

innoESPOO

InnoEspoo was a joint project between three educational institutions and the city of Espoo during 2013 and 2014 in Finland. In short, the InnoEspoo project provided support for creative student entrepreneurs and enhanced the development of innovative services for citizens of Espoo. Besides the city, three educational organizations from different levels (vocational, university of applied sciences, university) participated in the project. InnoEspoo was mainly funded by the European Social Fund. Specifically the following underlying issues were addressed: in the short-term economic downturn and in the longer term structural problems such as imbalances between government earnings and spending and economic and social challenges (such as aging population, and youth unemployment). The project target groups included student enterprises, student co-operatives, small-scale service businesses, part-time entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs in creative industries. The project helped the target groups to find new service solutions, business ideas and advice for their business plans. Moreover, the project has helped to create a community where entrepreneurs, students and educational staff work together in shared facilities, training sessions, and events. Simultaneously new services for the area have been created.

InnoEspoo Project in Practice

In the first stage of the InnoEspoo project, the objective was to learn to know people and the service offering in each institution (Omnia, Laurea and Small Business Center of Aalto University). In the second stage, the emphasis was on finding key areas and practical projects that would benefit from the co-operation. In order for a project to become accepted as a sub-project, it needed to represent one or more benefits from the following list:

- a) Project supports students to start new firms
- b) Project creates new firms or businesses
- c) Project creates new ways of working

- d) Project enhances citizen well-being
- e) Project supports co-operation between education, city, entrepreneurs and students
- f) Project supports the creation of new service models

After various discussions and facilitated brainstorming sessions, for example the following sub-projects were defined and carried out:

- Creating a pop-up learning environment through organizing a celebration in an old manor house in Espoo
- Entrepreneurship training for students delivered in co-operation between different learning organizations
- Delivery of a series of workshops to find out the training needs of new entrepreneurs
- Espoo Challenge service camps for students
- Creation of a web-based well-being market place for elderly people
- Creation of Innovaara, a low entry barrier accelerator for students' business ideas
- Organizing a series of half-day seminars for new entrepreneurs in fall 2014

Outcomes

Perhaps the most valuable outcome of the project has been the creation of an actor-level network across different learning institutions. By mobilizing this network, it is possible to take benefit from up-coming opportunities in the area of student entrepreneurship support in the future and to respond to possible challenges in the city of Espoo. This, in turn, is likely to foster the development of the system of entrepreneurship in the capital town region as more ideas and more entrepreneurially minded students enter working life. In the following, examples of more tangible results of the project are highlighted:

- I. **Enhancing entrepreneurship skills and attitudes of student entrepreneurs / creative entrepreneurs through training and by facilitating social interaction**
 - a) Various new student enterprises have been created with help of entrepreneurship training, e.g:
 - Co-operative in physiotherapy
 - Start-up in green area planning
 - Start-up for planning and constructing skateboard parks
 - b) Entrepreneur brunches were organized where ideas for training and coaching topics were developed. As a result, four half-day

seminars for microenterprises were organized in fall 2014 in the areas of customer-centered thinking, business economics, well-being and sales.

- c) A new start-up-center space (InnoVaara) for students was planned and implemented. The idea here is that students from different schools and educational levels work at the same events. Students can share their business ideas, find other business partners and further develop their ideas.

II. **Providing ideas and solutions to various challenges of the city of Espoo**

- a) Idea/solution generation to meet the challenges of the city of Espoo in a service camp in collaboration with students and the city of Espoo. Some ideas are possibly implemented in practice.
- b) A market place for well-being started its operation in September 2014. It will collect and present private service offering for senior citizens in Espoo. (www.seniori365.fi)
- c) Filling in an empty space in Entresse -shopping center in Espoo for three months in fall 2014 with the help of entrepreneurs, student entrepreneurs and staff of Omnia, Laurea, and Aalto Small Business Center.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that the InnoEspoo project has successfully developed entrepreneurship in the metropolitan area and especially in the Espoo region. On the practical level, the joint activities were spread around entrepreneurship support and service development. The experiences gained for example from joint training courses, Espoo Challenge innovation camp or senior 365 sub-projects are promising and suggest that co-operation must be continued in the future. While entrepreneurial attitudes and capabilities differ between individual students or other possible new entrepreneurs, it is important to support each individual path to facilitate the flow of entrepreneurial talent and ideas to the system of entrepreneurship.

An emerging topic in higher-education institutions is learning by doing and developing. Also in the InnoEspoo project, this new way of learning has been further experimented with. For example, students from Laurea University of Applied Sciences had the possibility to acquire study points by developing one's own

company. This kind of a practical approach is a relevant way of learning especially in entrepreneurship studies.

The InnoEspoo project is one of the first steps to co-operate across educational institutions in the area of entrepreneurship development. As such, the project has been fully integrated to the regional innovation system, or better, the system of entrepreneurship. Enhancing idea generation and developing entrepreneurship potential at a very early stage of the entrepreneurship process has been the key focus area. By so doing, the project has fostered the development of talent for the entrepreneurship ecosystem in the metropolitan area in Finland. It is assumed that most students pursue an employee career to begin with while some students choose small-scale entrepreneurship and only very few pursue high-growth entrepreneurship. All these groups, however, benefit from learning about entrepreneurship as a part of their studies.

While the InnoEspoo project has been a decent start for joint development of student entrepreneurship and co-operation between the city of Espoo and education institutions, various challenges have been met. Challenges in the execution of the project include unfamiliarity of the individuals with each other at the beginning of the project. Other challenges include tight time schedules and different interpretations of project objectives in each organization.

Once people have learned to know each other and their organizations, co-operation has proven substantially easier. One key outcome of the project is an actor-level network (practioners' community). This network can be rapidly mobilized in the future for entrepreneurship development activities and for service development in a border-crossing fashion. In the future, this resource needs to be utilized in order to promote new entrepreneurs from educational institutions and the various networks attached to them. This could take place as a continuation of the current project.

