



Good practice

Mature Your PhD (MyPhD): A challenge for testing potential R&D tech transfer project

Working Group: Research & Innovation (R&I)

Member State, Region: France, Alsace

Thematic area: Competitiveness and Innovation



Basic project details

Lead organisation:

SATT Conectus Alsace Technology Transfer Office (TTO) - France

Partner organisations:

- ETENA
- University of Strasbourg
- University of Haute-Alsace
- CNRS
- INSERM
- INSA Strasbourg
- ENGEEES
- bpiFrance
- Addat
- France 2030
- i-PhD
- i-Lab
- Starthèse

Project duration: 2019 – Ongoing

Overview and objectives

The 'Mature Your PhD' challenge aims to help PhD students turn their theses into Research and Development (R&D) tech transfer projects. It provides support for market analysis, intellectual property advice, and entrepreneurship training, with the potential for funding post-doctorate and proof of concept projects. Since their theses often hold hidden potential for tech transfer development the advantage is twofold: first, the 'Mature Your PhD' helps

identifying both innovative research results and young researchers open to business applications; second, it increases the volume of projects Conectus can transfer. Along with the goal of transforming PhD theses into professional opportunities and spin-offs, the project also identifies innovative research results and tech transfer. Conectus is one of the 13 French SATTs (Sociétés d'Accélération du Transfert de Technologies), which were created within the framework of the PIA (Programme d'Investissements d'Avenir). They finance the technological development of innovations stemming from French public research, thanks to an exclusive €856 million investment fund. Local and trusted players, SATTs have access to the skills and inventions of local researchers. They detect, evaluate, protect and bring these inventions to market by entrusting them to an existing company or a future start-up.

Context

The project was developed to help PhD students transform their research into real-world R&D tech transfer projects. It responds to the growing need for early-stage support in market analysis, intellectual property, and entrepreneurship training, enabling young researchers to explore the business potential of their theses and contribute to regional innovation.

Target groups

The target groups of the project are PhD students in their 2nd or 3rd year, registered in Alsatian universities.

Actions

'Mature Your PhD' is an open call where young researchers with innovative ideas and promising results are offered support for tech transfer. If selected, researchers win a specific support by Conectus and its innovation partners in several areas such as market analyses linked to the thesis project, personalized intellectual property advice and training on entrepreneurship to map out their tech project, career and business plan. Additionally, if the criteria of technological development and personal career choice are met, Conectus also offers to invest in a maturation project.

Financial allocation

Total budget: EUR 1 700 000 (2019-2025)

EU co-funding: No

Sources of funding:

The project is using a mix of public and private funds from the ecosystem of partners presented above. The TTO Conectus (publicly funded private company) made the initial investment. Since then, various stakeholders from the above-described ecosystem contribute every year.



Working Group Insights

“In agreement with the other members of the R&I WG, I selected this practice because of two important reasons. First, it directly addresses the issue of retaining talents in the region, by helping young researchers with innovative ideas in the 2nd or 3rd year of doctoral studies to transform their research into viable tech projects. Second, it addresses the issue of meeting regional market needs by transferring new, innovative academic results into viable businesses that could elevate the innovation potential of the regions.

By supporting PhD students in their market analysis, providing intellectual property advice and entrepreneurship training, the project contributed to successfully supporting PhD students in transforming their research into viable tech transfer projects, creating professional opportunities and fostering innovation. It maintains contact between Conectus and young researchers, and opens the doors of new labs, facilitating detection of innovative research results”.

LUCIANA FARLEA

Head of the Regional Planning Department, ADR Vest

MARIUS NICULAE

Head of the Department for Internationalisation and SME Support

Results

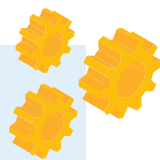
The ‘Mature Your PhD’ challenge was novel and original when launched back in 2018. As it improves valorisation education of the new generation of researchers, it has inspired other similar practices in France. While most detection actions target established researchers, the challenge is tapping into the tech transfer potential of PhD theses. It is linked with a support and training system for the students, and thus doubles as a professional opportunity action. It also connects research results to the regional ecosystem through the involvement of companies. A total of six editions have been organised until now, with 5 to 8 laureates per year. Two spin-offs (Albupad and La Turbine Française -for which additional information can be found in the Useful sources section) have emerged from MyPhD, and two more are in development. Seven laureates have successfully found employment in the private sector.



Success factors

Success factors include:

- Targeted support for market analysis and intellectual property, supporting the PhD students in setting-up their businesses or being successfully employed by other businesses;
- Comprehensive entrepreneurship training, which helped the PhD students to gain valuable skills for the process of setting up their own businesses;
- Potential for funding to advance tech transfer projects, facilitating the realisation of projects and supporting the initial inception stages of the PhD students’ businesses.



Implementation challenges

For many of the winners of 'Mature Your PhD', the lack of knowledge exchange was a challenge in the process of starting new businesses for the supported PhD students, due to intellectual property rights and ownership regulations. Mature Your PhD also faced difficulties in ensuring PhD students had access to relevant industry networks. Dedicated networking events and mentorship programs were introduced to facilitate knowledge exchange and provide access to the networks.

The conclusion of our expert Luciana Farlea, Head of the Regional Planning Department, ADR Vest, and Marius Niculae, Head of the Department for Internationalisation and SME Support

"Helping PhD students turn research into real-world solutions, this project is a great model for bridging academia and business together, while retaining talent in the region".

Useful sources

Official website: <https://challenge-myphd.com/en/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/satt-conectus/>

<https://www.satt.fr/en/societe-acceleration-transfert-technologies/>

<https://albupad.fr/about-us>

<https://www.monreseaudeau.fr/societe/ltf-la-turbine-francaise/>

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