

Empowering Entrepreneurship in Europe: Going from the Idea to Enterprise in 4 EU Countries

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Abstract. Innovation and entrepreneurship are among the top priority areas of the European Union in order to exit the economical crisis and assure sustainable and profitable growth and competitiveness on a global level. Although more and more entrepreneurship training and education programs exist in different EU countries, there is little cross-country cooperation and complementary among these activities. This paper introduces a European approach to a certified entrepreneurship training program that has been established in a consortium of several European training and education organisations. This program has been implemented around the long-term mission of empowering people to make ideas become real in the European context.

Keywords: Innovation, Entrepreneurship, Lifelong Learning

1 Introduction

Innovation and entrepreneurship have become key topics of the EuroSPI community with the objective of building up long-term sustainable European partnerships around certified qualification programs on VET and higher education levels. The first related collaborative EU-project in the entrepreneurship area was ResEUr (ECQA Certified Researcher-Entrepreneur), which was an innovation project that has been co-financed by the European Commission from November 2009 to November 2011, and carried out by a consortium of five partners in Europe in order to propose a competence set for entrepreneurial minds, as well as a complete e-Learning based training and certification program [1][2]. These partners were EMIRAcle (BE), University Politehnica of Timisoara (RO), Grenoble INP (FR), ISCN Ltd. (IE),

proHUMAN (SI), and Skills International GmbH (AT).

All these partners have a long-time experience in entrepreneurship and innovation, and are active members of the ECQA (www.ecqa.eu). With ResEUr, their target was to define a competence set that is complementary to existing training and education programs in entrepreneurship. ResEUr primarily addresses the phases before the decision of creating an enterprise is made. It aims at sensitising researchers for entrepreneurship and innovation rather than teaching them how to do business plans. This idea results from the conviction that the issue of taking into account innovation and marketing issues already during research is crucial.

“From Idea to Enterprise” has been launched in October 2012 in order to transfer ResEUr to VET and secondary education on a European level, following the national priorities in many EU member states. The project partners are the following: RPIC-ViP s.r.o. (CZ), ISQ (PT), EMIRAcle (BE), ISCN (AT), EUROSUCCESS CONSULTING (CY), CIRSES (IT). This project has been introduced at EuroSPI 2013 [3] with a clear focus on the results of the needs analyses carried out by the project partners in each partner country. This article summarizes different viewpoints on dissemination and exploitation strategies in the consortium partner countries Cyprus, Czech Republic, Italy and Portugal. It thereby gives a contribution to better understanding the specific needs of these four EU countries in the field of entrepreneurship.

Section 2 of this paper outlines the principal missions of the Idea2Enterprise qualification. Fulfilling these missions is at the basis of the consortium’s dissemination and exploitation strategy. The four subsequent sections are dedicated to dissemination and exploitation strategies in the four countries mentioned above. The paper concludes with a common view on dissemination and exploitation on consortium level, where the ECQA (www.ecqa.eu) has a major stake.

2 Missions of the Idea2Enterprise program

Beyond being a training program on entrepreneurship, Idea2Enterprise strives to implement the following core mission statements on a European level:

- 1) Empowering creative people to turn ideas into reality.
- 2) Networking with academia and industry for sustainable future success.
- 3) Becoming part of an international Innovation Community via EuroSPI and ECQA.
- 4) Turning passion into business.
- 5) Identifying talent and using it.

These missions have guided the development of the entrepreneurship training program, which is now entering the phase of pilot trainings in the four target countries Cyprus, Czech Republic, Italy, and Portugal. The need for these missions has been clearly confirmed in the extensive needs analysis that has been carried out by the project partners in each of these countries [3]. The following sections will explain the challenge of meeting needs of the different countries’ target groups while following a

common core set of principles relevant to the subject of entrepreneurship in the context of the missions cited above.

3 Dissemination and Exploitation in Cyprus

3.1 Key Target Audiences

In Cyprus there is no special training for people starting from pupil age until the age of 18, except for one week at the age of 16 which is called “working week”, where all students have to “work” for one week in jobs of their preference. Moreover, the training that higher education students receive is more on a theoretical base and not in practical, which does not help them develop their business ideas.

The target groups in Cyprus are pupils in their last year in school and students in the last university year, as well as unemployed young graduates and VET institutions.

3.2 Key institutions to partner up with

The main institutions that Eurosuccess have chosen to partner up and cooperate with are:

- European University Cyprus [4]
- University of Cyprus [5]
- Frederic University [6]
- Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry [7]
- Nicosia Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Business and Professionals women association
- Neorama Education Centre
- M.M. Knowledge and Consulting

The reason of the above selection is that the members or clients of each of the above organizations are the ones stated above in section 3.1 as the key target group. Moreover, the professionalism and the successful history of each of the above organizations, ensures the exploitation and viability of the project.

3.3 Key events/fairs to attend

The main events/fairs that EUROSUCCESS members will attend are the ones organized by their organization (seminars, conferences, and other projects meetings) and also the events/fairs that the above cooperating bodies will organize, like student fairs, information days, seminars and conferences.

3.4 Key facilitators

The key facilitators that can be found in Cyprus are:

- Agricultural Research Institute (ARI),
- Cyprus Neurology / Genetics Institute (CING),
- Research Promotion Foundation (RPF).

- Cyprus Business Incubator Association
- Diogenes Business Incubator University of Cyprus
- Ermis Research and Incubator Centre – ERIC
- Helix Business Incubator LTD
- Promitheas Bussines Innovation Centre LTD

4 Dissemination and Exploitation in the Czech Republic

4.1 Key Target Audiences

Based on national priorities, the main target audience is limited to initial vocational education and training which means mainly the students of secondary schools in the Czech context. There is a lack of technically educated professionals as well as students of technical secondary schools in Moravian-Silesian region, on the other side the local economy used to be and still is oriented to technical industry. One of the biggest Technical Universities is located in Ostrava.

Based on research done in the Ostrava region, it is estimated that 25,000 additional workplaces in industry will be needed in the future eight years, more than 3,000 per year. About 2,300 graduates of professional secondary schools stay on the labour market per year (i.e., do not continue on higher level of education). This means at least 5,000 graduates of technical secondary schools will be missing [8].

Even if this seems to be a reason of motivating pupils to go to technical secondary schools, their interest is still very low for different reasons. A training to develop their entrepreneurial skills and spirits in the pre-last year of their studies is considered not only a way of providing them some complementary competencies or making their studies more attractive but also as a strategy of multiplying the number of technically oriented companies and of increasing the employability of the graduates.

Therefore RPIC-ViP decided to pilot the trainings with young people in the pre-last year of studies in professional secondary schools.

4.2 Key institutions to partner up with

Regional Consulting and Innovation Centre (RPIC) itself has a direct link to professional secondary schools in their region thanks to projects realized in recent years (e.g. [9]).

The competencies in secondary education are set on regional level in the Czech Republic. Even if we suppose easy acquisition of students because of long term cooperation with schools, the strategic partnership with Regional Authority of Moravia-Silesia in the matter of training promotion will be initiated. The cooperation with public authority increases the sustainability of project outputs.

4.3 Key exploitation channels

RPIC-ViP participate in processes of development of educational system and active labour market policy in the region. The programming period 2014+ is being prepared in cooperation with local stakeholders to face the regionally specific challenges. The

key facilitators of the negotiating the priorities are Regional Office and Regional Authority. The team member will attend relevant workshops, roundtables or conferences and actively discuss the topic and actions to be taken to improve the competencies of graduates for future development of Moravia-Silesia.

The importance of activities of Technical University of Ostrava in the field of promoting innovation and start-ups is still growing. Start-up shows or innovative company competition events represent very convenient audiences to use the potential of the training.

At national level, RPIC-VIP is one of the facilitators of the smart specialisation strategy focusing for 2014+ on entrepreneurial discovery process.

5 Dissemination and Exploitation in Italy

5.1 Key Target Audiences

In the Italian VET System there are not figures devoted to support boys and girls “from idea to enterprise”. The training courses are in fact mainly focused on the theoretical knowledge, rather than to assist the realization of a professional project. However in some VET curricula, some experiences are carried out named “Enterprise Training Simulation” or “alternative school-work experience”.

The Enterprise Training Simulation is a virtual company animated by students who make market on the net, e-commerce, with the mentoring of a real company who is the reference model for each phase of the business life cycle: from the business idea to the business plan, from the registration in the chamber of commerce and in the office registry to the commercial transactions, from the financial transactions to the tax compliance [10].

The Enterprise Training Simulation allows building the concrete working model of a real company in a “laboratory” environment and therefore appears closer to the action-oriented learning methodology. A company tutor, corresponding to a real company operating in the area, cooperates with teachers setting the simulated company and its management in order to create a link with the real Labour Market designing real roles and duties for the students.

Following the above, the primary target group for Italy is typically the profiles interested in the Enterprise Training Simulation, as well as the key stakeholders involved in this training. More specifically, CIRSES will disseminate the Idea2Enterprise training mainly to the following target groups:

- Business consultants
- Recruitment consultants
- Chambers of Commerce Consultants
- Guidance Experts
- Tutors for entrepreneurship
- Professionals accountant

5.2 Key institutions to partner up with

The main institutions CIRSES have chosen to partner up and cooperate with are the following:

- Prima Forma - Progettazione Ricerca e Management per la Formazione
- Chamber of Commerce of Naples (Campania Region)
- Business Consultants - Rome
- Business Consultants – Naples
- Business Management Order – Roma
- Business Management Order – Naples
- ARLAS - Campania Region Agency for employment, education and training
- Cora Roma Onlus (Gender Guidance Association)
- Federimprese
- Università dei Sapori di Perugia –
National Center on Training and Food Culture (Umbria Region)
- Confcommercio di Perugia
- Italia Lavoro
- ISFOL – Leonardo da Vinci National Agency/ERASMUS+

6 Dissemination and Exploitation in Portugal

6.1 Key Target Audiences

One of the goals of the Portuguese government within the scope of the New Opportunities Initiative is to increase the participation in initial VET (IVET). Therefore, the government has launched a wide media campaign known as “It pays to learn” in order to stress the importance of qualifying the Portuguese active population.

Since 2007, a total of eight campaigns were launched, specifically aimed at either young people or adults, or targeted at both audiences. The latest campaign, whose main message was to establish the completion of secondary education as a common goal to both youth and adults, was launched in September 2010 and was directed at adults who had not completed the 12th grade of secondary education and young people who at the time had started the secondary educational level.

The Portuguese participation in the Euroskills and Worldskills initiatives also intended to contribute to the growth of VET’s public visibility. IVET participation is also encouraged by several economic benefits, such as training allowances.

Some measures were taken in order to assure the quality of double certification provision, particularly monitoring studies on vocational courses and their extension to the network of public schools. Vocational courses are a double certification training pathway which was previously delivered almost exclusively by private vocational schools. The target groups in Portugal to be addressed in this project are mainly VET students, either from the initial VET or the continuous VET systems.

Even if the higher education institutions, university students, universities staff members, unemployed youngsters, VET professionals and VET centres and are not part of the chosen target group, due to the topic of the project they will be important

stakeholders and also main target groups of the project, respecting the dissemination project activity itself.

6.2 Key institutions to partner up with

The main institutions that ISQ have chosen to partner up and cooperate with are:

- National Body for Qualification
- Portuguese Institute for Employment and VET
- Training Center for Trade Area
- Training Center for Handcraft Area
- Portuguese Foundation
- National Institute for SME's and Innovation
- Portuguese Entrepreneurial Association

The reason of the above selection is that they are partners in several networks of ISQ, and they fall into the target groups mentioned above in section 6.2. Moreover, the professionalism and the successful history of each of the above organizations, ensures the exploitation and viability of the project.

6.3 Key events/fairs to attend

ISQ has involved several staff members in a few events of different organizations, with the main aim of create awareness for the project objectives and future activities.

ISQ has been present in some meetings and seminars involving project stakeholders, mainly other VET centers where the project, its objectives, main activities and results were presented, in order to disseminate the project and at the same time create interest in the future phases, mainly for the project pilot training.

For the future, ISQ foresees that all main events and fairs will be organized in Portugal, by several of our stakeholders in the training area. They can be seminars, conferences, and other projects meetings and also the events/fairs more oriented to students, like fairs, information days, seminars and conferences.

However, ISQ intends also to have a spotlight in this project from some European and International organizations, like EVBB and SOLIDAR, two networks acting in the VET area that will gain a huge sustainability degree for the project results.

Conclusions and Outlook

This article has introduced the dissemination and exploitation aspect of a European initiative to introduce a certified training program that empowers creative minds to make their ideas become real in the form of sustainable entrepreneurship. While the first program of this initiative, ResEUr, is targeted at university students, the follow-up program Idea2Enterprise is mainly oriented towards VET and initial VET education levels. Rather than focussing on the formal process of company creation, Idea2Enterprise is focussed on the aspect of shaping ideas and successfully implementing them in entrepreneurship context. One key aspect of its uniqueness is that it

integrates the visions and needs of eight EU countries, and is embedded in two other European initiatives, EuroSPI and the ECQA.

Dissemination and exploitation of Idea2Enterprise are carried out according to the framework rules of the ECQA, however with very specific strategic target groups and partners as pointed out in this article for the countries Cyprus, Czech Republic, Italy, and Portugal. The project partners are currently carrying out the initial pilot trainings, and there is opportunity for EuroSPI community members to join.

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