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Interfaces

MAP Position Paper

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE & RESILIENT VALUE CHAINS



SHERPA has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement No. 862448.

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Citation: Kriezi, O., Lazarou, E., Zafiraki, P. (2022) MAP Position Paper (South Aegean, Greece) - Towards sustainable and resilient value chains.
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7351990

Paper finalised in October 2022

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Summary and key messages

The present paper documents the outcomes of the discussions and interactions held in the Multi Actor Platform (MAP) of the region of South Aegean 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 presented. Based on the members’ input, particular needs of the area were highlighted (e.g., the need to empower the role of cooperatives) as well as how the local value chains have responded to the challenges of Covid-19. Mentions to already implemented policy interventions have been made together with suggestions for policy interventions to be considered in the future (e.g., with respect to education and training).

1. Introduction

The discussions with the MAP members of the South Aegean region revolved around sustainable and resilient value chains. The MAP members have pointed out that the role of producers should be empowered and that the local trade needs to be strengthened. For this purpose, agri-tourism initiatives, such as, bringing tourists, while visiting the region, close to the local agri-food businesses have been proposed, given that the islands of the South Aegean constitute very popular touristic destinations. Social media should be also considered by the local producers as channels to promote their products.

Moreover, the MAP members have emphasised the need of training and education (e.g., on marketing) as a means to get the stakeholders of the local value chains become more familiar with sustainable practices. Funding of relevant initiatives by the local authorities, the state, or/and the European Union has been reported to be of increased significance. The importance of research and of bringing closer the value chain stakeholders with research findings and results (e.g., research on how to reduce the use of chemical inputs in agricultural production) has been also mentioned as a critical enabler of the transition to sustainable value chain-related practices. The questions 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?

2. Current situation based on background research and evidence

The careful management and use of natural resources are at the centre of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. According to the United Nations approach, the application of value chains is important not only to the economic sectors of each region, but, also, to the reduction of the environmental footprint. Moreover, value chains will play the key role to the better use of natural resources and would shape the socio-economic sectors. To this direction, Greece is trying to follow the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Tourism and primary sector are extremely important for the economy of the country, yet responsible for GHG emissions.

Specifically, the South Aegean Region, which is a border region at the national and European levels, consisting of two large island complexes, namely Cyclades and the Dodecanese. With a population of 308,610 inhabitants and numbering more than 50 inhabited islands, the region covers 4% of the total country area. It is further sub-divided into 13 Regional Units comprising a total of 34 Municipalities.

The structure of the economy is focused on low-tech sectors. The tertiary sector dominates the economy accounting for 84.9% of the regional GDP in 2009; industry and construction 12.8% and agriculture only 2.3%. Tourism is the most important sector followed by trade, transportation services and real estate activities. Within the manufacturing sector, dominated by small firms, the most important industries are the food and beverages, textiles, manufacture of products of wood & cork and manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products. These local firms, however, have not managed to exploit economies of scale due to their size and their relative isolation and so far, have found difficulties in exploiting public funding for their modernisation and incorporation into national or international value chains.

Transiting towards more sustainable practices is very important for the reduction of the country's value chains' impact to climate change. Agriculture is a core economic activity in the region of South Aegean (see Figure 1) with the islands located at the centre of the region being more active in terms of agricultural activity (Aegean Gastronomy). It is indicative that in 2015 the region of South Aegean accounted for 2076 accommodation facilities – 21% of the overall national capacity (as per data supplied by the Hellenic Chamber of Hoteliers on 31.12.2015). Apiculture is another important sector of economic activity for the region. There were 96,211 beehives registered in 2015 and 1,088 tons of honey produced (source: General Direction of Regional Agricultural Economy and Animal Health).



Figure 1: The region of South Aegean

3. Position of the Multi-Actor Platform

3.1 Identified needs

The MAP members have mentioned that during the Covid-19 pandemic the local value chains managed to remain functional, despite the lockdown restrictions that were imposed. The lockdown restrictions in place during the quarantine periods had a significant, negative effect on local trade. Even after the termination of the lockdown measures, there was a very limited shopping activity in the region. Consequently, a reduction in the consumption of goods was observed. As regards the supply of goods to the local markets, no significant problems were encountered during the lockdown periods.

In addition, public markets, traders, catering shops, and agricultural cooperatives are some of stakeholders involved in the region's value chain. Wineries and the "Bee Museum" are also significant players. As regards the "Bee Museum", it is worth saying that it is the only of its kind in Greece having more than 30,000 visitors per year. People visiting the "Bee Museum" can learn about the history of honey, bee products and much more.

During the last years, there has been an increased interest in agri-tourism. Based on this fact, agri-tourism initiatives should be a key strategic approach for the region. The MAP members stressed that the local producers and the region's trade need to be empowered. According to them, there is a need to make an action plan for the better operation of local cooperatives, and further strengthening of the necessary infrastructures. With this approach, a connection could be made between the local market and the touristic sector, by making available labelled agri-food products to disseminate the region's goods. All these actions could, eventually, boost the tourist traffic.

Within this context, the members of the MAP have mentioned that the local value chains should shift towards the adoption of more sustainable practices for the benefit of society, economy, and the environment. Visitors can be informed about, and become familiar with, the environmentally sustainable processes, adopted from the early stages of the production of local agri-food products (such as wine, honey and olive oil) to the packaging stage. As a result, they may probably prefer consuming local products as they will appreciate the commitment of the local value chain stakeholders to sustainable, environmentally friendly practices. Social media channels and websites of the agri-food businesses in the region can greatly contribute to the transition towards sustainable practices by being a modern means of sharing information (and stories of sustainable production methods) with consumers.

3.2 Existing interventions and actions

Both tourism and the primary sector are the most important sources of economic development of the region of South Aegean. So, the interventions and actions taken in the region relate to those specific sectors. The role of the Chamber Of Commerce and Industry of the Dodecanese¹ can be considered catalytic. An example of such actions is the "Aegean Cuisine".

"Aegean Cuisine"

It is an initiative taken by the Chamber aiming to build a large network of producers, processors, and restaurateurs for better promoting locally produced products. This initiative could be considered as a "strong" marketing tool for further attracting the interest of tourists visiting the region. For instance, campaigns promoting specific sectors (i.e., the wineries of 12 islands) or islands (e.g., in the island of Kos and its wineries) could be implemented. However, such an effort requires funding. Some of the local agri-food

¹ https://www.ebed.gr/Home/index_en

businesses, which have received funding, have been able to promote and make their products known (e.g., by participating to international exhibitions and making exports).

3.3 Recommendations from the MAP

3.3.1 Recommendations for future rural policies

According to the MAP members, policy interventions can be implemented not only at the local and regional levels, but also at the national level. Policy interventions can be considered of increased importance as the region of the South Aegean appears to have some disadvantages compared to other regions of Greece. Specifically, the operational costs of the South Aegean businesses are higher than other regions located near the capital of Greece. This happens because maritime transport burdens the trade duties. That obstacle can slow down the implementation of tasks that need to be done for the development of the primary and tertiary sector in the region. Therefore, it is necessary measures to be taken for the support and funding of the local agri-food businesses. The uniqueness of South Aegean's agri-food businesses, justify the investment moves that need to be done. The morphological features of the region enable the production of high-quality products such as wines and cheese (e.g., the wines of the island of Santorini and their unique quality attributed to the island's volcanic soil).

Policies could be established with a focus on measures related to the training of the stakeholders of the local value chains in management and marketing. Such skills are more than necessary, especially if we consider that the region is dominated by family businesses producing quality products only known to locals. Making these products known to a larger consumer basis (e.g., by using popular social media channels), the revenues and market value of these businesses could be increased. Moreover, feedback from the side of the consumers could be leveraged to improve the quality of products and services considering actual consumer needs. To this end, training is required.

The European Union can also have a significant contribution to the financing of training activities and initiatives. This way, more producers and value chain stakeholders can be provided with the opportunity of receiving training on sustainable, modern ways of agri-food product production and promotion. The MAP members highlighted that funding of such activities and initiatives should be complemented with mechanisms monitoring the quality of the provided training programs. For this reason, the capture of the actual needs of value chain stakeholders should be a priority at the EU level, so as to deliver training programs and activities of value to the audiences intended to be reached.

3.3.2 Recommendations for future research agendas

Based on the discussions, the MAP members referred to existing knowledge gaps and the need for research projects in the region to bridge them. In terms of research in the primary sector, they noted that nowadays there is no research project addressing, for example, sustainable cultivation methods, based on environmentally friendly practices that will focus on the plant/crop's needs, etc. Moreover, they highlighted the need to produce goods in ways that reduce the use of pesticides and manage risk resulting from such use, or that reduce the danger of antimicrobial resistance in agricultural production. In addition, the MAP members referred to the lack of access to methods/tools used to measure the nutritional value of local products. Access to such tools and methods would be a comparative advantage strengthening the brand development strategy of the region.

What is true about the Covid-19 quarantine, is that many people in the region started to become involved in agricultural activities, with some of them being interested in producing agri-food products not just for the local markets, but also to achieve an increase of national trade. Many of them are at a young age wishing to reach markets beyond the region's boundaries. They are eager to adopt sustainable production practices for the benefit of the environment, the society and the economy. The MAP members noticed that major steps

need to be taken towards this direction as there is no training about these methods and practices available so far. A large part of the locally produced products, also, are not being certified by relevant organisations and certification bodies. It is up to cooperatives and farmers (or scientists) to provide incentives (and the means) for a transition to more sustainable production practices. The shift to more sustainable practices should be part of a broader strategy implemented in the region. They also noticed the importance of involving the new generation of farmers in the primary sector, as they are eager to engage in the application of sustainable practices. Finally, the MAP members stressed that the strengthening of the role of cooperatives could contribute to the evolution of the primary sector. In the South Aegean region, the role of cooperatives has faded, consequently, there appears to be a lack of mentality for a collective pursuit of the transition to sustainable and resilient agri-food value chains. The cooperatives that are already active, are trying to make steps towards the mainstreaming of sustainable, eco-friendly practices that should be the lighthouses for this transition effort.

Conclusions

The main points highlighted in the MAP discussions have to do with the empowerment of producers and local trade. There is, also, a need of embarking upon agri-touristic initiatives to further promote locally produced agri-food products and “advertise” the sustainable practices adopted for their production. Social media channels are useful tools for promoting the local products. The MAP members emphasised the need of policy measures for funding education and training on sustainable production practices. The European Union could have a significant role to this effort, mostly related to the funding of R&D projects in the region of South Aegean for sustainable value chain-related methods.

Acknowledgements

The team of the Agricultural University of Athens would like to deeply thank the members of the South Aegean MAP for the time they devoted to participating in the discussions and their vivid interest in bringing up points having to do with the topic under discussion and investigation.

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Annex 1 Methodology used by the MAP

The steps that were followed with respect to the implementation of the discussions and interactions in the MAP of the region of South Aegean were as follows:

- (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;
- (v) and 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 know in advance, what the discussions would be about. To this end informative material was developed and sent (as part of the initial communication with them) 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.

The topic appeared to have an increased level of relevance to the region as made evident by the input of the MAP members. Although the number of participants was quite high, 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 be helpful.



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