

“A real entrepreneur doesn’t stop when faced with administrative obstacles”

Luisa Alemany, Director of the ESADE Entrepreneurship Institute



Luisa Alemany, director of the ESADE Entrepreneurship Institute, is the mastermind behind the recent publication of the *White Paper on Entrepreneurship in Spain*, a research study funded by the Prince of Girona Foundation that provides valuable insight into the status of entrepreneurship in Spain. The book – the result of more than a year of team work – provides a detailed description of the aspects that contribute to the low percentage of entrepreneurial activity in the country. Alemany is an advocate for change and believes that the future will hold many opportunities for growth.

- What were the reasons behind this research study?

Entrepreneurs are a very valuable force for the economy and society. The goal of the white paper was to try to gain a better understanding of the situation of entrepreneurs in Spain, and to come up with conclusions that could be put into practice to improve entrepreneurship in the future.

- What does the data collected reveal?

In Spain, only 5% of the population are entrepreneurs. Compared to other countries, that figure is pretty low. The book provides consistent data that reveal the problems that entrepreneurs are facing in Spain. For example, we discovered that Spaniards score very low on the main characteristics of entrepreneurial behaviour, such as not being afraid of failure, the capacity to take risks, and creativity. The reasons behind this are mainly cultural. A large percentage of Spaniards prefer security and stable jobs to uncertainty. The news that brings hope is that half of the new entrepreneurs emerging in our country are young people.

- What else did you discover?

We identified, secondly, the key factors that were contributing to the low levels of entrepreneurship in Spain. We found out that there were four main obstacles: cultural barriers, education, funding and administrative paperwork, the latter being the least significant – a real entrepreneur doesn't stop when faced with administrative obstacles! Another finding was that the reputation of entrepreneurs is pretty low in Spain compared to other countries. In the US, entrepreneurs are highly valued and sometimes even become inspirational idols – innovative thinkers such as Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg are just the tip of the iceberg.

- What is this low score in Spain due to?

Our findings showed that entrepreneurs are not well acknowledged partially due to society itself, but also due to the media. The percentage of news devoted to entrepreneurs in Spain is much lower than in other countries. Regarding the financial situation, we saw that just injecting more money wasn't enough and that the key is to encourage new generations of entrepreneurs to start businesses that can make a difference. We have to promote change in education: The only way to change the culture is by educating children so that they can learn, at an early stage, that being an entrepreneur and having initiative is good, and that failure is alright, and sometimes even necessary. The idea is that, in a few generations, these kids will be responsible for educating their children and society will gradually become more and more entrepreneurial.

- What are the main characteristics of a good entrepreneur?

They are academically well documented. Good entrepreneurs have no fear of risk or failure, they have a strong sense of independence, they are creative, they endorse change, they have internal control, and they acknowledge that what happens to them is determined by their actions and not by external factors. Think about it. If you let external factors rule your life, in a way you are accepting that there's a major force beyond your control, so you're not in command of your life. With this attitude of lack of control, the natural response is to lose initiative.

- What is the next step after the publication of the *White Paper*?

We are going to dedicate the next few years to exploring new ways to bring entrepreneurship to schools and to propose new educational models for primary education. If we want to change the culture someday, we have to start by changing education first. In the US, this entrepreneurial spirit is a built-in part of their culture; it pretty much runs in their genes. In Spain, maybe we do have it in our genes, too, but somehow it gets lost down the road. That's why education is crucial. We need to devote efforts to bringing positive change in order to encourage and retain new entrepreneurial talent.