“Students are a future driving force of innovation. Our task is to foster in them the spirit of entrepreneurship, motivation for professional growth, analysis and development.” Dzmitry Hlukhau, Polotsk State University

**TEMPUS Project**

530429-TEMPUS-1-2012-1-UK-TEMPUS-JPHES  “Innovation Laboratories: using an open innovation learning platform & action research in enterprise education in order to enhance the engagement & innovative capabilities of Universities in Post-Socialist Societies”

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WHERE WE ARE NOW

After the first year of the project the work team has developed the concept of INNOLABS and enterprise education alongside. This, in its turn, stimulated development of infrastructure for the Regional Ecosystem Platform necessary for the realisation of the concept and experimentation, as well as for enhancing curriculum at a series of study programmes across the participating universities. We are now at the final stage of the project where the work team will finalise official recognition of INNOLABS at the 5 partner universities in Belarus and Ukraine and experiment with the innovation laboratories widening the scope and quantities of users in the regions involved.

We started the newsletter with words which best define the place and role of students in innovation and development of entrepreneurship. Students are actually a driving force of innovation. They are exactly in the centre of attention of both staff at universities and employers and business in general. INNOLABS are centres where students’ initiatives, creativity and simply crazy ideas, staff’s research, and business’ needs and problems, meet and mix. INNOLABS operate on the basis of an e-platform which is a special space for such mix and collaboration. This is a Regional Ecosystem Platform.

http://www.innolabs.org/

INNOLAB & REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM PLATFORM

Do they two differ? The answer is ‘yes, they do!’ INNOLAB is a centre, REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM PLATFORM is an open innovation learning platform bringing together university students and academics and enterprises in order to support innovation with special spaces for academics, for students, and for enterprises.

Innovation Labs

A space for students and academics to experiment with breakthrough concepts and generate value for enterprises and society. Provide learning material as well as regularly updated challenges for a more creative and enterprising higher education in Ukraine and Belarus.

http://www.innolabs.org/innovation-labs/

Regional Innovation Platform

A platform that allows universities and innovative enterprises to work with each other, and get students and academics involved in challenges confronting businesses. It can also enable a better understanding and further development of their innovation ecosystem.

http://www.innolabs.org/regional-innovation-platform/

INNOLABS – CENTRES OF COLLABORATION

The Concept behind the INNOLABS

Innovation Laboratories will be a visible point of cooperation between universities and enterprises. This will enable student teams, led by academics, to work with enterprises in resolving ‘real-world’ problems and developing innovations, as part of their curricula which, in turn, will ensure sustainability. It is planned in the project that on completion innovation laboratories in the 5 regions – Polotsk and Grodno in Belarus, and Kharkiv, Kiev, and Uzhgorod, in Ukraine – will allow enterprises, working in collaboration with academics and students to experiment with breakthrough concepts. They will provide the setting for the development and advancement of solutions at the early stage of the innovation process and generate value for both society and enterprises.
Alongside the establishment of INNOLABS the project team worked on upgrading the existing curriculum at a series of study programmes at the 5 partner universities in Belarus and Ukraine. 16 members of staff at the universities took part in the activity to include two new study modules - “Open Innovation” and “Creative Thinking” into the existing courses of study - different ones at different universities. Besides, innovative education methods were applied, those that had been learnt by the project staff and postgraduate students during their study visits to Tallinn University of Technology in Estonia and Bradford University in the United Kingdom. That was indeed a start of the experiment with around 250 students involved.

“I enjoyed experimenting with education methods, especially using team work of students on studying the enterprise challenge and solving the problem. This is a completely new approach which was absolutely liked by the students in my groups. That was on the course “Entrepreneurship”. The work consolidated colleagues at our Department and seeded interest around other colleagues at the University soon after the results were disseminated”. Inna Yelshyna, Polotsk State University

“I enjoyed the work in teams. The process examples of creative thinking were great. It just shows that if the teacher has an entrepreneurial approach in the classroom, much can happen to open the mind of the student”. Kanstantsin Koushyk, Polotsk State University

“Great experiments! The only thing which is now needed as I feel is a space where we can share our ideas or simply exchange our experiences with enterprises”. Oleg Zhdaniiuk, NAUKMA, Kiev

“The introduction of ‘Creative Thinking’ and ‘Open Innovation’ modules into the existing curriculum was more than a great experience for both staff and students and the results went beyond everyone’s expectations”. Olga Savchenko, NTUKfPI, Kharkiv

“Thanks to our teachers who showed us an alternative way of learning and teaching in an environment which is more creative and therefore productive than the traditional ways”. Roman Kovach, Uzhgorod National University

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“The results were manifold and varied, often taking advantage of locally needed services, niche markets, and valuable time. These in-class experiments contain many valuable lessons on creative thinking including skills, ideas, and innovation as assets that always lend value”. Oleksandra Gumenna, NAUKMA, Kiev

We normally experiment to try, test something in order to verify results, discover something unknown, or obtain new ideas or products. In the case of experimenting with INNOLABS we shall try and test new approaches including upgrades in the existing curriculum, application of innovative education methods, and enhancement of collaboration between University and enterprises, all to increase innovation, support high-growth entrepreneurship and accelerate business growth in the long run.
From this we are able to analyse the systematic data captured and conduct a detailed analysis to evaluate the results not only from the platform.

Analysis of the Experiment and Its Results

On entering into the experiment participating students had to fill in a questionnaire to inform about their expectations and knowledge and skills in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship. At the end of the experiment the same students were asked to write their feedback in a separate questionnaire. Then the both were compared and analysed. The analysis of the feedback allows us to make conclusions about the experiment:

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5. 53.9% of the experiment participants claimed that their expectations from the experiment came true and they were satisfied with the results.

The project team has analysed the results of the feedback from students and has concluded that there will be additional work undertaken to optimise the experiment utilising the platform.

Reported by Alena Apiakun, Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno

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WHAT IS NEXT?

The experiment will continue starting early September 2014 using the Ideas Market but this time each university will work on separate tasks from a problem of an enterprise located in their region using their own platform. The idea of this experiment is to seek student perceptions from the questionnaires completed before and after each experiment attracting students who took part in the both stages of the experiment, some students who just participated in the first experiment and some students who had just participated in the second experiment. The work on the project will soon be completed after the main results have been achieved. At the end there will be a dissemination conference held in Minsk, Belarus, on 19-20 November 2014. Students and staff at the partner universities are welcome to take an active part in the final conference.

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1. The most important factor that influenced the performance of the participants was information obtained during practical exercises and lectures as well as during the Ideas Market work.

2. The main incentives for the participants were development of practical skills, introducing new challenges, working with new ideas, forming the ability to communicate with entrepreneurs, and generation of new knowledge.

3. The most important sources of ideas presented in the Ideas Market are participants’ own inventions, the Internet, and communication with friends, colleagues and the family.

4. The most important source for the development of competencies, as far as the participants see it, is their participation in the Ideas Market. Among the other important sources they have singled out practical training including workshops and team work.

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The best solution prize winners at Polotsk State University

“We delved into a real-life problem solving in a very new environment of study - team work where our teachers were only consultants but we did the main thing which helped us to start being active and creative in class”. Aliaksandr Bazhko, Polotsk State University

IDEAS MARKET: HOW IT WORKED

Development of creativity skills for entrepreneurship and innovation was central to the Ideas Market experiment which is part of the enterprise education initiative now undertaken by the 5 partner Universities in Belarus and Ukraine. In the basis of the Ideas Market experiment lay the “learning through entrepreneurship” principle.

The Ideas Market experiment was held on a specially designed platform that was a virtual market for ideas where all the participants, within an open space, suggested new ideas which were then collectively evaluated. Students acted like entrepreneurs who were able to express their ideas and collaborated with each other. In the result the most attractive and valuable ideas were invested in with the use of virtual currency. After a small period of time the ideas market closed and the best investment was the winner. The experiment took place starting at the end of April and closed on Friday 9th May using the Ideas Market platform at Yanka Kupala State University in Belarus.

More than 250 students from the 5 partner universities in Ukraine and Belarus individually participated in the experiment using the Ideas Market platform where they entered their ideas.

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