

Article

Youth Associations and Entrepreneurship: Insights from Case Studies in Portugal

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Abstract: 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. This article assumes that participating in a youth association enables young people to develop a series of skills, in particular, their entrepreneurial capacities. This study pays attention to the contributions of the participation in youth associations for the promotion of entrepreneurship. The investigation based on a qualitative approach, through comparative case studies in Portugal. 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.

Keywords: youth; associativism; entrepreneurship; third sector; social innovation

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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. Throughout the work, it is assumed that participation in a youth association enables young people to develop a series of skills and, consequently, to increase their entrepreneurial capacities. 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.

This article reflects on the contribution of a specific associative movement, youth associations, in promoting entrepreneurship among its participants, young people. The study is based on a qualitative approach, through the study of comparative cases. Data for analysis was obtained from youth associations in mainland Portugal, using two methods of information collection, which work in a complementary way, document analysis and interviews. The organization and analysis of the collected data were carried out based on content analysis techniques.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 is dedicated to exploring the interconnections of entrepreneurship and youth. Section 3 briefly describes materials and methods used in the empirical research. Section 4 presents and discusses the main findings. The article ends with a conclusion, highlighting key insights from the research.

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].

Jeffrey Timmons (1941–2008), associates entrepreneurship with the ability to build anything from scratch, recognizing the opportunity, highlighting the role of the entrepreneur, namely through a set of characteristics that he possesses and differentiates him from other individuals [15]. Well-established measurement scales for identifying core personality characteristics to enhance entrepreneurial performance, namely extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience are presented in the literature [16]. Entrepreneurship begins to be associated with the creation of any organization, regardless of its activity and size, associating entrepreneurship with the process of creating companies based on the identification of opportunities, regardless of the degree of innovation of their business [17].

Entrepreneurship is a process by which something new, creative, something different and innovative, is done, with the purpose of generating wealth and value for society. Louis

Filion sees the entrepreneur as an individual who imagines, develops and realizes visions, but defends the idea that entrepreneurs learn from past and current experience, acquiring a proactive posture, while identifying new aspects that they should learn in view of what they want to achieve [18]. Entrepreneurship orientation can explain 20% of the success in projects [19].

Entrepreneurship has recently occurred at significantly higher rates than at any time in the last 100 years [20]. Entrepreneurship is a significant lifestyle and a career identity for many, reaching 4% of adults at the business level; 1 in 25 individuals try to start a new business. Other authors note that entrepreneurship has been the driver of much of the growth of the business sector as well as the driving force behind the rapid expansion of the social sector [21]. Entrepreneurship orientation is a process by which creative ideas are implemented within an organization [22]. A partial indicator of the growth of social entrepreneurship over the last few decades may be the number of nonprofit organizations that have emerged. Until today, the determination of the entrepreneurial profile continues to be the stage for much discussion. It was believed, and is still a deeply rooted thought, that the entrepreneur is born with characteristics that are different from other individuals and even with a defined destiny to succeed in business. The behavioral perspective tries to explain entrepreneurship through the individual characteristics of the entrepreneur's personality. At the individual level, entrepreneurship skills can be viewed as skillsets that improve project performance, even in those of less entrepreneurial nature [10,23].

2.2. Youth and Entrepreneurship

The definition of youth has been the subject of much debate or seen as an unstable social fact [24]. 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 [25]. 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 [26].

The current situation of Portuguese young people reveals an increasing number of young people at risk of social exclusion, generally falling short of opportunities. Getting a job is considered the basis for all other young people's projects, however, the professional life associated with precariousness and atypical forms of employment is less and less capable of structuring a financial independence that makes it possible to buy a home or have children [1,27]. In Portugal, as in Europe in general, there are more and more situations of precarious work, provision of services, youth unemployment and rotation between jobs. This situation reveals itself mainly in young people with low qualifications, or medium qualifications, and is starting to reach the more qualified ones. Particularly worrying is the situation of NEETs, young people that are "Not in education, employment, or training". Data collected from Eurostat shows that the percentage of NEETs (Figure 1) in Portugal is lower than the European Union average in all the years but follows the same trend, growing considerably with economic crisis in 2013, with the peak of the Eurozone crisis, and in 2020, with the pandemic crisis.

Nevertheless, young people are the age group that most actively tends to diversify their strategies to get out of this situation [28]. Entrepreneurship has been gaining increasing recognition as a mechanism for economic development and job creation. The role of entrepreneurs and innovators in economic growth increasingly aligns with the creation of small businesses [29]. In this way, entrepreneurship is one of the possible options for young people to solve the difficulties of entering the labor market and into adulthood. Entrepreneurs have a higher need for achievement compared to non entrepreneurs [30]. Regarding youth entrepreneurship, the age group between 25 and 34 years old is the one with

the highest incidence of early-stage entrepreneurial activity (TEA—Total Entrepreneurial Activity—1.9%). The level of education with the highest incidence of entrepreneurial activity is postgraduate training; that is, young masters or PhD holders are the most likely to become entrepreneurs (TEA of 14.8% for the population with this level of education) [31].

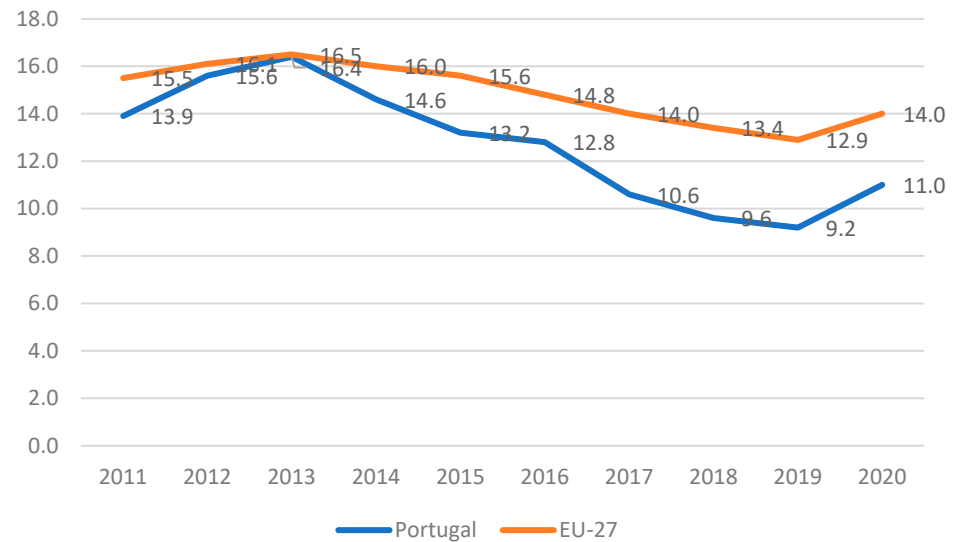


Figure 1. Young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), percentage of total population, in Portugal and European Union—annual data from 27 countries. Source: Eurostat [lfsi_neet_a].

Entrepreneurship is still a residual strategy among young people, manifested essentially by those who live in better socioeconomic conditions and have more qualifications [28]. Several reliable elements such as innovativeness, risk-taking, self-confidence and need for achievement to predict entrepreneurial inclinations have been emphasized by the literature [19,31,32]. 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 [33]. 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 [34] and social entrepreneurship is considered an emerging field of study [35]. 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 [36]. 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 [37]. Entrepreneurship in nonprofit sector has broader social goals than conventional forms of entrepreneurship [38]. 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 [37]. 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 [39]. Complementarily, entrepreneurial orientation in the social context is best characterized by the three dimensions of innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking [40]. 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 [41]. 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 [37].

Recent research on entrepreneurial behavior and success has established skill variety as a central human capital factor [42]. The development of certain competences cannot be done only through cognitive or practical training alone, but in the intersection between cognitive, technical and behavioral development [43]. In addition to the academic context, there are business initiatives, which play a crucial role in promoting the entrepreneurial skills of young people. In Portugal, the ANJE—National Association of Young Entrepreneurs—(www.anje.pt, accessed on 1 March 2022) stands out, and at the international level, JADE Portugal—Federation of Junior Enterprises of Portugal—(<https://jeportugal.pt/>, accessed on 1 March 2022) and AIESEC Portugal (<https://aiesec.org/>, accessed on 1 March 2022) are also worth mentioning.

Youth associations created in Portugal over the last 3 decades have developed a significant expression at the national level, which has been enabled the development of these same skills, often without this fact being properly recognized. Under the motto of “learning by doing”, young people develop projects where they improve their skills. According to the Profile of Portuguese Youth Associations, carried out by the National Federation of Youth Associations, the number of youth associations registered in the RNAJ—National Registry of Youth Associations—excluding student associations, was 1630, involving a total number of 470,339 young people [44].

3. Materials and Methods

Analysis Methodology

The methodology was applied in an exploratory fashion, based on a qualitative approach, through a comparative case study. The information for the construction of the cases was obtained using two methods of collecting information, which work in a complementary way: document analysis and interview. The organization and analysis of the collected data were carried out based on content analysis techniques.

Data were collected from youth associations in Mainland Portugal, whose selection was carried out according to a set of pre-established criteria, as indicated below: (i) youth association registered within the RNAJ; (ii) activity for at least the last 5 years; (iii) merit recognized through the “Good Practices–Youth Associations” Award; (iv) existence of human resources allocated to associative activity; and (v) agreement to participate in the study.

At first, data on selected youth associations were collected through document analysis. In the following moment, interviews were applied to the representatives/responsible for the same, according to a previously elaborated interview guide.

In the qualitative approach, the main interest is to understand the subjects and phenomena in their complexity and uniqueness, observing multiple aspects of their performance. Thus, it enables learning and transferability of knowledge to other situations and subjects, in analogous situations [45]. Qualitative studies focus on processes rather than products as well as value understanding and interpretation of how facts and phenomena manifest themselves, rather than determining their causes [46].

In this approach, the context is observed in a holistic perspective, without reducing it to specific variables. The creation of knowledge results from interpretive, ethnographic and phenomenological analyses, following a flexible design. This methodology follows an inductive model and proposes to achieve goals without neglecting the dimension of unpredictability of the human aspect in social life [47].

The qualitative approach offers different research possibilities, among which are the case studies [48]. Case studies are one of several ways to conduct social science research. It is the preferred strategy when “how” and “why” questions are being asked, while the researcher has little control over the events and the focus of the study is centered on real-life context phenomena [49]. A case study involves the detailed analysis of a well-defined phenomenon, the case [50]. In this article, the cases refer to youth associations, which include their members, their leaders, their participants and the activities and initiatives developed by and for them. Complementarily, the comparison between cases provides the basis for making statements about empirical regularities [51].

Document analysis is related to the examination of written materials of a different nature, which have not yet received an analytical treatment, or which can be re-examined, seeking new and/or complementary interpretations [48]. This analysis can be carried out on organizational documents (reports, records, products such as graphic videos), bibliographic documents (specialized journals), government documents or even statistics. One of the basic advantages of this type of investigation is that it allows the study of people and aspects to which there is limited physical access. Furthermore, the documents constitute a nonreactive source, the information contained in them remains the same after the passage of time. A document analysis is particularly opportune when the study focuses on long periods of time, seeking to identify one or more behavioral and/or cultural trends [48].

With regard to document analysis, information was collected on the selected associations, based on documents made available in the respective electronic domains and/or provided by their managers. The Statutes and Internal Regulations, the Annual Activity Plans and the Activity Reports and Accounts were used as reference documents to validate the interest of their inclusion and check their participation in entrepreneurship support activities. In addition, other elements provided by the associations and posted on their websites and social networks were analyzed, particularly to comprehend their communication about types of activities that were developed and main results achieved.

Interviewing is a data collection technique often used in qualitative studies. This technique is used when the objective is to map practices, values and systems of specific social groups, and is more or less well delimited [52]. The interpretation of the interviews is carried out based on the principles of content analysis, a technique for analyzing communication, such as what was said in the interviews or what was observed by the researcher. During the analysis of the material, it was classified into categories that helped with the understanding of what is behind the participants' speech. The main rules in content analysis are: homogeneity; exhaustive content analysis; respecting the criterion of exclusivity, i.e., the same content element cannot be classified into two different categories; perform an objective analysis, that is, different coders must arrive at different results; the categories must be appropriate and relevant adapted to the content and objective [53].

To complement the data collection, a semistructured interview was applied, according to a previously prepared script, which was recorded in audio format. The interview guide had a total of 26 main questions, in some cases unfolding into support questions, distributed in six blocks, covering the different dimensions of analysis (cf. Appendix A). In

some situations, questions that were not included in the interview guide may have been asked as a way of redirecting the interview to the objectives of the investigation.

The analyzed associations were between 11 and 23 years old. Association members were included according to their position and role at the time of the interview, namely as a legal representative or member of the executive body. The subjects were aged between 28 and 48 years old, having been in associative life for an average of 12 years, with 4 males and 1 female (individual 3). Respondents’ educational levels were at the level of higher education, in different areas (environment, health, communication, management) and they had other professional occupations in addition to the position held in the association. Respondents had a varied path in the respective associations, two of which had been involved in it since its foundation (individuals 4 and 5), which emerged to meet the needs of the respective communities in the area of youth (personal development, sports, environment and culture). The remaining three interviewees (individuals 1, 2 and 3) followed a development path in the association before assuming their current position, and started in the association by joining activities offered by them (individuals 1 and 2) and when looking for new opportunities (individual 3). The main functions performed by the interviewees were management, representation, communication and coordination of projects and activities.

The following table (Table 1) presents a summary of the applied analysis and investigation model. The planning matrix presents a research design based on five components, each of which is based on a set of essential questions for the coherence of the research. This interactive model consists of the components of the study and the ways in which these components can affect and be affected by each other [54].

Table 1. Planning Matrix.

Research Questions	Purposes	Conceptual Framework	Information	Methods
What do you want to know?	Why do you want to know?	What concepts to mobilize?	What is necessary?	Which approach to use?
What are the contributions of Youth Associations in promoting entrepreneurship among young people	Recognition of the role of the AJ Understanding the influence of AJ in promoting entrepreneurship	Youth Associations Entrepreneurship Entrepreneur	Analysis of initiatives and skills developed through youth associations	Qualitative Research Comparative Case Study Content Analysis

Adapted from [54].

According to data released by IPDJ—Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth—at the end of 2017, 1260 organizations were registered with the RNAJ, of which 1059 were youth associations. The selection of the sample, particularly with regard to case studies, acquires a particular meaning, since when choosing the cases, the researcher establishes the logical framework that will guide the entire data collection process [50]. The study population, youth associations, refers to the identification of participants and leaders of youth associations in Portugal. The group of interviewees thus includes five leaders of five youth associations, each belonging to one of the five NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistical Purposes) II in Mainland Portugal.

The selection of associations within each NUTS II was carried out based on the intentional nonprobabilistic sampling technique, as the sample associations result from a deliberate choice, defined based on the five previously established criteria, mentioned above. With regard to the research subjects, these are the individuals from whom it was intended to obtain information through an interview, complementing the data previously collected through document analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Respondents' Representations

Regarding the representations of the interviewees about the topic under analysis, information was collected at two complementary aspects, namely representations about youth associations and about entrepreneurship.

Youth associations are described as an “opportunity for personal development, social awareness and professional development” (individual 2). In this sense, an association adopts a dual role (see Table 2), that is, it contributes to the development of the individuals who participate/constitute the association, “it has a very important contribution in the training of young people, to open up new horizons and new doors for them” (individual 1); and social responsibility, in the transformations brought about in communities by their activity, “young people have a crucial role (...) to bring the necessary changes to society” (individual 3). It plays an important role in the development of society, namely local communities, responding to their needs and promoting the practice of active citizenship. It is referred as “a movement (...) that wants to be present in the most difficult issues (...) wants to take part in the changes that society needs” (individual 5). It is seen as a promoter of youth, being a space for putting young people’s ideas and/or initiatives into practice, “with spontaneity, according to the will of young people, (...) made up of a series of people with different wills and who manages to reach certain places that other instances cannot” (individual 4).

Table 2. Representations of respondents on key dimensions.

The role of youth associations			
Society	Awareness/Social change	Youth	Putting young people’s ideas into practice
	Responding to community needs		Personal development of young people
	Citizenship practice		Training
Main problems affecting youth			
Sedentary lifestyle	Lack of interest consumption	Unemployment Housing	Radicalization Social media influence
	Financial incapacity	Untolerance	Professional instability
Role of youth associations in responding to problems affecting young people			
Occupation Topics debate	Ideas development	Cultural and environmental awareness Project	Quality of execution Experience in leadership positions
	Putting ideas into practice	Insertion in the labor market	Sharing political and social ideas
Inhibiting Factors influencing youth entrepreneurship		Facilitating Factors	
Innovation-resistant/conservative society/community		Niches to explore Youth initiative Supports Associative movement	Believe in change Existing
Paternalistic, controlling society Lack of political recognition			Safe ways to experiment
Little experience sharing Lack of freedom to experiment			
Passivity Lack of funding Precarious work/financial instability of young people Poor communication Bureaucracy			
Benefits of participating in youth associations			
Independence Professional CV	Work experience	International experiences	Ease of exposing ideas
		Knowledge of different cultures Knowledge of other entities	Acquisition of humanitarian values More interested young people
Contributions of youth associations in promoting entrepreneurship			
Creating opportunities	Principles and values that it transmits Improved society	Youth as decision maker Make the difference Sense of belonging Skills development	Social responsibility Job creation Support offices for youth projects

Following the identified problems, and when asked about the role of youth associations in responding to these same problems (see Table 2), respondents report, “associations end up being the decoy for youth occupation activities” (individual 1), bringing them “into real activities, trying to raise cultural and environmental awareness” (individual 3). Youth

associations are “spaces for opportunities and for the creation of ideas, they promote that young people have their ideas and put them into practice” (individual 2). In this way, the associations seek to focus their activities on: occupation of free time; debate of topics relevant to society; opportunity to develop ideas/putting ideas into practice; cultural and environmental awareness; project development; insertion in the labor market; experience in leadership roles; and quality in the execution of its activities.

When asked about the main problems that affect young people (see Table 2), the interviewees mention: sedentary lifestyle; lack of interest; consumption of narcotics; unemployment; lack of encouragement for youth housing; little tolerance; radicalization of social-political ideals; unhealthy influence of social networks; professional instability; and weak financial capacity. Respondents highlight professional instability, “the priority problem is the lack of youth employment (...) young people have a waiting period to enter the labor market, they stop being young until they get it” (individual 5), associated with “little financial capacity” (individual 4) and lack of independence, “young people live longer with their parents, even when they are employed” (individual 2); in the lack of tolerance “to radicalization fronts, such as in terms of refugee and migrant issues” (individual 2), it is important to invest in multicultural environments and experiences and in access to correct information since “we see young people always distracted and too present on social media” (individual 3); and in a sedentary lifestyle “there are less and less interested in getting involved, in helping others” associated with “drug abuse, which is now noticed in younger people” (individual 1). Lack of initiative, lack of occupation, access to incorrect information, little intercultural experience, unhealthy lifestyle habits, lack of professional experience together with few opportunities to acquire this experience, and lack of financial resources and weak independence, indicate a particular concern with the fact that many young people do not feel personally and professionally fulfilled.

Regarding the understanding of entrepreneurship, it is worth mentioning that “the youth associative movement has always been entrepreneurial (...) detecting the gaps that exist in their communities and proactively managed to solve these problems with ideas that did not exist. (...) entrepreneurship is the act of making unthinkable things happen, or at least not available in our day-to-day life and that solve problems in society itself” (individual 5). Entrepreneurship is seen as “... the initiative to implement something that (...) will change or complement something that needs to be done” (individual 3), “... that meets a need, but which creates wealth, either this social, economic or financial wealth. It must be something that has never been done” (individual 2). An entrepreneur, on the other hand, is “... someone who wants to create something new for their well-being and for the well-being of those around them. Being an entrepreneur is being comfortable with the fact that you can make mistakes” (individual 4). “The entrepreneur is the one who has this ability to detect gaps in society and, through some more alternative, more unformatted, or out-of-the-box ideas, be able to present a solution” (individual 5), “...is the one who somehow, with what he has at his disposal, he is able to do something new and different that responds to some need” (individual 1), he has the “...initiative to implement something that, existing or not, will change or complement something that is necessary...” (individual 3).

Among factors that inhibit entrepreneurship in young people (see Table 2), there is the community itself, characterized as “very conservative, afraid of new things (...) and when I say community it can be the neighborhood, the family and even the group of friends” (individual 4); “public and general opinion turns out to be blocking, especially in the smaller circles” (individual 1); “paternalistic, being a little controlling (...) there is no sharing of experience and there is no freedom to experiment” (individual 2). Financial issues are also identified as an inhibiting factor of entrepreneurship among young people, as “the financial obstacle is the main factor that can prevent anyone from moving forward to anything” (individual 3), and thus “... projects imply that you have some money to do things, many projects remain on paper...” (individual 4). Other factors pointed out are “... bureaucratization and the fact that youth emancipation is increasingly late, a young person not having financial stability...” (individual 5), along with ease and

passivity, “in today’s society everything is very sudden, very consumable, very fast, there is no sustainability over time, everything is very accessible (such as information and resources) and if things are much easier, we become more passive and young people wait for things to come with them instead of going to meet them” (individual 2).

On the other hand, one of the factors pointed out as a facilitator of entrepreneurship among young people is the associative movement itself: “a young person who goes through the associative movement is sensitized to the issue of tolerance, being open to difference, to work as a team, to live projects in a passionate way. A young person who goes through this in their life will have another training and this can be a factor that enhances the issue of entrepreneurship” (individual 3). In addition, “support provided by the State, and by all entities in this area, to support these initiatives and projects” (individual 3).

Participation in a youth association is seen as facilitating, motivating and multicultural in the acquisition of humanitarian values. As a facilitator, participation in a youth association brings work experience, can enhance a professional résumé, fosters independence and ease in exposing their ideas, “...there is a gain in responsibility and independence, ability to work in a team” (individual 2), “in an association we do a lot and we end up winning a rhythm of work...” (individual 3). Motivating, in the sense that the young person “ends up being more proactive in almost everything they do in life, they are more interested...” (individual 1). Multicultural because it is an opportunity to acquire “... international experiences, knowledge of different cultures (...) contact with other people, with other cultures, gives a fundamental communication ability for your life in the future” (individual 4).

Youth associativism is a means of acquiring humanitarian values such as “equality and respect (...) extracts from young people the best they have and makes them grow in terms of human values and cross-cutting issues” (individual 5). When asked about the contributions of participation in a youth association in the transition to the labor market, the following keywords are removed: Skills development; Training; Bridge/Connection; and School of life.

With regard to the contributions of youth associations in promoting entrepreneurship (see Table 2), the directors interviewed emphasize the creation of new responses and opportunities, “... when we created it, there was no such response in the municipality and it even emerged from a conversation among young people, where we wanted to somehow support young people to define their path ...” (individual 1), the development of skills, “the experience gained in going through an association helps to gain these bases, which are often not gained in school or college” (individual 3), and job creation, “... supporting youth projects, in giving opportunities to young people and in using existing tools to put their ideas into practice” (individual 5).

In addition, youth associations are seen as promoting feelings of belonging and social responsibility, “because young people realize that they are part of the communities where they live, have social responsibilities inherent to this belonging, and they have to show work” (individual 4), and as a contribution to the introduction of improvements in society, “...whoever gets involved in an association must always be aware of the novelty and the creation of difference, the associative movement and entrepreneurship combine to create the difference” (individual 2). Youth associations are also described as an “engine of entrepreneurship due to all the principles and values that it transmits towards a better society, later on the young person will be the decision maker and thus be able to make a difference in society” (individual 2).

4.2. Discussion of Results

The results presented suggest that youth associations play a dual role: contributing to the personal development of leaders, associates and participants in a youth association; and as a promoter of social transformation, mainly in their communities; aligning to *associativism* the idea of creating solutions to concrete problems. At the same time, associations were identified as spaces for participation, developing an educational role of reference, embodied

in the learning of technical skills and competences, translating into responsibility for social transformation and, consequently, in the struggle for a fairer society.

Another inference drawn from this study is that youth associations contribute to active participation, bringing young people together around a goal. This notion underlines what was reinforced previously [1,41], when stated that being part of an association makes it possible to undertake certain objectives in a group, with a view to pursuing a common purpose. In this study on youth in the Atlantic Area, youth organizations were identified as the structures that most facilitated youth participation.

The main problems identified by the interviewees as affecting young people (see Table 2) are related to a lack of initiative and life project, vacancy and the adoption of unhealthy lifestyle habits. Other issues refer to misinformation and/or counter information, lack of sensitivity/intercultural experience, weak financial independence and lack of prospects for professional experience and/or career advancement. These issues are in line with the literature review carried out, which pointed out the young person as living at home with their parents until later and later and with difficulties in acquiring financial independence, situations arising from a marked professional instability [1].

In the analysis of the interviews, it is possible to verify that there is also an incidence in the reference to the issue of employability/employment, “the priority problem is the lack of youth employment (...) young people have a waiting period to enter the labor market that they no longer being young until you get it” (individual 5), associated with “little financial capacity” (individual 4) and little independence, “young people live longer in their parents’ house, even when they are working” (individual 2). These aspects are also in line with the proposals in the context of the elaboration of the National Youth Plan, in which employment and entrepreneurship appear as the areas considered to be of the highest priority [55].

On the other hand, the association leaders interviewed present a young person concerned with society, who reflects on the issues that will affect its future. They aspire for young people to assume greater intercultural awareness, adopt healthier lifestyles and develop their life projects. Complementarily, they assume youth associations as the creator of possible solutions for solving the problems mentioned as affecting youth, namely through the results of the activity of youth associations.

When looking for a definition for entrepreneurship and for the entrepreneur, the interviewed managers assume conceptually similar ideas to the authors referenced in the literature review [23,56,57]. Entrepreneurship is seen as “... the initiative to implement something (...) will change or complement something that needs to be done” (individual 3), “... that meets a need, but which creates wealth, be it social wealth whether economic or financial” (individual 2). “... it is the act of making unthinkable things happen, or at least not available in our day-to-day life and that solve problems in society itself” (individual 5). As mentioned above, as a definition of entrepreneurship is not simple, it is certain that there is no single way to practice it, which may involve the search for new opportunities, responding to a market need, obtaining resources or taking risks [58].

The entrepreneur is someone “...who has this ability to detect gaps in society and, through some more alternative, more unformatted, or out-of-the-box ideas, be able to present a solution” (individual 5), “...is someone who somehow, with what he has available, he is able to do something new and different that responds to some need” (individual 1), they have the “...initiative to implement something that, existing or not, will change or complement something that it is necessary...” (individual 3). It is “... someone who wants to create something new for their well-being and for the well-being of those around them” (individual 4). As verified in the theoretical framework, and in particular in Schumpeter’s contributions, the entrepreneur is seen as a person with ideas, who establishes new combinations of available resources in order to provoke imbalances through the innovations they introduce. In addition, the entrepreneur is referred to as an organizer of human, material and financial resources, being motivated by the need to achieve something, to do and to accomplish [19,30,32,57].

With regard to the characteristics of entrepreneurs, it is noted that perseverance is the characteristic most pointed out by association leaders, which may reflect the hostile environment that many associations face when developing entrepreneurial projects, or even when the association itself assumes characteristics of an entrepreneurial initiative. This aspect is in line with the third element in Schumpeter's model, which boils down to how to overcome resistance to innovations, since hostility in the social environment towards an entrepreneur can be extremely strong [59]. Next, they refer to creativity, which appears in different definitions in the literature review [57,60]. When looking for the common definition of creativity in the dictionary, the "ability to find different and original solutions in the face of new situations" emerges [61]. Schumpeter, on the other hand, described the entrepreneur as a creative who develops something that has not yet been tested, looking for solutions or better solutions for society's problems [62]. Interestingly, the word innovation is also used by the interviewed managers as a feature of great relevance when talking about entrepreneurship, as duly evidenced in the literature review, where entrepreneurship and innovation are interlinked.

As already mentioned [56], the profile of the entrepreneur can be attributed to the development of a set of technical skills, management skills and personal skills. According to the association leaders, teamwork, being motivating and being able to take risks, but in a calculated way, appear as technical skills on the part of entrepreneurs. As skills at a personal level, they point to persistence/perseverance, resilience, tolerance, confidence, creativity, the spirit of initiative and humility; and how management skills point to having knowledge in this area and without bureaucracy. Now, these characteristics mentioned by the association leaders were all present in the literature review carried out, with the exception of the one without bureaucracy. The entrepreneur is presented as possessing creative and intuitive characteristics, classifying them as being confident, creative, diligent, intelligent, skillful, persevering, versatile, visionary and perceptive [22]. It is referred to as an organizer of resources (human, material and financial) [57]. Despite not being referenced in the literature review, the lack of bureaucracy can be understood as the need to achieve something, to do and to accomplish, perhaps arising as a result of the various limitations that exist when trying to put ideas and projects into practice.

When analyzing Table 3, it is verified that, in addition to the characteristics of the entrepreneurs pointed out by the interviewed managers, they meet the characteristics of the entrepreneurs described in the literature review, and they also highlight the fact that a large part of these competences may also be in accordance with the interviewees, developed within youth associations. This aspect is a clear indicator that youth associations can enable the development of a series of skills that are consistent with the entrepreneurial spirit, with particular emphasis on leadership and teamwork, communication, organization and management, proactivity, creativity and resilience, characteristics that had already been pointed out by several reference authors as being distinctive of entrepreneurs.

As mentioned in the results presentation, the youth association is also described as an "engine of entrepreneurship due to all the principles and values that it transmits towards a better society, later on the young person will be the decision maker and thus will be able to make a difference in society" (individual 2).

Youth associations are also a tool for the applicability of social responsibility, as the underlying motivation for their activities involves responding to society's problems, mobilizing the resources at their disposal to respond to these problems, thus fitting into in the field of social entrepreneurship. As reviewed in the literature, the underlying motivation for social entrepreneurship is the creation of social value, rather than personal and shareholder wealth, and whose activity is characterized by innovation or the creation of something new [21].

Given the above, the contributions of youth associations in promoting entrepreneurship (see Table 3) can be analyzed in three dimensions. At the level of the individual, the close community, and society in general. At the individual level, there is the development of skills, the acquisition of principles and values, and the placement of the young person as

a decision maker. At the level of the nearby community, it is seen as a means of creating responses and opportunities; it develops a sense of belonging, job creation and opportunities to support youth projects. At the level of society, it responds to their needs and promotes the practice of active citizenship, being seen as “a movement (...) that wants to be present in the most difficult issues (...) wants to take part in the changes that society needs” (individual 5).

Table 3. Comparison between the characteristics of the entrepreneur, according to the literature and the interviewees, and their overlapping with capacities developed by the youth associations.

Characteristics of the Entrepreneur and Developed by Youth Associations		
Entrepreneur characteristics according to the literature review	Entrepreneur characteristics according to association leaders	Characteristics developed in youth associations
Innovation		
Leadership		
Moderate risks		
Independence		Proactivity
Creativity	Persistent/Persevering Error	Tam work
Energy	Tolerant	Resilience
Tenacity	Resilient	Responsibility
Originality	With ideas/Creative	Resource management
Optimism	Self motivated	Budget management
Results orientation	Willingness to work	Communication capacity
Flexibility	Trusting	Oratory and debate
Conduct situations	Spirit of initiative	Creativity
Needs achievement	Adventurer/Not Afraid of	Organization
Self-awareness	Taking Risks	Administrative Management
Self confidence	Calculated	Make plans
Involvement	Team work	Partnership work
Tolerance	Humility	Coordinating ability
Initiative	No bureaucracy	Knowing how to be
Learning	Knowledge in the area of	Leadership
Use resources	Management	Equality
Sensitivity	Motivator	Respect
Aggressiveness		
Trust in others		
Money as a measure		

Self-elaboration.

When analyzing the factors that facilitate entrepreneurship among young people (see Table 3), such as the desire to conquer described by Schumpeter [59], the belief in change [21] and the niches to be explored often arising from needs, the associativism movement itself is seen as a facilitator of entrepreneurship, and it is possible to list entrepreneurial initiatives that emerged from these youth associations. Existing support mechanisms are simultaneously facilitators and inhibitors, since they are seen as important to suppress issues such as financial difficulties, but not sufficient, and are understood as being too bureaucratic and poorly shared and disseminated. These considerations were also raised in the literature review when mentioning that funders impose on social entrepreneurs numerous requirements to obtain support and constant pressure to raise funds, often just to meet day-to-day operating costs [21].

On the other hand, in terms of factors inhibiting entrepreneurship among young people, the innovation-resistant/conservative society/community is described in the third element of Schumpeter’s model. Hostility in the social environment towards an entrepreneur can be extremely strong, often described as tradition, routine, social habits, conventions, institutions or anchored in vested interests. This resistance can be found both in the entrepreneur’s mind and in the surrounding context [59]. This aspect, together with the other factors considered to inhibit youth entrepreneurship, may help to understand how one comes to the conclusion that entrepreneurship is a residual strategy among younger people, manifesting itself essentially by those who have more qualifications and live in

better conditions. socioeconomic factors [28]. However, the contact with entrepreneurial models increase the likelihood of young people to become entrepreneurs as well [3], and at this level, youth associations occupy a privileged position in contributing to the promotion of youth entrepreneurship.

5. Conclusions

Entrepreneurship as a field of study has been experiencing growing progress, given its importance as a mechanism for economic development and job creation [4,6,63]. 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 [64,65].

Youth associations have enabled the development of these same skills in young people, without this fact generally being properly recognized. This article 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 [9,66,67], for other authors it is associated with the behavior and characteristics of the entrepreneur, assuming a behavioral perspective [16,19,30,31,68]. In this investigation, both perspectives are assumed to be complementary and relevant, although the study 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 socio-economic 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.

The socioeconomic crisis that youth is facing in Portugal is also present in other parts of Europe or even globally. This research was an opportunity to explore not only how important youth associations might be for young Portuguese in particular, but also suggest the significance and relevance for youth to engage in entrepreneurial activities in other parts of the world.

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Appendix A. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Framework	Specific Objectives	Comments
Block A Legitimation and motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - legitimize the interview - motivate the respondent 	~5 min
Intended Intervention		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank and inform the respondent about the study and its objectives; - Request collaboration for its continuation; - Ensure the confidentiality of data and the anonymity of the respondent (use the confidentiality statement); - Request authorization for the audio recording of the interview (use the informed consent statement); - Request that the respondent precedes the selection of a fictitious name. 		
Block B General data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - know the personal dimension of the interviewee - know the professional situation of the interviewee 	~15 min
Topics for Questions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How old are you? - What are your academic qualifications? - What is your professional situation? How has your professional career been? - What is your position in the Association? (since when?) - How long have you been part of the Association? (How has this journey been?) - What were the reasons that led to your involvement in the Association? - What are your roles in the Association? - Who works for you? (What are the functions of these elements?) 		
Block C Organizational data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - know the organizational structure of the association - know the associative environment 	~15 min
Topics for Questions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When was the association formed? (what are the reasons that led to this?) - How many members have membership? (what ages?) - What is the association's governance model? (what are the existing positions?) - How are members involved in decision-making processes? - What are the functions (activities) of the association? (how often do they occur?) - Who are the recipients of these activities? (and how many participants are involved?) - What resources are allocated to the implementation of activities? (do they have permanent human resources? and remunerated?) - Who are the association's partners and how are partnership relationships established? (and in relation to funders?) 		
Block D Representations on the subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - know the respondent's representations about youth associations - know the respondent's representations about entrepreneurship 	~25 min

Framework	Specific Objectives Topics for Questions	Comments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What do you consider to be the role of youth associations in society? – Of the various social problems that manifest themselves in Portuguese society, which do you consider to affect young people the most? – Do you consider that youth associations have a role in responding to these social problems? (How can you make this role feel?) – What do you understand by entrepreneurship? (and by entrepreneur?) – What are the characteristics that you consider to define an entrepreneur? 	
Block E Representations on the subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – know the interviewee's representations about the contributions of youth associations to the promotion of entrepreneurship 	~25 min
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What factors do you consider to be inhibitors of entrepreneurship among young people? (and what are the facilitating factors?) – What benefits do you think exist for young people who participate in a youth association? (What differences do you see between young people who participate/participate in a youth association and those who do not/have done it?) – What skills/learning are developed in the association's directors/associates/participants? – Do you consider that participating in a youth association can contribute to the transition period between studies and work? (like?) – How is it considered that the contribution of youth associations in promoting entrepreneurship is felt? – What entrepreneurial initiatives have emerged from your association? – What challenges and opportunities are there for the youth associative movement? 	
Block F Thanks and farewell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – give the respondent the opportunity to add something he/she considers pertinent – thank the respondent for participating 	~5 min
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Thank the respondent for their participation in the study; – Provide the respondent with the availability to add aspects that he/she considers pertinent and that have not been covered during the interview; – Inform about the future transfer (if required) of the transcript of the interview and the availability of the study results and close the interview. 	

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