BOOSTING POLICY SUPPORT FOR INCUBATION AND ACCELERATION IN EUROPEAN CREATIVE HUBS

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RATIONALITY
AND METHODOLOGY

This policy paper looks into Creative Hubs services, namely incubation and acceleration programmes, to provide insights on their strategy and operation, and to develop policy recommendations that ultimately aim at increasing the success of such programmes and creative hubs as a whole.

The rational for this paper lies not only in the increasing importance of Creative Hubs for job creation and for the advancement and sustainability of the cultural and creative industries sector, but also (and consequently) on the need to further expand research on this topic, and particularly on the topic of incubation and acceleration services.

It is therefore important to structure and inscribe knowledge advancements arising directly from creative hubs or from other sectors and contexts as an important exercise of best practices transferability. This is particularly valid and useful for incubation and acceleration programmes as while there is extensive literature of such services in other sectors, the same is not true for creative hubs.

In fact, as a relatively recent phenomenon, Creative Hubs as locations that actively promote the development of early-stage projects within the creative industries, are recording an increased interest by policy actors, creative industries practitioners and academics, namely to identify and understand the different existing strategic and management models.

In what concerns the development of “creative entrepreneurs and projects”, and while not all hubs offer these services, incubation and acceleration programmes usually play a relevant part as their aim is to support and nurture the development of new sustainable creative businesses.

The underlying premise is then to contextualise the intricacies of these services within creative hubs, and to promote the necessary mechanisms that ensure their response to the creative industries sector’s new business’s needs.

While the main target-groups for this paper are policy makers, particularly those at European Union level, as well as Creative Hub managers, the findings are also considered useful for policy officials at national level working on creative industries development, and to creative entrepreneurs in general.
Methodology

Step 1 – Literature Review

The literature review process aimed at understanding the basic principles and challenges of incubation and acceleration services at large and for creative hubs in particular. Both academic and non-academic databases were used; search parameters included: creative industries; incubation; acceleration; programmes; best practices; impact; evaluation; policies.

It should be noted however that given the existing limitations on creative hubs incubation and acceleration programmes literature, this first step goes beyond the creative industries scope as to inscribe best practices from other areas onto this sector; it references as well several non-sector specific studies as to identify relevant common traits across a wide range of sectors. In fact, incubation and acceleration programmes have their historical origins in centres supporting other sectors.

Step 2 – Case studies

The development of case studies on creative hubs incubation and acceleration programmes aimed at understanding such services in the context of the creative industries and particularly inscribe onto literature related practices.

A total of 3 case studies were developed, which were selected given not only their European geographic diversity but also to demonstrate the diversity of approaches to these services. Parameters under analysis were defined according to the literature review findings.

Step 3 – Policy recommendations

Considering the literature review and case studies findings, this final step is to develop policy recommendations that target specifically these services within the context of creative hubs.
KEY MESSAGES / POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As a topic that encompasses a wide variety of political actors, as can be seen from the diversity of public policies and programmes supporting incubation and acceleration services at large and within the particular context of the creative industries, this policy paper targets different policy makers to whom we believe such conclusions can be useful, namely:


→ European Union Executive Agencies: EACEA (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency), EASME (Executive Agency for SMEs), EIT (European Institute of Innovation and Technology), ERC (European Research Council Executive Agency), INEA (Innovation and Networks Executive Agency).

→ National and Regional level: Agencies for managing and implementing EU funds, Ministries of Economy and Ministries of Culture.

→ Local authorities managing policies in the field of creative industries, innovation, culture, real-estate, youth, small and medium-size enterprises.

Independently of the type of action(s) taken, it is however clear that creative hubs do need political support and funding; their development and success, particularly as a relatively new phenomenon and the need to further understand and consolidate incubation and acceleration services, depends on strong support at political level.

As such, and provided the presented results, the following key messages / policy recommendation at European Union level are proposed:

* Support Creative Hubs to enhance the Cultural AND Creative Industries sector ecosystem as a whole / Acknowledge the value to consider Cultural AND Creative Industries sector as a one ecosystem

By continued support and strengthening of the cultural sector as the critical knowledge source for creative businesses. This can be done through, for example, promoting a close interaction between visual artists, musicians or dance performers with creative entrepreneurs. Ultimately, the creative industries sector needs the cultural sector to survive; it is thus important to nurture this ecosystem.
Expand and consolidate the European Creative Hubs Network and similar initiatives as opportunities for learning and growth

By continued promotion of a common network where Creative Hub managers have the chance to regularly meet and discuss new approaches and contexts at large and incubation and acceleration services in particular.

Promote innovative transferability of incubation and acceleration best practices

By developing a detailed mapping of best practices on incubation and acceleration services from creative hubs and other sectors (e.g. a best practice toolkit) and to implement knowledge transfer sessions for creative hub managers based on such practices (e.g. study visits, workshops, etc.). Hands-on work and networking provide one of the best opportunities for knowledge sharing.

Encourage policy partnerships and joint-programming with other sectors in the innovation chain

Creative hub managers should also have the opportunity to develop and test new approaches for such services, namely by interacting with other sectors (e.g. joint programmes), such as technology, health, bio, among others. This can provide a unique possibility to tackle a variety of societal challenges with an interdisciplinary approach.

Support (locally and directly) early-stage creative projects through incubation and acceleration programmes relying on components such as:

Direct support to creative projects hosted at creative hubs, which can be done by building up European incubation and acceleration programmes targeting this group, in a number of ways:

- By providing mobility grants for managers of incubated projects
- Through subsidised/sponsored incubation/acceleration service vouchers
- Through support mentorship of incubated projects by creative hubs alumni.
- Through dedicated support for connection to investors and funders

Specific resources and time should be given to create partnership possibilities between cultural and creative projects, and investors and funders that traditionally support other sectors. For this action, joint efforts will be essential to raise awareness of the sector and its potential to this target-group.
**Support hubs to develop consistent monitoring and evaluation systems**

In order to increase impact and measure efficiency and effectiveness it is proposed that monitoring and evaluation systems on the success of incubation and acceleration services in this context are developed, that can measure not only their economic impact but also, their social, cultural and environmental impact.

**Support creative hub managers and services team’s capacity building**

As a central point in the success of creative hubs and their services, their managers and team should regularly participate in training actions on different topics (e.g. business development, sector trends, funding, etc.).
INCUBATION AND ACCELERATION SERVICES: A GLOBAL TREND

When looking for information on incubation and acceleration services it becomes clear the existence of a variety of programmes around the world and, consequently, a variety of approaches and definitions. Indeed, organisations around the world that provide such services are confronted with their own reality and their own drive to provide the best services possible and, therefore, on how to design and define them.

While each organisation will then define their services accordingly, it is however important to establish a common understanding.

This section therefore aims at exploring the framework of action for these services, but does NOT aim however at setting upfront a definition for such services. In fact, establishing a definition might be counter-productive as reality demonstrates a wide variety of approaches that work for the particular context needs.

Why establishing incubation and acceleration services?

A recent report by the Indian National Entrepreneurship Network [1] that focused on understanding business incubators around the world has found that most of them are established to support organisations and academic institutions to bring technologies to market and to promote local and regional growth, even if a smaller fraction aims at providing shareholder returns. This mission is also subscribed by EBN – Innovation Network when defining their core target-group – the EU|BICs which encompass incubation and acceleration services – with the goal of “contributing ultimately to regional / local economic development, competitiveness and growth”.

It is then within this framework that such providers and services are set-up on the evidence (and belief) that by targeting and nurturing (through different services as appropriate) early-stage entrepreneurial projects (for or not-for-profit) such mission will be accomplished.

The incubation and acceleration ecosystem

According to The Accelerator and Incubator Ecosystem in Europe report the number of such providers has grown nearly 400% between 2007 and 2013 in this geographical context. The Global Best Practices In Business Acceleration report goes even further by stating on a growing concern on a possible “accelerator bubble” in particular. This phenomenon is worth noting particularly as it deals directly with a variety of

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1 EBN is a global network, with a European focus, representing more than 160 EU|BICs (business and innovation centres, incubators, accelerators and other support organisations)
subjects that need to be considered such as competition / cooperation, quality of provided services, transfer of best practices, economic and social impact, etc. In fact, and when looking into the impact of European policies, a 2014 study by the European Court of Auditors focused on answering the question “Has the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) successfully supported the development of business incubators?” with results that clearly indicate that “the ERDF has made a significant financial contribution to the creation of business incubator infrastructure, particularly in Member States in which this type of business support was relatively rare; however, the performance of audited incubators was modest”.

The reason behind this result can be traced back, continues the same report, to the limited application of good practices, particularly the ones most relevant to the services provided by the incubators; to a mismatch of the provided services to the reality of the supported projects; to the limited or non-existence of monitoring systems; and concerns about the provider own financial sustainability.

It is also worth noting that when comparing the performance of ERDF funded incubators against certified EU|BICs, which include acceleration services, (implemented via EBN), the ERDF funded incubators “were comparatively less effective”, which hints on some possible critical aspects such as the importance of systematic external evaluation or the monitoring of results and impact.
2. BUILDING-UP A COMMON UNDERSTANDING ON INCUBATION AND ACCELERATION SERVICES

What are then incubation and acceleration services? What makes them distinct from, for example, general business consultancy? What are some of the common traits / characteristics of such services?

For an initial answer to this question a set of definitions on incubation and acceleration services were collected (see Appendix 1). This process was also useful to clearly demonstrates the diversity and sometimes the existing paradoxes in such definitions. Both academic studies and other non-academic reference studies were used as sources.

An analysis of these definitions provided the identification of the following common characteristics that incubation and acceleration services are about:

- supporting the development of early-stage projects / businesses for exploring and solidifying a business model;
- personal and regular support by experts;
- access to relevant networks / partnerships (including investors);
- community building and peer-learning;
- incubation is usually a more long-term process;
- incubation usually refers to projects being established in a physical location (i.e. building with a community of incubated projects);
- acceleration is usually more time-constrained;
- acceleration is usually more knowledge intensive;
- some acceleration programmes target projects still in the ideation phase (pre-incubation), while other target established business (just after incubation).

Ultimately, it is possible to find examples that contradict, even if partially, these aspects. They are, nevertheless, a starting point to help identify these services within creative hubs.
Further details on incubation and acceleration services

What other characteristics can be identified on the functioning of incubation and acceleration services?

Research done throughout the years on categorization of different services, have identified as relevant to understand the intricacies of what to pin-point as critical aspects when measuring the success of these services:

- **Incubation and acceleration services critical aspects for success**
  - developing a diagnosis of business needs for selection and to help further development;
  - access to the network of the incubator (industry, government, etc.);
  - access to investment / capital;
  - fast troubleshooting;
  - formalised support steps for increased efficiency (i.e. idea formulation, post entry development, opportunity recognition, etc.);
  - networking activities;
  - product development.

- **Service providers needed capacity for the success of incubation and acceleration services**
  - selection and monitoring of the services provided;
  - available business and sector expertise (including at managerial level);
  - diverse and close partnerships
  - access to a variety of investors;
  - credibility of the provider;
  - access to different sources of entrepreneurs (university, inventors, public sector, corporations, research labs and community).

These details are partially sourced from the definitions previously mentioned (Appendix 1) but also on a collection of best practices for incubation and acceleration services (Appendix 2).
3. CHARACTERISTICS OF CREATIVE HUB RESIDENTS

Provided the context of creative hubs it is obviously relevant to add any specificities of the cultural and creative industries, particularly from the entrepreneur perspective. Ultimately, creative hubs are about them; in fact, services provided by the hubs must consider their reality if they want to be successful, and therefore this section summarizes some of the main characteristics of creative projects.

In this context, entrepreneur is taken into its wider definition, by encompassing for and not for profit projects, as long as they are early-stage projects and/or need further consolidation/maturation.

The fundamental question is then what are the fundamental characteristics of creative businesses (that need to be taken into account when providing such services)? One of the relevant works and eventually one of the early works to establish a connection between creative entrepreneurs and incubators / accelerators is the EBN publication “Creative BICs – a practical guide to tailor services to the creative industries”.

A summary of these characteristics is presented:

1. Business structures (micro-small teams; subcontracting freelancers);
2. Work form (project-based; time constrained);
3. Innovation (high potential for innovative ideas; lack of resources for implementation);
4. Motivation (usually high self-motivation);
5. Partnerships (can build cross-cutting deals; need enablers to do so);
6. Business knowledge (lack relevant management skills);
7. Financing (lack investment; misunderstandings of creative businesses by potential investors);
8. Support (expect professional, affordable and pragmatic support).
For building up a policy paper tackling creative hubs incubation and acceleration services at European level it is also important to go through existing policies / programmes.

This section therefore intends to analyse relevant initiatives that directly or indirectly support these services or are taking the shape of such services; this is achieved by mapping relevant calls (closed, open or forthcoming - includes other sectors beyond creative industries).

Appendix 3 lists the identified relevant programmes / calls, mostly focusing on European Union level initiatives, particularly considering the geographical nature of the creative hubs network, while also pointing out to a selection of local level policies. For pragmatic/timely reasons, an extensive mapping of local (national/regional) policies was not done.

The variety of initiatives does show a great interest at EU policy level on supporting organisations that provide incubation and acceleration services even if some of the identified calls are not explicitly for such organisations. Such variety is not only a reflection of EU programmes for supporting such services, but it also ends up being a learning experience for policy makers to understand the dos and don’ts.

As an overview of these programmes and its main objectives can be summarised as follows:

→ Promoting cooperation / networking among fellow providers in Europe;
→ Testing new approaches (i.e. incubation and acceleration of ideas/ projects) to promote growth and jobs and incorporate lessons learned into policy; and
→ Supporting early-stage entrepreneurial projects.

Additionally, when looking into these programmes / calls with more detail one can also conclude that the tech / digital sector has available a more structured approach, as can be seen through the projects for building up a European community of startups and support services, namely through the Startup Europe initiative (Horizon 2020).

It is also worth noting that both Horizon 2020 and COSME programmes are more specialized in related incubation and acceleration projects, which is also due to their
nature and scope. In contrast, Creative Europe does not explicitly promote such projects, even though the scope of the programme is wide enough for participants to propose related project ideas to incubation and acceleration. Additionally, there are a few Horizon 2020 calls tackling Creative Industries (namely Design) and Tech, including the implementation of acceleration programmes.

While this section mostly references and explores EU level policies and programmes, both given the scope of the paper (and main target-groups) and for practical reasons, further exploration shows the existence of extensive policies and programmes at national, regional and city level.

Such policies and programmes, which are also supporting similar actions as the ones existing at EU level, are however of relevance for this paper due to their complementarity in the type of support given, through much needed funds for infrastructures and other amenities.
5. CASE STUDIES

Complementary to the literature review, three creative hubs were chosen as case studies.

**Selection criteria of creative hubs:**

- EU country diversity (3 case studies from 3 different EU countries);
- Provide incubation and/or acceleration services (according to the common characteristics previously identified);
- Availability to discuss in English and provide information about their services for the policy paper (1 hour maximum of Skype discussion with hub manager).
- Ability to express some judgements and ideas on the Creative Hubs’ needs in terms of support from policy makers.

**Explored topics within selected case studies:**

A common structure was defined for the three case studies to ensure comparability, but mostly to ensure that identified topics during the literature review stage (e.g. best practices, common characteristics, etc.) were included:

- About the Creative Hub: to understand the wider context and general strategy and operations;
- Introducing the programme: for an overview of the specific case study, namely the programme aim and evolution;
- Programme structure: to understand details of how the programme actually works, namely what specifically offers to its target-group;
- Management and funding model: to understand the human resources allocated to the programme and how costs are covered;
- Relevant partnerships: to understand which external links and knowledge the programme considers relevant for its success;
- Selection process: to understand how projects are identified, selected and engaged to the programme;
- Needs of supported project: to understand in concrete what needs the hub identifies as critical for the projects it is targeting;
- Monitoring and impact: to understand which mechanisms are in place for assessing the programme;
- Success stories: to provide a set of inspiring examples;
• Challenges and next steps: to understand the upcoming strategic decisions;

• **Recommendations for policy makers:** to understand directly from creative hub managers their needs, and how those should be translated onto policies.

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**Lessons learned from the case studies**

• A relatively small sample of creative hubs for the case studies portrays the diversity of the hubs universe regarding their governance, strategy and operations;

• Political support and funding was (and still is) essential to develop the selected case studies / services and the structure that supports them;

• External expertise and connections to other organisations (including other sectors) is of high importance both for the supported projects but also for strengthening the creative hub;

• Creative hubs and incubation and acceleration services require a highly specialised team to support projects development;

• Public recognition is important and time and resources also need to be dedicated to such activities;

• The project selection process is extremely critical, and the criteria cluster fundamentally around engagement, competences and added-value;

• Monitoring and evaluation procedures on the programmes impact are varied and not entirely structured.

The three case studies are presented in the upcoming pages.
The collaboration between these thematic centres has been increasing throughout the years as a strategic decision to increase its impact and success of supported projects. Indeed, it is possible to observe the regular discussion among the directors of all centres for joint decisions on several levels.

Introducing the programme

The “School of Startups” is an acceleration programme promoted and managed by UPTEC targeting consolidated business ideas that still require support before starting their activity and market reach.

Ultimately its aim is to nurture and develop ideas into sustainable businesses that can clearly position themselves and communicate efficiently their scope and activity.

The programme goes back to 2010 when it was taking its first steps as a coaching programme while projects were mostly supported by the University’s own Business School staff. As the programme evolved and UPTEC was becoming a more consolidated organisation, a decision was made in 2013 to take a more structured approach and create its acceleration programme. This programme had a duration of 6 months, with 2 rounds per year.

Following two more years supporting projects and learning the intricacies of what could be improved and what was working properly, the programme was revamped in 2015 to its current form.

The latest version of the programme, leading to the “School of Startups” brand, was therefore developed to
increase impact and efficiency, while simultaneously responding to the projects’ needs, namely appropriate topics and language.

Programme structure
The School of Startups has a duration of 4 months, with one edition per year starting in November. It has been receiving on average 50 applications from which a maximum of 22 are accepted.

The programme takes a multidisciplinary approach by accepting into the same group business ideas from all four thematic areas covered by UPTEC, thus providing from early start an opportunity to all projects to discuss their ideas with different perspectives from fellow projects. Moreover, the programme is structured so that projects can present and discuss their idea with a wide range of experts (mostly external).

Throughout the 4 months programme, projects have the chance to participate in a variety of workshops / classes covering topics such as intellectual property, budgeting and control or communication.

While these sessions gather all projects simultaneously, there are also “mentoring sessions” targeting separately projects according to their thematic area (i.e. Creative Industries) where each team can discuss its project with sector experts.

Management and funding model
The programme is entirely managed internally by UPTEC team, with the Executive Director acting as the programme coordinator and the thematic centres Directors as the sectorial managers. This model allows UPTEC for regular internal feedback and discussion, and to quickly take any decisions should it be necessary.

The core management team is supported by the communication department, and also shared services.

The School of Startups is mostly funded through EU National funding programmes that cover most of the programme expenses, while accepted projects are requested to pay 250€ (for a 3 to 5 person team) to ensure commitment and participation.

Relevant partnerships
Taking to their heart the multidisciplinary approach, UPTEC is very keen on establishing a variety of partnerships that allow supported projects to interact directly with different profiles, expertise and language discourse.

Particularly, and besides UPTEC team direct involvement in supporting the projects, regular and continuous partnerships can be structured as follows:

- **Academic partnerships**: namely with the University of Porto faculties of Economics and Management, Engineering, and Fine Arts for projects discussion on their state of the art and overall R&D expertise. The Creative Industries centre includes a PhD Programme in Design in its own premises working as an interface between academia and entrepreneurship;

- **Industry partnerships**: both national and international well established organisations (both big and SME) such
as Vodafone or Creative Commons, for open discussions with invited industry speakers as experts; and
- UPTEC companies’ partnerships: from the pool of incubated startups, for knowledge transfer with to-be startups.

Other partnerships are also established with a more limited timescale with organisations such as the Jewellery National Association or Arts National Museum, both located in Porto.

The established partnerships are also built on a win-win approach: projects have the opportunity to learn directly with different experts, academia can provide opportunities to its students and researchers and vice-versa, industry can detect new opportunities and potential new employees, UPTEC companies can establish new commercial deals and other organisations can establish new links and opportunities.

In what comes to relationships with investors the approach becomes however more difficult for creative industries projects (as opposed to the other supported sectors by UPTEC). The reasons lie mostly on projects that are not so easily scalable and therefore with a diminished return on investment and also on a general lack of acknowledgment on the value of the creative industries sector.

**Selection process**

For each edition, an open call is launched where each team is invited to submit a description of their business project idea. UPTEC management team will then select the best projects against the following criteria:

1. Team (education and training – mostly technical is ideal and not management per se; background in the business topic; competences to develop their project);
2. Project (differentiation and added value for the market);
3. UPTEC ecosystem (added value to the existing ecosystem, i.e. through new business areas not previously covered); and
4. University of Porto ecosystem (on the possibility of R&D valorisation and new partnerships with University of Porto faculties and centres).

While the first two criteria are commonly used throughout different acceleration programmes, UPTEC understands that its own most important added value to the projects depends on the last two, particularly on the valorisation of knowledge transfer possibilities with the University of Porto.

It should also be mentioned that while the open call provides the possibility to attract a variety of projects, UPTEC also receives throughout the year a variety of business ideas from which a selection are invited to respond to the open call.

**Needs of supported projects**

When applying to UPTEC acceleration programme, projects usually look for the following added value:

- learning new competences;
- business and scientific validation;
- access to otherwise restricted networks;
- shared services; and
- UPTEC facilitator role.
Monitoring and impact

The programme structure allows the management team to regularly assess the progress of each project, namely by assessing how each team responds and evolves to the challenges presented each session.

As the programme culminates in a final open public pitch, projects are encouraged to train for this session throughout the entirety of the programme; this is achieved precisely by responding to monthly challenges, namely by answering to a set of questions related to the topic at hand as an exercise for the following session (e.g. segmentation; critical factors, etc.).

At the end of the programme, there are 30% of projects, on average, that move forward by formally setting-up a company. On the longer term, about 10% of all creative projects become sustainable businesses. So far, a total of 68 companies have been formally setup.

Success stories

Throughout the programme implementation, several success cases could be identified; for the purpose of this case study a selection of three successful projects are presented to show variety and typology of projects supported by UPTEC.PINC:

- Building Pictures (http://www.buildingpictures.pt/): an audiovisual company focused on showcasing iconic architectural building through filming;
- Summary (http://www.summary.pt/): an architecture studio focused on the optimisation of time and resources, having participated at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2016;
- Iguaneye (http://www.iguaneye.com/): a summer shoe design studio, having won the Creative Industries National Award for best entrepreneurial project of the year.

Challenges and next steps

As the programme evolves and consolidates, some immediate challenges are properly identified:

- continue integration of management and engineering faculties involvement in the programme; and
- apply and fine tune the school of startups model to specific target-groups, namely researchers based at medicine, fine arts and sciences faculties).

Moreover, and given the success and external recognition of the programme, a stand-alone version is being prepared to be sold as a service per se to external organisations, while always maintaining the in-house programme running.

UPTEC has already been approached by some organisations to implement the programme in their context.

Recommendation for EU policies

From the Creative Hub perspective, and while overall European policies are well designed, there are still some fundamental aspects that need to be approached:

- an increased support to cultural activities, namely their valorisation, particularly as, in the centre Director’s own words, “creative industries projects need a rich and diverse artistic and cultural variety close by to survive”, and
thus links between creative activities and cultural activities should be further facilitated and promoted; and

- an increased support to mobility exchange programmes for creative projects (promoted by creative hubs) and increased support for programmes that foster interaction between creative projects and other areas, namely technological and scientific.
CREATIVE INCUBATOR PROGRAMME

DEPO2015
Pilsen, Czech Republic
https://www.depo2015.cz

Interview with Ondřej Kašpárek
(Centre for Creative Enterprise Manager / Programme Manager)
Date of interview: 21.10.2017

About the Creative Hub
DEPO2015 Creative Zone is a result of the Pilsen – European Capital of Culture 2015 project and is the only creative hub in Czech Republic. The structure is a former bus depot that was transformed into a creative hub now offering co-working space, interactive exhibitions, a café, a community garden, offices for hire, art studios, a space for artistic residencies and a hall for concerts, conferences and theatre shows.

DEPO2015 creative hub has therefore a strong political background, maintained today by the political governance directed by the city mayor.

The hub roughly divides its activities into the cultural section and the creative industries section. The first targets mostly the local city community at large, while the second targets mostly creative industries enthusiasts and businesses. There are also several activities to bring these two sections together, such as exhibitions on the products developed by hosted creative entrepreneurs.

In preparation for the project the team also dedicated a good amount of time and resources preparing the soil for the recognition, both at the political level and city wide population level, on the importance of the creative industries sector to the city development, and ultimately on the sustainability of the DEPO2015 project.

Introducing the programme
The “Creative Incubator” programme aims at capacitating creative industries professionals on business skills. Its ultimate aim is that supported professionals initiate their own business, but this goal is managed in parallel to the overall creative hub goal of “creating an atmosphere where creative industries are more than business”.

The programme goes back to 2014 when in a first moment the DEPO2015 team was focused on establishing the ground for the programme, by establishing relevant links with the local community and to clarify its positioning as to not overlap with local actors.

Since 2015 there has been 2 rounds (1 per year) with a new one starting in November 2017. The team also decided that for the moment 1 round per year is the most reasonable while the overall local / city community is being developed.

While still limited, the team is also pushing for crossovers between the different hub activities, such as “makerspace”, “coworking” or the overall “cultural sector”.

Programme structure

The programme has a total duration of 3 months structured according to the following:

- Workshops: a total of 8 topics are covered through workshops / lectures (business canvas, SWOT analysis, branding, marketing, benchmarking, economics / finances, presentations, communication, among others);
- Coaching: one-to-one coaching where each project can choose its coach. The programme offers 10 hours of coaching and each project can use this time as best preferred;
- In-house staff support: the programme team regularly meets with the projects for specific support, complementing the above two activities.

Each round has a total of 5 projects being supported.

The programme also offers the possibility for an own office, but considering that most participants are not located in the city, they end up not using this space fully.

A practical aspect that the team has also been dealing refers to the time needed for the programme as if being full-time it will be difficult to engage participants, and therefore sessions are usually held each weekend every two weeks.

Management and funding model

The programme team is composed by the programme manager and the production support manager. The programme manager is responsible for overall strategy and operations, while the production support manager for daily operations and follow-up.

The programme is mostly publicly funded through the local city hall, with a remaining cost being covered by a participation fee.

The fee is of about 1000 Euros per participant while public support is about 4000 Euros, thus totalling a 5000 Euros cost per participant.

DEPO2015 has also participated a few European funded projects that allowed to fund in-house staff that supports the programme, but also to hire experts that can support projects directly.

Relevant partnerships

The programme usually establishes its own partnerships mostly with local schools (of design), industry or designers (the Advisory Board being a good example). Other partnerships are also established through the creative hub as a whole.

In addition to local partnerships it was also highlighted the importance of European projects as highly relevant international partnerships for knowledge exchange. In particular, it was highlighted the Interreg project “Cross Innovation” (http://www.cross-innovation.eu/) through which the local team had the opportunity to interact with similar projects in different European countries and learn with their experience (travel support for visits was available).

Selection process

The selection process derives mostly from the nature of the local context. In fact, given the small size of the city
and the limited available opportunities this context makes it particularly hard to engage potential participants, which is why the team understands that most of their participants are coming from the country capital, Prague. This also means that the team understands the importance of slowly building up a local community.

In any case, potential participants are usually identified and engaged in advance mostly by the project team participation in local events such as Design Weeks or other creative industries events. There is a strong focus on design professionals given the context offered by local Design schools.

Potential participants are then invited to apply online where they need to detail their product/service, experience, overall goal/strategy and expectations. The form is valid both for fresh graduates (propose their idea) or for more experienced professionals (propose their business activity, as applicable).

The applications are then evaluated in a first phase by the Advisory Board (composed by designers, industry, banks, academic, etc.) and then on a second phase by the Advisory Board and the programme team with a presentation and discussion.

The criteria for selection is mostly based on the following two aspects:
- should have some entrepreneurial experience (can be limited and not necessarily business-minded);
- need to be fully engaged and committed to their project and demonstrate that by their own experience.

The programme does not have international participants as it is not yet mature enough to engage at this level.

### Needs of supported projects

The programme has been targeting two different profiles with different needs:
- fresh graduates: usually coming from the nearby school of design or other locations that still do not have a project/business running but are eager to further develop their idea; and
- established companies: usually with 6-7 years existence that aim at either learn business management skills for further growth and/or to test a new idea before reaching to market.

### Monitoring and impact

The management team uses the same meetings to support the projects to understand where they are and how the programme is overall evolving.

Evaluation is also done through the participants own feedback after each workshop session through specific surveys.

Monitoring and impact is still nevertheless a dimension that needs to be further developed, given the recent nature of the programme.

### Challenges and next steps

The team identifies four main challenges for the upcoming years:
- Diversify funding of the programme (including European funding opportunities);
- Decrease programme fee (to avoid “head hunting” and allow a wider, more
diverse participation);

- Rethink and refresh the programme (as a relatively new programme, the team considers of high relevance to learn from experience and adjust the programme as necessary); and

- Community development (continue the support and development of a wider creative industries local community to ensure a critical mass and ensure the creative hub’s sustainability).

**Recommendation for EU policies**

From the team perspective policy recommendations rely mostly on the following aspects:

- Increase awareness of available funding to incubators;

- Funding opportunities that are relevant to maintain and expand operations (for example: study visits, external expertise, possibility to fund in-house staff); and

- Participation in networks (as the European Creative Hubs Network which provided the hub team a unique opportunity to meet for the first time fellow hub managers).
FOUR-LEVEL PROGRAMME OFFER

Centre for Fashion Enterprise
London, United Kingdom

http://www.fashion-enterprise.com

Interview with Judith Tolley
(General Manager)

Date of interview: 12.10.2017

About the Creative Hub

Centre for Fashion Enterprise (CFE), a non-profit organisation, is a business incubator focusing on fashion, fashion tech and jewellery. It provides business expertise to creative entrepreneurs at different stages of development, from market entry to investment readiness.

The Centre for Fashion Enterprise was founded back in 2003 by the London College of Fashion and has been experiencing a sustainable growth ever since. It was supported from the early start by the London Development Agency. Until 2013, in a ten-year period, it supported 245 fashion designer businesses.

Its goal is ultimately, in their own words, “to support the new eco-system emerging in London, recognising the convergence of fashion and technology SMEs”.

Its development also demonstrates a clear interest on its internationalisation, either through hosting international fashion designers or through relevant partnerships.

An Advisory Board has also been setup with a total of 14 members with a variety of expertise available, including several members coming directly from the industry.

The centre is hosted at the Business and Innovation Department of the London College of Fashion.

Introducing the programme

The Centre model offers a set of programmes for recent creative entrepreneurs within CFE areas of expertise, each one targeting different levels of entrepreneurial experience (from early starters – at least 6 months of experience – to more experienced – at least 3 years).

The diverse offer provides the Centre with an interesting flexibility to select and channel entrepreneurs to the most appropriate programme depending on their level of expertise.

The programme offer does not provide creative expertise / direction but rather business advice covering strategy, finances, sales, funding opportunities, branding and marketing, internationalisation, manufacturing or digital. Such advice is provided through workshops, one-to-one expertise, invited speakers, etc.

The variety of programmes have been developed throughout the years, responding to the needs of the sector and according to the Centre capacity.

Programme structure

The Centre offer is divided within four levels (plus one specific programme on branding), as follows:

Market Entry Programme: for brands
with at least 6 months of entrepreneurial experience for a 2-day intensive workshop, looking for tools to grow;

**Pioneer Programme:**
- Fashion, for designers with £10k-£50k annual revenue and operational for at least 18 months, looking for wide-ranging business support;
- Fash-Tech, for designers operational for up to 6 months, looking to redefine the future of industry;
- Jewellery, for designers with £10k-£50k annual revenue and operational for at least 18 months, looking for wide-ranging business support.

**Production:**
- Fashion 1, for designers operational for at least 12 months, looking to professionalise their production process;
- Fashion 2, for designers operational for at least 18 months, looking to scale up production;
- Jewellery 1, for businesses operational for at least 12 months, looking to increase production capacity and profitability.

**Accelerate Programme:** for designers with over £50k and operational for at least 2 years, looking to a tailored business support.
- Fashtech Accelerate, for fashion technology entrepreneurs who have previously participated in the pioneer programme, looking for a tailored business support.

The programmes are flexible per principle and are essentially based on workshops, 1-1 consultancy, meet-ups and other mechanisms where fashion designers can learn from a variety of expertise while simultaneously develop their own business.

It should also be noted that for most programmes it is required that designers are based in London and are engaged/committed to their project.

The Centre offers a few studios for incubation within a very limited offer, thus only for a few businesses.

**Management and funding model**

The programme offer is delivered by a team of 12 persons, with most of them providing critical back office support (such as project funding reporting), and a core team providing direct support to hosted projects.

The CFE staff is structured according to the following profiles: Director; Manager; Director of Business and Innovation; Project Manager; Fashion Tech Projects Officer; Head of Fashion Innovation Agency; Programme & Applications Administrator; Production Manager; Projects Administrator; Enterprise Projects Manager; FashTech Project Assistant; ERDF Project Administrator.

With a no-fee participation model for their programmes, CFE funding is essentially built on European funds through a project approach.

**Relevant partnerships**

Centre partnerships can be roughly divided into the following:
**Academia:** centred on the relationship with the London College of Fashion at UAL. Besides providing a strong context for the incubator, joint activities also take place, including master dissertations on CFE. Partnerships with specific labs are also in place with such as the Digital Anthropology Lab.

**Industry:** connection with industry is one of key features of the incubators by allowing to identify and engage with a variety of experts that can support the projects hosted at CFE. A partnership with the UK Fashion & Textile Association is also in place.

**Government:** besides a strong connection with European Union, CFE has also established with UK government bodies such as UKTI – Trade & Investment Department.

Other partnerships include the British Fashion Council, London Fashion Week, F2iT – software for fashion designers, or Fashion Scout.

**Selection process**

Participants need to apply online for each specific programme whenever the process is open.

Dissemination is done via online and their partners while some participants are directly identified by the in-house team on events such as Fashion Weeks.

Selection criteria specific requirements are established for each programme (see above on section “programme structure”), while the “creative factor” is nevertheless a decisive element and a very personal evaluation by the CFE team, thus demonstrating the importance of an experienced staff, as can be seen by the Centre’s success.

Application forms are adapted to each programme, but generally include formal information about the business (e.g. turnover, etc.), about the product (e.g. description, garments, customer profile, industry supporters etc.), about the applicant (e.g. job, education, experience, etc.), about intellectual property (e.g. existing trademarks, etc.), about the team (e.g. role, payroll, etc.), and detailed information about business strategy and operations (e.g. objects, SWOT, marketing strategy, sales, production, main buyers, etc.).

**Needs of supported projects**

Project needs are closely linked to the programme offer with participants looking for:
- Access to finance;
- Finances / cash flow;
- Strategy.

**Monitoring and impact**

Projects are provided their own flexibility to develop their business and are monitored regularly.

The actual rate of the monitoring process depends on the specific programme, and for longer programmes assessments are usually done at the end of every semester. External experts are also involved in the process.

**Success stories**

Throughout the programme implementation, several success cases could be identified; for this case study a
selection of three successful projects were identified by the in-house team:

- Marques Almeida
  https://www.marquesalmeida.com/

- Craig Green
  https://craig-green.com/

- Roberts Wood

Challenges and next steps
One of the main challenges for the centre will be managing the Brexit process, particularly given the string dependence of CFE on European funding.

Given this challenge, the centre has been participating on regular meetings with a variety of stakeholders as to better understand how to deal with this transition.

Recommendation for EU policies
CFE recommendations for EU policies are the following:

- the need for funding to cover operation costs, including staff which is a critical component for the hub success; and

- to decrease the administrative processes necessary to access funding opportunities.
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APPENDICES

1. EXPLORING INCUBATION AND ACCELERATION DEFINITIONS

"A Business Incubator is as we defined earlier setup ‘to reduce the chances of failure in early stage companies and result in the financial viability and growth of firms that it supports’.”

Source: A White Paper Guidelines - Metrics & Milestones For Successful Incubator Development

"Accelerators: are more intense programs, akin to a pressure cooker, with a heavy focus on business building, product and market validations, go-to market strategy, and seeking out investment.”


"Incubators / Startup Academies: primarily focus on developing entrepreneurial skills and education – they typically take in idea-stage startups and help them sort through their ideation and company development phase, as well as support the development of a prototype, leading into initial market validation. We like to deepen the separation between incubators and startup academies, with startup academies placing much higher emphasis on entrepreneurial education than anything else (though we group them together for analysis).”


“(…) incubator programs accelerated the successful development of entrepreneurial companies through an asset of shared resources and services, guided by incubator management and offered both in the incubator and through its network of contacts.”

Source: Impact of Incubator Investments, National Business Incubation Association

"Accelerator: This model, which became globally famous with Y-Combinator in the US, has spread to many European hubs. Its main characteristics are that it involves an application process open to all, and there tends to be a provision of pre-seed investment in exchange for a minority stake in the startup. Support is time-limited and comprises events and intensive mentoring and the programme itself tends to be organised in batches of startups beginning at the same time.”

Source: The Accelerator and Incubator Ecosystem in Europe

"Incubator: These are usually physical spaces attached to a knowledge centre (university, research institute, business school, etc.) to help commercialise its own spinouts and foster business ideas from its network in exchange for a monthly rental fee. This model is found frequently in Ireland and Sweden. Its main characteristics are the provision of physical office space, mentorship network, informal event programs, consulting services, investor exposure and public funding links.”

Source: The Accelerator and Incubator Ecosystem in Europe

"The best business incubators try to provide all the resources for small businesses’ survival and growth. While technoparks often focus on space and business support centres on consulting, but incubators identify the bottlenecks and try to overcome them. Depending on the environment, the bottleneck could be space, training, access to capital or markets, infrastructure such as computer networks, and many others.”

Source: Best Practice in Business Incubation

"Certified EU|BICs promote, stimulate and develop innovative start-ups, scale-ups and/or SMEs through the delivery of smart and comprehensive detection, ideation, incubation and acceleration processes, with the goal of contributing ultimately to regional/local economic development, competitiveness and growth.”

Source: EBN – Innovation Network

"Incubation programme: An individually tailored document describing planned events and actions for each individual start-up hosted in the incubator. The objective of the incubation programme is to establish business objectives for a client company and to define a range of targeted resources and services which would support its development. The implementation of the programme and the achievements of business goals are monitored using indicators.”

Source: Has the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) successfully supported the development of business incubators?
2. SELECTION OF BEST PRACTICES

Given the variety of studies available on incubation and acceleration best practices around the world – even if from other sectors – and considering that one of the goals of the policy paper will be the inclusion of best practices to be translated into policy, this literature review therefore provides a set of relevant cases.

These are not meant to be exhaustive but rather inspirational examples that can potentially be transferred to creative hubs.

Integrated monitoring system

“One of the most successful audited incubators in the Czech Republic regularly monitored the performance of hosted companies and the relevance and quality of the support offered to them. To do so, the incubator had developed a system of key performance indicators integrating exhaustive information about the activity of the incubator (e.g., number of training sessions organised, number of lectures given) and the performance of hosted companies (e.g., turnover, number of patents applied for, number of full-time equivalent jobs created). The resulting information was used by the management to assess the effectiveness of incubation programs.”

Source: “Has the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) successfully supported the development of business incubators?”

Financial support from the parent organisation

“In Spain, in order to ensure stable operations and financial sustainability, the chambers of commerce, the organisations by which the incubators were managed, had formally committed themselves to making up any yearly deficit. This formal commitment is tangible evidence of the willingness of the incubators’ stakeholders to take part in the business creation policy, which is perceived as a public mission coherent with the activity of the parent organisation.”

Source: “Has the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) successfully supported the development of business incubators?”

Top-performing incubation programmes often share common management practices

“Practices most represented among high-achieving programs are having a written mission statement, selecting clients based on cultural fit, selecting clients based on potential for success, reviewing client needs at entry, showcasing clients to the community and potential funders, and having a robust payment plan for rents and service fees. All of these practices are highly correlated with client success. Conversely, incubation programs with lax or no exit policies typically have less-than-optimal performance.”

Source: Incubating Success. Incubation Best Practices that Lead to Successful New Ventures

Incubator advisory board composition matters

“Having an incubator graduate firm and a technology transfer specialist on an incubator’s advisory board correlates with many measures of success. Additionally, accounting, intellectual property (patent assistance), and general legal expertise on the incubator board often result in better performing programs. This study found that government and economic development agency representatives also play key roles in enhanced client firm performance, as their presence ensures that the incubator is embedded in the community, which is necessary for its success. Local government and economic development officials also help educate critical funding sources about the incubation program and its successes.”

Source: Incubating Success. Incubation Best Practices that Lead to Successful New Ventures

Incubation programmes with larger budgets (both revenues and expenditures) typically outperform incubators with budget constraints

“Programs with more financial resources have more capacity to deliver critical client services and are more stable. However, the sources of incubation program revenues and the ways the incubator uses these resources also are important. This study found that incubators receiving a larger portion of revenues from rent and service fees perform better than other programs. On the expenditure side, the more programs invest in staffing and program delivery – relative to building maintenance or debt servicing – the higher the probability of improved client outcomes.”

Source: Incubating Success. Incubation Best Practices that Lead to Successful New Ventures
A large applicant pool doesn’t reflect a quality applicant pool

“It’s important to be selective of the startups coming into a program, but also to reach out to startups/potential cohort participants that would be a good fit and have a likely positive outcome of the process (the right team, experience, product, receptive market, differentiation, unit economics, etc.)”


Most of the top programs value their alumni’s input

“(continues from title), from mentorship and consulting even to sourcing future cohort members. Engaging alumni in more ways can help add an invaluable perspective and resources to cohort as well”


3. RELEVANT EU POLICIES SUPPORTING INCUBATION AND ACCELERATION PROGRAMMES

non-exhaustive list

COSME – EU programme for Small and Medium-sized enterprises

COSME is the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). It runs from 2014 to 2020 with a planned budget of €2.3bn.

COSME will support:

- better access to finance for SMEs
- access to markets for SMEs
- entrepreneurship
- more favourable conditions for business creation and growth

Relevant calls:

European incubation network for CCis – FASHIONTECH (a similar call for tourism is also available)

“Facilitating and reinforcing cross-sectoral collaboration amongst relevant organisations (incubators, accelerators, labs, universities, research centres and other relevant business support organisations) may be done in particular through:

- Mapping the relevant initiatives and actors, opportunities and challenges for the sectors;
- Organising networking activities, workshops, study visits, events to enable learning, exchange of knowledge and good practice, including on leveraging public funds and private investment.
- Organising networking, match-making, hackathons and/or any other relevant events bringing together designers, technology providers, start-ups, SMEs, scientists, artists, etc.
- Setting up a dedicated internet platform;
- Involving other actors covering different parts of the relevant value chain, including universities, research and technology centres, materials producers, big brands, etc.;
- Developing and testing more long-term support models that would help innovative companies grow;
- Establishing cooperation with the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN).”


Erasmus for young entrepreneurs

“The general objective of the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme is to enhance entrepreneurship, develop the international outlook and competitiveness of European SMEs and foster potential start-up entrepreneurs and newly-established micro and small enterprises in the Participating Countries.

The purpose of the call is to select Intermediary Organisations (IOs) to implement the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme at local level. They will, in particular, recruit the entrepreneurs and assist them to benefit from the programme.”
Cluster go international

“This action builds upon the 2014 “Clusters Go International” call (COS-CLUSTER-2014-3-03) that contributed to launch the first round of projects in January 2016 encouraging cluster organisations across Europe to establish ‘European Strategic Cluster Partnerships-Going International’ (ESCP-4i) and work concretely together to exploit synergies as well as to develop a joint internationalisation strategy for the benefit of their SMEs.”

SPOC – Awareness

“The general objective of the present call for proposals is to promote the Points of Single Contact and the services they provide to entrepreneurs wanting to explore the potential offered by the Internal Market. It aims therefore at achieving the following general objectives:

- Create better conditions for SME’s expansion in the Internal Market.
- Raise awareness of the Points of Single Contact among the European businesses and entrepreneurs, so that they know where to turn for information, assistance or interact with public administrations in order to get established or provide services in the EU.
- Raise awareness among business support organisations of the PSCs’ role and their offer, so that they can provide comprehensive advice to their members or partners.”

Clusters Excellence Programme

“The overall objective of this call for proposals is to strengthen cluster management excellence in the EU as a way to provide more professional business services to European SMEs through clusters, and in this way, contribute to the development of more world-class clusters in the European Union.

In order to pursue cluster management excellence, cluster organisations need to provide added-value support services to their members and develop strategic approaches to address the innovation, growth and globalization challenges that SMEs face. This requires to strengthen the support services provided to cluster companies; to gain further insights into cluster members’ positioning in value-chains, to take stock of emerging industrial trends and dynamics, to develop a shared vision of their members with regard to collaboration with other clusters in Europe and in global markets; to consistently liaise with public authorities regarding the business support environment and coherence with regional policy, and to shape-up strategic plans and roadmaps for sustained cluster development.”

Horizon 2020

Horizon 2020 is the EU Research and Innovation programme ever with nearly €80 billion of funding available over 7 years (2014 to 2020).

Relevant calls:

User-driven innovation: value creation through design-enabled innovation

“(…) selecting and allocating funding primarily to the concept development phase of the selected projects. (…) The pilot should build on national and European level actions on design, incorporating a robust selection process to ensure that projects selected are likely to be further developed and implemented beyond the concept phase. The emphasis should be on practical experimentation, piloting and demonstrating activities as well as concept testing and incubating to improve organisations’ processes, services, products or business models in the private, public or third sectors.”
Piloting demand-driven collaborative innovation models in Europe

"Design and pilot public/private funding mechanisms aiming at increasing private funding participation in collaborative innovation projects, contributing to bring innovative ideas to the market. Such mechanisms could build on or combine existing mechanisms.

Piloting other concrete measures favouring collaborative forms of innovation from a demand-side point of view (i.e. with a focus on businesses needs).

Applicants could include partners from different sectors, such as knowledge transfer offices, regional development agencies, business associations, business accelerators, networks bringing together businesses and academia, innovation hubs, innovation centres, investment funds, venture capital, crowdfunding platforms, research and technology organisations etc."


Fast Track to Innovation Pilot

"The FTI pilot supports projects undertaking innovation from the demonstration stage through to market uptake, including stages such as piloting, test-beds, systems validation in real world/working conditions, validation of business models, pre-normative research, and standard-setting. It targets relatively mature new technologies, concepts, processes and business models that need a last development step to reach the market and achieve wider deployment. Consortia must involve participants from industry. Universities, research and technology organisations and further innovation actors may also participate. Actors that can play a key role in the commercialisation process are encouraged to take part, such as cluster organisations, end-users, industrial associations, incubators, investors, or the public sector. First-time industry applicants[4] and SMEs are particularly welcome.”


Cluster facilitated projects for new value chains

“Cross-border and cross-sectoral collaboration, innovation and entrepreneurship across different regions and value chains shall be promoted. The coordination and facilitation shall be led by cluster organisations and other intermediary organisations, by following a systemic approach that combines different resources, tools and instruments.

Each proposal should demonstrate the capacity to:

1) validate ideas for structured innovation projects driven by SMEs from different sectors and countries in collaboration with other innovation actors and facilitate the coordination towards new industrial value chains through this collaboration space.

2) support innovation activities and/or channel a mix of different targeted entrepreneurial and innovation support measures (such as mentoring, coaching, innovation and technical assistance vouchers, etc.) directly to the innovation actors of the validated innovation projects to further support their development, integration and large-scale demonstration in a strategic manner. At least 75% of the total proposed budget shall be allocated to support innovation in SMEs directly”


Peer learning of innovation agencies

“The proposed activities will provide incentives in the form of small lump sum grants to national and regional innovation agencies for engaging in peer learning on all topics relevant for design and delivery of innovation support programs for SMEs.”


Capitalising the full potential of online collaboration for SME innovation

"Identifying suitable partners for innovation activities is recognised as a major barrier to SME innovation. Innovation support services are addressing this challenge traditionally by two interventions that are often combined: (a) the provision of networking space for personal meetings either as one-off meeting (‘brokerage events’) or as more stable networks (‘clusters’) often with a limited geographic reach; and (b) the definition of ‘cooperation profiles’ (‘technology offers’, ‘partner search profile’ etc.) that are distributed through networks of intermediaries. To a different degree intermediaries become active in establishing the partnership (‘brokerage’). Social media and other web-based services challenge these existing approaches and ask for their revision."
To address the described gaps proposals should address one or more of the following aspects:
- develop and test new service designs for ‘assistance to online collaboration for innovation’ for SMEs in diverse sectors;
- make such new services accessible for enterprises in sectors that are typically not yet benefitting from innovation support;
- develop and test a qualification profile, curriculum and training courses for staff currently providing brokerage services in established networks or SME agencies.”


Community building and competence development for SME Instrument coaching

“Horizon 2020 (H2020) aims to increase the impact of SME participation. In the case of the dedicated SME instrument this will be achieved through a coaching and mentoring service delivered during the company’s participation in the instrument. The objective will be to empower SME instrument participants to develop and implement high growth strategies based on successful participation in the dedicated Horizon 2020 instrument. The coaching and mentoring will be provided by a network of appropriately trained and experienced business practitioners. It will be delivered in cooperation with the Enterprise Europe Network which will initiate, broker and monitor the coach-SME relationship as well as provide participating companies with access to the wider Network service offering.

The objective of the action is to create the conditions for a comprehensive and consistent delivery of the coaching and mentoring service. In order to support peer-to-peer learning and overcome their regional anchoring, the coaches should have the opportunity to exchange ideas and experience with each other to grow the competencies within the coaching network. This will also ensure consistent service delivery. A central facility should be set-up to gather the experiences and data accumulated through the coaching engagement. It should also act as a single reference pool and knowledge resource to assist the coaches in the service delivery.”

Web Entrepreneurship (call supporting Startup Europe initiative)

“The challenge is to create an environment in Europe that encourages more web entrepreneurs to start a business in Europe and grow internationally. The focus of this topic is on entrepreneurs who use web and mobile technologies as main components in their innovation.

a. Accelerate web entrepreneurship in Europe: Online platforms with new services
Proposals to develop and test online platforms connecting existing local web entrepreneurship ecosystems and hubs, and build upon these in order to provide new services for web entrepreneurs, complemented with other relevant activities. These platforms are expected to go beyond technologies and applications, to include necessary conditions for collaborative innovation.

The new services should help promising web startups to efficiently launch and scale up their operations across Europe, to create exposure to new financing opportunities, to link potential web entrepreneurs with key actors, e.g. mentors, located anywhere in Europe and to link acceleration programs from several locations - providing real EU added value.

b. Coordination activities in the area of web entrepreneurs
Support actions that strengthen the environment for web entrepreneurship in Europe and that exploit synergies across stakeholder communities. They aim at increasing the impact, accessibility and reach of the online support platforms and the new services they offer as well as link into other relevant initiatives. This action should as well cover actions beyond the technological, e.g. training, legal and financial aspects.

Therefore proposals may also include features such as networking all relevant stakeholders groups; encouraging people, notably the young and the women, to become web entrepreneurs; supporting European initiatives on web entrepreneurship; supporting awards to celebrate web entrepreneurship; promoting the use of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for web entrepreneurship skills.

- Support the growth of ICT innovative Creative Industries SMEs

“The scope is to stimulate the adoption and deployment of innovative ICT solutions by the creative industries SMEs. This can be achieved through collaboration with ICT providers and by accelerating and supporting the growth of European creative industries.

The topic should be addressed by the following actions:

a. Innovation Actions to support the creative industries SMEs in leveraging emerging ICT technologies (e.g. 3D, augmented reality, advanced user interfaces, visual computing) for the development of innovative products, tools, applications and services with high commercial potential. Beyond the driving participation of creative industry SMEs and the participation of ICT technology providers, the involvement of research and innovation centres is encouraged. Proposals should be clearly driven by user-needs and demonstrate the market demand for the solution and the innovation potential. Solutions should be cost-effective, market-ready and target international markets.

b. Coordination and Support Actions to stimulate the growth of European creative industries exploiting advanced ICT for the development of new products and services and ICT SMEs innovating in the field of creative industries.
Activities should:
- include, where beneficial, investor readiness support (e.g. explaining investors’ requirements, assisting in the
development of business plans ...).
- connect creative industries SMEs with appropriate sources of funding (e.g. loans, venture capital, business angels
investment, crowd-funding ...) and with international business networks.
- increase the market access of creative industries SMEs across borders."


Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support
“The challenge is to improve the framework conditions of the European ICT innovation ecosystem so that it offers
the best conditions for innovators to capture the full potential of innovation to transform ideas to the market for
sustaining growth and jobs.

a. ICT business idea contests in Universities and High schools
Organise and promote ICT business idea contests addressed to University and high-school students. ICT business ideas
contests should be organised at national and subsequently European level.

b. ICT Entrepreneurship Summer Academy
The creation of a European wide system of Summer Academies for university and last year high school students
entirely focused on ICT entrepreneurship. The summer academies will be action oriented and include activities such as
ICT and entrepreneurial skills development; experimenting, mentoring; support for business planning and setting up
your company; matchmaking; generation and development of ICT-related business ideas.

c. ICT Entrepreneurship Labs
Bring entrepreneurs, students, researchers and companies together in experimental spaces to foster innovation driven
entrepreneurship. The aim is to foster team-based entrepreneurial activities and deepen interaction between students,
entrepreneurs, designers, universities and professors. Activities should combine exploring entrepreneurship as career
through classes, workshops, learning by doing, co-working spaces, experimental activities like testing and prototyping,
access to resources, coaching and sharing experience with other entrepreneurs, including serial entrepreneurs and
successful founders.

d. Campaign on Entrepreneurship culture in innovative ICT sector
Develop a public campaign focused on promoting entrepreneurship and the culture of risk-taking attitude in Europe
with a focus on ICT sector. The campaign will address messages like “I’ve tried and I’ve failed”, “I’ve tried and I
succeeded” and role models that Europeans can relate and feel encouraged to become entrepreneurs. The objective is
to boost the entrepreneurship by changing the perception towards risk aversion in Europe.

e. Support for definition and implementation of Inducement Prizes (or Challenges)
The objective is to define 8 to 12 inducement prize competitions. This includes a validated analysis for multiple ICT
thematic areas of technological or societal challenges that potential competitions will solve.”

Boosting the Investment-Readiness of SMEs and Small Midcaps
“Europe lags behind other regions in technology transfer and the commercialisation of R&I. Lack of early-stage
investment is a major factor contributing to this situation. Facilitating the interaction of potential investors with
innovative SMEs and small midcaps participating in FP7 or Horizon 2020, together with preparing firms and
entrepreneurs to negotiate more effectively with such investors, can help address this problem.

Proposals should at minimum address:
1) A survey of the major investment-readiness (training and pitching events) schemes in Europe, including those
launched under FP7, such as the ‘ICT Finance Marketplace’ and ‘European Investor Gate’ initiatives.
2) An analysis of lessons to be learnt from the above (proposals are expected to build on and reinforce the outcome of
these schemes).
3) The training of entrepreneurs (as the key focus of this action) and the sensitisation of investors.
4) The planning and execution of pitching events.
5) Strategies for involving a wide range of early-stage investors, including, at minimum, business angels, family offices
and venture capitalists.”

Improving access by innovative SMEs to alternative forms of finance

“Proposals should take account of a) the diverse levels of development of the provision of information on access by innovative SMEs to alternative sources of finance across the Member States and Associated Countries; b) target countries where the potential for improvement is highest; c) harness the potential of innovative financial technology; d) take account of best practices with a view to their eventual replication. They should:

Develop a capacity-building strategy and consequent implementation plan that makes use of techniques (tailored for both women and men) such as awareness raising campaigns, coaching, mentoring, workshops, courses, training materials (in particular through social media) as well as knowledge transfer of best practices.”


Startup Europe

Startup Europe is an initiative coordinated directly by the European Commission and supported by a variety of projects under Horizon 2020 (see call above on Web Entrepreneurship) which broadly aims at supporting web entrepreneurs in Europe.

The relevance of this initiative for this context is on the coordinated effort to support tech / digital entrepreneurs across Europe by supporting service providers (through a consortium project-based approach). Such providers are then responsible to implement support activities that include training (both on and offline), travel and accommodation micro-grants for participation in startup events, mentorship, etc.

This initiative is now going for the second round of projects by bringing together service providers in different consortia for supporting tech / web entrepreneurs.

“What is Startup Europe?

Startup Europe is an initiative of the European Commission, which falls under its priority of the ‘Digital Single Market’.

The 4 main objectives of Startup Europe are to:

Connect people such as startups, investors, accelerators, female entrepreneurs, corporate networks, universities and #EUTechWriters through our array of networks.

The Startup Europe Map, a map which connects all startup players in the European ecosystems, is part of this.

Connect local startup ecosystems by way of our 5 Projects (Digistart, ePlus Ecosystem, Startup Scaleup, Twist Digital and WELCOME) which are based in cities all over Europe.

We also support regional initiatives such as Startup Europe Week or Startup Europe Regions Network.

Help startups soft-land in other markets such as Silicon Valley (for example SEC2SV: Startup Europe Comes to Silicon Valley initiative), India (for example the Startup Europe India Summit), Africa (Startup Europe Comes to Africa initiative, coming soon) and The United Arab Emirates (coming soon).

Celebrate entrepreneurs’ success (Techallstars, Europioneers and StartUp Europe Awards).”

http://startupeuropeclub.eu

Creative Europe

Creative Europe is the European Commission’s framework programme for support to the culture and audiovisual sectors. Following on from the previous Culture Programme and MEDIA programme, Creative Europe, with a budget of €1.46 billion (9% higher than its predecessors), will support Europe’s cultural and creative sectors.

Relevant calls:

Support to European Platforms

“The scheme is open to platforms, comprising a coordination entity and a minimum of 10 member organisations which are active in the cultural and creative sectors”

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/node/1773
Support for Access to Markets

"Only those applications corresponding to at least one of the 3 Actions below will be considered as eligible:

Action 1 – Business to business (physical) markets for European audiovisual professionals
Action 2 - Online tools encouraging business-to-business exchanges
Action 3 – Business to business promotional activities of European works"

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/node/1713

Support to European Cooperation projects


Supported projects shall therefore include a substantiated strategy and detailed description of how they plan to implement one or more of these programme priorities."


Pilot project supporting networks of young creative entrepreneurs: EU and third countries (outside Creative Europe but promoted via)

“This pilot project aims at creating a Platform that will gather existing networks of young entrepreneurs active in the cultural and creative sectors in the EU and in third countries and that will facilitate the creation of new ones. The Platform will enable connections/exchanges between professionals from Europe and third countries and help a new generation of creative professionals to accelerate their professional development.”

https://ec.europa.eu/culture/calls/2015-eac-s11_en

Regional EU Programmes

Given the variety of EU regional funding programmes, this specific area will not map the relevant calls / initiatives as that by itself would be a very complex and time-consuming task.

Nevertheless, such programmes are worth noting as they are the closest EU funding possibilities and incubators and accelerators in Europe can find.

In fact, they provide them the possibility to fund not only their establishment (i.e. ERDF – European Regional Development Fund) but also their regular activities, including such services, by encompassing eligible activities and expenses such as subcontracting of experts / mentors, acquisition of relevant equipment, organisation of events, etc.

https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/funding-grants_en
EUROPEAN CREATIVE HUBS NETWORK

Co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union

www.creativehubs.eu
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