



Athens Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (ACEin): Engaging students in open innovation with large companies

Athens, Greece



**Innovation Design and
Entrepreneurial Action**

Healthcare and well-being

Κάνε την ιδέα προϊόν



General Information

Title	Athens Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (ACEin)	
Pitch	Engaging students in open innovation with large companies	
Organisation	Athens University of Economics and Business	
Country	Greece	
Author	Dr. Richard Woolley (Ingenio)	
Nature of interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration in R&D <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commercialisation of R&D results <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility of staff <input type="checkbox"/> Academic entrepreneurship <input type="checkbox"/> Governance	<input type="checkbox"/> Lifelong learning <input type="checkbox"/> Joint curriculum design and delivery <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility of students <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student entrepreneurship <input type="checkbox"/> Shared resources
Supporting mechanism	<input type="checkbox"/> Strategic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Structural <input type="checkbox"/> Operational <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Policy	
Summary	<p>The Innovation Design and Entrepreneurial Action (IDEA) programme developed by the Athens Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (ACEin) at the Athens University of Economics and Business (AUEB) uses an open innovation project model to help large organisations work with groups of talented students, entrepreneurial teams or start-ups to solve specific business issues. IDEA has already connected students and start-ups with large organisations in the tourism, health and fintech sectors, producing a range of innovative product and service outcomes. IDEA progresses through three phases of solution identification and development, with additional incubation services introduced as milestones are met.</p>	



Introduction & Overview

1. BACKGROUND

The 'open innovation' model that structures the Innovation Design and Entrepreneurial Action (IDEA) UBC programme at the Athens Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (ACEin) was first put into practice through collaboration with Athens international airport and the scientific support of the ELTRUN e-Business research laboratory of AUEB. The airport initially planned to run a corporate social responsibility activity supporting young entrepreneurs. They decided to devote some marketing budget to this strategy.

ACEin issued an open call to young entrepreneurs, brought them together, facilitated the formation of interdisciplinary teams, presented them with specific problems the organisation had and gave them time to work on these problems.

The best proposals were presented to the organisation, which decided to continue to work with seven teams. ACEin then supplied incubation support as the teams continued to work with the organisation – right up to the point of signing a commercial agreement in some cases.

The IDEA model that was developed is nested within a range of other UBC activities provided by ACEin that enable teams to incubate their ideas to the fullest extent possible.

2. OBJECTIVES AND MOTIVATIONS

The objective of the IDEA series programme is to stimulate entrepreneurial action by bridging students and young entrepreneurs that have NO IDEA or an initial business concept with companies that have specific problems and need to innovate.

ACEin organises the IDEA programme in order to highlight innovative business models and products/services that will provide solutions to 'challenges' in various sectors of the economy and society. Specific objectives of the programme are:

- ▶ To properly educate the participants in innovation and entrepreneurship;
- ▶ To highlight youthful innovation in the digital Internet environment, mobile and new technologies etc.;
- ▶ To offer participants the knowledge and the essential tools to analyse the process of developing a new innovative product/service and the respective entrepreneurial idea, through the effective use of prototyping and user-experience-testing techniques;
- ▶ To analyse and promote new business ideas and models that will provide solutions to the 'challenges' in various sectors of the economy and society; and
- ▶ To create a type of 'intrapreneurship', meaning transfer an entrepreneurial mindset to individuals in a large organisation.

A core motivation for the establishment of IDEA was the development of entrepreneurial competences among motivated young people, in an economic context of high youth unemployment and economic crisis. IDEA seeks to shape the potential of motivated young people and potential entrepreneurs to maximise their potential to succeed in this challenging environment.

3. STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders include researchers and students at all higher education levels, who have discoveries or ideas that they want to translate into a business plan, start-up or product that can meet the needs of specific large companies. An important stream of participants in IDEA also comes from part-time students who are already employed but attend university at night for executive education.

The Faculty of the Athens University of Economics and Business (AUEB) provides education and development of business models and plans.

The ACEin project team, including PhD candidates and post-doctoral researchers working on Entrepreneurship and Innovation-related issues. ACEin links Open Innovation teams with a full range of incubation services as they develop their project. The incubator model at ACEin is to act as a hub of open innovation and entrepreneurial interaction rather than to simply be a provider of services to entrepreneurial teams.

Industry experts and consultants providing mentoring and networking to support the programme.

Large organisations provide problem contexts, sponsorship of teams with successful proposals and collaborate on the development and execution of IDEA projects following the open innovation model.





Implementation

4. INPUTS

The energy provided by highly motivated students contributes to the development and deepening of entrepreneurial culture. The IDEA projects situate students as active participants in open innovation rather than as clients of incubation services.

The framework for developing the projects is the Lean Start-up methodology. In particular, students value inputs to the design of their concrete project or product. Design development is also very important for building confidence in the project.

As a university unit ACEin works very closely with the industry. The ACEin centre has a core staff of six and draws on faculty from across AUEB.

The university also acts as a trusted third party in the collaboration between the incubated products and services and the large companies who wish to make a commercial arrangement to use them, helping with relevant aspects of closing a formal deal between the two.

5. ACTIVITIES

The IDEA programme of open innovation is a specific model of UBC that rests on, and benefits from, the broad base of entrepreneurship training and development and the incubation of start-up companies conducted at ACEin.

IDEA involves direct collaboration with larger organisations, bringing them into contact with entrepreneurial teams and talented students. The open innovation process has four phases:

Phase A: Problem Identification and Idea Generation, involving problem statements, team formation, generation of innovative ideas.

Phase B: Business Model Innovation, involving development and validation of the concept, introduction of marketing principles, identifying the value proposition and other basic business model elements, with a focus on innovation and feedback from the industry partner.

Phase C: Agile Design and Development, involves the mock-up development and rapid prototyping of the product/service and piloting through user testing.

Phase D: Form Idea to Product, finalises all issues related to the transition to the actual solution including the pitching and presentation necessary to present the solution to the industry partner. Selection of services/products of interest to the partner for further development and potential commercial partnership occurs at this time.

The IDEA process is designed around five learning outcomes enabling participants to:

- ▶ Move from the identification of market opportunities and definition of innovative ideas to the design of respective services and business models;
- ▶ Analyse the process of developing a new innovative product/service and the respective entrepreneurial idea, through the effective use of prototyping and user-experience-testing techniques;

- ▶ Structure their innovative ideas in a solid and complete developed outcome and support it with relevant arguments, utilising motion and creativity for presentation/pitching of the idea;
- ▶ Command a better understanding of themselves as entrepreneurs, including motives, roles and basic responsibilities;
- ▶ Understand the notion of team building for a knowledge intensive work team, the necessary business processes and other commonly faced challenges that have to be met during the development of a new process or establishment of a new venture.

The IDEA projects benefit from the deeper entrepreneurship culture developed in ACEin and across AUEB more broadly. This support is based on several major lines of action:

Education and training is provided through a mixture of lectures, team assignments/workshops, case studies and action learning, taught by faculty members and specialised industry experts.

Networking activities include access to the European network of university-based incubation centres and specialised team development approaches.

Depending on the maturity of the business team, consulting services are provided in areas such as business planning, marketing, branding and design, IT development activities, accounting and legal issues, through personalised meetings with experts.

Student competitions are organised to highlight innovative business models and products/services that will provide solutions to challenges in sectors including the digital economy/e-business, health/well-being and airports.

Mentoring services help teams by drawing on the ACEin network business experts.

The Ennovation entrepreneurship competition that has run across 18 universities for nine years connects young entrepreneurs and helps make emerging talent more visible. This competition is a key source of talent, whether students or alumni. Some teams from this competition also participate in Open Innovation. These teams normally have more developed ideas, but these can often be pivoted to the specific needs of IDEA.

6. OUTPUTS

The IDEA model of UBC has to-date produced several different types of outputs including digital technologies, new services and co-branding arrangements which are formally agreed between the start-up teams and the sponsoring organisation. These agreements have taken different forms depending on the exact details of the case including supplier contracts and revenue sharing agreements.

Currently, ACEin organises an IDEA programme focusing on the Fintech area in cooperation with Viva Wallet SA, one of the biggest players in the Greek market.

Digital Gate and Interamerican: Challenges and ideas proposed

In the case of the Digital Gate project with Athens International Airport, the IDEA programme invited applicants to explore the following challenges: facilitating and improving the overall travel experience for members of the airport community (passengers, employees, visitors, businesses, etc.); selecting the most effective and far-reaching means of communication to provide personalised services and reference systems capitalising on social media; and re-adapting location-based services.

The first prize was won by an application associated with reliable weather prediction, while the early stage start-up prize was awarded to an application that is introduced as the 'personal assistant' for visitors to Greece (Butlair). In addition, a tour and culture app for Athens (ClioMuse) was also selected. Other ideas selected were:

- ▶ the effective planning, monitoring and managing of daily personnel work in large rooms, as well as emergency management;
- ▶ finding parking spaces in real time;
- ▶ a mobile application / driver for disabled people in the airport;
- ▶ and an application for 'smart' tests and shopping through interactive displays.

In the case of the Interamerican health insurance company (member of the ACHMEA group), the company was seeking mobile phone ideas for communicating directly, and in a more contemporary fashion, with customers. Fifteen entrepreneurial teams managed to reach the semi-finals and five to the final. Ideas included:

- ▶ Portable electrocardiograph associated with a mobile application for measuring heart rate and vital signs, specially designed for heart patients and the chronically ill;
- ▶ A mobile tracker of insurance policies, medical information and personal medical history management;
- ▶ An application for the creation and monitoring of dietary programmes;
- ▶ An application monitoring vital signs and user location, addressed to minors, and to elderly drivers; and
- ▶ A medical history tracking service and medication manager.

After an evaluation of the ideas and the feasibility of their implementation by the executives of associated companies, three entered into cooperative development. Innovative services are expected to enter the Greek market in 2017.

7. IMPACTS

In addition to education outcomes students are generating value for themselves and others through creating start-ups and technologies, for example. Students develop entrepreneurial competences and develop confidence to work with large established commercial partners.

IDEA also generates satisfied stakeholders. The university sees revenues and other returns on its support for start-up entrepreneurs; firms see solutions as returns on sponsorship, students see their ideas and services close to or in the market place as an investment in their futures.

Such initiative can help large organisations to become agile and fast and move successfully from an idea or technology to actual execution as the success of a technology disruption lies in the people behind the new start-ups. People with high multi-disciplinary and entrepreneurial potential are very scarce and represent the most valuable capital of every company. While start-ups are more agile, larger organisations have a wealth of business experience and resources. Innovating collaboratively allows partners to play to their comparative strengths.

This case study also underlines the role that a university accelerator can take in fostering collaboration among many participants that have contrasting cultures. The IDEA initiative can create a type of 'intrapreneurship' meaning transfer of an entrepreneurial mind-set to individuals working within an incumbent company.





Support & Influencing factors

8. SUPPORTING MECHANISMS

The IDEA initiative is an operational instrument, a specialist designed programme of education and entrepreneurship development with integrated input of industry practitioners and consultants. Open innovation projects focused on collaborations with large firms to develop solutions to specific problems using the full range of operational instruments and other support mechanisms available.

A support of the IDEA initiative is the use of research programmes to fund staff in the Incubator, typically through post-doc positions, funded PhDs, and research projects such as involvement in H2020 consortia.

Another supporting mechanism is the establishment of a coordination committee consisting of faculty members, which predetermines, proposes and coordinates, within the framework of the university's operational structure, all the university's actions regarding Innovation and Entrepreneurship, including IDEA.

9. BARRIERS AND DRIVERS

One driver of UBC was the investment by the Municipality of Athens to create the office and incubator space at ACEin. The challenge is now to make funding sustainable.

IDEA/open innovation sponsorships contribute to the support of the teams in the incubator as a whole– usually around 20 teams at any one time. ACEin is able to use funds from the sponsored programmes to cross-subsidise all the teams in the incubator.

ACEin is participating as a partner in the EU-XCEL Virtual Accelerator, which is an EU-funded project trying to educate and mentor multinational ICT start-ups and teams from all over the Europe. Apart from its collaboration with the other project partners (University College Cork – Ireland, Munich University of Applied Sciences – Germany, Technical University of Denmark – Denmark, Poznan Science and Technology Park – Poland and Technical University of Cartagena – Spain), ACEin has created many collaborations including students and start-ups exchanges, while at the same time many teams that are formed during the EU-XCEL Virtual Accelerator have expressed their willingness to participate in IDEA programmes.

The notion of a business Incubator has not been broadly accepted in Greek universities historically. The location of the incubator was not promoted initially. The barrier to UBC of acceptance of an incubator within AUEB environment has been overcome to some extent.

The incubator relies on the contributions of AUEB academics. However, contributions to the incubator are not formally recognised. Some soft recognition is now emerging but this has not always been the case and this barrier is still to be fully overcome.

10. FUTURE CHALLENGES

Financial self-sufficiency is a key challenge. Developing the sponsorship model linked to the IDEA programme is one model than can be further amplified, but complementary strategies will be needed.

The further extension of networking activities to improve the quality and composition of teams and services linked to IDEA is another identified challenge.

Deepening the involvement of other schools and faculties within the AUEB is an important future goal. A positive and supportive relationship exists with many Professors within AUEB that can be built on. The challenge is to make it possible for these Professors to see some (career) rewards for their participation in the activities of ACEin.

11. CONTEXT

Crisis conditions continue to exist in Greece, which drives students to be highly motivated to succeed with entrepreneurial activities. IDEA is very attractive in this context as it represents a great opportunity to work with large companies and to establish a business. The local ecosystem is bursting with innovative ideas, and young people who are motivated and thrilled about the opportunity to try and turn their entrepreneurial vision into reality. Many people who have studied abroad also return with new visions and influences.

12. KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

The primary success factor is the strength of the motivation and commitment of incubated teams.

Significant incubation support, particularly in the early stages and with the reaching of milestones is also crucial to success.

The engagement of the business partner is also vital for delivering critical feedback, both shaping the case and driving the commitment of the team to improve the quality of their project. A virtuous circle of feedback that drives motivation and creativity emerges. The involvement of top management, particularly for the initial pitch and the final selection of successful cases, is crucial in this regard.

A critical success factor is designing a mechanism for funding the activities – a model that is a win-win both for the collaborating firms and the university.

A further success factor is gaining access to the broader community of innovators and entrepreneurs. This ensures access to high quality candidates for developing solutions through the IDEA competition and the open innovation process.



Further Information

13. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The support each team gets is different, depending on the team's commitment and maturity level. ACEin uses an interdisciplinary approach to monitor and evaluate the incubated entrepreneurial teams and the progress through various dimensions. These dimensions consist of measurable key performance indicators such as sales turnover, number of clients, profitability, meeting targets, growth but also more intangible indicators such as improved business skills, publicity, increased confidence in self and in business.

Investors, such as VC's, banks and business angels collaborate closely with the incubator. They participate in evaluation committees organised by ACEin, or ACEin organises private pitching sessions with each investor separately. This provides another way of monitoring and evaluating the value generated by the teams.

14. SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES

The paradigm of working with larger firms on specific problems is a strategy designed to ensure sustainability.

The model of collaborating with large firms has developed a self-financing model to increase the internally driven sustainability.

ACEin's sustainability is ensured via:

- ▶ The support of AUEB providing infrastructure and human resources. It is also supported by research projects (that fund research on entrepreneurship) and by sponsorships.
- ▶ Revenues from educational programmes and services such as hosting events, organising open innovation activities, competitions and hackathons in collaboration with the private sector.
- ▶ Cooperation with venture capital, banks, business angels etc.
- ▶ Voluntary contributions from mentors to the programmes' activities.

15. TRANSFERABILITY

The concept of open innovation as a partnership between large companies with specific challenges and entrepreneurial teams, with the university incubator as intermediary, is transferable to other contexts. The types of start-ups that could be incubated are contingent on the type of commercial sector with which partnerships can be developed and the specific problems that partner companies have an interest in addressing. The IDEA model has already been applied to contexts as different as a transport hub, health insurance and financial services, which offers strong validation for the transferability of the approach.

16. AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

In recognition to the undiminished efforts of the last years, AUEB has received international recognition and certifications regarding its work. In 2012, AUEB received both the 'Distinction of Excellence' and a 'Quality Distinction' for Innovation and Entrepreneurship support under the EFQM Model, being the first Greek university to receive an EFQM certification. In 2013, AUEB received the 'National Champion' award in the 'Promoting the Entrepreneurial Spirit' category of the European Enterprise Promotion Awards.

ACEin was initially funded (2014-15) by Project 'Athena' (EU-funds), run by the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (ADDMA) on behalf of the Municipality of Athens. The Centre also participates in and supports the EU-XCEL EU-funded project (2015-2016, www.euxcel.eu).

17. PUBLICATIONS AND ARTICLES

Elli Diakanastasi, Angeliki Karagiannaki and Katerina Pramataris (2016). Entrepreneurial team dynamics and new venture creation process (submitted to SAGE Open, under revision)

Vasileios Mantzios, Aggeliki Karagiannaki and Theodoros Apostolopoulos (2016). Technology Entrepreneurship and Commercialisation: A set of Assessment Dimensions. In the Proceedings of the 2016 MCIS Mediterranean Conference on Information Systems, Cyprus.

Elli Diakanastasi, Angeliki Karagiannaki (2016). Entrepreneurial team dynamics and new venture creation process in ICT entrepreneurial teams: An exploratory study within a start-up incubator. In the Proceedings of the 2016 MCIS Mediterranean Conference on Information Systems, Cyprus.



VivaNest
An IDEA in Fintech

18. LINKS

ACEin Centre <http://acein.aueb.gr/en/>

IDEA in Health <http://idea.aueb.gr/>

The Digital Gate <http://thedigitalgate.gr/>

Ennovation competition <http://www.ennovation.eu/>

IDEA in FinTech <http://idea.fintech.aueb.gr/>

E-business research centre <http://www.eltrun.gr>

19. CONTACT PERSONS



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