

THE COMPARATIVE PERCEIVED DESIRABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP WITHIN GREEK SCHOOLS

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Abstract

It is generally assumed that extensive provision of enterprise education will result in high levels of entrepreneurship. Greek data appears to run counter to this assumption. Greece consistently shows high levels of business start-up, and intention to act entrepreneurially. Yet there is very little provision of enterprise education within Greek schools. The aim of this paper is to draw on comparative data from across European schools to explore this Greek counter-example, by identifying and analyzing a range of enterprise cognitions. Specific attention is paid to enterprise intention, to the perception that entrepreneurship is a desirable or feasible career option, and to previous exposure to entrepreneurial experiences. The field data was gathered from more than 500 schools stakeholders in seven European countries. Our main findings are that in Greece there is a higher than average intention to start a business even during childhood. We also find that Greek students claim to know enough to start a business, although though they are the least likely European students to have been taught to do so in school. Moreover, Greece has the highest percentage of indirect enterprise experience via the parents. Finally, a significant finding is that despite high levels of intention, experience and perceived knowledge, Greek students appear to be afraid of anxiety and tenseness during start-up. Also, surprisingly, the entrepreneur has an overall negative connotation among them. JEL Classifications: L26, I28.

Keywords: Enterprise Education; Enterprise Culture; Greece; Enterprise Cognition, Intention.

1. Introduction

Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in interest in all things enterprising, encapsulated in the European Union's Lisbon vision of a flexible, innovative, knowledge-driven, entrepreneurial Europe. The role of the education system in achieving this vision, within both schools and universities, has also been much studied and commented upon. However, little attention has been paid to one important aspect of enterprise education, namely, the potential impact of socio-cultural cognitions within the schools environment. Developing under-

standing of this matter is nonetheless critical, since it shapes the needs and aspirations of learners. Greece provides an especially interesting environment for considering the impact of culture upon the educational environment. This is because in spite of very little direct enterprise education, nevertheless Greece reports consistently high levels of entrepreneurship.

It is generally assumed that extensive provision of enterprise education is required for high levels of entrepreneurship to be achieved. Greek data appear to run counter to this assumption. Greece consistently shows high levels of business start-up, and intention to act entrepreneurially. Yet there is very little provision of enterprise education within Greek schools. Why might this be so? Are there clear substitutes for formal enterprise education within the Greek socio-cultural environment? Do Greek young people manage to obtain the skills, aspiration and confidence needed for start-up from other “institutions”?

The aim of this paper is to draw on comparative data from across European schools to explore this Greek counter-example, by identifying and analyzing a range of enterprise cognitions. Specific attention is paid to enterprise intention, to the perception that entrepreneurship is a desirable or feasible career option, and to previous exposure to entrepreneurial experiences.

The European Universities’ Research on the Promotion of Enterprise Education (EUROPE), a Socrates’ funded project, was an extensive, detailed and innovative study of schools-based enterprise education in seven European Union countries. The seven EU countries studied by project partners were: Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom ¹.

This sample contains traditionally entrepreneurial economies, countries with high growth rates, emerging market economies, and countries with a more conservative economic structure. By adopting varied methodological approaches the consortium partners applied multiple lenses to study the relationship between the environment and enterprise education. The project methodology combined an intensive literature review with the use of a range of quantitative surveys, as well as semi-structured interviews and metaphor analysis. The primary research carried out included the views of multiple stakeholders, both within and outside schools.

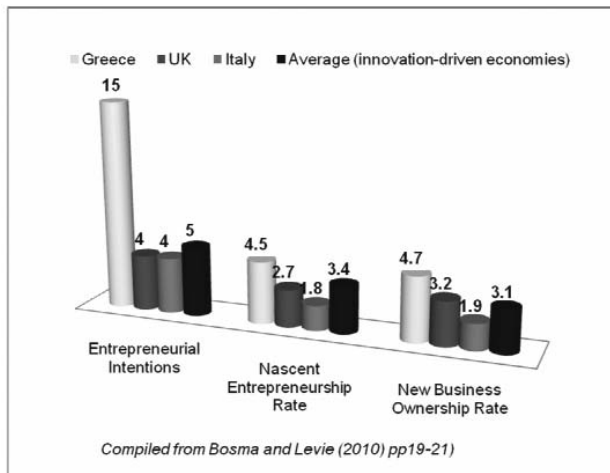
1. The persons leading the National Research Teams in the other partner countries were: Skevos Evripidou (University of Cyprus), Enzo Pontarollo (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milano), Patricia Fleming (University of Limerick, Ireland), Wojciech Wiszniewski (Warsaw College of Economics), Hans Moerel (Radboud University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands) and Nigel Culkin (University of Hertfordshire, UK).

We next present a brief overview of relevant conceptual and empirical material relating to Greek entrepreneurship, to enterprise education, and to social cognitions. Then, we present our methodology for the study's field work, before moving onto elucidate findings. Finally, we discuss the implications of our results for enterprise education in Greece, and beyond.

2. Enterprise Education and Social Cognitions

Greece has historically shown high levels of self-employment, new venture creation, entrepreneurial intention, and preference for self-employment over working for someone else. Recent evidence supports the view that this trend continues. For example, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's 2009 Global Report indicates much higher rates of entrepreneurial intention, nascent entrepreneurship, and new business ownership for Greece, than for other innovation-driven (developed) economies, as Figure 1 illustrates.

FIGURE 1
Gem 2009 Entrepreneurship Indicators



Similarly, Eurobarometer 2007 found that Greece was one of just four countries in the EU15 group for whom self-employment is a preferred career choice to being an employee, and the only one where this preferential trend is growing (Gallop, Hungary: 2007, p. 7). Greece is also in (another) group of four countries, this time from the EU25 region, where entrepreneurs are perceived to have higher status than managers (2007, p. 7). And (again for the EU 25

region), Greece ranked fourth in terms of the greatest increase in those reporting a preference for self-employment over employment, with a gain of 8% as against Eurobarometer 2004 (Gallop, Hungary 2007, p. 53). Greece (33%) comes second only to Iceland (35%), out of all EU25 countries, in proportion of those who report entrepreneurial experience (Gallop, Hungary 2007, p. 58: EU25 average = 23%). Iceland (17%) and Greece (16%) also top the EU25 rankings for respondents who are established entrepreneurs, reporting that “set up or took over a business more than three years ago or over three years ago” (Gallop, Hungary 2007, p. 60). It seems clear, then, that Greece as a nation, enacts, values and desires entrepreneurship.

Yet the picture of entrepreneurship in Greece is not one of unalloyed perfection. Greek enterprises are amongst the smallest in Europe, with just three employees, on average (Voulgaris *et al.*, 2004). Greece reports an above average rate (for innovation-driven countries) of discontinuation of businesses (GEM 2009, p. 21). There is also a pronounced mistrust of the entrepreneur as an archetype. More than 60% of Greek respondents in the Eurobarometer study agreed with the statement that entrepreneurs exploit other people’s work (Gallup, 2007, p. 32). This suspicion has been found to be especially prevalent within the secondary school environment, as Anderson et al’s recent metaphor analysis indicates. Greek schools-stakeholders exhibited very profound mistrust of the entrepreneur, often portraying them as a “ruthless, predatory, criminal exploiter of others” (2009, p. 129).

Enterprise education has risen substantially in prominence in previous decades (Matley, 2006), perhaps even to the extent of appearing a panacea for socio-economic ills. With many countries within Europe introducing some form of compulsory enterprise education for all pupils, Greece is very unusual in having practically no formal classes in entrepreneurship, even as electives, within its schools. Perhaps surprisingly, given this lack of exposure to enterprise education, Greece nevertheless boasts amongst the highest rates of enterprise intention, start-up activity, and venture foundation in the developed world. This study attempts to shed some light upon this apparent contradiction. To do so, we draw on conceptual approaches emphasizing the importance of social cognition to shaping national divergence in entrepreneurial intentions, education, and competences.

Variance in rates of entrepreneurship between countries suggests a need for understanding the underlying international differences in terms of desires, needs and propensities to become entrepreneurs: “developing an appreciation

for the nature of entrepreneurship as socially constructed in different milieux offers a way to grasp what is needed to encourage enterprise” (Anderson *et al.*, 2009: 127).

Given the increasing importance of enterprise education internationally (Katz, 2003) and on the European agenda, it may be especially relevant to uncover divergence within the school environment along such lines. Anderson and Jack (2007) have argued that educational institutions play an important role not just in supplying knowledge to students, but also in shaping attitudes, and enabling them more widely as entrepreneurial products. If pupils from different national contexts express a range of country-specific entrepreneurial perceptions, intentions, cognitions, and experiences, then it is reasonable to argue that their educational needs will also vary. Béchar and Grégoire (2005) have argued along these lines, pointing out that researchers need to further their comprehension of social-cognitive dimensions, and their impact upon entrepreneurship education. The aim of this study is to shed light on entrepreneurial cognitions within Greek schools, in comparison to other European samples. In particular, we wished to address the puzzle of why Greece, with very little enterprise education in place, manages to generate, as a society, such high level of entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial intention. Perhaps we can identify factors which shape youth career preferences, beyond formal educational initiatives.

The 2009 GEM Global Report found that a major theme for their interviews with national experts was that “In practically every country, entrepreneurship education and training in primary and secondary school is one of the worst-rated conditions” (Bosma and Levie, 2010, p. 6). In Greece, lessons or tutorials related to entrepreneurial studies have not been systematically introduced in primary or secondary schools. Nevertheless, some courses refer to organisation and business administration, economics and accounting in upper secondary schools. At the same time at lower secondary school level notions, related to business are included in the framework of technology lessons (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
 Courses included in the National Curriculum of Greece
 (Source: final synthesis report: EUROPE project)

Course	Includes	Level
Principles of Organisation and Business Administration and Services	Entrepreneurship, business operation & administration etc	Upper Secondary
Principles of Economic Theory	Market forms	Upper Secondary
Principles of Accounting	Financial results	Upper Secondary
Technology Courses	Meaning of business, role playing, information processing etc	Lower Secondary
Business Orientation	Self employment	Lower & Upper Secondary

In spite of very sporadic levels of enterprise education, nevertheless, research shows that Greece continues to exhibit a high level of entrepreneurial activity, as we have indicated. This raises the question, where do Greek pupils learn to start businesses? Indeed, where do they learn to want to start businesses? Social-cognition theory, with its emphasis on desirability, feasibility, and previous experiences, is especially well-suited to addressing this issue. Research into entrepreneurial cognition has particularly flourished in the last decade (Krueger, 2000), not least because a high degree of success has been enjoyed in empirical tests of the hypotheses these studies have presented. As psychologists studying entrepreneurship, as well as their colleagues from other branches of psychology, moved away from trait theory approaches, which focused on innate individual characteristics, cognition theories began to gain dramatically in credibility and importance (Delmar, 2000, p. 143).

The conceptual approach here has its roots in theories of planned behaviour, self-efficacy, and social learning. In essence, theories of planned behaviour assume that intention to act – in this case, intention to act entrepreneurially

ally - is determined, in part, by the coming together of prior personal experience and exogenous environmental factors, such as societal approval of enterprise. These combine into perceived feasibility of entrepreneurship – *can* I do it? - and perceived desirability – do I *want* to it? Entrepreneurial intention, the plan to found a new venture, is influenced by both these elements: desirability **and** feasibility.

Perceived feasibility is defined as “the degree to which starting a new business is perceived as a feasible career option” (Krueger and Brazeal, 1994). The five perceived feasibility cognitive script elements measured in the Krueger and Brazeal (1994) scale are: ease of start-up, certainty of start-up success, ability to cope with start-up workload, sureness of themselves about start-up, and adequate start-up knowledge. Perceived desirability is defined as “the degree to which starting a new business is perceived as a desirable career option”. The three perceived desirability cognitive script elements measured in the Krueger scale are: I would love doing it; I would not be tense at all; I would be very enthused. Additionally, exposure to entrepreneurial experience has been shown to be a relevant determinant of feasibility and desirability. This considers the degree to which respondents have been exposed to the entrepreneurial experience through their own actions, and those of people closest to them. The variable also measures the positiveness of such experiences. By measuring and comparing these entrepreneurial cognitions for pupils from Greece, and other comparator nations, we hope to uncover some answers as to the high rates of entrepreneurship in Greece, given very low levels of enterprise education. We are especially interested to identify the nature, degree, and origin, of enterprise competences within the Greek schools environment.

3. Methodology

In order to develop a dataset which was both capable of comparison across cultures, but also rich in meaning, a multi-method approach was developed, beginning with a literature review in each of the partner countries of the history of enterprise education, followed by primary research which engaged with multiple stakeholders using both qualitative and quantitative methods. In this paper we will focus on reporting the findings for one of the survey instruments which we deployed, examining entrepreneurial cognitions.

It was felt important to make use of structured well-tested instruments to facilitate statistical analysis across a number of cultural dimensions, most notably by country. To examine entrepreneurial cognitions with educational

stakeholders we utilized the instrument developed by Krueger (1993) for use with university students, which was also later tested on (Australian) high school students (Peterman and Kennedy, 2003). This questionnaire harvests data on entrepreneurial intention, perceived entrepreneurial desirability and feasibility, and exposure to enterprise experience.

TABLE 2
Sample Demographics
(Source: final synthesis report: EUROPE project)

	Pupils	Teachers	Parents	Entrepreneurs	Business Assoc/ Admin	All
Cyprus	22	12	7	12	2	55
Greece	51	18	7	3	3	82
Ireland	70	13	15	10	3	111
Italy	36	15	6	9	3	69
Netherlands	27	17	9	8	3	64
Poland	28	17	15	12	3	75
UK	20	13	7	7	3	50
Total N	254	105	66	61	20	506
% of Total	50%	21%	13%	12%	4%	100%

Each partner was requested to recruit four secondary schools to participate in the study, attempting to secure representation from schools located in both affluent and under-developed areas, as well as from schools with both positive and negative experiences of entrepreneurship education. This process produced a final sample of 506 respondents. As Table 2 shows, of these, 50% were pupils, and 21% teachers. Pupils were all engaged in secondary education, and aged between 14 and 19.

The lead partner supplied a digital (SPSS) data entry spreadsheet to all partners facilitate the generation of transnational results. These were duly returned

to the lead partner, where a six-month research effort took place, using standard statistical tools to formally test the key hypothesis of the project, and to explore the implications of specific inter-relationships between the environment and various aspects of enterprise education. Descriptive statistics have been used to carry out the analysis presented in this paper.

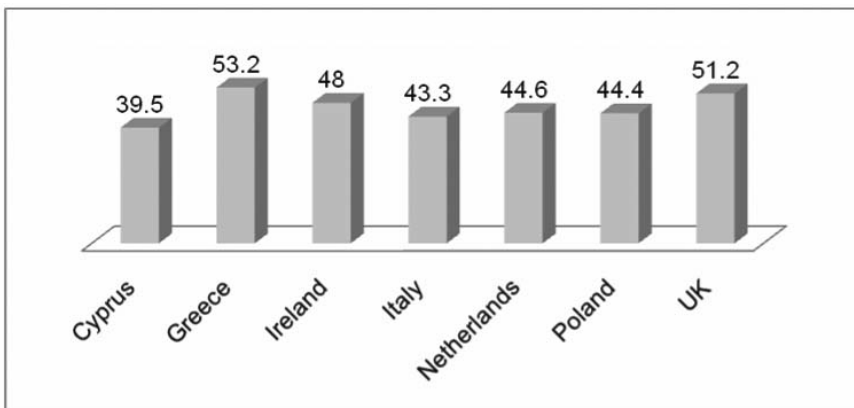
4. Findings

4.1 Intention to Found

Surveys of the Greek adult population, as noted above, generally report above average rates of intention to found entrepreneurial ventures. We were thus intrigued to discover whether this characteristic was also inherent within the Greek schools environment. Entrepreneurship Education is about far more than encouraging young people to start their own business, of course. Nevertheless, this is one key objective of such educational initiatives. Entrepreneurial Intention is measured by asking the very simple and direct question: “do you think you will start a business”? As a starting point for our analysis, we calculated the impact of country and occupation on the intention to start a business. Generally speaking, the figures are relatively high, and top of the list are Greece (53%), and the UK (51%), as shown in Figure 2.

The first important finding of this survey, then, is that the higher than average intention to found one’s own business associated with Greece begins even earlier than previously realized. It is, indeed, evident within the school environment.

FIGURE 2
Intention to start a business



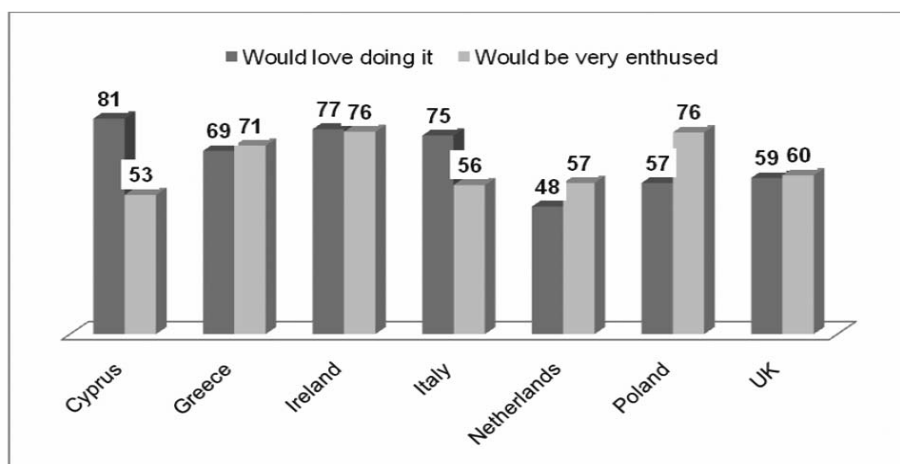
It is worth underlining that more than half of the Greek school stakeholders surveyed reported that they believe they will indeed start a business, and that this was the highest figure across the sample of seven European countries. The Greek preference for entrepreneurship appears to be inculturated early indeed, and without direct exposure to formal enterprise education.

4.2 Desirability Cognitions

Among the diverse aims of both enterprise policy, and enterprise education initiatives, are facilitating an increase in the number of people, for example, who would love to start a business, and hence experience positive perceptions of business start-up. Similarly, increasing students' sureness about themselves with regard to enterprise also achieves a more general increase in their self-confidence.

As discussed above, high intention rates have often been shown to be associated with strong desirability cognitions (Krueger, 2000). Simply put, how enthusiastic are people about starting their own business has repeatedly been shown to impact upon how likely they are to plan to found. For all countries, more than half the respondents claimed that they would be very enthused about starting a business. Similarly, most respondents noted that they would love starting their own business (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3
Desirability Cognitions 1
Love and Enthusiasm

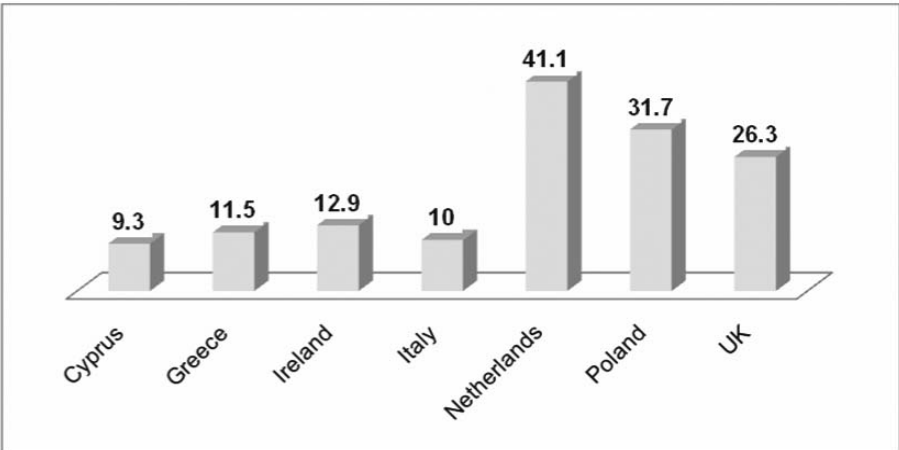


Once again, figures for Greece are quite high when compared with European averages, with Ireland leading the field for both love and enthusiasm overall. This finding provides an indication that it may be high levels of perceived desirability which are driving Greece pupil's strong desire to found their own business.

The third measure of perceived desirability asks respondents if they agree with the statement "I would not be tense at all". Essentially, this measure attempts to capture a specific cognitive barrier to entrepreneurial intention. The more tense we anticipate that an action will make us, the less likely we are to plan for it. Conversely, the less tense we expect to be when performing a specific action, the more likely we are to intend it.

As Figure 4 indicates, only around 10% of Greek students reported that they would not be tense at all when starting their own business. The comparative nature of our data allows us to note that this places Greek students within a rather anxious cluster also made up of Cypriot, Irish, and Italian students, which contrasts strongly with the results from the other 3 countries in the study. In spite of the Greek's students high intention to start their own business, thinking about doing so generates a perception that it will be a tense process. This may indicate a perceptual barrier to entrepreneurship, possible responses to which are discussed below.

FIGURE 4
Desirability Cognitions 2
Would not be tense

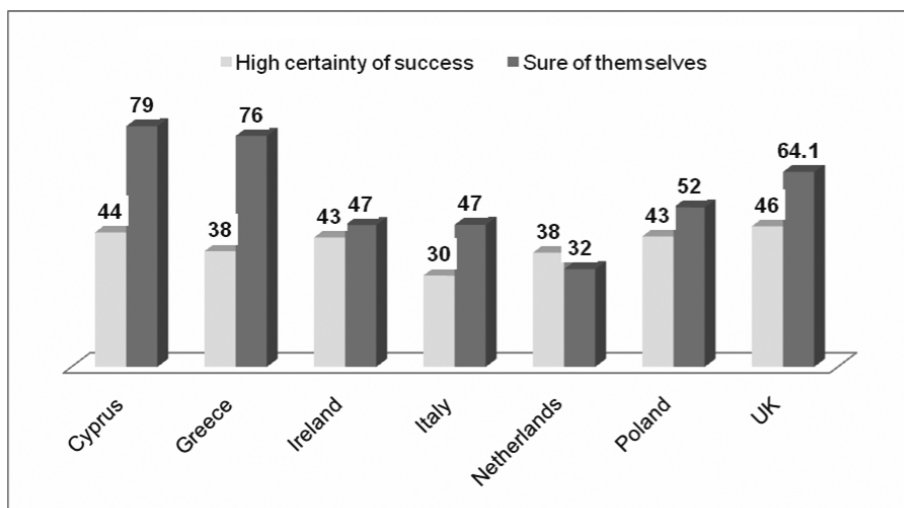


4.3 Feasibility Cognitions

Being confident about one's ability to start a venture is an important antecedent to intention to found. One should believe one is able to start a venture, if one is indeed to do so. High perceived confidence in business start-up skills also implies that these same well-developed skills – perceiving ideas, strategic thinking, innovation, leadership and resource management, for example – can be potentially carried over into the rest of their life, study and work.

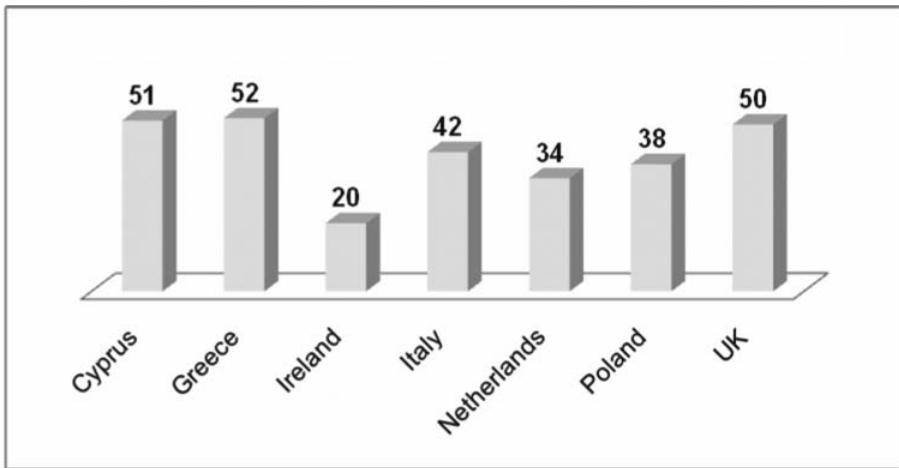
Figure 5 shows that the Greek sample has a very high degree of sureness about starting a business, which is perhaps to be anticipated given the highest intention rate in the study. However, surprisingly, the Cypriot sample reports the highest degree of sureness about starting a business, which contrasts with their low intention to found. The contrast between Greece and Cyprus is especially noteworthy given the high degree of socio-cultural homogeneity between the two nations. The comparison is an indication that specific cultural factors within individual countries affect the intention to found in idiosyncratic ways. This provides further support for the basic premise of the study, that specificities of national culture must be taken account of when designing and implementing enterprise education.

FIGURE 5
Feasibility Cognitions 1



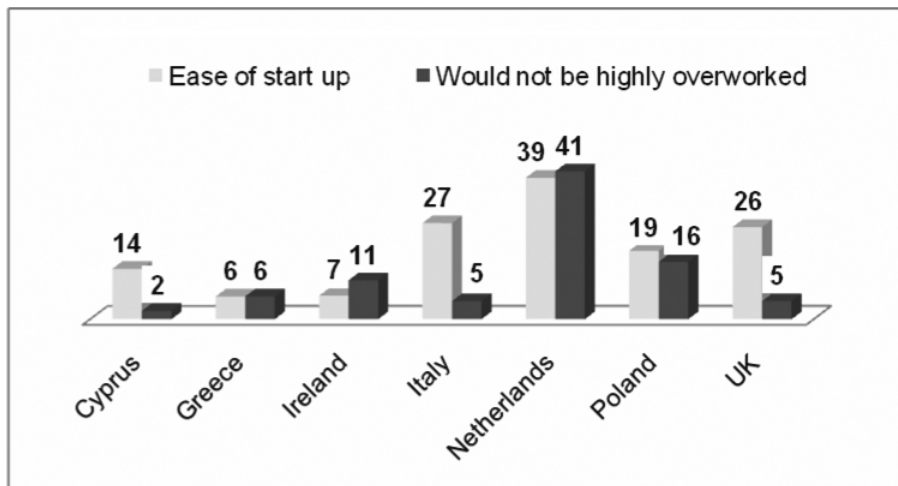
Interestingly, although Greek respondents appear very sure of themselves, they are much less certain of the success of their venture, falling within the mid-range of European country samples for this variable. Figure 6 suggests that this lack of sureness about venture success is probably ascribed to external factors, since Greek school stakeholders are the surest in Europe that they know enough to start a new business.

FIGURE 6
Feasibility Cognitions 2
Know enough to start



It should be recalled at this point that Greek respondents, unlike many of the other schools stakeholders surveyed, had not been exposed to formal enterprise education. However, in spite of this, they are remarkably sure that they already know enough, at 16 years of age, to start a business. Further analysis is required to ascertain whether this is a reason for celebration or anxiety.

FIGURE 7
Feasibility Cognitions 3



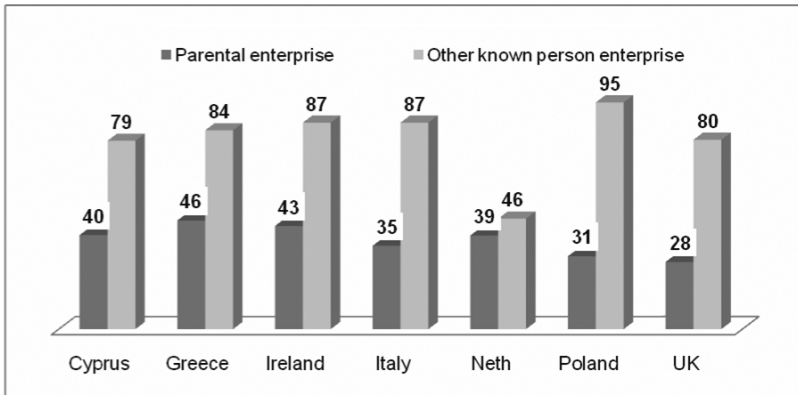
It has already been noted that Greek schools' stakeholders did not feel that start-up would be a stress-free experience. Other areas where Hellenic respondents report anxiety about entrepreneurship are shown in Figure 7, where it can be seen that only 6% of Greek respondents felt that start-up would be easy: the lowest figure in the study. Also quite low are the 6% of Greek respondents who felt that they would NOT be highly overworked at start-up. So, although Greek respondents told us that they want to start new ventures, would very much enjoy doing so, already possess the skills to do so, and are sure of their own success, nevertheless, they feel that the process would make them tense, would not be easy, and would make them highly over-worked.

4.4 Exposure to Enterprise Experience

We captured data relating to two kinds of exposure to enterprise experience. Firstly, indirect experience of entrepreneurship is measured by asking schools-stakeholders if their parents, or another known person, has ever started or owned their own business. Secondly, direct experience of entrepreneurship is measured by asking respondents if they have worked for a small firm, or starting their own.

Exposure to family enterprise is highest in Greece and Ireland and lowest in the UK and Poland. Almost everyone (except for the Netherlands sample) knows someone else who has started a business.

FIGURE 8
Indirect Enterprise Experience



A high number of the sample has been employed in small or new firms, especially in Greece and Cyprus, although not in Poland and the Netherlands. The Netherlands sample reports fairly low exposure to enterprise across the board, with the exception of personal enterprise experience, which is ascribed to the mini-company activities of the pupils in the study.

FIGURE 9
Direct Enterprise Experience



5. Discussion of Findings

This paper addresses the level of enterprise intention, enterprise desirability and exposure to previous entrepreneurial experience among Greek school pupils. The significant trigger behind this discussion is the fact that despite lack of formal and informal enterprise education, Greece demonstrates one of the highest levels of self-employment and entrepreneurial intention. One of the key findings is that the higher than average intention to start a business is already present during childhood. Given the absence of enterprise education in Greece, it is essential to understand the cognitive process that leads students to this predisposition. This is even more complicated, if one takes into account the finding that so many Greek students claim to know enough to start a business, even though they are the least European students likely to have been taught to do so in school. Perhaps the Greek students don't appreciate fully the competencies required for establishing and growing a business, or, alternatively, they may have learned these things from a different source of knowledge. In either case, no causal link appears to be in place between formal or informal enterprise education and the intention for and desirability of starting a business.

The question therefore arises on how this desirability is shaped at such a young age. A straightforward answer would be through the experience of parents, relatives or other adult people in their environment. Greece has the highest percentage of indirect enterprise experience via the parents. This implies that exposure to a family business offers students an important alternative in their career planning exercise. It is also highly probable that students have worked for the family business at some point, a practice that helps them better understand their parents' experiences and feedback from the business. This may also explain the fear of anxiety and tenseness during start-up, as the projection of a parental experience and its effect on family life. A significant suggestion therefore would be to establish a training mechanism that incorporates family business experience, and works on the effect of significant environmental shapers of adolescent attitudes towards enterprising.

Similarly, in order to overcome the anxiety that students feel when envisaging the option of starting their own business, the educational system could cater more in that direction, rather than focusing on building intention and desirability. Given the elevated numbers of the latter and the difficulty to explain – if not dubious – perception of students that they know what is required to start a business, more weight surely needs to be given to experience building training, rather than a more theoretical text book approach. This could also alleviate the

Greek sample's perception of having high desirability to become entrepreneurs and yet a negative perception of the entrepreneur – an explanation of which could be the better life successful entrepreneurs enjoy and the jealousy that results from social conditioning.

6. Conclusions

This study has identified that Greek students are more willing and eager to start their own business than other European students, although they experience limited, if any, enterprise education at school. The research question has been how these high levels of intention and desirability are achieved. It appears that Greek students have extensive indirect enterprise experience, mainly through family businesses. Some of them also appear to have direct experience. It is also shown that although Greek students have high levels of intention and desirability and they appear confident of knowing enough to undertake entrepreneurial activity, they are the most tense about it compared to other participating countries. The fact that Greek students believe that they would be successful in their enterprising endeavors to a degree that leaves behind all participating countries except for Cyprus further complicates these findings. We therefore suggest that the educational system formalizes an experience building approach to enterprise education and focuses on the impact of family business on students' mindset and the alleviation of anxiety issues that appear to be a contradicting force to the rest of the identified indicators of feasibility.

In terms of the paper's limitations, paramount is the lack of space to present other issues explored in the study, such as level of regional economic development, which emerged as an important macro variable. Similarly, we would underline that culture can be defined along a variety of parameters, and our choice of the nation-state as one unit of analysis does not by any means cover all macro-environmental bases. Also, a further limitation of this study is the fact that we do not know what Greek students (compared to the other countries) consider success. Is it personal well being, social recognition or business growth? An understanding of this factor could explain both the high desirability and the intention results. In order to better understand the phenomenon that has been identified in this paper, further research needs to be done so that we can explore the forces that boost desirability and intention to such a high level, especially when there is no apparent link with enterprise education. In this direction the role of indirect enterprising experience needs to be investigated, especially in the direction of family business. Such a study could also explain the discrepancy between the fact that students feel confident in knowing about

starting a business, while they have increased levels of anxiety. Finally, it would be interesting to examine the high levels of belief in having enough knowledge to start a business, and to identify whether this reflects what an entrepreneur must actually master in order to succeed.

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