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To cite this Article / Käytä viittauksessa alkuperäistä lähdettä:

Kokko, K. (2023) The beauty of human interaction in offsite and off-line surroundings - and how it enables learning. TAMK International, 19.6.2023.

URL: <https://blogs.tuni.fi/tamk-international/international-event/the-beauty-of-human-interaction-in-offsite-and-off-line-surroundings-and-how-it-enables-learning/>

The beauty of human interaction in offsite and off-line surroundings - and how it enables learning

19.6.2023 — Riikka Kramer



Picture 1: Pfronstetten leisure centre, where the bootcamp took place.

In May 2023 HUBS Sustainable Entrepreneurship team took part in Entrepreneurship Experience, a Blended Intensive Program (BIP), created in collaboration with Hochschule der Medien Stuttgart and Amsterdam UAS. Entrepreneurship Coach Kaisa Kokko and ten students with multidisciplinary and multicultural backgrounds travelled to vernal Germany to learn how sustainable business ideas could be transformed into viable business ventures. In this blog, Kaisa is summarising the key benefits of the learning experience implemented in not-so-traditional surroundings.

The program and its pedagogical practices

The structure of the program was following the standards of a Blended Intensive Program (BIP): five full days on site supported by three online sessions. The “bootcamp” was basically a 3-day offsite camp combined with a 2-day “city-rally” in Stuttgart city-center surroundings. The program applied the Lean Startup methodology. Throughout the facilitated process participants were able to develop their business ideas and learn entrepreneurial skills.

The key feature of the program needs to be underlined: Pfronstetten, a former farmhouse, is in the countryside, very close to nature. In terms of internet connections, there wasn't any. This meant that the students had to come up with very creative methods on how to come across the customer validation, building tangible prototypes etc.

Learning experience according to the students

The participants included 40 students and seven coaches from 15 different nations, sending institutes being TAMK, HdM from Stuttgart, Amsterdam UAS, Syracuse, and Clemson Universities from US. On the first day, the students were guided to form teams around their pre-presented problems. The team formation was encouraged to be carried out in a multidisciplinary and multicultural manner. After, students continued working in eight teams of different sizes.

When asking how likely the students would recommend the bootcamp, they rated the experience in nine out of ten. The most appreciated features were attached to the unusual learning environment in nature-based surroundings:

“The physical activities (hiking, city-rally) made the group bond together really well as well as having a place disconnected from the internet which contributes to it.”

For most of the students, taking time off from the hectic city life and university surroundings seemed to be something truly special:

“The fact that we spent three days in the woods out of the city was a really interesting experience.”

Key take-aways for a coach

From a coach's point of view, some kind of magic did happen in Pfronstetten. The mark that lack of internet connection maybe made in the viability of the ideated business ventures, was paid back double when looking at the key learnings on the “soft skill” side – many of these recognised as key competencies in entrepreneurship (EntreComp 2018). To name a few:

Working with others, Creativity = genuine human interaction without the constant disturbance of digital devices. Active presence when seeing the students truly listening and speaking, a true dialogue culture in practice. A true living-lab of working and innovating in international and multidisciplinary teams. Interacting with new people from different cultures.

Mobilising others, Taking the Initiative: A playful competitiveness between the teams when pitching the ideas. Celebrating even the small pieces of successes together.



Picture 2: HUBS Coach Kaisa Kokko

giving an input session at Pfronstetten.

How about implementing similar international BIP programs also in Finland? Like so many great things in life, the significance and strong memory trace are created through a *holistic experience*, where you take a human being in his all dimensions and competencies, psychological and physical, into account. Team-based learning and sparring conversations – done also besides a hike in the nature. Practicing how the teamwork is done in international teams – also in shared household chores. Strengthening the group and team-spirit besides the bonfire.

After all, doesn't it begin to sound very Finnish indeed?

Sources:

EntreComp. The entrepreneurship competence framework. https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/entrecomp-entrepreneurship-competence-framework/competence-areas-and-learning-progress_en

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Pictures:

Picture 1: Kaisa Kokko

Picture 2: Janina Erb