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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# EXPLORING SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY (SSE) DURING THE GREEK ECONOMIC CRISIS

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**ABSTRACT:** In the last decades, Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) has become an everyday practice for an increasing number of citizens, and the SSE sector has been constantly expanding. Particularly, during hard economic times, SSE has acted as a viable economic alternative and as a means to support vulnerable social groups, hit by the recession. However, SSE does not merely act as an emergency actor during harsh economic times, but also as a form of resistance to neoliberal dominance and as a tool of empowerment, transformation and social change. This paper, using quantitative data from the LIVEWHAT project, explores SSE organisations in Greece, as one of the European countries most severely affected during the recent global financial crisis. The results, which are indicative of the Greek SSE sector during the period under study, shed light on the role of the recession as one of the main triggers for the recent expansion of SSE organisations that are often less formally organised, and primarily act as coping mechanisms, which aim to meet the uncovered, urgent socioeconomic needs of citizens. The findings also demonstrate that the Greek SSE sector, under study, acts as an economic alternative, promoting collective action and new social movements.

**KEYWORDS:** Alternative action organisation analysis, economic crisis, Greece, social and solidarity economy, social movements

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## 1. Introduction

In the last decades, the term Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) has emerged in order to capture the numerous alternative economic activities that are springing up worldwide. However, SSE is not a new concept; it embraces both Social Economy and Solidarity Economy. The former, mainly rooted in the cooperative movement, is understood as the group of entities ‘where members are shareholders among whom profits are distributed’ (Kousis and Paschou 2017, 150), whereas Solidarity Economy stems from social movements and promotes both political and economic goals for socio-economic transformation (Adam 2016; Kousis and Paschou 2017). The combination of these concepts, which does not always work complementarily, results in different perceptions and definitions of what SSE is all about.

In a broad sense, SSE is recognised as the group of organisations with explicit social (and often environmental) objectives – instead of simply profit-making – operating under the principles of solidarity, participation and democratic management (Fonteneau et al. 2010; Utting 2015; Klimczuk and Klimczuk-Kochańska 2015). International agencies, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), define SSE entities on the basis of their legal status, including cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, foundations and social enterprises (TFSSE 2014). On the other hand, RIPESS<sup>1</sup> claims that SSE includes formal organisations, but also informal initiatives and citizens’ movements, geared to democratise and transform the economy. Academic research identifies developments of contemporary SSE in the revival of new forms of cooperatives and social enterprises, as well as in various formal and informal groups, including exchange networks, fair trade networks, solidarity-based credit organisations and groups, community-based solidarity networks, alternative food networks, time banks and community-based banks, to name just a few (Utting, van Dijk and Mathhei 2014; Sahakian 2016). Therefore, SSE includes entities from the traditional Social Economy, such as cooperatives, more recently developed formal entities, such as social enterprises, as well as a plethora of bottom-up alternative initiatives and practices (Amin et al. 2002; Marques 2013).

Recently, SSE has become an everyday practice for an increasing number of citizens and the sector is constantly expanding (Utting 2015). According to different scholars, the expansion of SSE is mainly due to the contemporary challenges of increased social

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<sup>1</sup>RIPESS is an Intercontinental Network that connects national and sectorial SSE networks and is committed to the promotion of SSE (see also, <http://www.ripeess.org/>).

needs, related to unemployment and poverty (Morais and Basic 2013; Utting 2015; Meglio and Zandonai 2015). Sahakian (2016) underpins the fact that the interest in SSE is associated with the recent economic crisis and the widening inequalities. People hit by the crisis often turn to different types of cooperative economic activity and alternative ways of accessing products and services, in order to endure daily difficulties and overcome challenges (Nardi 2016; Kousis and Pashou 2017). Experiences from previous recessions verify such tactics. For instance, following the collapse of the Argentinean economy in the late 1990s, an alternative economic system, called 'Trueque', aimed to stimulate local activities in favour of the people (Gomez 2016). Additionally, workers who lost their jobs reopened closed factories under a cooperative model (Restakis 2010).

Indeed, SSE acts as a means to combat poverty (Saguier and Brent 2017). SSE was initially born and developed as a necessity, and its main aim was to actively respond to social problems linked to unemployment, poverty and social exclusion (Neamtan 2002; Razeto 2013). Empirical studies around the globe highlight its importance as the basis of action against poverty (Kay 2006; Klein et al. 2009). SSE practices that advocate such goals include the provision of services to meet uncovered needs by the welfare state (e.g., shelters for the homeless, collective kitchens, etc.) as well as economic activities to promote the integration of people excluded from the labour market (e.g., social enterprises, women cooperatives, etc.) (Lévesque 2003; Fontan et al. 2003; Lévesque and Mendell 2005). These practices mostly attract – as users, clients and beneficiaries – the most vulnerable members of society, i.e., those who have limited or no access to employment or certain goods, products and knowledge (Fonteneau et al. 2010).

However, SSE does not merely act as an emergency actor during harsh times, but also as an inclusive and fair alternative economic model, placing human beings at the centre of economic and social life (Sahakian and Dunand 2014; Calvo, Morales and Zikidis 2017). From a radical social movement perspective, SSE is a project of development and improvement of the economy, in favour of people and communities, but also a tool of empowerment, transformation and social change (Razeto 2013, Nardi 2016), a form of resistance and emancipation from neoliberal dominance, a pathway for a more equal and sustainable society and a viable economic alternative to capitalism (Arruda 2004; Marques 2013; Saguier and Brent 2017). In this sense, SSE is at the heart of the anti-capitalist global movement and local social movements (Denerstein 2014).

The paper, using data from the LIVEWHAT<sup>2</sup> project, explores an indicative sample of SSE entities in Greece, i.e., a country which has become the centre of the recent global economic crisis and has faced the most acute recession in its modern history with devastating effects on the lives of citizens (OECD 2014). The paper relies on the innovative methodological approach of Alternative Action Organisation Analysis of SSE organisations' websites, active within the time frame of the recent global economic crisis (i.e., at least between 2007 and mid-2016). Given the lack of definitional clarity, a broad working definition is applied in the present study. SSE is conceptualised as 'enterprises, organisations, and innovations that combine the production of goods, services, and knowledge with achieving economic and social goals, as well as solidarity building' (Klimczuk & Klimczuk-Kochańska 2015: 1413), including both formal entities (such as cooperatives, social enterprises, community banks, time banks, etc.), informal groups and grassroots initiatives with alternative economic activities and/or provision of services, aiming to assist those in need.

The paper aims to provide some preliminary quantitative empirical evidence on the Greek SSE sector, in the context of the economic crisis. In order to do so, it explores some of the main features of the SSE organisations under study (such as their organisational structure, activities, beneficiaries, ultimate aims and means to achieve them) and further examines SSE entities (in relation to their ultimate aims, primary means to achieve them and solidarity approaches), which make references to the crisis in their online media outlets, as opposed to those that do not. The latter approach investigates whether SSE entities that refer to the crisis – and are hence more strongly related to it – are more likely to restrict their objectives in remedying the effects of the crisis, compared to their counterparts with no relevant references.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section includes a brief presentation of the Greek SSE sector, before and during the recent recession. The third section develops the methodological approach applied and the analysis used; the fourth section presents the main descriptive and explorative findings. Finally, the concluding part sums up the results and discusses their theoretical implications with respect to the main features of the SSE sector during hard economic times in Greece.

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<sup>2</sup>Results presented in this paper have been obtained within the project 'Living with Hard Times: How Citizens React to Economic Crises and Their Social and Political Consequences' (LIVEWHAT). This project was funded by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme (Grant Agreement No. 613237).

## **2. Greek SSE before and during the crisis**

Before the recent economic crisis, the Greek SSE sector primarily involved formal organisations, such as cooperatives and social firms, and was less developed compared to other European countries (Adam and Papatheodorou 2010). Also, insufficient policy frameworks, the lack of official registry data and limited scientific research have resulted in our modest knowledge in the field (Tsobanoglou 2012). Nevertheless, Adam (2012) highlights the importance of women's cooperative organisations in the development of local communities, as well as the importance of European Union (EU) funding for social enterprises supporting the employment and education of people with mental disorders. Moreover, Nasioulas (2012) explores the cooperative field in Greece, up to 2011, pointing out its underdevelopment, despite the positive potential for the economy. According to Nikolopoulos and Kapogiannis (2013), the weak expansion of the Greek SSE sector is related to the 'anaemic' civil society and the prevailing distorted image of cooperatism and volunteerism in public opinion. Similarly, Tsobanoglou (2012) underlines that the low prevalence of volunteering and self-organisation act as key components of the poor SSE development in Greece.

Different scholars argue that since the beginning of the recent crisis, there has been an increase in formal and informal SSE initiatives and organisations, primarily associated with the draconian austerity policies and the effects of the recession on citizens' living and working conditions (Kavoulakos 2015; Vathakou 2015; Adam 2016). SSE activities and services vary from the provision of food (e.g., social kitchens) and free medical examinations (e.g., social clinics) to networks of cooperatives, producers' collectivities, networks of exchange, time banks, etc. (Bekridaki and Broumas 2017). For instance, the annual report (2015) by Solidarity for All<sup>3</sup> signifies the development of cooperative enterprises, aiming to cope with the unemployment of university-qualified young people. Today, the VIOME factory in Thessaloniki, which closed due to the crisis, serves as an example of cooperative and solidarity economy, based on self-management and a participatory approach of former workers and citizens to produce natural cleaning and environmentally-friendly products (Solidarity for All 2015).

Similarly, an increasing number of studies show that the economic crisis has acted as the main trigger for the spread of SSE in the country, to cover unsatisfied needs and remedy the impact of the crisis. For instance, Adam and Teloni (2015) examine the numerous social clinics that emerged during the crisis as a response to the increased

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<sup>3</sup>Solidarity for All' is an organisation that offers technical support, capacity building, and network-scaling for various grassroots initiatives in Greece.

number of citizens excluded from the National Health System (ESY). Furthermore, Gritzas, Tzekou and Pazaitis (2015) explore the time banks established in Athens which not only aim to help citizens cope with the effects of the recession, but also critically question capitalist values and practices. The authors argue that time banks usually operate on weekly assemblies open to all members, while their key principles include equity, democracy and transparency (Gritzas, Tzekou and Pazaitis 2015).

Rakopoulos (2015) explores the characteristics of approximately eighty anti-middlemen initiatives that have begun in Greece since 2010. In his view, SSE does not only constitute a coping strategy against the crisis, but also a politicised response to austerity, arguing that 'it is the direct offspring of a critical historical turn and consequent political radicalisation' (Rakopoulos 2015, 179). Moreover, local exchange systems, such as 'the exchange network of Chania' in Crete, are examined by Sotiropoulou (2015), whereas solidarity and cooperative economy networks are explored by Petropoulou (2013). Research on such SSE organisations underpins the fact that their daily practices are primarily grounded in the increasing needs of people at times of crisis, but they also promote everyday practices and relations based on solidarity (Petropoulou 2013). In addition, by interviewing members of SSE grass-roots organisations established in Athens after 2011, Bouziouri and Pigou-Rebousi (2014), conclude that the main principles and values involve citizens' empowerment so that they may contribute to their community, fostering an anti-capitalistic way of living by focusing on recycling and exchanging products and services, as well as promoting respect towards the environment and biodiversity.

Whilst the above studies have significantly contributed to our understanding of SSE development in Greece, they are geographically limited and/or focus on specific SSE types and activities. The exception to this is the latest Report by the SSE Secretariat General (Social Solidarity Economy Secretariat General 2017) including information on various types of primarily formal and active<sup>4</sup> SSE entities across the country. In the Report it is underpinned that, since 2013, there has been a continuous increase in the number of registered SSE entities in the country, which are mostly concentrated in the region of Attica and are active in a wide range of sectors of activity, primarily associated with education, catering, wholesale and retail trade. Moreover, SSE entities mostly operate locally, have diverse staffing and management structures, as well as clear social goals, and provide assistance to those in need.

Despite the potential merits of the Report by the SSE Secretariat General (Social Solidarity Economy Secretariat General 2017), empirical quantitative evidence that captures a broader portrait of the wider SSE sector and its main attributes across the country, remains scarce. The scarcity of quantitative nationwide studies on SSE is probably due to the relatively re-

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<sup>4</sup>It should be noted that active SSE entities are considered those that have submitted an annual report to the General Register of Social Economy; hence they are mostly formal.

cent expansion of the sector and the fact that, up until recently, there was a lack of a coherent legal framework that would allow research based on official data. It should be noted that before 2011 (Law 4019/2011), when the first legislative act of SSE was voted, there was no formal legislative framework for the SSE sector beyond cooperative legislation. At the end of October 2016, the Greek parliament voted for a new law (Law 4430/2016) on 'Social and Solidarity Economy and the development of its actors' that is considered to constitute essential progress for the development of SSE in Greece.

### **3. Data and methods**

The study uses data derived from the LIVEWHAT (Living With Hard Times) project<sup>5</sup>, which was conducted in nine European countries, including France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. The method applied is Alternative Action Organisation Analysis (AAOA)<sup>6</sup>. The specific methodological approach, inspired from protest event analysis, protest case analysis and political claims analysis, uses organisational websites (including their online media outlets such as Facebook, blogs, Twitter), and applies a hubs-based approach in the study of Alternative Action Organisations (AAOs)<sup>7</sup> (Kousis, Giugni and Lahusen 2018).

Specifically, for each country participating in LIVEWHAT project, AAOs' websites were centrally retrieved from 'hub/subhub' nodal-websites, which had been identified and ranked according to specific criteria<sup>8</sup>. It should be noted that the 'hub/subhub' nodal-websites comprise the resources from which the population of AAOs is composed, in order to draw a random sample of them for coding purposes.

<sup>5</sup>More information about the project can be found at: <http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/?p=1>

<sup>6</sup>More information on the method applied could be found at:

LIVEWHAT, 2016. Integrated report on alternative forms of resilience in times of crises (Deliverable: 6.4)-PART 1: Alternative Action Organisation Analysis (Available from: [http://www.unige.ch/livewhat/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/LIVEWHAT\\_D6.4.pdf](http://www.unige.ch/livewhat/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/LIVEWHAT_D6.4.pdf))

<sup>7</sup>AAOs are defined as "groups or organisations (formal/informal) engaging in strategic alternative/solidarity actions in the public sphere which are not operated or exclusively supported by mainstream economic and political organisations (i.e. state or EU related agencies). AAOs' aim is providing citizens alternative ways of enduring day-to-day difficulties and challenges, usually in difficult economic times" (LIVEWHAT 2016, 10).

<sup>8</sup>The criteria of selecting 'hub/subhub' nodal-websites included: a) they should have nationwide coverage of AAOs, b) the AAOs that they contain should be active in multiple action fields and c) they should contain a significant number of websites.

For Greece, four ‘hubs/subhubs’ of AAOs were used <sup>9</sup>, including: a) <http://www.enallaktikos.gr>, b) <http://www.solidarity4all.gr>, c) <http://omikronproject.gr> and d) <http://www.boroume.gr> (Marketakis et al., UoC-Forth deliverable, 2015). Based on the above hubs/subhubs, the total number Greek AAOs’ websites was retrieved, from which a random sample of 500 AAOs was drawn for coding purposes and content analysis<sup>10,11</sup>.

From the study’s Codebook<sup>12</sup>, using the variable measuring the type of AAO organisation, specific AAO types are selected, which satisfy the working SSE definition presented in the introductory section of the paper. These include: a) informal citizens/grassroots solidarity initiatives and networks of social/solidarity economy, b) community credit unions/ community banks (finance-related cooperatives), c) formal social economy enterprises/mutual companies, d) formal cooperatives (non-finance related) and e) formal time banks. From the 500 AAOs participating in the Greek survey, 213 organisations are included in the analysis<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the specific ones were established in the context of the recent economic crisis and have been widely recognised in relevant literature.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that the 500 randomly chosen Greek AAOs to be coded were selected only if they were active at any time within approximately between 2007 and 2016, i.e. capturing the period of the recent economic crisis. Moreover, excluded from the sample are: a) state (central)-related organisations as sole organisers of alternative action, b) EU-related organisations as sole organisers of alternative action and, c) Corporate-related organisations as sole organisers of alternative action [e.g. corporate social responsibility action] (LIVWHAT WP6 Codebook 2015). AAOs practices may take the form of solidarity-based exchanges and cooperative structures such as barter clubs and networks, credit unions, ethical banks, time banks, alternative social currency, cooperatives, citizen’s self-help groups, solidarity networks covering urgent/basic needs, and social enterprises.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that an AAO is coded based on the information provided by its website, including its online media outlets such as Facebook, blog, Twitter.

<sup>12</sup> More information about the study’s Codebook can be found at: <http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Deliverable-6.1.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> From the analysis (i.e. from the 500 AAOs) are excluded: a) Protest groups/Indignados/occupy protests/movement of the squares, b) Information platforms and networks, c) NGOs/Volunteer Associations/Non-profit Organisations (professional, formal organisations), d) Charities/Foundations (professional, formal organisations), e) Unions, Labour Organisations, f) Other work/profession related Associations/groups, g) Cultural/Arts/Sports Associations/Clubs, h) ‘Hybrid’ Enterprise-Associations with local, regional state government units, i) Local (municipality)/regional Organisations, j) Church/Religious organisations. It should be noted that part of the literature recognises non-for profit organisations, charities, foundations and NGOs as SSE entities. However, due to the variety and even contradictory nature of such entities, the issue is an open debate (Fonteneau et al. 2010; Utting, van Dijk and Mathei 2014); hence the present study excludes them from the analysis.

It should be noted that the AAOA method has many advantages<sup>14</sup>; however, its major limitation is that it excludes AAOs with no websites or hub connections that could provide more representative evidence at the national level. Moreover, given that the main rationale of the survey was not research on SSE *per se* but on AAOs, the findings derived from the 213 SSE organisations are indicative, rather than representative, of the Greek SSE entities during the period under study. Table 1 presents the types of the 213 SSE organisations included in the present study. As shown, the vast majority of SSE organisations are informal citizens/grassroots solidarity initiatives and networks (77.9%). 13.1% of SSE organisations are formal social economy enterprises/mutual companies, whereas the prevalence of community credit unions/community banks (finance-related cooperatives) (2.3%), formal cooperatives (non-finance related) (4.2%) and formal time banks (2.3%) is much lower.

**Table 1- Greek SSE organisations participating in the study**

	Observations	(%)
Informal citizens/Grassroots solidarity initiatives and networks	166	77.9
Community credit unions/ Community banks (finance-related cooperatives)	5	2.3
Formal social economy enterprises/mutual companies	28	13.1
Formal Cooperatives (non-finance related)	9	4.2
Formal time banks	5	2.3
Total	213	100.0

Source: LIVEWHAT

The high prevalence of informal Greek SSE entities in the present study seems to contradict recent reports on the Greek SSE sector (Social Solidarity Economy Secretariat General 2017) but that might be due to the fact that during the period of data collec-

<sup>14</sup>For instance, the method surpasses the limitations of using conventional media sources (such as newspapers) by providing the best possible coverage of action repertoires, up to date information about informal and formal collective action organisations and their main features, as well as an approximate ‘population’ of organisations from which samples can be drawn to be used in subsequent research (e.g., such as web-based content analysis, online surveys, qualitative interviews) (Kousis, Giugni and Lahusen 2018).

tion (i.e., until mid-2016) Law 4430/2016 was just implemented, so formal SSE structures were less likely to be captured by nationwide research.

In order to explore the two-fold rationale of the paper, different variables are used from the study's Codebook, presented in more detail in the following section. The paper applies descriptive analysis to portray some important attributes (e.g., organisational structure, type of activities, beneficiaries, ultimate aims and means to achieve them, value frames and solidarity types) of all the SSE organisations under study and explorative analysis (*Chi-Square test of Independence*) to detect potential associations between SSE organisations referring to the crisis and specific features.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Descriptive analysis of the SSE organisations under study

The analysis indicates that the vast majority of Greek SSE organisations (76.0%) under study have been founded after the onset of the current economic crisis, i.e., after 2010<sup>15</sup>. Such a finding reflects the poor development of the Greek SSE sector until recently (Adam and Papatheodorou 2010; Nikolopoulos and Kapogiannis 2013), while additionally supporting the argument that the recent recessionary conditions might have acted as one of the critical triggers for the foundation of SSE organisations (Adam 2016; Bekridaki and Broumas 2017). Furthermore, the results are in line with the latest Report by the SSE Secretariat General (Social Solidarity Economy Secretariat General 2017) showing that the number of SSE entities has been significantly increased between 2013 and 2016.

Moreover, the majority of SSE activities are carried out at the local level (91.3%); whereas 6.8% and 1.9% are conducted at the regional/multi-regional level and at the national/transnational level, respectively. Such evidence underpins the importance of local SSE projects in encompassing and supporting local economies during hard times, while contributing to local revitalisation and development (Laville 2010; Barkin and Lemus 2013; Dinerstein 2014; Loh and Shear 2015). It should be noted that the research conducted in Greece shows that the majority of activities organised at the local level aim to cover basic needs (Solidarity for All 2015). However, Vathakou (2015, 176) argues that, despite the primarily local orientation of these initiatives:

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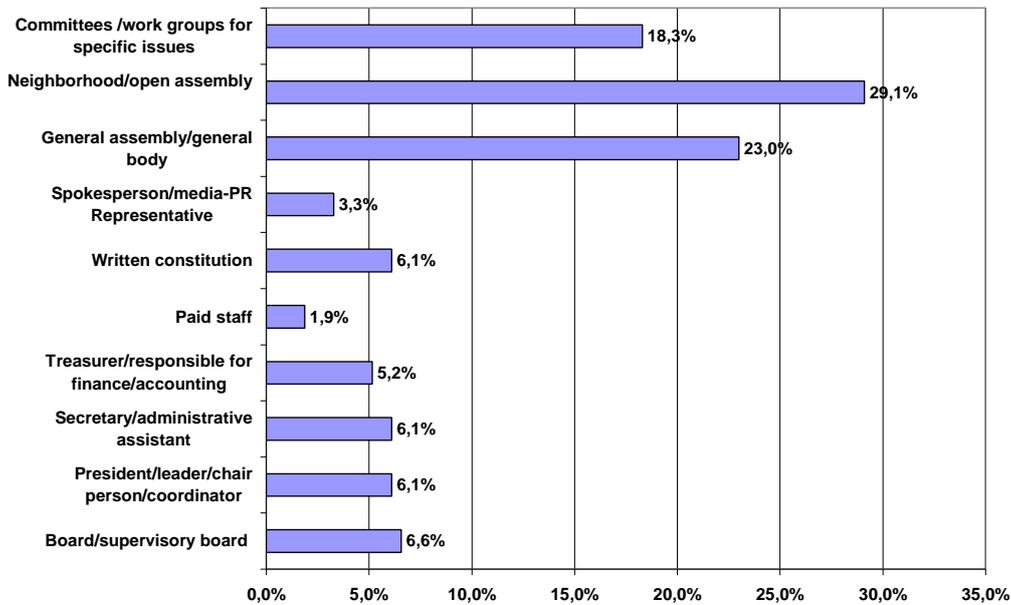
<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that in May 2010, Greece received the first bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Commission (EC). The bailout involved the implementation of radical reductions in Government expenditures and austerity programmes that featured severe cuts in salaries, pensions and social benefits as well as sharp increases in taxes (e.g. VAT and property taxes).

...they are not confined to their own localities. Most of them have an interest in what happens at the national and global levels... Looking at the local level, different cooperative cafés, restaurants and shops operate, not only as social enterprises, but also as informal meeting points, providing the time, space and appropriate environment for building ties among initiatives in the same region.

As shown in Figure 1, the Greek SSE organisations under study are more likely to share organisational features that are not so tightly related to the formalisation and professionalisation of management. For instance, the lowest prevalence is reported for formal features, such as having a board (6.6%), a president/leader (6.1%), a secretary/administrative assistant (6.1%), a treasurer or person responsible for finance (5.2%), paid staff (1.9%), a written charter (6.1%) and a spokesperson/media representative (3.3%). On the contrary, the highest prevalence is reported for organisational features such as neighbourhood/open assembly (29.1%), which primarily portrays the informal SSE structure. Moreover, from the Greek SSE organisations participating in the study, 23.0% have general assemblies and 18.3% feature committees/work groups, set up for specific issues.

The organisational structure echoes the SSE informal composition shown in Table 1, as the vast majority of organisations are informal citizens or grassroots solidarity initiatives and networks. Past research underpins the fact that the organisational attributes of SSEs are primarily associated with their formal/informal orientation, as well as the size of each organisation (Fonteneau et al. 2010). For instance, informal initiatives and small-scale organisations, which fit more with the Greek SSE organisations of our study, promote self-management and open-access participation and encourage their members and beneficiaries to actively take part in the decision-making process via general assemblies and open meetings (Fonteneau et al. 2010; Vathakou 2015). Moreover, it should be noted that a considerable number of SSE initiatives emerged through Citizens' Assemblies in the aftermath of the Greek Indignant movement in 2011 (Simiti 2014). Therefore, self-management and democratic processes that characterised the 'Indignant movement' were inherited in SSE organisational structures (Bekridaki and Broumas 2017).

Figure 1- Greek SSE organisations' structure



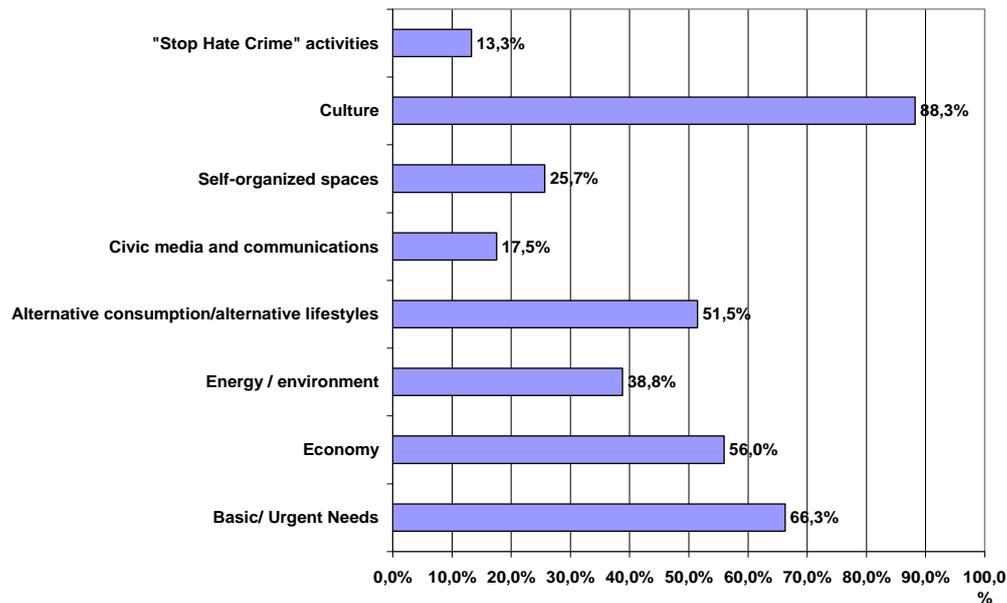
Source: LIVEWHAT

Figure 2 presents the types of activities of SSE organisations, indicating that the most prevalent one includes cultural-related actions (88.3%), such as art/theatre/cinema/music actions, festivals, concerts, non-formal educational activities for the public, etc<sup>16</sup>. The second most important type of actions aims to cover basic and urgent needs (66.3%), such as housing, food, clothing, free health services/medicines, education, etc. More than half of the activities are related to the economy (56.0%) (such as barter/local exchange trading systems/swap/exchange services/products, alternative coins, fundraising activities, economic development support, etc.) and alternative consumption/alternative lifestyles (51.5%) (such as community sustained agriculture, community gardens, alternative transportation/carpooling, 'de-growth/post-growth' actions, etc.). It should be noted that 38.8% of SSE activities are associated

<sup>16</sup>Part of such activities target to bring SSE organisations together. For instance, the 'Festival for the Solidarity and Cooperative Economy' takes place every year since 2012 as a meeting point for members of cooperatives, grass-roots solidarity structures and various other citizen initiatives (Bekridaki and Broumas 2017). Also, cultural events such as concerts, are organised by SSE organisations to support their activities related to basic/urgent needs (e.g. to collect medicines or food products) (Papadaki and Kalogeraki 2017).

with energy and environmental issues (such as protection of the environment/wildlife, renewable energy/climate change, anti-carbon/anti-nuclear, waste management/recycling, etc.), indicating that the Greek SSE sector, in line with international research<sup>17</sup>, combines social with environmental concerns.

Figure 2- Greek SSE organisations' types of activities



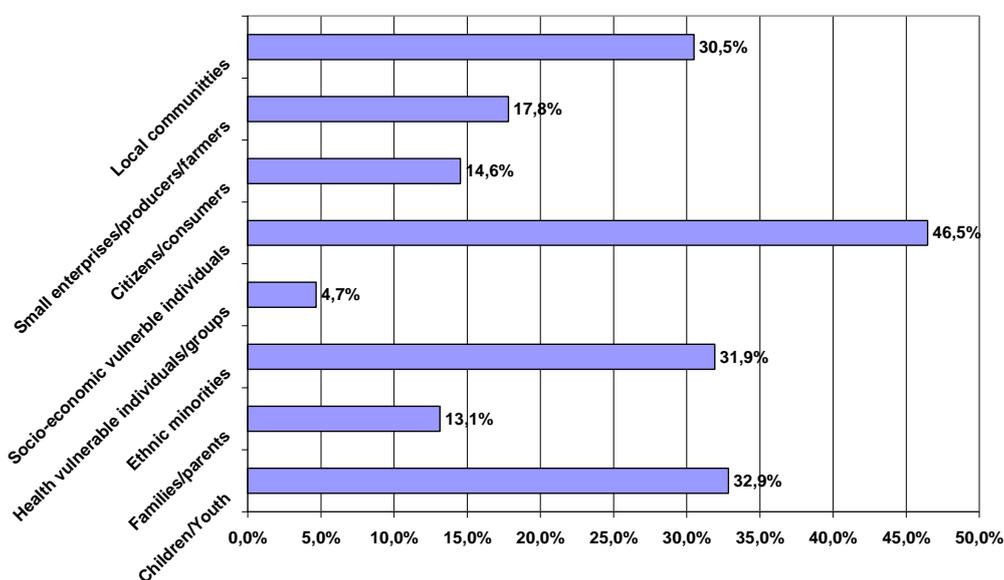
Source: LIVEWHAT

In addition, more than a quarter of activities involve self-organised spaces (for instance, social movement/civic/autonomous management of spaces such as squats, occupations of buildings, etc., self-organised shops such as cafés, etc.), whereas lower prevalence is reported for activities associated with civic media and communications (17.5%) (e.g., creating/maintaining/updating digital media outlets on alternative actions/groups, software/data exchange, e-press, e-TV, e-radio) and activities related to preventing Hate Crime, for instance on migrants, refugees, the disabled, etc. (13.3%).

<sup>17</sup>International research indicates the increase of environmentally motivated SSE organisations (see for instance, Calvo, Morales and Zikidis 2017).

With respect to the main type of beneficiaries<sup>18</sup>, Figure 3 shows that the Greek SSE organisations under study, primarily aim to assist socioeconomically vulnerable individuals, such as poor and marginalised individuals, the unemployed, the homeless, the uninsured, precarious workers, etc. (46.5%), children and young members (32.9%), ethnic minorities, immigrants and refugees (31.9%), as well as local communities (30.5%). In the SSE organisations, 17.8% of beneficiary types include small enterprises/producers/farmers, 14.6% citizens/consumers, 13.1% families/parents and just 4.7% health-vulnerable groups.

Figure 3- Greek SSE organisations' most important type of beneficiaries



Source: LIVEWHAT

<sup>18</sup>The beneficiary type of 'Children/youth' includes children, youth/teens and students, of 'families/parents' includes families, parents, mothers, fathers, single parents, of 'Ethnic minorities/immigrants/refugees' includes racial/ethnic minorities, immigrants, refugees, applicants for asylum, of 'Health vulnerable individuals/groups' includes health-inflicted (e.g. Alzheimer, cancer, HIV positive), health vulnerable groups (e.g. substance abuse) and disabled (e.g. physically, sensory and mentally), of 'Socio-economic vulnerable individuals' includes poor/economically vulnerable/marginalized communities, poor/economically vulnerable/marginalized persons, imprisoned, homeless, uninsured, unemployed, workers/precarious workers. It should be noted that the above types of beneficiaries are not mutually exclusive.

The findings in Figure 2 and Figure 3 uncover the plurality of activities and type of beneficiaries of the SSE organisations participating in the study. However, the findings also highlight that a significant proportion of SSE actions aim to satisfy basic needs of primarily socioeconomically vulnerable groups as beneficiaries. Such evidence provides some support to the research advocating that the Greek economic crisis has played an important role in the recent SSE expansion in order to cover unsatisfied urgent needs that should have been covered by the State (Kavoulakos 2015; Adam 2016).

Table 2 presents the ultimate aims of the Greek SSE organisations under study, which are grouped into three broader categories, including aims primarily associated with: a) crisis-coping strategies and economic recovery, as well as sustainability, b) social change, empowerment, democratic governance and alternative practices at the collective level, and c) change and empowerment at the individual level. From the first group, the highest prevalence is reported for aims associated with reducing the crisis' negative effects (31.5%), providing further support to arguments that the recent development of the Greek SSE sector is interrelated with the current crisis. Moreover, 20.2% of the SSE organisations under study report aims associated with health, education and welfare, 15.5% with sustainable development and 11.3% with reducing poverty and exclusion. From the second group, the most popular ultimate aim is associated with promoting collective identities and community responsibility/empowerment (37.6%), which is the highest across all aims under study. Promoting social change (32.4%), alternative non-economic practices, lifestyles and values (31.5%) are also popular ultimate aims across the SSE organisations participating in the study. Additionally, more than a quarter of SSE organisations report ultimate aims associated with promoting alternative economic practices, lifestyles and values (26.8%), approximately a quarter emphasise democratic practices (23.0%) and roughly a fifth emphasise aims such as combating discrimination and promoting equality of participation in society (20.7%).

The last group of ultimate aims associated with social change and empowerment at the individual level, demonstrates a generally lower prevalence than the other two groups. For instance, 16.0% of SSE organisations emphasise ultimate aims associated with promoting positive individual change, 12.7% with promoting dignity, and 10.3% with self-determination/self-initiative/self-representation and self-empowerment, and just 2.3% with individual rights and responsibility.

As Figure 4 shows, SSE organisations achieve their ultimate aims primarily through direct actions (93.4%). Moreover, more than half accomplish their goals via raising awareness (61.0%), whereas changing the government, policy reforms and lobbying are the least popular routes used to achieve ultimate aims. It should be underlined that

more than a third (33.8%) of the main routes utilized to achieve ultimate goals take place via unconventional political actions, such as protests.

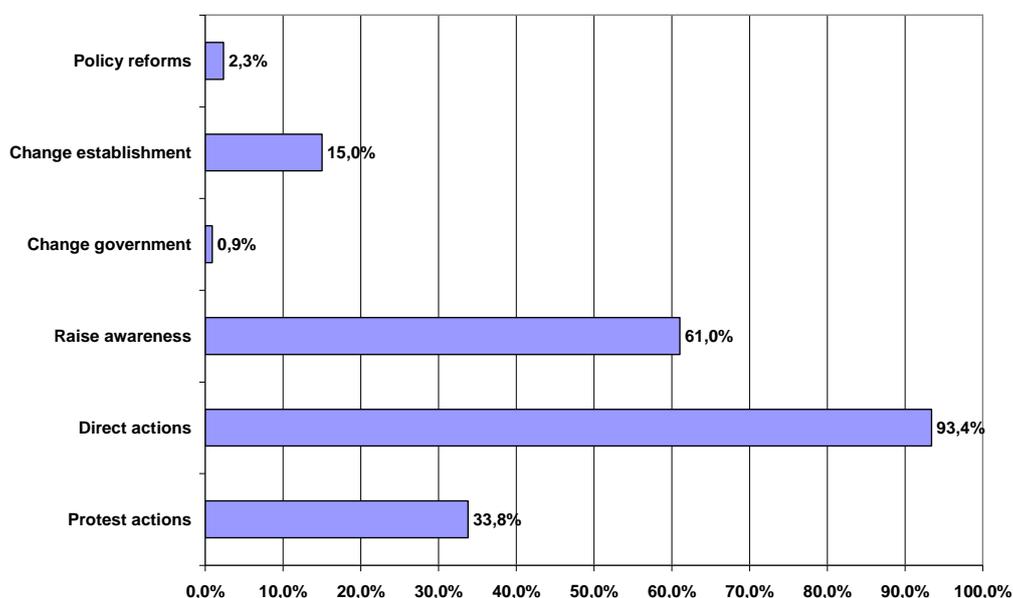
**Table 2 - Greek SSE organisations' ultimate aims**

<i>Aims mostly associated with crisis' coping strategies and economic recovery as well as sustainability</i>	<i>n (%)</i>
Reduce crisis' negative impacts	67(31.5%)
Reduce poverty and exclusion	24(11.3%)
Promote sustainable development	33(15.5%)
Promote health, education and welfare	43(20.2%)
<i>Aims mostly associated with social change, empowerment, democratic governance, and alternative practices at the collective level</i>	
Promote/achieve social change	69(32.4%)
Promote alternative economic practices/ lifestyles and values	57(26.8%)
Promote alternative noneconomic practices/ lifestyles and values	67(31.5%)
Promote social movement actions and collective identities	34(16.0%)
Promote collective identities and community responsibility	80(37.6%)
Promote democratic practices	49(23.0%)
Combat discrimination/ promote equality of participation in society	44(20.7%)
Increase tolerance and mutual understanding	25(11.7%)
Promote self-managed collectivity	31(14.6%)
<i>Aims mostly associated with change and empowerment at the individual level</i>	

Promote individual rights and responsibility	5(2.3%)
Promote self-determination/ self-initiative/ self-representation and self-empowerment	22(10.3%)
Promote and achieve positive/individual change	34(16.0%)
Promote dignity	27(12.7%)

Source: LIVEWHAT

Figure 4- Greek SSE organisations' main routes to achieve ultimate aims



Source: LIVEWHAT

The ultimate aims of SSE organisations and their primary means to achieve them, presented respectively in Table 2 and Figure 4, provide some preliminary evidence that the Greek SSE sector, besides operating as a coping strategy to remedy the effects of the crisis<sup>19</sup>, also acts as a tool of empowerment, transformation and social change (Re-

<sup>19</sup>Also captured in the activities and beneficiary types discussed earlier.

intjes 2003, Razeto 2013), and promotes collective action via protest movements. Research, conducted in Greece, points out that the recent economic crisis and austerity policies have questioned dominant views about the economy and have promoted new social movements (Kavoulakos 2015).

Moreover, the study explores the different types of solidarity approaches<sup>20</sup> applied by the Greek SSE organisations under study (Figure 5). It should be noted that the concept of solidarity is perceived in a variety of ways in SSE literature. For instance, Lewis and Swinney (2008) view solidarity through the lenses of reciprocity and mutual collective benefits. In that respect, solidarity takes place among the members of a SSE organisation and/or among its members and users or beneficiaries. Gardin (2014) argues that reciprocity cannot be achieved (for instance, when beneficiaries are not in a position to give back) and, in those cases, solidarity follows an altruistic approach. However, Sahakian (2016) points out that although solidarity tends to lean towards reciprocity, it moves beyond giving and receiving, as long as it involves voluntary relations based on the interest in the community. According to RIPESS (2015, 4), SSE networks emphasise solidarity in a broad sense ‘as an element that allows us to recognise ourselves in relation to others and to be concerned about their well-being’.

In the present study, solidarity approaches capture different type of practices, applied by SSE organisations in order to provide their services and implement their actions. Mutual and self-help practices, emphasising collaboration for common interests, primarily capture bottom-up solidarity practices, which relate solidarity to the notions of reciprocity, equality, cooperation, mutual and shared responsibility. According to Papadaki, Aleksadridis and Kalogeraki (2015), the approach of solidarity ‘from below’ is promoted by the active involvement of all – including organisers, members, and beneficiaries – in SSE activities. On the other hand, the distribution of goods and services captures a top-down process that resembles the philanthropic approach (Vathakou 2015). Moreover, solidarity approaches that frame their actions as forms of general help or support to others, reflect a more general altruistic approach. Such an approach entails collective practices that stem from concerns towards others, without expecting returns (Prainsack and Buyx 2011).

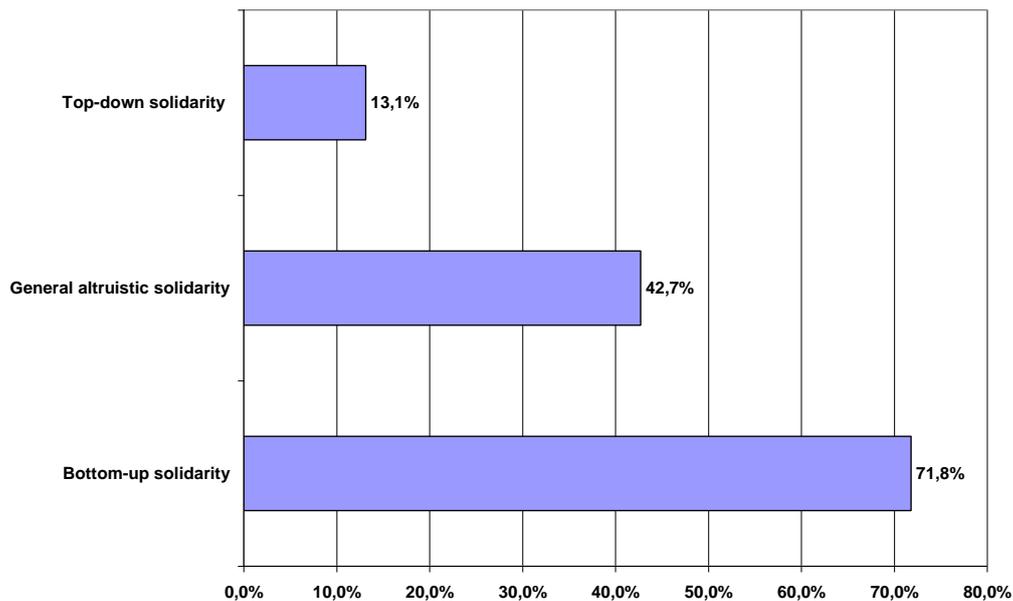
As Figure 5 illustrates, the vast majority of SSE organisations participating in our study emphasise a bottom-up solidarity approach (71.8%), which promotes citizen involvement and awareness of their capacities in order to take responsibility for them-

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<sup>20</sup>SSE organisations’ solidarity orientation is captured with three dichotomous variables that measure different types of solidarity, including: a) mutual-help/mobilizing or collaborating for common interests (labelled ‘bottom-up-solidarity’), b) help/offer support to others in general (labelled ‘altruistic’) and d) distribution of goods and services to others (labelled ‘top-down-solidarity from above’).

selves and others (Vathakou 2015). The general altruistic approach is quite prevalent among Greek SSE organisations (42.7%); whereas the least prevalent one is the top-down solidarity approach (13.1%).

Figure 5- Greek SSE organisations' solidarity approaches



Source: LIVEWHAT

Moreover, the study explores the value frames<sup>21</sup> of SSE organisations, i.e., the values upon which SSE actions draw, in order to take their fundamental meaning. In the study's codebook there are six main categories of values, including: a) humanitarian/philanthropic<sup>22</sup>, b) rights-based ethics<sup>23</sup>, c) empowerment and participation<sup>24</sup>, d) diversity and sustainability<sup>25</sup>, e) economic virtues<sup>26</sup>, and f) community and order<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>21</sup>According to the study's Codebook, value frames are used to code the framing of action undertaken overall by organisations. Value frames may be latent or manifest within the organisation's websites textual information such as in the main page of organisation's website, in sections such as 'mission', 'who we are', etc.

<sup>22</sup>Including 'solidarity and altruism', 'truthfulness, honesty and sincerity', 'trust', 'dignity', 'voluntarism' and 'respect'.

<sup>23</sup> Including 'political equality/equality', 'civil rights and liberties', 'human rights'/women's rights/children's rights', 'fairness/ ethics', 'social justice' and 'peace, safety'.

As Figure 6 shows, the vast majority of Greek SSE organisations under study, frame their actions with humanitarian/philanthropic values (90.8%), as well as empowerment and participation (89.2%). Additionally, values associated with rights-based ethics (43.6%) and diversity and sustainability (35.6%) are quite popular; whereas the least prevalent values are related to community and order (18.8%) and economic virtues (11.1%). The findings are in line with the fundamental values of the SSE sector associated with solidarity and the promotion of rights, social justice and dignity (Kawano 2009; Fonteneau et al. 2010). Moreover, SSE emphasises citizens' empowerment and participation, but also respect for ethnical and cultural diversity, as well as sexual identity, fighting against all forms of discrimination and favouring more harmonious man-nature relations (RIPESS 2015).

#### **4.2 Explorative analysis of SSE organisations referring to the crisis**

The following analysis investigates whether Greek SSE organisations, referring to the crisis and framing their action in relation to it, primarily aim to remedy the effects of the crisis or whether their role expands beyond the crisis *per se*, to promote collective action aiming to transform both society and the economy. Specifically, based on explorative analysis (*Chi-Square test of Independence*), potential associations are investigated between SSE organisations which make/do not make references to the crisis<sup>28</sup>, in relation to their ultimate aims, main routes to achieve them and solidarity approaches. It should be noted that the vast majority of SSE organisations participating in the study, i.e., 74.1%, make references to the recent economic crisis.

<sup>24</sup>Including 'community building/empowerment', 'freedom and emancipation', 'self-reliance/self-sufficiency', 'participatory democracy', 'mutual understanding', 'collaboration across interested parties', 'internationalism/globalism'.

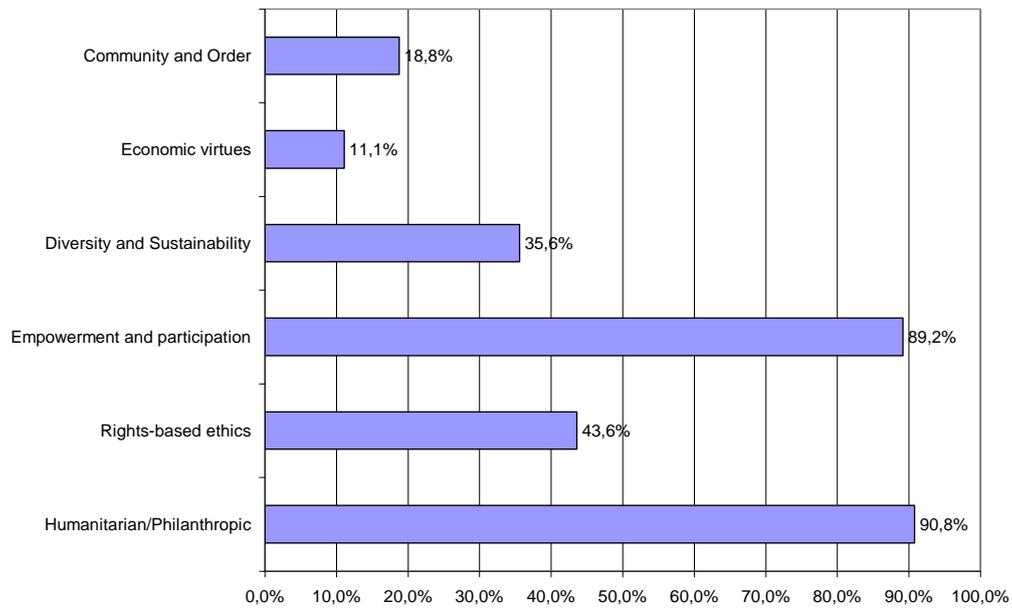
<sup>25</sup>Including 'ecology, environment, and sustainability', 'intergenerational justice, 'respect for difference', 'toleration'.

<sup>26</sup>Including 'economic prosperity', 'accountability', 'competitiveness and merit', 'professionalism'

<sup>27</sup>Including 'security and stability', 'nationalism/national belonging', 'tradition', 'social equilibrium', 'social cohesion', 'preserving existing local communities'.

<sup>28</sup>According to the Codebook, any clear mention, detected in actions, statements, documents, posters, press releases etc., of the recent economic crisis captures framing of the crisis.

Figure 6- Greek SSE organisations' value frames



Source: LIVEWHAT

Table 3 presents the results from the *Chi-Square test of Independence* indicating that from the first group of SSE ultimate aims, related to coping strategies for the crisis, and economic recovery as well as sustainability, significant associations are reported for reducing the negative effects of the crisis, along with poverty and social exclusion. Specifically, SSE organisations referring to the crisis are more likely to report such ultimate aims compared to their counterparts with no relevant references. From the second group of SSE ultimate aims, significant associations are reported, specifically for promoting alternative economic practices/lifestyles and values, and for promoting collective identities and community responsibility. Specifically, more SSE organisations with references to the current crisis underscore the specific ultimate aims compared to SSE organisations with no relevant references. From the last group of ultimate aims, related to social change and empowerment at the individual level, the *Chi-Square analysis* indicates that at  $\alpha=5\%$ , no significant associations are reported.

**Table 3- Greek SSE organisations' reference/no reference to the economic crisis and ultimate aims**

	<i>SSE with reference to the crisis (n=146) n (%)</i>	<i>SSE with no reference to the crisis (n=51) n(%)</i>	<i>Chi-square test</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<b>Aims mostly associated with crisis' coping strategies and economic recovery as well as sustainability</b>				
Reduce crisis' negative impacts	62 (42.5%)	0(0.0%)	25.602	.000
Reduce poverty and exclusion	21(14.4%)	0(0.0%)	8.211	.004
Promote sustainable development	20(13.7%)	11(21.6%)	1.766	.184
Promote health education and welfare	32(21.9%)	7(13.7%)	1.598	.206
<b>Aims mostly associated with social change, empowerment, democratic governance, and alternative practices at the collective level</b>				
Promote/achieve social change	53(36.3%)	13(25.5%)	1.983	.159
Promote alternative economic practices/ lifestyles and values	47(32.2%)	7(13.7%)	6.478	.011
Promote alternative noneconomic practices/ lifestyles and values	49(33.6%)	14(27.5%)	.649	.421
Promote social movement actions and collective identities	27(18.5%)	5(9.8%)	2.098	.148
Promote collective identities and community responsibility	60(41.1%)	12(23.5%)	5.029	.025
Promote democratic practices	38(26.0%)	9(17.6%)	1.461	.227
Combat discrimination/ promote equality of participation in society	27(18.5%)	12(23.5%)	.604	.437
Increase tolerance and mutual understanding	13(8.9%)	9(17.6%)	2.912	.088
Promote self-managed collectivity	22(15.1%)	8(15.7%)	.011	.916
<b>Aims mostly associated with change and empowerment at the individual level</b>				

Promote individual rights and responsibility	2(1.4%)	2(3.9%)	1.237	.276*
Promote self-determination/ self-initiative/ self-representation and self-empowerment	16(11.0%)	5(9.8%)	.053	.818
Promote and achieve positive/individual change	22(15.1%)	10(19.6%)	.572	.449
Promote dignity	24(16.4%)	3(5.9%)	3.561	.059

**Source:** LIVEWHAT, Notes: \*Fischer's exact test

Table 4 indicates that the prevalence of protest actions and changing the establishment, as main routes to achieve ultimate aims, are significantly higher in SSE organisations referring to the crisis. Non-significant associations are reported for direct actions, raising awareness, changing government and policy reforms between SSE organizations referring to the crisis and their counterparts.

**Table 4- Greek SSE organisations' reference/no reference to the economic crisis and main routes to achieve ultimate aims**

	<i>SSE with reference to the crisis (n=146) n (%)</i>	<i>SSE with no reference to the crisis (n=51) n(%)</i>	<i>Chi-square test</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Protest actions	58(39.7%)	10(19.6%)	6.768	.009
Direct actions	139(95.2%)	46(90.2%)	1.658	.198
Raise awareness	94(64.4%)	26(51.0%)	2.852	.091
Change government	1(.7%)	0(0.0%)	.351	1.000*
Change establishment	27(18.5%)	3(5.9%)	4.656	.031
Policy reforms	3(2.1%)	1(2.0%)	.002	1.000*

**Source:** LIVEWHAT, Notes: \*Fischer's exact test

With respect to the different types of solidarity approaches, Table 5 indicates significant associations, specifically for the general altruistic solidarity approach, which is higher among SSE organisations making clear references to the crisis. Non-significant associations are reported for top-down and bottom-up solidarity approaches between SSE organizations with references and no references to the crisis.

**Table 5- Greek SSE organisations' reference/no reference to the economic crisis and solidarity approaches**

	<i>SSE with reference to the crisis (n=146) n(%)</i>	<i>SSE with no reference to the crisis (n=51) n(%)</i>	<i>Chi-square test</i>	<i>p-value</i>
General altruistic solidarity	73(50.0%)	15 (29.4%)	6.482	.011
Top-down solidarity	19(13.0%)	8 (15.7%)	.228	.633
Bottom-up solidarity	106(72.6%)	35(68.6%)	.294	.588

*Source: LIVEWHAT*

## 5. Discussion

Specific interest in SSE as a viable economic alternative has gathered pace in Europe, particularly since the recent global economic crisis (Utting 2015; Sahakian 2016). By combining economic activities with solidarity, supporting disadvantaged and disabled people back into the labour market and contributing to active citizenship, SSE has become a critical component in providing innovative solutions to overcome the recession (Toia 2013; Nardi 2016).

The present study provides some preliminary empirical evidence of the Greek SSE sector in the context of the recent economic crisis, using nationwide indicative data derived from the LIVEWHAT project. The findings reveal the twofold role of the SSE entities participating in the study, i.e., as means to respond to the effects of the crisis, but also as tools of collective empowerment and social transformation. With respect to the former, the vast majority of SSE organisations have been established after the onset of the crisis (i.e., after 2010), while among their most widespread activities is covering the urgent needs of different type of beneficiaries, which primarily comprise vulnerable socio-economic groups such as the unemployed, the homeless, the uninsured, etc. The findings provide some empirical support to previous research, underscoring the fact that the Greek SSE sector has been significantly developed to combat the effects of the crisis (Adam and Teloni 2015; Vathakou 2015; Kousis and Paschou 2017). This development is in agreement with Moulaert and Ailenei's (2005) arguments that, historically, the emergence and re-emergence of SSE is associated with times of crisis. In that respect, SSE acts as a means to cover the increased needs due to recessionary conditions.

The amalgam of ultimate aims, emphasising both remedying the effects of the crisis, but also promoting social change, empowerment, democratic governance and alternative practices, indicates that the Greek SSE sector does not merely aim to support those in need. The emphasis placed on collective – rather than individual – transformative procedures, as well as the significant role of protests as a means to achieve ultimate aims, portray a more radical view of SSE that promotes collective action and develops forms of political resistance (Marques 2013). Within such a spectrum, SSE could be placed among the new social movements that are working to transform both the economy and society (Kawano 2009). Moreover, the most prevalent values emphasised by the SSE organisations under study, involve humanitarianism/philanthropy, which are primarily associated with the recession, but also empowerment and participation, which echo the emphasis given on the role of citizens in deciding their own development.

Explorative analysis provides some further support to the dual role of SSE entities, as means of coping with the effects of the crisis, but also as a tool of social change. Whilst SSE organisations, which make reference to the crisis, stress, among their ultimate goals, coping with the effects of the crisis and eliminating poverty and social exclusion, non-significant associations are reported in the vast majority of the rest of the ultimate aims under study. This finding is in line with scholars arguing that the potential of Greek SSE goes beyond recessionary times, and SSE organisations are building up a common identity based on common goals (Kavoulakos 2015; Rakopoulos 2015; Bekridaki and Broumas 2017).

In addition, the exploratory analysis sheds some light on an important aspect of SSE organisations that refer to the crisis. They seem to adopt a more radical stance, compared to their counterparts with no references to the crisis, as they primarily use unconventional political means, such as protests, and emphasise changing the establishment, as main routes to achieve their ultimate aims. Such results provide some preliminary evidence that SSE organisations, which make reference to the crisis, may resemble more radical social movements (Miller 2010; Marques 2013; Dash 2014). Finally, although the bottom-up solidarity approach is the most prevalent both for SSE organisations with references and no references to the economic crisis, the former seem to more frequently adopt a ‘general help/ support to others’ approach than the latter. Such an approach is likely to indicate that, during the crisis, altruistic and humanitarian motivations are reinforced (Theodossopoulos 2016), but also that during recessionary

times, the practical implementation of solidarity as a mutual benefit process and the active involvement of both members and beneficiaries, faces obstacles<sup>29</sup>.

The present quantitative study captures an indicative snapshot of the Greek SSE sector in the context of the recent crisis. Despite the potential merits of the empirical findings, the study suffers from specific methodological limitations that need to be addressed in future research. First of all, the method applied excludes SSE initiatives without available websites, hub connections or online media outlets (such as Facebook, blogs, Twitter). Therefore, the data is limited exclusively to organisations that are active online. Additionally, the findings are based on SSE entities that originate from a broader sample of Alternative Action Organisations; hence they can only provide some indicative – rather than representative – results. Moreover, the investigation of the ultimate aims of SSE entities becomes a rather difficult task, specifically within quantitative research, due to their diversity and plurality, which demand qualitative approaches for their deeper understanding.

The study of the SSE sector in Greece is a methodological challenge (Adam and Teloni 2015), primarily due to the sector's relatively new expansion, as well as the recent establishment of a coherent legislative framework. Future studies could apply mixed method designs, i.e. combining quantitative data from different sources (such as official registers, studies based on the AAOA method) with qualitative data that could shed more light on our understanding of the Greek SSE sector and its potential.

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, beneficiaries of SSE activities that are hardest hit by the crisis mainly struggling to cope with daily needs and do not engage in associational life and collective action (Simiti 2015).

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