



Where is
the key?

What are eco-systems of entrepreneurial learning?



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Struggling at the doorstep of 21st century learning
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Bringing education and work closer together to innovate and re-think
education and learning - creating local and global **ECOSYSTEMS** of
interaction between learning, reality and work

One of the huge challenges in the world of *Europe 2020* will be involving the private sector in systematic collaboration with educational institutions at all levels and in non-formal youth provisions to:

- > Create entrepreneurial mentality in education
- > Move education and learning closer to labour markets and real life, and create local and global ecosystems of interaction between learning, reality and work
- > Involve young people in real projects and allow them to learn through real projects

This mission includes a dramatic change in private companies' self-perception and identity: in the new global order companies will be directly involved in and interact with education systems on a systematic basis.

Most companies are miles away from such a change.

And most companies will ask:

→ So, we're expected to offer lots of resources to education and learning; but what's in it for us? How will we benefit from that?

Such questions are valid and justified.

In the "old" industrial world, the answer would be easy: don't do it; you will be wasting your time.

In the new globalized world, very different answers will be given in the private sector.

These answers are closely linked to what is called *the new nature of innovation*.

My point is that private companies must change mentality in both directions at the same time!

Meaning: open up the collaboration with education and learning at the same time as they open up to new forms of innovation.

If they can do that, then the investments in networking with education will make sense, because this interaction can precisely be used to connect to users, future generations and new ideas.

In other words: private businesses must move towards a double change of mentality allowing them to give and take at the same time; to offer and to benefit at the same time.

The need to change education and learning is widely recognized and strongly explained and promoted by for example the European Commission within the 2020 strategies.



The need to change mentality in private companies is less recognized. It is closely linked to the new nature of innovation.

What is the new nature of innovation about?

Well, let's ask the OECD:

Companies have to open their innovation processes. They must listen carefully to customers and address needs based on the customer's terms - not the company's. Information and communication technology (ICT) will be a key enabler in co-creating unique value with individual customers and in enhancing the experiences of the consumers. ICT enables companies to co-create with many customers simultaneously. Companies will involve users in early stages of their innovation processes by tapping tacit or hidden knowledge from customers, and by finding inspiration in users' new solutions to problems.

In the industrial age, companies competed in the areas of production efficiency, low-cost distribution and persuasive marketing. In doing so, company innovation relied on internal resources, organized and efficient mass production, and the use of branding and marketing to spot new markets. Today, insight into customer needs and behavior must be an integral part of a company's strategy and business model.

Companies must listen and have dialogue with customers and give them access to all kinds of information, platforms and company systems. Companies must be transparent and evaluate risk with their customers. In doing so, companies will co-create unique experiences in collaboration with individual customers, as well as with many different customers at the same time. The emergence of new ICT has made this possible at a very low cost - sometimes at nearly zero cost.

Tapping hidden knowledge from customers and involving users in the beginning of innovation processes requires different knowledge and competencies than has previously been necessary for innovation. To understand how new generations think and act may require a whole new set of skills or even a new company culture.

OECD *The New Nature of Innovation* 2009

In short: companies must open up to collaboration with education at different levels and use this collaboration to establish relations to present and future customers, including inviting them to evaluate the company's products, inviting them to co-innovate and co-produce ideas and new perspectives and inviting them to use, test and promote the products.

This does not exclude the company's collaboration with other groups of people in the society, but obviously the companies should take a special interest in interacting with the new generations.

If educations and companies can join forces in this way, a clear win-win will occur and dramatically change the nature of both education and innovation.

In the preparation of such interactions, the involved players will of course need to define the mission, scope and relevance of the collaboration. One company will find kindergartens and primary schools very interesting; another will find vocational training or higher education more attractive. Some will find for example non-formal youth and media clubs attractive, as they need input from creative youth.

What should not happen is establishing such ecosystems of interaction simply based on social responsibility. Social responsibility will be a dimension in the interaction, but is not a sustainable driver: companies need stronger reasons to use resources in this new way.

What is most important to understand is that re-thinking education and changing mentality in private companies is totally interdependent! One thing is not likely to happen without the other.

Let's, then, offer some pragmatic definitions of what *ecosystems of learning, reality and work* mean:

- › Small ecosystems in this context means a number of players from different sectors working together, step by step, and in very flexible ways, never freezing into fixed forms, but more like living organisms
- › Small networks or communities are formed based on joint missions that must be concrete, realistic and manageable, yet full of potential
- › The ecosystems are expected to be initiated and facilitated by education institutions; perhaps only one, perhaps a group of educational institutions
- › The ecosystems should not develop into big bureaucratic organisations or networks, but should be small and close to the key players: children, teachers, students, companies, cultural institutions
- › Bottom up initiatives are more likely to be authentic than top down initiatives; bottom up initiatives are expected to receive clear political support
- › Such small ecosystems should include one or more educations, formal as well as non-formal, a small number of private companies, including for example finance enterprises, and a small number of cultural institutions and NGO's
- › The ecosystems should not be dependent on public authorities, but should be endorsed by public authorities
- › The small ecosystems should develop their own practice, their own work form and their ways of collaboration, based on a clear and strong mission
- › Flexible permanent ecosystems are more attractive than stand-alone ones

Obviously, such *ecosystems of learning, reality and work* should include a strong and visible global orientation, either through the collaboration with global players through the private companies, or through including one or two global players in the ecosystem.

In many cases the ecosystem themselves will be able to create global dimensions through their projects and initiatives, such as using social networking, open crowd based exploration, etc.

Forecast: one thing is certain and that is:

- if educations or classes or project groups will have to create collaboration with private and other community players from scratch all the time, it will not happen.

Entrepreneurial projects in educations must be able to tap into already existing ecosystems of collaboration.

This means that the ecosystems should consist in two structures: the framework collaboration between a number of players and the concrete projects exploiting this framework.

(See illustration below)

➡ Entrepreneurial projects in educations must be able to tap into already existing ecosystems of collaboration

One of the challenges will be to make sure that such ecosystems are based on certain criteria, closely linked to the joint mission. Mission based criteria are key to success. Examples of such criteria might be:

- › The ecosystems and the projects must be relevant to the learning mission and provide practice and exploration fields supporting the learning mission
- › The ecosystems must be relevant to and clearly benefit the involved private companies
- › The private companies must be able to use the ecosystems to innovate, to dialogue with new user generations and to create alliances with the children, young people and students involved
- › The private companies must be able to spot talents among the learners that they would like to follow and mentor and perhaps offer traineeships
- › Other community players such as cultural institutions, social NGO's and sport organisations must be able to identify with the missions of the ecosystems and to benefit clearly from collaborating with the educations and private companies



Authentic entrepreneurial mentality can only be created among learners if the collaboration with private enterprises and community players is highly relevant to and benefitting all the involved organisations.

This is why stand-alone or situation-based collaboration should be avoided; it is naïve and unrealistic, and few educations will be able to make that happen. A few educations might be able to offer the learners long-term entrepreneurial projects in collaborations with private companies, but this will be the exception, not the rule.

Most educations at all levels will have to rely on the existence of ecosystems to tap into, when they create projects or initiatives to foster entrepreneurial mentality among the learners - and teachers!

➡ Most educations at all levels will have to rely on the existence of ecosystems to tap into

Could we offer a few simple examples of initiatives based on such local ecosystems? Of course, so let's do that...

SCENARIO 1

A secondary school in Denmark establishes a project for two classes running in parallel with one full semester, addressing environmental challenges.

They tap into the local ecosystem to establish collaboration with the global windmill producer Vestas, with the regional TV station, the local energy museum and some new small game companies in the community. On the side-line the local authority's energy office will open the doors to the projects.

The project's global orientation is established through Vestas Brazil.

The projects aim to produce innovative ways to encourage youth to combine local and global environmental behaviour and to find ways of doing this in everyday life.

A special aim is to focus on innovative ways of communicating and marketing important social content and messages linked to environmental missions, through media and through social networking.

SCENARIO 2

A primary school in Catalonia Spain establishes a brand new four week course for 10-11 years old kids about lifestyle diseases.

They tap into the local ecosystem of collaboration and create a small collaborative network between the school, the local sports clubs, the regional healthcare center and... the local bank.

The local newspaper will be following the projects and offering free space to the young teams.

The school is able to offer the learners collaboration with a school in Ghana Africa working with a similar project, and to offer social networking with other schools in Europe.

The aim of the projects is to create new ideas about initiatives to be taken among children and young people in the community, also taking into account the economies of lifestyle diseases, and in addition to raise awareness of emerging lifestyle diseases in Africa.

The new ideas will be followed up along subsequent school years.

SCENARIO 3

Second year social science students at the university of Bologna are challenged with the mission to transform social innovation policy into real-life initiatives.

They will work in a full semester to create at least three ways of establishing growth economies through new social initiatives addressing serious social issues and organized on private or private-public terms.

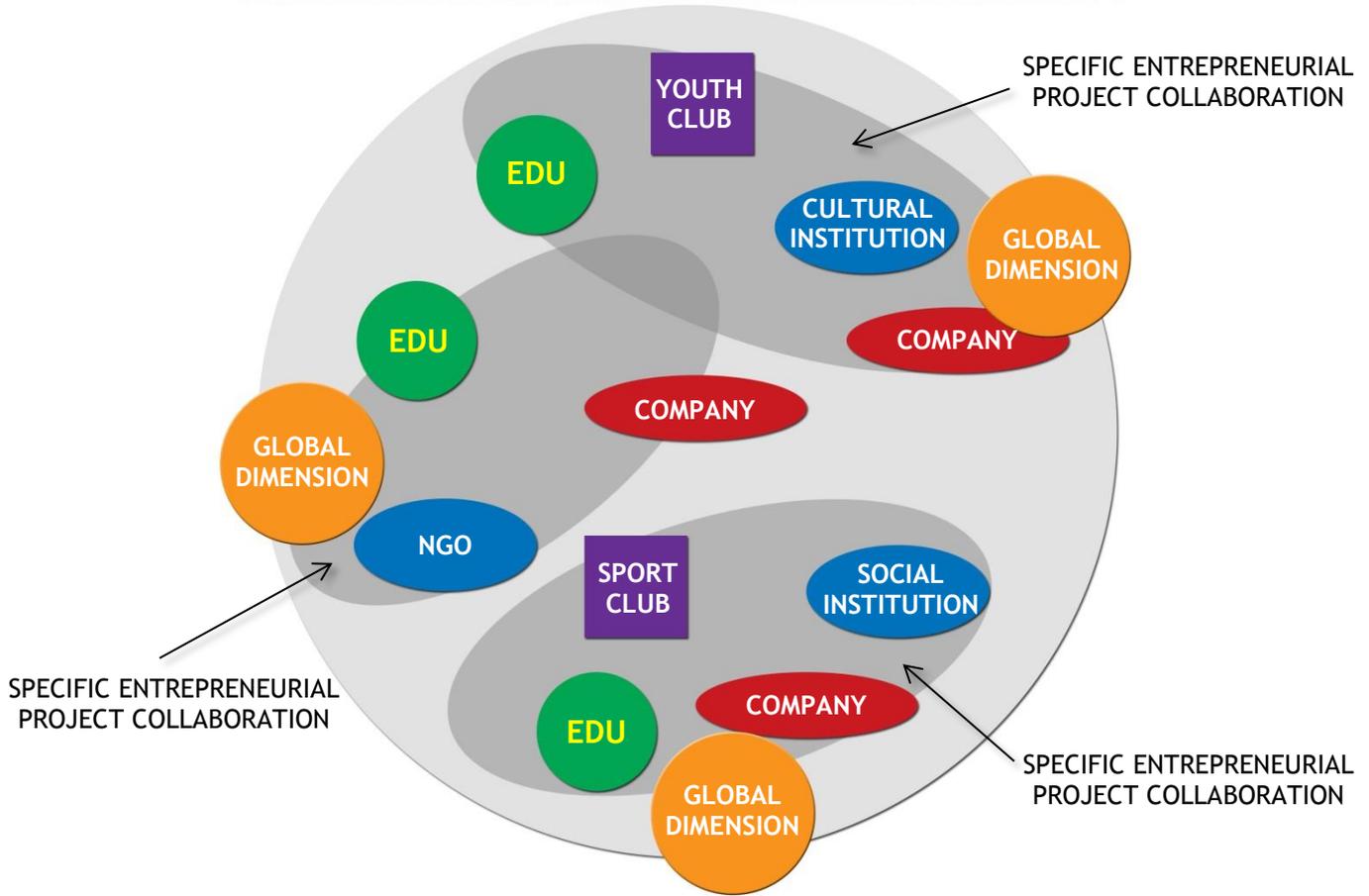
They tap into the ecosystem established by the university and establish collaboration with local NGO's, the municipality's social department, with a local bank and financing enterprise, along with community organisations linked to people with unmet social needs.

The semester is linked to the implementation of a European project, offering the students access to collaboration with three other universities working in similar directions.

The further global orientation is established by the students themselves in the form of a knowledge generating social network, inviting students at global level to discuss and share how social innovation can be implemented in practice and create new economies and jobs.

The long-term objective is to mobilize the students to turn ideas into action in parallel to their further studies and thereby create emerging economies.

ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM IN A COMMUNITY



Let us return to question on which this small text is based:

⇨ What's in it for the private sector?

Schools might be convinced that opening up to projects in the community will benefit the learners and the school in general.

Cultural institutions and NGO's might, due to their social and community mentality, be persuaded to join.

The local authorities will probably open the doors to their own schools.

This will not be the case when addressing the private sector.

They are in the game to produce economy, to grow and expand, and they are under pressure from increasing global competition.

Large companies, banks, insurance companies and SME's will not automatically see themselves in the mission of offering services to kindergartens, schools and universities - or to youth clubs!

This is why I say: charity, social responsibility, private contacts, and having a heart for children and youth will not do the job. Such mentality will be sufficient in small stand-alone activities, but not to establish local ecosystems of collaboration.

Therefore we must be able to penetrate into the very core of the businesses and link such collaboration to the identification of the company's needs, interests and benefits.

If there is not real benefit for the company, the collaboration in the ecosystems will not be sustainable and offer the desired development of quality entrepreneurial mentality to the learners.

→ The key to company benefit is the new nature of innovation!

Collaborating closely with users, consumers, the new generations and social networks will offer many companies new growth potentials.

This is already happening across groups of pioneer companies, locally and globally, but for most private businesses this orientation is new and unexplored.

Creating local ecosystems to foster entrepreneurial mentality among learners through participation and creation of real-life projects requires a double mentality shift:

- Schools and teachers changing mentality as to work with the community
- Private sector players changing mentality as to create innovation and grown in collaboration with users and the new generations

A new nature of innovation requires completely new, multidisciplinary skills and competencies, and the demand for these new human resources will be immense. OECD *The New Nature of Innovation* 2009



In the first many years, the creation of such ecosystems of entrepreneurial mentality will include hard work and much effort to change the mentality in both education and private business.

This will make the first many projects slow, demanding and not all that successful.

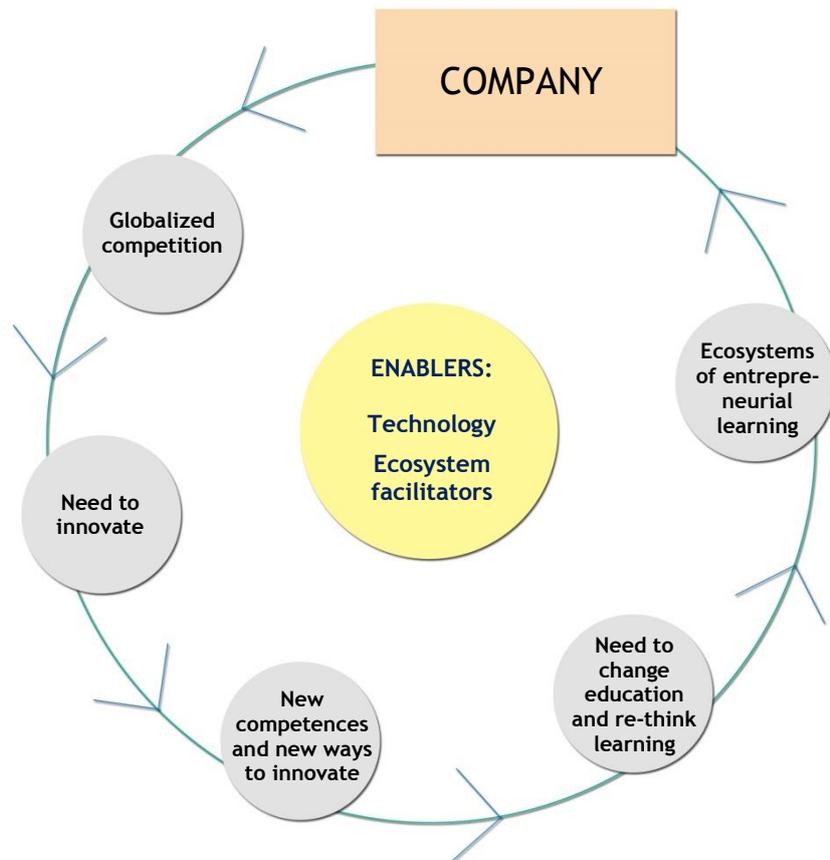
This state of play must be accepted by the funders of the new projects. The involved players must be allowed time to develop new mentality and behaviour.

In Europe we are looking forward to see Erasmus+ programs and Horizon 2020 programs supporting such new ecosystems and accepting that it will take time to create new mentality and behaviour among all players and stakeholders.

Strong funding of a variety of such ecosystems and community collaborations will no doubt be of immense importance as role-models and good practice.

I hereby invite European officers working on these programs and actions to share their knowledge, ideas and concrete plans in this field - perhaps the most important field of educational innovation in Europe the next decades.

COMPANY NEEDS AND BENEFITS “DRIVER” CIRCEL



WHO?

Who will initiative, facilitate and support such entrepreneurial ecosystems?

The school, the bank, the football club, the theatre?

I'm not sure they will, or can...

This is interesting, as it opens up *entrepreneurial* opportunities aiming to create *entrepreneurial* mentality..!

Perhaps qualified players in the communities might establish initiatives in support of the creation of such ecosystems?

No doubt, strong facilitating will be needed in the communities to initiate and drive forward such new ecosystems, and hopefully various funding mechanisms, such as the Social Fund and the transnational European programs, will offer support to such facilitation.

SERIOUS GAMIFICATION?

Ecosystems of collaboration to develop interaction between education, reality and work can be created in many different ways, also depending on local resources, needs and ambitions.

However, an interesting approach to the creation of such ecosystems might be what is now called *serious gamification*.

I use the expression *serious* gamification to distance me from all sorts of popular gamification offering to solve just about any problem.

Serious gamification exploits the most powerful digital game principles to create missions, exploration, joint ventures, collaboration, ownership, motivation and to change mentality and behaviour.

Serious gamification can, if used in intelligent ways, offer interesting frameworks or platforms for the establishment of such new ecosystems of entrepreneurial learning in the communities.

Serious gamification can offer a language for and a mutual understanding of such enterprises, and help the “eco-gamers” to work hard for the set goals and the joint mission.

You need help, guidance or support?

If you wish to start creating such ecosystems in your community or such entrepreneurial activities in your education, but you are not sure how to do it, you are welcome to contact us. Perhaps we can find a way...



Did you find the key?
If not, keep looking!