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Youth Entrepreneurship and Role Models at Local Level. Case Study: Bihor County, Romania

Anca Otilia DODESCU¹, Ioana Crina POP COHUȚ²

Abstract

In the context of promoting inclusive entrepreneurship in Romania, the present paper addresses the issue of youth as a disadvantaged group on the labour market and under-represented in entrepreneurship from a local perspective and highlights the role models as a key instrument for encouraging youth entrepreneurship. Thus, in addition to a brief theoretical background about youth entrepreneurship and policies to stimulate business creation among young people in the European Union (EU) and Romania, we analysed the statistics on the labour market and youth business creation in Bihor County, Romania and conducted a qualitative research based on an in-depth interview applied to 12 young entrepreneurs from Bihor County, Romania. The research findings outline a local perspective about the motivations, opportunities, obstacles and difficulties of youth entrepreneurship in an EU lagging region, the access to finance, the role of education, family, support networks and the influence of models from local business environment for young entrepreneurs, their business identity in the local business environment, and how entrepreneurship changes young people's perception of business creation and self-employment. The main conclusion of the paper is that, despite the Romanian legislation and policies that are not friendly enough to youth entrepreneurship as well as local business environment, and despite erroneous perceptions of young people about financing a business, there are young models who had the courage to change their lives for good, who succeed and recommend to other young people to become business owners or self-employed. Alongside facilitating access to finance, role-models are, in our opinion, the most important tool for promoting youth entrepreneurship at local level.

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Keywords: *youth entrepreneurship, role models, access to finance, Bihor County, Romania.*

1. Introduction

The present paper sets out from an inspiring approach to the concept and policies devoted to inclusive entrepreneurship of the Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Programme of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [36], and of the Community of Practice on Inclusive Entrepreneurship (COPIE)[8], according to which everyone should be able to start their own business and get adequate support for a professional start-up [9]. In this approach, inclusive entrepreneurship is more than creating their own business – it is the “set of attitudes, competences and skills which allow people to turn their dreams into concrete projects or ‘enterprises’” [8], and the policy on inclusive entrepreneurship addresses not only the promotion of entrepreneurship but also the self-employment of people at risk in the labor market [9].

In the current context of the European Union (EU), the issue of young people is by far the most pressing one in this respect. As the 2015 EU Youth Report shows, the economic crisis has particularly hit young people, increasing the number of those at risk of disengagement, marginalization, or even radicalization [18]. In 2016, according to Eurostat data, of the total of nearly 90 million young people (15-29 year olds), representing 17% of the total EU population: 8.7 million do not manage to find a job; 13.7 million are neither employed nor in education or training (NEET); nearly 27 million are at risk of poverty or social exclusion [20]. The most serious cause for concern is unemployment. Although in decline compared to 2013 when it reached the maximum (18.9%), the youth unemployment rate in the EU in 2016 is 14.7% - almost double the average unemployment rate (8.6%), according to Eurostat [20]. Self-employment rates for young people are around 50% of the overall rate of self-employment [34, 35]. The EU supports young people in terms of employment, employability and social inclusion, notably through its Jobs, Growth and Investment Agenda, Europe 2020 Strategy and through EU funds such as Erasmus +, the European Social Fund (ESF) and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)[18].

The problem of youth unemployment has become chronic in Romania as well as across the EU. An unemployment rate among young people 4 times the average unemployment rate in 2016 [25] combined with a self-employment rate among young people at about half of the average self-

employment rate [35] along with the lowest density of SMEs in the EU [19] combined with the highest level of potential entrepreneurship in the EU [19], outlines suggestively, in our opinion, the context of youth entrepreneurship in Romania.

In the context of a high but not exploited latent entrepreneurial spirit, the stimulation of youth entrepreneurship is a priority for Romania. However, as the literature review of recently published research and policy papers shows, local context and role-models are critical for youth entrepreneurship.

The present paper addresses the issue of Romanian youth as a disadvantaged group on the labour market and under-represented in entrepreneurship from a local perspective and highlights the role models as a key instrument for encouraging youth entrepreneurship.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the situation of youth unemployment and business creation in Romania and analyzes the scientific literature in the field of youth entrepreneurship in order to operationalize the research problem, research hypotheses and to select research methods for stimulating youth entrepreneurship at local level, Section 3 considers the research questions and hypotheses, respectively the research design used to address the research hypothesis, Section 4 presents the findings of the research for Bihor County selected as case study and Section 5 summarizes and concludes the paper.

2. Problem Statement

2.1. Youth Unemployment and Business Creation in Romania

In Romania, according to the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), during the period 2000-2016, the analysis of employment and unemployment rates shows a progressive worsening of the situation of young people (15-24 year olds) [25]. In 2016, the youth employment rate is about one-third of the total employment rate. The youth unemployment rate (15-24 year olds), compared to the unemployment rate for those aged 25 and over, increased alarmingly year after year throughout the period 2000-2014 from 18.4% (compared with an average rate of 5.1%) in 2000 to 24% (compared with an average rate of 5.1%) in 2014, followed by a decrease to 20.6% (compared with an average rate of 4.8%) in 2016 [25].

Unemployment rates for people with medium or low education are about 1% to 5% higher than in the case of people with higher education; people with a medium level of education tend to be more affected than those with a low level of education during the period 2000-2016 [25].

According to the OECD, the self-employment rate for young people in Romania is about half of the average self-employment rate [35].

Romania has the lowest density of SMEs (the number of SMEs per thousand inhabitants) in the EU. With 24.06% in 2013, Romania is around half of the EU average, well below the average in other EU member states, such as the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Sweden, which are above the average EU with around 70 SMEs per 1,000 inhabitants [19].

Paradoxically, however, the density of SMEs at half the EU average coexists in Romania with the highest level of potential entrepreneurship in the EU according to the Small Business Act (SBA) [19]. In 2015, although Romania's SBA performance is well below the EU average for four principles – “skills and innovation” (worst performance), “internationalization”, “environment” and “single market”, and the scores for “second chance”, “receptive administration”, “state aid and public procurement” and “access to finance” is at the level of the EU average, Romania is the leader of the EU in terms of “entrepreneurship” [19].

2.2. Youth Entrepreneurship. Literature review

Starting from the OECD/EC inclusive entrepreneurship framework [34], youth is considered the most disadvantaged group compared to employment and entrepreneurship at EU level, addressing both business creation and self-employment for youth is the most important strategic option for promoting entrepreneurship, securing labour market and reducing social exclusion at present [35].

Our analysis of youth entrepreneurship is derived from a larger research regarding women entrepreneurship in Western Romania [3, 12, 13, 4] and inclusive entrepreneurship in Romania in the context of European Union [15, 16, 17, 30]. We concluded that the target groups for inclusive entrepreneurship policy in Romania are partially different compared to the EU general context, but youth is the most disadvantaged group, followed by women and rural people [15, 16], and the most sensitive issue for boosting inclusive entrepreneurship in Romania is designing specific measures tailored on local needs [17, 30].

Starting from the social and cultural aspects of entrepreneurship, research in the field proves that inclusive entrepreneurship target groups have different particularities – women have a smaller inclination to entrepreneurship than men, ethnic minority may create a feeling of insecurity that encourages entrepreneurial success, while young people encounter the greatest difficulties in accessing financing [6, 29], but local needs analysis is always a key factor in entrepreneurship policy [24, 1].

Looking at age as determinant of entrepreneurship, most of studies undertaken suggest that individuals are increasingly likely to become entrepreneurs as they age. According to Parker - "entrepreneurship is concentrated among individuals in mid-career i.e. between thirty-five and forty-four years of age" [29, p 114] and "age may have different effects on the willingness and opportunity to become an entrepreneur" [29, p. 115].

Defining entrepreneurship as "a fluid process that relies on the bidirectional interplay between a developing individual and his or her context", Geldhof et al. [22] show that the scientific study of youth entrepreneurship is "truly in its infancy" and there is still much to study to understand how entrepreneurial intentions and actions manifest in youth.

The obstacles of youth entrepreneurship vary from the access to finance as shows Parker [29] to the lack of social relations in the community and discourses of youth as "at risk" as shows Dejaeghere, Wiger and Willemsen [10]. According to Sikenyi, the lack of social networks, entrepreneurial skills and mentorship and inadequate support structures might explain young people exclusion from entrepreneurship [31].

The analysis of the empirical case studies of youth entrepreneurship emphasizes the relevance of strong entrepreneurial attributes in developing financially capable young entrepreneurs in Malaysia [2], cultural context in the development of youth enterprise potential in Portugal [5], teaching creativity and problem-solving skills in Nigeria [28], implementing a skills development and entrepreneurship education programs in Tanzania [10], entrepreneurial programs through models and case studies and of co-curricular activities supporting entrepreneurship in Romanian universities [32, 7, 37, 23, 21] etc.

According to Parker, an absence of entrepreneurial role models might explain the lower rate of entrepreneurship among ethnic minorities, "fewer favourable role models could translate into weaker pro-entrepreneurial attitudes among young blacks" [29, p. 174]. The positive relation between role models and inclusive entrepreneurship is highlighted by many researches, studies, case studies, including in Romania [11, 32], where real role models for the youth entrepreneurial education are missing, as show Szabo and Marian [32]. Nevertheless, even the relevance of local needs and role models from local business environment for young entrepreneurs is well known, stimulating youth entrepreneurship through role models at local level is almost understudied.

3. Research Design

Starting from above theoretical background, the present research aim is to outline a local perspective about the motivations, opportunities, obstacles and difficulties of youth entrepreneurship in an EU lagging region, about the influence of role models from local business environment for young entrepreneurs and how entrepreneurship changes young people's perception of business creation and self-employment.

Accordingly, our research hypotheses have been developed as follows:

H1: *Education is the most important factor for youth entrepreneurship at local level.*

H1: *Access to finance is the most important obstacle for youth entrepreneurship at local level.*

H2: *Alongside facilitating access to finance, role-models is the most important tool for promoting youth entrepreneurship at local level.*

In order to outline a local perspective of youth entrepreneurship in an EU lagging region at a descriptive level and to highlight the role models as a key instrument for encouraging youth entrepreneurship, as well as the extrapolation of the specific results at national level, we chose as a case study the Bihor County of Romania, we analysed the statistics on the labour market and youth business creation of this county, and conducted a qualitative research based on an in-depth interview applied to 12 young entrepreneurs from this county. The qualitative semi-structured interview method was chosen to allow an in-depth understanding of the influence of models from local business environment for young entrepreneurs, as well as the role of access to finance, education, family, support networks in stimulating entrepreneurial motivation and overcoming obstacles.

The interview guide was structured in four parts, as follows: 1. *Demographic profile*: the name and surname of the entrepreneur, place and date of birth, studies, year of business creation, company name and business field, company website or Facebook; 2. *Business profile*: brief description of company activity, number of employees, turnover, brand identity, business engagement in the local business environment, customer profile; 3. *Entrepreneurial story*: where the business idea originated, sources of funding, the roles of family, education, business support services, etc. in business creation, difficulties and obstacles encountered; 4. *Motivational aspects and role models*: the motivation to start a business, the importance of a business role model, the influence of models from the local business environment on business creation, the motivation to continue the business, the willingness to motivate and recommend starting a business to other young people, to get

involved in promoting entrepreneurship to young people, recommending and recognizing the merits of other young entrepreneurs.

The sample was chosen through a non-probability sampling technique both by evaluation and by identification. The selection of respondents targeted people aged 15-29 (young people in EU sense) with a business experience of less than 5 years and covering a broad range of fields of activity in all economic sectors, including production. As a first step, the potential respondents were sent the interview guide via e-mail, then they were contacted on the phone to determine the date of the face-to-face interview. From a total of 60 potential respondents contacted from Bihor County, 12 young entrepreneurs were interviewed. The difficulties encountered in selecting a sufficient number of entrepreneurs aged 15-29 have led us to raise the age threshold to 35 years. Data collection was conducted between 1 September and 31 October 2017.

4. Findings. Bihor County Case Study

4.1. What Does the Statistical Data Say?

Bihor County fits in the national context with regard to the youth employment and unemployment situation. However, it presents a number of particularities in terms of demographic trends, employment and unemployment, business creation.

According to NIS – Bihor County Office of Statistics data, of the 575,398 inhabitants of the county in 2011 (at the last Population Census), 112,432 are young (aged 15-29), representing 19.7% of the total population of Bihor County, 73,898 are aged 15-24 years, representing 12.8% of the total population of Bihor County [26]. By place of residence, according to NIS - Bihor County Office of Statistics, of the 619,653 permanent residents of Bihor County on 1 July 2015, 51.58% live in the urban area, 117,620 are young people aged 15-29 years, representing 18.98 % of the total population of Bihor County, respectively 69,610 are aged 15-24, representing 11.23% of the total population of Bihor County [26].

From the perspective of employment and unemployment, the Bihor County's situation is better than the situation existing at national level. At the end of 2016, it amounts to 262.8 thousand people, the average number of employees being 153,529, the number of registered unemployed – 9,601 persons, and the unemployment rate of 3.5% is well below the national average of 5.9% [26]. In 2016, although Bihor County has an employment rate (71.6%) more than 5% higher the national average, the monthly average net nominal earning of 1,396 lei puts it among the counties with the lowest

average salary level, which is the main vulnerability of the local economy. Even if the unemployment rate in Bihor – 2.39%, in September 2017, stands at half the average unemployment rate in Romania, the situation of the young people does not differ from the one existing at national level. In September 2017, in Bihor County, the total number of unemployed is 6,507 persons, most of them young (under 25 years) – 1,473 persons, respectively persons with low level of education (primary, gymnasium and vocational) – 4,875 persons, and with a duration of unemployment of 3 to 6 months [33].

From the perspective of developing the SME sector and business creation, the situation of Bihor County is also better than the situation at national level. In 2015, the SME sector accounted for 99.70% of the total active local units in Bihor County and contributed 78.22% to the total turnover achieved in the Bihor County [26]. There were 17,891 commercial companies, of which 17,581 SMEs (0-249 employees) and 52 large enterprises (250 employees and over) and 11,104 private entrepreneurs, of which 10,729 independent persons and 375 family associations. Of the total SMEs, 87.20% are micro-enterprises (0-9 employees), 10.75% have between 10-49 employees, 1.75% have between 50-249 employees [26]. In the period 2016-2017, the number of new start-ups registered a revival in Bihor County, with a total of 4,134 companies compared to 2,796 in 2016, an increase of 47.85%. Of these, the largest increase was registered by new LLCs, with a share of 48.82% and that of self-employed persons by 23.79%. [27].

According to Bihor County's Sustainable Development Strategy for the period 2014-2020, Bihor County aims to become a dynamic and competitive county by 2020, to be recognized as a gateway to Western Europe where entrepreneurship initiatives are sustained actively by public institutions through appropriate public quality services and infrastructure. Encouraging entrepreneurship and development of small and medium enterprises is one of the main directions of action aimed at identifying and promoting successful cases of entrepreneurs in the county, and, along with the development of business support services, represents a specific objective at the level of Bihor County [4].

4.2. What Do the Interviews Say?

After analyzing the interviews on the four components outlined in the interview guide, the main results are presented below.

1. Demo-economic profile

Of the total of 12 interviewees, 7 are women. The age of respondents ranges from 24 to 35 years, half of those interviewed are under 30 years of age. All interviewees were born in Bihor County and live in Bihor County, most of them in the city of Oradea. Most interviewees have higher education, 66.67% of them have university education in the economic field. Taking into account the business creation year, most interviewed entrepreneurs have a business experience between 2 and 5 years (7 people), and 5 people have less than 2 years of experience. All the interviewed entrepreneurs are the initiators, but also the administrators of their companies and are self-employed. Firms initiated and administered by the interviewed entrepreneurs are active in the following areas: agriculture (production and retail of vegetables and fruits), processing industry (manufacture of pastries and fresh pastry products, manufacture of soap and maintenance products, cosmetics and perfumery), services (travel agency, restaurant, services and catering for events - weddings and baptisms, on-line clothing retail for women, communication services and on-line media, on-line advertising, financial-accounting services, human resources services, business and management consultancy).

4.3. Business profile

All of the interviewed entrepreneurs' firms fall into the category of micro-entreprises: 60% have up to 3 employees, 40% - between 4 and 8 employees. The turnover for the year 2016 is between 1,000 - 25,000 EUR for 50% of the interviewed entrepreneurs; between 25,000 - 50,000 EUR for 16,7% of the companies; between 50,000 - 100,000 EUR - 16,7% of the companies; between 100.001 and 500,000 EUR 8,3%; over EUR 500,000 for 8.3% of firms. In regards to the identity of the brands created by young entrepreneurs, there are two orientations – a somewhat “classic” orientation of those who are very concerned about the quality of services/products offered to customers, and a more modern approach focused on defining a more individualized identity, centered on experiences and functionality. The word “quality” is found most frequently among the answers of the respondents (25%).

Modern minimalist symbols, simplicity, personalized experiences or functionality are found in the identity of brands of 41.66% of respondents. Regarding the engagement of their own business in the local business environment, the majority (66.67%) are satisfied and optimistic, enjoying the growth of the business in the past two years, having good partners and solid partnerships in the local business environment, and anticipating that their business has growth potential in the future. 8.33% identified a major growth

potential, even doubling the business in the next year. On the other hand, 16.67% of respondents have a more moderate view, considering that they have niche businesses for which customer identification and retention is more difficult, and another 8.33%, even though they are registering their own business growth, are critical of business engagement in the local business environment: „*The only links with the local environment would be: the fact that we created jobs and the fact that we pay the taxes. [...] But often the local context is so changing that it seems to exploit the entrepreneurial environment more than supporting it*” (G.N.). The profile of the young entrepreneurs' customers is also interesting. They know very well who they are addressing, what the profile of their customers is, what the tastes, preferences and what the level of preparation of their customers are. We observe that young people generally appeal to young people (8.33% say they strictly address young people aged between 20 and 35 years) and active people (75% say they address active clients aged between 18 and 55 years). A general characterization of the clients' profile of the young entrepreneurs surveyed would include: people with secondary or higher education from urban areas who appreciate quality rather than quantity, who are mindful of what they consume and are willing to pay the price of quality products and services; they are lovers of beauty, of simplicity, of naturalness, they like to keep informed, to read, to eat healthily, and prefer products grown in the country, in an environment very close to the one they live in day by day.

4.4. Entrepreneurial story

Almost all the stories of interviewed young entrepreneurs start with a dream, an idea, a revelation, a passion, a certain fascination, a “zero point”: “The moment I knew I wanted to do this” (A.C.). Only 2 of the interviewed entrepreneurs declare that the business idea started from an opportunity, namely the need to take over the family business from parents.

The vast majority (83.33%) of the surveyed entrepreneurs created the business relying on their own savings, family support or “small personal loans” (A.C.). None of the respondents said they had difficulty accessing funding because they all started with small sums: “We invested a very small amount in the business at first; although money was not a problem, I wanted to start a so-called “garage” business that I could then grow nicely from year to year” (S.S.); „ The amount of money I started my business with was not big. I acquired what was necessary to carry out my business, and I enriched the material assets of the firm in the long run” (I.O.). Generally, they started with modest amounts between 1,000 and 10,000 EUR. Only 16.67% of respondents have used bank loans between 5.000 - 50.000 EUR.

Three quarters of the respondents say the family has played a role in the business creation process, and they have benefited from the support of family members after starting the business. 66.67% of the respondents attribute a very important role to the family: “My family played a very important role since it supported me from the first moment in all possible ways” (T.O.), while only 8.33 percent attribute a small role to the family: „My parents were skeptical, and my husband too, because I was quite exuberant and I think they were afraid of a failure. Somehow my mother gave me support, even though not very vocally, but if I asked her to start a company for me, she would do it with fear, but without having my back (my mother is an accountant), and my husband told me he would be by my side even if things didn’t work out, but he was quite afraid because we had debts” (A.T.). On the opposite side, 25% of respondents do not attribute any role to the family in the story of their business.

The role of education in creating a business is the second most important factor after the family for young entrepreneurs. 58.33% of interviewed entrepreneurs consider that education in the business sphere played a very important role: “My economic education has helped me in this endeavor because a firm is considered to be a living body that needs to be supported from various points of view: planning, managing, advertising, customer relationship, doing the job itself, etc., and my educational training so far has certainly helped to accomplish all these” (T.O.), “I majored in Economics, which helped me with the management of the firm, and my studies in Pharmacy gave me the added benefit of creating quality products that also have curative beneficial effects on the skin” (B.I.). 8.33% of respondents attribute an average role to education: “my university degree and master’s degree have helped form a general knowledge about business” (G.L.). On the other hand, one-third of the respondents (33.33%) do not attribute any role to education, on the one hand, because the specialization of the undergraduate studies is in a totally opposite field to the one in which they operate, and on the other hand, they consider that school did not develop them in the direction of entrepreneurship: “School actually prevented me from developing myself in the direction of entrepreneurship. Instead, there were events I attended that had nothing to do with school but which were more relevant in helping me get an idea of what the entrepreneurial context means” (G.N.).

Even if they assign a significant role to education, young entrepreneurs say that they relied very much, beside education, on themselves, and their own experience in the local or international business environment as an employee and the desire for life-long learning have helped them along the way: “... 80% I was my own mentor” (A.C.); „ ... the

virtually innate spirit and the awareness that education is a continuous process” (A.A.).

While family, education, and themselves are the main anchors on which they created their business, it is interesting to note that no respondent assigns any role to business support structures, support networks, etc., saying they have not benefited from any support such as: counseling for creating a business or services specific to a business incubator. This indicates a gap that needs to be further addressed at local level.

Therefore, the H1 hypothesis is not confirmed, the education is the second most important factor after the family for young entrepreneurs and followed by themselves in Bihor County case.

The main difficulties and obstacles which young entrepreneurs encounter are, in order of frequency:

- relations with the state, bureaucracy (41.66%): “The biggest obstacle is the state. The laws. Bureaucracy. We lose ourselves in papers... There are some pressures demanding wage increases in the private environment” (A.C.); “the biggest impediment is the lack of information and concise regulations, in a system that is, I have to say, quite twisted” (S.S.); “somebody teaching me, as a young entrepreneur, how to work with the state institutions, what to pay attention to, what ‘dangers’ are related to the misunderstanding of documents and accounting situations, etc.” (P.L.);

- lack of money and financial support dedicated to young entrepreneurs (41.66%): “Yes, there were moments at the beginning when I was thinking about where I would get money from to pay salaries or taxes, but we overcame them” (G.L.); „ You need financial support so you can start without being immobilized by fear of consequences if you fail” (AT);

- lack of experience and the preconceptions of people about the young entrepreneurs (33.33%): “the fact that I am perceived as young/inexperienced for this field” (B.F.); „ the fact that I am young and without a generous financial base to rely on to start my business” (T.O.); „being young was an obstacle. That's why I would rather talk on the phone” (G.N.); „ my lack of sales experience and of the courage to sell my services” (O.M.).

- lack of promoting successful entrepreneurship examples (16.67%): “few successful entrepreneurship examples promoted” (A.A.).

Consequently, the hypothesis H2 is partially confirmed, acces to finance and relations with the state, bureaucracy are, at the same postion, the most important obstacles which young entrepreneurs encounter in Bihor County case.

4.5. Motivational aspects and role models

The main motivations for business creation among the young people interviewed are: passion (33.33%), financial independence (25%), opportunity (16.67%), personal challenge, experience gained in the former job, family inheritance (each with 8.33%)

Regarding the importance of a role model in creating a business and the influence of models from the local business environment on creating a business - 33.33% assign a very important role to a role model - one person or several people in the family, from the local business or education environment: “My role model is a business woman from Oradea. I can say that at the beginning of my career I was inspired by the elegant style of approaching things through competence, intelligence and kindness” (L.P.); „ These people, including the professors from the university I have graduated from, have helped me greatly to develop myself”(S.S.); 16.67% declare that one of the family members is a role model: “my father - a businessman” (G.L.); “He (the husband) was a role model for me in terms of business and management” (B.I.); 16.67% say they did not have a specific role model, but they watched what other entrepreneurs did, or they wanted to be the kind of entrepreneur they would have wanted as a boss. On the other hand, 33.33% of respondents say they did not have a role model, and this can also be correlated with the fact that they complained about the lack of examples of successful entrepreneurs promoted among young people at local or national level.

Regarding the motivation to continue the business, the positive perception of all interviewed young people about the impact of their own business on their own lives and their own person is significant. The analysis of interviews reveals that the creation of one's own business has a major impact on the life of the young entrepreneur. A quarter of those interviewed say their lives have changed radically in the sense that they have to be more responsible, work more, coordinate a team, be more involved: “My life has changed radically. First of all, it's an enormous responsibility. But it is also very satisfying. When you are the captain of the ship, you must know that all the crew depends on you” (A.C.); „You are no longer only responsible for yourself, but you are also responsible for those working in the company, so the perspective is changing” (G.N.); “To have a business means to bring together a team around you that contributes to fulfilling a dream and you can be as involved as you want according to the period of your life that you are going through” (A.T.). It is very interesting to note that 66.67% of young entrepreneurs declare that the major impact of their own business on their lives was the change in perception of themselves: they are more confident in

their own capacities, they like what they do and they do it out of passion, get a sense of fulfillment, are proud of the products and services created, their own business make them more ambitious, etc.: “I became more determined, more wise, more independent” (B.I.); „When you create a business you begin to understand that you are and must be the most important asset of your company. [...] It is extremely important to do something that keeps you passionate because, and I say it honestly, this way you will not even feel that you work most of the time” (S.S.). 16.67% think their lives have changed because they work harder but have a more flexible program, they do what they like, it gives them a sense of fulfillment, and brings them financial rewards. Only 8.33% declare that starting their own business did not have a major impact on their personal life because they were also involved in their role as an employee.

We also consider it extremely significant that all (100%) young entrepreneurs interviewed have expressed their willingness to motivate and recommend creating a business to other young people and to get involved in promoting entrepreneurship among young people; the arguments they would use in this sense are: professional satisfaction, financial independence, personal and professional development, flexible program, positive experiences, the desire to be your own boss, the freedom to do things in their personal style, the ability to use skills and competencies to the full capacity etc.: „You have to do it! The greatest regrets in life are not due to failures, but to missed opportunities. You tried and failed, it's nothing, you're young, you get up, you try again and you'll do it a lot better the second time” (S.S.).

Regarding the recommendation and recognition of the merits of other young entrepreneurs, 75% of young people surveyed listed at least 5 other young entrepreneurs whom they know, admire and recommend them as role models or examples of best practice. In this respect, we find the following opinion very relevant: “I admire any person who has the courage to start something on his own, regardless of age and whether or not they succeed” (O.M.).

Therefore, the H3 hypothesis is confirmed.

5. Conclusions

Our research findings show that in the Bihor County case - family, education, and their selves are the main important stimulating factors for young entrepreneurs; acces to finance and relations with the state, bureaucracy are the most important obstacles which young entrepreneurs

encounter followed by lack of experience, the preconceptions of people about the young entrepreneurs and lack of promoting successful entrepreneurship examples. Alongside facilitating access to finance, role-models is the most important tool for promoting youth entrepreneurship at local level.

Despite the Romanian legislation and policies that are not friendly enough to youth entrepreneurship as well as local business environment, and despite erroneous perceptions of young people about financing a business, there are young models who had the courage to change their lives for good, who succeed and recommend to other young people to become business owners or self-employed.

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