Chapter 1
Entrepreneurial Education in Roma Communities in Portugal:
Challenges Beyond the Crisis

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an exploratory study about Roma communities, located in the municipalities of Torres Vedras and Figueira da Foz, to identify how entrepreneurial education has been taking place and how it can be improved by reflecting on which predictive skills of entrepreneurial success can be stimulated to this target audience in a non-formal educational context. From this point on, it aims to contribute not only to the development of a theory about entrepreneurial education, but also to awaken dormant or little stimulated potential, with the aim of triggering processes of human and socioeconomic development that reflect on the improvement of the quality of life of communities and society as a whole. In this sense, it aims to understand how entrepreneurial education, in a non-formal spectrum, can contribute to improving the quality of life of the Roma people.

INTRODUCTION

Roma communities are known, essentially as nomads. They are given this association due to their migratory tendencies. Studies conducted by Pinto (2000) have shown that Roma citizens experience, all over the world, similar difficulties as other ethnical minorities.

Although there is, nowadays, a significant corpus of studies on Roma in different parts of the world, the majority focuses on the processes of integration, discrimination and scolarization (Azevedo, 2013; Candeias, 2016; Casa-Nova, 2002; Magano, 2013). Studies about this population and entrepreneurial education (EE) remain, indeed, scarce.

Cavalcante and Costa (2016) underline that it is essential to produce knowledge about Roma communities not only to show its vulnerabilities but to support and develop sustainable public policies that help overcome these issues.

It is worth mentioning that in Portugal, during five centuries of permanence, due to their forced nomadism (Azevedo, 2013), Roma have dedicated themselves, mostly to the following activities: tinsmiths; animals shearers; basketry; seasonal economic activities (vegetables and fruit crops) and street trade in fairs (Coutinho, 2016) that allowed a great amount of autonomy and flexibility.

Apparently, the process of becoming an entrepreneur relies on living experience and daily life observation. However, until now, there is no scientific evidence supported by a formal research that shows the relation between education-learning of entrepreneurship among Roma in Portugal. Therefore, this chapter presents an exploratory study directed to Roma communities in the Portuguese municipalities of Torres Vedras and Figueira da Foz, using a qualitative approach with the following research methods: literature review, participant observation and interviews.

The scope of this endeavour is to understand how Roma citizens learn entrepreneurial skills and how they have been able to preserve their entrepreneurial spirit beyond the 2008 crisis that brought several negative consequences in the income obtained from the sales at street fairs. In parallel, this study aims to provide support in the identification of skills that enhances entrepreneurial success which can then, be promoted among this adult target group in the context of non-formal education, leading to a constructive reflection about entrepreneurship education best practices.

From there it aims to contribute not only to the development of the theory about entrepreneurship education but also to enhance dormant or poorly stimulated competences in so-called vulnerable groups like Roma, which may activate processes of human and socio-economical development with a positive impact in the improvement of life quality of both Roma citizens and the majority society.

In brief, as this chapter aspires to help the reader to understand how entrepreneurial education in a non-formal context can contribute to the improvement of life quality of Roma people, the choice was to take a didactic approach that may provide a fluid, productive and pleasant reading. In this sense, the present chapter is divided in four different and complementary parts, as following:

The first section is dedicated to the history of Roma communities in Portugal in a diacronic perspective, starting from its origin, going through its arrival to Portugal and lastly, focusing in the present reality.

In the second section, the reader is invited to reflect about the relation between Roma people and entrepreneurial practices with special focus on its performance at Portuguese street fairs and the impact of 2008 crisis in Portugal.

The third section presents the concept of entrepreneurial education, its didactic-methodological features, dimensions and purposes. This framework will enable the reader to understand how the process is undertaken amongst Portuguese Roma communities.

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