

Educational service ecosystems in the Arctic Europe

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Northern bridge builders

The role of the higher educational institutions (HEI) is to be bridge builders between students and working life. The HEI's also have an important role in the regional development. Also, the lecturers are not only teachers and coaches but on a university level more like bridge builders helping the students to become future-proof to be able to work and develop their competences in the changing business environment. The objective of this article is to analyze, how the enterprises, students and universities could benefit from a wider ecosystem in the Northern business environment.

Rethinking the future

Blommaer and van den Brock (2016) argue that we are not anymore living in a linear world. Due the digitalization, we should move from linear to exponential thinking. Rethinking the future is about replacing the old mindset, the idea that we could to some extent control, order and predict the future, with a mindset based in discontinuous change.

In few years, we will see self-driving cars on our roads, robots take over dangerous and labour-intensive jobs in industry, in health care robots are smart assistants, drones take care of delivery of packages etc. Artificial intelligence, 3D printing, algorithms, big data, nanotechnology and social platforms will influence us all also in the North meaning that linear thinking is useless in a non-linear world (Blommaer et.al 2016, 12).

This new world means that also the education has to meet the challenges of the new world. Accelerating scientific and technological progress leads us towards a point in time in which self-learning computers will outsmart us. The key question is: Can creativity be taught? The new thinking should be taken into account in curricula. In high school science fiction could be part of the curricula as it stimulates imagination and creativity. We need to remember that the students and pupils of today will enter the labour market soon.

Lapland University of Applied Sciences is updating its strategy and the changes in the operating environment are taken into account because the new developments will have a serious impact on the way organizations operate and are being managed. These issues need to be remembered

also when designing new curricula for Bachelor and Master programmes. The Kolarctic project called Bridge (Barents Region Initiative for Developing Growth and Employability) which started in spring 2019, is a great example of how young business students from five Arctic universities learn about the business life in Finland, Norway and Russia, and how it is to work in transnational teams (www.kolartcticbridge.com). This is also a good example on how to develop creativity on university level.

Be connected, agile and engaged

Lapland UAS operates in close cooperation with the regional working life and Lapland University. Arctic cold technology, bio economy and circular economy are great examples of how the clusters in different industries work together in a service ecosystem.

Key concepts in the fast developing world are: be connected, cooperation, creativity, agility and engagement (Blommaer et.al. 2016, 30).

During the studies, the students get new friends who might be valuable contacts also later when they enter the working life. Lapland UAS is stressing the importance of linking the RD&I and education in Lapland. This means that the two first key words be connected and cooperation are well-taken care of on organizational level and partly on the students' level as well. Being connected is extremely important because also in job interviews today one of the most important questions is: What kind of network do you have?

As I argued earlier, creativity can be learned. We have several examples of projects where students have worked in cross-border teams to design new products and services for local businesses, Creative Edge, Practice Future, Transnational Innomarathon, Young Innovative Entrepreneurs and Bridge, just to mention some of them. On Master level, the Three Nations Project deepens the partnerships between the universities and develops the students' competences in intercultural interaction.

Agility is a must for many organizations in the exponentially developing world. They will have to live through the transition from a product-oriented to a solution-oriented organization, the new route will be from mass production to a single-piece development, manufacturing, selling and servicing. In this new world, bureaucracy and hierarchy are out, more responsibility must be given to agile teams which can faster respond to the needs of the market. Bottom up is in.

Also for universities, agility is important because in a rapidly changing industry, there is no future without accelerated innovation. The traditional degree programmes react too slowly to the fast changing needs of the market.

Ownership, engagement and inspiration are in, distrust is out, trust is in. Traditionally trust is a key value in Finland. It has been said that a handshake is enough, no written agreements are needed. The confidence of the Finns in the citizens of their own country is the largest of all the EU countries. In Finland, 85 percent of people agree or strongly agree that they can trust most of their countrymen. (Statistics Finland 2018). On the other hand, in international politics, Finns sometimes seem to be too blue-eyed.

The central role of teams in the new economy stresses the importance of trust not only in Finland, but all over the world. In addition, diversity management plays an important role as

for each project the best team should be nominated. The Swedish old saying “lika barn leka bäst” is probably not the only truth in the new world.

All above mentioned issues will bring new challenges for management of businesses and enterprises, but also for teachers because many old management theories will be outdated.

Service ecosystems are innovative networks

According to Vargo and Lusch (2017), service ecosystems are relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system[s] of resource integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange.

A good benchmark of a well-working ecosystem can be found in Bolzano in South Tirol Italy. They have created a regional network consisting of enterprises from a development agency, chamber of commerce, different industries, research institutions, universities and financiers. They provide services in the areas of export, innovation, tourism marketing and agricultural marketing, and support business activities to enable enterprises to maintain or increase their competitiveness. Services the network offers consist of knowledge and technology transfer, innovation and development, networking and cooperation, and projects and funding. Their Smart Specialization Platform includes Green (energy and environment), Alpine (construction, safety of sports and tourism), Food, Health and medical, ICT and automation, and Creative industries including film. According to Andreas Winkler, the head of the ecosystem (2018), they have succeeded well and the whole region is developing fast thanks to this service ecosystem. I participated the workshop in Bolzano in spring 2018 together with the representatives of Lapland and Schwaben Chamber of Commerce. In the meeting it was decided that the three regions will start cooperating, and to build a platform for the regions. In this transnational project, if succeeded well, Lapland UAS would have a key role in the North.

High North cooperation and cross-border expertise

About 25 years ago, I said that my mission as a teacher is to get students interested in internationalization, to be a bridge builder especially in the High North. Since 1997, I work as a principal lecturer in international degree programmes, first on Bachelor level and last 12 years on Master level.

I have worked in Arctic projects since 1993. First, we organized training courses for managers and employees of Kola Peninsula banks together with a Finnish bank and Lapland Chamber of Commerce. In my Doctoral dissertation I studied performance management practices in Barents area enterprises. Today I am a member of a thematic network at University of the Arctic. Since 2009, we, a teacher team from three countries, are organizing a 60 ECTS online course in Travel and Tourism Management (TTM) for students from Northern Arctic Federal University (Arkhangelsk), Arctic University of Norway (Harstad) and Lapland UAS. In June 2019, a summer school of the seventh TTM will be organized in Tornio. Bridge is a three-year Kolarctic project in which more than 200 students from five universities will in five semesters work in transnational teams on assignments from about 50 commissioners in each of the five regions.

Bridge and TTM are wonderful examples of projects, where young people from the European Arctic develop their expertise and learn about the Barents region business environment. The projects develop competences needed in working life such as internationalization, networking, teamwork, communication, and innovation. Also the case companies get creative ideas on how to develop their business models.

Lapland UAS is an active player in Interreg and Kolarctic projects and it could take a key role in the design of an Arctic service ecosystem together with universities and public and private organizations including dissemination of the outcomes all over the world. My wish is that also in future, Lapland UAS, together with partners, will look to the future and support cross-border projects and educational programmes where the young generation learns about the opportunities of the European Arctic. Because the future is in the North.

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