

FIN-URB-ACT

Thematic Paper XII

Working group on Communication Edinburgh meeting



**FIN-URB-ACT work group meeting
Edinburgh 9/10 February 2010****Working Group on Communication:**

During the Working Group on Communication in Edinburgh, two topics have been presented and discussed. First, the city of Aveiro presented the communication of its local action plan, and its communication tools, and second, Professor Kailer from the University of Linz gave an example on the creation on how to teach entrepreneurial skills among students and how to communicate the advantages of creating their own business to students from the university in a combined practical and theoretical approach and to send them the message that being an entrepreneur can be a valuable option for life. The communication process will give an additional dimension to the LAPs by putting the outputs of the Local Support Groups under the spotlight and it will be implemented at two levels. External with various target groups: the business community and their representative organisations, the supporting organisations and decision makers at higher level and internal, within the Municipality departments, so that the SME dimensions is considered when measures affecting the businesses are envisaged.

1. Communication of the Local Action Plan in Aveiro:

The Local Action Plan of Aveiro is based on four pillars

- Promotion of Entrepreneurship Culture
- Promotion of Entrepreneurship in Schools
- Business Incubation
- Support for SMEs

For all these four pillars of the LAP in Aveiro an overall communication and dissemination strategy was developed under the common brand “Aveiro Emprendedor” in order to have a visual identity for all involved partners and stakeholders.

The objectives of the communication and dissemination strategy are to diffuse the information and raise the awareness about the project with the general target audience, to promote participation and to further reinforce ties with target audiences. The general flow of information should be optimised between the project partners and to maintain mechanisms for effective and timely communication. In order to raise the awareness of external stakeholders, links will be established with further projects of similar initiatives in order to make advantage of potential synergies. Finally the results will be communicated to entities who might be interested in the project.

The target audience comprises three different levels. First there is internal communication to the project partners. Second, there is the external audience which comprises various stakeholders like potential entrepreneurs from academic, commercial and industrial side, young entrepreneurs (primary, secondary and vocational schools), incubator projects, SMEs and as well as science, technology and innovation support organisations. The third level of the target audience addresses a general audience like the community, media, policy maker public entities and the FIN-URB-ACT network.

Of particular interest is the creation of the integrated Webpage, as it reflects the main Ideas of the FIN-URB-ACT project approach. So far, the members of the Local Support Groups present their support facilities and services, products and events at their own webpage so that many valuable information co-exist along side by side without being really linked. In fact potential investors (in particular coming from outside) or entrepreneurs might be lost in an unclear bunch of information. Hence, Aveiro going to use in the near future the one-stop model virtually in interlinking the ramification of divers support facilities in a clear arranged and thus more fruitful way in form of an “integrated webpage”.

The main goals are to provide knowledge of references in the field of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. In the future the integrated webpage should not just act as information point for external users, but also as a platform for the relationship between of providers and is disseminating all information related to the topic of innovation, creativity, financing and entrepreneurship (e.g. information on financing possibilities, local innovative companies, research and development institutions, local policies, opportunities for cooperation and collaboration...)

This is crucial, as many studies has shown that the internet is becoming more and more important for entrepreneurs, founders and investors for the procurement of information, and establishing contacts. (in particular for external persons or potential investors coming from abroad).

The second strategic idea to use communications synergy effects is by using bigger events as overall hook to organise smaller events related to the same topic. So far often, different events have been carried out separately like on financial instruments, incubating companies encounters for competitiveness.

Until now the participation of Aveiro in the FIN-URB-ACT network was published in newspapers, on the cities internet platform and the monthly published municipal magazine which has a total amount of 40.000 editions. Furthermore, the city participated and introduced the integrated approach of FIN-URB-ACT during events related to this topic. For example during a visit at the Aveiro City Hall by a group of students from Aveiro Professional School who attended the project “Entrepreneurial Skills? Yes, You Have”, a project, funded by the EU Programme “Lifelong Learning” in cooperation with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training”. A second opportunity was the presentation of FIN-URB-ACT during the seminar on the topic “Entrepreneurship: Developing Cross Competencies: The path to personal and professional success”.

As in the previous meeting it was presented by the city of Linz which uses two overall events the European Year of Creativity and Linz Cultural City of 2009 effectively. Aveiro used the European SME Week 2010 and is provided four different events carried out mutually by the members of its Local Support Group. Some examples are:

TEDxAveiro is an event organized independently, replicating the model, standards, specifications and guidelines of the TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) an annual event where leading thinkers and creators are invited to share and discuss ideas on the field of multimedia. The motto of this meeting is "ideas that deserve to be promoted ...". This event is took place in Aveiro, on May 29, and was characterized by being a space of promoting culture characterized by shared knowledge and experiences of the actors are therefore based on the wealth of personalities gathered for the event. A second event which is mutually carried out with the Municipality of Aveiro and the IAPMEI (Instituto de Apoio às Pequenas e Médias Empresas e da Inovação the) under the programme “Encounters for Competitiveness” is a working session with companies in the Region of Aveiro. The aim was to provide open spaces for the dissemination, discussion and networking between SMEs, potential entrepreneurs and employees of businesses.

The approach is similar as in the city of Linz. They used the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, and Linz as a European Cultural City 2009 to boost the creative industry sector in the city. The particular stakeholders might be easier in advertising people to local events and to attract more potential stakeholders to contribute (reach critical mass) by exploiting these kind of umbrella events.

2. Teaching Entrepreneurship:

The Case of Johannes Kepler University Linz

The Johannes Kepler University is situated in Linz, the capital of Upper Austria with about 13.000 students in business administration, law and engineering. (noch andere Fächer)

Part of the faculty of business administration is the Entrepreneurship Institute with a major of "Entrepreneurship and Organizational Development" on master level, however also entrepreneurship and business planning courses are being provided for engineering students, academic staff and the University of Fine Arts Linz.

Besides the regular teaching tasks, the institute is responsible for promoting entrepreneurship and further education related to entrepreneurship at the university. By additionally hiring external lecturers, coming from consultancies or entrepreneurs itself, approximately 30 workshops and discussions are being organised every year.

In order to carry out entrepreneurship programmes successfully, some guiding principles have to be taken into consideration. First, graduates should personally know relevant experts from the regional support infrastructure (chamber of commerce, banks, incubators, consultants) and entrepreneurs, in order to facilitate the establishment of a relevant business and social network at an early stage. And second, graduates should have developed entrepreneurial competencies (for instance in business planning) and have to practice them.

The target group for entrepreneurship programmes are students with interest and potential for start-ups and business successions, students as potential start-up consultants, (e.g. in banks, incubators, chambers of commerce or other organisations supporting start-ups). Additionally, focus is also put on alumni, as potentials for networking and the involvement of alumni entrepreneurs in master courses as role models.

Cooperation with Entrepreneurs

In order to develop and better the skills and business acumen and to raise the potentials of founders among students the cooperation with entrepreneurs takes a decisive role. Besides obtaining explicit knowledge (is knowledge that has been or can be articulated, codified, and stored in certain media) the possibility of obtaining implicit or tacit knowledge (knowledge that is difficult to transfer to another person by means of writing it down or verbalizing it) is given by contacts with entrepreneurs. In particular it is advantageous, to step into dialogue with entrepreneurial actors from the entire life cycle, (young start-ups, student-entrepreneurs, experienced entrepreneurs, business successors and start-up teams), to cover various perspectives of know how and perspectives from all businesses and more important to act as role models and to motivate potential actors to found their own business. Cooperation at the JKU in Linz is facilitated through presentations, "founders dialogue" series of the "founders café". Additionally the alumni network is strongly used.

Co-Operation with all relevant Regional Support Organizations

Besides the know-how the so called know-whom is to be subsumed within critical items in successfully foster founder activities. Thus, contacts has to be set with all relevant stakeholders from Regional Support Organisations like e.g. chambers of commerce (e.g. in Linz the WIFI training centre, start-up centre), networks of young entrepreneurs, local academic incubators (tech2b in Linz) and further founder centres.

The Johannes Kepler University Linz implemented a broad range of support programmes. There are courses with up to 200 participants involving entrepreneurs, experts and field interviews. Particular seminars are being provided focussing on special entrepreneurial competences for young entrepreneurs (e.g. sales strategy, creativity, law issues for business succession, reputation management, self management and business planning). As many students coming from different subjects, interdisciplinary seminars are provided for both entrepreneurship and engineering students.

Two examples:

As examples on particular measures conducted by the JKU, the „*Innovation Lab(oratory)*“ and „*Bizkick*“ has to be named. The first one is a seminar with business and engineering students on the topic „Is this technical business idea worth a start up?“. The participants learn to draft opportunities and to write business plans for own or external ideas. In order to internalise and implement the learning matters, they receive real-life tasks. This provides a win-win situation for students and (future) entrepreneurs and develops team skills.

The second example, which is called „*Bizkick*“, is going one step further. Here the students are not only about to write, but also to implement an idea. Students are guided by professional coaches and teachers on their way to a start-up. The objective is not to found a perfect business to successfully enter the market. In fact it is aiming at provide students a practical economical matters in order to raise the motivation on creating their own professional start-ups. Mostly the students are highly motivated additionally driven by a competition between student groups from two universities for best their performance.

Lessons Learned from Practice and Surveys

- Surveys and figures have shown that students prefer a start-up in teams. However, it is not always easy to arrange a well working group.
- Mostly, graduates are attracted by big and notable companies. Most of them want to start their own business after three to five years experience. Anticipated hindrances are mainly financial risks, lack of capital and lack of business ideas.
- When graduation and or the start-up is close, the demand for support related to the individual entrepreneurial need is rising in particular on mentoring, business plan coaching, personal coaching/life planning
- With hindsight, ex-students highlight the importance of role models, testimonials, practice oriented problems solving and involvement of practitioners
- Entrepreneurship programmes should be on a voluntary basis
- Courses and seminars should be accompanied by outreach activities (founders fair, founders dialogue) as well as PR activities
- Credit-points for all measures are very important for students
- Dealing with business ideas with limited market potential/without implementation also teaches important know-how for a second try
- Limitation of efforts through restricted resources

During the discussion it has to be stated that not in every case well functioned interrelation among the universities is given. An institute mostly is tailored to one person (a professor). If this person it is not willing to cooperate or is simply not interested in an integrated approach it is difficult to install an exchange platform. Thus the question remains, how Universities can be attracted to be actively involved in the entrepreneurial support structure.

Conclusions:

Additional themes to mention:

FIN-URB-ACT should probably make a recommendation on the use of web sites as good information vehicles for SMEs: Aveiro, Edinburgh, Gliwice ...have some experience and could give some indications on the network recommendation.

Aveiro is a good example of efficient communication: they initially defined a clear message that they disseminate during each event or opportunity. Communication is often based on repetition and this is a good illustration of this principle.

Linz:

They teach entrepreneurship efficiently because they work on cases closely linked with local reality: the opportunities exist or may be implemented locally and students are taught through real life examples.

Students are connected with the local support organisations: this means that their projects will normally be rooted locally and will develop locally if they are implemented. If cities support teaching programmes, they will like these programmes to have local outcomes and this may be a way to guarantee that teaching programmes may have positive returns for the local economy.

URBACT II

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development.

It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal challenges. It helps them to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 181 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants

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