

# Microbrewery in Greece: Reasons for its Development

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**Abstract** The paper looks into the reasons for the impressive development of microbrewery in Greece the decade of 2010's. It was constructed through using a questionnaire to microbreweries in Greece based on six hypotheses related to the existing literature on microbreweries and to the particularities of Greece. A distinction between microbreweries on the Greek islands and continental Greece was maintained in order to obtain more precise results. In the first set of hypotheses our findings are quite close to that found in the literature. This set is comprised of three main hypotheses, which are: firstly, that social media and the internet have an important role; secondly, that microbrewers adopt an argument different to the big brewery industry; thirdly, that localism has an important place in the policy. The second set of hypotheses has not been discussed in the previous literature; these hypotheses examine the role of the unemployment and the public financial help on the creation of this craft industry and the tourism effect on the development of microbreweries. Contrary to what was expected, unemployment and the search for work were not reasons to create microbreweries; microbreweries received financial help but it was not the main reason to invest; tourism had a crucial role in the development of microbreweries, particularly in those on the islands and on continental Greece near to the coast.

**Keywords:** Microbrewery, economic crisis, entrepreneurs, small business, tourism, Greece.

**JEL classification:** L22, L26, R11, Q13, Z32.

## 1. Introduction

In the 2010s, Greece experienced one of the biggest economic crises in its post-war history. This crisis was due to the austerity policies imposed in 2010 as a result of the agreement on international financial assistance to the country by International Monetary Fund (IMF) and European Union (EU). The main goal of this agreement was the reduction of fiscal deficits and, in the long run, of public borrowing. The country's economic downturn has caused, among other things, rising unemployment, declining production and the bankruptcy of many companies, due to a rise in the number of non-performing loans. Similar phenomena have occurred in other countries

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that have received financial assistance from the IMF and the EU, such as: Cyprus, Ireland and Portugal.

In the same decade, however, an exceptional event occurred, which is a large increase in the number of microbreweries both in Greece and in other countries, especially in Portugal and Ireland (Karafolas et al. 2020). The number of new microbreweries created in the 2010s is many times higher than the number of microbreweries that existed until 2009. New microbreweries were created throughout Greece, both in the islands and on continental Greece.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the reasons why microbrewery in Greece developed so strongly during this period. The study is twofold. It is interested in seeing if a number of reasons that characterized the development of microbrewery in other countries apply to Greece as well. The use of social media, the attitude of microbreweries towards large companies and localism are parameters examined by international literature and are considered in this research.

However, Greece presents peculiarities that concern its unique geography, its accepting a large tourist population, as well as the particular period of its economic crisis. Three parameters can be mentioned: the search for work, financing and tourism. The unemployment was very intense in this decade and forced many Greeks to even emigrate. Thus, is the search for work a key reason for someone or a team to start running a microbrewery? Another parameter is related to funding. Since the 1990s, Greece has been receiving funding through European programs and Greek companies have received significant grants for investments. A typical program is the LEADER initiative that helps agro-food and agro-tourism businesses, especially in the countryside. To what extent was the decision to make the investment based on such financial assistance? The third parameter is related to tourism as Greece is the recipient of more than 30 million arrivals per year on average this decade. These parameters have not been discussed in the previous literature; they characterize Greece but can be supported in other studies of countries with similar characteristics not only for microbreweries but for other small enterprises. After the introduction the paper discusses previous results in section 2; the growth of microbrewery through the number of industries and their geographic extent is presented in section 3; the reasons of this development is discussed in section 4, referring to the hypotheses adopted, the methodology followed and the results. Conclusions are offered in section 5.

## **2. Previous results**

Brewery and craft microbrewery have been examined through several aspects such as business strategy, diversity of production, localization strategy, rural tourism, consumers' attitude, work environment, the role of the internet and the effect of the economic crisis. On business strategy a main conclusion is the role of diversity on the product and quality. Danson et al. (2015) argue that the growth of microbreweries in UK is based on the diversity and quality of their product and not on a competitive price which is the preferable competitive area of the big breweries. Cabras and Bamforth (2016) based on a case study of microbreweries in USA and UK, found that aggressive marketing

strategy and innovation permitted them to grow up into well established companies. Kleban and Nickerson (2012) found that the main strategy of craft breweries in USA is the diversity of their product based on quality, stability and taste. Yongmei Zhang et al. (2015) also mentioned the strategy of diversity of the product. The role of marketing as a strategic parameter was examined in a comparative study between Canada and USA by Heroux and Clark (2017); the authors accepted its role and highlighted the specific role of social media and the internet. Social media and internet impact was examined as a hypothesis by Blanchette (2016), Pogrebnyakov (2013), and Foster et al. (2017). On the localization strategy, several studies have shown microbreweries' strategy on marketing and branding called neolocalism. This strategy is based on the local names emphasizing their connection to their location and community engagement. Schnell and Reese (2003) found that microbreweries used neolocalism as a tool of local identity. Holtkamp et al. (2016) showed the neolocalism of microbrewing in the case of three states in the USA: Colorado, Oregon and Texas; Myles and Brune (2017) did it through three case studies in West Sacramento, CA, Lexington, KY and Manchester, UK; Derrek (2014) and Blancette (2016) did it in the Canadian case.

Blanchette (2016) referred to the positive role of the internet and social media on the information acquired from microbrewers, in the case of Quebec, at least at the beginning of their activities.

Rural tourism has been related to craft breweries. Murray and Kline (2015) examined the relation between craft beer and rural tourism in the case of North Carolina, USA. Positive effects on rural tourism are related to three main factors: the connection with the community, the desire for unique consumer products and satisfaction. Beer tourism is considered as a niche market in tourism by Francioni and Byrd (2016) while Dunn and Wickham (2016) mentioned some advantages of this market such as: the encouragement of consumers to visit the brewery, the contribution to overcome barriers to distribution, the creation of clusters between craft breweries and the development of "beer culture".

The consumers' attitude has been the object of other studies. Rivaroli et al. (2019) focused on the attitudes and motivations toward craft beer consumption using two samples, in Italy and Germany; they concluded on the major role of the consumer's attitude and the desire for unique consumer products. Donadini and Porretta (2017) were interested in consumers' behaviour in the beer market and importance they give to several factors as price, type of brewer, location of the brewery, brewing technology.

The working environment has been the subject of the study by Thurnell-Read (2014); the author was interested in the results of working in a microbrewery. He concluded that work in a microbrewery may offer an antidote to the labour alienation of modern capitalism by being part of the whole production process.

A comparative analysis of the growth of the brewery industry during a period of economic crisis was examined by Karafolas et al. (2020) using the case of four countries that received international financial help: Cyprus, Greece, Ireland and Portugal. The paper concluded that despite the negative effects of the economic crisis, microbrewery played an important role mainly by the creation of new microbreweries, especially in Portugal and Greece.

### 3. The development of microbrewery in Greece

#### 3.1 A recent development during economic crisis

The creation of microbreweries in Greece is very recent; out of 51 microbreweries functioning in 2019, 33 were created since 2015 while 44 were created during the economic crisis of 2009-2019, table 1. An analogous movement is observed in the case of Portugal because all 115 microbreweries registered in 2017 were created since 2011, and in the Irish case since 95 of 105 microbreweries were created the time period 2008-2017 (see Karafolas et al. 2020). The period of economic crisis seems to be a period of investment initiatives for new sectors of production. In the Greek case these initiatives are concentrated during a period of transition from political, economic and social uncertainty, (especially on 2015 when the Greek government decided the capital control), to political and economic stability in the years that followed.

**Table 1.** Creation of microbreweries in Greece

<b>Creation year</b>	<b>Number</b>
1996	1
1998	1
1999	1
2004	1
2006	2
2007	1
2009	2
2010	1
2011	2
2012	2
2013	1
2014	3
2015	7
2016	12
2017	6
2018	7
2019	1
Total	51

Source: Author's investigation through microbreweries sites and **Greek microbrewery (2019)**

#### 3.2. Dispersion to all Greek regions and the role of tourism

Microbreweries were created in all 13 Greek regions, table 2; Greece is divided administratively into 13 regions. Four of them are island regions; the other nine are in

continental Greece, nevertheless, having important sea shores and even islands. In total, out of 51 microbreweries registered in our investigation, 22 are established in islands.

**Table 2.** Dispersion of microbreweries to Greek regions

<b>Region in Greece</b>	<b>Number</b>
Attica	4
South Aegean (*)	8
North Aegean (*)	3
Crete (*)	5
Ionian Islands (*)	3
Peloponnese	7
Central Macedonia	6
Eastern Macedonia and Thrace	5
Western Macedonia	1
Thessaly	6
Central Greece	1
Epirus	1
Western Greece	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Source: As table 1.

(\*) Island region

Five of them are in Crete: in particular, three in Heraklion and two in Chania. In the South Aegean region two microbreweries are registered in Santorin and one each in Rhodes, Mykonos, Paros, Naxos, Tinos and Folegandros. In the North Aegean region microbreweries are located in Chios, Lesvos and Ikaria. In the Ionian Islands there are microbreweries in Corfu, Kefallinia, and Zakynthos. Three other microbreweries were created in islands that belong to the continental regions: in Alonisos and Scopelos in the region of Thessaly and in Samothraki in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.

The number of microbreweries in the Greek islands and these near to sea shores makes the tourism an important parameter for the development of microbreweries because it can have a crucial effect on beer's consumption especially during tourism period, even if the tourist population is occurs mainly during the summer period. Table 3 shows the evolution of total arrivals and overnight stays in Greece, including foreign and domestic ones, for the time period 2010-2018. The number of arrivals increased from 29.6 million in 2010 to 38.4 million in 2018. This increase occurred during the crisis period, table 3.

**Table 3.** Arrival and overnight stays in Greece, (in million)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total Arrivals	29.6	30.2	26.7	29.1	32.4	33.8	34.2	37.6	38.4
Total Overnight stays	63.4	65.64	58.4	63.8	68.4	71.5	73.3	80.7	82.2

Source: Institute of the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (INSETE) Intelligence, 2019, Regional Statistics, (authors calculations), <http://www.insete.gr/en-gb/INSETE-Intelligence/Statistics/Statistical-Bulletins>

Note: Data comes from part of the total beds available; results are not estimated and displayed in 100% of reporting units due to lack of information on the months of operation of each accommodation within the year.

## 4. Causes of this development

### 4.1 Hypotheses

A number of hypotheses were admitted to investigate the reasons for the creation and growth of this small industry that took place especially during the period of economic crisis in Greece, in the 2010s. Hypotheses had to explain the creation of microbreweries and their development. Previous research is expected to be useful to explain the phenomenon; however the particularities of the country had to be considered. Thus six hypotheses were considered: three of them are related to aspects examined by the literature and three of them are related much more to Greece, namely, the economic crisis, public funding and the tourism effect.

Hypothesis 1: Microbreweries make active use of the internet and social networks as part of their brewing activities. The application of the internet and social media should be used by Greek microbreweries, as in the case of other countries such as Canada, Blanchette (2016). On this hypothesis two questions have been asked: a/ Does the microbrewer use the internet as a source of information and learning in the field of brewery? b/ Does he use it to expand the network of contacts?

Hypothesis 2: Participation in the community of small brewers is subject to specific attitude. Four questions were asked of microbreweries: a/ Must the beers be considered quality beers? b/ Does the microbrewer adopt an attitude opposed to that of the large industrial breweries? c/ Does the microbrewer express a kind of creativity through this activity? d/ Do microbreweries cooperate with each other and share privileged information with one another?

Hypothesis 3: It is based on the neolocalism to which several studies relate. The microbrewery seeks to establish contact with its immediate environment. Four questions were asked: a/ Dose the microbrewery look for direct contact with the environment and the consumer? b/ Does the microbrewery make use of local raw materials? c/ Dose the microbrewery make use of names with a local accent? d/ Does the microbrewery participate in the local community?

Hypothesis 4: Microbreweries developed as a result of unemployment and a lack of business opportunities. Greece faced a serious economic depression as result of the economic crisis and the economic and financial conditions applied by the austerity

plan that followed the international financial help to the Greek governments (Karafolas 2018). Unemployment has been one of the main results of the economic depression: it increased from 9.6% in 2008 to 23.5% in 2016 (Karafolas 2018). Unemployment should be a reason for the creation of microbreweries. Three questions were asked: a/ Was the microbrewer unemployed before he took up microbrewery? b/ Does the microbrewer find it easier to work in the region rather than the main urban areas of Athens and Thessaloniki that have almost half of the Greek population? c/ Is microbrewery closer to the subject of his studies?

Hypothesis 5: Investments in microbrewery are financed partly by public funded help. Productive investments have the possibility of public financial help through programs funded by the European Union and the Greek state. This parameter is added to other financial resources such as self-financing and bank lending. Four questions were asked: a/ Did the microbrewer self-finance his company? b/ Did the microbrewer get a bank loan? c/ Did the microbrewer receive a grant from a European or national financial program? d/ Had the microbrewer mixed funding based on the previous cases?

Hypothesis 6: Microbrewery is based on tourism and the local market contrary to the big breweries which have a big part of the national market. The hypothesis is based on the implantation of microbreweries that show a preference for the Greek islands and to areas near the Greek coast; it is also influenced by the neolocalism idea and the small size of these companies. Four questions were asked: a/ Are sales based mainly on tourism? b/ Does the microbrewery sell mainly to the local market? c/ Does the microbrewery export a limited part of production? d/ Does the microbrewery have any important expansion on the national market? Additionally, it was asked to island microbreweries to indicate which part of sales has any one of the above markets.

#### ***4.2 Methodology and data***

The research was conducted in several steps. In a first step the sorting of microbreweries was necessary. On the basis of this sorting the questionnaire was sent to 49 of microbreweries; in addition, some microbreweries received a personal visit. The time period between sending out the questionnaires and receiving the answers was from winter 2019 to April 2020, at the beginning of lockdown due to covid-19. Answers from 34 microbreweries were received covering all Greek regions, table 4. The sample may be considered as sufficient. From this sample 14 answers were provided from microbreweries functioning in islands, (including three islands from the continental regions of Eastern Macedonia and Thessaly) and 20 from continental Greece. The microbreweries that answered the questionnaire were created mainly during the Greek economic crisis. 29 of them were created after 2009 and 18 during the period 2016-2019. The recent creation influences the stage of growth: thus for most of microbreweries, that is three quarters of them, sales are less than half of million, and mainly they are between 100,000 and half of million; on annual average they have 4 permanent and 5 seasonal employees.

**Table 4.** Microbreweries that answered the questionnaire, by Region in Greece

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of microbreweries</b>
Attica	1
South Aegean	3
North Aegean	3
Crete	4
Ionian Islands	2
Peloponnese	2
Central Macedonia	7
Eastern Macedonia and Thrace	4
Western Macedonia	1
Thessaly	4
Central Greece	1
Epirus	1
Western Greece	1
Total	34

Source: Author's investigation

### **4.3 Findings**

The sample was divided into two categories of microbreweries: those based on the islands and those based on continental Greece. This distinction could offer more precise results on the needs of microbreweries based on their geographic location. This distinction was considered more appropriate and it could be useful for other countries having the same particularities.

On the role of the internet and social networking, that is the first hypothesis, two interesting findings appear. Microbreweries in Greece make an active use of the internet in order to acquire any useful information and knowledge on the brewery industry. This is the case in almost all continental microbreweries (90% gave a positive answer) and 79% for those in islands. The use of internet did not have the same importance on the growth of sales: it has a positive impact on sales for 60% of microbreweries in continental Greece and for only 43% of microbreweries in the case of the islands. The Greek case approaches the conclusions of Blanchette (2016) in the Quebec case. The internet and social networking has a role at least at the beginning but it does not make the microbrewery community a virtual community. This case of sales differentiates the Greek case from the conclusions of the strengthening of the digital relationship between artisan industries and their consumers supported by Foster et al. (2017).

On the second hypothesis, regarding the attitude of microbrewer, the first important finding is that all microbreweries agree that a microbrewer adopts an argument and attitude different from the big industrial breweries. We find this in the argument of



Thurnell-Read (2014) on the differentiation of the microbrewer to the labour alienation of modern capitalism. A second finding is that almost all agree on cooperating with each other and sharing useful information. Regarding the proof of creativity by the microbrewer and the proof of quality beer, the answers do not prove the necessity of these parameters since only about half of total answers agreed.

On the third hypothesis the localism seems obvious in the Greek case, both on island and continental Greece. All microbreweries seek to establish contact with the immediate environment and the consumer; all of them seek to be involved in the local community; almost all make use of names of local characters and the big majority use local raw materials (64% in islands and 85% in continental Greece). Localism seems being quite strong in the Greek case as in other cases in USA, Holtkamp et al. (2016), United Kingdom and USA, Myles and Brune (2017) and Canada, Derrek (2014).

The fourth hypothesis relating to employment and job orientation was based on three main ideas. The huge unemployment (see Karafolas 2018) that Greece faced during the crisis period would incite people to create their own activities and this would be the case with microbreweries in Greece. All microbrewers on islands and almost all on continental Greece (90%) did not consider unemployment the reason to create the microbrewery. The second idea is the wish to leave the urban centres and go to the province where it is easier to find or create a job or activity. For the big majority of microbrewers on the continental Greece this was not the reason to go there (80%); in the case of island microbrewers, for more than half of them (57%) it would be an incentive to create the microbrewery in this locality. The third idea was that the microbrewer should create such an activity because it is closer to his studies: this was the case for a little more than the half of island microbrewers and it was true only for a minority, (about one third), in the case of the microbreweries on the continental Greece. Therefore it is clear that the creation of microbreweries was not the result of difficulty in joining the labour market.

The fifth hypothesis was based on the financing of microbrewery. The Greek economy received important financial help from the European Union in order to finance productive activities, in particular investments in the private and public sector. This is related also to specific financial help offered by programs focusing on such activities in non-urban areas: as in the case of the LEADER initiative, see for example Karafolas (2013). The idea was to investigate if microbreweries were financed with public financial help, banking credit or by self-financing. Mixed financing was the case for all microbreweries but in different ways. In the case of continental microbreweries almost all (90%) received public financial support; this was the case only for half of the island microbreweries who based their investment to self-financing much more than the other microbrewers. Therefore public financial help had a role on the decision to invest but it was not the principal reason for the investment decision of microbrewers, especially for microbreweries in islands.

The sixth hypothesis was interested on the sales markets of microbreweries. Four sales markets were examined: this related to tourism, the local market, the national and exports. In the case of island microbreweries for the big majority sales are related to tourism, followed by sales to the local market and the national market. Sales to tourism

have about 70% of total sales. In the case of microbreweries on continental Greece, sales are mainly to national and local market followed by tourism. Exports have a very small part of sales. Sales to tourism and local market have the role expected in the case of islands but also in microbreweries based on the coast of continental Greece with significant tourist traffic. Table 5 on arrivals in places with one or more microbreweries in existence is quite characteristic. In three cases arrivals are higher than one million, even 1.5 million in the case of Rhodes and Heraklion in Crete, table 5. In 20 cases arrivals are higher than 100,000. Thus tourism becomes a main source for the demand and consumption of beer, especially with tourists asking for local products such as beer produced by local microbreweries as concluded by the study of Rivaroli et al. (2019). The tourism effect in the Greek case surpasses the simple relation of local tourism to microbrewery as concluded by Murray and Kline (2015), Francioni and Byrd (2016), Dunn and Wickham (2016).

**Table 5.** Annual arrivals in selected islands and coast areas in Greece having at least one microbrewery, average of period 2010-2018 <sup>(1)</sup>

<b>Area</b>	<b>Arrivals</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Arrivals</b>
Rhodes	1,604,461	Santorin	155,687
Heraklion	1,456,972	Kavala**	127,164
Salonika	1,107,602	Kefallinia	126,020
Chania	807,446	Thasos	121,054
Corfu	726,177	Samos	118,584
Chalkidiki	724,604	Lesvos	109,990
Kos	724,183	Paros-Antiparos	76,128
Lasithi	530,396	Lefkada	67,051
Rethimno	504,938	Chios	54,695
Zakinthos	426,625	Tinos	44,276
Magnisia *	373,851	Naxos	32,394
Korinthos	264,560	Ios	19,662
Mykonos	263,577	Limnos	19,194
Pieria	196,443	Ikaria	9,026

Source: as table 3

<sup>1</sup> Athens was not included in the list due to its much wider role in the arrival of tourists

\*Coast area having the islands of Alonisos and Skopelos

\*\* Coast area having the island of Samothrace

However, the instability in the tourism industry should be noted. Tourism development every year depends on factors with significant uncertainty such as disposable income, natural disasters in the tourist destination or global problems such as the case of covid-19 pandemic. In a study realized by INSETE with reference to top tourist

markets for Greece, due to the covid-19 pandemic, consumers have postponed the cost of holidays and travel in a greater degree compared to other consumer goods and services, (INSETE 2020). Consumers have postponed the cost of holidays and travel: the percentage of this decision amounts to 40% of the Germans, 49% of the British, 44% of the Americans, 37% of the French, 49% of the Italians, and 56% of the Romanians (INSETE 2020).

## 5. Conclusions

During the decade of the 2010s, characterizing the economic crisis of Greece, the establishment of new microbreweries occurred. More than 40 microbreweries were created and continue to function during the period 2010-2019 in all Greek regions. The paper was interested in the reasons for this phenomenon; investigating on the one hand hypotheses adopted by the international literature and on the other hand hypotheses considered more close to Greek specificities. The investigation was conducted through a questionnaire and visits to over 50 microbreweries throughout all Greek regions. Answers were received from 34 microbreweries from all Greek regions. There was a distinction maintained between those from islands and those from continental Greece in order to have a clearer image on particularities between microbreweries on the islands and those on continental Greece.

On the first set of hypotheses, our findings are quite close to the literature. The role of internet and social media seems to be important for all microbreweries in order to acquire necessary information on the brewery industry but it is not essential for the sales of their production. Microbrewers adopt an argument and attitude that are different from the big breweries; further they agree on cooperating between themselves. Localism seems obvious for the Greek microbreweries.

The second set of hypotheses has not been examined to previous literature. It was related to what we considered as Greek peculiarities but they could also have a more general character. The first examined hypothesis was on the role of unemployment on the decision to create and work in a microbrewery; during this period of time unemployment and the search for new jobs have been crucial in Greece. The second examined hypothesis was on the ways of financing the investment and especially on the role of grants from European and national programs; these financial programs were introduced in the 1990s helping investments especially in the agro-food sector in Greece. The third hypothesis was related to the role of tourism. The findings are very interesting and in some cases they overturn the beliefs that were considered at the beginning of the research. Unemployment was not considered a reason for the creation of and work in a microbrewery. It seems therefore that more is to have a vision for this kind of work. Public financial help may have played a role but it is not a principal reason for the creation of the microbrewery; self-financing and bank loans contributed significantly to the financing of the investment. Finally, the tourist market is a main market for the sales of microbreweries, especially in the islands. The results of this research may be useful for studies in other countries having similar geographic and economic characteristics, such as the importance of tourism and the economic crisis Greece faced during this period.

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