

Travel report for the Stena Scholarship

The Sten A Olsson scholarship made it possible for me to discover the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Tel Aviv. I stayed in Israel for a total of eight weeks between January and April 2017. Below you can find a brief report as well as pictures from the visit.

Findings

This thesis investigated the factors behind the growing success of Tel Aviv as an entrepreneurial scene. The economic capital of Israel has become one of the most important clusters of innovation in the World (Engel & del-Palacio, 2011). By analysing these factors with key entrepreneurial actors, the hopes were to find new qualitative evidence to back up the statistics. The aim of the thesis was to use qualitative interviews with chosen entrepreneurs and investors to give insights in Tel Aviv and how it has become a flourishing ecosystem. This has in turn enhanced the previous research on Knowledge-Intensive entrepreneurship by adding a singular case study. Analysing the Tel Aviv ecosystem allowed me to find ten different factors of its success. These can potentially be used as inspiration points for stimulating clusters of innovation around the World.

The main research question was “*How has Tel Aviv become a leading entrepreneurial ecosystem?*”. This question delivers a complicated answer where a multitude of variables come into play. By combining historical, cultural and economical assets, Israel have played their cards well compared to their neighbouring countries. This has lead them on a path of economic growth that allowed infrastructural changes. Ten factors were analysed from the interviews as being central for the development of the Israeli cluster. With a three-year military service and a singular survival instinct, the Israelis have built a strong a secure country for the entrepreneurs to start their ventures. The lack of natural resources and the necessity of self reliance obliged them to become creative and innovative already seventy years ago. This has resulted in a culture of problem solving and constant questioning. The ecosystem has been active for the past forty years, seeing waves of skilled labour flowing into the country to help stimulate it. With the people came the capital, as many multinational tech firms invested in research centres throughout Israel. With the people came also the strong network from previous countries which allowed for stable trade partners who were much needed considering the small size of Israel. Taking this into consideration with the top education Israelis receive really points out all the assets needed for a fruitful ecosystem. Finally, by adding the Jewish-Israeli culture of risk taking and entrepreneurship, the recipe for a competitive cluster like no other is fulfilled.

January 2017: Preparing the thesis

The idea of writing about Tel Aviv came up after a ten day visit to Israel during an International Week with the University. I was surprised to discover a country with so much focus on entrepreneurship in the Middle East. As the KBE program does not allow us to go on an exchange semester, I thought the Stena Scholarship would be a great alternative for me.

I booked my flights to Tel Aviv already for the 22nd of January which gave me a week to prepare for interviews. As we just had done a research methods course, my research proposal and questions were already all set. I spent the week preparing my interview guide and sending around 100 emails to organise meetings. I mainly used the personal network from the previous trip as well as internet databases on startups and venture capitalists (<http://972vc.com/incubators/>). It was surprisingly easy to reach my goal of ten interviews as Israelis seemed very happy and interested that I wrote about their experiences.

February 2017: Interviews and Transcribing

February was the time for the interviews with six entrepreneurs and four ventures capitalists. Parallel to this, I also read related literature and the history of Israel. After each interview, I would transcribe it directly in order to be able to quickly analyse it. The interviews were all good experiences and meeting them face to face was definitely important to take the time to discuss all subjects.

March 2017: Computing results and starting writing

Until March, my thesis was still very limited in terms of content. After coming home to Sweden for the halfway seminar in mid-March, I was able to focus on writing the literature review, empirical background and methodology. I then moved on to computing the results with the help of my supervisor Linus Brunnström. The interviews were easy to connect to the literature and the rest of my theoretical frameworks, while still giving many aspects to reflect upon.

April 2017: Analysis and feedback

In close contact with my supervisor, I finalised the thesis in order to be able to meet the entrepreneurs again for a follow up if needed. I therefore travelled back to Tel Aviv between the 11th-25th of April. This was a time of reflection for the analysis and feedback from other Israelis. While I did not write much during these two weeks, I got to confirm my reflections and make sure that I was on the right track. This trip was not initially planned, it was however very beneficial to the final results.

May 2017: Final hand-in

May marked the end of my thesis adventures, with the finalising of all the content. The final presentation was the chance for me to get feedback from teachers and other students, while also reading another thesis. A few minor fixes to the structures and the content were done in order to increase in quality and credibility.

Concluding words:

Writing a master thesis has been a great time for me as I took the chance to discover a whole new country. Israel has a lot of potential when it comes to Entrepreneurship and Innovation that is definitely worth studying further. I would also recommend to any student to choose a “secondary” country such as South Korea, Germany or Israel for their studies as the Silicon Valley scene might be a bit too crowded. People are much more keen to genuinely help out and assist in any reflections you might have.

From a personal point of view, I would also recommend to write the thesis alone. It was a great experience to actually prove to myself that I could do it. Although it was not always easy, it was highly rewarding.

Finally, the Stena Scholarship was for me a really important factor in pursuing the idea of writing abroad. It allowed me to finance the flights and part of the apartment cost in Tel Aviv. I would highly recommend it to any student that is looking for a challenging experience.

Below you can find some photos of my trips to Israel.

Camel Ride in the Negev Desert



Visiting Jerusalem and the Western Wall



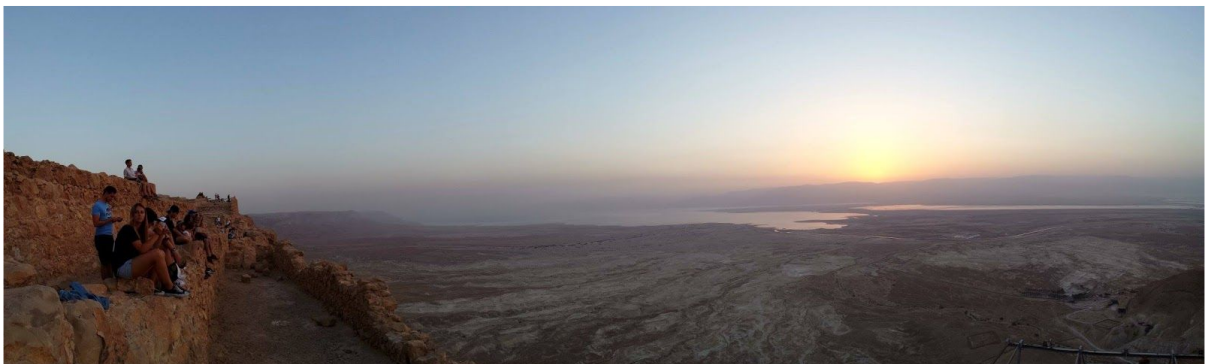
Staying in a Bedouin Tent in the middle of the Negev desert.



Market visit in Jerusalem



Sunrise at the Masada with the Dead Sea



Hiking in Mitzpe Ramon



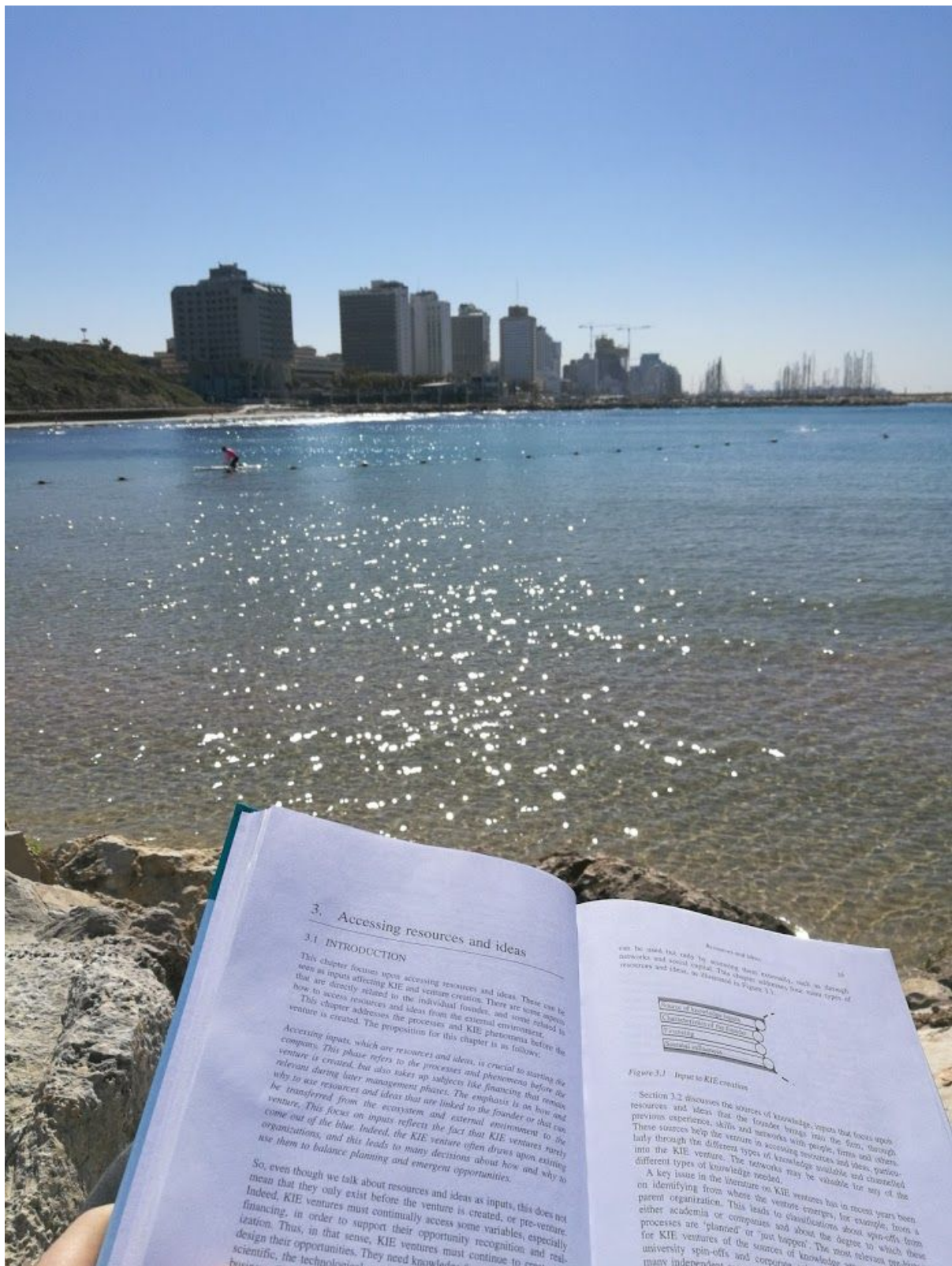
Interview with Amir Milo at the Microsoft Offices in Israel



Sunset over Yaffo



Studying Knowledge-Intensive Entrepreneurship on the beach in Tel Aviv



View over the harbour in Tel Aviv

