



The 'COEUR' – University Network:
Experiences with Joint Learning Opportunities in
European Entrepreneurship Education

by

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1 Introduction

In 2002, an initiative called 'COEUR – standing for '*Competence in EuroPreneurship*' was founded.

The founders of the idea, Matthias Eickhoff (FH Mainz, Germany) and Andrew Turnbull (RGU Aberdeen, Scotland) formulated their vision:

"We want to organise a conference where students from different universities meet in an open atmosphere of initiative, creativity and responsibility to learn with experienced entrepreneurs and to establish a common basis for the entrepreneurial future in a Europe of regions, forming a nucleus for development and change, a junction in a quickly developing European business-culture."

Since then a network of six European Universities in Germany (Mainz), Scotland (Aberdeen), Portugal (Lisbon), France (Dijon), Poland (Wroclaw) and the Czech Republic (Prague) has developed.

The COEUR network establishes learning opportunities in the European higher education area with outstanding goals in the education of Competence in European Entrepreneurship. The paper will introduce the underlying concept and learning targets of all COEUR learning opportunities, as well as the educational concept itself. It will furthermore integrate results of participant evaluations and discusses the difficulties and challenges encountered.

2 Relevance of the Subject

2.1 Development of Entrepreneurship Research and Education

European history has been influenced in a variety of ways by entrepreneurial success and failure. Not taking into account Schumpeter's Theory of Economic Development (Schumpeter 2006) which was based on the action of a pioneering entrepreneur, the basics of entrepreneurship theory have largely been developed in the United States of America since the early 70s of the last century.

Nowadays entrepreneurship theory and education in the USA frequently serve as global benchmark, as both, entrepreneurship-research and education, have reached a high level in the United States and there is good reason to learn from these experiences.

Nevertheless it is not self-evident to address entrepreneurship as a global, uniform phenomenon instead of having a closer look at its determining factors at a lower aggregate level.

A new perspective may arise from two influences. First, the discussion about the future orientation of the discipline, as for example, at the annually held "IntEnt Conferences", (www.intent-conference.de) shows that besides traditional interests focusing on the entrepreneur, the availability of profitable business opportunities and the presence of entrepreneurial people are two vital factors for entrepreneurial societies. Secondly the idea of the Transnational Enterprise nourishes the concept of 'Glocalpreneurship' (Hilb 2000), putting emphasis on local adaptation of the entrepreneurial mindset.

2.2 The European Perspective

Despite legal fragmentation, cultural differences and historic roles, a new type of entrepreneur seems to be emerging in Europe as a study at the Centre for European Reform found out: "Encouragingly, a new business generation is emerging in Europe, with shared aspirations, values and outlooks. The common features among Europe's twenty- and thirty-something entrepreneurs are far more striking than the differences" (Leadbeatter/Ussher 1999). Increasingly process-orientation changes the way people do business and favours flexibility to size, variety to standardization. In a way Europe seems to be strongly equipped with the prerequisites to adapt successfully to these changes. Europe needs many of these new entrepreneurs and it has the chance to develop a new European entrepreneurship culture (Reid 2004). Romano Prodi, former President of the European Commission, stated in a speech entitled 'For a new European entrepreneurship' at the Instituto de Empresa in Madrid on 7 February 2002: "During the post-WWII period, the role of entrepreneurship seemed to be fading away. Today, what is going on in business points to a major reversal: the rebirth of the entrepreneur. And I share the view expressed with many observers that, the dotcom crash notwithstanding, there is every

reason to believe that this new age of enterprise will not fade away again in the near future.“

A survey conducted for the EFER (European Foundation for Entrepreneurship Research) among 240 Entrepreneurship-Teachers in Europe showed that although there has been a significant growth in the past five years in the teaching of the subject, much more needs to be done especially in the areas of action-oriented innovative approaches and in the creation of a cross-border faculty that helps to spur innovation and entrepreneurship in Europe (Wilson 2004). The survey highlighted a strong need for more faculty collaboration, exchanges and research across borders as most of the respondents, 90%, indicated that they work at academic institutions in their home country and less than 20% spend time teaching outside of the country. However, the survey continues, a greater critical mass of entrepreneurship faculty, research and course material is needed in Europe to help spur innovation and entrepreneurship and assist in the achievement of the goals set out in the Lisbon Agenda. Among the recommendations it is noted that students should be encouraged to take entrepreneurship courses and to strengthen links with their peers across borders. The sharing of good practices across their own institution as well as with other institutions should also be facilitated.

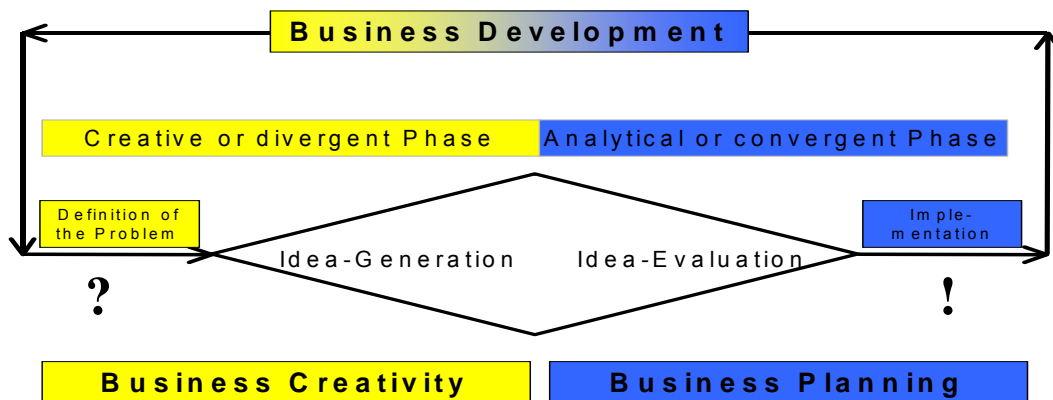
2.3 Purpose of the Paper

The paper discusses the joint learning opportunities developed in the frame of the COEUR project. It also outlines the underlying concept of the 'Business Evolution Process' (Eickhoff/Jakob 2005) that constitutes the learning targets of all COEUR learning opportunities. Subsequently the basic COEUR programmes are presented in structure and content, which is regularly evaluated and monitored through anonymous participant evaluations. Thereby the basic and initial concept of the annual 'COEUR Idea Generation Workshop' has been approved by students for 4 years in a row now. Nevertheless, the recent development of the workshop concept into a one-semester module encountered significant difficulties through the integration of E-learning elements in order to bridge the geographical distances of participating institutions.

3 Innovating European Entrepreneurship Education: 'COEUR' Learning Opportunities

It was crucial for the concept that the COEUR learning opportunities are not meant to add one more business-plan competition to the existing portfolio in entrepreneurship education. As many of these competitions already exist from local to global scale, the concept was designed to focus on an earlier stage of development: Business Creativity. The COEUR Network builds on the comprehensive concept of the Business Evolution Process which is understood to be a regulative circle integrating Business Creativity, Business Planning and Business Development (Eickhoff/Jakob 2005). By concentrating on the process of problem definition and idea development the COEUR learning opportunities contribute to harvest the most important resources on which Europe will have to build in the future: creative ideas!

Figure 1: The Business Evolution Process



Source: Eickhoff/Jakob 2005

The idea of business planning has very much been in the focus in recent years. Analytical tools and instruments have already been developed and the significance of business planning is accepted both in theory and practical application. On the other hand the

perception of the challenges of business creativity and business development are still not a common idea. As the following table shows, different tasks occur in each phase which require different approaches of thinking and different tools.

Figure 2: Application of the Business Evolution Process

<p>Business Creativity: Problem definition and creative idea development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•The real problem: the obvious or something 'behind'?• How can creativity 'be managed'?• Which creative tools are appropriate?•... <p>Business Planning: Idea evaluation and implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Which ideas appear to be economically viable?•How can market introduction be organised?•Which resistances are to be expected: company and market?•... <p>Business Development : Monitoring and re-inventing the business model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•'Never change a winning team' - Really?•Weak signals – indicators of future development?•Binding and un-binding customers: the philosophy of change!•...
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Source: Eickhoff/Jakob 2005

As pointed out at the 8th European Conference on Creativity and Innovation it may become essential to foster the responsiveness of companies to unpredictable changes in their surroundings (open change). While companies today are well prepared to react to deterministic change or to adapt proactively to predictable change on the basis of personal experience or marketing research, many of them seem not yet to have understood the necessity of creative problem-solving in a chaotic surrounding (Eickhoff/Jakob 2005). Offering intercultural experiences leading to intercultural understanding, the COEUR learning opportunities should also be fostering a growing together within the European Union. Furthermore the COEUR - University network promotes the European dimension of higher education, as well as the attractiveness of the European higher education area by networking at a European level and bringing students together from different European

countries in an inspiring educational environment employing experiential learning (Kolb 1984, Rae 2007).

3.1 The COEUR Workshop

In 2002 the idea of an international workshop for students from all disciplines, enhancing competence in European entrepreneurship, was born. The basic workshop task was to develop innovative entrepreneurial ideas within a European dimension. Regarding the business ideas themselves, there are no restrictions to the field in which the idea should be positioned, so a new enterprise, a new social institution, a 'bridge from A to B' would all have been possible as long as the European dimension regarding its realisation is considered. Since 2004 the annual workshop has been running alternately at one of the COEUR network universities welcoming students from all further network Institutions:

FH Mainz - University of Applied Sciences Mainz (Germany)

RGU Aberdeen - Robert Gordon University Aberdeen (Scotland)

AE Wroclaw - Wroclaw University of Economics (Poland)

ISCTE Lisboa - Higher Institute for Management and Social Sciences, Lisbon (Portugal)

ESC Dijon - Burgundy School of Business, Paris, Dijon (France)

VSFS Praha - Institute of Finance and Administration, Prague (Czech Republic)

3.1.1 The Basic Concept

The 1st International Students workshop on EuroPreneurship, COEUR 2004, was designed within a conceptual framework which had been the subject of discussion in the participating universities. The partners agreed on a framework which was tight enough in its basic principles to have a clear guideline for the future and as well as loose enough to leave enough room for individual adaptation to local conditions. As the first conference still was very much an experiment to test the concept, it had also been subject to modifications in some respects in the meantime. The basic elements of a COEUR workshop include the following:

Frames: The COEUR workshop is meant to be a 5-day workshop with not more than 50 students in total and about 10-15 students from 3-6 partner universities forming the COEUR – network. Students and staff meet yearly, the meetings organised alternately by one of the universities. The participating students are mixed in inter-culturally different groups (country, study-subject or others). The groups have the task to develop the value proposition for a new challenging and innovative idea with entrepreneurial challenge and European vision.

Input: During the development process students' ideas are stimulated by diverse inputs such as key note speeches of successful entrepreneurs, creativity training tools and excursions enhancing creative thinking, factual knowledge and intercultural sensibility.

Methods: The above mentioned inputs are combined with regular 'idea check-ups' (presentation of the teams and critical feedback from staff on site) and a large amount of problem-based 'action learning'. This extraordinary combination successfully serves to spur the flow of thoughts and makes the participants act as a team within a short period of time. Through intensive experiences the COEUR workshop offers participating students the acquisition of competencies in the following subject areas:

Competence in European Entrepreneurship: The participants are constantly supported by the project leaders and other experts, to foster the education of the students' competence in 'EuroPreneurship'

Entrepreneurial Perspective: through the contact with experienced entrepreneurs in the context of key note speeches & discussions and excursions.

Social Skills: Through intensive intercultural teamwork, problem solving competences as well as conflict management will be permanent challenges in the process.

Presentation Skills: A regular monitoring of the students' idea generation during the workshop gives them practise and routine in presenting their ideas to other people especially to experienced experts.

Intercultural Competences: Through the intensive work with students from different European nations and professional backgrounds in the workshop.

Language Exercise: The COEUR workshop is held solely in English and demands in return English communication without compromise from the students.

Moreover, since its first run in 2004, a regular evaluation of the COEUR workshop has been made at the end of every workshop when all participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire. Additionally, the lessons learned have been discussed within the accompanying academic team at the end of every COEUR workshop. Every year the respective host of the COEUR workshop accounts for the entire organisation and the conceptual structure of the workshop. To point out both conceptual development and continuity arising from successful structures, time schedules as well as abstracts from the evaluation of each COEUR workshop since 2004 are integrated into the workshop presentations below, which are based upon information received from the hosts in charge.

3.1.2 1st Coeur: Mainz, Germany 2004

The 1st COEUR Conference was undertaken from 29th September – 4th October 2004 in the University of Applied Sciences Mainz, Germany. Participants from the Akademia Ekonomiczna, Wroclaw, the Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Impresa ISCTE, Lisbon, the Scottish Institute for Enterprise, Glasgow and the Institute for Entrepreneurial Behaviour (IUH), Mainz - 4 Professors, 4 academic staff members and 43 students attended the conference. The way the conference was organized, through multiple networks energised by a limited number of keystones, could also illustrate organizational forms for future ventures. COEUR 2004 in the beginning was not much more than a blurred idea, wrapped in a strong resolve: one cornerstone of the concept was to involve students as the owner-players of the event. The university and accompanying staff were not in a position to deliver the content of learning or to control the process. Instead, they acted as provider of the means and the structure in a facilitating role. The initial input was restricted: Students were mixed together in the most diverse multicultural groups. The basic task was described as: "Develop entrepreneurial ideas with visionary strength and a European dimension".

On the first day students participated in a public event 'Entrepreneurship Day' which offered keynote contributions of successful entrepreneurs and presentation of first rank business leaders, consultants and politicians on future perspectives of society, industries and technologies, followed by a panel discussion "Europe – An Entrepreneurial Challenge".

evaluation of this poster presentation achieved a score of 530 out of 850 points and no team was evaluated with less than 400 points.

Practicalities of the programme: With heterogeneity in the prerequisites there are bound to be differences and possible sources of conflict. In some of the participating universities entrepreneurship education already is a part of the curriculum (compulsory or not), in some there were business plan competitions, but others were not active in that field. In some countries entrepreneurial initiatives are strongly supported by regional or national government, for others there was business community involvement, but for yet others both were lacking. Therefore it had not been possible to establish firm criteria for student selection: who would come – with or without entrepreneurship experience, with or without support – was left to the person in charge in each university.

To accept heterogeneity is not easy – however it is necessary to build our European present and future. Upon arrival students were grouped and soon were confronted with the differences. Most obvious: Language – some were native speakers and some students merely achieved a satisfactory level of proficiency; some students were used to holding free presentations while some others could not. Some students had had their study trip paid for by their respective institutions and could even enjoy some allowances; others had paid out of their own pockets. Expectations of the program were also quite disparate, depending on the students' previous exposure to entrepreneurship experiences. The facilitating role of the teachers involved was therefore to find a common ground on which the students could build their projects and assist them in accepting heterogeneity. In the end, as one can also see in the evaluation and statements of the participants, this worked more than successfully!

Evaluation 1st COEUR 2004: The 1st COEUR Workshop was evaluated as very successful, both from the organisers' and from the participants' point of view. On a scale from 1 ('cool') to 7 ('crap') 70 % of the participants valued the COEUR-experience with 1 or 2. The concept followed the idea of letting the participants work under high time pressure in order to guarantee a clear focus of the event on the entrepreneurial challenge instead of tourist or personal interest.

The idea of having an intercultural mix of students was more than accepted (43%), it proved to be one of the core-benefits of COEUR. 96 % of the participants said that they

would participate again and recommend COEUR to friends. 92 % of the participants judged the team sessions as good or very good and the students testified that the COEUR-goals had been reached: to gather European integrative experience and networks, to improve language proficiency and cultural understanding, to develop personal skills, experience and development.

57% rated the number of countries represented as too few. The number of students was just right for 91%. A (significant) increase in the number of countries involved would increase the mix but would also weaken the concept, as the idea was to hold COEUR in all the participating universities in the following years, and thus their involvement would be lowered. Over 60 % of the participants had a generally positive impression (score 1-3) of the organisation of COEUR 2004.

The initial plan was to choose a venue far away from the regular university facilities, like a monastery or a castle, in order to minimise the disturbances of group dynamics from outside the process. For cost reasons the University of Applied Sciences Mainz had to be the location of the conference. Experience in Mainz as well as (positively) later in Scotland proved that the initial idea was right: An external venue is an important factor for the success of the programme. In this context the importance of accommodation should also be pointed out. An 'on campus solution' offers clear advantages for group dynamics and transaction time and costs (transportation).

The excursions/events were definitely amongst the highlights of the conference. They not only offered new contextual perspectives but were also important for group-dynamics and have thus been integrated into following programmes as well. The excursion to Frankfurt Airport was scored with 1 by 54% as well as the working session in Bacharach by 78%. 92% of the participants saw the team sessions as above average, almost 80% as good and better. The team sessions proved to be the most powerful element in the development process and should be strengthened. The idea of team orientation should also be communicated more strongly in advance in order to avoid a possibility of individual frustration.

The length of the event was mostly accepted. Too little time for group work is in conflict with too little free time. Following the strategic aim of working under time-pressure more free time could only be offered by 1-2 extra days before or after the conference.

Highlights and lowlights seem to be acceptable for the first trial. COEUR 2004 proved the power of the basic idea and showed that the development work was on the right track. One more indicator is that COEUR participants from Portugal built network structures which are now successfully supporting their common start-up-company which was established after their final exams.

3.1.3 2nd COEUR: Edzell, Scotland 2005

The second workshop was held under the auspices of the Aberdeen Business School, a faculty of The Robert Gordon University (RGU), Aberdeen, from Monday, September 19th to Saturday, September 24th, based at the Burn House, Edzell (from 19th-22nd) and the Glenesk Hotel, Edzell (from 22nd-24th). Although the necessary location-split created some problems in terms of accommodating everyone in one place (some delegates needed to stay separately) it achieved the objective of making the event more economic (and therefore more affordable for the student groups) and easier to organise.

The number of participants fell slightly from year one, though in addition to the groups from the FH Mainz, the University of Economics in Wroclaw and ISCTE Lisbon in Portugal, The Robert Gordon University was pleased to welcome a French delegation from ESC Dijon, Bourgogne, as a fifth network-partner. In total 6 German students, 6 Polish students, 9 Portuguese and 9 French students together with 8 Scottish students made up the total number of 43 workshop delegates including 6 staff members from all institutions.

Sir Charles Skene, Donor and Visiting Professor of the 'Charles P. Skene Centre for Entrepreneurship' at The Robert Gordon University gave the opening address. During the week, further input was given by John Park, RGU, on 'The Creative Process' and by Andrew Turnbull, RGU, on 'Critical thinking and the importance of understanding what customers want and need'. Excursions included visits to the Fettercairn Distillery, Glamis Castle (birthplace of the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret) and Kirriemuir (National Trust for Scotland (NTS) sites: Barrie's Birthplace and the Camera Obscura) and a golf training session. Evening events included presentations by each country's student group on their university, city and country and the staff of the Burn House, a university convention centre, hosted a Scottish evening with traditional songs and dancing. The main aim of the programme was to create an entrepreneurial team spirit amongst the 6 international groups

established on arrival, in a series of group meetings that would culminate in presentations to a panel of judges on the afternoon of Friday, 23rd September. Each group was expected to develop a European business idea, expressed verbally and visually (in poster format).

The ideas presented were:

Dimensions Unlimited: a service agency for the fulfilment of individual 'dreams'

E.GE-EuroGeneration: a private elementary school with an integral European mission

EuroBridge: a platform for the mediation and utilisation of ideas in Europe

Indeco.com: a platform for individual planning and sales of furniture and art in Europe

SmartWeight: an integrated weighing system for suitcases, packages and more

Workin' Europe: a service agency to support professional mobility in Europe

Evaluation 2nd COEUR 2005: A questionnaire was issued to work out an evaluation of the formal programme and 35 completed forms were collected. Only 2 students (who had to leave earlier for organisational reasons) did not hand in questionnaires. The students rated the event overall as a great success. On a scale of 1 (very good) – 7 (poor), the average score was 1.6. The general comments and post-event e-mails bear out the very positive rating. In addition, all but one student would recommend participation in the future to others (the one did 'not care') and all except two (who did not submit answers) would still have taken part, if they could turn back the clock.

The overall organisation and administration were also viewed very positively (rated 2.04). A few adverse comments were made, in part reflecting the change in venue that became necessary (because the Burn House was only available for a maximum 3 night stay) midway through the workshop. The accommodation arrangements scored highly. On the same scale (used throughout) the Burn House came out fractionally ahead of the Glenesk Hotel overall (2.08 v. 2.14).

The presenters were all highly rated (Charles Skene 2.91, John Park 1.31 – the best single rating on any aspect – and Andrew Turnbull 1.66) and there may have been room for more. More information would have been appreciated prior to the event regarding the aim, format and personal requirements.

The group work again was a major strength of the workshop (rated 2.2) but with some negative and some positive comments reflecting the problems and difficulties that can arise when mixing students together from different cultures and different backgrounds in a competitive environment.

Finally, the excursions were mostly, although not universally, well received. The visit to Glamis Castle was easily the most popular (rated 1.6) reflecting the professionally delivered guided tour and the impressive surroundings. The distillery attracted mixed ratings (still high overall at 2.6) and trailing well behind were the NTS attractions, especially Barrie's Birthplace, in Kirriemuir (3.66).

The combined result was undoubtedly a very successful, positive experience for all concerned. The written comments back this up and suggestions for the future, as well as any remarks reflecting on the 2005 event were mostly very constructive. Some students wanted to do a better job, for example on their presentation and would have appreciated additional facilities such as Internet provision. Keeping the students away from telephones and e-mail however, could be viewed as a plus point. The success, and the concentration of so much into such a short time, probably contributed to the feeling of almost a third that the workshop period was too short. A sizeable minority (45.7%) wanted more countries involved, although there was greater consensus regarding the number of students. The overriding feeling was nevertheless that the event was highly beneficial in (roughly) the current format. A participating student wrote in her statement:

"Co - operation was exciting and frequently complicated – a real thrill. It challenged us all. Discussions and the attempt to come to a common conclusion on the basis of our different cultural backgrounds made communication complicated. I understood in that week that you only have new ideas and learn to understand each other if you agree to disagree! The week was an incredible experience. It brought me together with people which couldn't have been any more different. It opened my eyes and I can only recommend to my fellow students to participate in a COEUR-Conference when they might get the chance to."

3.1.4 3rd COEUR: Wroclaw, Poland 2006

The COEUR workshop in 2006 took place in Wroclaw - the capital of Lower Silesia - from 13th - 19th September.

Figure 4: Evaluation of the 3rd COEUR Workshop 2006

		Average	Expectations Fulfilment
1.	Location(s)	4,5	87,5%
2.	Organisation	4,4	85,6%
3.	Accommodation	3,6	65,0%
4.	Food	3,5	63,1%
	Events:		
1.	CULTURE: International evenings	4,9	96,3%
2.	LEISURE: Barbecue (Polish evening with music)	4,8	94,4%
3.	CULTURE: Portuguese evening	4,7	91,9%
4.	PRESENTATION: COEUR '06 Presentations	4,6	89,4%
5.	EXCURSION: Chojnik Castle	4,5	86,3%
6.	CULTURE: "Welcome to Poland" evening	4,4	84,2%
7.	AWARD CEREMONY and farewell party	4,2	80,9%
8.	WORKSHOPS (Selling Business Ideas / Creativity)	4,1	77,7%
9.	PRESENTATION: Presentation on Entrepreneurship Incubators	3,9	73,6%
10.	EuroPreneurship panel	3,9	71,9%
11.	CULTURE: Discovering Wrocław	3,9	71,7%
12.	EXCURION: SITECH company	3,4	60,8%
13.	EXCURSION: Wałbrzych Special Economic Zone	3,4	60,6%
14.	PRESENTATION: Back to COEUR '04 presentation	3,3	56,4%
15.	PRESENTATION: Presentation of the University of Economics	2,5	36,9%
1.	Have you acquired intercultural skills?	4,6	90,4%
2.	Have you developed teamworking skills?	4,3	81,3%
3.	Have you expanded entrepreneurial skills?	4,2	80,0%
	<i>Was the event worth the money you paid?</i>	4,5	88,1%
	GENERAL IMPRESSION OF COEUR'06	4,6	90,6%

Source: Evaluation questionnaire appraised and summarised by the AE Wrocław

The overall objective of COEUR 2006 was to emphasise that there is no universal recipe for entrepreneurial success in Europe. What is a great business idea in France, Germany, Portugal or Scotland does not have to work in Poland. Therefore, participants should

become acquainted with the peculiarities of the business environment of the hosting country by learning about the conditions for investment in special economic zones, discussing support for foreign entrepreneurs investing in Lower Silesia with a representative of municipal authorities and discovering which projects would be willingly supported by financial institutions. In order to make the contest more competitive the number of teams was increased to seven, of which each consisted of about seven students. The final concepts were presented to and evaluated by a panel of successful practitioners and specialists from the field.

Evaluation 3rd COEUR 2006: Figure 4 summarises the most important findings from the students' evaluation. Again, the results mirror a concept that has - for the third time in a row - proved to be successful and broadly appreciated by students from all over Europe.

3.1.5 4th COEUR: Lisbon, Portugal 2007

The 4th COEUR workshop took place in Lisbon, Portugal, from 17th to 22nd of September 2007, with the VSFS Prague as additional member institution in the network. The workshop was held at a secluded place near Mafra - at Quinta da Montanha - one of the last reserves of the Iberian wolf, a protected species. The fact that this species is almost extinct should prompt participants to reflect on some of the big problems the world is facing today and which perhaps entrepreneurship can solve. Accordingly the COEUR-Workshop evolved around:

the theme: "Europe and the World"

the focus: "Entrepreneurship to Save the World"

and the inspiration: "EuroPreneurship, success made in Europe"

The *theme* guided the seminars and technical visits that were held throughout the programme. The *focus* is the background of the group activities, interests and concerns and the *inspiration* should remind the teams that whatever idea or solution (product, service, process) they will put forward, simple or complex, it will have to have a market and to be viable and successful in that market.

Evaluation of 4th COEUR 2007: The restriction of the workshop task to the above mentioned focus did not necessarily restrict students' creativity but was nevertheless experienced as too restrictive by the students as during the workshop students did not have any sources of information apart from the pool of their existing knowledge and competences. This may have impacted on the emergence of some very close ideas throughout the teams. Furthermore an uncertainty on the students' part was stated about how to generate innovative ideas that would bridge a gap in the market and how to allocate these gaps in a first step. The intercultural and 'multicompetence' composure of the groups builds a fruitful basis to develop outstanding concepts. Nevertheless, the ability to systematically profit from this potential was requested. Therefore the coming COEUR Workshop in 2008 will integrate more intensive input on creativity techniques which may spur the process of problem definition and idea generation at the very beginning of the workshop. To make this process visible to the jury, the focus of team work and presentation will be shifted towards pointing out the process of origination and development of ideas up to the final concept, in order to judge a true capability of thinking and acting entrepreneurially rather than rewarding a coincidentally good idea with no foundation.

On the other hand, great value has already been added through the integration of an interactive team building session as well as presentation training by a professional trainer. These exercises contributed very positively to the team building process and students' self-confidence when presenting and articulating their ideas.

3.2 Further development of the Workshop: The COEUR - MODULE

As the basic assumptions of the COEUR concept proved to be successful, the participating institutions extended and intensified their cooperation: In February 2006, the Institute for Entrepreneurial Behaviour together with the five COEUR university network partners applied for EU funding for a Curriculum Development Project under the SOKRATES PROGRAMME to develop a '*COEUR BCM - Business Creativity Module*'. In the application the universities describe their goal

“...to develop a module in European Entrepreneurship training in entrepreneurial skills and intercultural competencies by focussing on the 1st phase in the Business Evolution Process, the problem definition and creative idea development.”

The module can be delivered at any European university. It will be accessible for students from any discipline at undergraduate level. It also provides the basis for a highly intensive 5-day ‘Idea Generation Workshop’ where students and staff from a network of 3-5 European universities meet to develop entrepreneurial ideas with European dimension within intercultural teams. The project objectives are:

“to develop a curriculum for the COEUR – BCM in order to assure its quality,

to implement the expected interdisciplinary module in the regular curriculum of the partner universities and to equip it with an appropriate amount of ECTS credits,

to disseminate the COEUR-BCM idea at other partner universities in order to initiate new European COEUR-BCM networks all over Europe with the overall aim of strengthening an entrepreneurial perspective within the European higher education area.”

The total budget was approved by the European Commission and in October 2006 the two-year project started. While year I of the project was predominantly dedicated to the module development - the conception of and agreement on basic structures - year II realises the implementation of the module within the COEUR university network and furthermore aims at disseminating the module in the European higher education area to initiate new BCM networks. In the winter term 2007/08 the module passed its first test run within the COEUR university network. The module was delivered both virtually on an e-learning platform and in real life classes at each partner university. While the COEUR workshop assures intercultural experiences through intensive multinational group work the Business Creativity Module aims at bridging the geographical gap through virtual group work in intercultural teams.

Considering the differing semester schedules of all COEUR universities as well as the usual student fluctuation at the beginning of a semester, all students were successfully enrolled in the e-learning platform by the beginning of October 2007. Teams were formed online by the module coordinator striving for a best possible mixture of cultures & competences and then the virtual idea finding and developing process

started. Through regular classes at every university the virtual team work was accompanied by supporting input and was monitored by means of local idea check-ups. Although local and virtual support was available at any time, the module initially aimed at fostering self-responsible work.

All virtual activities and real life classes were based on a common schedule, with common deadlines for all examinations and tasks, feeding their lessons on a common content, currently being fixed in a module manual. Through the use of an idea data base the business ideas gained through the delivery of the module can be realised by their creators or left to be used by another European Entrepreneur with the agreement of all the team members.

After more than two months of team work students presented the final stage of their team work at their local university in front of a panel of academics and experts in the field. Furthermore a PowerPoint presentation as well as a written work-out of the entrepreneurial idea was submitted by every team.

Evaluation of 1st BCM 2007/08 - The challenge of virtual learning: The use of e-learning facilities as a substitute for face-to-face communication was enthusiastically welcomed and generally considered as the logical consequence of the geographic dispersion of students during the module. The chosen e-learning platform was equipped with all required functions and tools and the course was installed in time to assure a smooth course of action. Nevertheless the first test-run in winter term 2007/08 encountered unexpected difficulties due to the inexperience with virtual learning. As virtual teams differ in many ways to traditional, physical teams, they require a different management approach requiring an appreciation of the benefits and constraints as well as a proactive approach to ensuring that the success of the team is facilitated (McLean 2007).

While the evaluation of participating students is still in process – the monitoring of the experiences gained among the module lecturers has shown that a much greater emphasis needs to be put on the following aspects:

Building a sense of team identity and community at the very beginning by bringing individuals together for a face-to-face introductory meeting, thus enabling the forming process to begin. This can happen through a kick-off meeting at one of the universities or

alternatively via video conference which assures visual contact and a certain break of anonymity. This is also intended to increase a feeling of team-responsibility and the motivation to perform successfully.

A much stronger focus on the coaching and supervising of the teams is required at the expense of a subordinate priority of the teaching of contents. The immense challenge of self-responsible working in a virtual environment was underestimated due to the expectation of a high intrinsic motivation on the students' part.

Creating awareness and fostering respect for cultural as well as personal differences by appreciating that such diversity can be an asset.

Building trust as soon as possible after the teams have been formed. This aspect is closely linked to the creation of a team identity and will be encountered by weekly scheduled virtual meetings of all participants to assure regular communication among all teams and to guide this process through constant availability of the module lecturers.

Stronger exchange with practitioners and experts from the field to serve as examples and advisors for the students projects.

Clearly defining the team's goals and objectives (especially including performance requirements) at the beginning to assure every student's awareness of the extent of the work load and responsibility for the team.

Moreover, by means of an online pre- and post-module evaluation of participating students and staff, lessons learned from the modules will continuously flow into the module conception and contribute to sustainable improvement. Furthermore, the year 2008 preludes the embracing of activities of promotion and dissemination of the module in the European higher education area: Through illustration of the module content and structure as well as the added value for European entrepreneurship education the initiation of new BCM networks will be highlighted. Furthermore a broad marketing support is planned as well as the presentation of the module at academic conferences.

4 Conclusion

While the basic concept of the above presented COEUR learning opportunities – the education of business creativity in an intercultural university surrounding – has proved to adapt perfectly to the requirements of the situation of open change, a best possible integration of virtual learning will develop throughout further experiences and a growing acceptance of its use in the European higher education area.

Using virtual teams to undertake projects without the limitations of geography, time and physical location enables organizational, individual and task flexibility. Although at the same time the constraints of virtual team work are numerous, education will more and more make use of the equally numerous benefits. The difficulties encountered have already provided an opportunity for improving the concept and adapting to the requirements of virtual learning in the field of entrepreneurship education.

The creation of an entrepreneurial spirit amongst the team members forms the core of all COEUR learning opportunities. Therefore the presentation of the 'COEUR Learning Opportunities' is meant to introduce innovative instruments in the new venture creation process combining Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Creativity and to foster the curiosity to implement these within further university networks.

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