

TOMORROW'S ENTREPRENEURS: HOW YOUNG PEOPLE FROM WESTERN ROMANIA ARE CHANGING COMMUNITIES THROUGH CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

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Abstract: *Entrepreneurship has demonstrated significant economic importance by contributing to job creation, economic development and increased social welfare. In this context, young entrepreneurs play a crucial role, having the potential to bring innovation, generate positive social change and revitalize local communities. Starting from the research question regarding the degree of civic involvement of future Romanian entrepreneurs, this paper aims to investigate the degree of civic involvement of young Romanians who want to become entrepreneurs, with the main objective of evaluating this aspect. The research was based on a quantitative methodology, more precisely the sociological survey method, using a questionnaire distributed by operators, and is part of a larger study. Following the analysis of the data collected from 881 respondents from western Romania, the results emphasize the need for concrete support measures to increase the civic involvement of young entrepreneurs. At the same time, these conclusions reflect similar trends observed at the European level.*

Keywords: entrepreneur, civic involvement, volunteering, young people

1. Introduction

Economic growth remains a central topic in both economic policy and academic research. In Europe, attention to this aspect has increased in the context of the high unemployment rate. After the Second World War, OECD member countries experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth, but in the 1960s and 1970s the focus shifted to demand management and a more equitable distribution of income. In the 1980s, stagflation and unemployment redirected attention to the supply-side economy and the factors influencing it, coinciding with two major phenomena: the growth of small firms and the return of entrepreneurship.

This transition from large corporations to small firms was facilitated by the relaxation of market entry regulations, along with an economic context characterized by creative destruction, changes in consumer preferences and increased labor supply, which led to falling real wages and a steady increase in educational attainment (Brock & Evans, 1989). Entrepreneurship thus becomes a key area of interest for economists for several reasons.

First, entrepreneurship contributes significantly to wealth generation. According to the OECD (2003, 2005), between 20 and 40% of labor productivity growth in the main industrialized economies can be attributed to the redistribution of resources through the emergence of new firms and the exit of less efficient ones. Second, entrepreneurship has a major impact on positive economic externalities, such as the creation of new jobs and the introduction of innovative products to the market, which benefit both employees and consumers (Berglann et al., 2011).

These aspects are also recognized by the European Commission, which considers the promotion of self-employment and entrepreneurship as an important means of stimulating job creation and improving employment prospects for the unemployed and disadvantaged groups. For example, the employment package of 2012 emphasizes the potential of entrepreneurship to contribute to an economic recovery rich in employment opportunities (EU, 2016). Young entrepreneurs are considered essential for this process, as they bring innovation, adaptability and a new perspective to the market (Čočkaló et al., 2019), having the ability to stimulate the evolution of society (Shastri et al., 2009).

2. The concept of entrepreneurship

Studies in the field of entrepreneurship have revealed a significant problem at the academic level: the lack of a clear consensus on the definition and structuring of this field. A series of works (Brockhaus, 1987; Carsrud et al., 1985) highlighted the fact that researchers have not reached a common understanding of what constitutes entrepreneurship as an economic and social phenomenon. This lack of

uniformity poses challenges not only in defining terms, but also in establishing clear objectives and standardized research methodologies. In later studies, such as those carried out by Low and MacMillan (1988), respectively Sexton and Smilor (1985), the need for better structured approaches that provide a holistic understanding of entrepreneurship is emphasized. These authors suggest that the diversity of interpretations is a consequence of the complexity of the entrepreneurial phenomenon, which involves economic, social, psychological and cultural factors.

Because of this, entrepreneurship can be approached from multiple perspectives. Naude (2008) suggests three main defining frameworks: occupational, behavioral and outcome focused. The occupational definition, proposed by the OECD (2016), describes the entrepreneur as a self-employed person who manages his own business, assuming financial and operational risks. Szaban (2018) adds that independent entrepreneurs have greater flexibility and can react quickly to market changes, offering customized solutions that are often inaccessible to large companies.

In addition to the economic aspects, many definitions of entrepreneurship focus on the behavioral dimension. Brown and Uljin (2004) point out that social and behavioral aspects play an essential role in this context. Carton et al. (1998) defines the entrepreneur as a person or team capable of developing a new business, having the ability to identify opportunities and mobilize resources. McClelland (1961) supplements this definition by emphasizing specific behaviors such as risk taking and opportunity identification.

In terms of outcome-focused definitions, Shane and Venkataraman (2000) argue that entrepreneurs not only identify and evaluate business opportunities, but also act on them, generating tangible impacts on markets, economies and society. Entrepreneurs capitalize on inventions, creating new products or processes, discovering alternative sources of supply, and establishing new forms of organization (Carrasco & Perez, 2008). This perspective highlights the transformative role of entrepreneurship, capable of producing significant changes in the economic and social environment.

3. Civic involvement of the entrepreneur

Bénabou and Tirole (2006) propose a theory of prosocial behavior, according to which behavior that does not always prioritize individual utility, but aligns with social welfare and community interests, plays an important role in economic processes. In this sense, entrepreneurship can become a tool for promoting civic competences and a stronger sense of self-governance (Mitra et al., 2020). By developing innovative products, exploring new markets and implementing innovative solutions, entrepreneurs contribute not only to local economic growth, but also to the creation of jobs and the improvement of social well-being.

This contribution becomes particularly relevant in the context of the transition to more sustainable business practices. Entrepreneurship can stimulate ecological initiatives that protect the environment and support sustainable development, an aspect also emphasized by Méndez-Picazo et al. (2021). Replacing unsustainable traditional practices with ecologically sustainable solutions contributes both to protecting the environment and to the economic and social progress of communities.

Youth entrepreneurship brings significant social and economic benefits. Chigunta (2002) states that young entrepreneurs develop positive attitudes towards business and actively contribute to economic and social life. They not only stimulate the development of their communities, but also assume a greater role in generating positive changes in society. Through access to appropriate resources and opportunities, young entrepreneurs acquire essential traits such as business vision, discipline, resilience and the ability to exploit new opportunities. These qualities make them responsible and active members of communities, contributing to economic and social progress.

Palanivelu and Manikandan (2016) emphasize the importance of young entrepreneurs in revitalizing local communities and promoting innovation and resilience. By creating jobs not only for themselves but also for others, these entrepreneurs facilitate the integration of marginalized groups into the local economy. In addition, developing skills and experiences through entrepreneurship helps young people to face life's challenges and avoid socio-psychological problems such as delinquency associated with unemployment. Thus, young entrepreneurs become more receptive to emerging economic opportunities, having a significant positive impact on society.

4. Research methodology

In order to obtain a solid database and be able to draw relevant conclusions, we chose to use a quantitative research method, based on a questionnaire. This approach allowed us to collect a large volume of information from a considerable number of respondents, ensuring significant diversity in their

profiles. The choice of the questionnaire as the main research tool was due to its advantages, such as the possibility of asking standardized questions to a large sample of people and obtaining quantifiable data, essential for a rigorous and comparative analysis.

Regarding the sampling method, we opted for quota sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, which allowed us to create a balanced distribution of respondents according to age and gender.

The questionnaire was distributed online with the support of the operators, ensuring that we reached as many respondents as possible from different geographical regions and socio-economic backgrounds. The data collection period spanned approximately one month, during which we managed to obtain a total of 881 responses from young people with varied interests in entrepreneurship: from those who intend to become entrepreneurs, to those who have already started a business and even those who do not plan to take on this role. This diversity of responses gives us a solid basis for better understanding the motivations, behaviors and civic engagement of these young people.

The present study focuses on the partial analysis of the obtained data, being part of a larger and more complex research. Specifically, we will examine the data related to the civic involvement of future Romanian entrepreneurs; to assess to what extent these young people are involved in activities that contribute to the development of their communities and the well-being of society.

The general objective of the research has in mind identifying the degree of civic involvement of future Romanian entrepreneurs. Regarding the research question, it sought to identify: how involved are future Romanian entrepreneurs from a civic point of view?

Following the operationalization of the general objective, we formulated the following objectives and hypotheses:

Ob1. Identifying the degree of involvement of future Romanian entrepreneurs in organizations that pursue social change

Ip1.1. There is a statistically significant relationship between the desire to become an entrepreneur and involvement in social organizations

Ip1.2. There are statistically significant differences between would-be entrepreneurs, depending on their gender, in terms of involvement in organizations that pursue social change

Ob2. Identifying the degree of involvement of future Romanian entrepreneurs in actions aimed at social change

Ip2.1. There is a statistically significant relationship between the desire to become an entrepreneur and involvement in actions aimed at social change

Ip2.2. There are statistically significant differences between future entrepreneurs, depending on their gender, in terms of involvement in actions that aim for social change

5. Result

Following the data collection stage, we noticed some trends regarding young people's interest in entrepreneurship. Of the 881 respondents, only 39 stated that they had already established their own business ($M = 4.4$). However, a considerable number of 286 respondents stated that they intend to open a business in the future ($M = 32.5$), suggesting significant potential for youth entrepreneurship.

In contrast, the majority of study participants ($N = 366$; $M = 41.6$) do not want to start a business. Among the reasons chosen by the respondents is the lack of interest, respectively the necessary desire to become entrepreneurs ($N = 108$; $M = 12.3$), while others believe that the process would be too complicated ($N = 81$; $M = 9.2$) or feel that they do not have the appropriate entrepreneurial skills ($N = 77$; $M = 8.7$). Also, risks associated with starting a business ($N = 50$; $M = 5.7$) and lack of access to finance ($N = 50$; $M = 5.7$) were important inhibiting factors (Table 1).

Conversely, some respondents still remain undecided about the possibility of opening a business, which highlights the uncertainty or lack of clarity regarding their entrepreneurial future. These data suggest that although there is a moderate interest in entrepreneurship among young people, multiple barriers influence their decisions and perceptions about this career.

Also, these results coincide with a study carried out by the European Union, according to which 46% of young people want to become entrepreneurs, while only 9% of respondents are already self-employed, while the lack of capital or resources, financial risks and insufficient knowledge and entrepreneurial skills were considered the main barriers to young people becoming entrepreneurs (European Union, 2023).

Table 1
Frequency table regarding the intention to open one's own business in the future

	N	Mean
Yes, I want to open my future	286	32.5
I have already opened my own business	39	4.4
No, I don't want to become an entrepreneur	108	12.3
No, it's too complicated	81	9.2
No, I don't have the skills	77	8.7
No, it's too risky	50	5.7
No, I don't have the necessary financial resources	50	5.7
I don't know	190	21.5

From the data collected, a relatively balanced distribution between men and women can be observed among those who have already set up a business. Of these, 21 are men (N = 21; M = 53.8%), and 18 are women (N = 18; M = 46.2%) (Fig. 1). Most entrepreneurs who started a business have higher education (N = 19; M = 48.7%), which indicates a correlation between the level of education and the ability or desire to start a business.

Analyzing the profile of potential future young entrepreneurs from the western region of Romania, the data indicate that most of them are women (N = 186; M = 65%) (Fig. 2). Also, most young people who would like to start a business in the future have higher education (N = 186; M = 65%). This trend reflects an increase in the involvement of women in the field of entrepreneurship and a strong orientation towards higher education as an important factor in the development of entrepreneurship.

Figure 1. Distribution of entrepreneurs by gender

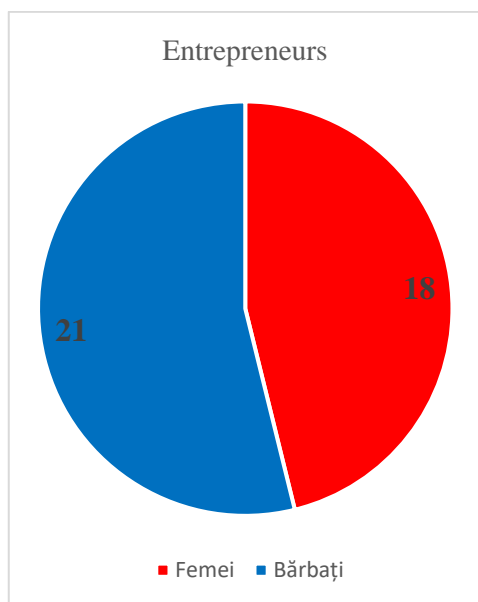
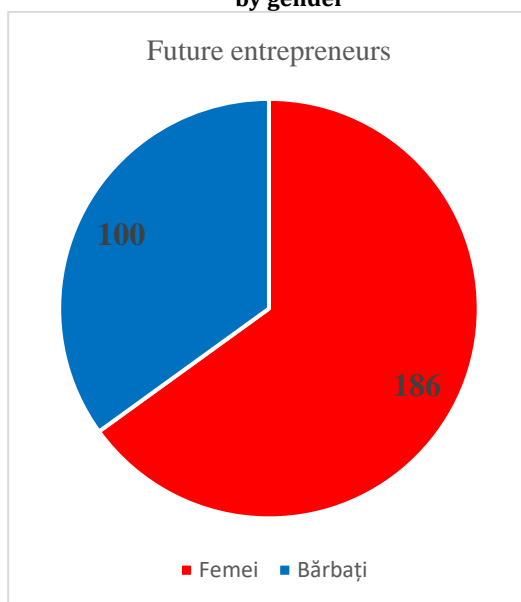


Figure 2. Distribution of future entrepreneurs by gender



Following a frequency analysis regarding involvement in volunteering activities, it is noted that a significant part of those who opened their own business had no previous volunteering experience (N = 18; M = 46.2%). However, among those who performed volunteer activities, the majority did so for the

benefit of the local community (N = 11; M = 28.2%), indicating an awareness of the importance of supporting the community in which they operate.

When it comes to participating in political elections, most entrepreneurs voted at local, regional, national or European level (N = 27; M = 69.2%). Those who did not vote had either age-related reasons (N = 6; M = 15.4%) or did not want to vote (N = 6; M = 15.4%).

For young people who want to open a business, involvement in volunteer activities is also low, most of them having no experience in this field (N = 150; M = 52.4%). However, among those who were volunteers, the majority chose to get involved in activities aimed at supporting the local community (N = 67; M = 23.4%), followed by initiatives for the development of Romania (N = 64; M = 19, 7%).

Regarding voting participation, the majority of future Romanian entrepreneurs were active in political elections held at the local, national, regional or European level (N = 142; M = 49.7%). Those who did not vote generally cited a lack of age requirement (N = 83; M = 29%), which emphasizes that young people are interested in civic engagement but are often limited by external factors such as age.

As part of the research, I performed a Chi-Square test after which I noticed a statistically significant connection between the desire to become an entrepreneur and involvement in local organizations aimed at improving the local community (Chi-Square = 4.466; df = 1; p = 0.035). However, according to the results obtained, the magnitude of this link is very weak (Cramer's V/Phi = 0.080) (table 2). A possible explanation could be that involvement in such organizations can only be a first step in developing an entrepreneurial mindset, but not a major catalyst.

We went on to conduct a Chi-Square test that revealed a statistically significant correlation between the desire to become an entrepreneur and involvement in organizations dedicated to promoting human rights or global development. The results of the test (Chi-Square = 5.223; df = 1; p = 0.022) indicate that there is an association between these two variables. However, according to the obtained results, the magnitude of this link is very weak (Cramer's V/Phi = 0.087) (table 2). This weak association could indicate that although human rights activism may stimulate social awareness and initiative, other factors play a much more important role in determining the willingness to become an entrepreneur, such as economic or personal motivations.

As part of the research, we performed a Chi-Square test, which revealed a statistically significant link between the desire to become an entrepreneur and involvement in organizations active in the field of climate change (Chi-Square = 8.484; df = 1; p = 0.004). However, according to the obtained results, the magnitude of this link is weak (Cramer's V/Phi = 0.111) (table 2). This may reflect the fact that concern for climate issues can stimulate a social sensitivity but is not a major determinant in the development of entrepreneurial ambition.

Table 2: Chi-square test between willingness to become an entrepreneur and involvement in social organizations

	Chi-Square	Mr	p
Local organizations aimed at improving the local community	4,466	1	0.035
Organizations that promote human rights or global development	5,223	1	0.022
Organizations working in the field of climate change	8,484	1	0.004

Continuing the analyses, we verified, through a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the distribution of the variables related to involvement in the last two years in activities within organizations with social missions. Thus, we noticed that the variables related to participation in sports clubs (D (286) = 0.505; p < 0.005), in youth organizations (D (286) = 0.486; p < 0.005), in cultural organizations (D (286) = 0.527; p < 0.005), in organizations aimed at improving the local community (D (286) = 0.524; p < 0.005), in other NGOs (D (286) = 0.518; p < 0.005), in organizations promoting human rights (D (286) = 0.539; p < 0.005), in organizations targeting climate change (D (286) = 0.529; p < 0.005) are abnormally distributed.

Considering the abnormal distribution of the variables, to test the second hypothesis, we performed a testnonparametric Mann-Whitney. Following the results obtained, we identified statistically significant differences between men and women only in terms of involvement in sports clubs (U = 9819.5; z = -4.743; p < 0.005).

Following a Chi-Square test, we did not notice a statistically significant relationship between wanting to become an entrepreneur and signing a petition (Chi-Square = 0.041; df = 1; p = 0.839) (Table 3). Since the relationship between the desire to become an entrepreneur and signing a petition is not

statistically significant, this may suggest that involvement in petition actions, which are forms of civic participation, is not directly associated with entrepreneurial orientation. This may indicate that those who aspire to entrepreneurship do not necessarily show an increased interest in participating in protest actions or petitioning, activities that may involve more civic activism than economic activities.

Following a Chi-Square test, we did not notice a statistically significant relationship between the desire to become an entrepreneur and participation in volunteer activities (Chi-Square = 0.081; $df = 1$; $p = 0.777$) (table 3). Volunteering, although an altruistic and collaborative activity, may not be directly related to entrepreneurial motivations, which may be more focused on individual initiative, risk-taking, and economic independence, versus collaborating for charitable or social purposes.

Following a Chi-Square test, we noticed a statistically significant relationship between the desire to become an entrepreneur and participation in projects that involved young people from other cities (Chi-Square = 4.994; $df = 1$; $p = 0.025$) (table 3). However, according to the obtained results, the magnitude of this link is very weak (Cramer's $V/\Phi = 0.085$). A possible explanation for the obtained results could be that participation in such projects may expose individuals to extensive social networks and learning opportunities, aspects that are essential for the development of an entrepreneurial mindset, but this influence is not strong enough to suggest a strong causal relationship.

Following a Chi-Square test, we did not notice a statistically significant relationship between the desire to become an entrepreneur and participation in protest actions (Chi-Square = 3.049; $df = 1$; $p = 0.081$) (Table 3). Protests are often oriented towards political or social change and may involve a different dynamic than that required for entrepreneurship, which involves focusing on economic initiatives and innovation. Although both involve a degree of mobilization, they appear to be motivated by different values and goals.

Following a Chi-Square test, we noticed a statistically significant relationship between the desire to become an entrepreneur and civic activities organized by NGOs (Chi-Square = 5.082; $df = 1$; $p = 0.024$). However, according to the obtained results, the magnitude of this link is very weak (Cramer's $V/\Phi = 0.086$) (table 3). This result may reflect that participation in such activities provides opportunities for leadership, social networks and organizational practices, which may stimulate interest in entrepreneurship, but not in a decisive way.

Following a Chi-Square test, we did not notice a statistically significant relationship between the desire to become an entrepreneur and participation in projects involving young people from other countries (Chi-Square = 2.959; $df = 1$; $p = 0.085$) (table 3). International projects, while exposing individuals to diverse perspectives and practices, do not seem to provide a strong enough stimulus to influence entrepreneurial aspirations. The motivations for participating in such projects may be more related to cultural development and global collaboration than to entrepreneurship.

Following a Chi-Square test, we did not notice a statistically significant relationship between the desire to become an entrepreneur and participation in public debates or consultations (Chi-Square = 0.281; $df = 1$; $p = 0.596$) (table 3). These activities are usually oriented towards democratic participation and influencing public policies, which do not necessarily align with the entrepreneurial spirit, which is more focused on private initiative and economic innovation than on collective decision-making processes.

Table 3: Chi-square test between the desire to become an entrepreneur and involvement in activities that seek social change

	Chi-Square	Mr	p
Signing a petition	0.041	1	0.839
Participation in volunteer activities	0.081	1	0.777
Participation in projects involving young people from other cities	4,994	1	0.025
Participation in protest actions	3,049	1	0.081
Participation in civic activities organized by NGOs	5,082	1	0.024
Participation in projects involving young people from other countries	2,959	1	0.085
Participation in public debates or consultations	0.281	1	0.596

Next, we checked, through a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the distribution of the variables related to the involvement in the last two years in civic activities. Thus, we noticed that the variables related to signing a petition ($D(286) = 0.358$; $p < 0.005$), participation in volunteer activities ($D(286) = 0.359$; $p < 0.005$), participation in projects involving young people from other cities ($D(286) = 0.407$; $p < 0.005$),

participation in protest actions ($D(286) = 0.495$; $p < 0.005$), participation in civic activities organized by NGOs ($D(286) = 0.486$; $p < 0.005$), participation in projects involving young people from other countries ($D(286) = 0.443$; $p < 0.005$), participation in public debates or consultations ($D(286) = 0.484$; $p < 0.005$).

Considering the abnormal distribution of the variables, to test the second hypothesis, we performed a nonparametric Mann-Whitney test. Following the obtained results, we identified differences between men and women only in terms of involvement in volunteer activities ($U = 10915$; $z = -2.017$; $p < 0.044$). However, the data are not conclusive enough to determine whether these differences are statistically significant.

6. Conclusions

The present study investigated the civic involvement of young people in Romania who aspire to become entrepreneurs, using quantitative data obtained from a questionnaire applied in the framework of a more extensive research. The results highlight a significant potential for entrepreneurship among young Romanians: only 4.4% of respondents have already launched their own business, but 32.5% intend to become entrepreneurs in the future. This percentage reflects an important openness to entrepreneurial initiative, but also highlights the major barriers that prevent this process, including the complexity of starting a business and the lack of essential skills. Many of those not interested in entrepreneurship cited these obstacles, thus suggesting an urgent need for educational programs and specific support for youth entrepreneurship. These findings are aligned with the data of a recent European study (European Union, 2023), which underlines the fact that the challenges faced by young people in Romania are similar to those on the entire continent. In this context, the need for coherent political and economic measures to support the entrepreneurial initiative of young people is becoming increasingly evident.

According to the theory of prosocial behavior proposed by Bénabou and Tirole (2006), a behavior oriented towards the well-being of the community can be integrated into economic processes, and in this study, we identified a link between the desire to become an entrepreneur and involvement in social organizations, such as concerning human rights, climate change or the development of local communities. Although these links are statistically significant, their intensity is low, indicating that civic engagement has a potentially magnified influence on the development of a socially responsible and community-oriented entrepreneurial mindset. Economic motivations seem to play a more important role in the decision to start a business.

Furthermore, the results show that participating in more active forms of civic engagement, such as signing petitions or participating in protests, is not directly correlated with the desire to become an entrepreneur. This suggests that young people with entrepreneurial ambitions are not necessarily attracted to civic activism, but rather focus on economic initiatives. On the other hand, involvement in projects involving collaboration with young people from other cities or participation in activities organized by NGOs was associated with the desire to become an entrepreneur, although the links are of low intensity. This aspect shows that exposure to collaborative networks and opportunities for personal development can play a role in forming an entrepreneurial mindset but is not a decisive factor.

In conclusion, although young Romanians show considerable interest in entrepreneurship, the existence of important barriers and the limited influence of civic involvement on this process suggest the need for clearer and more effective support measures. At the same time, the results indicate that entrepreneurship and civic and community involvement represent two interconnected fields, at the level of motivations and dynamics, both of which are important for the socio-economic development of young people and the community.

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