

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES ARE ENGAGED IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The European Desk of the Belgian-Italian Chamber of Commerce is widening its portfolio of services through a new LLP project, the Uni-Key project.

The Belgian Italian Chamber of Commerce (CCBI) is one of the main partners of the Uni-key project. Uni-key, led by the University of Fulda, was launched in November 2011 and it foresees the participation of other eight partners from Europe and South-Africa. The project aims to raise the students' awareness of their entrepreneurial potentials through the attendance of an e-learning course.

Students, in fact, tend to not fully understand the potentials that they acquire during their academic life or during

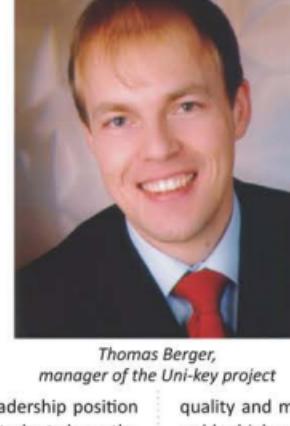
an internship. For this reason, the project is addressed to those students who are abroad for a placement and, it wants to enhance their perceptions on the entrepreneurial skills and competences that they are gaining through this experience.

CCBI truly believes that promoting an entrepreneurial mindset and an entrepreneurial attitude is a key strategy to promote an economic growth in Europe. Since 1950, indeed, CCBI is committed to help enterprises to develop their potentials. This project simply represents another step forward to support the development of innovation among enterprises.

Thomas Berger is the Director of the Institute of interdisciplinary Research in Fulda (Germany). He is not only, one of the creative minds behind the project's idea, but also the manager of the Uni-key Project.

Why do you consider so important to enhance the awareness of students on their entrepreneurial skills?

Entrepreneurship comprises a set of skills such as creative thinking, management of oneself and others, awareness and seizing of opportunities, sense of initiative and responsibility etc., which are not only relevant in case students plan to start an enterprise later in their life but those skills are relevant in any leadership position you can think of. Only a minority of the students have the chance to attend entrepreneurship training as part of their study course. However there should be more opportunities for entrepreneurial learning – and there are already, but sometimes there is a lack of awareness of those opportunities. The Uni-key project is based on the experiences gained by the partners in Erasmus and Leonardo mobility programmes and in European initiatives to support young entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial skill development (i.e. Erasmus for young entrepreneurs programme). The project consortium, indeed, experienced that young graduates are not fully aware of their competences/skills and their potential. They gain a lot of different skills when undertaking an internship, volunteering service etc. in a foreign country but



Thomas Berger,
manager of the Uni-key project

they fail to translate these experiences into acquired skills marketable on the job-market.

Which benefit will bring the increase of entrepreneurial mindset among EU young citizens?

Boosting the creativity and entrepreneurship throughout the learning process is fundamental for a future growth. In fact, given the actual global economic situation and the increasing global competition, the European countries will no longer be able to compete on cost and price, therefore, a new pathway has to be drawn. The consortium believes that the EU countries need to produce higher quality and more innovative products and services delivered by higher skilled people. We hereby agree to the conclusions of the EU2020-strategy developed by the European Commission.

How you intend to enhance the students' awareness?

We collect students when they come out of their "comfort zone" of their home university, i.e. when they go abroad to undertake a practical training or internship. During this period students face a number of challenges, which we turn into "key entrepreneurial learning situations". We develop a number of E-learning modules, which help students to master those challenges and in the same time train entrepreneurial skills. In this way, they will have the chance to



Partners of the Uni-key project

reflect on the experience that they are living. The purpose is to help the student to fully exploit the working/training opportunities that the hosting-organizations are offering them. Just to give two examples: Every student applying for grants to finance the stay abroad faces a "financial planning challenge", we turn that "private issue" into a learning opportunity in financial planning skills for their project – the stay abroad. Most students will encounter conflicts or misunderstandings based on intercultural differences; again we turn this issue in an exercise to train creative thinking, as the change of perspectives – to look at yourself or at a situation through the eyes of strangers, questioning stereotypes can be seen as a source of creative thinking and innovation.

Where does the innovation of this project lay?

Although, several universities have implemented start-up or business innovation centres, there is still a wide gap between the potential of development of entrepreneurial skills and the number of students and graduates actually taking advantage of those offers. For this reason, our mission is to "unleash the latent entrepreneurial mind-set in mobile students". We hereby address a lack of awareness of relevance and potential of entrepreneurial skills among students. We complement our new training approach with accompanying measures, which address Universities (as organisers of student mobility) and enterprises (as host organisations of

mobile students). For example we investigate how we can promote internships in young and micro-companies – as a way to organise more direct contacts between students and "real-life" entrepreneurs. We investigate opportunities for mobile students to assume a role of an "agent of knowledge transfer" between their home university and their host enterprise. Furthermore we make sure that our E-learning course will be accessible using mobile devices as we address mobile learners. This fresh look at the role, organisation and qualities of student placements/internships abroad makes our project unique.

Why a student should be interested in participating in courses developed by this project?

Students should decide to attend our course because it will give them the opportunity to fully profit from their placement experience – for many a once in a lifetime experience. Indeed, with a little extra effort he/she will have the chance to reflect on his/her experience and display its potentials, as well as getting to know other students and enterprises involved.



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