostering inclusivity.

Sustainability and environmental education are also key focuses for local initiatives. Institutions often involve community members in projects that advocate for sustainable practices, such as organic farming and waste management. These programs typically combine theoretical learning with hands-on experience, enabling participants to implement sustainable practices in their daily lives. At the same time, these initiatives raise awareness of environmental issues, helping to cultivate a culture of sustainability within the community.

Finally, many local institutions emphasize the integration of marginalized groups into society through specialized educational programs. These initiatives provide vocational training and social entrepreneurship opportunities for vulnerable populations, including individuals with disabilities and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Through workshops and mentoring, participants gain confidence, develop marketable skills, and access employment opportunities. This



inclusive educational approach not only empowers individuals but also strengthens social cohesion, creating a more supportive and inclusive community.

3. Current State of Social Innovation for Youth

The Greek government has introduced several policies and programs aimed at supporting social innovation among youth. One of the most significant legislative efforts is Law 4019/2011, which formally recognizes the social economy and introduces the concept of Social Cooperative Enterprises (KoinSEp). This law represents a major step forward in institutionalizing social innovation in Greece, although it has been criticized for being overly restrictive and not fully supportive of the sector's needs.

The National Youth Strategy (2017-2027) is another important framework that includes provisions for promoting youth entrepreneurship and social innovation. This strategy emphasizes the need to equip young people with the necessary skills and resources to engage in social innovation through education and training programs. However, the implementation of these policies varies across regions, with some areas receiving more support than others.

Institutional Support

Several institutions and organizations play a crucial role in promoting social innovation among Greek youth. Impact Hub Athens is one of the leading organizations in this field, offering a range of programs that support social entrepreneurs, including co-working spaces, mentoring, and access to networks and funding. The organization has been particularly effective in engaging young people, providing them with the tools and support needed to develop and implement innovative social projects.



The Social Solidarity Economy Network (SSE Network) is another key player in this space. The SSE Network is a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to advancing social economy and solidarity initiatives in Greece. It provides resources and support for social enterprises and cooperatives, particularly those led by young people, and advocates for policies that support social innovation.

The Youth Foundation for Lifelong Learning (INEDIVIM) also plays a significant role in promoting youth participation in social innovation. INEDIVIM manages several EU-funded programs that provide young people with opportunities to develop skills in social entrepreneurship and engage in community-based initiatives.

In addition to these national organizations, numerous local institutions have been instrumental in fostering social innovation at the community level. Many local initiatives emphasize experiential learning, sustainability, and the inclusion of marginalized groups, often working in collaboration with educational institutions and local communities. These initiatives not only provide young people with practical skills but also promote social cohesion and community development.

Local cultural centers and art museums serve as creative spaces for cultural education and community engagement, organizing workshops, exhibitions, and seminars that promote social learning and inclusivity. Additionally, local institutions dedicated to sustainability often engage community members in projects that advocate for sustainable practices, such as organic farming and waste management, thereby embedding environmental education into the social fabric.

Institutions also play a crucial role in integrating marginalized groups into society. By offering vocational training and social entrepreneurship opportunities, these organizations empower individuals from vulnerable populations, helping them to build confidence, develop marketable skills, and access employment opportunities. This localized support is vital in creating an inclusive environment where social innovation can thrive, especially among the youth.



4. KANE's experiences

Over the years, our organization has actively participated in a range of social innovation projects, particularly those focused on youth. These initiatives have been instrumental in promoting social entrepreneurship, building capacity, and fostering creativity among young people.

One of our key projects is SE-HUB: Empowering Change-makers: Youth Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation in the Citizen Sector. This 18-month initiative, conducted under the EU's Key Action 2, aimed to strengthen the capacity of youth organizations in Europe and partner countries. The project focused on fostering youth-led social entrepreneurial ventures and implementing socially innovative approaches within the non-profit sector. Key outcomes included capacity-building activities, particularly for disadvantaged youth, the development of training materials, and the creation of Social Innovation Training Hubs in participating countries. These hubs, connected via the SE-HUB Network, served as a resource-sharing platform.

The Social Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas project, originally launched as a training course called "The Social Start-up Cultivators," has also made a significant impact. Now titled Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas, the project aims to provide participants with essential knowledge in social entrepreneurship, with a particular focus on rural communities. The program covers impact-centered business models, management skills, and practical tools like financial management and marketing. Study visits and exposure to real-life examples further enhance participants' understanding of how to implement social innovation in their communities.

In addition to these, the Making Space 365 project focuses on creative and cultural entrepreneurship. This initiative develops tools and approaches to help youth and community organizations foster ownership and pride in community-driven projects. By focusing on sustainability and creating resources for both online and in-person settings, the project enables young people to develop entrepreneurial skills in creative fields, which they can apply in professional settings or in starting their own businesses.



The MUSICLING project integrates social entrepreneurship with the arts, encouraging youth to create instruments from recycled materials. Participants develop entrepreneurial skills related to music and crafts, while also learning about project management and social media promotion. This initiative not only promotes environmental sustainability but also builds a community of artisans engaged in repurposing waste materials, fostering both artistic and business skills among young people.

Moreover, one of Greece's most successful social innovation projects is the cooperative formed by Cattle and Sheep Breeders in Western Thessaly. In response to monopolistic practices in the dairy industry, these farmers established a cooperative to negotiate better prices and improve their economic situation. This initiative demonstrated the power of collective action in achieving economic benefits and social change. Similarly, the Pieria Action Team, a grassroots movement, gained national recognition for its efforts to sell agricultural products directly to consumers, bypassing middlemen and ensuring fair prices for producers and consumers alike.

Challenges and Solutions

Promoting social innovation in Greece comes with significant challenges. Over-regulation and political interference often stifle grassroots initiatives, and Law 4019/2011, which governs social enterprises, has been criticized for its restrictive nature. These obstacles hinder the growth of social enterprises and limit their potential for autonomous development.

To overcome these challenges, leveraging digital platforms has proven effective in mobilizing resources and increasing public engagement. For example, online platforms have enabled the coordination and promotion of social innovation projects, allowing organizations to reach a broader audience. Additionally, forming strategic partnerships with international organizations has provided access to critical resources and credibility. However, a large portion of the Greek community, including youth, remains uninformed about social innovation. This lack of awareness hinders broader participation and limits the spread of social innovation practices.



Given that youth work is not formally recognized in Greece, there is an opportunity to raise awareness and disseminate information about social innovation through collaboration with institutions. By fostering greater community engagement, these partnerships can significantly enhance the impact of social innovation initiatives across the country, encouraging a more informed and active society.

5. Recommendations

1. Increase Awareness and Education: There is a significant gap in awareness about social innovation among Greek youth and the general public. To address this, targeted awareness campaigns should be launched, focusing on integrating social innovation concepts into school curricula and extracurricular activities. Collaborations between educational institutions and youth organizations are essential to embed these ideas within the education system.

2. Formal Recognition of Youth Work: Youth work is not formally recognized in Greece, limiting the potential for engaging young people in social innovation. Advocating for the formal recognition of youth work as a profession would create a stronger foundation for disseminating social innovation practices. This recognition would also empower youth workers to play a more significant role in guiding young people towards social entrepreneurship.

3. Leverage Digital Platforms: Digital platforms offer a powerful tool for promoting social innovation projects and facilitating the exchange of ideas and resources. By encouraging the use of online tools, social innovation can become more accessible to youth across Greece, helping to bridge the information gap and expanding the reach of these initiatives.

4. Strengthen Institutional Partnerships: Strategic partnerships between Greek institutions and international organizations can bring essential resources, expertise, and credibility to social innovation efforts. These partnerships are crucial for overcoming local challenges and enhancing the impact of social innovation projects, ensuring that they are sustainable and far-reaching.



5. Integrate Social Innovation into Educational Systems: To embed social innovation into the fabric of education, it is necessary to develop innovative educational methodologies. This includes specialized training for educators and creating platforms that allow students to engage in real-life social innovation projects. By integrating social innovation into the education system, young people can be better prepared to contribute to and lead social change initiatives.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, promoting social innovation among youth in Greece is essential for addressing social challenges and fostering active citizenship. While there have been notable efforts and successes in this field, several barriers persist, particularly in terms of awareness, institutional support, and the formal recognition of youth work. The restrictive regulatory environment and the influence of political interests further complicate the landscape, making it difficult for grassroots initiatives to develop independently.

Our analysis of existing literature and current practices reveals that although there are innovative educational methodologies and promising social innovation projects in Greece, these initiatives are not yet widely accessible or integrated into mainstream education and youth work. The lack of comprehensive policies and the fragmented nature of institutional support underscore the need for a more cohesive and strategic approach to fostering social innovation.

The experiences of our partner organizations in implementing social innovation projects highlight both the potential and the challenges associated with this work. Successful strategies, such as leveraging digital platforms and forming international partnerships, have demonstrated that it is possible to overcome some of the barriers to social innovation in Greece. However, the widespread lack of awareness among the general population, particularly among youth, suggests that much more needs to be done to create an enabling environment for social innovation.



Moving forward, it is crucial to prioritize the dissemination of information and the integration of social innovation into educational and youth work systems. Advocating for the formal recognition of youth work and promoting collaborative efforts between institutions can help create a more supportive ecosystem for social innovation. Moreover, simplifying regulatory frameworks and increasing access to funding will empower grassroots initiatives and encourage broader participation in social innovation projects.

Implementing these recommendations has the potential to significantly enhance the impact of social innovation in Greece, particularly among young people. By fostering a culture of innovation and active citizenship, Greece can harness the creativity and energy of its youth to drive social change and contribute to the development of a more inclusive and resilient society. Although challenges remain, with concerted effort and collaboration, the potential for lasting, positive impact is within reach.



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