

ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING, LITERACY AND INDUSTRY COMPETITIVENESS

© João ALBUQUERQUE
(Commercial and Business Association of Barcelos, Barcelos,
Portugalía)

albuquerque@acibarcelos.pt

Received: 31.07.2012; Accepted: 24.04.2013; Published online: 05.06.2013

The ACIB - Commercial and Business Association of Barcelos - is an entity that, in result of his own vocation, linked to business and commerce, has developed a strong department of adult education and training, considering their role in the enhancement of human resources and their importance for companies competitiveness. We propose in this article reflect on the processes of continuing vocational training of entrepreneurs and workers at firms with which the ACIB has established partnership. Based on the defense of corporate social responsibility in this regard, we pretend to demonstrate the performance that ACIB has been achieving on the implementation of projects in this area, given the fact that companies are consider as workspaces, but also for socialization and learning. Considering the challenges of competitiveness, companies need qualified, motivated and integrated employees. With the modification that has been occurring in the forms of management and the new technologies emerging, with constant changes in business strategy, training chalks its importance and its need are being felt by workers and management of businesses. We will develop a questioning of training practices developed by ACIB, focusing the particular orientation that has been behind this practice. This approach is particularly interesting because we know that the training is geared largely to public cataloged as having low skills and also low levels of literacy. The concern with issues such as literacy and qualifications/skills assumes further/particular importance, according to the fact that vocational training is a process by which individuals acquire knowledge and skills for the performance of official duties, and that the acquisition of knowledge in the professional influences the trainee / employee. We conclude with a characterization of the practical training conducted in Portuguese business reality, describing in more detail those that have been made by ACIB and its levels of success.

Keywords: Adult education and training, social responsibility, vocational training, literacy, competitiveness.

The corporate social responsibility on the processes of vocational training among its employees – the ACIB 's performance «beyond the obligation». Corporate responsibility in the field of adult education assets implies that companies adopt positions of inter-relationship between social performance and economic performance. Presently, we are witnessing a renewed appreciation of the companies and their functions and this is not inseparable from the economic and social crisis. This shift is due to the assumption that firms have a much wider role than its purely economic accomplishments.

In this respect there is a concern with the interactions developed between business and society, assuming the companies a broader mission, closely associated with the society in which it operates and the impact that it generates.

This confluence of interests results in a compromise between the companies objectives, mostly economic, and penchant for what society has the right to demand, particularly with regard to ecology, employment of minorities, among others. Despite this sense, the concept of corporate social responsibility also makes reference to the field of initial and continuing training and development of its human resources.

The corporate social responsibility relates to the field of planning, organization, communication and control of the social activities that they assume in relation to employees, customers, shareholders and the community surroundings.

And this is precisely one of the goals that we pretend to share with the companies that are wishing to be competitive: meet the economic and social performance, understanding them as inseparable dimensions.

In another complementary theoretical sense, defined by Sainsaulieu, "*the development of the company as a solution to the problems of the crisis involves no more consider it only as a limited company (...) but as a society of collective economic action*" (Sainsaulieu, 2001:346). In this sense the companies are a central social institution in our society and its operation gives them enough autonomy to influence the overall social system. In other words, companies emerge as producers of norms, values and rules that influence behavior and social attitudes of citizens (Sainsaulieu, 2001:345).

Under this interpretation we are dealing with a company integrated in a knowledge society and information, in which the processes of learning and producing knowledge and skills play a decisive role in their competitive ability.

ACIB advocates the view that companies have an irreplaceable role in the process of transformation and social development alongside the State, School and other institutions. In this sense, it implies the commitment to continuous training of workers and / or the basic training of those who do not have compulsory education. This is more evidenced in the Portuguese reality, because there are serious bottlenecks in the system of teaching and training that are reflected in the fragility and dependency of the productive sector. Underlying this conception of a company is the incitement on continuous training processes for active adults, viewed from the perspective of co-investing together.

Companies have assumed, therefore, wider responsibilities in the training of its workers as a necessary condition to ensure its competitiveness. Thus companies emerge as institutional actor and indispensable partner in the field of training, but also in the field of basic training, which means that we have an extension of its training responsibility (Azevedo, 1993:2). The alignment of business policies for continuing education is essential, to the extent that technological change and shortening product life cycle are quickly outdated.

We will be able to see later in this presentation the importance of commitment to training, as the guarantor of companies of medium and high technological intensity.

Although not always have been a commitment to training by the companies, with greater expression to the beginning of the 90s, those tend to stay away from formal education processes. Note that in the last four years of the 80, only 22% of manufacturing companies organized training courses.

In order to counter this, the ACIB created its training department. Assuming as a key partner of the companies, ACIB has a privileged role in promoting training, intervening so that the training goes beyond the informal plan, which is traditionally held on the job through a rapid learning which aims only the preparation for the execution of simple and routine tasks.

The ACIB and the Training Department

The origins of Commerce and Industry Association of Barcelos date back to 1890, initially more focused on trade. After successive reformulations, under the legal frameworks, has assumed the designation of Commercial and Industrial Association of Barcelos in 1990. This long history makes ACIB one of the most representative associations of the country.

ACIB represents the entrepreneurial of the Cávado Valley and has 4.874 member companies. The intervention zone of ACIB is the region of the NUT III, of Cávado, composed by the counties of Amares, Barcelos, Braga, Esposende, Terras de Bouro and Vila Verde, all belonging to the District of Braga. In Cávado Valley there are about 13.294 companies, with 3.355 of industry, 2.278 of commerce, 4.808 construction and 2.853 of other sectors. In 2008, exports accounted 18.5% of volume of business in the region NUT Cávado, twice what was found at the national level, which gives an export vocation to this region. The weight of exports in this region is very high. The industry sector in the county of Barcelos is composed of 2.956 industrial firms (INE, 2009), employing about 25.000 workers (50% of the employment), by which is attributed to this sector the greater responsibility in terms of growth of the county, either in jobs or in sales volume.

Overcoming many obstacles and difficulties, the local industry has established itself in the industrial fabric of the country, currently worth 7.1% of the industry throughout the North Region. Its growth has been accompanied by specialization and product quality, increased successively with international recognition.

However, recognizing the assumptions explained in the previous chapter, it would be essential to create a training department. Founded 20 years ago, ACIB can be considered a pioneer in promoting training, in benefit of the companies. The ACIB clearly anticipated that the quality of human resources is crucial to the competitiveness of countries and regions. In Portugal, and especially in our region, the quality of human resources has been a real problem for the development and consolidation of corporate wealth, so it mattered to initiate actions that would reduce this problem.

For these reasons, aware of the importance of Vocational Training, the ACIB have developed their skills in this area, creating a very active and professional Department of Vocational Training, based on a specialized technical team. We highlight the main lines of training that ACIB performs:

- Continuous training for entrepreneurs, asset managers and workers;
- Training / action for companies;
- Training of initial qualification for young people;
- Adult Education-training;
- Diagnosis and preparation of training plans;
- Program of internships in companies.

The intervention of ACIB Vocational Training has been done considering that there is no development, wealth and competitiveness if human resources, vertically, were not qualified.

The combat for the integration of young unskilled in the labor market is essential for the negative model does not recur in younger and therefore not to remain in the region the profile of the unqualified over the future generations.

The vocational training designed to assets workers and entrepreneurs is a key instrument for adapting to new patterns of operation, suitability for the needed professional profiles and for increasing the capacity of management, planning and innovation.

The public intervention with the unemployed is an effort in which ACIB has also contributed, given the local situation and the imperative need to bring these workers to different areas of employment, with requirements different from those they were accustomed.

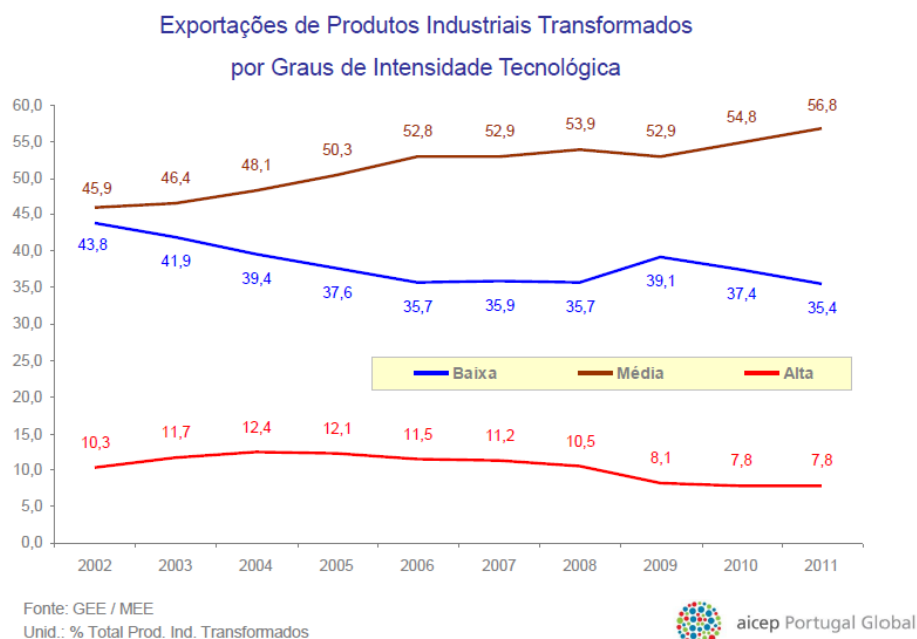
Companies - work and learning / socialization places

The training has assumed different meanings. In the business context has been defined as a planned intervention, according to the needs of the organization. This is a learning environment that aims to achieve changes, based on improving knowledge, changing attitudes and behaviors and skills development, in the hope that all of this together results in improving the performance of each person in the exercise of their duties.

It is assumed that by contributing to the personal and professional development of individuals, inherently contributes to improving their performance in the company and its results.

Technological development spurs companies to come out of isolation, creating other structures and other labor relations to cope with the changes required to them. In this perspective. The innovations develop conditions to the social expansion on the companies, projecting them to competitiveness.

In support of this need for more training, we found that the industries of high and medium technological intensity are those that have registered higher growth in terms of exports at the expense of low-tech industry. Thus, it is justified the need for competent professionals prepared to the point of dealing with the incorporation of value in products and services, so it requires a training set of innovation profiles. This data provided by AICEP demonstrate precisely this evidence:



The concept of training targeted for asset adults encompasses all activities aimed at acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes that underlies the process of creating a social purpose in producing organizational framework at the level of movement of individuals, their cultures, their interactions and social systems that support their organizational relationships.

Certainly the most significant fact to retain the sociological effects of vocational training is the way it changes the entire social and emotional relationships within the company, as well as the emergence of new evolutionary aspects in all its economic, social and cultural.

Being training a process of social creation, global and permanent, this tends to enhance such cultural, technical and social development in two main entities (Godinho et al., 1996), preparing them for work ever more demanding; and the company benefits from upgrading skills as well as the effectiveness of worker performance.

Through training covers is "*opening new personal horizons, for updating, consolidation and expansion of knowledge gained through work experience*" (Godinho et al., 1996:223), preparing for the professional and personal fulfillment through a social recognition in the company. The acquisition of new skills, allow the individual an effective integration in the new work systems, which requires appropriate behaviors to new models of professional performance.

Challenges to the level of competitiveness - companies need qualified, motivated and integrated workers

The training has been the hallmark of modern society, being valued in times of crisis, considering the effects that it causes on worker and companies. In fact, the planned and adjusted training right to the needs of the companies is an instrument par excellence to enable an integrated growth where we can combine the company's interest and the interest of individual workers. The constant pursuit of success and increased competitiveness through knowledge, with adoption of new attitudes, leads to behavioral change through the development of people and different objectives. This evolution is

driven by the explosion of new information systems that puts us closer to the level of the best countries in this area.

By approving the importance of training from the standpoint of the company and the impact that falls on the workers and the environment, we validate that the training can be viewed as a process involving schools, businesses, training providers, the state and unions. In short, the whole set of social production process of qualification is aimed at social development.

In addition, to these relationships between training and company culture, it is important to consider that the process of training develops sociological effects, besides the relationships.

Education for Competitiveness

We defend the thesis of corporate social responsibility, particularly in training. The company is a consumer of knowledge and skills, but must also be a producer of knowledge and skills required for their process of economic and social development. If companies do not produce the skills they need, they would not find, at this particular and severe time, the means to meet their objectives of competitiveness and survival for a period of crisis.

Thus, companies will have to assert itself as a privileged educational space, particularly for workers with low educational qualifications and professional school, because the company has the capacity to interfere in the field of knowledge of being and acting beyond the knowledge (technical and theoretical) of the know-how (Le Boterf, 1989, 1990). Become competitive and be able to survive in a shaky economic environment goes through these initiatives.

Population with low skill levels and the adequacy of professional training practices

According to 2011 Census data, reported by the National Statistics Institute (INE), in terms of educational attainment, the Portuguese population is characterized as follows: only 12% of the population has a college degree, 13% secondary, which contrasts with 19% of people without any educational level. However, between 2001 and 2011 almost doubled the number of people who happened to have higher education - are now around 1.2 million. This trend is also observed in secondary education.

It is women who have higher qualifications, 61% of female graduates, but they are also women who dominate the group of people without any schooling. 25% of the population has only the basic education level.

Given these data is easy to see that the problem of low levels of qualification gained an increased relevance, especially since the 80's, as a result of processes of technological and organizational innovation. In very concrete terms, associated with the development of enterprises, it is required the evolution of workers (Parente, 1995).

Thus, the concept of training in this way relies on the assumption that it is itself a source of profitability and competitiveness for companies, analyzed as a global project of the company.

Assuming that the training may be a way to preclude the exclusion from the labor market, we must ensure that this process is effective and as such recognize how adults learn. This makes it necessary to identify the two sources and discuss teaching methodologies capable of transmitting the knowledge and expertise they need in order to realize the learning process.

So, concerned is further recognition of knowledge and skills acquired during the professional career and personal.

Advocate a training adapted to the characteristics of workers is what ACIB has been engaged to do, a clear rejection of models of standard training catalog, considering that it will have little chance to adapt to them, and both companies' needs. At the same time requires an inside job from the companies, the use of external trainers, the use of specialized support in planning, design and organization of training.

The active adults, from our experience, are a fringe of the population with particular needs and wants, revealing not uncommon resistance to training, because it is associate to a return to school. Our task is to motivate them to build a training project inserted into an occupational project. Basically, as stated Dubar (1990), it is an assessment of training needs, which is nothing more than a pedagogical process of formulating training objectives from the requirements of the organization. The purpose of ACIB is to take these adults to integrate learning into their cultural capital (Bourdieu), so that experiences are not ephemeral, before consolidations and foundations for subsequent initiatives.

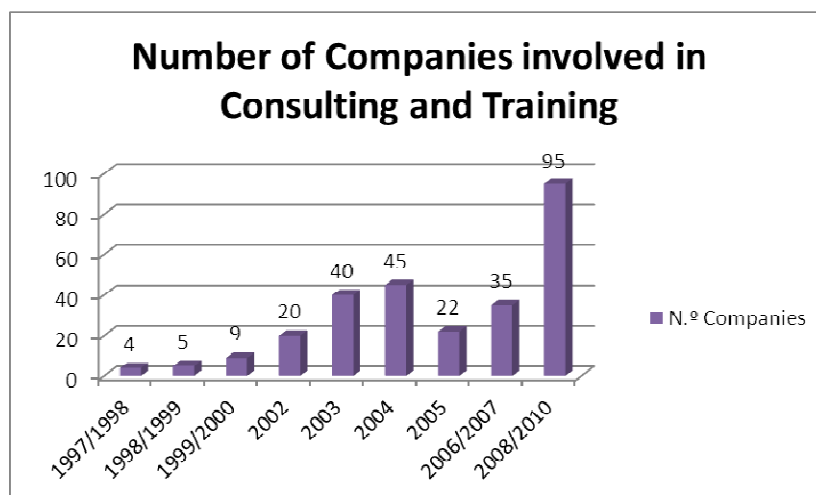
Training is therefore an expresses need, which also tends to be increasingly felt a need from entrepreneurs, social partners and especially from workers. It is a essential condition to prepare the actual human resources, and of those who come to fall on business.

Experience shows that the ACIB's adopted training practices are very appropriate, being a vehicle for the graduates exceeded the typical resistances of those who left the education system early. Besides the gains for the company, more easily measured, there is a set of individual gains, translatable in abilities in social and civic life, to stimulate entry into further training courses, but also in educating the children and the expectations that generate, thus breaking cycles of replication of failure or reduction opportunities.

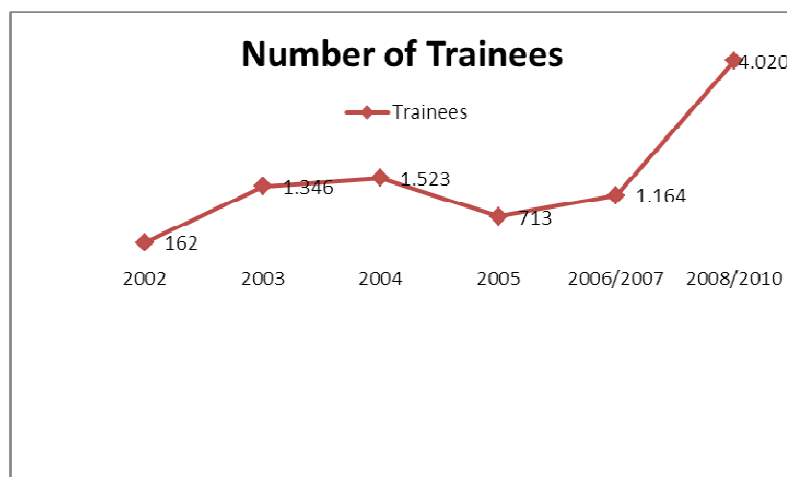
Portugal also has a significant way to go, but ACIB is pleased to have some time to contribute in this direction, avoiding the "no training" continues to delay the socio-economic development, with all the associated costs. We propose, on the following chapter, to give evidence to the concrete work of ACIB on business training.

Data from the work of ACIB in training beside the companies

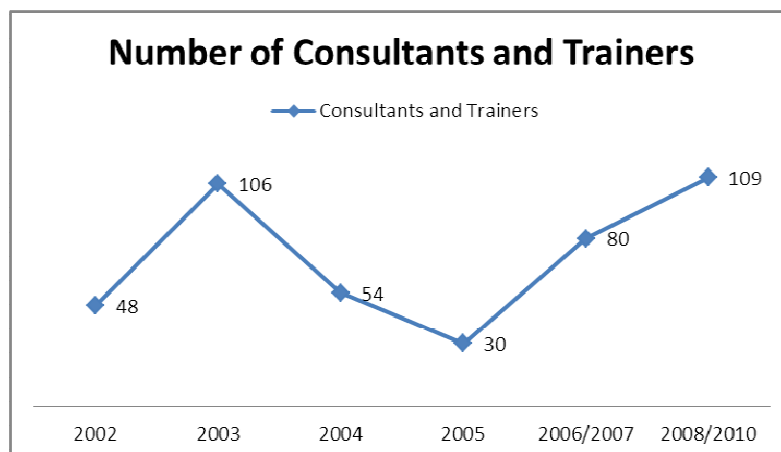
We present now some results of our participation on the Training Program SMC - Small and Medium Companies, sponsored by AEP - Associação Empresarial de Portugal (Business Association of Portugal), Chamber of Commerce and Industry and organized by ACIB.



Over the years there have been an increasing number of companies involved in the consulting and training, with the exponent in the period 2008 to 2010. In terms of number of trainees it has also been increasing, reaching its peak in 2008/2010.



It should also be noted the importance of having highly qualified trainers, an essential condition to the success of these actions. The existing team of trainers has increased, remaining stable.



We noted that on the latest editions of the training program SMC, the impact on the companies was very positive, as the following results show:

- a) Improvement of the degree of visibility and performance of the business valuation by the companies that participated.
- b) Expressions of interest in participating in new editions;
- c) Generalized knowledge by the companies about the realization of the program and the recognition of the brand SMC Training;
- d) Recognition by the people in general (active, families and former assets of the intervened companies) of the SMC Training brand, derived from the sessions of delivery of certificates of training (6,000 persons present at the last delivery. These ceremonies usually rely on the presence of Government leaders in the area);
- e) ACIB is constantly requested by companies for intervention and support of diverse nature and for opinion polls.
- f) Constitution of a recognized team of trainers and consultants by the companies;
- g) The region benefited out, on the one hand, by the increase of new ways of managing the business and know-how and, on the other, by the dynamics attributed to the sectors of activities of the participating companies.
- h) In terms of specific results from the companies that participated in the latest edition of SMC (2008/2010), already evaluated, there were the following:
 - Increased skills and / or the qualification of workers;
 - Increment of the information to the top management;
 - Knowledge of the legal obligations of the activity;
 - Effective increase on motivation and development by workers on the companies;
 - Increased capacity and strategic decision by the entrepreneurs;
 - Strong presence in the market by the companies by betting on the image, publicity and openness to the outside;
 - Effective increases in productivity;
 - Application of new methods of analysis;
 - Access to new domestic and international markets;
 - Improvement of the physical working conditions;
 - Increased technological development;
 - Involving the employees in the mission and objectives of the companies;
 - Greater control of the financial and economic activity, among others.

A contribution to equal opportunities and gender

The evaluation of these projects is very positive, reason why ACIB continues to apply to be awarded by donors in all competitions. One project was considered good practice at national level (equal to innovate), ranked as one of the best projects in the area of private companies. At the level of female entrepreneurship has been achieved, in recent years, constitute 13 companies. Under innovation, was developed the project Innovate with Equality. Plans were implemented for Equality in 10 companies of national repute, based in Cávado valley. This ambitious project has been welcomed by staff and was a brand of innovation to member companies.

The project consisted in constructing a diagnosis on the theme of Gender Equality and Opportunity, in the construction of an action plan and its implementation. Of measures implemented, emphasis is placed on the enhance of mainstreaming policies, strategy, mission, values, practices, procedures, rules, etc. of this theme; discussion with all stakeholders on the issue; implementation of new forms of work organization, conciliatory with personal, professional and family life; new management practices, either in human resources, recruitment, management and career progression and remuneration, as on internal communication strategies and inter-departmental and training; change of the means and manner of communication with the outside; social dialogue and worker involvement; benefits to workers through the implementation of agreements with companies (insurance, banks, pharmacies, bookstores, gyms, holiday camps, daycare centers, kindergartens, SPA, etc.); creation of database of local services (shoemakers, dressmakers, welfare, etc.); protection awareness in parenting and family care, etc.

Noteworthy that this project was considered innovative and good practice by the CIG, the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality, starting to show on his observatory and having deserved divulgation in the national media. This project resulted in the publication of a study conducted in partnership with the Catholic University "*Innovate with Equality – Report of Evaluation and Impact of the project on Cávado Valley companies.*"

Conclusions

We must conclude by state that firms have a much wider role than its purely economic accomplishments. Adult Education, Training and Literacy are also the key to Industry Competitiveness.

This is precisely one of the goals that we intent to share with the companies that are wishing to be competitive: meet the economic and social performance, understanding them as inseparable dimensions.

ACIB advocates the view that companies have an irreplaceable role in the process of transformation and social development alongside the State, School and other institutions. In this sense, it implies the commitment to continuous training of workers and / or the basic training of those who do not have compulsory education.

In order to counter this, ACIB created its training department. Assuming as a key partner of the companies, ACIB has a privileged role in promoting training, intervening so that the training goes beyond the informal plan, which is traditionally held on the job through a rapid learning which aims only the preparation for the execution of simple and routine tasks.

Founded 20 years ago, ACIB's Training Department can be considered a pioneer in promoting training, in benefit of the companies. ACIB clearly anticipated that the quality of human resources is crucial to the competitiveness of countries and regions.

The combat for the integration of young unskilled in the labor market is essential for the negative model does not recur in younger and therefore not to remain in the region the profile of the unqualified over the future generations.

It is assumed that by contributing to the personal and professional development of individuals, inherently contributes to improving their performance in the company and its results.

Certainly, the most significant fact to retain the sociological effects of vocational training is the way it changes the entire social and emotional relationships within the company, as well as the emergence of new evolutionary aspects in all its economic, social and cultural.

We defend the thesis of corporate social responsibility, particularly in training. The company is a consumer of knowledge and skills, but it must also be a producer of knowledge and skills required for their process of economic and social development. Thus, companies will have to assert itself as a privileged educational space, particularly for workers with low educational qualifications.

The active adults, from our experience, are a fringe of the population with particular needs and wants, revealing not uncommon resistance to training, because it is associate to a return to school. Our task is to motivate them to build a training project inserted into an occupational project.

Experience shows that the ACIB's adopted training practices are very appropriate, being a vehicle for the graduates exceeded the typical resistances of those who left the education system early. Besides the gains for the company, more easily measured, there is a set of individual gains, translatable in abilities in social and civic life (our cultural programs participation is an evidence of it), to stimulate entry into further training courses, but also in educating the children and the expectations that generate, thus breaking cycles of replication of failure or reduction opportunities.

The evaluation of these projects is very positive, reason why ACIB continues to apply to be awarded by donors in all competitions.

Under Innovation, was developed the project Innovate with Equality. Plans were implemented for Equality in 10 companies of national repute, based in Cávado valley. This ambitious project has been welcomed by staff and was a brand of innovation to member companies.

For all these reasons, ACIB knows adult education and training is a matter of social responsibility of companies and institutions that represent them, as ACIB is, in order to achieve industry competitiveness.

References

- AZEVEDO, Lemos de (1993). *Sugestões para a reforma da formação profissional empresarial*. Lisboa: Lemos de Azevedo.
- DUBAR, Claude (1990). *La formation professionnelle continue*. Paris: La Découverte.
- GODINHO, Rosaria, GONÇALVES, Filomena, PIMENTEL, Duarte, & VIEIRA, Célia (1996). Das expectativas aos efeitos sociológicos da Formação Profissional. In *Sociologia. Problemas e Práticas* (pp. 215-224). Lisboa: CIES; ISCTE.
- INE (2009). *Anuário Estatístico da Região Norte, 2008*. Lisboa: Instituto Nacional de Estatística.
- LE BOTERF, Guy (1989). Comment investir en formation. Les démarches d'investissement appliquées à la formation. *Études et expérimentations en formation continue*, (2), 2-6.
- LE BOTERF, Guy (1990). Comment investir en formation. Les démarches d'investissement appliquées à la formation. *Formations professionnelles & apprentissages*, 38 (nr. 431), 21-25.
- PARENTE, Cristina (1995). *Avaliação de impacto da formação sobre as trajetórias profissionais e a Competitividade Empresarial. Um ensaio em empresas textéis do Vale do Ave*. Lisboa: ISCTE.
- SAINSAULIEU, Renaud (2001). *Sociologia da Empresa, Organização Cultura e Desenvolvimento*. Lisboa: Instituto Piaget.