

## Re-territorialize the traditional system of olive oil production through collective action in a lagging Mediterranean island. The case of the cooperative social enterprise "Modousa" in the island of Lesvos (North Aegean, Greece)

Mediterranean rural and island areas subject to natural constraints face serious economic, socio-cultural, political and environmental challenges in the era of economic globalisation (low fertility and fragmentation of agricultural land, extensive agricultural production systems, ageing of the rural population, environmental and landscape degradation, remoteness and transport costs, etc.). As a result, they cannot easily establish competitive economic activities in terms of economies of scale and have therefore long been marginalised by rural development policies within the dominant productivist model. In this unfavourable context, these areas could address disadvantages and empower rural communities by focusing on the sustainable management of their inherent resources and territorial specificities. They are therefore called upon to find new ways to reactivate social and cultural assets through diversification and strategic investment in quality, locality and innovation (Belletti et al. 2012; Torres Salcido and Muchnik 2012; Moulaert et al. 2014; Vandecandelaere, 2009). In fact, as highlighted by numerous field surveys conducted worldwide, in both the North and the South, local action, cooperation and community-led social entrepreneurship are a strategy for mobilizing local productive potential and fostering social progress.

Our presentation will focus on the island of Lesvos, which represents a typical Less-Favoured Area (LFA), being a "traditional" semi-mountainous rural landscape, highly economically dependent on agriculture (olive oil production and sheep farming), and characterised by low-intensity family farming. More specifically, it will focus on the case of the cooperative social enterprise (ESC) "Modousa" (which means an abundantly productive olive tree) in the olive-growing area of Gera, in the east of the island of Lesvos. This is one of the first social economy projects in Greece and is considered a relevant and successful enterprise.

Modousa represents a bottom-up collective social cooperative action created in 2014 by 9 olive oil producers, and now bringing together 77 members. The main activities of SCE Modousa are: the production, bottling and trade of olive oil (extra virgin olive oil), as well as auxiliary activities aimed at creating additional income and strengthening links within the local community, such as the creation of a delicatessen, a small producers' market, information days and seminars, eco-cultural and musical events, etc. Modousa tries to meet the multidimensional challenges of Lesvos, through cooperation, the valorisation of local resources (enhancing local added value) and the reterritorialisation of agriculture (promoting territorial quality specificities) by linking the emblematic olive-growing terroir of Gera, quality products and services and the local community. The key objectives are the sustainable management of the "common goods", with the emphasis on enhancing the value of Gera's century-old olive grove as an ecosystem and cultural landscape of particular value, the promotion of social cooperation and solidarity through equity throughout the agri-food chain, the creation of jobs at local level, and a community-led local development perspective.

Based on the results of field surveys and participatory research, we will try to detect processes of reactivation of the emblematic olive grove of the island of Lesvos and, consequently, to evaluate a process of re-territorialization of small-scale olive growing through collective action from the perspective of the community economy approach subscribing to the principles of the

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social and solidarity economy (SSE) (Bibson-Graham, 2008.); Pavlis and Anthopoulou, 2017; Partalidou and Anthopoulou, 2019).

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