

# TRAVEL REPORT FOR STEN A. OLSSON FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP 2020

## MASTER THESIS

**A Multiple Case Study of How Top-ranked European HEIs Approach Innovating Postgraduate Entrepreneurship Programs**

## WHO



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## WHEN



March 3<sup>rd</sup> – March 27<sup>th</sup>

## WHAT

- Interviews with Alumni
- Interviews with Students
- Interviews with Professors
- Interviews with Coordinators

## WHERE



- Dusseldorf, Germany
- Antwerp, Belgium
- Rotterdam, The Netherlands

We share profound gratitude towards the Stena A. Olsson Foundation, for selecting us in their scholarship program. Thanks to it we were able to take our master thesis to a level of ambition that otherwise wouldn't have been possible. It provided us with the opportunity to visit Belgium, The Netherlands, and Germany, on the mission to collect empirical data from the most prestigious and innovative universities in Europe. The objective was to collect accurate information through in-person interviews and class observations, which was extremely important to increase the validity of the thesis.

## BACKGROUND

One of the main goals was to answer the question 'what and how should universities innovate in order to improve the quality of their entrepreneurship-related programs and help their students achieve entrepreneurial success after graduation?'. The focal point was to understand how these universities approach structuring their entrepreneurship programs and building curriculums. As a result of our trip, we managed to get information on: (i) what topics the universities were most likely to include in the program and what content they considered to be irrelevant, (ii) what novelty they brought to structuring their courses, (iii) how these universities approached balancing theory and practice. The reason for picking the topic of entrepreneurial

education was because we are a part of it ourselves. And we are passionate about both entrepreneurship and education. We sought to compile best teaching practices and innovations into a set of recommendations to help teachers and students jointly improve their performance in the future.

It was important to include several different countries to broaden the scope of research. We wanted to compare and contrast how different countries and universities approach innovation in entrepreneurial education. We believed the chosen countries created the perfect scope for our study. We believe that education and teaching, in particular, are mostly tacit knowledge. And owing to this trip, we were able to see in person how other European universities work and learn a lot of valuable lessons about education for our research.

## **THE TRIP**

Initially, we picked 9 of the best-known, most prestigious, and most innovative universities in terms of business, innovations, and entrepreneurship in their countries. 5 of them became part of the study. The universities resided in countries with great start-up ecosystems and environment for business innovations. All Belgium, Germany, and The Netherlands have the 'Very Easy' classification for doing business according to the 'Doing Business 2019' report. We picked these countries due to their strong independent research base. All of them have outstanding academic systems and were considered to be the best in the world of higher education.

Owing to the scholarship we were able to travel to the mentioned countries in-person. We spent nearly one month visiting chosen universities in Belgium, The Netherlands, and Germany. On the 3rd of March we landed in Belgium which was our first destination. The target university was Antwerp School of Management which is located in the historical centre of the city of Antwerp. We were warmly welcomed by the university. During our time there we were able to conduct interviews with students, alumni, professors, and the academic director. After that, we spent 1,5 weeks in Rotterdam where we were very unfortunate to meet the COVID-19 outbreak. Even though we were not able to conduct in-person interview as was initially planned, we visited the RSM campus, and managed to talk to some students. Our final destination was Dusseldorf, Germany. Unfortunately, all our arranged interviews were cancelled and the school did not agree to continue the cooperation for our project. Nevertheless, we spent a great 1,5 weeks in the city visiting the university campus and arranging interviews with other schools that did make it to our final project.

The COVID-19 pandemic raised many challenges for conducting in-person interviews and class observations in general. However, we rose through this and the result was of high quality. Besides this, we were able to meet many interesting people, expand our network, and gather information that could assist us in our future ventures.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our finding was that innovation in entrepreneurship education is focused towards teaching methodologies that allows students to learn through experience rather than informal teaching.

The principle is also known as learning-by-doing and action-based learning. Approaches for this is to incorporate internships, simulations, gamification, competitions, study trips abroad, and real venture creation. These practices are based on studies that show that it is essential for entrepreneurship students to learn through experiential learning instead of passive learning. Some literature even suggests these teaching innovations might leap over to other field of education.

Moreover, it was revealed that geographical and cultural setting of the schools played a significant role in how they organized their programs. It was the local communities' and external actors' involvement that made the programs unique. These are some interesting findings that we hope and believe will contribute to entrepreneurship education globally.

Once again, we would like to thank Stena A. Olsson Foundation for making this possible. We truly believe that this opportunity makes a difference not only for us, but also for those before us and those to come.

Thank you!

Aleksei Kuchera and Douglas Redman

