

Youth Associations and Entrepreneurship

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The development of skills for entrepreneurship among young people has attracted interest at various levels, as a way of overcoming many problems that affect this group in the areas of economic development and job creation. It was possible to verify that youth associations assume a dual role, on the one hand contributing to the personal, social and professional development of its leaders, members and participants, and on the other hand, as a promoter of social transformation, particularly at the local level.

youth

associativism

entrepreneurship

third sector

1. Introduction

Young people in western societies currently live in a paradoxical social condition: never has a generation been so qualified, nurturing high aspirations and expectations throughout school, regarding the value of employability and professional progression, while unemployment rates reach worrying values in younger population, a situation that is becoming structural ^[1].

While discussing how the tools for the development of skills for entrepreneurship in the young population can be integrated into educational curricula, there has been a movement around youth associations for some time, which in Portugal has reached a significant level, enabling the development of these competences, without this fact being duly recognized in general.

Youth associations act as citizenship schools, where young people have opportunities to experiment, develop ideas and put into practice their solutions to everyday problems ^[2], being spaces for the development of a series of skills that are consistent with the development of entrepreneurship. In doing so, they are involved in the development of their communities and, at the same time, is given the opportunity to develop their personal, social and professional skills.

Participating in a youth association is a possible way to strengthen skills and tools, to gain awareness of the context in which young people are inserted and to commit to its development, while at the same time acquiring a series of technical–professional knowledge. In this way, it is crucial to understand the impact of youth associations on the development of youth entrepreneurship, verifying which dimensions it is associated with, as well as identifying the existing challenges and opportunities, in order to invest in the creation of young people's skills.

2. Entrepreneurship and Youth

2.1. Entrepreneurship and Innovation Dynamics

Various social actors currently invoke entrepreneurship as a solution to many problems, particularly in economic terms [3]. Entrepreneurship has attracted increasing attention because of its importance in economic growth, job creation and productivity [4][5]. It is considered one of the main mechanisms in promoting economic development [6][7], innovation and well-being [3]. It is seen as a dynamic process of change, which is based on the identification of opportunities and new solutions by the entrepreneur, with the objective of meeting the needs of individuals and groups [8].

The 20th century brought a turning point to the concept of entrepreneur and its relevance. Joseph Schumpeter (1883–1950) contributed significantly to the study of entrepreneurship and innovation. His book, “Theory of Economic Development”, published in 1911, rejected the prevailing view at the time, which identified the entrepreneur as the manager of the company, subject to great risk in order to achieve his goals, and assumed the role of the innovator, representing the driving force of the economic system [3]. Schumpeter interprets innovation as an endogenous process, that is, internal to the system itself, which makes it possible to do more with the same amount of resources [9]. Entrepreneurship and innovation dynamics are thus interlinked, highlighting the idea of the entrepreneur as responsible for the processes of combining means of production, new products and/or new markets, assuming himself as the key figure in economic development in opposition to capital owners. Entrepreneurship skills can be viewed as important skillsets for success in projects [10].

Following this line of thought, Peter Drucker (1909–2005) also placed the emphasis on innovation, defending innovative entrepreneurship as the main catalyst for many changes in business, industrial and economic contexts [11]. For Drucker, what successful entrepreneurs reveal is not just any special personality trait but also a personal commitment to a systematic practice of innovation, with innovation being the specific function of the entrepreneur [12]. Entrepreneurial skills will strengthen an individual's belief to be an entrepreneur and provide an individual with the capabilities necessary for entrepreneurship, such as creativity, innovativeness and self-efficacy [13][14].

2.2. Youth and Entrepreneurship

The definition of youth has been the subject of much debate or seen as an unstable social fact [15]. Youth, understood as a stage of life and a sociocultural category, is a product of modern times, and there are many moments throughout history in which reference is made to the role of young people [16]. The General Assembly of the UN—United Nations Organization—defined as young people as being between 15 and 24 years old, for the first time in 1985, in the scope of the commemorations of the International Year of Youth. Currently, statistically, the 29-year threshold is used and young people are spoken of as individuals before reaching adulthood, mentioning the existence of several sub-steps. A view of youth as an apparent unity (when referring to a stage of life) and as diversity (when different social attributes that distinguish one from the other) are alleged [17].

Entrepreneurship is still a residual strategy among young people, manifested essentially by those who live in better socioeconomic conditions and have more qualifications [18]. Several reliable elements such as innovativeness, risk-

taking, self-confidence and need for achievement to predict entrepreneurial inclinations have been emphasized by the literature [19][20][21]. Still, in this way, it is mentioned that young people who have contact with entrepreneurial models are more likely to become entrepreneurs themselves [3]. This evidence portrays the relevance of young entrepreneurship, contributing to its institutionalization as a field of analysis and action, which is clearly visible in the guidelines of many governments, public entities and institutions. [22] concluded that policies to enhance economic performance and growth through promoting entrepreneurship can be effective.

2.3. Third Sector and Youth Associations

Third Sector organizations play a fundamental role in society and have been growing in terms of quantity, heterogeneity, type of activities and their articulation with social protection systems [23] and social entrepreneurship is considered an emerging field of study [24]. Major societal challenges are faced all over the world, such as climate change, socioeconomic inequalities and ageing populations, and social entrepreneurs take it on themselves to develop innovative solutions for such societal challenges [25]. Youth associations show a development pattern in accordance with this description. The term Third Sector designates a set of organizations very diversified among themselves, which represent forms of organizing activities, production and distribution of goods and provision of services, distinct from the two dominant economic agents—public authorities and private for-profit companies [26]. Entrepreneurship in nonprofit sector has broader social goals than conventional forms of entrepreneurship [27]. Youth associations are included in the framework of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and may take on different types depending on the main activity carried out, as part of the range of Third Sector organizations.

Associativism is referred to as the organization of civil society and understands the process of constitution of associations as a grouping of people around common interests, resorting to the creation of entities with legal personality and cooperation objectives with a view to one or more purposes in common [26]. The diversity of associations is seen in their differentiation through the goals they aim to achieve, the people who are part of them, their organizational models, and the activities and initiatives they develop [2]. Nevertheless, two key ideas are mentioned regarding *associativism*: voluntary and free cooperation and the creation of solutions to concrete problems.

Public policies should focus on social values oriented to progress in order to stimulate valuable entrepreneurial activity and hence facilitate economic development that also embraces vulnerable communities [28]. Complementarily, entrepreneurial orientation in the social context is best characterized by the three dimensions of innovativeness, pro-activeness and risk-taking [29]. Associations are identified as spaces for participation, developing a reference educational function, embodied in the learning of skills, techniques and competences for cooperative work and participation in communities [2]. Being part of an association makes it possible to undertake certain objectives as a group, with the view to pursuing a common goal [30]. This possibility is open to young people through their integration into (youth) associations. Youth associations are a heterogeneous collective due to the diversity of functions they fulfil and the recipients to whom their actions are directed [26].

3. Conclusions

Entrepreneurship as a field of study has been experiencing growing progress, given its importance as a mechanism for economic development and job creation [4][6][31]. In addition, the development of skills for entrepreneurship among young people has attracted a growing interest at various levels, particularly as a way to overcome the main problems that affect this layer of the population in these areas [32][33].

Youth associations have enabled the development of these same skills in young people, without this fact generally being properly recognized. This work sought to contribute for the understanding of the impact of youth associations on the development of entrepreneurship.

If, for some authors, entrepreneurship is associated with an eminently economic perspective, necessarily implying innovation, identification and exploration of new opportunities [9][34][35], for other authors it is associated with the behavior and characteristics of the entrepreneur, assuming a behavioral perspective [36][19][37][20][38]. In this investigation, both perspectives are assumed to be complementary and relevant, although the entry is eminently focused on changes that youth associations can cause in terms of behavioral changes in young people. In promoting an entrepreneurial profile, emphasis should be placed on the development of a set of technical, management and personal skills, and entrepreneurship is often explained through the individual characteristics and personality of entrepreneurs, particularly relative aspects to confidence, creativity, diligence, perseverance, versatility and vision.

Associations are a reference as spaces for participation, developing an educational function based on learning skills, techniques and competences for cooperative work and participation in communities. In this way, youth associations can be particularly effective catalysts for social entrepreneurship in young people. The results obtained allow to verify that young people involved in youth associations are, in the understanding of those responsible for the entities, aware of the main issues affecting youth, evidence of this is the fact that the main issues highlighted during the interviews agree with the literature review. Complementarily, the associative youth movement is seen as the creator of possible solutions for solving the problems that affect youth.

It is possible to infer that youth associations play a dual role, where on the one hand it contributes to the personal, social and professional development of its leaders, associates and participants, and on the other hand it promotes social transformations, especially in the communities where it operates. In line with this, youth associations are identified by various authors as spaces for participation, which develop an educational role of reference, embodied in the learning of technical skills and competences that translate into responsibility for social transformation.

Youth associations are spaces for citizenship, where young people have the opportunity to experience and put into practice their solutions to everyday problems, particularly those that are closer to their local realities. They are spaces where it is possible for young people to present proposals, put them into practice, and in doing so to see themselves involved in the development of their communities while developing a series of technical–professional skills, which are consistent with the development of entrepreneurship. Youth associations can structure a space for the development of skills and strengthening of entrepreneurial capacities, with particular emphasis on leadership and teamwork, communication, organization and management, proactivity, creativity and resilience. These

characteristics are also found in the theoretical framework as being outstanding aspects of entrepreneurs. Despite this, their development is often not given due importance when young people go through the education system.

Entrepreneurship as a strategy for accessing the labor market is still somewhat residual among young people, manifesting itself essentially in young people with better socioeconomic conditions and more qualifications. This result confirms Bourdieu's suggestion, which proposed two youths, one a child of the bourgeoisie and the other of the working class, with the latter being much more limited.

The results obtained support the interest in investing in creating opportunities for young people to develop entrepreneurial skills. The European Union has suggested that youth policies should create conditions and learning opportunities that allow young people to develop skills to integrate into social, working, cultural, political and economic life. The needs for education and training, not only for youth, but throughout life and in all domains, reveal that fundamental competences can only be acquired through learning carried out simultaneously in formal, informal and nonnormal contexts, where the youth associations can play an important role. The importance of a stimulating context for the development of entrepreneurship among young people is, therefore, crucial. Young people who have contact with entrepreneurial models, whether in a family context or in the milieu they attend, are more likely to become entrepreneurs themselves.

The development of spaces for the involvement of young people and for the development of their skills, with youth associations being a preferential means for this to become an increasingly possible reality, is central to the affirmation of engaged citizenry. Addressing the existing challenges and opportunities provided by youth organizations can be achieved by activating young people for participation through associativism, reinforcing the effectiveness of support programs and recognition of the merit and social impact of this movement. At a more concrete level, this may be achieved by creating and/or optimizing youth participation spaces such as youth councils, creating and implementing youth plans and projects directed to young people such as participatory budgets, youth parliaments and other related initiatives.

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