

FASTER project
Training for Fast Growing Entrepreneurs

Final Report of the Regional Scans

Executive summary

1. FASTER project overview

The creation of new businesses and the contraction or exit of less productive firms are key elements in the dynamism of modern economies. New firms attract resources to new activities, and when they prosper and are able to grow rapidly, they generate significant numbers of new jobs. Young firms seem likely to grow more rapidly in some countries than in others. This points to the importance of ensuring that the business environment is conducive to rapid expansion of young, especially innovative firms once they establish themselves. New firms are often the source of new processes or products and contribute to productivity improvements in the economy as a whole and governments have increasingly recognised the contribution that entrepreneurship can make to reducing poverty and empowering disadvantaged groups.

Thus, if it is to make a success of the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment, Europe needs to stimulate entrepreneurial mindsets among young people, encourage innovative business start-ups, and foster a culture that is friendlier to entrepreneurship and to the growth of small and medium-sized businesses. The important role of education in promoting more entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours is now widely recognised.

Improving the creation of innovative business is particularly important in the new member states of the European Union as these are the ones needing a stronger effort for fostering regional development and for setting a conducive business environment for start ups, compared to the EU15.

FASTER answers the above challenge by supporting the transfer of an existing training programme for fast-growing company creation, successfully run in Italy by the Business School ISTUD Foundation, to other 4 New Member State Countries, namely Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland and Cyprus, by defining the best format to guarantee that the ISTUD Entrepreneurship Programme (IEP) can be both delivered and effectively embedded in each partner country VET system.

IEP is a comprehensive course designed to teach entrepreneurship to those committed in exploiting their knowledge through the creation of a high-growth oriented company ,

rather than just a one-man company (ambitious entrepreneurship versus self employment attitude) .

The programme focuses on two crucial areas for the launch of a new enterprise: the establishment of a network of reference and the preparation of a business plan.

It is ideally composed by different activities which can be delivered either as class stage (class lessons, full/part time, and meetings with sector's experts or testimonials) or as business planning meetings (meetings, individual and/or in groups, with assistance for the business implementation plan, with the support of sector's experts and teaching staff).

The FASTER project will foster the adaptation, transfer and sustainability of the IEP programme in the benefiting countries by following the methodology and process described below:

- **Needs analysis.** Since it has been proved that the environmental conditions (political, economic, social and cultural) can strongly affect the company creation process, and as the IEP course is devoted to company creation, the scope of the needs analysis is to understand the environmental conditions in each benefiting country in order to decide whether and how to adapt the IEP programme to regional characteristics.
- **Customization and transfer strategy.** On the basis of the results of the previous stage, this activity aims at customizing the IEP programme to regional characteristics and needs. The customization process relates both to the definition of the target groups for training, the course general objectives, and the main contents. Once the customised courses are ready and approved by partners, a transfer pathway (a list of actions that should be undertaken at regional level) is suggested and agreed in order to bring the programme from the paper to the real word.
- **Capacity building.** Since transferring a training course is not just an issue of providing people with teaching material, but mostly it involves the development of capacities for autonomously managing and delivering it, this bulk of activities foster the development of knowledge and skills of local training managers.
- **Pilot testing.** This activity aims at testing the real impact of the regional courses on the target group so to understand whether the programmes are correctly tailored.

- **Evaluation and fine-tuning.** It represents a key issue since it provides FASTER partners with feedbacks needed to align the course in response to users needs, thus securing its success.

2. The Regional Scan

As the transferring process is not just a “copy and paste” exercise, it requires preliminarily investigations of a selected set of environmental conditions in the transferee regions, which could block/facilitate the transfer, efficacy and sustainability of the concerned practice in the recipient region.

Therefore, in order to adapt and successfully transfer the IEP course, a preliminary investigation (regional scan) of some selected environmental factors in the transferee regions, have been undertaken.

This document presents the Regional Scan results completed in each partner country and the customisation proposals and transfer pathway derived from the Scan results.

Methodology

The regional scan completed in each transferee country took into consideration a range of environmental factors which can profoundly impact the development of Entrepreneurial activity in regions and therefore influence the efficacy and sustainability of a training course for company creation.

The environmental factors investigated within the regional scan were:

- **Institutional framework.** The level of maturity of the existing political and regulatory framework supporting the development of a favourable environment for entrepreneurship.
- **Knowledge intensity.** The number and dynamism of regional knowledge basins and their capacity of both producing and exploiting R&D.
- **Entrepreneurial texture.** The relative percentages and survival rates of new ventures created each year, in comparison to the existing businesses.
- **Supply side system.** The completeness of the supply side chain for entrepreneurship, its capacity of providing consistent support, its capacity to co-

operate with the other actors of the chain in order to provide better integrated service to entrepreneurs.

- **Culture.** The social recognition of entrepreneurship as a feasible and appealing carrier path.

In order to gather such information, partners have been provided with common methodology and tools.

The methodology comprised of two levels of analysis: “desk research” (macro-level) and quality-quantitative “on the field analysis” (micro-level).

Desk research objectives, with regards to Entrepreneurship development, were:

- To understand the policy and regulatory framework in favour of entrepreneurship;
- To identify the characteristics of the regional entrepreneurial texture;
- To identify the main regional players acting in the field of entrepreneurship/company creation

“On the field analysis” objectives were:

- To understand entrepreneurship support supply side (soft services and financial services) characteristics;
- To understand entrepreneurs’ needs;
- To understand the mismatching between authentic entrepreneurs’ needs and the present offer.

Regional Scan Results

The investigation of the mentioned environmental factors in each region permitted a comparison of the results allowing a concrete analysis of similarities and differences among regions.

For each environmental factor a maturity level has been assigned ranging from:

- **Unripe.** When a region is performing worse than other regions in its country and also compared to the EU15 average.
- **Developing.** When the region is a front runner in its country and catching up with the EU15.

- **Well developed.** When the region is in line with the EU15 average.

The results of the regional scan can be summarised as follow:

	Environmental factors					Classification
	Institutional frame work	Knowledge intensity	Entrepreneurial texture	Supply side system	Culture	
West Pomerania	unripe	developing	unripe	unripe	unripe	Group 3
Cyprus	unripe	developing	unripe	unripe	unripe	Group 3
Plzen	unripe	unripe	developing	developing	developing	Group 2
Central Hungary	developing	developing	developing	developing	developing	Group 1

According to the benchmark we can group the regions in 3 main categories:

- Group 1 (Central Hungary), with a “developing” evaluation for all the fields, having: a) an institutional framework focused on competitiveness aspects, supporting policies for the creation of a favourable innovative and entrepreneurial environment (this year Central Hungary became obj. 2 region); b) a good knowledge intensity in terms of knowledge production capacity, even if with a lower R&D exploitation capacity; c) a quite dynamic new entrepreneurial texture with a good survival rate of new ventures; d) a well developed innovation supply system, including the early stage financing sector which is crucial for knowledge intensive start up creation; e) a quite positive cultural attitude toward entrepreneurship, despite the still existing influences of the regime.

- Group 2 (Plzen), with a mainly “developing” evaluation in the concerned fields with some “unripe” aspects, having: a) an institutional framework still focusing on convergence aspects, supporting policies for improving the overall regional economic performance, without any specific focus on innovation and entrepreneurship; b) a limited knowledge intensity, in terms of knowledge exploitation capacities, but an increasing/developing knowledge production capacity (recently the UWB Faculty of Applied Science won the competition for the EU Center of Excellence and three more centers were accepted as regional excellence centers and their infrastructure will be funded by the EU structural funds); c) a quite dynamic new entrepreneurial texture with a good percentage of innovative companies among them; d) a quite active innovation supply side,

which is used to cooperate, including early stage investors: e) a quite positive cultural attitude toward entrepreneurship, despite the still existing influences of the regime.

- Group 3 (West Pomerania and Cyprus), with a mainly “unripe” evaluation in the concerned fields with just a few “developing” aspects, having: a) an institutional framework still focusing on convergence aspects, supporting policies for improving the overall regional economic performance, without any specific focus on innovation and entrepreneurship; b) a good knowledge intensity in terms of knowledge production capacity, even if with a lower R&D exploitation capacity; c) a scarce or down-sized entrepreneurial texture d) a not complete innovation supply chain with the absence of early stage investors and with the lack of co-ordination among regional actors e) a quite negative cultural attitude toward entrepreneurship (in particular toward risk-taking).

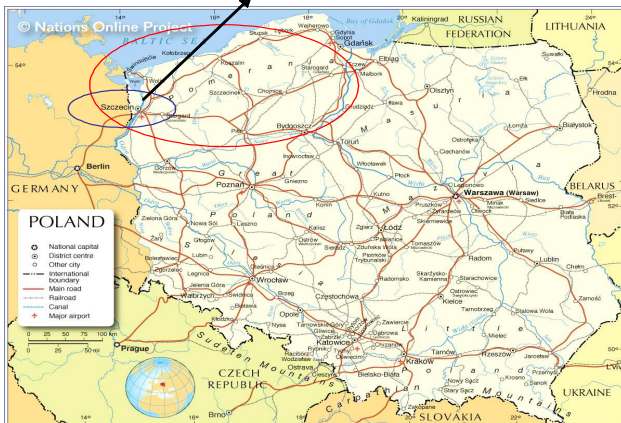
3. Customisation proposal for regional courses

This grouping has been functional at supporting the design and development of a customisation proposal based on the environmental characteristics and strengths of each transferee region and of a common transfer path to support partners in identifying and implementing the needed actions for embedding the customised course in their environments.

The fact sheet below presents, for each partner country, the customization proposal suggested on the basis of the regional scan insights.

Poland (West Pomerania Region)

West Pomeranian Business School



Target Group

According to the regional analysis the West Pomerania Region, despite having a good knowledge basin system, lacks of the ability to exploit R&D results and have a quite negative cultural attitude towards entrepreneurship. Thus, the customisation proposal of the IEP programme is to focus on the target group of *researchers*, so to leverage on the knowledge intensity strength of the region.

General objectives

Since the proposed target group has been identified i.e. researchers and considering, on one side, the need to strength the exploitation capacities of R&D results, and on the other, the appreciation of entrepreneurship as a positive carrier option, the programme general objectives should be to promote entrepreneurial culture on researchers and provide them with the knowledge and tools for R&D valorisation.

Hungary (Central Hungary)



Target Group

This is the Region presenting the most mature environment for entrepreneurship among the transferee regions. , and could therefore plan the implementation of a course for start up creation.

Being INNOSTART's target group would be/novel entrepreneurs (practitioners), and considering that other regional player are already offering training to *researchers* for spin-off creation, the customisation proposal has been focused on the target group of would be/novel entrepreneurs and/or young practitioners with limited previous business experience .

General objectives

As mentioned before, Central Hungary is the most mature environment among the transferee countries. For this reason, the customisation proposal opted in designing a very practical course (similar to the original IEP course), providing trainees with knowledge, operational tools and access to a supportive network for starting-up their venture.

Czech Republic



General objectives

In this case the course should seek to develop awareness on the overall issue of new business creation and give basic tools for understanding and planning such process.

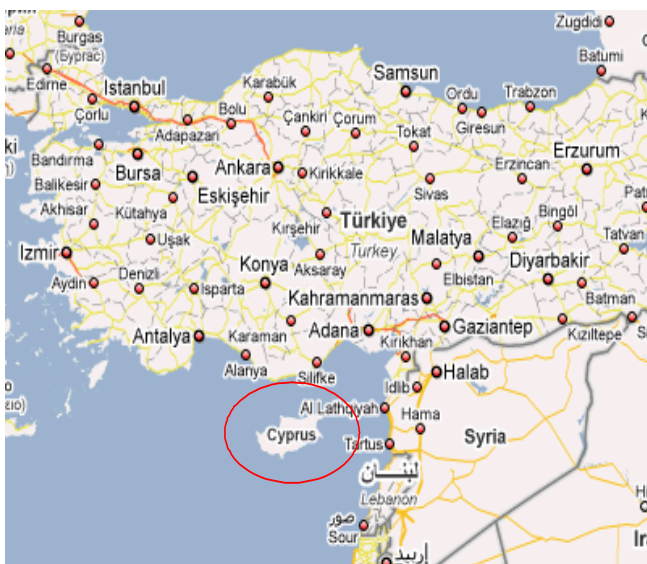
Target Group

The regional analysis for this group shows a good entrepreneurial texture, a quite developed supply system along with a developing cultural acceptance of entrepreneurship. In this case the customisation proposal of the IEP course could focus on two target groups:

- Practitioners
- University students

Nevertheless, as UWB's primary target group are University students, and within its strategy supports development of entrepreneurship elective courses, the selected target group for customisation has been University students.

Cyprus



General objectives

Since the target group has been identified researchers- and considering, on one side, the need to strengthen the exploitation capacities of R&D results, and on the other, the appreciation of entrepreneurship as a positive career option, the programme's general objectives should concentrate on the promotion of entrepreneurial culture among researchers and provide them with the knowledge and tools for R&D valorisation.

Target Group

According to the regional analysis Cyprus (like West Pomerania) lacks the ability to exploit R&D results and has a quite negative cultural attitude towards entrepreneurship. Thus, the customisation proposal of the IEP programme is to focus on the target group of *researchers*, so *as* to leverage on the knowledge intensity strength of the region.

On the other hand, the scan results also suggest that the target group could be formed by novel entrepreneurs willing to develop an internationalisation strategy for their venture.

3.1 Common didactical issues

The customization process mainly related to the course outline, learning objectives and contents, which has been adjusted according to regional characteristics, strengths and needs, while some other didactical and organizational issues, such as teaching approach, networking/outreach and assessment methods remained common for all the transferee countries and are briefly presented below.

Teaching approach

As entrepreneurship represents a very practical domain, the teaching approach should include both traditional and active teaching methods, giving students and trainees the possibility to interact/practice and stimulate a “learning by doing” attitude.

So, together with traditional lectures the teaching approach should massively use class work, case studies, incidents and role playing.

In any case, the best mix of techniques to be used in the program is to be defined on the basis of participants’ profile and number. Nonetheless, some of them are listed in the table below , and will be selected by each transferee country.

Type of approach	Main activities	Challenges
Classroom lectures	Lectures on themes such as market analysis, venture creation, new product development, project management, financing, strategy development etc.	Classroom lectures need to be combined with more experiential approaches to learning. Theory needs to be combined with practice. Lectures must be made relevant to real-world entrepreneurship problems.
Business plans	Preparing business plans individually or in teams. Competitions and prizes for the best business plan.	Business plans must be made realistic. Business plans should be tested against market conditions and potential risks. Teaching must also look at turning business plan ideas into real practice.
Case studies	Presentations and discussions of real company/entrepreneur experiences of business creation, growth, adaptation and failure.	Significant resources are required to develop case studies. Case studies must focus on problems potential entrepreneurs will actually face.
Entrepreneurs and guest speakers	Entrepreneurs invited to present their experiences in lectures and discussions, in the classroom or in their enterprise.	HEIs must find ways of attracting entrepreneurs to teaching programmes. They must also support entrepreneurs in their teaching practice, notably in drawing out the learning from their experiences.
Student business start-ups	Students start real or virtual business individually or in teams.	Funds will be required to create start-ups and to develop virtual firm technologies. Rules must be established for sharing rewards from successful starts.
Business games	Computer-simulated or other business games.	The requirements for developing or purchasing the technology should not be underestimated. Efforts are needed to integrate games with other teaching. Teachers need training to provide a framework for learning from the games.
Student entrepreneur clubs and networks	Student societies and networks to discuss entrepreneurship issues, create entrepreneurial teams, obtain mutual support and increase confidence.	Nurturing is required to make networks successful. Activities must be found to animate the networks. Networks should be expanded to include experienced entrepreneurs, investors, consultants etc.
Placements with small firms	Short-term assignments with small firms to assist with business development projects such as market or technology development.	Firms must be found to provide good quality placements. University staff must support the student during the placement.
Feasibility studies	Exploring the feasibility of business ideas with environmental scans, market potential investigations, competitor analysis etc.	It can be difficult to assess how well feasibility studies have been undertaken compared with real conditions on the ground.
Communication training	Presentation techniques, interpersonal communication	Communication skills need to be developed under pressure (stressing) and real-world conditions.

Type of approach	Main activities	Challenges
Consulting for SMEs	Student participation in consulting projects for new and small firms with the support of university staff.	It is necessary to find suitable companies and consulting opportunities. Although academics xxxx
Support for graduate student start-ups following the course	Seed money, mentoring, incubation, consultancy etc.	Sufficient funds must be generated for the support. Decisions must be made about the right amount and duration of support. Where possible links should be made with existing support providers outside of the HEI.
University-wide entrepreneurship education	Spreading entrepreneurship teaching out to faculties beyond the business school.	The right balance must be achieved between the benefits of proximity and tailoring to specific study programmes (curricula) through separate courses for each specialization and the benefit of economies of scale and greater experience through centralised and inter-disciplinary courses.
Specialist entrepreneurship degrees	Undergraduate or postgraduate degrees majoring in entrepreneurship.	It can be difficult to obtain academic rigour from pure entrepreneurship degrees. It can also be difficult to attract students to these degrees. Practical entrepreneurship outcomes are not guaranteed.
Distance education programmes	Use of electronic media including web-based programmes, interactive DVDs and electronics discussion groups.	Student learning rhythm should be maintained and student isolation avoided.
External partnership	Creation of entrepreneurship centres with financial support from business and public agencies. Advisory boards with external experts.	It is necessary to maintain academic rigour and HEI independence whilst adapting to the concerns of other stakeholders.
Courses for entrepreneurship teachers	Courses for prospective teachers of entrepreneurship to understand the entrepreneur's environment and behaviour and to develop their teaching approaches.	Ways are required to develop insights on the world of the entrepreneurs for teachers who have no entrepreneurship experience and to develop teaching abilities in existing or former entrepreneurs.

Networking/Outreach

Since entrepreneurship education is an activity not designed to take place in the confinement of academia, it requires close cooperation between academia and business. Past barriers to academic collaboration with business need to be broken down and outreach both encouraged and supported.

In particular existing companies and successful entrepreneurs play instrumental roles in promoting entrepreneurial education by providing knowledge, expertise, mentoring, social capital and financial support. In addition, businesses with an entrepreneurial culture contribute directly to the entrepreneurial education process by providing employees with the opportunity to cultivate entrepreneurial skills and aptitudes at work. Therefore, developing the proper outreach for the course is a crucial step to be undertaken to foster the programme success.

To this aim some entrepreneurs will be directly involved in the designing and teaching of the programme or in the validation of the contents.

Moreover, by using web based technology the programme could support participants in the development of a network among them, thus creating a “community” of participants.

Assessment method

The success of the transfer strongly depends on users’ satisfaction. On the other hand, users will be satisfied if they feel their knowledge and competences have grown substantially. This is why evaluation represents a key issue since it provides FASTER partners with feedbacks needed to align the course in response to users needs, thus securing its success.

Thoroughly assessing a training programme, thus best exploiting the obtained results for its improvement, implies to look at the following dimensions:

- **Knowledge/skills.** This implies the investigation of the efficacy of the course by verifying whether participants’ knowledge/skills improved or not after course attendance.
- **Users’ Satisfaction.** This implies the investigation of the level of satisfaction of the different actors involved in the course organization and delivery, such as students,

programme team, institutional/non institutional stakeholders (i.e. external organizations involved in the delivery).

- **Medium/long term results/impact.** This implies the investigation of course results/impact in the territory, for example in terms of new company created to assess the effects that the program has developed.

4. Transfer process

Once completed and agreed the shaping of the regional programme, 8 fundamental steps/activities to bring the programmes from the paper to the real world have been defined in order to reach FASTER's target as follow:

1. As first step, each partner should **validate the target group** proposed for the regional course. This means that each partner will have to get in contact with the main regional stakeholders and a sample of the identified target group to verify whether there is coherence between the perceived needs and programme's objectives and contents.
2. Another important activity is to **define the goals each partner wants to achieve through the course.** A clear and shared vision on how to embed entrepreneurship education within each organization and what to achieve with it, is a crucial step toward programme sustainability and success.
3. **Anchor the course into the organisation's process** is the next step partner organizations should take to foster course sustainability, which for example implies the identification and official recognition of the course faculty.
4. **Verifying the coherence** in goals, target group, contents and articulation of the programme and defining teaching materials is also part of the process.
5. If we want the transfer process to be complete we cannot forget to **"market" the course** which means on one side to create awareness among regional actors, and potential end-users about the importance of entrepreneurship in modern economies., and on the other side, to find attendees for course delivery.

6. Creating course managers through a **“train the trainers” session**, aiming at providing them with the needed understanding, insights and tools for effectively organizing the regional course.
7. **Delivering and assessing the pilot** so to understand the real impact of the course on the target group and fine-tuning the course’s programme accordingly.
8. Last but not least, indentifying financing sources (i.e. other public money, sponsorship, registration fees, a mix of them, ect) to **guarantee the self sustainability** of the programme after FASTER completion.

5. Critical success factors

FASTER effectiveness may be enhanced by securing the following conditions:

a) Trainers selection

It is very important to employ experienced professionals (also from the financial sector) coupling theoretical and practical experience so to be able to raise competences of trainees but also to provide them with tips and tricks from real life examples and giving them access to a wide network. Nonetheless, involving successful entrepreneurs is another key element as they can act both as role models and mentors.

b) Regional partnerships & accreditation

The success of the course can be strengthened by sponsorships and positioning within the regional training system (direct access to entrepreneurial basins like universities, partnerships with training providers interested in delivering the IEP, relationships with investors networks, possibility to get vouchers from local incentive sources, insertion of the course in the regional/national accredited system etc)

c) A correct selection of the trainees

The course is successful if the right target is captured. A not homogenous class can be very difficult to manage since different people coming from different experiences and educational/professional background have not only different needs but also different expectations for training.

On the other hand, bringing together people of different backgrounds can be very fruitful (i.e. creation groups from engineering and economics and managerial specializations in business planning).

d) Continuous improvement driven by feedbacks

The feedback from users is essential to enhance IEP performances.

e) Networking/outreach

As already pointed out, the IEP educational approach stresses the importance of setting up a network of reference. This because would-be-entrepreneurs and new ventures need to network with different actors (i.e. financial operators, intermediaries/consultants, other entrepreneurs/existing companies) to enhance their possibilities to start up and rapidly grow. Therefore, the capacity of entrepreneurship education providers to secure the connection at regional level with the proper actors is a crucial success factors for the course.