OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ENGAGEMENT OF UNIVERSITIES IN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION: A PILOT EXPERIENCE IN AVEIRO REGION

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RESUMO

A promoção do empreendedorismo e da inovação social tem sido recorrentemente apresentada como uma resolução chave no contexto europeu, como um modelo económico capaz de promover um crescimento que é mais justo, verde e ancorado nas comunidades locais. Há sinais encorajadores de que nos estamos a mover nessa direção, como sociedades que testemunham uma onda de modelos de negócio híbridos, i.e. que perseguem uma missão social ao mesmo tempo que desenvolvem atividades comerciais, como forma de gerar receitas para sustentar as suas operações. Considerando os passos que estão a ser dados tanto ao nível europeu como ao nível regional para a promoção de ecossistemas adequados para as empresas sociais, os atores regionais necessitam melhorar e aumentar a sua capacidade para cooperar e apoiar o crescimento das empresas sociais.

Este contexto coloca uma chamada importante ao papel das universidades no ecossistema da inovação social. As universidades têm sido reconhecidas como atores chave na persecução do objetivo de um desenvolvimento inteligente e inclusivo que tem sido adotado pelas economias europeias, uma vez que detêm recursos importantes que podem ser mobilizados para contribuir para a resolução de problemas sociais. As

universidades podem contribuir para a avaliação do conhecimento, das capacidades e competências presentes numa região apoiando a identificação das áreas de especialização mais promissoras para essa região.

Este artigo descreve a experiência e os resultados de uma iniciativa piloto liderada pela Universidade de Aveiro para envolver os atores regionais na identificação de oportunidades para o desenvolvimento de projetos de inovação e empreendedorismo social. A iniciativa envolveu a colaboração de uma equipa multidisciplinar da Universidade (incluindo investigadores das áreas da Economia, Gestão, Design e Ciências Sociais) e atores chave dos 11 municípios da Região de Aveiro com o objetivo de promover a criação de serviços baseados em estilos de vida sustentáveis. O trabalho de campo seguiu uma metodologia passo-a-passo que incluiu: i) um conjunto de ações preliminares para sensibilizar, aumentar o conhecimento e motivação de atores chave regionais para a área do empreendedorismo e inovação social; ii) uma fase de trabalho de campo exploratório, onde os investigadores interagiram com as populações locais para identificar as principais oportunidades relacionadas com o património local, a partir do qual foi desenvolvido um portfólio de oportunidades; iii) a seleção de uma amostra de oportunidades para o desenvolvimento de negócios sociais; iv) a condução de um conjunto de *workshops*, baseados numa metodologia orientada para o projeto; v) o acompanhamento dos resultados dos *workshops*, incluindo sessões de mentoria para as oportunidades de negócio social mais promissoras e definição da estratégia para a região. Neste artigo, toda a metodologia é descrita e discutida, levando à identificação de fatores críticos de sucesso e dificuldades enfrentadas pelas universidades que pretendem participar no desenvolvimento regional.

Palavras-chave: *Colaboração Universidade-Região, Desenvolvimento regional, Inovação social e empreendedorismo*

ABSTRACT

The promotion of social entrepreneurship and innovation is being persistently put forward as key resolution in the European context as an economic model that is able to promote a growth that is fairer, greener and anchored in local communities. There are encouraging signs that we are moving in this direction, as societies witness a surge of hybrid business models, i.e. pursuing a social mission while engaging in commercial activities in order to generate revenue to sustain their operations. Whereas steps are being taken both at European and regional level for the promotion of adequate eco-systems for social enterprises, regional actors need to improve their ability to co-operate and enhance their capacity to support social enterprise growth.

This context places an important call on the role of Universities in social innovation eco-systems. Universities have been acknowledged as key actors in the achievement of the intelligent and inclusive development goals that have been embraced by European economies, as they embody important resources that can be mobilized to contribute to solutions to social problems. Universities can contribute to a region's assessment of its knowledge assets, capabilities and competencies, supporting the identification of the most promising areas of specialisation for the region.

This paper describes the experience and results of a pilot initiative led by the University of Aveiro for engaging regional actors in the identification of opportunities for the development of social innovation and entrepreneurship projects. The initiative involved the collaboration of a multidisciplinary team of the University (i.e. including researchers from the domains of Economics, Management, Design and Social Sciences) with key actors from the 11 municipalities of the Aveiro Region in order to promote

services based in sustainable lifestyles. The field work involved a stepwise methodology including: i) a preliminary set of actions to increase the awareness, literacy and motivation of key regional actors for the area of social innovation and entrepreneurship; ii) a phase of exploratory field work, where the researchers interacted with local populations to identify key opportunities linked to the local heritage from which an opportunity map and portfolio was developed; iii) the selection of a sample of opportunities for social business development; iv) the conduction of a set of workshops, based on a design-driven methodology, for the specification of projects to be developed with local communities; v) the follow up of workshop results, including mentoring the most promising social business opportunities and setting the strategy for the Region. In this paper the full methodology is described and discussed, leading to the identification of key success factors and constraints faced by Universities aiming to engage in regional development.

Keywords: *Regional development, Social innovation and entrepreneurship, University-Region collaboration*

1. Introduction

Due contextual circumstances, notably the economic crisis, currently we are assisting to the growing focus on the management of limited resources and the resolution of complex problems such as the youth unemployment, the ageing or the environment degradation. Traditional solutions are often inadequate and the market, the public sector and the civil society are not able to respond to these new challenges by itself (BEPA, 2011).

Concepts such as social entrepreneurship, social innovation or social enterprise are becoming more popular between academics and practitioners, as new approaches to more traditional concepts and already well-explored in the literature, like entrepreneurship and innovation. These approaches claim the establishment of new mechanisms of collaboration between sectors as a more effective way to the creation of shared value (European Commission, 2013).

The promotion of social entrepreneurship and innovation is being persistently put forward as a key resolution in the European context and an economic model that is able to promote a growth that is fairer, greener and anchored in local communities (BEPA, 2011). Steps are being taken both at European and regional level for the promotion of adequate ecosystems for social enterprises (European Commission, 2013; TEPSIE, 2014). In this new framework, regional actors need to

improve their ability to cooperate and enhance their capacity to support social enterprises growth.

Universities as key actors in the regional development, have also been acknowledged as key actors in the achievement of the intelligent and inclusive development goals that have been embraced by European Economies (European University Association, 2014), once they embody important resources that can be mobilized to contribute to find solutions to social problems or needs. They can play an important role in a region's assessment of its knowledge assets, capabilities and competencies, supporting the identification of the most promising areas of specialisation for the region.

This paper describes the experience and results of a pilot initiative led by the University of Aveiro for engaging regional actors in the identification of opportunities for the development of social business ideas. The initiative involved the collaboration of a multidisciplinary team of the University with key actors from the 11 municipalities of the Aveiro Region in order to promote the design of services based in sustainable lifestyles. From the analysis of the results of the pilot experience, are identified the key success factors and constraints faced by Universities aiming to engage in regional development.

The paper is organized as follows: in the next section is discussed the emergence of social entrepreneurship and innovation and then in section 3, the role of universities in the regional development; in section 4 is presented the pilot experience and is described the full methodology; finally, are drawn some conclusions concerning the key success factors and constraints faced by universities engaging in the regional development considering the experience of the University of Aveiro.

2. The emergence of social enterpreneurship and innovation

social innovations are defined by Murray, Caulier-grice, & Mulgan (2010: 3) as *"new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collabo-*

rations". On the other hand, Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern (2006: 2) argue that social entrepreneurship is a *"innovative, social value creating activity that can occur within or across the nonprofit, business, or government sectors"*. Examples of social entrepreneurship and innovation initiatives may be very diverse, from a movement of citizens like Refood, working to eliminate food waste and hunger in each neighbourhood, to a social enterprise like ColorADD, aiming to make communication for colour-blind more efficient and inclusive through a licensing system for using colour identification codes in the development of products and signs.

Social entrepreneurship and innovation are becoming a trend in a world where organizations aim to be more responsible and sustainable at the environmental, economic and social levels. Several social enterprises have emerged in the last years, pursuing a social mission while engaging in commercial activities in order to generate revenues to sustain their operations (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Doherty, Haugh, & Lyon, 2014). These new business models with a hybrid nature incorporate the principles of social entrepreneurship and innovation, often involving actors from different sectors in the delivery of a solution to a social problem or need, such as the beneficiaries or volunteers, as stressed in both definitions presented previously. According to Barrutia and Echebarria (2012), regions can achieve major social goals by promoting co-decision and co-creation in networks.

Some authors have studied how the context shapes and is shaped by entrepreneurial activities, notably social entrepreneurship and innovation activities (Friedman & Desivilya, 2010; Newth & Woods, 2014). In order to get legitimacy, social entrepreneurs need to manage the expectations and demands of a wide variety of stakeholders (e.g. formal or informal institutions, the market, etc.), whose support is essential for the successful implementation of the solution they propose (Newth & Woods, 2014). The access to tangible and intangible resources from government or private individuals is considered a key enabler of entrepreneurial activity (Stephan, Uhlaner, & Stride, 2015).

At the European and regional levels, steps are being taken for the promotion of adequate ecosystems for social enterprises. Europe 2020 strategy emphasizes innovation as a central instrument for the promotion of a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, as well as poverty and social exclusion as one of the major concerns. This is a clear signal of the commitment of Europe in this matter that already had an impact in the design of some regional programs which include initiatives directed to the support of social entrepreneurs.

A report published by the TEPSIE project outlines the measures, structures and policies that need to be put in place to support the growth and development of organizations with a social purpose across Europe. In that report are identified several forms of support that are likely to be important for social purpose organizations including, beyond the financial support, non-financial resources such as incubators, business development support, mentoring and coaching, peer to peer support and other professional services (TEPSIE, 2014).

Universities as important actors in the regional context, may also play an important role in the promotion of social entrepreneurship and innovation in the regions they are integrated. In the next section, is discussed the role of universities in the regional development.

3. The role of universities in the regional development

universities contribute to the regional development in many ways, through the several activities related to the three main missions they pursue: teaching and education, research and creation of knowledge, relation with the community (European University Association, 2014). They may enhance regional innovation through their research activities, promote enterprise, business development and growth, contribute to the development of regional human capital and skills and improve social equity through community development (European University Association, 2014; Goddard & Kempton, 2011). Universities are also important to build networks and connections between different regional actors and may help to build and develop a regional identity, as stressed by Doyle (2010) in her work.

Although the study of the role of university in regional development be a well-explored topic in the literature, in the last years has been discussed the role of universities in Smart Specialisation Strategies (European Commission, 2014; European University Association, 2014; Goddard & Kempton, 2011). This new policy approach to economic and social development is promoted by the European Commission and rely on the identification of domains for specialisation in a region or country to address issues of economic competitiveness, growth and social cohesion as outlined in Europe 2020 strategy. The identification of domains for specialization can become especially challenging once it involves several stakeholders and it is necessary to understand how to motivate the participation of these stakeholders and how to make the entrepreneurial process of identification and prioritization of domains for specialization operational (European Commission, 2014). Universities can contribute to Smart Specialisation Strategies not only from a technological point of view, but also giving a large contribution to the non-technological needs of the region, such as in social innovation and participation in cultural and artistic life (European University Association, 2014), namely in terms of capacity building (Shiel, Filho, Paço, & Brandli, 2016).

It is important to understand the benefits universities obtain from their engagement in social innovation processes, once the collaboration between universities and regions only can be sustainable if it generates benefits for both parts. Benneworth and Cunha (2015) refer in their work the tacit knowledge as an important benefit emerging from social innovation processes. This new knowledge is a vital resource for universities and can be used in innovative and rigorous ways to sustain for example new research directions and support innovative teaching, due its degree of novelty.

However, these activities related to the engagement of universities in regional development and in particular in social innovation processes tend to be not evaluated in assessment exercises, what may discourage a greater involvement of academic actors (European University Association, 2014). According to Benneworth and Cunha (2015),

as important as the direct resource benefits from social innovation activities (e.g. income generated or student recruitment) is understanding and assess, in some way, how these benefits contribute to stimulate their own institutional development and evolution, to the performance of their core missions, and to improve their stakeholders' satisfaction.

In the next section is described a pilot experience conducted by the University of Aveiro as well as the main results in order to promote a discussion on the key success factors and constraints faced by universities while engaging in regional development and in particular in the promotion of social entrepreneurship and innovation initiatives.

4. Universities and promotion of social enterpreneurship and innovation: a pilot experience in Aveiro region

4.1 The pilot experience

The pilot experience described in this paper was integrated in the activities for the promotion of entrepreneurship that were defined as part of Platform for the Support and Valorization of Entrepreneurship and Innovation (PAVEI) established under the Business Incubator of Aveiro Region (IERA).

The Region took the creation of IERA as a strategic challenge for the eleven municipalities of Aveiro Region, the business associations and the University, in order to implement a common strategy for the promotion of entrepreneurship and sustainable development of innovative businesses in the region. The innovative character of the adopted incubation model, dictated from the beginning the need to create a strategy to support its effective implementation. In this context, was created the PAVEI as a platform to support the implementation of IERA purposes. Specifically, PAVEI included a set of actions to empower municipalities to be autonomous in managing their business incubators, as well as to stimulate the emergence of new business ideas and support the sustainable development of these initiatives in the region.

The actions defined within PAVEI were organized in several lines of action to the promotion and empowerment for entrepreneurship, which included: the promotion and development of a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in the region, the incubation of new businesses in the framework of the strategic priorities of Aveiro Region, as well as the development of networks and initiatives to support entrepreneurship. Within each of these lines of action were included specific actions to the particular reality of social entrepreneurship and innovation that were implemented over a year by a multidisciplinary team from the University of Aveiro with the collaboration of the municipalities of Aveiro Region. These actions were intended to:

• Empower citizens and organizations for social innovation in order to develop their ability to respond to social needs and challenges through collaborative models of value creation from the resources and heritage of the region;

• Identify opportunities for the development of social entrepreneurship and innovation projects to respond to priority social challenges in the region, from the mobilization of resources, skills of citizens and organizations in a collaborative way;

• Promote the valorization and sustainability of social entrepreneurship and innovation initiatives in the field;

• Disseminate knowledge and best practices of social entrepreneurship and innovation.

This work allowed the creation of a regional space for interaction, shared by the different actors involved in the promotion of entrepreneurship in Aveiro Region, increasing the collaborative work. Figure1 presents the methodology adopted for the development of the pilot experience (the 4 E's methodology), the objectives and the main actors involved in each phase.

Engaging	Exploring	Empowering	Enterprising
Awareness of regional actors	Identification and selection of key opportunities	Development of social business ideas	Mentoring sessions for future social entrepreneurs
Mayors; Municipal interlocutors;	Municipal interlocutors; Local actors (e.g. craftsmen, entrepreneurs, etc.)	Local actors; Unemployed; Students; Etc.	Participants in the previous phase;

Figure 1: The 4 E's methodology adopted for the development of the pilot experience.

The pilot experience comprised the follow steps: i) awareness of regional actors for social entrepreneurship and innovation; ii) identification of key opportunities linked to the local heritage; iii) selection of a sample of opportunities for the development of social businesses; iv) workshops for the development of social business ideas; and v) follow-up of workshop results and definition of the strategy for the Aveiro Region. In the next pages, these steps will be described in detail as well as the main results.

4.1.1 Awareness of regional actors for social entrepreneurship and innovation

All the work was developed with the help of the interlocutors from the eleven municipalities (one by municipality), people working in the city councils, whom guided the team from the university in the field and enabled the contact with local actors.

Therefore, the first step was the awareness of these people for the importance of social entrepreneurship and innovation in the current context. It was conducted a first meeting to present the planned actions and introduce the concepts of social entrepreneurship and innovation, giving some examples of best practices. However, as remained some doubts about these concepts, was scheduled a community of practices and was invited a person from the Institute of Social Entrepreneurship (the organization of reference in supporting social

entrepreneurs in Portugal) to discuss with them these topics, answer their questions and give some more examples of best practices in Portugal and abroad.

This first step was very important to ensure that the interlocutors were aware of the project aims, once their collaboration was needed to identify the local actors to involve in the second step that corresponds to the field work of identification of key opportunities linked to the local heritage for the development of business ideas in the social entrepreneurship and innovation domains.

4.1.2 Identification of key opportunities linked to the local heritage

Following the meetings with the interlocutors, they were asked to identify some local resources and opportunities in their municipality for the development of social business ideas. It was provided a template for the identification of these resources and opportunities and they were invited to classify each opportunity according to its historical value and innovative character, as well as to characterize the socioeconomic potential of the opportunity attributing a score in terms of potential economic impact, impact on local identity and social impact.

After that, a multidisciplinary team from the University of Aveiro (with background on Design, Management and Social Sciences) conducted on average two visits to each municipality, always guided by the local interlocutor, to meet and interview local actors in order to collect data about the potentialities of that territory. Over four months, the team did 27 visits to municipalities and were involved 74 people in the field work.

The next step was the selection of opportunities to integrate the "Portfolio of opportunities for social entrepreneurship and innovation in Aveiro Region".

4.1.3 Selection of a sample of opportunities for social business development

From the field work, were identified a list of local resources and dynamics linked to the heritage that could be valued through social entrepreneurship and innovation projects contributing to the creation of social and economic value and employment opportunities. A selection was conducted in order to identify which opportunities include in the final portfolio, which describes 30 opportunities and existing projects in the field.

The exercise of identification and selection of opportunities had another purpose beyond the development of a portfolio available to everyone through the website and in the format of book at the end of the pilot experience, as one of its outputs. From the final list of opportunities emerged the themes for each one of the four workshops of development of social business ideas to be held later. The four themes are briefly described in Table 1, as they are presented on the website (http://ois-iera.web.ua.pt/?page_id=744).

Table 1: Themes that emerged from the identified opportunities to be considered in the workshops for the development of social business ideas

Theme	Description
#1 Health & Care	Issues related to health, mutual aid between neighbours, organizations and local community. Senior and active aging, intergenerational relationships for a more active citizenship by young people, combating isolation and loneliness, services directed to people with dementia, handicapped, young people with special needs or at risk, etc.
#2 Tourism & Environment	Issues related to the natural heritage of the region, trying to value and preserve in a sustainable way natural resources. Walking trails in ria, rural tourism, awareness of the ria, fishing activities, etc.
#3 Agriculture & Food	Issues related to food/cooking and local products, sustainable food production, the preservation of local knowledge. Establishment of partnerships between schools for the training of chefs, community or school gardens, creating a collection of local recipes to preserve, etc.
#4 Culture & Heritage	Issues related to the preservation of collective memory, sharing of knowledge about crafts, stories, tales, songs, customs, etc. Participation and collaboration of the local community to build a collection of knowledge, cultural valorisation of the built heritage, etc.

The next subsection describes the workshops mentioned previously, specifically their structure, the participants and the main results.

4.1.4 Workshops for the development of social businesses

The second most important output of the pilot experience, was the organization of four workshops for the development of social business ideas. Each one of them took place at a different location. Since the beginning, it was intended that it happens in the municipalities and not at the university, closer the populations and in a more informal context.

The workshops were conducted by a multidisciplinary team from the University of Aveiro with background in Design, Management and Economics. Each workshop had the duration of 12 hours, occurred in two days, based on a design-driven methodology. The first day was dedicated to the organization of working groups, ideas generation, the construction of scenarios and design of a proposal. The second day was dedicated to the discussion of the economic and financial viability of the idea and design of the final proposal incorporating external feedback from potential users.

In the total of the four workshops, there was 62 applications, 44 participants and 12 social business ideas developed in the different themes presented previously. Most of the participants were students and unemployed, about 80% were women and their ages ranged between 22 and 73 years. The workshop with more participants was that with the theme "Tourism & Environment".

At the end of each workshop was distributed an evaluation questionnaire in order to collect the opinion of participants on the training model, identify their strengths and weaknesses. The questionnaire was answered by 40 participants. As main strengths were pointed the collaborative work, the supporting materials and tools (these two aspects were referred by 13 participants) and group activities (referred by 12 participants). Most of the strengths are related to the methodology used and the contents, such as the examples presented during the sessions. On the other hand, as the main weakness of the training model were most frequently referred the time constraints for the development of a social business idea.

When surveyed about what did not correspond to the initial expectations, the participants claim a more emphasis on the study of the financial and economic viability of their idea as well as the possibility to work on the business ideas brought by the participants, the business ideas they already had and would like to develop with the help of others.

Once the participants claim more time for the development of their social business ideas, it was decided to provide them some mentoring

sessions to follow-up the workshop results. This was the last step of the pilot experience that will be described in the next subsection. Additionally, it will be briefly mentioned the definition of the strategy for the Region that occurred in parallel with the other steps of the pilot experience.

4.1.5 Follow-up of workshop results and definition of the strategy for the Region

The mentoring sessions were conducted by a person with experience supporting people in the development of businesses and with knowledge in social entrepreneurship and social innovation domains, once she is also a social entrepreneur. Were organized five mentoring sessions for all the people interested in develop more their idea. The first two sessions were conducted with all the groups simultaneously and the last three were conducted individually. In these sessions were addressed several topics such as the existing sources of funding for social entrepreneurship and innovation initiatives in Portugal, as well as the existing tools for monitoring and impact measurement.

Simultaneously to the pilot experience, was developed work for the definition of a Regional Program for Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Employment which intends to identify actions, strategic orientations and the challenges of public policies, providing a common framework for the Region to consolidate its innovative ecosystem. Between the Program's objectives it is possible identify some of them more related to social entrepreneurship and innovation, such as the enhancement of an entrepreneurial culture (economic and social), notably the "non-technological" innovation, with special emphasis on social innovation; the promotion of new products, services and social businesses; and, the encouragement of a collaborative, interdisciplinary and inclusive learning.

One of the proposed actions is the support and promotion of social innovation projects through the empowerment and development of business ideas and solutions in this field, as well as supporting the establishment of businesses (through mentoring, coaching, awards, etc.). As main target-groups for these set of actions are pointed the

women, youth, and long-term unemployed or socially excluded people.

The definition of this Regional Program was an important step and a clear sign of the commitment of the Region and the University of Aveiro, as a partner of the Region, with the issues related to the development of entrepreneurship and innovation and, in particular, the social entrepreneurship and innovation as key drivers for the future development of the region. This makes believe that will be implemented more actions like that which was described in this section.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The description of the pilot experience conducted by the University of Aveiro can be a starting point to discuss some of the key success factors and main constraints faced by universities engaging in the promotion of social entrepreneurship and innovation at the regional level. Several challenges have emerged throughout the process.

In the initial phase, that aims the awareness of local actors, it is considered critical the choice of the interlocutors. In the particular case of the pilot experience described in the present paper, the interlocutors were people already involved in other activities of IERA. They already were identified as the right person to contact in their municipality, known each other and were aware of the objectives of PAVEI. However, it was important motivate them to the topic of social entrepreneurship and innovation, because their contribution would be vital to the success of the following stages, notably through the identification of local actors and dissemination of the workshops. Moreover, the awareness of mayors was also important to ensure their commitment with the implementation of the strategy defined for the Region.

On the other hand, the field work was essential to better know the region. In previous experiences in which University of Aveiro was involved in the conduction of workshops for the design of social entrepreneurship and innovation ideas, taking place in other municipalities, one of the aspects more frequently pointed by participants

in the evaluation questionnaire was the lack of knowledge about the territory and its dynamics. In this pilot experience, the field work was confirmed as a valuable contribution to identify beforehand some opportunities for the development of social business ideas, raise awareness of social entrepreneurship and innovation between actors who were not involved in the previous phase and disseminate some information about the workshops, motivating these local actors to participate.

The workshops for the development of social business ideas were very important to the capacity building of local communities, bring together people from different backgrounds and create connections between them, as well as to promote innovative training programs and methodologies in communities that typically have no access to them. Although the diversity of participants is beneficial, the diversity of motivations led to some unfulfilled expectations. Some participants wanted to work an idea they already had, with people they knew, and saw the workshops as an opportunity to get some support and mentoring. Others just wanted to learn more about social entrepreneurship and innovation or meet people with different backgrounds to develop an idea they had. Future editions of the workshops should take into consideration this diversity and try to respond to the expectations of these different stakeholders. It is also recognized the need to give more time to participants to develop the social business idea.

Finally, the mentoring sessions were very useful to support the participants in a more advanced phase of development of their projects, although it is identified the need of more support in other domains (e.g. financing) or promote the contact with other people that could help them in the implementation of their social business ideas, such as local incubators.

The present paper intended to discuss the engagement of universities in social entrepreneurship and innovation through the example of the University of Aveiro. Most of the literature on the role of universities on smart specialisation strategies, are theoretical contributions, and the literature on social entrepreneurship and innovation has not

focused yet on the role of universities in the promotion of these new business models. More empirical studies like this are needed, once the dissemination of existing practices represents a step forward in the discussion of this topic.

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