

Chapter 2

Learning Processes in Impact Communities: Different Variables to Consider

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ABSTRACT

Engagement processes are facing a lot of challenges since the boom of the IT. This is true when there is a face-to-face engagement process, but also when the ties are mostly virtual. Nowadays, access to social networks, platforms for content posting and sharing (blogs, wikis, etc.), and for collaborative work are changing the way people engage. Those tools have enriched the processes, but also initiated new challenges. Knowledge sharing and transfer are processes that occur when several factors are combined. One of them, and the most important, is the existence of human critical mass capable of thinking the world and finding ways of changing it for the better, in this specific case social entrepreneurship. The authors studied a pilot of an impact community, its path, and the challenges it has faced. They also implemented four interviews to specialists in the areas of networks, social entrepreneurship, and learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Social Entrepreneurship in Portugal has suffered a positive evolution over the past few years. CASES (Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social) has shown that, in 2010, Social Economy represented a 2.8% of the Portuguese gross value added, 5.5% of the paid employment and 4.7% of total employment. Moreover, there were more than 55000 organizations from the social sector which had a result of 41.3% of the Portuguese gross value added and 40.6% of total employment (INE, CASES, 2013).

These data confirm the Social Economy and Social Entrepreneurship importance for the Country development, with the prediction of growing in the next years. And as Social Entrepreneurship is highlighted, it is easily understood that it's important to be aware of its many critical success factors. Two of them are going to be discussed in this paper: cooperation and sharing. It's our belief that these two dimensions largely contribute for knowledge creation, learnings dissemination and territorial development.

At this point it is important to analyze how one can contribute for sustainable growth of the booming sector. Sustainability meaning its financial, social, communicational, sharing, learning and knowledge creation dynamics, territorial and individual development, and other dimensions, which grant a holistic approach to Social Entrepreneurship and to the communication processes development among its actors, social entrepreneurs.

Thus, the key question is how Social Entrepreneurship (SE) and Communities of Practice (CoP) can contribute for the knowledge sharing and transfer processes dissemination? This question will help to define some guidelines of the networks communication processes potential of a specific group of actors (social entrepreneurs), in order to understand its influence in knowledge transfer and sharing and, consequently, in the construction of smart territories.

Additionally to Social Entrepreneurship development in Portugal, there are groups of social entrepreneurs gathering in Impact Communities (IC). These communities, along with other purposes, respond to a frequent need of social entrepreneurs to meet with others with similar objectives, to respond to their constant need to obtain knowledge, to learn, but also to share their learning with others. The IC are places to obtain answers to problems that social entrepreneurs face.

But an essential aspect in any community and in IC in particular is the way its members interact with each other, whether through moments of collaboration, sharing or observation / presence and how this interaction can be converted into greater or lesser involvement. It is essential because it will be this involvement that will revert to the sustainability and continuity of IC. Thus, this paper addresses precisely the challenges inherent in sustainability and the maintenance of an IC, based on the

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