



Good practice

Pathways to Innovation & Entrepreneurship

Working Group: Research & Innovation (R&I)

Member State, Region: Italy, Campania

Thematic area: Competitiveness and Innovation

Basic project details

Lead organisation:

University of Naples Federico II - Italy

Partner organisations:

- Dipartimento di Eccellenza
- JACOBS Technion-Cornell Institute
- EECOLE
- YOUNIBUO
- SEI

Initiative duration: 2023 – Ongoing



Overview and objectives

The initiative leverages collaboration between universities and businesses to share a culture of Responsible Research and Innovation (RR&I) along with promoting opportunities for applied research and skilled employment. This non-traditional training initiative provides a platform for sharing knowledge, ideas, and experiences among researchers, professionals, and emerging and established entrepreneurs. The main goal of this program is to build a network of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and universities in rural areas of Italy and in the US, attract and engage talents, develop Research and Development (R&D) collaborations, and create business opportunities between US and Italian companies.

Context

The initiative was based on the need to address the skill gaps and promote innovation and entrepreneurship in the Campania region.

Target groups

Young researchers (including graduate students, PhD candidates, post-docs, start uppers), SMEs in space economy, electronics/robotics/Artificial Intelligence (AI), bioeconomy/agri-business/pharma, tourism/cultural heritage conservation & valorisation.

Actions

The initiative's actions include: a) In-field training sessions, consisting of Networking sessions, R&D collaborations, Matchmaking between companies, Roundtables with entrepreneurs and knowledge sharing, b) Online meetings c) Summer course for participants in New York.

Financial allocation

Total budget: USD 50 000 (approximately EUR 47 940)

EU co-funding: No

Sources of funding: Project funded by the US Embassy in Italy

Working Group Insights

"In agreement with the other members of the R&I WG, I selected this good practice because of its innovative approach despite a limited budget. The initiative brought together students from diverse fields to address real challenges in a rural area, collaborating with local SMEs and stakeholders. The initiative fostered Italian-USA collaboration by connecting students with New York's innovation ecosystem. This low-cost initiative enhanced students' skills, emphasizing RR&I and interdisciplinary collaboration, and demonstrated that impactful results can be achieved through purposeful, cross-cultural, and resource-efficient activities.

By providing in-field training, networking opportunities and fostering the collaboration between industry and academia, the initiative contributed to building a network of SMEs and universities, attracted talents, and developed R&D collaborations. The feedback from the participants also outlined that they identified essential steps for transforming research and innovation into marketable products or services as well as they learned about social innovation".

PAOLA FANTINI

Education and Innovation expert at the University of Naples Federico II



Results

This small-scale initiative united students from diverse backgrounds to tackle the challenge of responsible research and innovation. By engaging with local SMEs and stakeholders while connecting with international experts from New York, the initiative offered students the opportunity to develop their skills by learning from USA innovators. The learning outcomes underscore the importance of Responsible Research & Innovation as participants become able to:

- Derive from macroeconomic outlooks, collaboration programs, and networks, examples of identifying challenges and opportunities for their own business across regions;
- Analyse complex social, cultural, and political environments, and identify opportunities and possible pathways towards social innovation in their activity;
- Identify business opportunities for research results;
- Co-create models to support multi-stakeholder planning and governance, encompassing a systemic perspective, uncertainty, sustainability, and ethics;
- Develop a framework for impact investments;
- Adapt and use assessment frameworks to evaluate the societal impact of a project/initiative;
- Evaluate sustainability goals and results. Start meaningful conversations with stakeholders (policymakers, associations, financiers, etc.) to explore future collaboration on new projects/initiatives.

Moreover, the initiative fostered a shift in students' mindsets, promoting a more collaborative and purpose-driven approach to research, facilitating the collaboration between universities and businesses in Campania, promoting innovation in production and entrepreneurial skills among researchers, and addressing the region's unique challenges and opportunities. In 2023, nine young researchers with different backgrounds, from Social Innovation, Industrial Engineering, and Chemical Sciences, have participated in the project, presenting their research, ranging from drones and marine microalgae to anti-cancer agents and artificial intelligence for predictive maintenance, as well as studies on the socioeconomic impact of performing arts and policies to combat educational poverty. The young researchers have interacted with business managers and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) from aerospace, electronics, agri-food, and arts and culture.

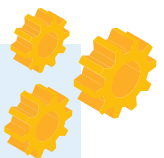
Success factors

Success factors for the initiative include strong collaboration between universities and businesses, effective knowledge sharing which contributes to knowledge valorisation, and providing students with practical tools to continue their journey in the dynamic innovation environment.



Implementation challenges

Despite its strong concept, the project faced two implementation challenges, namely the limited financial resources which posed constraints on the scale and continuity of activities, and the challenging engagement of SMEs and stakeholders in both Italy and the US, which demanded significant coordination efforts, especially given the geographical, cultural and time differences.



The conclusion of Paola Fantini, Education and Innovation expert at the University of Naples Federico II

“This initiative proves that with strong partnerships and a hands-on approach, in Moderate Innovator regions even a small budget can create big opportunities for innovation, skills development, and cross-border collaboration”.

Useful sources

Official website: <https://www.pathwaystoinnovationentrepreneurship.eu/>

Contact

E-mail: secretariat@harnessingtalentplatform.eu

Website: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/harnessing-talent-platform_en

