

DIVE Project: Sharing Experiences of non-formal Education in Social Entrepreneurship

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Abstract: The social entrepreneurship approach is presented as a basis for helping to solve problems that exist in society. Social economy activities play a key role as they combine innovation with the execution of solidarity relations between the community and the involved environment, thus highlighting their mission and contribution to sustainable development. This study aims to share the reflection of the European project "DIVE" of non-formal education on social entrepreneurship, presenting editions, main developed activities, and involving partner entities. It also aims to understand its impact on the perceptions of project participants and coordinators, as well as its evaluation and recommendations. Additionally, it tries to understand if changing the world through social entrepreneurship is or is not a utopia of contemporary society. For these purposes, research based on a mixed approach was developed and materialized through 2 surveys: one for the project participants and another one for the coordinators. This study shows the high impact of DIVE, both for the participants and for the coordinators and society. Indeed, the results reveal a great approach by all involved in the community, with a strong connection between the Academy's formal education and non-formal education. The project seems to have provided and developed tools that allowed young people to successfully face the challenges of the labor market, encouraging the creation of social enterprises and a closer look at sustainability issues. Through the involvement and active participation of young people, the promotion of modern European values is strengthened and a more equitable approach towards developing countries and stakeholders is attempted. Important skills are worked on and a more critical and reflective mentality, necessary for building the desired future, is built.

Keywords: Innovation; Formal and Non-formal Education, Social Entrepreneurship; Social Innovation; Sustainability; Utopia

1. Introduction

Globalization, uncertainty, and change mark an era of all kind's huge problems, namely economic, social, and environmental ones. Nowadays a community approach to "fight" against these issues and social economy organizations emerge as pillars, their mission based on the fulfillment of community solidarity relations between the surrounding environments (Mendes, 2017). Paradigms are changing and new solutions are required to expand human development, allowing its valorization and its growth as a changing agent. Education can thus inspire social change (Yami et al., 2021; Ramus et al., 2018; Papadopoulos & Hegarty, 2017) by opening new horizons and making the individual aware of its power in building a better future (OECD, 2018).

The concepts of social entrepreneurship and sustainable development intersect (Picciotti, 2017) and social entrepreneurs use corporate means to provide systemic solutions for social and environmental problems (Partzsch & Ziegler, 2011), while guaranteeing their autonomy and sustainability (Mair & Marti, 2006). Most of the literature on social entrepreneurship focuses on the relevance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurship for economic development (Simón et al., 2017). However, the recognition of opportunities is conditioned by the entrepreneurial knowledge and innovative skills of entrepreneurs (Hall et al., 2010; Santos et al., 2020), which are recognized as the engines of sustainable development (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). Academic discourse on how this process is done is very scarce among entrepreneurs (Onwuegbuzie & Agwu, 2018).

The concept of social entrepreneurship is recent and overlaps with the notion of corporate social responsibility (Campinho et al., 2020). In its kernel, entrepreneurs are seen as social agents and their main purpose is the creation of social value instead profit value, therefore meaning that both paths do not can coexist (Marques & Dhiman, 2020). Situations, where a part of society is neglected or disadvantaged, are identified, and paths are designed to find solutions and resolve their causes rather than resolving only the symptoms they manifest. Networked partnerships and cooperative work are central to the sustainability of their ventures (Ferreira et al., 2019).

This study is divided into 4 main sections. After a Literature review of concepts on social innovation, social entrepreneurship, sustainability, and innovation, section 3 shows the methodology, data, and results of gathered data. Discussion is presented in section 4 and Conclusions in section 5, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship

Social innovation is an important research theme, being especially highlighted by Western academics and political management (Bassi, 2018). There is no consensus on what concerns its definition, but all definitions seem to acknowledge the fulfillment of social needs and the upgrade of social inclusion as a mainstay (do Adro & Fernandes, 2020). It can be analyzed through a perspective of solving particular social problems and systemic and structural issues (Nicholls et al, 2015).

In this context, social innovation is perceived as projects and ventures that aim to solve social problems, while endorsing social transformation, across empowerment, inclusion, participation, and new relationships (Lévesque, 2012; Quandt et al., 2017). It matches innovation with different social players (do Adro & Fernandes, 2020), with a profit or non-profit goals (Schumpeter, 1961), driven by social distress and challenges (Dawson & Daniel, 2010).

Social entrepreneurship may be seen as a novel activity that intends to create producer surplus by reducing negative externalities and/or creating positive externalities via the incorporation of the core of society as well as entrepreneurship constructs (Newbert, 2014). The theme is sensitive because it reflects the mix of a passion for a social mission and the image of discipline linked to management, innovation, and determination (Dees, 2012). Social entrepreneurship may require higher support for social legislation and policies (Peredo & McLean, 2006), and its role is crucial for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (Campinho et al., 2020).

2.2 Sustainability, Innovation, and Society

Sustainability is a global challenge demanding innovation and innovation is critical to business (Luqmani & Leach, 2017). Innovation and sustainability shape an important link in the search for environmental, economic, and social development (Michelino et al., 2019), being innovation an important tool for achieving sustainability (Adams et al., 2016). Research stresses the relevance of innovation for sustainability as well as the goals of sustainable development (Christensen, 2019). Due to these copious studies, innovation is recognized as the main engine of industrial growth, as well as one of the main reasons of social and environmental disorders (Hall & Vredenburg, 2003). However, innovation is an important development device, particularly if encouraged by public policy or voluntary initiatives. Despite the presupposition that innovation raises sustainability, innovations should generate positive economic, social, and environmental outcomes at the same time (Kuzma et al., 2020).

The benefits of innovation may grow to individuals, groups of people, communities, industries, societies, nations, regions, and the world. They all follow innovation for better preparation for the future (Canton, 2016). However, innovation should not passively be future smart by preparing to meet the uncertain future by being predictive, adaptive, and agile. Instead, innovation should be more assertively active in creating a smart future that provides more opportunities for a better quality of life (Lee & Trimi, 2018). The world is changing and there is a clear need for paradigm shifting. Civil society is the kernel for the needed change strategy, based on identified collective shared visions (Dieguez, 2018).

2.3 Education for Sustainable Development

According to the United Nations, Education for Sustainable Development permits every human being to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to build a sustainable future (UNESCO, 2005). Education is what identifies the essential framework conditions for action for the members of any society (Dieguez, 2012). However, sustainability is a longitudinal multidisciplinary issue, being the focus of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) knowledge, skills, and attitudes as related to and affecting a sustainable future (Lockart, 2016). It promotes general competencies such as criticality, ethical imagination, creativity, and collaboration, among others.

One critical component of education is non-formal education (Kieu & Singer, 2015), being especially critical in developing countries (Kieu & Singer, 2015). Therefore, the non-formal sector enables access to education for

marginalized groups (Mahruf et al., 2011). The value of the non-formal education sector is an important supplement to formal education, not just for ESD, but for education in general (Adam et al., 2021). Non-formal education can be just as effective as, if not more effective than, the formal sector (Brennan, 1997).

Non-formal education can significantly contribute to developing a supportive, sustainable, and inclusive ecosystem for social entrepreneurship: playing a tremendous role in addressing the issue of skills shortages; involving key stakeholders in the process of support; modernizing education; providing young people with high-valued skills, abilities, and knowledge (Borzaga & Galera, 2012). In addition, the skills through youth work and participation in non-formal education activities can help to promote social entrepreneurship and contribute to the personal development of young people in general. This is the form of education of choice for a better and more prosperous future for the young generation (Kimmerle, 2015). Non-formal education can take different forms and can include programs such as school training, seminars, forums, job shadowing, study visits, and many others, preparing young people for their active involvement in the social entrepreneurship field. As a voluntary, participatory, and learner-centered process, non-formal education can take place in a diverse range of environments and situations that can be staffed by professional learning facilitators and by volunteers. It can be based on involving individual and collective process-oriented approaches based on experience, and action and applied in different contexts (McLaughlin et al., 2016).

3. Methodology

This study intends to share the reflection of the European project "DIVE" of non-formal education on Social Entrepreneurship, presenting editions, main developed activities, and involved partner entities. It also aims to understand its impact on project participants and project coordinators, as well as their evaluation and eventually recommendations. A further aim is also to realize whether changing the world through social entrepreneurship is a utopia of contemporary society, their interpretation as well as the experimental conclusions that can be drawn.

3.1 Methodological paradigm and procedure

The present research used a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research to address a research question. The aim of this option is related to the possibility of establishing a more complete understanding of the issue, triangulating findings, developing a complementary picture, identifying trends, and validating results, as argued by McLaughlin et al. (2016).

This study was developed through a case study of the European project "DIVE". For this purpose, 2 questionnaires were conducted: one for project participants and another for coordinators. The population under study relates to all participants (165) and coordinators (30) who were involved in this project throughout the 3 editions. The obtained sample was formed by 79 participants (response rate of 48%) and 21 coordinators (70% response rate). The questionnaires were carried out between June 1 and September 22, 2019, through the DIVE Alumni (closed group) on the Facebook platform.

Within the scope of the present study, the 2 used questionnaires were simplified in terms of structure and are mostly composed of closed questions. Responding to the case study objectives, the questions were grouped into 4 dimensions, namely: demographic characterization, perception of the Project's impact, project evaluation, and changing the world.

3.2 Dive Project editions

The DIVE project arose from the perception of mass migration of young people out of the country, as well as the need to create alternative and innovative approaches to solving social, environmental, and economic problems through intersectoral cooperation and using effective tools and business models. The "DIVE" is a capacity-building project co-founded by the European Commission through the Erasmus+ Action KA2, and consists of 3 editions, namely Dive 1: "Dive in Social Entrepreneurship", Dive 2: "Dive deeper" and Dive 3: "Dive 3: Zero to One > 1 to N". The main objectives of the project were to provide for the active development of human capital, as well as encourage the practice of social activities. It is also intended to establish effective paths for job creation for young people in cooperation with the different involved parties. The project leader was Youth Alliance, a non-profit association in Macedonia.

3.2.1 Dive into Social Entrepreneurship

The main objective of this edition was to provide a path to the active development of human capital and a practical incentive for social entrepreneurship. It occurred between December 2016 and 2017 and included various activities. It had the participation of young people, project coordinators, and representatives of institutions and authorities.

Table 1: First edition framework (own elaboration)

Involved countries	Main developed activities
Macedonia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Romania, Brazil, South Africa and Costa Rica	Initial seminar in Skopje: December 15-18, 2016
	Local research studies in Skopje: January to February, 2017
	Seminar in Iasi: 16 to 22 February, 2017
	Training course I in Florina: March 17th to 24th, 2017
	Training course II in Istanbul: 5 to 11 May, 2017
	Study visits in Sofia: June 12th to 19th, 2017
	Job shadowing in the countries involved: June to September, 2017
	Evaluation meeting in Krusevo: December 1-4, 2017

3.2.2 Dive Deeper into Social Entrepreneurship

While DIVE 1 focused on understanding young people regarding the meaning of social enterprise, the second edition concentrated its study in deepening matters, such as legal forms of business, youth policies, and financing for start-ups, as well as the development of ideas. It occurred between December 2017 and 2018. During the Dive Deeper in Social Entrepreneurship edition, numerous mobility activities were implemented, in which several aspects of social entrepreneurship and skills development to combat youth unemployment were considered.

Table 2: Second edition framework (own elaboration)

Involved countries	Main developed activities
Macedonia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Romania, Portugal, South Africa and Costa Rica	Initial seminar in Skopje: December 1-4, 2017
	Training course I in Krusevo: January 21st to 27th, 2018
	Training course II in Iasi: March 3-8, 2018
	Activities (public awareness): January 1 to April 30, 2018
	Training course III in Sofia: 3 to 8 May, 2018
	Training course IV in Barcelos: June 22-28, 2018
	Activities (public awareness): May 1 to July 31, 2018
	Evaluation meeting in Krusevo: December 3-6, 2018

3.2.3 Dive Deeper

DIVE 3 is based on collaboration for innovation and exchange of good practices, in which the main objectives establish the link between the concept of social entrepreneurship and the formula "Zero Poverty, Zero Unemployment, Zero Emissions Carbon". During this edition, several mobility activities were developed, in which the themes of poverty, unemployment, and the environment were addressed, to create solutions to these problems.

Table 3: Third edition framework (own elaboration)

Involved countries	Main developed activities
Macedonia, Romania, Peru, Italy, Slovenia, Poland, Bulgaria, Nicaragua, Greece, Romania, Portugal, South Africa and Costa Rica	Initial seminar in Skopje: February 7-10, 2019
	Study visit in Ljubljana: May 13-18, 2019
	Training course in Iași: September 18th to 24th, 2019
	Study visit to Cape Town: August 5-10, 2019
	Jobshadowing (Peru, Costa Rica, Nicaragua): August to September, 2019
	Seminar Dive 3 in Skopje: October 24-27, 2019
	Final evaluation meeting in Skopje: February 7-10, 2020

3.3 Dive Project main Partner Entities

During the 3 editions of the project, some countries were involved through their entities that contributed to the cooperation and development of activities. The respective entities were Macedonia, represented by the Youth Alliance-Krusevo (YAK), Bulgaria by the National Youth Forum of Bulgaria (NYF), Turkey by the International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation (IBC), Greece by the Association of Active Youths of Florina (OENEF), Romania by EuroDEMOS, Portugal by Association For all (IAFA), Peru by Social Work Lab, South Africa by Belle and Company (Belle & Co.) and Costa Rica by ACI Costa Rica. Each of these entities bases its purpose on improving the quality of life in society in a sustainable way, through several areas of performance.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Analysis of Participant Perception

Considering the 79 respondent participants (response rate 48%), they were mainly male (51%), aged 25 and 35 years old (48,10%), already got an academic degree (67%), and came mainly from Romania (18,99%), Costa Rica and Turkey (12,8%).

The main acquired skills within Dive Project are linked with the development of creative thinking (24.17%), intercultural skills (21.80%), encouraging an entrepreneurial mindset (18.96%), and positive attitudes toward change (17.54%). With the development of these skills, and in accordance to Santos (2012) research, the results reveal that the most valued values among participants were multiculturalism (17%), participation (14.99%), cooperation (14.41%), mutual support (11.82%) and solidarity (11.24%). The most widely used values during the project are multiculturalism (17%), followed by participation (14.99%), and cooperation (14.41%). According to the results, it was verified that 62.53% of the participants totally agree/agree that after they participated in the project they got to know the concept of social entrepreneurship, and 45.56% of the participants fully agree that they acquired an entrepreneurial mindset and developed more creative thinking.

Concerning the impact that the project had on each participant, it seems that it had a very significant impact on the participants (48.17%). Participants highlighted the development of creative thinking (12.50%), the incentive to entrepreneurial mindset (11.98%), intercultural skills (11.72%), development of skills in the area of social entrepreneurship (10.16 %), and positive attitudes toward change (9.38%). They also consider that it enabled the creation of accessibility, cooperation, support, and inspiration in social businesses (8.33%), helped in the collaboration and exchange of good practices in social entrepreneurship (8.07%), and offered non-formal education activities (7.81%). Most participants got to know the concept of social entrepreneurship (62.53%).

After the project, 18.34% of the participants started companies linked to social. Regarding the evaluation of the project, it was found that 55% rated the project as "very good" and 30% as "good". 95% of the participants would recommend participation in this project. To understand whether changing the world through social entrepreneurship is a utopia of contemporary society, 40 respondents answered that it is not a utopia.

3.4.2 Analysis of Coordinator Perception

Considering the 21 respondents (response rate 70%), they were mainly male (62%), aged 25 and 35 years old (71,43%), already got an academic degree (61,9%), and came mainly from Greece (18,18%) and Bulgaria (13,64%).

The majority (12) of the respondents referred to the existence of collaborations/partnerships within Dive project partners. However, of the 21 coordinators, 61.67% entered into partnerships with local organizations. Regarding the evaluation of the project, 62.15% of the responding coordinators rated the project as "good", and 17.68% as "very good". Regarding the question about the recommendation to participate in this project, every coordinator would recommend it.

All the project coordinators think that changing the world through social entrepreneurship is not a utopia of contemporary society. Since the social impact of organizations is a direct consequence of their mission and structure, the stakeholders are committed to it and the organization remains faithful to the interests of its members and its community.

4. Discussion

Considering the main developed skills by the 79 respondent participants during the project, the development of creative thinking competence is the one with greater representativeness (24.17%), followed by intercultural

skills (21.80%). With less representation, there appeared an incentive for mentality (18.96%), language development, and positive attitudes toward change (17.54% each). It is important to note that all the developed skills during the project fall between 17% and 24%, showing a balance between all.

Of the 79 participants in the sample, it appears that multiculturalism corresponds to the most work (17%), followed by participation (14.99%) and cooperation (14.41%). The least worked values during the project are understanding (6.92%) and democracy (7.49%).

35.31% of the participants agree that they got to know the concept of social entrepreneurship after participating in the project. 39.66% agree that they developed their intercultural skills during the project. 45.56% of the participants fully agree that the project awakened them to an entrepreneurial mindset and helped them to develop and create more creative thinking. In what relates to acquired skills, the responses of the participants were very balanced and followed the literature (Bornstein, 1998; Dees, 2012). The authors should discuss the results and how they can be interpreted in the context of previous studies and the working hypotheses. The findings and their implications should be discussed in the broadest context possible. Future research directions may also be highlighted.

Participants highlight that participation in non-formal education activities can help to promote social entrepreneurship, contribute to personal development, and helping to build a better and more prosperous future for the younger generation (Lockhart, 2016).

After the project, 18.34% of the participants started companies linked to the social area (Table 3), which occupy a prominent place for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth in contributing to the objectives of the "Europe 2020" strategy.

However, of the 21 coordinators, 61.67% entered into partnerships with local organizations. And these collaborations/partnerships meet one of the objectives of the DIVE project: the development of new practices based on intersectoral cooperation in the participating countries (YAK, 2018).

The participant's and the project coordinators' opinions are balanced on this topic. Both assume that changing the world through social entrepreneurship is not a utopia of contemporary society. Since the social impact of organizations is a direct consequence of their mission and structure, the stakeholders are committed to it and the organization remains faithful to the interests of its members and its community. YAK promoted new ways for young people to express their opinions and to accept and develop modern European values for young people; it also contributed to the promotion of youth activism in society and allowed us to create (some) necessary conditions for sustainable economic development. In this way, it is demonstrated that the project had a significant impact on its participants and coordinators, who, for the most part, would recommend participation in this project. One of the strongest impacts of the DIVE project is the innovative way in which it sets out to value and develop the personal talents of young people. Another one is providing tools that enable young people to successfully face the challenges of the labor market, encouraging the creation of social businesses. Also important is the potential for "sharing" and dissemination among the various participating countries from different regions of the world, guaranteeing the sustainability of its effects.

5. Conclusion

Social entrepreneurship emerges as a phenomenon for the potential of human development, and this project presents evidence in terms of "acquired competencies", namely creative thinking, intercultural competencies, encouraging entrepreneurial mentality, and positive attitudes to change. The results point to multiculturalism, participation, cooperation, mutual support, and solidarity as the values most worked on by the participants. Different types of organizations operate in pursuit of social values, to promote human rights, economic justice, equal opportunities, freedom of expression, and environmental protection, among others.

Social entrepreneurship is based on cooperative work, mainly by civil society actors through voluntary organizations or groups of citizens. Throughout this research, it was also found that collaborations/partnerships were created through cooperation between the coordinating entities. Most of the participants who did not know the concept of social entrepreneurship before the project did know it, showing that skills in working with young people and participation in non-formal education activities can help promote social entrepreneurship, thus

contributing to personal development and shaping a better and more prosperous future for the younger generation.

This study shows the high impact of DIVE, bringing the community closer and linking the Academy's formal education with non-formal education. The project provided/developed tools that would enable young people to successfully face the challenges of the labor market, encouraging the creation of social enterprises. Through the involvement and active participation of young people, the promotion of modern European values is strengthened and a more equitable approach towards developing countries and stakeholders is attempted.

The main limitations of the study are the relative importance given to the perceived impact of the project on environmental sustainability and possibly the low focus on economic issues. For future research, it is suggested that, with the DIVE project study, more emphasis be given to the issue of non-formal education and its impact on youth and local communities. It would also be interesting to benchmark other projects (European and/or global) to identify good practices to improve the design of future projects in the field of social entrepreneurship. Important skills are worked and a more critical and reflective mentality, necessary for the construction of the desired future, is built.

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