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ENTREPRENEURSHIP, CULTURE AND SOCIAL ECONOMY IN THE SUSTAINABILITY OF A MOUNTAIN TERRITORY¹

EMPREENDEDORISMO, CULTURA E ECONOMIA SOCIAL NA SUSTENTABILIDADE DE TERRITÓRIO DE MONTANHA

Teresa Sequeira²

Francisco Diniz³

Abstract

Montemuro Mountain, in Portugal, is an economically and socially disadvantaged mountainous territory, with a scarce and aged population and extremely adverse climate conditions. The objective of the work is to analyze the impact of initiatives in the areas of entrepreneurship, culture, and social economy on regional sustainable development, at direct level through job and income creation, and indirectly by positive externalities generated. The methodology was focused on documentary research and conducting interviews. The results indicate a great positive impact, reinforcing the importance of supporting these types of experiences in terms of public policies, capable of fostering individual and community life and ensuring the survival of the territory.

Keywords: Regional sustainable development. Entrepreneurship. Economy of culture. Social economy. Low density territories.

Resumo

A Serra Montemuro, em Portugal, é uma zona de montanha económica e socialmente desfavorecida, com população escassa, envelhecida e clima extremamente adverso. O objectivo do trabalho consiste na análise do impacto de iniciativas das áreas do empreendedorismo, da cultura e da economia social, no desenvolvimento sustentável regional, a nível directo, via criação de emprego e rendimento, e indirecto, pelas externalidades positivas geradas. A metodologia concentrou-se na pesquisa documental e na realização de entrevistas. Os resultados apontam grande impacto positivo,

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² PhD in Economics, Dr., Assistant Professor at Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (UTAD). Senior researcher at Transdisciplinary Centre for Development Studies (CETRAD), Vila Real, Portugal. Scopus Author ID: 55917290100. ORCID: 0000-0003-3238-0354. E-mail: tsequeir@utad.pt

³ PhD in Economics, Dr., Associate Professor with Habilitation (Retired), Senior researcher at Transdisciplinary Centre for Development Studies (CETRAD), Vila Real, Portugal. Scopus Author ID: 55881300300. ORCID: 0000-0001-6770-430X. E-mail: fdiniz@utad.pt

reforçando a importância, em termos de políticas públicas, do apoio a estas tipo de experiências capazes de fomentar a vida individual e comunitária, assegurando a sobrevivência do território.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento regional sustentável. Empreendedorismo. Economia da cultura. Economia social. Territórios baixa densidade.

Introduction

In this work we will look at a territory with very peculiar characteristics and at some outstanding initiatives in this territory by their potential as instruments of development, with strong effects on positive externalities. We will try to understand their genesis, the functioning, the connections between them and the outside and their effect on the dynamization in the region.

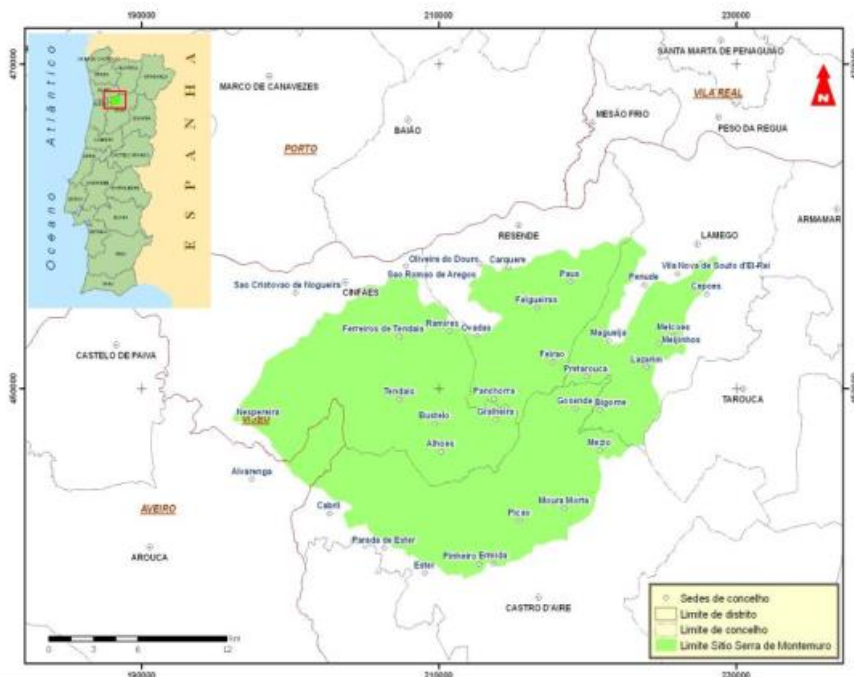
Our main objective is, therefore, to assess the economic and social impact of the previously identified local initiatives. In addition to their direct effects on income and employment, an attempt was also made to inquire about the indirect ones, namely the positive externalities generated by them.

Consequently, it was analyzed some strategies implemented for the development of a territory, which took into account its endogenous potentialities in order to obtain a better understanding of the process. Likewise, it is intended to be able to propose improvement actions, as well as the discussion of its capacity to replicate in territories with similar weaknesses and resources, naturally taking into account the specificities of each situation.

Local context

We refer to the Montemuro Mountain, which, according to Vieira (2008), is an imposing massif with abrupt slopes, a place of unparalleled beauty and rich landscape and morphology that, however, remains a little-known region. Its magnificence, associated with adverse morphological and climatic conditions, has always conditioned the population's fixation and limited its development. The author refers to a work by Amorim Girão, titled "Montemuro. The most unknown mountain in Portugal", published in 1940, as well as the scarce production of geographical content about this mountain area in Central Portugal.

Figure 1: General location of Montemuro Mountain



Source: Azevedo et al. (2009)

The Montemuro Mountain Site (PT CON0025) is one of the 60 Sites on the National List of Natura 2000 Network Sites. According to Marta-Costa et al. (2013) it is bordered to the North by the Douro River, to the West and to the South by the Paiva River and to the East by the Brook Balsemão which, like the Bestança River, rises in the interior of this área (figure 1). It includes parts of the municipalities of Castro Daire (50%), Cinfães (35%), Resende (17%), Lamego (15%) and Arouca (3%).

The initiatives to be analyzed were identified by prior knowledge of the territory and are often cited by institutional actors, the media and scientific works already developed, although usually from a more historical and ethnographic perspective.

We refer to “Capuchinhas”, a cooperative resulting from the resilience and entrepreneurship of women in safeguarding local knowledge and traditions, associated with a bold design; to the Theater, an unexpected cultural initiative; and to the Montemuro Artisans Association with its Artisans Cooperative, which, in addition to promoting, encouraging and disseminating local handicrafts, has successfully restored local cuisine in its restaurant, and also provided social services support.

The activities studied in this work are located in two places of the Montemuro Mountain: the village of Campo Benfeito and the place of Mezio, both in the municipality of Castro Daire, Viseu district, in the central region (NUT II), and inserted into the Dão/Lafões sub-region (NUT III).

Village of Campo Benfeito belongs to the parishes union of Gosende and is a typical mountain village, classified as “Villages of Portugal”, having 368 inhabitants at the date of the 2021 census (691 registered in 1991, a loss of 47% of the population in 30 years, according INE Portal data (2020). The “Capuchinhas Cooperative” and the “Montemuro Theatre”, other targeted initiative, are located here.

The two other activities studied, the “Montemuro Artisans Cooperative” and the “Montemuro Ethnographic and Social Association” are located just a few kilometers away, at the Mezio site. Mezio is part of the currently called Union of Parishes of Mezio and Moura Morta, with a population of only 532 inhabitants (INE, 2022). Both parishes have a valuable natural, cultural and built heritage, deserving special attention the arts and the traditional crafts, namely linen and wool crafts and woolen clothing (*burel*), gastronomy and several activities based in its natural resources, as those that were suggested by the “Route of Water and Stone of the Magic Mountains” (ADRMAG, 2017).

Conceptual framework

As for the conceptual framework, several themes will be analysed, although in different extent in each of the activities. Entrepreneurship is especially relevant in the “Capuchinhas” Cooperative; Culture is also transversal to all but with particular emphasis in the Theatre, in the craft activities of Cooperative and in Gastronomy. Social Economy is particularly important in the work of the Association.

Having identified the dominant thematic areas, we will proceed with a brief theoretical reference, which is necessarily incomplete given the complexity and variety of the themes.

Entrepreneurship and development

The concept of entrepreneurship is very heterogeneous, in general going much further than simply understanding it as any attempt to create a new business or new venture. Authors, such as Slevin and Covin (1990) point out the ability to take risks and proactivity, as well as the initiative to take actions and obtain results. Souza and Lopez Júnior (2011) emphasize that more than the acquisition of knowledge, it is the learning to learn, to be, to do and, above all, to live together. And in this sense of living in common, usually named teamwork, is the concept presented by Miranda et al. (2020) where they mention that anyone, at some point, can find an opportunity and the ability to turn it into a profitable business, which depends on a set of factors, being essential to understand the characteristics of each one and to work on them to create value. According to them an entrepreneur should not be a talented superman who has all the necessary skills or who creates, develops and consolidates a profitable business on his own. Nowadays, the skills necessary for success should be combined through teamwork, allowing for greater complementarity and providing the enrichment of the project with different perspectives and risk sharing.

Regardless of this conceptual heterogeneity, the relationship between entrepreneurship and development through growth becomes consensual if we adopt a classic growth perspective, based on

the market model and supported by the importance of production factors. The entrepreneur can be seen as a development actor, because he is a potential creator of wealth and employment.

Schumpeter and Backhaus (2006) stressed the importance of entrepreneurial capacity as a catalyst of economic changes and jobs creation, linking entrepreneurship to innovation. In this sense, they referred to the social actor who undertakes in an innovative way as being the main driver of economic development, emphasizing innovation as its main characteristic, whether in new products, services, markets or in a new source of a raw material.

Many other authors have published empirical studies on the relationship between the process of entrepreneurship and the development, such as, for example, those published in Carvalho *et al.* (2015).

Development and culture

The links between culture and development have been subject of increasing reflection by several authors. As reported by Burity (2007), since the early 90s and as the result of the work promoted by international organizations, culture appears to be an “unavoidable sign of singularity, suggesting a multiplicity of paths for development” (BURITY, 2007, p.58). Later, there was a double finding: on the one hand, the more effective are development projects, the more they integrate and interact with local culture, and there is a need to consider the cultural context in public intervention policies for development; on the other, the fact that the sustainability of projects depends on the participation of the actors most directly involved. Already in the XXI century there is a clear notion that culture is not just a condition of the development process, but a key factor. This finding was reinforced by the increasing importance of cultural industries, as well as leisure and tourism in contemporary societies.

Bayardo (2007) also points out the instrumental characteristic of cultural policies, which consider them as a means to achieve other purposes, namely economic, as well as the importance of knowledge and collective intellectual production and of its private appropriation in the processes of enhancing the current economy.

Nurse (2006) referred to culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, stating that “the standpoint is premised on the view that sustainable development is only achievable if there is harmony and alignment between the objectives of cultural diversity and that of social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability” (NURSE, 2006, p.33).

Also institutions such as the United Nations (UN), through its specialized agency for the sector, UNESCO, which states that “only an approach to development centered on the human being and based on mutual respect and open dialogue between cultures can produce lasting, inclusive and equitable results” (UNESCO, 2020).

The 2015 UN Summit defined the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), within the scope of its agenda for the eradication of poverty and development on a global scale by 2030 and highlighted the role of culture in this process. This highlight has been reinforced in several works, namely that of UNESCO (2018) regarding the rethinking of cultural policies, where it is established as one of the objectives, “to integrate culture within the framework of sustainable development”, recognizing the complementarity of economic and cultural issues of sustainable development and contributing to SDG 4 - Quality Education; SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 17 - Partnerships to Achieve the Goals (UNESCO, 2018, p. 167-187).

As for the European Union, and although each Member State (MS) is responsible for its own policies for the cultural sector, there is institutional recognition of the importance of the cultural and creative sectors for cohesion and development, particularly after 2008, with effective support to the implementation of these policies of each MS. The European Commission supports common challenges, such as the impact of digital technologies, the change of cultural governance models and the need to support the cultural and creative sectors in innovation (COMISSÃO EUROPEIA. 2020). It pays special attention to the importance of culture in non-urban areas affected by depopulation, as shown in a recent document (EUROPEAN UNION *et al.*, 2020).

There seems to be a consensus that sustainable development should prioritize cultural identity in addition to environmental balance, social justice, and eco-efficiency, in the understanding that the development of society is based on values and institutions specific to its culture.

In empirical terms, one of the major challenges lies in assessing the impact of culture on development, due to the nature of cultural goods, which require a revision of traditional economic assumptions (including the use of the principle of decreasing marginal utility by their frequent

intangibility, irreplaceability, and their nature of public goods, which cause, among others, market failures). This results in an additional difficulty in valuing, plus the existence of externalities, and the complexity of measuring the effects not directly captured by the market, as noted Reis (2007, p.19), ironically summarizing this issue as "measuring the immeasurable".

Social economy and development

The close relationship between social economy and development is the most intuitive of all the issues addressed here, and therefore, the one that will require less justification, in terms of content.

Therefore, we will only mention that the action of the social economy is normally carried out through a set of entities, which despite having an existence dating back to the XIX century and linked to movements of workers and solidarity associations, only after the work of Delors and Gaudin (1979) was developed a scientific interest about this issue. The authors drew attention to the importance of "*un troisième secteur*", intending to name a heterogeneous set of entities, such as associations, cooperatives and others, with a social positioning and objectives different from those of the so-called profitable private sector and of the rest of the public sector.

According to Evers (2000), the third sector would be an intermediate space between the State, the market and the informal sector. To Lipietz (2001), this third sector would correspond to the interception of the social economy with the solidarity economy. There are, therefore, concepts such as social economy, solidary economy, third sector, which authors like Defourny and Develtere (1999) associate to the cleavage between the French and Anglo-American schools, linking the problem of social and solidarity economy to the French school, and the sector of non-profit or voluntary organizations to the Anglophone school. Anheier and Salamon (2006) deepened this cleavage and, in addition to the French concept of social economy, recalled the notion of Italian associativism, the tradition of the German subsidiarity principle and the British tradition of charity and voluntarism.

But, if in conceptual terms there are somewhat different opinions about the concepts, with those who highlight the most normative component of the objectives or their most functional component, in practice there seems to be no doubt about the importance of these social initiatives in the support of development, as it is understood today. Several empirical studies prove the real impact of these initiatives, such as Ramos (2006) and Sequeira and Diniz (2013) in low-density areas in Portugal, or Santos (2017) in Brazil.

In conclusion, we refer Drucker (2006, p. 439) who, faced with the question of who takes care of social tasks in a knowledge society, says that the right answer is neither the government nor the company, but "a social sector, new and independent... to perform multiple tasks, in the name of the common good and social cohesion". The social economy has therefore become an essential dimension in terms of development.

Methodology

The methodology used to achieve the aforementioned objective, namely the assessment of the economic and social impact of the specific initiatives developed by different agents, was supported by Albarello et al., (2005), Hill and Hill (2012) and was based on case study approaches, using documentary research, several visits to the sites and initiatives under analysis, made either previously with students as part of study visits, and later, individually, using the interviewing technique.

First of all, a reference to the selection of case studies: it was based on prior knowledge of the territory, a rural, inhospitable, depopulated and aged region, as mentioned above. The numerous previous field visits allowed the researchers to understand which initiatives should be studied. This selection of cases was confirmed through documentary research.

The cases studied correspond to the most important initiatives that occur in this territory, and are recognized as such by public documentation, namely the official websites of public entities that act at the local level, such as the City Council and the parishes where they are inserted (MUNICÍPIO DE CASTRO DAIRE, 2020). Likewise, the information made available online by each entity under study and referred to below was also used. Documentary research was carried out in terms of scientific articles on the issues under analysis, referred to in the conceptual framework and

previous scientific works in this territory, namely those by Rebelo *et al.* (2007); Pato and Figueiredo (2017).

After the selection and preliminary characterization of the initiatives or case studies to be analysed, the next step was the direct approaching of each institution, in order to obtain information through an interview.

The people to be interviewed were indicated by each institution. Thus, in “Capuchinhas Cooperative”, all the workers were interviewed, a total of 4. In the “Montemuro Theater”, we interviewed the general director, the artistic director and 2 actors; and finally, in “Montemuro Ethnographic and Social Association”, was interviewed the person responsible for crafts, as the person responsible for the Restaurant; the technician responsible for the social support component and also a restaurant worker, in a total of 12 interviews. The interviews took place during the month of July 2020, and the script of each interview was constructed in a way that was less breaking with everyday life, in the spirit of Chicago school work (as suggested by Albarello *et al.*, 2006, pp. 109 - 116), therefore not isolating the individual from his environment. The interviews can thus be considered within the scope of a predominantly non-directive attitude, with the exception of issues related to the economic component, where a position between the semi-directive, or even directive, when the concern focused on issues related to economic and monetary aspects.

The results presented below are the output of documental research, local knowledge, and interviews.

Results

– Capuchinhas Cooperative

We preserve the past, reinvent fabrics and patterns, we color wool with natural dyes and create pieces suitable for modern times.

CAPUCHINHAS, CRL, 2020

“Capuchinhas” is a cooperative - Cooperativa Capuchinhas CRL - founded in the 1980s by women, six today, who produce clothes in *burel* (a Portuguese handcrafted fabric, made from sheep's wool), linen and wool, on handlooms and traditional methods in an old school outside the village of Campo Benfeito. The name of the cooperative comes from “Capucha”, the cape used by the shepherds to protect themselves from the cold and rain. Although supported by a whole productive tradition, the pieces have a modern *design*, due to the support of stylists (figure 2).

The original collections, in linen in summer and in wool and *burel* in winter, are developed annually and disseminated through a catalog. They are put up on sale, in their own facilities and also in artisanal stores and publicized at sector fairs, such as the the International Handicraft Exhibition (FIA), the largest multicultural fair that takes place in the Iberian Peninsula and the second in Europe.

Figure 2: Modern design pieces, made by traditional materials and processes



Source: authors

All the four co-workers have been interviewed, in a fluent conversation in their work-room, being possible to obtain additional information allowing to deepen our knowledge in order to understand the economic and social impact of the initiative. The cooperative has an average turnover of 40 thousand euros, mostly (75%) clothing, the remainder corresponding to the sale of accessories, such as bags and *souvenirs*. They sell more than 80% directly in their shop in the village or by their own online media, about 15% through retail in other stores, and exports account for 5%, mainly for the Japanese market. They are affected by seasonality, being the first semester significantly weaker than the second one.

It should be noted that the selling price of the products is not accessible to the majority of domestic consumers, even with very small profit margins, given the low level of Portuguese income *per capita*, on the one hand, and on the other, the slowness of the manufacturing process, the very strong component of labour and the cost of inputs.

Can't you see? This bag, made of linen, costs 65 euros. That's more than 10% of the national minimum wage! We cannot undersell; it's more than a day at the loom, apart from the materials, sewing and finishing...", said Mrs. Henriqueta, one of the oldest workers in "Capuchinhas.

They receive the support from the City Council that has given them the space of the old school where they are installed, as well as transportation to disclosure fairs. They get training from the Vocational Training Center for Crafts and Heritage (CEARTE) through specific actions organized by the Montemuro Ethnographic and Social Association, which will be referred to below. More recently they are receiving tourists from a circuit organized by the City Council.

In terms of costs, the most significant are labour costs: they keep 4 permanent jobs, with remunerations close to the national minimum wage. As the workers are inhabitants of the village, it is believed that most of these wages are spent in the region.

The raw materials are got from national suppliers but outside the region: the wool comes from Serra da Estrela, the linen from Arco de Baulhe and the *burel* from Seia. Only the dyes for finishes are bought locally from native plants such as thistle.

As constraints, they mention the importance of obtaining a more favorable tax treatment, namely in terms of VAT. The current rate of 23% is a huge burden on the price of the final product, which, as previously stated, is quite high. They also argue the difficulty in payment of contributions to social security.

Despite having excellent access via the road network, the local communication infrastructures have enormous deficiencies, with serious failures in internet and mobile phone signals.

As opportunities, it is pointed out the fact that the village of Campo Benfeito integrates the "Villages of Portugal" network and the existence of several rural accommodations with significant occupancy rates (6 in the village and 2 in the village of Codeçal). Also the nature trails and research projects such as the blue butterfly and sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) bring people and serve as creative inspiration.

Finally, it was mentioned a new source of tourists, those coming from the National Road 2 (EN2) circuit, which has resulted in a remarkable growing flow of customers and disclosers.

In the case of Capuchinhas, the importance of these women's entrepreneurship is quite evident: with a proactive attitude and teamwork, they took advantage of existing knowledge, created a new business, added value, namely through design, took risks, and obtained results. Linking to the conceptual framework made earlier, in terms of entrepreneurship these women learned to learn, to be and to live and fight together (Souza and Lopez Júnior, 2011) and managed, in the sense pointed out by Miranda et al. (2020) to transform an opportunity in a business capable of generating jobs and ensuring its survival.

– Montemuro Mountain Regional Theatre

Even considering that there is a long history of animation practices in villages in the interior of Portugal, it is still surprising to find a theater in so small village like Campo Benfeito. The surprise lies in the fact that most of these practices ended a long time ago with the desertification and the aging of the villages. This aroused the interest in knowing not only the reason for its existence but also of the dynamism revealed and the impact of this initiative in the territory where it is located (figure 3).

Figure 3: In the middle of nowhere, a theater appears



Source: authors

The framework is unique. To go to the theater these days and to attend a show at the Festival Altitudes is to visit a unique Portuguese landscape. The experience of imagination crosses between the natural and human landscapes of the village of Campo Benfeito - a small village with 50 inhabitants in the Montemuro mountain, in the heart of Beira Alta - and the artistic proposals, which introduce an interruption of the contemporary experience of that cultural and built heritage... In that corner of the country, there are places to visit that also talk about this world yet to be invented that allows us to deceive the end...

Galhós (2018), *Jornal Expresso*, 11-08-2018

The Montemuro Mountain Regional Theater (“Teatro Regional da Serra do Montemuro”, (TRSM)), was born out of the nonconformity in the absence of cultural activities and the lack of opportunities for a group of young people willing to settle on land. It was driven by an initiative led by an English man Graeme Pulleyn, a volunteer of the *Institute of Cultural Affairs*, which has over 30 years of activity, according to the theater's official website (*TEATRO REGIONAL DA SERRA DO MONTEMURO*, 2020).

It was built with volunteers from different parts of the world, particularly those from the United Kingdom and was assumed a traveling company. The shows are created by a collective democratic process that involves all stakeholders of all levels, with an artistic identity based on rural experiences, and mainly through the human sharing promoted by the company.

Interviews with theater directors and actors emphasized the importance of artistic creation, particularly in the last 10 years, performing an anual average 100-120 traveling shows. Along with these shows, the company promotes other initiatives, namely with the young public of schools in the region, looking for subjects that allow multiple works in different areas, such as the one carried out with the subject “water”. It is estimated that 80% of the work is carried out outside the physical structure of the village theater.

In this structure there are productions such as the “Village Evenings” and also the “Festival Altitudes”. This festival started in 1998 as an exchange of performances between diferent companies, currently offering a variety of cultural expressions, from theater, concert, dance, to exhibitions, conferences and film cycles, exhausting almost daily the 200 seats available, with people coming on purpose from Lisbon, Porto, Viseu, Castro Daire, Lamego and many other places.

This success is due to the balance between new proposals and widely recognized authors and the unquestionable quality of programming and unique geographic location that make the “Festival Altitudes” a reference in the cultural and artistic national programming.

In this regard, Fernando Tordo, one of the greatest Portuguese singers, states in his closing concert of the 2018 edition “... These are people who come from who know where”, surprised by the unusual geographical location of the festival, but also by the amount of audience that attends the shows (*FESTIVAL ALTITUDES*, 2020).

With a budget of around 317 thousand euros, the revenues are mostly (50%) the financing of the Central State through the Ministry of Culture, plus about 25% from the municipalities and the remaining 25% from ticket revenues.

The Montemuro Theater is based on permanent team of seven people full-time, adding more 5-6 people per task. The theatre activities absorb most of the costs (70%), being the remaining 30% related to the physical structure.

Most of the costs are retained in the region, where permanent staff and about half of service suppliers live. We noted a special concern in purchasing locally, in order to guarantee the continuity of supply to the residents of the village.

Regarding other indirect positive impacts in the region, Paula, one of the interviewed theater directors, mentioned “the promotion of the village, the improvement of the quality of life and the attraction and retention of new residents, either of returning emigrants “children of this land”, or of people who fell in love with the place. Rural accommodation has also been developed”.

As for difficulties, in addition to the clear and very specific existing gaps, such as the lack of restaurants and coffee shops as sharing spaces, and failures in communications via the mobile network (as already mentioned by the “Capuchinhas”, but which are in the process of being overcome with the installation of an antenna), the challenges of Montemuro Theater are hiring employees and their staying in the village

Recalling what has been highlighted in terms of culture and development, namely the fact that the sustainability of the projects depends on the participation of the actors most directly involved, we were told that the the greatest difficulties are those clearly linked to the interiority. In other words, the need to face the potential of the interior and not just the question of the survival of the territory, enhancing conditions for young people and families to stay there with effective public support and an aggressive job creation strategy.

– *Montemuro Ethnographic and Social Association*

Montemuro Ethnographic and Social Association (“Associação Etnográfica e Social do Montemuro” (AESM)) was born in 1978, through the initiative of a teacher born in Mezio, with the aim of surveying cultural heritage, documentary research and raising the awareness of the population of Mezio to the importance of preserving cultural heritage, in order to avoid the disappearance of materials and traditions so typical and unique in this region.

A collection of various pieces of handicrafts in wool, linen, cotton, rags, straw, brambles, reeds, and clogs has been collected and is available to the public with a permanent exhibition. In this exhibition you can see the linen cycle, manual looms in operation, as well as the home-made medicine and the recreation of living spaces, such as a kitchen and a bedroom.

It is also possible to purchase handicrafts produced by the artisans' cooperative, as well as honey, teas and other regional products, with estimated average sales of around 20 thousand euros per year.

The products are mainly publicized by the customer's “word of mouth” and by disclosure through media interviews and reports. Visits to the exhibition, of about 100 to 150 visitors per month, are also an important attraction.

The association carried out a survey of recipes of typical dishes from the region, which are available for tasting in the restaurant operated by the association.

Currently AESM achieves its ethnographic and social purposes through the “Dolores de Jesus” Ethnographic Museum; Montemuro Artisans Cooperative; Bar/Restaurant Mezio's Typical Cuisine; “Cantares, Danças e arte de Bem Falar do Montemuro- Mezio” Group and the Home Support Service (AESM, 2020). From these initiatives, we highlight:

Bar/Restaurant Mezio's Typical Cuisine -This Bar/Restaurant, as mentioned, is an integral part of the Montemuro Ethnographic and Social Association and hence its inclusion in the analysis. In addition, it is the main restaurant unit in the area. Started in 1987, as a small unit, but the high demand imposed an expansion of facilities that now have a capacity of 150 people. Typical cuisine dishes, such as bean rice with “salpicão”, or kid roasted in the oven, justify the success.

Now it employs 10 people full time. According to the last annual report and accounts of the association (Ethnographic and Social Association of Montemuro, 2019), in 2018 the Bar/Typical Cuisine had a profit close to 68 thousand euros.

As part of our fieldwork, it was found that it serves an average of 100 meals a day. And according to the manager, Mr. António: “During the week the client type are workers from nearby (mainly from wind units and dams). At the end of the week there are tourists who come purposefully

from different parts of the country, even coming from Lisbon and Vila Real de Santo António, in the extreme south of the country”.

Also in the case of this restaurant, the issue of the importance of the entrepreneur is particularly highlighted and not only because of the economic results generated (and above all from the dissemination of a typical dish of the region, the aforementioned "rice and beans with salpicão"). In fact, the profits obtained in this activity make it possible to co-finance already described activity of the artisans, but above all the social support activities described below. And last but not least, the jobs created, very important in a poor and almost depopulated region like this one.

Home Support Service - it operates since 2006, being one of the last resources created by the association. It is the result of the awareness of the situation of living conditions of many elderly people, with varied needs and social isolation, in a region with a high level of emigration. Its action extends beyond the União de Freguesias do Mezio and Moura-Morta, covering neighboring parishes.

Basic services provided include home delivery of 4 meals on weekdays; laundry treatment; housing hygiene; personal hygiene and image care. In addition, a range of complementary services are added, namely meals on weekends, transport and accompany, provision of small services, medication support and entertainment activities.

It has a staff of 7 people, 1 social service technician and 6 assistants. According to the previously referred last annual report, the labour costs are about 63% of the total activity costs. Revenue comes from state subsidies (60%), being the rest from users' contribution.

According to the same source, it supports a monthly average of 27 users, with a monthly cost of 412 euros per user and an estimated average contribution of around 162 euros per month and per user. Despite the state support, it is a loss-making activity offset by restaurant revenue.

– *Montemuro Artisans Cooperative*

The Montemuro Artisans Cooperative is working since almost 40 years in the survey, collection, preservation and dissemination of cultural and natural heritage of Montemuro region together with EMSA, being both created at about the same time.

The cooperative currently has 12 members, most of them women, who are artisans of linen, *burel*, wool and rags and have 2 employees who promote and sell the products on the association's premises (figure 4).

The artisans deliver the product of their work, getting immediately the corresponding remuneration. The raw materials they use, namely linen and wool, are of national origin but from outside the region.

As mentioned for other craft activities, the manager interviewed, Mrs. Lurdes highlighted that “these entities face many difficulties, namely in the receipt of the membership fees, in the tax burden of the final products and with the bureaucracies”.

And indeed, the very tight margins do not allow forms of sales on consignment or investments in advertising, in particular through the Internet.

Figure 4: Traditional loom of the cooperative



Source: authors

As positive aspects, it was highlighted the networking between the various activities of the cooperative and the association, especially the attractiveness of the restaurant and its potential effect on the sale of handcrafted products.

The expansion of rural tourism, both the existing one (such as “Casa do Arco”) and the one that is expected to start up in a near future (“Casa Tomé”) create many expectations.

This is another activity, a community initiative, where the entrepreneurial spirit manifested itself not only in the desire to preserve traditional knowledge, but above all in the ability to look for an alternative source for obtaining financial resources. In fact, the promoting of the restaurant is a strategy to obtain financial resources for craft activities and social support.

Final remarks

The results of this work confirm what the theoretical studies mentioned indicate that culture, entrepreneurship, and social economy can be effective catalysts of development.

From the documentary survey and the interviews with the promoters of these initiatives, it was possible to verify that the activities analyzed have a long history of survival of more than thirty years. And more than just resisting, they were able to grow and to intensify their relationship, strengthening each other in a deeply adverse context.

Jobs were created and maintained in a growing economic dynamic, with the consequent generation of income, the maintenance and dissemination of culture and traditional knowledge and flavors, which is particularly evident in the case of the Cooperative of Artisans and the Association. Simultaneously, there is a dynamic of innovation in terms of products, particularly visible in “Capuchinhas”, and in the work in the social field, with all the support given by the Association, and the remarkable work of the Theater Company.

And above all, it was possible to maintain a population in a territory of such low population density, with all the positive and very significant consequences for territorial sustainability.

It is worth highlighting the importance of the whole in relation to the parts and their interrelationship: without the Association's restaurant, the area's attractiveness would certainly decrease; without the Theater, the area would remain unknown to a large and young group of visitors; without Capuchins and Artisans, the identity would be lost; without the Association, the aging population would be left without any support. In other words, in addition to the direct effects of these developments, we are easily aware of the very strong externalities generated by these entities.

Other initiatives are being added to these, namely in the field of local accommodation and tourism associated with nature trails.

In what is concerned with specific challenges, we summarize by quoting one of our interlocutors from the Montemuro Theater: “a whole strategy in the territory has clear implications for micro and small businesses in the territory. These are not our challenges; they are the challenges of a territory”.

Public policies to support these initiatives have been very important in the answer to these challenges, particularly in the cases of Theater and in the social component of the Ethnographic Association; in “Capuchinhas” there is a greater autonomy in relation to the challenges, but less support in the Artisans' cooperative, which needs to be increased.

And taking into account that all these mentioned initiatives were of a particular scope, that is, the actions identified are the result of initiatives by local actors, driven by strong social interests, it is worth questioning the role of public policies in this matter.

So far and according to the data collected, these initiatives have had some occasional public financial support, but they are not the result of an effective strategy defined by local or national authorities.

In view of the success in terms of entrepreneurship, conservation of cultural heritage, social support and resilience, the question that arises is precisely the need to insist with public entities for a clear definition of a strategy for development and support for entrepreneurship to this disadvantaged and depopulated territory, accompanied by the availability of effective financial support, taking advantage of the European guidelines in the matter.

On the other hand, Portugal has several areas with similar situations, without however having registered this type of initiatives. Therefore, it would certainly be desirable to take advantage of the demonstration effect.

And we believe it will be important to analyze in more detail this case study, suggesting, as future work, the impact assessment not captured by the market, not only from these initiatives, but

probably from a wider territory, with a common denominator, the National Road 2 (EN2), referred by some interviewees as the most recent factor of attractiveness of the territory.

It will be therefore advisable to deepen these issues, through a research project involving the several relevant stakeholders with the aim of proposing an orientation and strengthening of these public policies, particularly in terms of policy to support entrepreneurship, to promote sustainable development of these territories with a view to greater efficiency and effectiveness.

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