

# BARRIERS TO INTERNATIONAL SUPPLY CHAIN COLLABORATION FOR SMALL CHINESE COSTUME JEWELLERY SUPPLIERS

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## ABSTRACT

*This article represents the first output of a research project in progress. The overarching aim of the research is to establish the barriers that the Chinese Jewellery small enterprises are faced with in their internationalisation attempts. This paper concentrates on the two primary objectives of the research: firstly to establish a framework that separately captures (and subsequently jointly discusses) the concepts of marketing and logistics in a small Business to Business context. Secondly to deploy that information in a second framework that captures the pertinent issues of international collaboration for joint supply chain development. The third and final objective of this research is to generate a framework that will ultimately enable the researchers to establish the barriers within the aforementioned context. This final framework is not discussed here but the preliminary literature findings are.*

*Keywords: International Supply Chain Development; SMEs; China; Collaboration.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Firms remodel their supply chain to fully apprehend the benefits of shared information, business process benchmarking and advanced business planning (Trkman, et al., 2007). Also, globalisation influences the worldwide business environment where the synergies and differences between West and East have now become imperative issues (Li and Khalil, 2006). Thus, supplier firms around the globe engage collaboration to re-align the relationships with their (foreign) retail buyers and manufactures (Sheridan, et al., 2006), and to achieve “*the strategic management of product groups through trade partnerships, which in turn aims to maximise sales and profits by satisfying customer needs*” (IGD, 2000, p.1).

Other scholars point out that studies involving Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) should draw more attention to the international implications; certain aspects of the world-class practices and performance in SMEs are different from those in larger organisations (Cagliano et al, 2001).

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In the past six years, as the fourth largest economy in the world (the People's Republic of China) started to encourage entrepreneurship in a wide variety of small-scale enterprises and welcome foreign trade and foreign investment (XinHua report, 2006), more and more Chinese Jewellery Suppliers are keen to go to the international market where there is huge demand for their products (China trade News, 2006).

When it comes to supply chain management (SCM) and implementation, major differences exist between industrial sectors (Wong, *et al.*, 2005). The fashion industry in particular has been referred to as “fast fashion”, where the implications of ineffective supply chain management can be catastrophic to local economies (Fernie *et al.*, 2004).

Hence, the two main objectives pursued in this paper are as follows: firstly to establish a framework that separately captures (and subsequently jointly discusses) the concepts of marketing and logistics in a small Business to Business context. Secondly to deploy that information in a second framework that captures the pertinent issues of international collaboration for joint supply chain development. Ultimately, the purpose of the research is to produce and test a third framework that reflects the synthesis of the previous two and consequently expands in addressing the barriers faced by the Chinese small enterprises when attempting to collaborate with other businesses (in a business to business context) in the international business arena. The last section of this paper provides an overview of the preliminary literature findings. These findings will ultimately enable the construction of the third framework that captures the barriers as they are derived from the relevant literature and subsequently test them within 20 case study organisations. These organisations are all small enterprises based in the Zhejiang province in the Southeast of China.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Supply Chain Management (SCM) is a key activity for any business. The likelihood of a small business succeeding, in part at least, depends on the extent to which it is able to manage the relationships it has with those organisations which form the immediate supply chain. A supply chain is regarded as the alignment of organisations to bring products or services to market (Lambert *et al.*, 1998). Thus, “*supply chain management represents one of the most significant paradigm shifts of modern business management by recognizing that individual businesses no longer compete as solely autonomous entities, but rather as supply chains*” (Chen and Paulraj, 2004, p.136). Also, with the developing information technology each member of a supply chain continually needs to review the way to manage relationships with their business partners (Cassivi, 2006). Conceptually, there is a need to develop a model for successful supply chain operation for SMEs, building on the models derived from the marketing and logistics literature.

Also, competition drives businesses to become globalised (Lynch, 1997). Hence, globalisation essentially becomes a “necessary” trend

for business as “*it signifies the shrinking of the world where people, services and goods are available to each other across the globe through a variety of means and in increasingly immediate ways*” (Edwards and Usher, 2000, p.13). Moreover, “*supply chain often is the part of a firm that is mostly affected by changes in such international environments*” (Edmund *et al.*, 2001, p.823). The SCM approach has been increasingly identified by many small organizations as an opportunity to improve their competitive capability and achieve their goal of better customer care and increased profitability (Chin *et al.*, 2004). Thus, one way of achieving this is through collaborations in supply chains. Collaboration has been considered as a very effective and efficient method for leveraging the small business (Polychronakis and Syntetos, 2007a)

According to Udin *et al.* (2006), collaborative SCM can be defined as a condition in which all parties in the supply chain are dynamically working together, towards objectives by sharing information, knowledge, risk and profits, which possibly involve consideration of how other partners operate and make decisions. Although the importance of international supply chain collaboration has been noticed, “*adopting a global perspective is often difficult because the individual member has been trained to work as a single entity only guided by local perspective and often exhibits opportunistic behaviour*” (Simatupang and Sridharan, 2002, p.16). Consequently, a model is needed in part to reflect the dramatic changes in increased global competition, to guide organisations in SCM and to enable them to improve international collaboration.

Collaboration in supply chain activities is significant in any advanced or developing economy, and particularly for SMEs which may often be vulnerable to failure after a relatively short operating period. This issue is particularly significant in one of the world’s largest and fastest growing economies, the People’s Republic of China (Prasad, 2004).

Currently in China, ‘*the principal economic target is to double the 2000 per-capita GDP by 2010*’ (China Report, 2006, p.218) and, to achieve this goal, China is seeking development by relying on its own strength, following the policy of opening-up the economy to market forces, and involves widespread global economic and technological cooperation, and the outgrowth shares with all other countries (China Report, 2006). SMEs have similar to the above mentioned, international problems and start to cooperate with foreign firms when buying and when, in particular, selling abroad (Ruzzier, *et al.*, 2006).

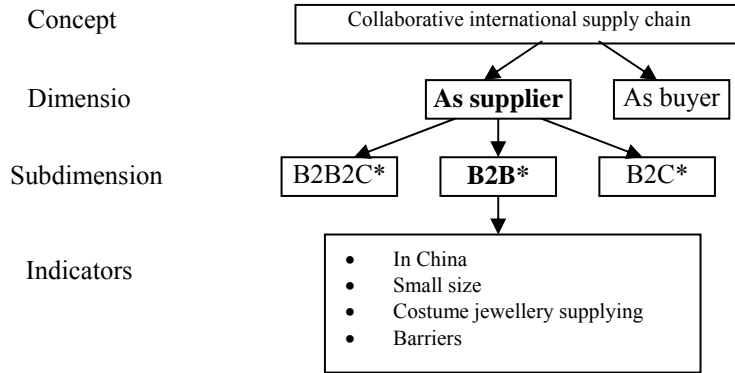
This paper considers the issue of collaboration in SCM by focusing on small Chinese businesses. At present, in comparison with big or state-owned enterprises, undersized Chinese small suppliers are more sensitive to any internal and external influences, when they are attempting to generate partnerships in international supply chains. This is “*due to their lack of size, limited resources and multiple competitors*” (Ottesen and Gronhaug, 2007, p.36).

Having said that, jewellery consumption in the west as a sort of fashion expenditure, is getting more associated with people's daily life, as more people pay attention to their image (Beaudoin *et al*, 2003). Individuals and society use fashion to communicate their taste and lifestyle. Therefore, in certain cases, the design of the item is viewed as more important than the value of the material (Barnard, 1996, and Cholachatpinyo *et al*, 2002). As part of the light industry sector, jewellery business sector has very fast growth rates. This industry is characterised by low-value material and high-value on manpower involvement, therefore, costume jewellery manufacturing is the type of industry that is currently heavily supported by the Chinese Government. This is evident in an official report-XinHuaShe report, published by the Chinese government (XinHuaShe Report, 2006). The selling volume of Chinese-made jewellery in 2005 was about £10.7 billion, and total amount of import and export was £3 billion. Currently, in China, there are more than 5000 jewellery manufacturers, and more than 2 millions people are employed in this industry. The annual selling volume in jewellery business increases by 10% per year for the past 6 years. Chinese jewellery suppliers are keen to find appropriate ways to satisfy the international market (CLII, 2006).

Thron *et al*. (2006) have pointed out that for different products, companies or industries, the framework of SCM may differ from one to another, thus, individual studies in novel contexts are necessary to throw some light on the above. Arguably, focus on SCM for small businesses in the light industry sector in the rapidly growing Chinese economy is not well-covered in the literature. This is particularly true in the context of the costume jewellery industry.

**FIGURE 1: RESEARCH FOCUS**

**Paper focus**



(Adopted from: De Vaus, 2001, p.26)

\*B2B2C: business to business to customer  
B2B: business to business  
B2C: business to customer

This paper is dimensioned as shown in figure 1, where the authors arrow-down the research to the collaborative international SCM. Ultimately, the research focuses on establishing the barriers that small Chinese suppliers are faced with when attempting to collaborate with their international partners. The findings of that will be the theme of one of our forthcoming papers.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature provides the theoretical underpinning for the two generated frameworks proposed in this paper. It addresses in detail the pertinent literature on SCM, business globalisation, international supply chain collaboration and reports on the current state of the Chinese small jewellery producers.

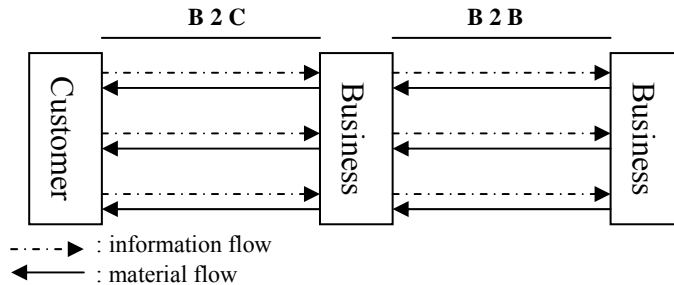
### 3.1. Supply Chain Management

“A supply chain consists of all stages involved, directly or indirectly, in fulfilling a customer request. The supply chain not only includes the manufacturer and suppliers, but also transporters, warehouses, retailers, and customers themselves” (Thomas, 2002, p.1). It is regarded as a package of arm’s length and closer relationships linking suppliers and buyers (Erridge and Greer, 2002; Polychronakis and Syntetos, 2007b).

#### 3.1.1 Business to business to customer (B2B2C) supply chain

Christopher (2005) and Handfield and Nichols (1999) describe the notion of a supply chain of interconnecting activities with a flow of materials and associated information from supplier to end user that has been developed as part of a move towards the customer led operation. As shown on figure 2, SCM has the potential of contributing to the competitiveness of those enterprises within the supply network if properly managed and implemented.

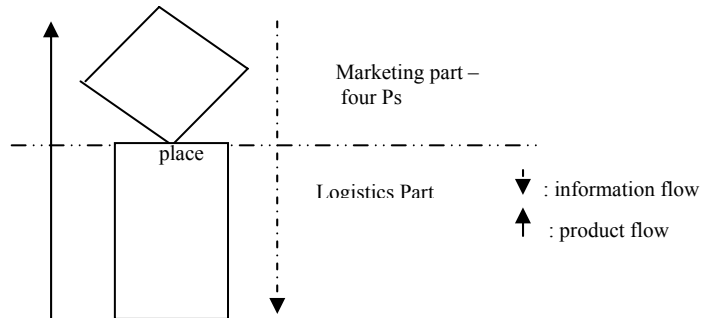
**FIGURE 2: B2B2C**



#### 3.1.2 The marketing and logistics interface

A company’s supply chain is an integral part of its approach to the markets it serves. The supply chain needs to respond to market requirements and do so in a way that supports the company’s business strategy.

**FIGURE 3: MARKETING AND LOGISTICS IN SUPPLY CHAIN**



As shown on Figure 3, “place”, which is one element from Marketing 4Ps (people, promotion, price and place) is the point which marketing management and logistics join together as supply chain and support the right product, in the right place at the right time (Christopher, 2005). Framework A joins the tasks of marketing and logistics, in a B2B2C context.

*Step 1. Starting with “Marketing research” and new product launch*

New-product or business development is an integrated innovation (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006). Consequently, to create successful new products or business, a company must understand its consumers, markets, and competitors and develop products that deliver superior value to customers. Strong new-product planning and a systematic new-product development process should cover idea generation, idea screening, concept development and testing, marketing strategy business, analysis product development, test marketing and commercialisation (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006).

*Step 2. Capability analysis (environment analysis)*

When the initial product or business is decided, understanding internal strengths and weaknesses is essential. It lets firms realise its resources, capabilities and core competencies. PEST (Political, Economic, Social and Technological) analysis and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis help to identify the main opportunities and threats in the target market, and how to overcome the main weaknesses (Bangs 2002).

### *Step 3. Splitting in-house and out-house business*

Outsourcing is also an important task though the core business is the firm's concern to gain competitive advantage. The word "outsourcing" defines the process of transferring the responsibility for a specific business function from an employee group to a non-employee group (Zhu, *et al.*, 2001). "*The greatest advantage of outsourcing, in both high- and average- performing companies, is the sharpening of focus on the core competences of the organisation*" (Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2002, p.85; Franceschini, *et al.*, 2003).

### *Step 4. Relationship management*

The strategic procedure of relationship management is replacing the function of purchasing (Cousins, 2002, Polychronakis, *et al.*, 2006, Polychronakis, *et al.*, 2005a). Thus, after defining core business and outsourcing projects, internal and external relationship management in the supply chain should be considered in detail, such as which type of strategic relationships should be set, cooperation, co-existence, co-competition or competition, how to maintain the relationship, what added value could be created by this cooperation, and so on.

### *Step 5. Producing procedure and Transportation*

With the achievement of precedent tasks, enhanced SCM capabilities can create efficiencies and cost savings across a wide range of business processes, from marketing and product design groups all the way through to the "accounts receivable" department. It must be conducted between enterprises, since optimising entire supply chains will require a level of information sharing and collaboration among enterprises previously unknown in most business (Sahay, 2003).

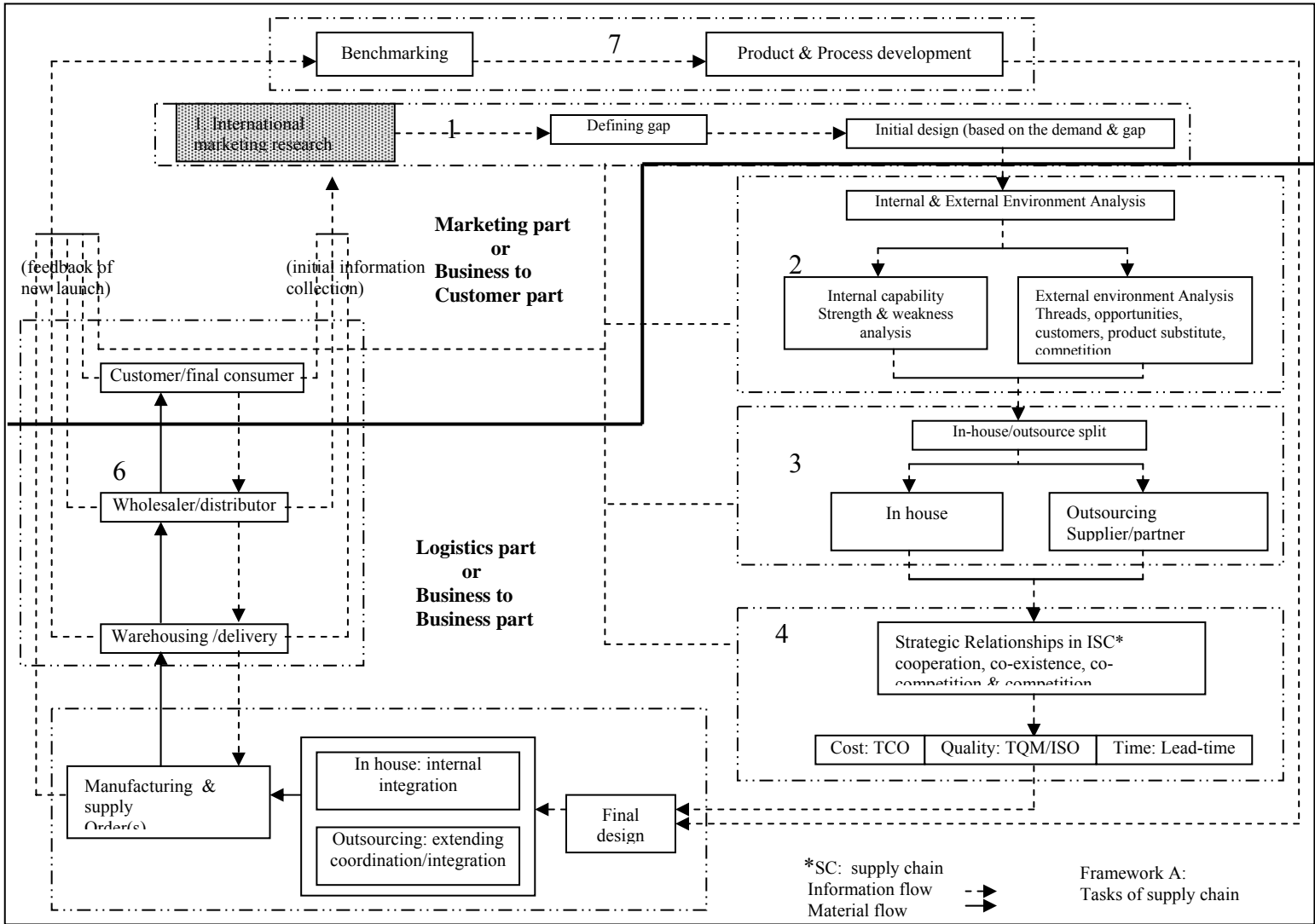
### *Step 6. Marketing*

In this stage for logistics the task is to deliver; but for marketing is also to collect feedback and information from the market. One of the major changes is that marketing - from having focused initially on gaining new customers - is now more preoccupied with retaining existing customers. It is possible to propose that marketing as a business function follows a life cycle (Shaw, 2000).

### *Step 7. Benchmarking and further development*

Benchmarking should be considered based on the whole process and all the internal and external parts, then recognising the existing problems and providing innovation (Ribeiro and Cabral, 2006). By accomplishing the above process, the

developed design and business strategy will be able to function, which in turn leads to stronger customer loyalty and higher profits.



### *3.2. International business*

The term ‘globalization’ has been coined to represent the ways in which markets have converged throughout the world and the ways in which production poles have shifted geographically to satisfy global consumers (Hines, 2004).

As global markets grow increasingly efficient, competition no longer takes place between individual businesses, but between entire supply chains. Collaboration can provide the competitive edge that enables all the business partners in a supply chain to prevail and grow (Sahay, 2003).

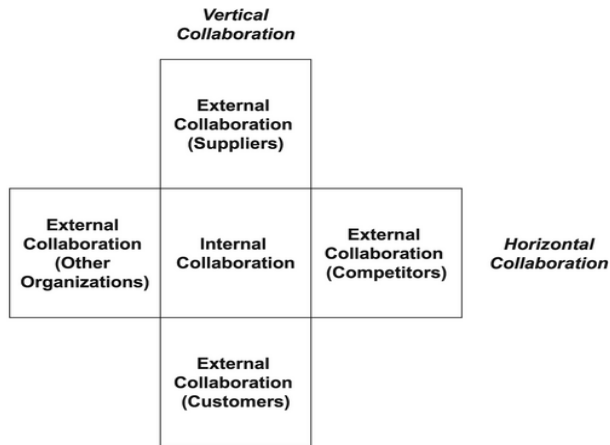
### *3.3. Collaboration*

There are many driving forces for collaboration in supply chains. For example, the innovative nature of products, the length of the life cycle and the duration of retail trends in the industries, the longer more complex supply chains and the general movement to offshore production are only some of the associations that move supply chains in to that direction. Global markets and more competition is likely to move supply chains towards a more universal participation where final retailers and upstream suppliers will be more willing to collaborate in an effort to cut costs (Polychronakis and Syntetos, 2007b; Fliedner, 2003).

#### *3.3.1 Forms of collaboration in the supply chain*

There are a variety of forms of potential supply chain collaboration, which can be divided into two main generic categories (see figure 4). Vertically, collaboration includes external customers, internally (across functions), and with external suppliers. Horizontally, it include collaboration with competitors and with other external non-competitors (Simatupang and Sridharan, 2002; Barratt, 2004).

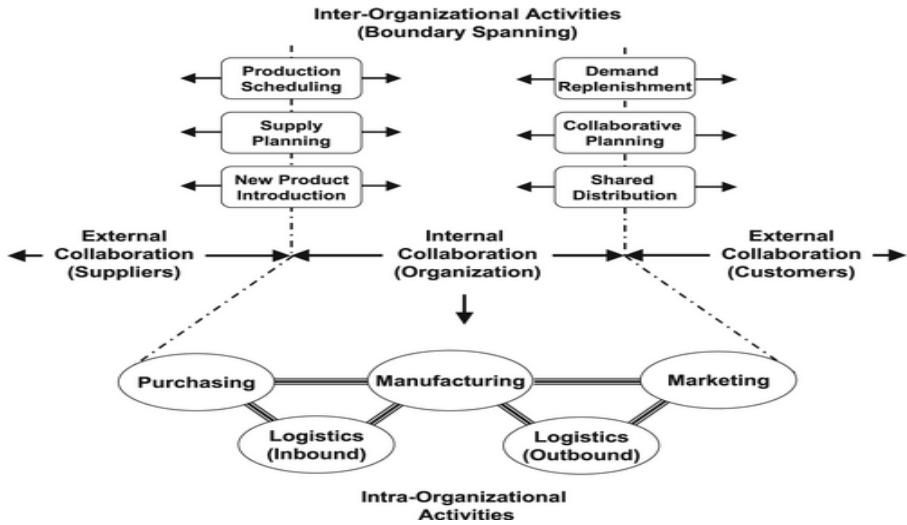
**FIGURE 4: THE SCOPE OF COLLABORATION**



*SOURCE:* (Barratt, 2004, p.32)

In terms of external collaboration, figure 5 presents a number of potential opportunities for vertical supply chain collaboration such as customer relationship management (CRM), collaborative demand planning (which in turn includes Collaborative Planning, Forecasting and Replenishment - CPFR), demand replenishment, and shared distribution (Barratt, 2004).

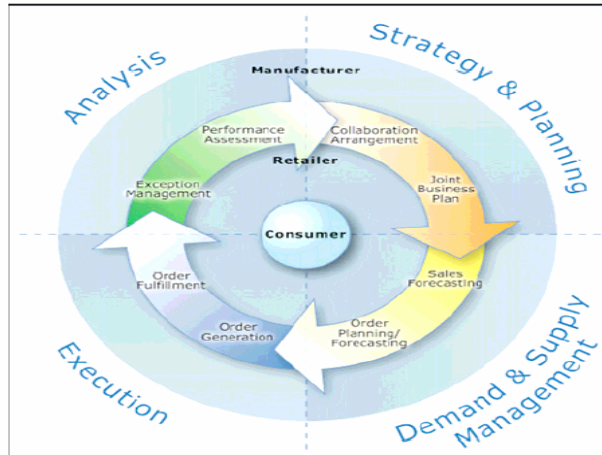
**FIGURE 5: THE SCOPE OF VERTICAL COLLABORATION**



*Source:* (Barratt, 2004, p.34)

### 3.3.2 Collaborative Planning, Forecasting and Replenishment (CPFR)

**FIGURE 6: 2004 VICS CPFR MODEL**



**Figure 1: 2004 VICS CPFR Model**

Source: (Oracle, 2005, p.3)

Explained by Oracle (2005), the latest CPFR model (Figure 6) highlights the collaboration as a continuous cyclic activity where the focus is on collecting and sharing the determinants of supply chain performance that measure success.

The important tasks which are covered by the current CPFR are:

1. *Collaborative Planning* – all parties should enthusiastically integrate each other to get ready to respond variable requirements from the market.
2. *Collaborative Forecasting* – retailers and suppliers in channels with high volume adapt their demand planning processes to incorporate feedback from trading partners.
3. *Collaborative Replenishment* – retailers and suppliers that have relied on continuous replenishment planning (CRP) or vendor-managed inventory (VMI) are evolving to collaborative inventory management.

(Oracle, 2005, p.4)

### 3.3.3 Framework B

The previously mentioned literature addresses CPFR and the development of Framework A. In this section of the paper we deal with the rationale behind the

development of Framework B. Steps 1 to 3 provide an overview of the three main stages as they appear in Framework B.

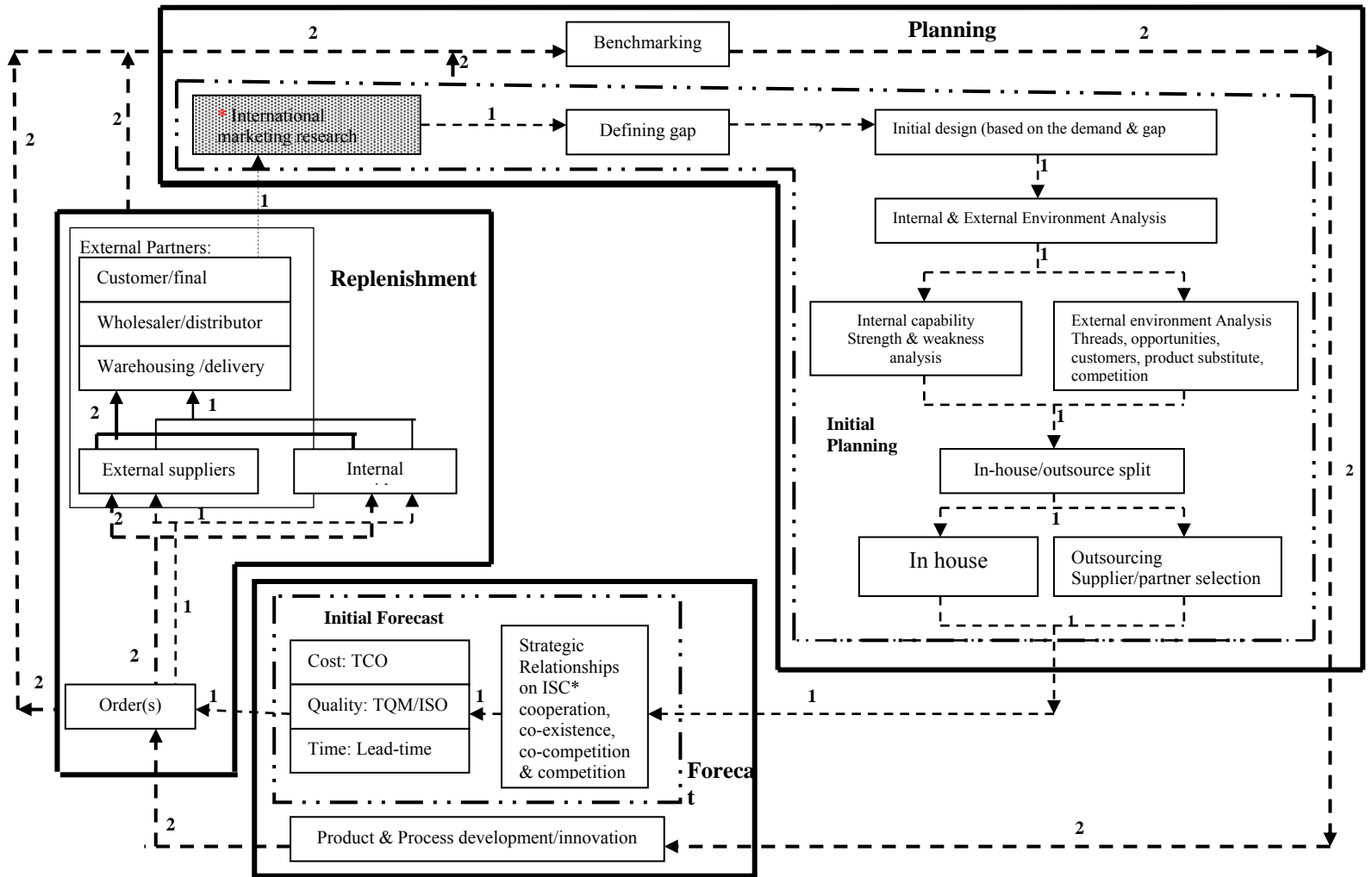
Technology is important, but appropriate information flow is essential: *“the efficient information flow between partners is identified as the key to improving the time, quality and cost factors. Meeting the customer objectives satisfactorily depends on co-ordination of information that helps produce highest quality, low cost and minimum time to service”* (Titus and Bröchner, 2005, p.78).

1. For the Collaborative Planning, all parties should enthusiastically integrate with each other to define and meet market requirements. Thus, accurate understanding of market demand, and own and potential partners’ capability, become essential identifications. Task 1 to task 3 in Framework A are fulfilling these requirements.

2. Collaborative Forecasting encourages the integration of feedback from each party such that it enhances their own planning processes – see Task 4 and the initial part of Task 5

3. Collaborative Replenishment employs continuous replenishment planning (CRP) or integrated inventory management techniques, which are leading to collaborative inventory management – see the later part of Task 5 and Task 6 in Framework A

As is highlighted by the latest CPFR in figure 6, endless cyclical improvement is crucial to improve customer satisfaction. Companies can only achieve improved market share by keeping modifying and adjusting their business strategy and improve their products. Then benchmarking is essential and becomes an effective approach to achieve both previous performance and further improvement objectives. Collaborative benchmarking provides motivation for supply chain collaboration in order to improve overall supply chain performance (Horvath, 2001; Simatupang and Sribharan, 2002), and further improvements that in turn contribute to both individual and mutual benefits (Simatupang and Sridharan, 2004). Hence, benchmarking can be regarded as an integral part of the planning and development stages. In that respect, product and process innovation can be decided by considering the new items on cost, quality and time management through the whole chain.



\*:Begin of the International supply chain    - -> : Information flow    -> : Material flow    1: first time    2: second time

**Framework B**

## 4. Barriers for Chinese Small Suppliers

### 4.1. The Chinese Context

China has become a major player in outsourcing/offshore sourcing production and assembly for products supplied to local markets of western firms (Hong, et al., 2006). This has forced China to change its traditional way of doing business. In China, as Yang and Xu (2006) state, SMEs are the main driving force of economic and social development. The Chinese economy has undergone four major stages of change namely the “*early stage*” (1949-1957), “*growth and fluctuation*” (1958-1963), “*innovative transformation*” (1978-1996) and “*rapid growth*” (1997 onwards) (Sun, 2003). *The scale of the “rapid growth” phase can be illustrated by SMEs statistics. In 2003, SMEs accounted for 98.9% of the total number of businesses in China, and made up 65.6, 63.3, 54 and 77.3 per cent of gross industrial output value, sales revenues, total profits, and employment respectively*” (China Statistics Press, 2004, in Yang and Xu, 2006, p.174).

### 4.2. Problems that small Chinese costume jewellery suppliers face

This section of the paper provides a summary overview of the preliminary findings as we have identified them in the relevant literature.

The main problems are generally generated from differences in the business environment, physical characteristics, climate, infrastructure, population, economic strength, political systems, and cultures (Waters, 2003). These differences create numerous problems, for example Gibb (2000a, b) points out that “*the transfer process from developed to developing countries includes substantial elements of implicit and explicit transfer of ideologies and culture* (Gibb, 2006, p.267).” This in turn leads to problems with language, concept understanding, agency involvement, and so on (Gibb, 2006).

Gaps specific to the Chinese small enterprises include embryonic international outsourcing, nascent logistics system, un-globalised relationship management, knowledge transfer inefficiencies, lead-times, responsiveness and innovation, quality and cost, trust and sharing. (Wiley, et al., 2006, Lin and Miller, 2003, Li-Hua, R. and Khalil, T.M, 2006, and Hong, et al., 2006)

Other problems pertinent to the Chinese small business globalisation attempts originate from the fact that although small enterprises are widely regarded as agents of

innovation, economic growth, and wealth creation, nevertheless as China opens its gate to foreign business, many gaps are created in the small business sector development in such areas as financing, management skills, motivated skilled labour, supply chain and subcontracting networks (Poutziouris, *et al.*, 2002).

Compared to large firms, small enterprises in China have problems of both internal financial resource constraints and difficulties to involve external finances (Yao, 2003), government policy restrictions, and triangle debts that represent a type of debt collection situation where three or more firms are involved (Tang and Zhang, 2002, Tang, *et al.*, 2007). Other specific problems on internationalisation attempts (under a regime of strong official influence) include lack of capability on international market research or overall lack of international marketing skills (Bamforth and Brookes, 2002, Siu, 2005 and Li and Matlay, 2006). Furthermore, with labour-intensive production methods, low capitalization and a low level of computerization, adding value to the raw material and overall product quality are also low (Chen and Shih, 2004).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND EXTENSIONS

It is true that *“from time to time researchers do explore new grounds with the changing dynamics that occur in the same field”* (Cavana *et al.*, 2001, p.108 and Sekaran, 2003, p.119). For modern small enterprises success in capturing sales opportunities and to satisfy customer needs in terms of speed, location and product variability, it is highly dependant on their supply chain capabilities (Council of Logistics Management, 2004). In this scenario, strategic alliances (including their business partners and competitors), core competencies and information technologies are the key weapons to achieve flexibility and responsiveness (Gunasekaran and Ngai, 2005). Members in the supply chain are forced to rethink the way they manage their business (Cassivi, 2006). To that end the first major contribution of this research paper is framework A that portray how marketing and logistics fits in the organisational context within a “process map” rationale.

Moreover, the various customer tastes and concerns, fast developments in technology and business globalisation remodel today’s small businesses (Hsu and Wang, 2004). Effective collaboration between units in a supply chain plays a crucial role, as it supports firms to concentrate on their core activities and ultimately outsource the rest. It also allows enterprises to focus on the innovation, flexibility, and lead-time and permits them to concentrate on the sources of competitive advantage necessary for survival in global competition (Fisher, 1997; Lee, 2002, Simatupang, *et al.*, 2004). With that in mind the second major contribution of this paper is framework B which captures all the elements of collaboration in the modern international supply chain.

To summarise this paper contributes to the current body of knowledge on SCM by focusing on a specific problem in a specific industry within China, namely the costume jewellery industry. Based on the relevant literature we have generated an initial framework that brings logistics and marketing together in fitting the organisational context. Following that we have produced a second framework that addresses collaboration pertinent issues. We are currently in the process of developing a final framework that captures the specific barriers for international supply chain collaboration for Chinese small businesses. To that end we have provided in section 4 of this paper some preliminary findings based on the review of the related literature. As previously mentioned we are looking at testing this final framework within a sample of 20 small enterprises in order to further review, evaluate and finalise it. Further results of our work will follow in a future publication.

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# DISABILITY IN LESVOS AND CHIOS, GREECE: KEY FINDINGS FROM MULTI-METHODOLOGICAL SOCIAL RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

*The aim of this article is to present some key findings on crucial social dimensions of mobility disability in a peripheral area of insular Greece (Lesvos and Chios). The findings are derived from a telephone survey research on local population's stances towards people with disabilities and from in-depth qualitative research on social representations of people with disabilities, concerning mainly their social life, social relations, family and social reproduction, educational and labour market arrangements and participation and interaction with health and social policy institutions.*

*Key words: Disability; Mobility problems; Multi – methodological social research.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper concerns basic findings derived from a multi-methodological social research on the social dimension of disability in the islands of Chios and Lesvos, Greece. This study was part of a broader research project (EQUAL Initiative) funded by the European Union. Lesvos and Chios islands are located in the northeast of Greece and are characterized by socio-economic peripherality and geographic remoteness. The permanent population of Lesvos is, according to the latest national survey (2001), about 108.000 people (the capital of Lesvos Mytilini accounts for about 38.000 people) whereas the permanent population of Chios is about 53.000 people (the capital of the island accounts for about 25.000 people) (NSSG, 2001). The particular social, economic and cultural characteristics of the two islands were historically formed under the strong influences from the multicultural and multinational urban centres of Asia Minor (Siphneou, 1994). This historical continuity was ruptured after the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922, which ended with Greek defeat. The following extensive exchange of Muslim and Christian populations between Greece and Turkey marked the end Greek presence in Asia Minor. The impact of this historic change on Lesvos and Chios, which were encapsulated in the Greek national territory in 1912,

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was manifold; disruption of commercial, social and cultural bonds with Asia Minor, which contributed to the decline of financial investments and corresponding employment opportunities; lack of infrastructural development; the cultural degradation and the gradual formation of a mentality of ‘isolationism’ in the two prefectures (Htouris, 2000). Thus today the 4th Community Support Framework recognizes North-East Aegean islands as one of the Greek regions eligible for additional financial support, in order to converge with the rest of the country. Two important features, related to our research with people with disabilities in Lesvos and Chios, characterize this socio-economic environment:

- The first feature is related to the limited socio-economic and employment opportunities for people with disabilities compared to those available to other areas of Greece (mainly to the major urban centres of the country), associated with exacerbated infrastructural problems.

- The second feature is related to the strong sense of ‘community’ in Chios and Lesvos and to the central role of family relations and networks to the social reproduction of people with disabilities. This feature results to a series of positive and negative outcomes as regards social integration of people with disabilities in the area and is discussed later on in the paper.

## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The basic methodological approach of this study was that of the in-depth qualitative investigation of stances and interpretations of disabled people in Lesvos and Chios, as regards their social role, relations and position. Complementary to this basic approach, we conducted a telephone survey in the municipalities of Mytilene, Lesvos and Chios, in order to investigate the stances of general population towards people with disabilities. The telephone survey questionnaire included fourteen (14) basic questions and the mean time of completion was between five and ten minutes. Thus, choosing the technique of telephone interviewing led to a relatively large sample of completed interviews, allowing the capturing of basic trends as regards broad social stances towards disabled people in the two islands. In total four hundred and eighty two (482) complete telephone interviews were taken (254 in Mytilene, Lesvos and 228 in Chios). The sample frame used was that of the most recent voting catalogues of the two municipalities and the final sample was formed by stratified random sampling according to age and gender. The basic findings of this survey research are presented and discussed in the next section of the paper.

Our main methodological approach was based on a series of in-depth semi structured interviews with people with mobility disabilities in Lesvos and Chios. We

put an emphasis on the people with mobility problems because this category comprises the vast majority of people with disabilities in Lesvos and Chios (NSSG, 2002). This was also reflected in the findings of the general population survey. The vast majority of people in Lesvos and Chios develop or had developed occasional or more stable social relations with disabled people with mobility problems. In total twenty-two (22) in depth-interviews were taken in the two islands (12 in Lesvos and 10 in Chios). Eighteen of the research participants were men and four were women. The age of the vast majority of them ranged from 20 to 45 years, whether twelve research participants had mobility problems from birth and the rest acquired the problem at some time in their life-span (mainly caused by car accidents). The general purpose of this study was to understand the interpretations of being a person with mobility problems in the specific context of north Aegean islands. More specifically we ought to answer the following, interrelated research questions:

- What are the basic features and characteristics of social life of people with mobility problems in Lesvos and Chios and how they construct and interpret their social relations?
- What is the role of family and family relations to the social reproduction of people with mobility problems and to their overall life trajectories?
- How people with mobility problems are integrated (or not) into society through educational and labour market arrangements and participation?
- How people with mobility problems relate with health and social policy institutions at national and local level?

In order to address these questions we constructed a detailed *Interview Guide*. The guide was divided into four major thematic parts; the first part concerned with broad social life and social relations, the second part with family and family relations, the third part with education and labour market participation and the last one with medical care and social policy. The above themes and sub-themes were developed further into a series of open-ended questions, giving special emphasis to the wording and the sequence and to the avoidance of leading, biased or insulted questions (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Although the interview research framework proved to be quite detailed and analytic, it changed considerably through the research process due to the constant interaction between researchers and research participants and due to the open character of the whole process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Flick et al, 2004). Thus the participants brought up several themes and issues during the interviews, which subsequently were extensively discussed with other interviewees. In

all instances we made an effort to keep a balance between pre selected interview themes and interviewee suggestions and responses.

The whole research process was based on teamwork. Four researchers were participated in the research process after reaching an agreement on basic common interviewing approaches. Research lasted for about five months (July - September 2002, February - March 2003) and the average duration of each interview was over two and a half hours. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants in combination with parallel note taking. Interviewees talked extensively about their personal and collective life experiences and interpretations giving rich and detailed information about most or all of the research issues. Total anonymity was guaranteed and the purposes and scopes of research were explained to the prospective research participants in detail. Additionally, the possibility of ending the interview process at any time was made clear in all of the prospective participants (Hopf, 2004). Furthermore, access of research participants to the interim and final research reports for review, evaluation and response was guaranteed. For this purpose all research reports were made publicly accessed via the Internet, while hard copies were available to all research participants on request.

The selection of prospective interviewees was based on the snowballing technique and the initial contacts were made through various associations of people with disabilities in Lesvos and Chios ('Iliatida' and 'Kipseli' in Lesvos and 'Panhiakos' and 'Iones' in Chios) (Robson, 2002). We made an effort, through the selection process of prospective interviewees to capture the whole spectrum of their basic characteristics such as age, gender, place of residence, educational level and working experience. Furthermore we included people who were born with mobility problems and people with acquired mobility problems at some time in their life course. This difference proved to be crucial for social life trajectories, social relations and social integration (please see next part). Almost all interviews were conducted at associations' facilities and some of them at the houses of people with mobility problems. The research process ended when a certain degree of saturation was reached and when we felt that the research questions were satisfactorily addressed (Robson, 2002). The degree of saturation was mainly dependent on the repeatability of responses of the interviewees. It was also dependent on the formation of a set of qualitative data, through which the research questions were answered in a comprehensive way.

### 3. KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Survey findings

Starting from the basic findings of the general population survey in the two islands, Table 1 shows the basic demographic characteristics of the final sample. These characteristics correspond to a great extent to the real characteristics of the population of the municipalities of Mytilene, Lesvos and Chios.

**TABLE 1: BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS**

Gender			Age			Education		
	Frequency	%		Frequency	%		Frequency	%
Male	239	49.5	18-35	113	23.4	Primary	79	16.3
Female	243	50.4	36-50	116	24.0	Secondary	173	35.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>100</b>	51 and above	253	52.4	Post-secondary and higher	166	34.4
			<b>Total</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>100</b>	No response	64	13.2
						<b>Total</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey results

Almost 54% of all research participants stressed that they know or have known in the past a disabled person or persons. Nevertheless almost half of the sample has never developed any kind of social relation or contact with people with disabilities (see Table 2). The vast majority of people which stressed that they know or have known a disabled person (over 70%) determined that these persons have some kind of mobility disability. The rest comprised of various categories of disability or perceived disability such as mental problems, psychological problems, vision and hearing problems etc.

**TABLE 2: RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION ‘DO YOU PERSONALLY KNOW OR HAVE KNOWN AN INDIVIDUAL WITH DISABILITIES?’**

	Frequency	%
Yes	260	53.9
No	218	45.2
No response	4	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey results

The basic causes of social contact with people with disabilities are three (see Table 3). The first one is related to the association (accidental, occasional or more frequent and stable) with people with disabilities because of sharing common social grounds, environment or relationships (for example common friends). The second cause is related to the fact that the disabled person is a family member and the third is related to the fact that the disabled person is a working colleague.

**TABLE 3: CAUSES OF SOCIAL CONTACT WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Social environment	163	33.8
Family member	67	13.6
Work	45	9.3
Other	34	7.0
Special associations	8	1.6
No response	165	34.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey results

The dominant types of social relations with disabled people were again three (see Table 4). The first important type is the familial one (13%) whereas 18% of the respondents said that their relations with people with disabilities are only accidental, superficial or occasional. Only 17% of the sample maintains close or simply friendly relations with a person with a disability.

**TABLE 4: TYPE OF SOCIAL RELATIONS WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Occasional or accidental social relations	87	18.0
Friendly and close social relations	83	17.2
Social relations because of family membership	63	13.0
Other	44	9.1
No response	205	42.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey results

We think that the answer to the hypothetical question ‘Would you develop close social relations with people with disabilities?’ has great implications on the understanding of the general social stances towards disabled people (see Table 5).

Almost 22% of the sample would not develop any kind of social relations with people with disabilities or would develop some kind of relations under special circumstances and under conditions. This quite high percentage for a telephone survey, where respondents could take a more favorable position without any personal cost, reveals the relatively widespread stereotypical and biased social stance of a large proportion of the population towards the disabled (Lambridis, 2004). This finding is reinforced from the kind of answers in the hypothetical question ‘Would you cooperate with people with disabilities at work?’ (see Table 6). Here about 31% of the sample would not cooperate with disabled persons at work or would cooperate under special circumstances or conditionally. This very high percentage of dismissal of the possibility of cooperation with the disabled at work is of great importance as it concerns a field (work and the labour market) which plays an extremely important role to the social integration and inclusion (or exclusion) of people with disabilities.

**TABLE 5: RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION ‘WOULD YOU DEVELOP CLOSE SOCIAL RELATIONS WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?’**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes or probably yes	363	75.3
No or probably no	85	17.6
Under conditions	21	4.3
Other	6	1.2
No response	7	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey results

**TABLE 6: RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION ‘WOULD YOU COOPERATE WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AT WORK?’**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes or probably yes	313	64.9
No or probably no	112	23.2
Under conditions	37	7.6
Other	6	1.2
No response	14	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey results

Finally, the survey comprised a question on evaluating Greek public policy for people with disabilities (see Table 7). Although about 62% of respondents found public policy on the matter not satisfactory, 26% were satisfied or relatively satisfied from the public provisions and benefits for disabled people in Greece. This finding, is once again, characteristic of broader social stances towards disabled people, as it is

generally recognized that public disability policy in Greece is still underdeveloped, failing to combat the multidimensional problems of the disabled population in an effective way and to create a social, economic and cultural environment of inclusion and integration (Darais, 2001; NSSG, 2002; Psilla et al., 2003)

**TABLE 7: EVALUATION OF PUBLIC POLICY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN GREECE**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Not satisfactory or relatively not satisfactory	297	61.6
Satisfactory or relatively satisfactory	117	24.2
Very satisfactory	8	1.6
No response	60	12.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey results

In general, the findings of the survey of the population of municipalities of Mytilene, Lesvos and Chios, Greece revealed a certain trend of social prejudice and bias towards the disabled people. This trend is verified further as it corresponds with the experiences and interpretations of disabled people themselves in their narratives. Those interpretations concern mainly four fields of social life; social relations and participation, family relations, education and employment and medical care and health policies.

### *3.2. Qualitative research findings*

#### *3.2.1. Social relations and participation*

The fear of social rejection, which is a relatively extended social phenomenon in the study areas as the findings of the telephone survey in Lesvos and Chios indicate, the frequent weakness of independent mobility and the problem of access to public and private places, due to the absence (in most cases) of suitable infrastructure, pose obstacles to the everyday life of persons with mobility problems. As it is obvious by the narrative of an interviewee, the fear of social rejection is very strong:

“When they brought me the wheelchair, it was a sensational moment in my life. For the first time, I was going out of my house, out of my bed. And when I went to the square, as it was summer, people gathered on the balconies, outside the houses, in the square [...], they thought they were seeing a monkey...A gypsy who came with his monkey to give a performance...So I summoned up my strength, my courage and I faced everyone with self-control and stoicism. I had to give the performance...Is he

crazy, is he stupid, is he this or that [...], everyone [...], as I told you, I was a stranger...It was the first time that I went outdoors, to the community. And especially to that [community] of a village, because people of the village have strong curiosity.” (age 72, male, disabled because of illness, date of interview: 09/02/2003)

Talking about social rejection, another interviewee presents characteristically her experiences:

“...I can’t keep my temper, you know...One day, I’m getting off the car and I am ready to get on the wheelchair, and behind me there was a taxi driver, and he was just the first car ...So he could see what was happening, he wasn’t the last one where there was no visibility, so he looks at me and starts honking. Then, I was pissed off and I said, “Why are you honking, are you blind?”

“Another day, I was getting off the car and there was a Mercedes. There was space. If he got slightly on the pavement, he could pass through. The other cars did that, but he was afraid for the tires, I don’t know what he was afraid of, and he didn’t get on the pavement. So I go to him, pissed off, and I say, “Eh buddy, what do you think you are doing? Do you think your Mercedes is more expensive than this thing I’m sitting on?” [the wheelchair] And he apologized for honking. You see? ...” (age 27, male, disabled because of accident, date of interview: 14/02/2003)

There is a widespread feeling of social discrimination among the interviewees. This discrimination is perceived mainly as social prejudice related to their particular situation and place in society. It must be noted that the majority of interviewees connected the feeling of being discriminated against, with specific incidents and associated behaviors taking place outside their home, at recreational places and during their contacts with state or local institutions. For many research participants, these incidents marked significantly the way of viewing society and their place and role within it. Another crucial issue of perceived social discrimination is related to the serious access problems that interviewees face in their daily routines, which keep them excluded from basic activities of social life. Although the access problem of people with disabilities is general in Greece, it is worse in Lesvos and Chios as these islands are less favored areas and are characterized by major infrastructural deficiencies.

Wider uneasy social relations lead to high appreciation of social life within special associations of people with disabilities. For the vast majority of interviewees, associations form the most important field for their social interaction, socialisation and respective activities. The value ascribed by the research participants to these special associations is indicated below:

“I like it very much in the association because it is a place where I can get help when I want to be informed on something concerning people with disabilities, solve a problem of mine and have the possibility of learning things. It is a friendly environment where I have a good time, get to know people and so I don’t stay isolated within the walls of my house.”

“...In the past, I stayed most of the time at home, then things got better. Through the association I acquired all the knowledge on my work. In the beginning, I didn’t want the job. At first, we are afraid to begin something. At first I made some mistakes, but gradually I improved...” (*age 22, male, disabled since birth, date of interview: 06/08/2002*)

“I come to the association; I talk with the people and deal with the various activities of the association as well as the different discussion groups. Furthermore, here I work out, I play basketball and take part in all activities. My life has changed a lot in the association; now I have a very good time and enjoy myself much more than in the past” (*age 29, male, disabled since birth, date of interview: 24/07/2002*)

“I didn’t manage to make friends and keep contact with people who don’t belong to the association. This is not easy and I know it from experience, because friendships I made with many able-bodied persons didn’t last; the next day the most, everything was over. I say that, because I have made this mistake many times...” (*age 22, male, disabled since birth, date of interview: 06/08/2002*)

The degree of dependence on associational social life between people with acquired mobility problems and people with mobility problems from birth differs considerably. The former develop wider social relations and are more autonomous even when their mobility problems are more serious than those of the latter. On the contrary, people with mobility problems from birth – even in cases that their problem does not inhibit their independent mobility – show greater hesitation and express greater insecurity regarding their social contacts and relations, especially with non disabled people. Those people firmly prefer the development of relationships with persons facing the same (or similar) disability or (even generally) with other disabled people, whereas they are particularly hesitant in sharing emotions and experiences with others.

Friendly or intimate relationships with others are considered to be «difficult» or even «problematic», by the vast majority of research participants. In general, they believe that the contact with another disabled person is easier, whereas they consider extremely difficult the development of a stable social relationship or an intimate affair with non-disabled people. As an interviewee puts it:

“...Now if you have an affair [...]; it is widely believed that a handicapped man should have an affair with a handicapped woman, if a normal woman goes with me, she is not normal or she is ‘weird’ or crazy or something else, in other words, this is the ‘status’ in Greek society. The handicapped will marry [...], he has the right to get married or have affairs only with a disabled woman...You must be normal, honestly I don’t know how they define ‘normal’...” (age 36, male, disabled because of accident, date of interview: 12/02/2003)

“...The relations of disabled people are a bit more difficult. The relationships of able-bodied persons, able-bodied man with able-bodied woman, are different from a relationship of a guy on a wheelchair with a non able-bodied girl. It’s like puzzle pieces that must be compatible, in other words disabled man with disabled woman an so on. Let’s say, a man on a wheelchair must get married to a woman who has a problem. Basically, an able-bodied woman will not accept to live her life with a man on a wheelchair. I believe that a girl would consider the relationship with me as a hang-up, because I have a mobility problem. She would meet many difficulties in taking this decision. I would try it, but if she were an able-bodied woman, a hundred percent I would fail. Whereas if she was a non able-bodied woman she would fully understand me since she would also have a problem...” (age 22, male, disabled since birth, date of interview: 24/07/2002)

The participation in associations of disabled people is considered to be a largely positive characteristic of social life by the interviewees. Within the associations lasting friendships, relations and cooperation are developed. On the other hand for the vast majority of the research participants their social life is limited within the associations. While they have developed strong social bonds within these associations their ties with the ‘outside’ world are relatively weak and in many cases emotionally painful. Thus, the contradictions of associational social life lead to raising important questions on the process of broader social integration.

### 3.2.2. Family relations

The most striking finding as regards family relations is that family overprotection leads to dependence and social closure, even in cases where there is high potential for autonomous living and full social participation. A characteristic example of family over protected behaviour, which causes social isolation and exclusion, is given below:

“Many times, I fear to make contact with people, despite the fact that my problem is not so serious. I fear that I’ll feel embarrassed, you know! This feeling was in part provoked by my family, because sometimes they told me not to go out so as not to be

seen and feel embarrassed. They said such things; it was difficult for them, too!” (*age 27, male, disabled because of accident, date of interview: 28/08/2002*)

From the whole research process, it became evident that although family support is crucial for people with mobility problems, its content needs major redirection towards the enhancing of their autonomy and social participation and away from the promotion of passiveness and social closure. Thus, family dependence emerged as an extremely crucial issue from the whole research process. This dependence is related to the seriousness of the mobility problem but what is more important is the associated over-protection behavior of the vast majority of their families. Family over-protection reinforces the dependence feeling, as it limits the prospects for greater autonomy and personal development of people with mobility problems.

### *3.2.3. Education and employment*

People with mobility problems adjust their reactions to their educational and labour problems according to the type and degree of their inadequacies, as well as the time and the circumstances under which they were manifested. In cases where disability existed from birth and the people with disabilities were never self-defined as «healthy», a predisposition of low expectations regarding education and employment is obvious, both by him/herself and his/her family. The majority of people with disabilities from birth have only completed the compulsory public elementary education, while they enrich their (general and professional) knowledge and training through their participation in associations, professional workshops and professional training centres. As one of these interviewees reported:

“Thanks to the association I started fulfilling my dream which was the basic education. It also helped me deal with computers. Financial problems kept me from carrying on this occupation at home. I occupy myself as much as I can and I have some equipment but I didn’t have the chance to carry on further.” (*age 29, male, disabled since birth, date of interview: 06/08/2002*)

Under these circumstances, the role of the «educational» and «supportive» personnel of the associations for people with disabilities is very crucial: if they are patient and persistent (and they are in most cases) they can boost certain changes of the mentality of people with mobility problems. Although initially, people with disabilities are usually self defined as incompetent and inadequate, they can regain a great part of their self-confidence, through their participation in the educational and working procedures organised by the above mentioned agents:

“I just finished elementary and middle school because I believed I didn’t have the strength to go on with high school. But here at the association, I have learnt many things about computers and there was a girl who was a volunteer and thanks to her I learnt some things about the Internet, Word and PowerPoint and I liked it very much” *(age 22, male, disabled since birth, date of interview: 24/07/2002)*

“I work at the association [as supportive personnel] and I’m very happy with my job. I believe that what matters, is not just the availability of employment posts, but to love your job. The more love you show, the more you will accomplish and succeed in anything you want, even if you are a person with disabilities ...I like my job so much and I am very satisfied with my life regarding my profession. Of course, I don’t know what I’ll do after the completion of the programme, but for now it doesn’t bother me. I enjoy the co-operation with the other people very much...” *(age 22, male, disabled since birth, date of interview: 24/07/2002)*

According to the aforementioned statements, we can assume that people with mobility problems suffer more from the lack of awareness and guidance for improving their skills, rather than from their disabilities themselves. This conclusion is enhanced by the (well-founded) tendency for systematic self devaluation of their abilities, especially in relation and coherence to various educational procedures. The negative self image concerning their educational abilities and skills, and consequently their social inclusion and acceptance, it seems to be a major problem for the people with mobility problems in their effort for social inclusion:

“I finished high school. Initially they stared at me in a strange way but later on they got used to me. At high school things were harder. I remember a fellow student who threw me the ball after the accident and told me: ‘Now, you must forget all these!’. I didn’t say anything to him because I had realised that all these, indeed, was not for me any more. I couldn’t imagine playing basketball then, although I had seen it in America [USA], I always thought of Greece, about the Greek standards...At school I couldn’t sit behind the school desk properly and one of my teachers said to me: ‘Masters desk doesn’t lower!’, while another teacher lowered the masters desk in order for me to write an essay...” *(age 36, male, disabled because of accident, date of interview: 13/02/2003)*

It is indicative that people who suffered mobility problems at a relatively late stage in their life course adopt a more «open» and «courageous» attitude about the issues of education and professional rehabilitation:

“I attended up to middle school and I was awarded the school certificate although I had hardships with my health every now and then, and I had to be absent; after middle

school I went to a school...of three years of duration and I received a certificate. There were seminars about learning different crafts and I chose; and at this school we also were paid. Then I attended some computer seminars that lasted 6 months. The association for people with disabilities informed me about these seminars and I enrolled and attended them. We learnt many things there about computers such as Windows, Corel Draw and Excel... Most of all I liked Windows, it was a very good experience for me, I enjoyed it, because if you ask for a job you must have some skills. I followed some English lessons too, but then I quitted so I didn't get any certificates ...” (age 25, female, disabled since birth, date of interview: 06/02/2003)

“After finishing school I worked there at the service of economics for six months doing my practice. It was very good there because my colleagues considered me as equal. I would like to find a job relative to what I have studied, because now I'm doing something different. The job I have now at the office of ...did me good on social issues, because people saw that I can make some things and they are no longer hesitant towards me. In the past, they thought that because of my disability I couldn't do things, since they didn't know ...” (age 36, male, disabled because of accident, date of interview: 12/05/2003)

After the completion of their studies, people with mobility problems still have to cope with social stereotypes, since, most employers, even the unprejudiced, prefer to employ able-bodied, «healthy» persons. This attitude drives very often people with mobility problems to social and labour market exclusion:

“In fact, I have not tried to find working positions outside the association to see to what degree people consider people with disabilities able to cover the needs of a job. Perhaps these problems that I imagine don't exist at all, however I don't think so, because not all bosses are 'saints', and in some cases not so tolerant. I believe that the relations in the working environment are rather defined mostly by the employer, because even if your colleagues are OK with you, if your boss doesn't like you or doesn't consider you important, then things become bad. If I had an employer who wouldn't treat me well I would try to show him that I am willing to succeed ...OK, I can't say that I am perfect, since sometimes due to problems of transport, I may be late for example, but I would try to show my boss that although I'm a little bit late, I'm quick-witted...” (age 22, male, disabled since birth, date of interview: 24/07/2002)

However, despite the difficulties faced by people with mobility problems, there are recorded experiences of some of them who managed to be admitted to the labour market. An experience of that kind is described as following:

“In the beginning, people showed great hesitation. They thought I couldn’t do various things...you know, people thought of me...can he use a computer? When they asked me to write, you know at first all of them showed hesitation...could he make photocopies? One day, an elder woman, around 70, said ‘son could you write for me the address to send the letter to my child’. ‘I’ll write it’, I said and so I wrote the address and there was a [lady] behind me...[who said] ‘Oh! He can write!’ in other words she confirmed something which [is a common ground: mobility handicap subconsciously is connected by the wide public to a general disability of working]...”  
*(age 36, male, disabled because of accident, date of interview: 12/05/2003)*

An additional series of important problems of people with mobility difficulties working «outside protected structures» concerns their financial earnings, their working rights, as well as their relationship with employers. As one of them stated:

“...Legislation must give motives to employers and support the socialisation of people with disabilities and include them in the labour market. Employment is a fundamental condition for socialisation and it is both a financial and psychological support ...Usually, the employer, receives by OAED some money [he/she] pays I.K.A. [Social Insurance Foundation] and gives the rest to the employee, you see? And sometimes he doesn’t give him/her the entire sum that rests so in a way we can’t say that financial support is guaranteed. He doesn’t pay overtimes, neither Sunday working, he keeps him/her working at irregular hours...there are some things that basically cannot be dealt with so easily...”  
*(age 46, female, disabled because of accident, date of interview: 10/02/2003)*

Interview data reveal that there are limited opportunities for social development, which are mainly observable in the fields of education, training and active labour market participation. Apart from the developmental and structural problems that characterize the local economies of Lesvos and Chios, what is more important is the low self esteem of people with mobility problems and the associated perceived ‘inability’ to participate fully to educational and labour market procedures away from the educational, training and working activities available within associations.

### *3.2.4. Medical care and health policies*

People with mobility difficulties were (in general) very critical about the Greek National Health System, as well as the health policies addressed to them. The majority expressed great dissatisfaction about the quality and effectiveness of Public Health in the sector of rehabilitation, while in many cases, they have also pointed out crucial, according to their opinion, mistakes of the medical and nursing personnel, which had unpleasant physical and psychological consequences for people with disabilities :

“...In 1997, I was admitted to a public hospital in Athens and I had a bed which should be a special one in order to protect us, since if you stay still you get bedsores. That happened to me, which is extremely painful! It is the worst thing I have ever experienced in my life and I still suffer, because that got me upside down, I couldn't practice anything I had learnt! The availability of special beds, special mattresses are essential...There should be a suitably operating Public Rehabilitation Centre, not a 'Dahaou'... Buildings should be different and there should be available modern medical equipment, not only for us but for others, too ...” (age 36, male, disabled because of accident, date of interview: 13/02/2003)

Summoned up, their critiques were focused on issues concerning mainly public hospitals. People with mobility problems believe that the Greek State should deal with the issue of rehabilitation with greater responsibility and Public Health Services must be staffed with specialised medical and nursing personnel who, apart from the medical knowledge, should show greater sensibility about the way of treating people with disabilities:

“In other words, there should be specialised personnel, medical personnel knowing well their work and knowing how to treat patients who suffer from these problems and are in this position ...” (age 36, male, disabled because of accident, date of interview: 13/02/2003)

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

People with mobility problems in Lesvos and Chios, Greece face a series of intense difficulties related with different aspects of their social life and a series of challenges. Due to family dependence, over-protection and a series of negative social experiences, people with mobility problems have, in a great extent, 'internalized' the 'social stigma' (Lemay and Ashmore, 2004) of being a disabled person. These experiences are mainly related to social rejection and prejudice against people with disabilities. The findings of both the survey and the qualitative part of research are in agreement on this extremely important matter. Thus, the relatively high percentages of social rejection of people with disabilities found in the telephone survey research coincide with the discourses of those people, who talked extensively about different aspects of the negative side of their broad social relations. People with disabilities in Lesvos and Chios have gradually adopted a highly negative self-image, which is indicated in their discourses and interpretations of personal 'inability', 'inefficiency', 'incapability' and 'powerlessness'. Despite that, this image is in direct contrast with their actual capabilities and personal qualities (as showed by their activities within their associations), it leads to curbing their great autonomy potentials and results to minimal broader social integration. These research findings contribute to the limited

Greek literature on the matter, mainly by changing the view of the role of families of disabled people and by showing the ambiguity of associational participation. Empirical research on disability in Greece is still limited despite the great social problems that those people face, which are mainly related to social discrimination and closure, exclusion from the labour market, inefficient education and training and access problems due to unsatisfactory infrastructural arrangements (Ksiromeriti-Tsaklaganou, 1984; Stasinou, 1991; Psilla et al, 2003; Dourakopoulos, 2004)

The constant negotiation between the autonomy potential and the negative self image among people with mobility problems, and among disabled people in general, raises broader public policy questions, such as the need of redirection of public intervention towards the creation of permanent structures of family training, personal empowerment and social sensitizing. Specific policy recommendations, derived from the whole experience and findings of this research, are the creation of specialized and permanent structures of family counseling, the development of programs for the empowerment of people with disabilities, the generous increase of public spending for the disabled persons, the significant improvement of infrastructure, especially in peripheral areas and the creation of stable structures of additional training and education of people with disabilities without separating people with disabilities from mainstream educational institutions.

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