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MAP Position Paper

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE & RESILIENT VALUE CHAINS



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<https://rural-interfaces.eu/maps/greece-peloponnese/>

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1. Summary and key messages

The present paper documents the outcomes of the discussions and interactions held in the MAP of the region of Peloponnese as part of addressing the topic "Sustainable and resilient value chains". After outlining the current situation in the region, the key results of the discussions in the MAP (held in July 2022) are then presented. The inputs of MAP participants to the discussions highlighted the needs of the Peloponnese region (e.g., need to empower the role of cooperatives) and how the local value chains responded to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Already implemented policy interventions were considered as well as other interventions that could be implemented at the local, national and EU levels (e.g., related to education and training).

2. Introduction

The current position paper outlines key issues, needs and objectives for the Peloponnese region. As the regional economy is based in agriculture, it was deemed important to identify the needs of the sector. The MAP participants highlighted the needs of the region related to a transition towards sustainable and resilient value chains. The strengthening of the role of the producers has been identified as a key to this transition. Providing support to cooperatives has been also identified as a critical enabler of moving towards sustainable value chains. The establishment of a non-profit organisation setting and monitoring the rules of value chain operations has been also identified as an important issue by MAP members. Limiting the role of intermediaries is also a point that has been made.

The empowerment of the local value chain also requires a more effective promotion of the local agri-food products when bringing them into the market. The MAP discussions also stressed the need for producers' education and training (regarding the acquisition of digital skills and familiarisation with sustainable practices). The questions that were used to guide the discussions in the MAP were the following:

- What are the needs of the area covered by the MAP in relation to sustainable and resilient value chains?
- What are the policy interventions already in place, and what are examples of actions taken by local actors addressing these needs implemented on the area covered by the MAP?
- Which policy interventions (i.e., instruments, measures) are recommended by MAP members to be implemented at the local, regional, and/or national level? How can the EU support these interventions?
- What are the knowledge gaps and what research projects are needed?

3. Current situation based on background research and evidence

With the 2015 Paris Climate summit the international community agreed on various policies and measures necessary for the mitigation of anthropogenic climate change. For instance, tourism is a flourishing industry worldwide having a significant contribution to GHG emissions and climate change. Therefore, it is important to decrease its carbon footprint to contribute to climate change mitigation (*Vourdoubas J., 2019*). Tourism constitutes a financial sector having a significant contribution to Greece's GDP (it represents 20.8% of the GDP of the country) (*IWTTTC, SETE, 2019*). The region of Peloponnese, located in the south of Greece, (Figure 1) is a well-known touristic region as there are monuments, archaeological sites, forests, villages, and a long seashore providing opportunities for a broad range of leisure activities. In addition, the region of Peloponnese is known for its high quality agri-food products, such as olives and olive oil, honey, cheese, wines, etc.



Figure 1: Region of Peloponnese
Source: Wikipedia

The region has a share of 35% in Greek olive production, producing some of the best quality olive oil worldwide. In the prefecture of Laconia (located in the southeast part of the Peloponnese), there are 13 million olive trees and the olive oil produced there represents 10% of the total production in Greece. The Laconian olive oil is famous for its golden-green colour and its special chemical and organoleptic characteristics. There are more than ten PDO olive oil labels. The prefecture of Messenia (located in the southwest part of the Peloponnese) produces 50,000 tons of olive oil, rich in antioxidants, every year. (*Peloponnese olive grove*).

The primary sector is very important to the economy of the region. However, specific conditions (e.g., climate change, insufficient resources, energy crisis, etc.) necessitate the need to act for change and particularly the adoption of practices contributing to the transition towards sustainable food value chains (i.e., value chains that are profitable for all the involved stakeholders, provide benefits to society, and have a neutral impact on the environment; see Figure 2).

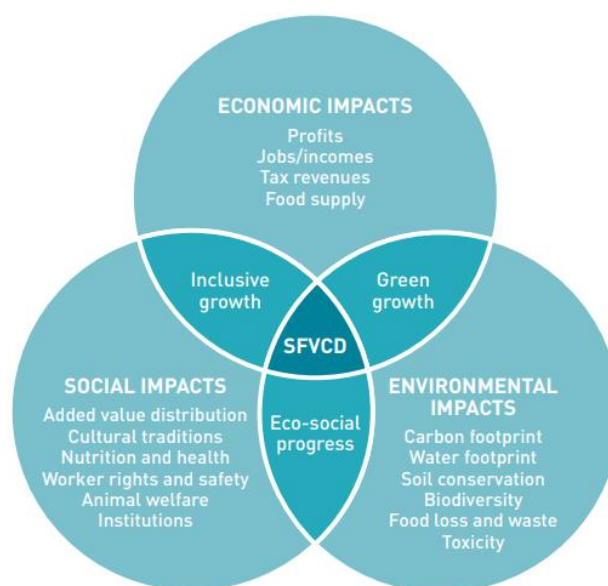


Figure 2: Sustainable Food Value Chain Development (SFVD)
Source: FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation)

4. Position of the Multi-Actor Platform

4.1 Identified needs

The Covid-19 pandemic has had direct and indirect, short-term and long-term impacts on the agri-food system both at a local and global scale (*Desa & Jia, 2020; Phillipson et al., 2020*). Some of the pandemic impacts on agri-food are likely to become permanent, thus considering new policies and interventions is necessary (*Apostolopoulos N. et al., 2021*). Regarding this, the MAP members pointed out that the regional value chains have been affected by the pandemic. Specifically, they referred to delays in the promotion of agri-food products from the farm to the market. Moreover, there has been a reduction in production as well as an increase in production costs.

Public markets, retail sale points, catering shops, wholesale trade markets, agricultural cooperatives, traders, as well as manufacturing and processing units are the major players in the regional agri-food value chains. However, the role of producers in the value chains has been identified as the most critical one; hence, the need to empower producers and strengthen their role in the value chain is considered of major significance. The role of intermediaries in the agri-food value chain has been commented by the MAP members as being a parameter interfering the most with the strengthening the role of producers. In some cases, the prices that consumers have to pay for agri-food products are high because of the costs related to intermediaries. The establishment of short supply chains, where producers could have a strengthened role, could be a solution to providing consumers quality agri-food products at affordable prices (especially within the currently emerging energy crisis landscape).

Strengthening local trade is also an issue of importance. This target can be achieved by providing incentives for collaboration and coalitions among value chain actors. The goal should not just be the profit of the value chain actors involved in trade, but also a shift towards socially responsible trade focusing on public good and benefit. This is difficult and takes time to be achieved as things are not there yet. Steps towards this direction could be made through the establishment of non-profit organisations playing the role of a control mechanism regulating the rules of value chain operations (e.g., fair trade, monitoring of profit and values, etc.). What the MAP participants with respect to this need additionally mentioned was the potential contribution of social media channels and websites bringing producers closer to the consumer. The acquisition of insights into new trends, prices, and new technologies, as well as consumer preferences could be a way for improving services and offering goods addressing consumer needs. This could have a positive impact on the local trade, as consumers could have their needs in quality of agri-food products to be sufficiently met and establish a deeper understanding of the role and contribution of producers to the value chain.

4.2 Existing interventions and actions

The region of Peloponnese is known for the quality of the locally produced agri-food products. Although there are ideas for strengthening the “presence” of regional products in the market, such as the “The basket of Peloponnese products” or the establishment of a non-government organisation named “Agri-food partnership for region of Peloponnese”, there are no specific actions yet. Therefore, it is up to regional cooperatives to contribute to the empowerment of the local value chains.

Agricultural cooperatives

Many local products (e.g., oil, olives, vegetables, cheese, honey, wine, etc.) find their way to the market via cooperatives. Cooperatives aim to aid the needs of the agricultural sector and support the income of farmers. Moreover, some of these cooperatives implement climate-friendly practices in agricultural production and provide solutions in the form of financial support to farmers (e.g., expense covering).

4.3 Recommendations from the MAP

4.3.1 Recommendations for future rural policies

The MAP members noticed that measures and policies both at the local and national levels should be taken. From their point of view, the reduction of bureaucracy is one of the most important problems to be solved. Knowing that no bureaucracy obstacles would be faced on the way to entrepreneurship or to move towards more sustainable practices in each stage of the value chain, more initiatives could be carried out n regarding value chain stakeholders. Additionally, tax relieves could provide a significant boost to value-chain-related entrepreneurial initiatives. So, labour and invoice subsidies would provide relief to entrepreneurs.

Emphasis could be given on letting citizens know the importance of cooperatives and their potential contribution towards the transition to sustainable agri-food value chains. It is a way of shifting towards a healthier way of living and responsible action to the environment and consumption as well. In these terms, subsidies to cooperatives for participating in agri-exhibitions promoting their products could be a priority.

At the EU level, policies should be made for shifting to resilient value chains. The MAP participants mentioned that the European Union has already started considering policies that contribute to these issues. Additionally, EU-funded R&D programs could play a crucial role in furthering the adoption of such practices by the Member States, proposing interventions where needed. In all cases, prioritisation is important. EU rules advancing green transition and helping towards taking steps promoting transparency are important considerations for consumers, investors, and producers.

4.3.2 Recommendations for future research agendas

What is mentioned above could be catalytic for the transition towards sustainable and resilient value chains. However, it is worth mentioning that education and training of producers in digital skills and the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices (especially the older generations) could contribute to the vision for a green era. What the MAP members emphasised is that a strategic approach to the production process incorporating sustainable practices could be considered a key. Emphasis on water saving and waste management, circularity in use of resources, adoption of precision agriculture strategies, and protection of the environment should be some of the actions to be taken into consideration at the various stages of the value chain.

The MAP members mentioned that the new generation of farmers will have a major role to play as they are more eager to engage in change and adopt sustainable practices. They can achieve more with respect to the protection of the environment based on true altruistic motives. Rapid technological developments provide the young generation of farmers with the means to effectively engage in those changes. Their familiarity with digital technologies is regarded as a critical enabler of the shift towards sustainable practices.

At the end of discussion, the members stressed that farmers should be more actively engaged in cooperatives and that the strengthening of their role (i.e., the role of the farmers) could enable the establishment of a common rule set for the operation of the cooperatives. Through the collaboration of various agencies, more actions can stand out and succeed, as long as there is transparency from all involved parties.

Conclusions

There is a need for the empowerment of producers and the local trade. Moreover, the role of intermediaries should be monitored and controlled. The role of cooperatives should be strengthened, and emphasis should be placed on their public benefit. Social media channels and websites have the potential to contribute to more direct interactions between producers and consumers, thereby supporting local value chains as they meet the needs of consumers.

Regarding the policy measures that should be taken, the MAP members highlighted the need for bureaucracy reduction, the supply of employment and invoice subsidies, and a more favourable taxation regime. They emphasised that the role of producers should be strengthened, as they are key players in the agri-food value chain. Additional subsidies to encourage cooperatives to participate in agri-exhibitions is a measure that should be considered. The MAP participants commented that R&D programs funded by the EU could play a crucial role in changing mindsets towards the adoption of sustainable value chain-related practices. Non-profit organisations that engage in the monitoring and controlling the operational rules of agri-food value chains could also provide solutions.

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Annex 1 Methodology used by the MAP

The following steps that were followed for the implementation of the discussions and interactions in the Peloponnese: (i) development of informative material sent to the people invited in the MAP (a slide deck summarising the main topic points/questions for guiding the discussions); (ii) initial communication with representatives of the local agri-food value chains for the purpose of identifying the MAP members; (iii) recruitment of the MAP members by means of targeted communication with them (via email and phone calls) including the sending of the informative material that was created (including the MAP Discussion paper); (iv) implementation of the MAP meetings and collection of input/feedback from the MAP members; and (v) processing of the results/outcomes of the MAP discussions by drafting the MAP Position Paper.

The stakeholders who got involved in the discussions as members of the MAP were representatives of the local society, representatives of the public authorities of the region, and scientists. They were all very eager to learn in advance what the ensuing discussions would be about. For that purpose information material was developed and sent to them as part of the initial communication with them. This aimed to help them establish an understanding of the scope and purpose of the meetings/discussions.

Although the MAP members were eager to contribute to the discussions and provide useful points regarding region-related needs and recommendations, it was sometimes difficult to keep track of time and a structured way of having the discussions by also keeping a focus on the topic and questions discussed. Given the above, the duration of the MAP discussions had to be slightly extended to provide enough time to all MAP members to present their points and have their voices heard.

MAP members' input evidenced that this topic appears to have an increased level of relevance in the region. Although the number of participants was quite large, no controversial points were made. There appeared to be a consensus about what is considered a need and what is considered a priority for the region and the local stakeholders when it comes to the establishment and strengthening of short value chains.

From a methodological point of view, more time and a better structure for the discussions would have been helpful.



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