



ΠΡΑΞΗ:

«ΘΑΛΗΣ-ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑΣ-

Το ανθρώπινο δυναμικό ως βασική συνιστώσα της αναπτυξιακής δυναμικής και διαφοροποίησης των περιοχών: Η περίπτωση της Ελλάδας»

Κωδικός MIS 380421

ΥΠΟΕΡΓΟ:

«Το ανθρώπινο δυναμικό ως βασική συνιστώσα της αναπτυξιακής δυναμικής και διαφοροποίησης των περιοχών: Η περίπτωση της Ελλάδας» και α/α «01»

ΕΠΙΧΕΙΡΗΣΙΑΚΟ ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ:

**«Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» (Ε.Π.Ε.Δ.Β.Μ.) 2007-2013
Υπουργείο Παιδείας και Θρησκευμάτων**

ΑΞΟΝΑΣ ΠΡΟΤΕΡΑΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ 11:

«Ενίσχυση του ανθρώπινου κεφαλαίου για την προαγωγή της έρευνας και της καινοτομίας στις 3 Περιφέρειες Σταδιακής Εξόδου»

ΚΑΤΗΓΟΡΙΑ ΠΡΑΞΗΣ:

«ΘΑΛΗΣ»

Η Πράξη συγχρηματοδοτείται από το Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο (Ε.Κ.Τ.) και από εθνικούς πόρους, μέσω του Προγράμματος Δημοσίων Επενδύσεων (Π.Δ.Ε.) του Υπουργείου Παιδείας και Θρησκευμάτων

Παραδοτέο

Παραδοτέο Π4.6.3: Τελική έκδοση κειμένου προς δημοσίευση σε διεθνές περιοδικό

ΥΔ4.6: Συγγραφή τελικών κειμένων – Διάχυση των αποτελεσμάτων της έρευνας

Δράση 4: Μελέτες περιπτώσεων τοπικών πρωτοβουλιών



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

Συντάκτης : Σκορδίλη Σοφία

Για την εκπόνηση του παραδοτέου απασχολήθηκαν τα κάτωθι μέλη της ομάδας έργου :

ΜΕΛΗ ΚΥΡΙΑΣ ΕΡΕΥΝΗΤΙΚΗΣ ΟΜΑΔΑΣ (Κ.Ε.Ο.)

ΣΚΟΡΔΙΛΗ ΣΟΦΙΑ

Θεσσαλονίκη, 30/11/2015



1

Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.



Πανεπιστήμιο Μακεδονίας

Ερευνητικό Πρόγραμμα ΘΑΛΗΣ

Το ανθρώπινο δυναμικό ως βασική συνιστώσα της αναπτυξιακής δυναμικής και διαφοροποίησης των περιοχών: Η περίπτωση της Ελλάδας.

ΟΜΑΔΑ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑΣ 4

Χαροκόπειο Πανεπιστήμιο

Σκορδίλη Σοφία

Δ4. Μελέτες περιπτώσεων τοπικών πρωτοβουλιών

Παραδοτέο Π4.6.3: Τελική έκδοση κειμένου προς δημοσίευση σε διεθνές περιοδικό



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.



ΠΑΡΑΔΟΤΕΟ 4.6.3

Agrifood localization in crisis-hit Greece and beyond

Sophia Skordili

Final paper to be submitted to an international journal



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

Agrifood localization in crisis-hit Greece and beyond

Sophia Skordili

Harokopio University

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to investigate the profile and the local embeddedness of new dynamic small-scale agrifood firms operating in Greece. The paper presents a critical review of the main points of the intense relative theoretical debates currently underway and the results of secondary data analysis and field-work survey realized in the framework of a recently implemented Research Project financed by the EU and the Greek Ministry of Education. The first results of the survey shows that new ventures share a set of promising qualities, nevertheless they keep suffering from crucial long-standing problems typical of traditional small agrifood firms. Hence their success is extremely fragile.

Key words: small-scale agrifood processing, short food supply chains, local embeddedness, agrifood localization, Greece.



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

Introduction

Greece has a rich tradition and long standing specialization in agrifood sector. Its contribution has always been critical in the formation of key economic indicators and the smoothening of the acute regional disparities of the country.

During the last 30 years or so a small group of Transnational Corporations joint by a few large domestic competitors, control every agrifood market of the country. There is little doubt that the leading corporations have followed a path of high cost development with poor results for people, places and the economy. The deep recession has brought into a sharper focus the many failures of the prevailing corporate-led food system in Greece. Powerful agrifood processors and retail chains are heavily criticised for their catastrophic effects on the environment and the local economies, their relentless squeeze on the weaker actors of the supply chains, as well as, their failure to provide the public with affordable and nutrient food (Skordili 2013a; Skordili 2013b). In a shrinking market, their dominance has been further enhanced and small agrifood firms are the main victims of the current crisis.

However it is encouraging that in the midst of the recession there is remarkable mobility in small-scale agrifood processing and retailing. Day-in day-out, a diverse set of specialized small scale agro-food initiatives are emerging all over the country. From edible snails cultivation and standardization to premium olive oils and novel types of small-scale grocery retail outlets, a new generation of Greeks are turning to innovative practices in agrifood aspiring to a way out of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. These practices are mostly run by highly qualified relatively young men and women who work long hours and apply their skills and creativity in order to survive in a hostile business environment led by long-standing recession and social unrest, increasing market concentration in the agrifood sector, as well as, instability and limited access to the banking system.

These ventures have been very welcomed by governmental bodies, political parties and the mass media. It is widely believed that they share a number of positive features that make them qualitative different from the typical traditional agrifood SMEs. Hence they can act as an antidote to the mounting socio-economic problems associated with the corporate-led food production and consumption, a valuable source for new employment opportunities, income and local development.



Nevertheless we have a very vague idea about their actual characteristics and potential.

The paper aims to shed some light into these issues by a) documenting the extent and the spatial pattern of new firm formation and b) assessing their local embeddedness and development potential.

There is an urgent need to clarify crucial issues and sharpen our research questions in order to grasp the new realities set by the crisis. New questions are searching for novel answers. The core questions are directed to the impact of the entrepreneur to business success and the linkages of new firms with the local areas. A set of additional questions focuses on the impact of new firms to rural development exploring the spatial configuration of supply chains and their linkages to local economies.

The remaining paper is structured in four parts. The next part is a critical review of the main points of the intense theoretical debate currently underway on agrifood systems localization. The following two parts present the main findings of a recently implemented Research Project funded by the EU and the Greek Ministry of Education. The research has followed two consecutive stages. The aim of the first stage (part 3) is to define the extent, the broad profile and the spatial pattern of newly established (after 1/1/2010) or recently restructured small-scale dynamic agrifood processing firms. The second stage (part 4) presents the main findings of 40 in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs of these ventures found within two-hours time zone from Athens. The ultimate part synthesizes the findings and attempts to assess the potential of new agrifood initiatives in local development.

Agrifood systems localization

At global north there is a growing awareness that the conventional corporate-led agrifood system is malfunctioning. The criticism has become increasingly prevalent during several past decades. The main claims revolve around its serious costs in terms of corporate power, food safety, nutritional value and sustainability (Lang and Heasman 2004; Fold & Pritchard 2005; Morgan et al. 2006; Burch and Lawrence 2007; Blay-Palmer 2008; Sage 2012; Clapp 2012, Kalfagianni 2014). The continuing financial, economic and political turmoil accentuates already existing environmental



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

and social failures of the agro-food system thus creating an urgent need to identify innovative, effective and legitimate responses.

The pros and cons of local food

In this context, agrifood localization initiatives, i.e. initiatives that rely on local production and processing practices for the provision of food, appear particularly promising. There is no doubt that there is a lot of room for local initiatives to provide a concrete response to widespread concerns about the profound troubles and limitations of the conventional industrialized agro-food system. They can bring some sort of equilibrium in a highly unbalanced and unequal conventional food system. They can give value to local resources and supply the market with long forgotten local varieties that do not fit into industrial production methods and conventions. They can provide a valuable source of income to small farmers, processors and retailers, that have been excluded from conventional food supply chains or work on severe price-squeeze conditions (Donald and Blay-Palmer 2006; Allen 2010; O'Neil 2014).

Too often it is taken for granted that small local firms are always associated with benign and desired outcomes. However these qualities are not given, neither guaranteed. Far from claiming that local scale is inherently bad, there is nothing inherent about the scale (Born and Prucell 2006). Local-scale initiatives are equally likely to be just or unjust, sustainable or unsustainable, fair or unfair (Morgan and Sonnino 2010). Following the seminal work of Born and Prucell:

Mounting empirical research has shown that the contribution of local agrifood systems is not always positive in several basic aspects. Small farmers too often make extended use of intensive high-input agricultural practices with devastating effects to natural resources. In several instances small producers are making use of exploitative labour relations. While historical discrepancies in power due to wealth, linkages to political parties can lead to oligarchic decision making structures and lack of transparency (Allen 2011; DeLindl 2011; Wilson 2013).

What constitutes local food?

The definition of the local food is not as obvious as it seems at first glance. There is not a precise definition of what constitutes local food (Heinrichs 2007).



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

Usually definitions of the local are restricted to spatial descriptions. However it is doubtful whether any definition of 'local food' could ever be based purely on physical proximity. According to the size of the served area the boundaries of the foodsheds vary considerably. The much publicized locavores movement has launched the 100 miles diet. These definitions should be revised when applied to metropolitan regions. In New York City, the "Healthy Food and Healthy Lives Act" introduced in 2008 defines as locally produced food that is acquired from the State of NY or from another State when travelling less than 400 miles. In the case of London food markets producers should be located within a 100-miles radius (Morgan and Sonnino 2010).

In some instances local denotes the provenance of food in certain scales. However the local origin of food does not always identifies with small and authentic. Locally made food can be the output of a big factory owned by a giant corporation (Morgan et al. 2006).

'Local' is often equated with a host of values relating to social, environmental and 'quality' criteria. Definitions should not be restricted to geographical understandings of products 'made' in the region. They should include more complex understandings based upon economic, social and cultural factors, such as: where the ingredients come from? where the value was added during its production? who it was made by? where the product was to be sold? what is the impact to local economy? what is the historical association with the region? (Seems 2010).

Short Food Supply Chains

The labels 'Alternative Food Networks', 'Short Food Supply Chains', 'Quality food', 'Local Food' are contested concepts. They are often used interchangeably since there are no concise definitions to describe the nuance differences among them. In short, they are qualitative different or even countercultural to corporate-led Conventional Food Networks. Indeed, they share their opposition to specific failures and harmful effects of the conventional, corporate-led agrifood system. However there is no doubt that they embrace a wide range of initiatives with highly varied product values, aims and practices (Venn et al. 2006)

According to a loose but accurate definition alternative agrifood network is loosely defined by what it is not rather than by what it is (Morgan 2010). Since conventional



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

food sector is far from coherent it is expected that localised agrifood sector can take various forms as well.

Alternative versus conventional dualisms should be abandoned. Most producers adopt a hybridised approach to production, which is characterised by a tendency to 'dip in and out' of conventional and alternative modes at different times (Ilbery and Maye 2005).

In order to transcend the abovementioned ambiguities and perplexities that are associated with the narrative of the Alternative, we adopt the relevant and more specific concept of Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) introduced by Renting, Marsden and Banks (Renting et al. 2003).

SFSCs are the 'short-circuit' of the long, anonymous supply chains characteristics of the industrial mode of food production and have the potential to resocialise and respatialise food. By constructing short and transparent chains consumers have knowledge on the origin and quality of foods. SFSCs are creating new linkages between producers and consumers. Equally significant, SFSCs are an important carrier for the 'shortening' of relations between food production and locality, thereby potentially enhancing a reembedding of farming towards more environmentally sustainable modes of production (Marsden et al. 2000).

There is a great variety of SFSCs. We can distinguish three broad types of SFSCs as concerns their organisational structure and the specific mechanisms they entailed to extend relations in time and space: *Face-to-face interaction*, *Spatial Proximity*, *when* Products are sold in the region (or place) of production *and extended SFSCs* when products are sold to consumers outside the region of production who may have no personal experience of that locality. Needless to say that one business may be involved in more than one categories of the following three supply chains (Sage 2002; Sonnino and Marsden 2006; Sage 2012). It is obvious that the longer the SFSC the more possible it is to involve conventional firms as well. The main point of critique to SFSC analysis focuses on the ignorance of upstream connections. The starting point is usually the primary producer while the provenance of seeds and fertilisers is not included in the analysis (Ilbery and Maye 2005).

Authenticity and trust, the product is embedeed with info when it reaches the consumer.



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση(Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

The extent and the spatial pattern of the new ventures

A systematic search on various secondary data sources beginning from 1/1/2010 revealed 150 dynamic new or recently restructured small firms operating in food processing and retailing.

Two interesting findings were revealed at the initial stage of research. First, many failed attempts and second, the much lower than anticipated number of incidents. Both are strong indications that the public debate on this issue is overly optimistic and light hearted.

Domestic and international media are reproducing suspiciously selective data from a small number of supposed 'success stories' and avoid any reference to failures. They remain conspicuously salient on the various obstacles to business environment set by the crisis and the numerous failed attempts. It seems to conflate the desired with the real. However the systematic search has shown that a substantial proportion of highly anticipated ventures were forced to withdraw the market at the initial stage of their development. Food market shrinkage due to drastic cuts in available incomes of consumers and the instabilities of the wider business environment were named as the main causes of failure

Key informant interviews indicated the importance of additional sources of failure. The rate of failure is substantially higher in activities linked directly with primary agrifood production due to the underestimation of the difficulties and uncertainties of the agricultural sector. A notable example is the highly promoted cultivation of edible snails. Hundreds of new farmers, with little or no knowledge of the difficulties of the agricultural profession, realized the hard way that snails are extremely vulnerable to extreme weather conditions and infections. In processing and retailing activities lack of access to the banking system, as well as, long delays in payment installments of investment projects financed under the EU and state programs, were critical in firm's survival.

The second interesting finding has to do with the considerably lower than anticipated incidence of new dynamic ventures. A systematic search to various sources reveals no more than 150 processing and retailing firms that fulfill the eligibility criteria. The public debate makes reference to considerably higher figures. The same overestimation characterizes the relevant debate on counter-urbanization. Results of a recent Survey financed by the Ministry of Agriculture showed that no



less than 1,5 million urban residents were willing to move to rural areas and work as farmers (Demetra, 2012). It is widely believed that ex-urban residents can make a fresh start at the idyllic environment of greek rural areas away from the over-crowded and hard hit by crisis greek cities. However research results show considerable lower figures (Gkartzios 2011; Kasimis and Zographakis 2014).

The 150 entries to the data base construct a diversified group of initiatives with very different business orientation and strategies. The available secondary data on employment creation and the profile of the entrepreneur were very poor and cannot lead to credible conclusions. Still there are some indications that the new initiatives are very small, in fact they are mostly micro and nano enterprises. Also, new independent retailers provide valuable employment opportunities for younger and middle aged urban residents, the groups with the higher unemployment rate.

However secondary data search were valuable source of information regarding the product specialization and the location pattern of the new dynamic agrifood firms.

Product specialization

There is a remarkable shift of business specialization to higher value products. In food processing there is a clear trend to revitalization of traditional local products (wineries, spirits, sauces, cheese and dairy, dried meat), as well as to novel products for the domestic market. In retailing, there is a massive influx of “new wave” local food retail outlets. They offer a big variety of products carefully selected from small local producers all over the country.

However the most interesting finding is the organization of production along the lines of vertical integration even for very small firms. As shown on map1 several firms are active in primary production and processing, or processing and sales, while a small number of them is active in the three sectors of economic activity.

Map 1

Spatial pattern

As shown in map 1, new dynamic agrifood firms follow a clear spatial pattern. There is a profound concentration in adjacent areas to Athens and Thessaloniki metropolitan regions. Also, they have a strong presence in areas that combine tourist



attraction with significant agrifood specialization (mainly in Crete and several other islands, as well as, in southern Peloponnese).

This is an interesting finding since recent empirical investigations show a relevant move, closer to key markets of Athens and Thessaloniki metropolitan conurbations, for the top 100 agrifood processors too. The relocation of big firms is evident even on traditional firms of primary manufacturing. This trend should be explained by the influx of low cost, raw and semi processed, fruit and vegetables (e.g. frozen concentrated orange juice from Brazil, or tomato from China) (Skordili 2009). It is indicative that a recent study by the Co-federation of Farmers has shown that only in 2011 alone the aggregate rate of national sufficiency for 41 key products of arable and livestock production has declined by 3% (PASEGES 2012). Hence, for a growing number of firms processing activity is confined to the final stages of production, while several products of their product range are imported as final goods. The bypass of places by agrifood corporations has led to the gradual eradication of longstanding local agro-food complexes and the loss of important indigenous varieties and knowledge.

Hence, the traditional over presentation of agro-food processors to certain rural areas of the country seems to be weakening in favour of major urban regions. As a result the acute regional disparities are expected to be widening.

Fieldwork Research

The answer to the second group of questions, i.e. assessing the local embeddedness and the actual development potential of new ventures, draws on 40 face-to-face interviews with entrepreneurs of selected small-scale dynamic agrifood firms. Research was conducted in the period between October 2014 and June 2015.

Due to the scarcity and omissions of available secondary data, the findings of the desk-top research were valuable in order to formulate the geographical area of research and the business sample. We came to a decision to focus our research in and around Athens Metropolitan Region which is the prime area of new ventures at national level. More specifically, research area includes continental areas (islands are excluded) within the two hours time-zone from the Athens metropolitan area.



Map 2 shows the boundaries of the research area and the geographical distribution of the sample.

Map 2

It is a highly diversified area, in fact a miniature of the country, including the prime conurbation and market of Greece, traditional places of agrifood production (Argolida, Korinthia), areas of intensive agricultural production, significant tourist destinations, as well as, the main transport facilities and logistics infrastructure at national level. The boundaries of the area are roughly identical with the main agrifood provisioning area of the Athens metropolitan region. Hence the study of the potential of localized agrifood ventures in this area is useful for any future development of a Food Planning Study for Athens.

The profile of the entrepreneurs

Several agrifood sector activities are characterised by low barriers to entry since the needs for initial capital and know-how can be very low. Also food market due to the staple character of food has experienced moderate decline, compare to other sectors of the economy. Hence there is a notable interest for small business formation in the midst of the crisis. This is extremely important in an economy characterised by disinvestment and huge unemployment rate (more than 26%).

The sector has attracted people from several professional backgrounds. In fact, the research has shown that besides the traditional sources of entrepreneurship we can identify the following three additional sources triggered by the crisis. First, offspring who had initially chosen a different career path were forced (due to unemployment or instability caused by the crisis) to be involved in the family business later in life. Second, entrepreneurs who were forced to give-up their business in declining sectors (e.g. garments, construction) identified opportunities and started business to agro-food sector. Third, recently unemployed in several sectors of the service economy (advertising and marketing executives, journalists, architects, teachers, etc), started a small agrifood business.



The majority of the entrepreneurs that took part in fieldwork survey have high educational qualifications. They are holders of University degrees, often at postgraduate level. Also, they are fluent in English and computer skills. This is a radical change compare to the very low record of the typical owner of small firm a few decades ago (Labrianidis et al., 2004). However we found that a substantial number of them have a working experience only as employees hence they lack experience in basic entrepreneurial skills such as, decision making, management, business planning, et al.

The analysis is not restricted to the study of qualifications and skills of the entrepreneurs. Using the institutional lens, equal emphasis is given to less obvious areas such as their ability to be creative, to cooperate and set in the local context (Biggeri & Ferrannini 2014).

A big part of the literature on counter-urbanization shares the view that the arrival of former urban residents to the country side is expected to complicate the correlation between business and place (Herslund 2011). Field work research has shown that this movement has been kept to low levels. A big share of the entrepreneurs did not have any previous linkage with the wider area of location of the processing firm. In fact, a not insignificant number of them were Athenians. The decisive local factor to start business in the area was the proximity to Athens and the best transport networks of the country.

What is more interesting is the fact that they did not move their permanent residence from Athens. They use to operate their business from their Athens offices and visit the processing firms occasionally. The seasonal

The inability of firms to integrate in the local economy and society was obvious in several aspects.

Despite of their small size they were unwilling to start cooperation and synergies with other firms even in the simplest business areas, such as common transport of goods to the same market. Recent Survey has shown the low level of social capital among farmers and orange juice processors. Processors were complaining about the low quality of the oranges due to the indifference and lack of professionalism of growers. They were also profoundly annoyed by the growers' flexibility in changing factories during the same harvesting season on the basis of price. On the side of the growers there was an abiding sense of over-exploitation stemming from the low



prices set by the local factories, which do not enable them to cover production costs (Skordili, 2009).

Also entrepreneurs remained distant from the local community and expressed a lot of complaints for the indifference of the local authorities to be supportive in economic activity in any way.

The configuration of supply chains

These firms are considered, by definition, typical Short Agro-food Supply Chains, i.e. initiatives that rely on local raw materials and processing practices for the provision of food (Marsden et al. 2000). However this is not always the case. In fact the degree of integration to local areas varies significantly among the firms. To a great extent it depends on the applied product development strategy. In search for profit away from highly competitive and saturated and low paid markets firms adopt various product differentiation strategies. In short, we can identify three distinctive product development strategies: slight differentiations in composition and packaging, move to premium and luxury markets and move to new product markets. Each strategy entails very different attachments to the local areas.

Slight differentiations in composition and packaging

A big part of new agrifood processing firms are stuck to the typical product range of small agrifood firms: various types of pasta, jams, spoon sweets, cookies, and so on. However their products are substantially differentiated from the well known and heavily advertized products of big corporations, as well as, from the traditional SMEs products found in the lower part of the market. They produce more sophisticated and value added products with notable changes in composition (low calories, high content in fresh vegetables, gluten free,...) and packaging. A special group of these firms specialize in revitalized, long forgotten, traditional local products like carob rusks, cheese and cured meat specialties, traditional spirits, e.t.c.

These firms have the closest links with local areas than any other group. In several instances they are making use of raw agricultural material from the wider area. In this case, family businesses adopt a unique intergenerational division of labour. Different age groups of the family of the entrepreneur are responsible for different stages of production. Usually the parents, who are experienced farmers,



have the responsibility of the agricultural production. While members of the next, better educated, generation are in charge of processing and sales.

However a not insignificant number of them were making use of raw materials found in distant areas of the country. In our relevant questions entrepreneurs declared that the market asks for Greek and not local raw materials. The current crisis has enhanced the market patriotism of a big share of consumers. There is an obvious turn to Greek products at the expense of the strong brands of big TNCs. There is an obvious retreat of the local provenance of food in favour of the national origin. Indeed a closer look at their actual supply chains reveals that the use of imported raw materials is kept at low levels.

The products of these firms combine good quality and affordable prices. They are targeting to conscious consumers of the middle class. Given the severe recession and increasing market concentration by major super market chains it's no wonder that access to market is the Achilles heal of the majority of the firms. New entrepreneurs were very active in establishing new market channels of direct sales. They aim to make use of several market channels, in order to minimize the risk. Usually more established conventional channels, like super market chains and wholesaling networks, coexist with newer and more alternative channels like, e-commerce, specialized stores of local products, tourist market, e.t.c. These products are mainly found in the selves of new generation grocery stores mushrooming all over the urban centres and tourist areas of the country.

Move to premium and luxury markets

A not insignificant number of small firms are targeting to demanding niches of mainly export markets. They have launched premium and luxury products with the higher standards in composition, packaging and marketing. This trend is frequent in several well known Greek specialties. The most profound example is olive-oil whereas there are few other cases mostly in honey production, vinegars and wines. These firms are most often initiated by people with previous experience in creative professions such as Architects, Designers, Advertising Executives and Journalists.

In the case of premium and luxury products the crucial issue is the construction of an interesting image of the product in order to gain value in the framework of symbolic consumption. Hence the focus is on the promotion and marketing than on production process. A common characteristic of these ventures is the orientation to



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση(Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

promotion and sophisticated marketing techniques, while production process is put in second place. In several instances the product is produced by subcontractor and the firm is dedicated to the final stages of production.

Move to new product markets

Quite recently a number of novel products are found in the domestic food market. Among them, craft beers, edible snails, various types of mushrooms, dips, e.t.c., have been welcomed by the consumers and increase their market shares. These products are produced by new small, or to be more accurate, micro processing firms.

In this case the production process is an imitation of production practices applied in several European countries, mainly Italy, France and the Netherlands. Hence the linkages with the local area are minimal. In many cases the know-how is entirely imported and small firms have close ties with relevant institutions and firms abroad. However as the production process goes on several firms attempt to put enhance the local character of the products (e.g. new blends of citrus or honey to craft beers).

Another interesting point is the diversification of such processing firms to service sector. The first movers in several novel sectors for the Greek market, like edible snails cultivation and standardisation, truffles hunting and processing, provide consulting services to potential new entrepreneurs. They organise training seminars, make several tests to evaluate the suitability of the available farms to start the cultivation and provide technical assistance to newer farmers.

Discussion

There is no doubt that there is a lot of room for local initiatives to provide a concrete response to widespread concerns about the profound troubles and limitations of the conventional agro-food and tourism sectors. Research revealed really promising signs. In several aspects these firms are far from residuals of the past and show promising prospects for a more sustainable and equitable future. They seem to be qualitative different in several grounds compare to the typical traditional small agro-food firms. They are mostly run by highly qualified relatively young men and women who work long hours and apply their skills to generate economic value by applying creative solutions. They contribute to the upgrade the image of Greek food and gastronomy. They offer a room for responsible



entrepreneurship and provide employment and income to highly qualified men and women.

However research outcome did not match entirely with the highly optimistic picture constructed by the media. It seems that domestic and international media often reproduce suspiciously selective data from a small number of the supposed “success stories” conflating the desired with the real. The public debate on this matter gives great emphasis to the favourable conditions while the many obstacles and difficulties are overlooked.

The research has identified several problems as well. New ventures share the problems of the old typical traditional small firms operating in agro-food sectors in certain less visible but important areas. The fieldwork survey revealed weak ties with the firms with the local economies and societies. Despite their small size they were rather unable to form co-operations with other firms. The new entrepreneurs were highly qualified however they lacked basic business skills.

Hence their long-term viability and success is questioned unless they will be supported by appropriate state policies. In the case of Greece, agrifood localization should lead to a food system that is better aligned with goals of economic efficiency and equality, social justice and ecological integrity.

Acknowledgments

The research was implemented in the framework of the Research Project THALES “Human capabilities as a basic component of development dynamics and differentiation of the regions: the case of Greece” coordinated by the University of Macedonia (prof. Lois Labrianidis) and co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund - ESF) and the Greek Ministry of Education. The author was the coordinator of Harokopio University team.



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση(Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

References

- Allen, P. (2010). 'Realizing justice in local food systems'. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 3(2), 295-308.
- Biggeri, M. και Ferrannini, (2014). Sustainable human development: A new territorial and people centered perspective. London: Palgrave.
- Blay-Palmer, A. (2008). *Food Fears: From industrial to sustainable food systems*. London: Ashgate
- Born, B., & Purcell, M. (2006). 'Avoiding the local trap: scale and food systems in planning research'. *Journal of Planning, Education and Research*, 26(2), 195-207.
- Burch, L., & Lawrence, G. (2007). 'Supermarket own brands, new foods and reconfiguration of agri-food supply chains'. in J. Lawrence & D. Burch (eds.), *Supermarkets and agri-food supply chains: Transformations in the production and consumption of foods* (pp 100-128). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Clapp, J. (2012). *Food*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- DeLind, L. (2011) 'Are local food and the local food movement taking us where we want to go? or are we hitching our wagons to the wrong stars?'. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 28, 273-83.
- Demetra. 2012. "Press Release 11/04/2012: Survey Results" (in Greek).
- Donald, B. & Blay Palmer, A. (2006). 'The urban creative food economy: producing food for the urban elite or social inclusion opportunity?'. *Environment and Planning A*, (38): 1901-1920.
- Florida, R. (2003) *The rise of the creative class*. New York: Basic Books.
- Fold, N., & Pritchard, B. (2005). 'Introduction'. in N. Fold & B. Pritchard (eds.) *Cross – continental food chains* (pp 1-22). London: Routledge.
- Gkartzios, M. (2013): "Leaving Athens: Narratives of countr-urbanization in times of crisis", *Journal of Rural Studies* (32): 158-167.
- Heinrichs, C. (2003). 'The practice and politics of food systems localization', *Journal of Rural Studies*, (9): 33-45.
- Herslund, L. (2011) "The Rural Creative Class: Counterurbanisation and Entrepreneurship in the Danish Countryside", *Sociologia Ruralis*, 52(2), 235-255.
- Ilbery, B. and Maye, D. (2005). 'Alternative (shorter) food supply chains and specialist livestock products in the Scottish English borders., *Environment and Planning A*, 37:823-844.
- Kalfagianni, A. (2014). 'Addressing the global sustainability challenge: The potential and pitfalls of private governance from the perspective of human capabilities'. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 122(2), 307-20.



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

- Labrianidis, L., Skordili, S. & Kalogeresis, A. (2004) "Entrepreneurship in Rural Greece: Kilkis and Lesvos", in L. Labrianidis (ed.) *The Future of Europe's Rural Periphery*, London: Ashgate, 223-46.
- Lang, T., & Heasman, M. (2004). *Food wars: The global battle for mouths, minds and markets*. London: Earthscan.
- Morgan, K. 2010. 'Local and green, global and fair: the ethical foodscape and the politics of care', *Environment and Planning A* (42):1852-67.
- Morgan, K. & Sonnino, R. (2010). 'The urban foodscape: world cities and the new food equation', *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 3(2), 209-224.
- Morgan, K., Marsden, T., & Murdoch, J. (2006). *Worlds of food: Place, power and provenance in the food chain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- O'Neill, K. J. (2014) 'Situating the 'alternative' within the 'conventional': local food experiences from the East Riding of Yorkshire, UK', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 35:112-125.
- PASEGES (2012) "The rate of sufficiency in basic agricultural products at 94%", Research Study by the Greek Framrs' Federation, 02/2012, (in greek).
- Renting, H., Marsden, T. & Banks (2003). 'Understanding alternative food networks: exploring the role of short food supply chains in rural development', *Environment and Planning A*, v.35:393-411.
- Sage, C. (2012). *Environment and food*. London: Routledge.
- Sage, C. 2002, 'Social embeddedness and relations of regard: alternative 'good food' networks in south-west Ireland', *Journal of Rural Studies*, (19):47-60.
- Seems, R. (2010). 'Putting place on the menu: The negotiation of locality in UK food tourism, from production to consumption', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 26:105–115.
- Skordili, S. (2013a) "Economic Crisis as a Catalyst for Food Planning in Athens", *International Planning Studies*, 13(1):128-141.
- Skordili, S. (2013b). 'The sojourn of Aldi in Greece'. *Journal of Business and Retail Management Research*, 8(1), 68-80.
- Skordili, S. (2009) "Gross-continental agro-food chains and local agro-food complexes: the case of orange juice agro-food complex in the Peloponnese region", in *Changing European Spaces: Winners and Losers*, Athens: Seminars of the Aegean Series, p.111-24.
- Sonnino, R. & Marsden, T., 2006. 'Beyond the divide: rethinking relationships between alternative and conventional food networks in Europe', *Journal of Economic Geography*. 6, 181-99.
- Marsden, T., Banks, J., Bristow, G. (2000) "Food supply chain approaches: exploring their role in rural development", *Sociologia Ruralis* 40 (4), 424–438



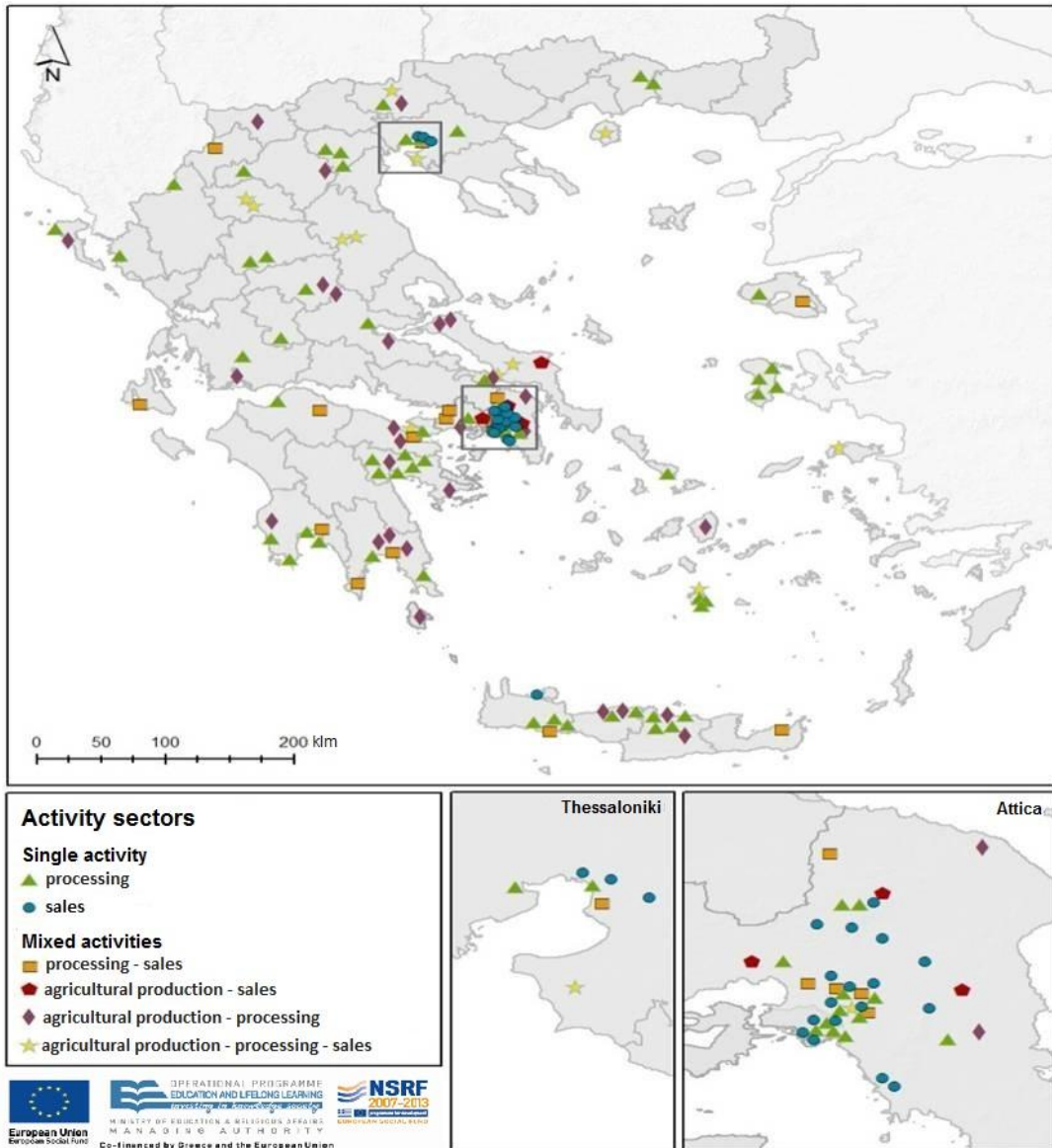
Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

- Venn, L., Kneafsee, M., Holloway, L., Cox, R., Dowler, E. and Tuomainen, H. (2006). 'Researching European 'alternative' food networks: some methodological considerations', *Area*, 38(3): 248–258.
- Wilson, D.A. (2013). 'Beyond alternative: Exploring the potential for autonomous food'. *Antipode*, 45(3), 719-737.



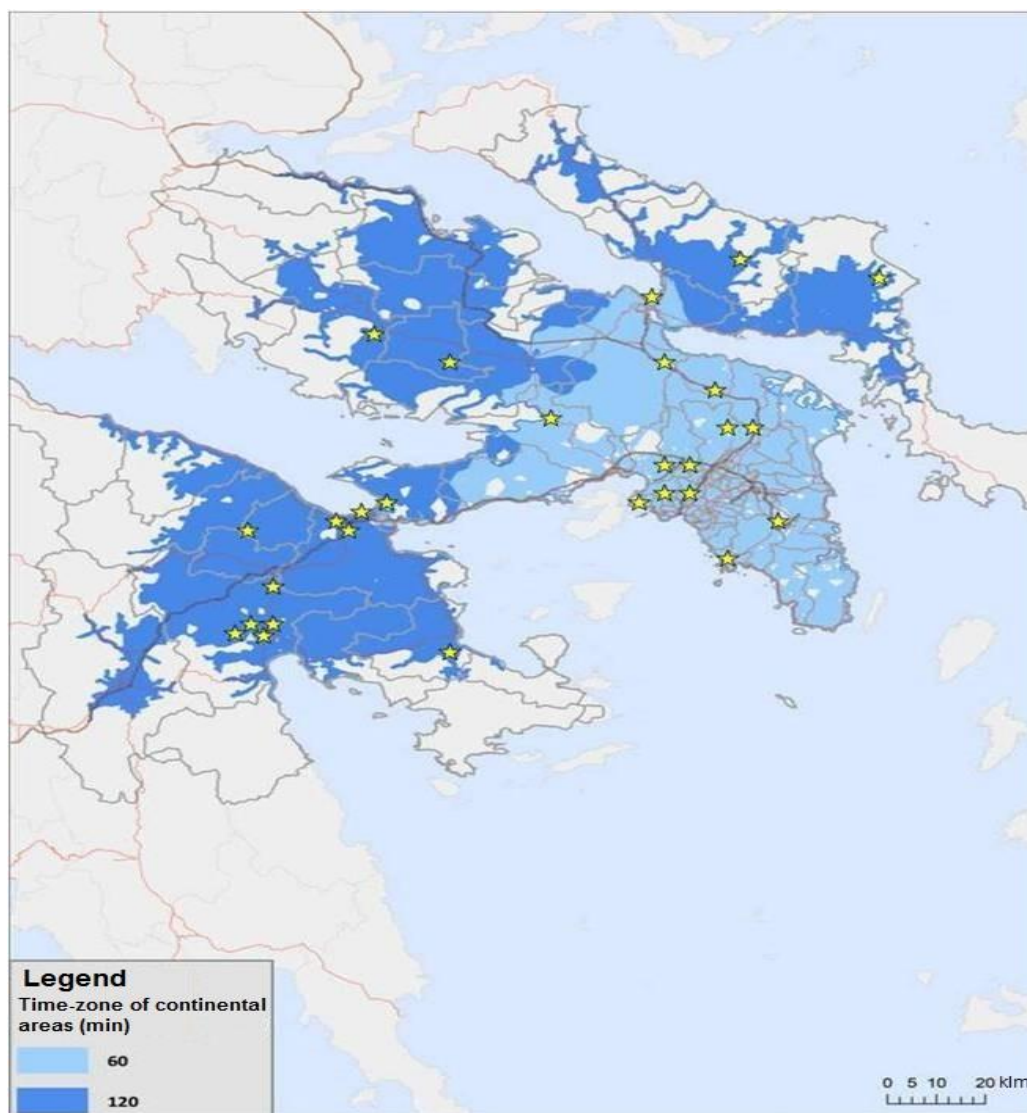
Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

Map1: Geographical distribution and sectoral specialization of new dynamic ventures, 03/2015



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.

Map 2: The boundaries of research area and the geographical distribution of firms that took part in field-work research



Η παρούσα έρευνα έχει συγχρηματοδοτηθεί από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση (Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινωνικό Ταμείο - ΕΚΤ) και από εθνικούς πόρους μέσω του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος «Εκπαίδευση και Δια Βίου Μάθηση» του Εθνικού Στρατηγικού Πλαισίου Αναφοράς (ΕΣΠΑ) - Ερευνητικό Χρηματοδοτούμενο Έργο: ΘΑΛΗΣ. Επένδυση στην κοινωνία της γνώσης μέσω του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινωνικού Ταμείου.