

Commentary

Encouraging Arctic Cross-Border Entrepreneurship Through Collaborative *Creative Steps 2.0* Methodology

Anzelika Krastina & Anitra Arkko

The viability of Arctic economies depend on many factors. Development and utilization of Arctic human capital can be considered as one of the most important aspects. To move from exogenous towards more endogenous economies, innovation and entrepreneurship are considered to be the key to assuring thriving communities and value creation in the North. (The Arctic Institute, 2017). However, there are certain challenges for entrepreneurship development in particular in the Finnish Lapland and Barents Euro-Arctic regions.

Entrepreneurship is not the first career choice for young people living in the Arctic. They often prefer to move to the south for better job opportunities, lacking a vision of what the North can offer. Training and education can help reverse that situation. Through specific entrepreneurship and innovation courses with appropriate methodology of experiential learning, many young people reconsider a possibility to establish and develop a company in the Arctic. Many good examples and success stories of student-established companies could be linked to the entrepreneurship training activities at the university. But there could be, *and* should be, more success stories.

There is an increasing understanding that entrepreneurship education and training needs to be intensively developed and integrated into education. Investing in entrepreneurship education provides one of the highest return on investments (European Commission, 2017). While general entrepreneurship education is considered as an important task at Lapland University of Applied Sciences, for us, acting in the field as entrepreneurship coaches, it is clear that there is a need for such entrepreneurship training methodologies, that take into account the specifics of the North. Understanding the Arctic – environment, infrastructure, long distances, climate, cross-border cooperation possibilities – can help better understand the various opportunities and challenges that exist in the region. Entrepreneurship training needs to be directly linked to real life situations and encourage actual networking with local, regional, international stakeholders.

Anzelika Krastina is Director of International Relations at the School of Business and Culture, and Anitra Arkko is a Senior Lecturer at the Lapland University of Applied Sciences.

Creative Steps 2.0 methodology model, developed at Lapland UAS' School of Business and Culture, is an attempt to find new ways of entrepreneurship pedagogics best suited to the entrepreneurship development and education in Arctic circumstances.

Creative Steps 2.0 (CS 2.0) is an innovation workshop model – a guided step by step approach that helps to develop new business ideas. CS 2.0 is also an education methodology for entrepreneurship training. However, it is not a typical business development and innovation workshop. First, CS 2.0 methodology aims to enhance cross-border collaboration and the interaction of actual businesses with students and coaches. Second, CS 2.0 methodology aims to encourage the use of digital tools for better online and distance collaboration. Third, it offers simple and sequential patterns of activities that help all participants of the workshop to progress in their work from one step to another with clear tasks and outcomes. Therefore, it serves as a guideline for any educator or facilitator in various entrepreneurship development situations. CS 2.0 model is based on the original *Creative Steps* model developed during the Creative Edge project (2011-2013). First version of CS methodology was focusing mainly on local small business development. With an increasing trend of Arctic cooperation, there appeared the need to go beyond local business operations towards a more international collaboration of companies and business developers. CS 2.0 model helps companies located in remote regions of Northern Europe to connect, collaborate and innovate across borders.

CS 2.0 methodology was developed during the Creative Momentum project funded by the EU Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme. It was first piloted in May 2016 under the leadership of Lapland UAS. Eight micro and small companies from different parts of Northern Europe collaborated online with four student groups (sixteen international students) located in the Rovaniemi and Tornio campuses in Finland. Most of the collaboration work between companies and students happened online, while students' teamwork sessions were held in face-to-face and online mode. Coaches supervised all work, whether online or in class depending on the task performed. The work began by establishing the business case, defining the "customer's pain" and the potential source of innovation. Through ten collaborative steps, companies and student teams developed actual prototypes of a new innovative service or a product and presented them to Creative Cave Pool – the panel of international judges: business experts who participated in the final pitching remotely and provided their feedback online. In Spring 2017, similar CS 2.0 model testing was carried out by Technichus Mid-Sweden Ltd. Final testing of CS 2.0 model is planned for October 2017 and will be led by the National University of Ireland, Galway. Once all three pilots are completed; project partners will upgrade methodology and further proceed with the integration of the methodology into educational institutions by training of trainers on the use of the CS 2.0 approach.

The feedback of participants (both companies and students) shows that working in a 'virtual world' is an innovative way to work across borders and it can offer new possibilities for businesses. "I think international cooperation is growing, so in the future virtual working skills are no more optional but mandatory for us to work productively," reflected one of the participants. According to the participants, it was easy to innovate through ten defined steps and to see actual progress. Diversity of workshop participants (different cultures, organizations, age) can be an asset as well as the challenge.

CS 2.0 model piloting leads to the conclusion that entrepreneurship education is not static. New models for entrepreneurship development and cross-border collaboration in the Arctic can be efficient and bring actual results. Coaching (teaching) through these types of models require a multi-dimensional and cross-disciplinary approach. It is a mutually beneficial learning process by all participants, which sometimes can be rather challenging. However, the most encouraging part of the process is the discovery of unexpected sources for innovation found in the Arctic.

References

- Arkko-Saukkonen, A. & A. Krastina (2016). *Creative Steps 2.0: Step by Step Guidelines to Business Idea*. Lapland University of Applied Sciences, Rovaniemi, Finland. Retrieved from, <http://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/121144>.
- European Commission (2017, 7 September). *Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2020*. Retrieved from, http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/action-plan_en
- The Arctic Institute (2017, 7 September). High North Dialogue. Retrieved from, <http://www.thearcticinstitute.org/event/high-north-dialogue-2017-innovation-arctic/>.