

# **Enhancing Entrepreneurial Journey at Lahti Campus**

**Case: LAB University of Applied Sciences**

LAB University of Applied Sciences

Bachelor of Business Administration, International Business

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## Abstract

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Abstract		
<p>The study aimed to assess the entrepreneurial ecosystem at the Lahti campus from the perspective of students. The goal was to explore the challenges and opportunities in the Lahti campus entrepreneurial ecosystem. By identifying areas for improvements, the study is intended to benefit both LAB University of Applied Sciences and LUT University as well as for the campus entrepreneurship communities.</p> <p>The study pulled inspiration from Isenberg's (2010) framework of entrepreneurial ecosystem to help structure the analysis across different entrepreneurial ecosystem key actors. The qualitative study used thematic analysis approach and data were collected through interviews with LAB and LUT students. Official university websites and relevant external organizations were used as the secondary data for the study.</p> <p>The result of the study showed that students valued the entrepreneurial opportunities at the Lahti campus but struggled with unclear and scattered information. The study concluded that the entrepreneurial ecosystem's effectiveness depended on clearer communication, stronger support and better integration of entrepreneurship into student life.</p>		
Keywords		
entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial ecosystem, student entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship society (ES), Lahti campus, university innovation, student-led initiatives		

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Entrepreneurial education has become a critical area of focus in many universities worldwide as institutions recognize the role of entrepreneurship in fostering innovation, economic growth and job creation. Today, Finnish universities are offering specialized programs, workshops and resources to promote innovation and business development. There are entrepreneurship societies (ES), which are student-driven communities. They provide a platform for young people to develop business ideas, form connections and gain practical experience in entrepreneurship. There are 17 ES across the country, attracting over 19,000 participants to their organized events. The entrepreneurship-focused activities are growing and reflecting the significance of entrepreneurship learning in Finnish Universities. (Startup Foundation 2023, 4.)

Entrepreneurship societies play a pivotal role in enhancing entrepreneurial skills among students and leading them to measurable economic contributions. *The Role of Entrepreneurship Clubs and Societies in Entrepreneurial Learning* (2011, 15–16) highlights that participation in an ES enhances practical skills and motivates students as well as improves employment opportunities. Building on this study, according to Startup Foundation's report (2023, 25), the impact of Finnish ES groups has contributed over 376 million euros to Finland's GDP in 2023. The capital was generated by companies founded by ES alums. Approximately 20% of former ES board members have transitioned into professional entrepreneurs, which underlines the effectiveness of student engagement in entrepreneurial activities.

Currently, the Lahti campus has an ongoing entrepreneurship society called LahtiES. They are growing with more participants and events. Using the Lahti campus as part of their entrepreneurial ecosystem, LahtiES is able to develop Lahti's own ES and introduce students to entrepreneurship outside lessons. For students, an entrepreneurial society can serve as an accessible entry point into entrepreneurship and the startup world. However, as the community is still developing, the strengths and weaknesses of the ecosystem remain unclear. Understanding students' perspectives and experiences can help identify these aspects and provide insights into how the entrepreneurial development, sustainability and relevance can be maintained.

Nieminen's (2022, 4) case study on Aalto University, titled *Implementing the Entrepreneurial University Concept in the Finnish Innovation Ecosystem*, suggests that embedding entrepreneurship into the university's core mission allows students to actively solve real-world

problems through innovation. Integration across academic disciplines encourages collaboration and gives students the tools to launch impactful projects. Lahti campus can also explore ways to maximize entrepreneurial thinking in its courses or other key initiatives, helping to grow a culture of innovation, which can benefit both the entrepreneurship community and the universities.

The potential of entrepreneurship to empower students in shaping their career paths is apparent within the university. Events such as Slush show the strength of the Finnish Startup ecosystem and proves that there is room for growth within the local community. This study explores the University's entrepreneurial environment. This study supports youth entrepreneurship by offering insights into students' experiences in the Lahti campus entrepreneurial environment.

## 1.2 Thesis objectives, questions and delimitations

This study aims to firstly provide an overview of the key entrepreneurial courses, projects, community and other entrepreneurial initiatives on the Lahti campus. The focus will be on LAB University of Applied Sciences, including LUT University, due to the intertwined nature of their activities. After mapping the current entrepreneurial landscape of the campus, this study will assess the effectiveness of the Lahti campus entrepreneurial ecosystem through students' experience. The objective is to better understand the key factors influencing student experience, satisfaction and to further enhance the entrepreneurial journey of students at the Lahti campus.

Following the thesis objectives, the main question this study looks to answer is:

- How effective are the entrepreneurial initiatives at the Lahti campus from the students' perspective?

To address this question comprehensively, the following sub-questions will guide the analysis:

- What are the key entrepreneurial initiatives and programs offered at Lahti Campus?
- How do students perceive these entrepreneurial initiatives and support structures at the Lahti campus?
- What are the challenges and opportunities for improving the entrepreneurial ecosystem at the Lahti campus?

This thesis answers the research questions through reviewing the literature and official platforms of the universities and other relevant key players. The effectiveness of the campus's entrepreneurial ecosystem will be determined by LUT and LAB students who have been

involved in the entrepreneurial activities in the Lahti campus. The study is concerned with the entrepreneurial activities, community and resources available at the campus. While the primary focus will be on the LAB University of Applied Sciences, the close connection between LAB and LUT necessitates the inclusion of LUT University's contributions as well. In this study, only existing activities and resources will be examined without proposing new initiatives. The study will serve as a resource for readers who seek to gain insight into students' perspectives of Lahti campus entrepreneurial offerings in 2025.

### 1.3 Theoretical framework and research methods

The theoretical framework of this thesis focuses on the concept of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, entrepreneurship societies and student-led initiatives. The concept is explored through Isenberg's framework (2010), which describes the entrepreneurial ecosystem as an environment. In it, there are elements such as resources, capital, knowledge, other entrepreneurs and businesses, markets and even working space. These elements can either support the ecosystem or hinder it. Isenberg highlights that different factors need to work together for starting businesses or startups to succeed. Understanding the factors that will contribute to the success of an entrepreneurship ecosystem will help identify the elements necessary for the improvement of the Lahti campus ecosystem.

After exploring Isenberg's framework for entrepreneurial ecosystems, the theoretical framework compares the broader entrepreneurship ecosystem with the university's own ecosystem. Elaborating on the differences between those two ecosystems will help readers understand that each has different elements while also sharing the same goals.

This study utilizes research articles and findings on university platforms to provide various examples of student-led societies and initiatives. This part of the thesis will explore the meaning of entrepreneurship societies, present multiple examples of different student-led initiatives inside and outside Finland and examine the impact that these student-led initiatives have on the students.

Entrepreneurship society is one important element of the university's entrepreneurial ecosystem. These chapters will explore its objective and role within the university entrepreneurship ecosystem. Sources used for this are AaltoES, the leading entrepreneurship society from Aalto University in Helsinki, Finland.

A qualitative research approach will be applied to the research method. The study will be conducted through semi-structured interviews with LAB and LUT university students to examine their perspective of the Lahti campus entrepreneurial ecosystem. The data from interviews will be transcribed and then coded and themed using the thematic data analysis

method to find patterns within the student responses. Finding patterns helps to reveal students' experiences within the campus' entrepreneurial ecosystem and at the end of the study to help evaluate what can be done in order to strengthen the ecosystem.

#### 1.4 Thesis structure

The first part of the thesis report is the introduction, which opens up the topic and provides relevant background information. The introduction is followed by the theoretical framework, which presents theories that give a foundation to the empirical research. This study's theoretical framework reveals the concept of an entrepreneurship ecosystem, student-led activities, the history of entrepreneurship societies (ES), and their role in enhancing the entrepreneurial journey of university students.

The third chapter focuses on the Lahti campus, covering its entrepreneurial ecosystem and relevant factors, including existing initiatives offered by the campus and its students. After this overview, the thesis moves to empirical research based on interviews, explaining the research method, data gathering, and result analysis. The final chapter concludes the research by summarising the study, comparing it with the theoretical framework, and discussing the objectives. It ends with recommendations based on the results and reflections on the study's implications (Figure 1).

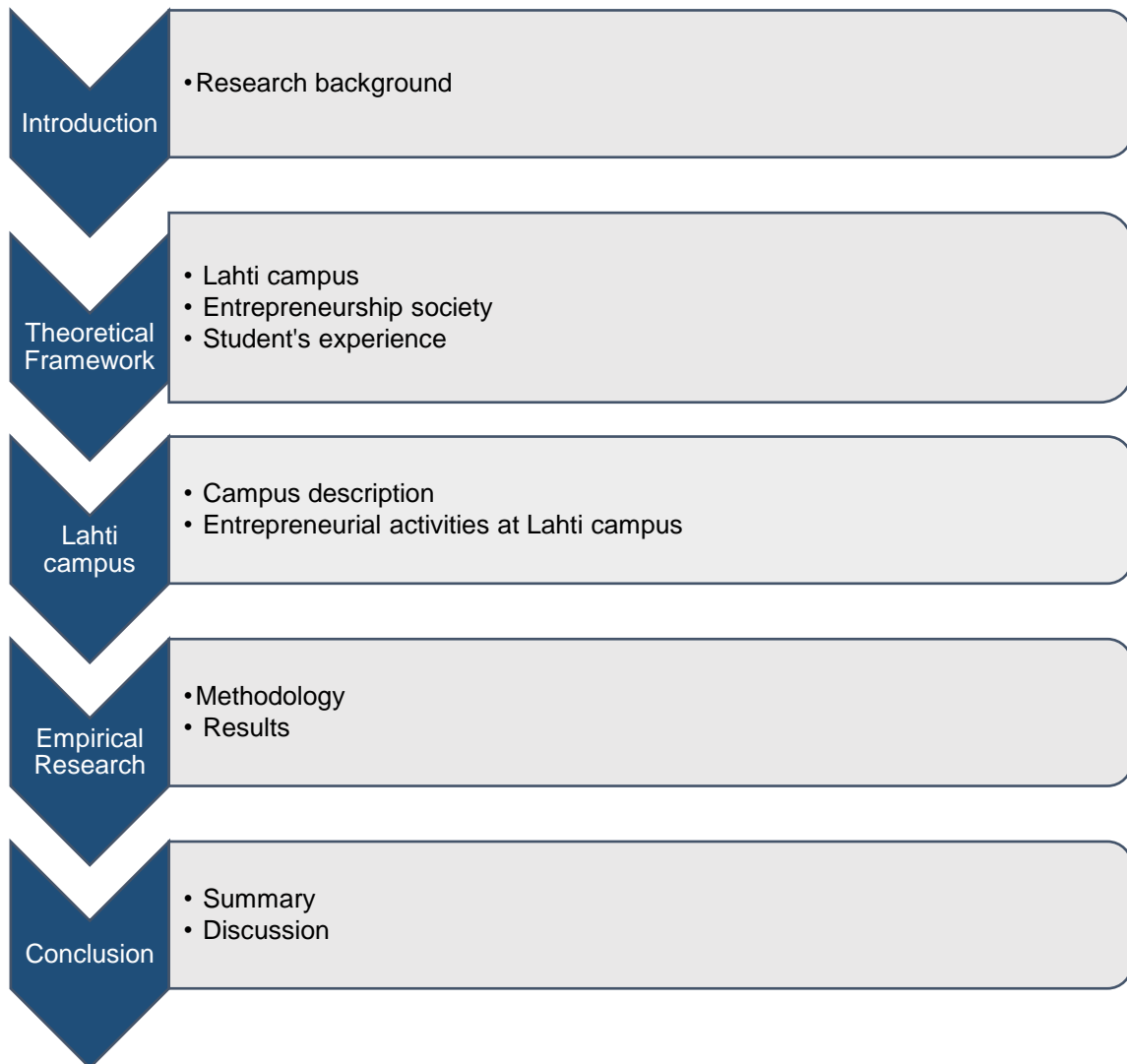


Figure 1. The structure of the thesis

The thesis report is organized into five main chapters. Every chapter guides readers through a step-by-step process, moving from background information to theory, specific case study focus, empirical findings and conclusion. Each main chapter builds on the previous one, supporting a research flow.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Defining entrepreneurship ecosystem

According to Isenberg (2010), an entrepreneurial ecosystem is a network of individual key elements such as access to capital, labor, infrastructure, market, supportive culture and effective policies. These elements work together to create an environment that helps businesses thrive. In his framework he uses international economic strategies as examples. Isenberg believes that by understanding and cultivating these factors from his model, communities can better support entrepreneurs to boost and drive economic development.

The broader environment and the university's entrepreneurial ecosystem both aim to foster innovation and entrepreneurship, but differ in their focus, resources and scope. The entrepreneurship ecosystem outside educational institutes focuses on building a comprehensive network that supports businesses at all stages, from ideation to scaling and growth. These ecosystems typically comprise many stakeholders, including entrepreneurs, investors, government bodies, universities and large corporations, who collaborate to create an environment conducive to business development. The ecosystem provides access to essential resources such as capital, market opportunities, talent and infrastructure. Entrepreneurs benefit from a more developed network of investors, customers and support services that are critical for scaling businesses. (Stam 2015, 1761–1764.)

The entrepreneurial ecosystem in universities primarily focuses on the initial stages of entrepreneurship, emphasizing education, research and skill development. Universities are often seen as incubators for new ideas, where students, faculty and researchers can test their entrepreneurial concepts and access early-stage support. Universities are key players in regional innovation by providing resources like research facilities, skilled people and opportunities for business collaboration. They help turn research into new products and support entrepreneurship. However, for innovation to grow, universities must work with a broader range of local partners, such as governments and private companies. (European University Association 2019, 22–59.)

While both ecosystems aim to support entrepreneurship, the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem is more expansive and mature, offering resources and networks that help businesses grow, scale and thrive (Stam 2015, 1761–1764). On the other hand, the university ecosystem is more focused on education, idea development and early-stage support, creating the foundation for future entrepreneurs, but lack the capacity to sustain businesses beyond the initial stages (European University Association 2019, 22-59).

The Lahti campus's entrepreneurial ecosystem can be understood through Isenberg's (2010) six key actors that create a supportive environment for entrepreneurship. Here are the six key elements:

- policy
- finance
- culture
- market
- human capital
- support.

This classification follows Isenberg's (2010) entrepreneurial ecosystem framework but has been adapted to fit the context of a university setting. The adaptation presents policy, which fit to represents the role of leadership and academic governance that supports entrepreneurship in the campus. The second is finance, which refers to the availability of funding and grants for entrepreneurial activities. The third element would be culture, which involves the presence of entrepreneurship societies, university traditions and student engagement. The fourth element is the market, which represents the strength of partnerships and alumni connections that promote entrepreneurial growth. The fifth is human capital, which represents the involvement of students, faculty and researchers in driving entrepreneurship. The last element would be the support, which is the infrastructure available within that ecosystem, such as working spaces, career and guiding services and incubators and accelerators that foster entrepreneurship through mentorship or development programs.

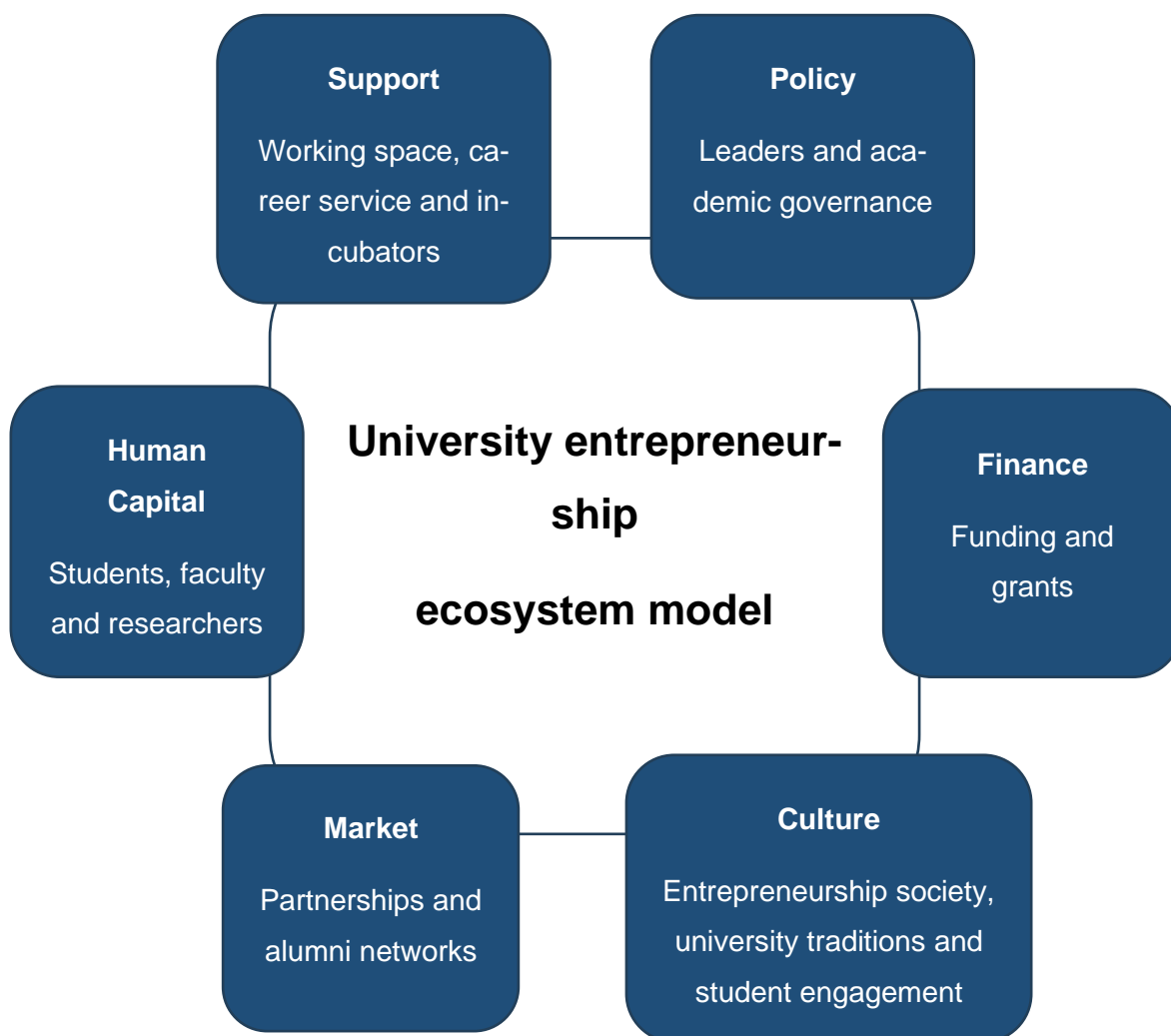


Figure 2. University ecosystem model (adapted from Isenberg 2010)

As Isenberg highlights, in order for an entrepreneurial ecosystem to thrive, different elements need to work together, because entrepreneurship does not survive in isolation (2010). This model indicates that entrepreneurship is not driven by a single factor. Hence, universities seeking to enhance their entrepreneurial impact could require an assessment of all factors to evaluate the ecosystem's strengths and weaknesses as well as to determine the next step for improvement.

## 2.2 Entrepreneurship societies and student-led initiatives

Startup foundation report describes the entrepreneurship societies are student-led and non-profit organizations that aim to foster entrepreneurial skills, innovation and a proactive mindset among members, and they are seen mostly in academic institutions, as the societies are being led by university students (Startup Foundation 2023,4). These societies provide platforms for students to engage in activities such as workshops, networking events and startup competitions to enable the exchange of ideas and the development of business

insight (Startup Foundation 2023, 13–18). The concept is not particularly new, considering that entrepreneurship involvement in university education had started as early as 1846 in the UK (Henry et al. 2023, 37). The community is found worldwide outside the term of entrepreneurship society as clubs, hubs and different districts worldwide, focusing on networking, skill building, innovation and development of an entrepreneurial mindset. The role of an entrepreneurship society is to cultivate an entrepreneurial culture that encourages proactive problem-solving and value creation. (Dakkak 2012; Startup Foundation 2023.)

Students at Aalto University in Finland founded AaltoES in 2008. This society has had an impact on transforming the Finnish startup culture. Aalto started Slush in 2011, which has grown into Europe's leading tech and startup event, attracting many student volunteers and thousands of participants annually. Additionally, AaltoES established Junction in 2015, now recognised as Europe's largest hackathon. It played a significant role in creating Kiuas, a startup accelerator in Finland (Argillander 2022).

As for foreign successful student-led initiative, students in University College London (UCL) receive strong support for their business ideas from the institution. UCL's entrepreneurship center provides funding and mentoring for their students. A program called Bright Ideas supported student startups such as Double Dutch Drinks and Bio-bean. (UCL 2016.)

In the United States, Columbia University has a student-led business club. Additional to clubs they have the Columbia Organisation for Rising Entrepreneurs (CORE) and Alma-works, an accelerator that helps students grow their startups (Columbia 2025.)

These are examples of student-led initiatives and the results show the pivotal role that student-led entrepreneurship societies play in fostering innovation and shaping startup ecosystems within universities. Across the world, universities have fostered dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystems through entrepreneurship societies and student-led initiatives. These efforts have led to influential programs, accelerators and events supporting innovation and new ventures.

### 3 Lahti campus entrepreneurial ecosystem

#### 3.1 Campus description

Lahti campus is an educational base for LAB University of Applied Sciences and LUT University. There are two buildings on the physical campus, which are located at Mikkola 19 and Niemi 73 in Lahti. Additionally, the University of Helsinki is tied to the Lahti campus as the third institution which offers studies in environmental sciences. These are the higher education institutes that collaborate together to educate students in the Lahti region. These institutions emphasise practical learning, research and collaboration to support students in many fields, including business. (LAB University of Applied Sciences a.)

LAB University of Applied Sciences focuses on practical education while offering degree programs that combines real world business challenges with academic studies. Its education model encourages students to engage in project-based learning, making business a part of students' studies. LUT University is known for its sustainability, technology and business research. LUT complement the ties by fostering innovation-driven entrepreneurship through its research centres and business networks. (LAB University of Applied Sciences b; LUT University a.)

Lahti campus contributes to the region's development by supporting entrepreneurial ventures, offering coworking spaces and engaging in projects that promote sustainability, innovation and technological advancement. For example, LAB's StartHub accelerator supports startups and provides valuable resources to businesses in the area, including the ones started by students (Lahdentiedepuisto). LUT collaborated with ANDRITS Oy and, as a result, established a new fibre technology centre on Lahti Campus. The Electric Mobility Research Center (EMRC) introduced an innovative approach to collaboration with companies. (LUT University b.)

LAB and LUT invest in regional development, focusing on improving the local business environment, supporting innovation and fostering entrepreneurship. Not only by concentrating on studies, but also on driving business growth and improving the region's economy. (LAB University of Applied Sciences c.)

Lahti Campus maintains strong ties with regional businesses, public organisations and local entrepreneurial communities. Collaborations with companies allow students to gain hands-on experience from trainings, startup accelerators and joint research projects.

Additionally, the campus participates in national and international business-related programs and research to foster a global perspective on business development. These collaborations help students navigate the early stages of entrepreneurship while gaining exposure to broader market opportunities. (LAB University of Applied Sciences d.)

Through its academic programs, resources and connections, the Lahti Campus is providing an environment for students to explore their business ideas. However, there is more to discover about the ecosystem, specifically concerning the entrepreneurial activities available for students on campus, which are explored in the next section.

### 3.2 Entrepreneurial activities at Lahti campus

One of the most widely recognised entrepreneurial programs for LAB and LUT students is the Lahti Venture Program, or LVP in short, which is a two-month course where students work in teams to develop solutions for real business challenges presented by significant local companies such as Kempower, Ramboll, Trio shopping centre and Salpausselän Kisat, which is Lahti's biggest annual ski competition event. LVP provides participants with valuable experience in business development, teamwork and pitching, making it one of the most engaging entrepreneurship-focused programs. (Lahti Venture Program.)

At LAB and LUT, students can earn credits by combining practical entrepreneurship with their studies. Programs like Growth Entrepreneurship – Startup Kit help students refine business ideas through interactive sessions, coffee breaks and creative tasks, even if they do not initially have an idea. Students can earn credit through active participation in developing a business or startup. This course is a mentoring opportunity, guiding students on their entrepreneurial journey. (LAB University of Applied Sciences e.)

Additionally, LAB-Duuni is a model that recognises prior learning acquired through work, volunteer activities or other experiences outside formal education. Students can discuss with their tutor teachers how to demonstrate their entrepreneurial skills and knowledge for recognition. Yoop supports students in turning their entrepreneurship competence into credits by helping them apply for recognition of prior learning. With this initiative, LAB encourages students to integrate their entrepreneurship experiences into their degree program, further promoting a practical approach to learning and supporting students in applying their real-world experiences towards earning academic credits. (LAB University of Applied Sciences f.)

DuuniExpo, the biggest job fair event, is held annually at LAB University of Applied Sciences. Its purpose is to help students expand their professional network, offering the chance to connect with employers, find internships, summer jobs or full-time positions and even

discover topics for a thesis. The event is held to support students' career growth and to create valuable connections for future opportunities (DuuniExpo 2025).

The campus cooperates with StartHub to support students on their entrepreneurial journeys. This cooperation provides students with space, community and guidance, creating opportunities to turn students' ideas into real businesses. StartHub is an entrepreneurial support organisation that provides entrepreneur members with co-working space, mentorship events and workshops. The hub is located on the Mukkula campus. Students can visit and gain advice on business development, connect with potential partners and investors and learn outside the classroom among real entrepreneurs and people with years of valuable business experience. (StartHub 2025.)

These programs are some of the most presented initiatives across the campus that are inclusive to all students. They contribute to an environment where students can experiment with entrepreneurial ideas together, gain industry exposure and develop practical skills. The following section will further explore the events and activities complementing these structured programs by engaging students in hands-on entrepreneurship.

### 3.3 Student-led community and events

Student-led activities play an important role in shaping the entrepreneurial culture on university campuses. There is a study about participation in student-led activities and events and their association with higher entrepreneurial intentions among students. The study focused on the Student-led Entrepreneurial Organizations (SLEOS) and found that they help develop an entrepreneurial mindset in their members, thereby promoting an entrepreneurial culture within the university. (Landoni et al. 2021, 411–422.)

LahtiES is the current entrepreneurship society at the Lahti campus, connecting students, companies and alumni and forming a collaborative platform. According to their website, LahtiES members describe themselves as driven and motivated individuals who believe in innovation and the value of learning from every experience. LahtiES' mission is to support the community by creating space to embrace challenges, learn together and push the boundaries of what is possible (LahtiES b.)

Since its first event launched in 2024, the ES has been organizing regular events, starting with Entrepreneurship 101, which introduced society to the students. Several student-led communities have branched out from LahtiES, creating Hera, a female-founded and focused entrepreneurship group and Project Skura, a platform supporting game startups (LahtiES, 2025a.)

LahtiES communicates through Instagram, LinkedIn and LahtiES online webpage, where it updates people upcoming events. Instagram is The ES' primary channel for event announcements, keeping students informed and engaged. The society's board members, consisting of volunteer students from LUT and LAB, each hold specific roles, which are listed on its website.

LahtiES organizes hackathons, startup events, pitching competitions and networking opportunities to support student growth and foster connections within the entrepreneurial community. In March 2025, an event was held by Hera's Build & Bloom business fair on International Women's Day at Lahti City Hall. This event aimed to offer engaging workshops, inspire attendees through keynote speeches and panels featuring female entrepreneurs and showcase female-led businesses and startups. After Build and Bloom, LahtiES continued with the Startup Fest, a four-day event. This event consists of pitching competitions, keynote speakers and a hackathon. (LahtiES 2025c; Hera 2025.)

LahtiES collaborates with organizations and companies to grow the community and its impact. These partnerships include collaborations with LUT Industrial Engineering Management, Ladec, Lahti City, Crazy Town and StartHub. Through these partnerships, LahtiES is gaining valuable support, resources and exposure while contributing its own efforts to the growth of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. The more the ES gains significant partners, the more accessible the connections, mentorships and funding will be for student startups and businesses. (LahtiES 2025d.)

## 4 Empirical research

### 4.1 Research method, data collection and data analysis

The study used a qualitative research method to examine the students' experiences and their perception of the Lahti campus entrepreneurial ecosystem. The study was an attempt to provide an understanding of the entrepreneurial ecosystem at the Lahti campus, specifically targeting the effectiveness of the existing initiatives, such as the currently available resources and community.

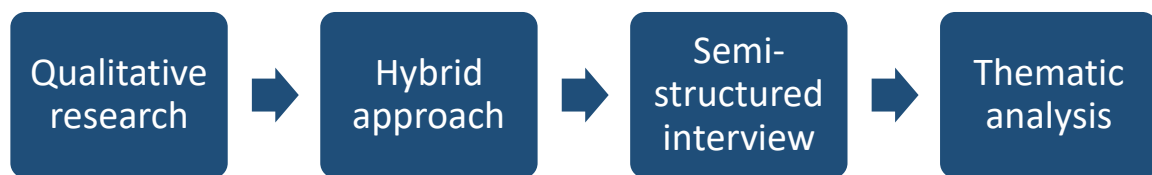


Figure 3. Research method flow

Qualitative research was used in this study to explore entrepreneurial experiences from the participants' point of view. The method was chosen for its qualitative nature, because of the study's aim was to examine student participants' entrepreneurial experiences at Lahti campus. The method is commonly used to answer questions about meaning, perspectives, and experiences (Hammarberg et al. 2016, 499).

The study was conducted through interviews that are semi-structured. They helped to provide flexibility and allow participants to express themselves freely while making sure that the key themes were addressed. This method supports the exploration of complex *how* and *why* questions and aligned with the view that reality was socially constructed. (Azungah et al. 2012, 386–387.)

A hybrid approach combining inductive and deductive reasoning was used in this study. The inductive element involved creating themes and insights from raw interview data, while the deductive aspect was taken from a pre-existing framework, which was inspired by the entrepreneurial ecosystem framework by Isenberg (2010). The dimensions from his framework were only included to help guide and structure the analysis to be clear and focused on answering the main question. (Azungah et al. 2012, 391–394.)

#### 4.1.1 Data collection

This study was conducted at the LAB University of Applied Sciences. The study used qualitative, semi-structured interview method to collect primary data. The objective of this study

was suitable for a qualitative research method; therefore, the interview method was chosen. The participant's answers can be explored deeply and from a subjective point of view through this method. The semi-structured interview questions allowed students to explain in their own words what they had experienced in the Lahti entrepreneurship ecosystem, what challenges they faced, how they felt about the community and support system as well as allowing them to talk about the activities that they joined. The topic had many actors involved and some elements that interlinked from funding to networking and culture, therefore, the semi-structured interview questions would be suitable for this case. (Azungah et al. 2012, 386–387.)

The interview participants' personal entrepreneurial journey within the campus was examined in this study. The students who were interviewed were from LUT University and LAB University of Applied Sciences. Altogether, seven students from different fields were included. Their study fields ranged from business programs to design packaging to industrial mechanical engineering programs. All the students had some experience of participating in entrepreneurial activities within the campus, some were ES volunteers, some were entrepreneurs and some were studying business. The purpose of collecting the student perspective is to evaluate the strengths, challenges and overall functioning of the entrepreneurial ecosystem at the Lahti campus.

The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1. The questions were formed in an open-ended manner and it was made aiming to let the students explore and express their own personal entrepreneurial journey within the time they had studied in LAB and LUT universities. The questions were formed to understand how students perceived entrepreneurial initiatives and opportunities on the campus. The students were told to openly assess how well the campus environment supported their growth and which resources they received, focusing on their skill development. The interview questions helped to identify the key enablers, the barriers and gaps in the local environment, as well as to answer whether or not there were accessible resources, enough community support and easy market accessibility. Gathering insights into the personal and professional impact of the entrepreneurial ecosystem on students helped author to reflect on how the current entrepreneurial experience at the Lahti campus might have influenced students' future entrepreneurial intentions or careers.

The interviews were conducted through online Microsoft Teams meetings. The interview length was approximately 30–40 minutes. The entire process of gathering secondary data took 2–3 months. However, Table 1 demonstrates that the primary data was scheduled and collected within one week.

Table 1. Interview schedule

Date	Study institution	Participant	Interview method
10/4/2025	LAB	Participant 1	Microsoft Teams
10/4/2025	LAB	Participant 2	Microsoft Teams
15/4/2025	LAB	Participant 3	Google Meet
15/4/2025	LAB	Participant 4	Microsoft Teams
16/4/2025	LAB	Participant 5	Microsoft Teams
16/4/2025	LAB	Participant 6	Microsoft Teams
16/4/2025	LUT	Participant 7	Microsoft Teams

Table 1 demonstrated the timetable for seven interviews that were conducted remotely between April 10–16, 2025, mostly via Microsoft Teams. All participants were from LAB, except one from LUT.

The interview transcription was done by using Microsoft Teams' automatic transcription tool. The transcription was not altered for grammar, because they were used only for the internal analysis in the report. The participants were informed before the interviews that their consent was required for recording and transcribing and their honest opinions were valued and kept for thesis evaluation only. The recordings and transcriptions were handled carefully and disposed of properly through the informed consent process and ethical guidelines. All the answers from participants were analysed and explained anonymously, which meant that the students' names would not be disclosed. These were the ethical considerations that were put into conducting this study.

#### 4.1.2 Data analysis

Interview responses, which were used for the thesis report, were minimally cleaned for clarity without changing the meaning of the original quotes spoken by the participants. The data were organised into themes for analysis. The collected data was analysed using the thematic approach. Thematic analysis was a way to find, study and explain repeating ideas across qualitative data. It worked by carefully coding the data and then grouping those codes into themes. (Braun & Clarke 2022b, 4.)

The coding was done manually. The approach combined vivo coding and theory-driven coding. The vivo coding approach was utilized to stay close to the original language that the participants used, which essentially preserved the authenticity of their experiences. Deductive thematic analysis was used, where a set of pre-defined codes from an existing framework guided the process. Alongside the vivo coding, theory-driven coding was also

applied to map the data onto Isenberg's entrepreneurial ecosystem framework. Using these predefined dimensions ensured that the themes remained focused and firmly connected to established theory. (Braun & Clarke 2006, 15–23.)

The aim was to locate recurring patterns and name a theme relevant to evaluating the campus's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The data was categorized by dimensions extracted from the entrepreneurial ecosystem framework to help answer the main question. The transcriptions were first revised for clarity and annotated. The interviewees were anonymous, which meant that no identification details were revealed or included in the report for ethical reasons. The students were named Participant 1 through Participant 7 when their answers were used in the report.

## 4.2 Results

To make sense of all the information gathered from the interviews, the data were organized into a thematic analysis table. This table helped show the main topics and patterns that came up during the conversations. It grouped similar ideas under common themes, which made it easier to see the similarities in the students' experiences. By using the table, the key insights from each interview were easier to compare and analyse.

### 4.2.1 Policy

The goal of the interview was to understand the student's perspective of the Lahti campus entrepreneurial ecosystem, what resources had been available to them, different networking opportunities and any limited awareness and communication within the campus. The interview also aimed to find patterns among the students' opinions and investigate any barriers, inconsistencies or what was missing within the ecosystem. The analysis revealed five significant themes: lack of institutional support, the importance of networking, inconsistent motivation and inspiration, positive outlook on future development and limited awareness.

Each dimension of the entrepreneurial ecosystem was examined individually to reveal students' perspectives and experiences related to it. The analysis began with the examination of the policy within the Lahti campus entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Lahti campus's policy exhibited areas of improvement in supporting student entrepreneurship. Several interviewees noted that something was lacking within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. A student expressed challenges with information access:

*You don't know who to talk to. You don't know who to reach out to. The information isn't easily found on platforms like eLAB. It's unclear who to contact, so students often*

*have to ask their tutor teachers for advice. However, teachers themselves might not know the right person to reach out to, which makes the process more confusing. (Participant 1.)*

Interviewees reported mixed clarity and accessibility. Other students have noted that while institutional guidelines existed, navigating them could be confusing. One student observed:

*There should be clear guidelines on who to contact for funding or business support, especially within the city, as many people are involved, but their roles are unclear. Without specific information tailored for students, it becomes difficult to know where to seek help, leading to confusion and uncertainty. (Participant 5.)*

Similarly, another interviewee, a student of International Business, described how visa delays forced them to miss orientation entirely, causing a significant knowledge gap about on-campus entrepreneurial support. As they explained:

*I missed all the initial information, so I fell behind. Launching a business isn't impossible. Had I known about these resources in my first week, I would have jumped in azungah. (Participant 2).*

The experience suggested that policy support should include clear guidance documents, more user-friendly digital portals for common entrepreneurial procedures or even a mentorship that helped students in small steps.

On the other hand, policy initiatives such as Erasmus+ exchanges and internships demonstrated proactive support for international collaboration and skill development. Erasmus programs gave opportunities to work in a multicultural environment, which could have indicated that strategic partnerships were effective policy tools:

*Our school offers many exchange programs in the business field. Whether it's a week or a full semester abroad, these programs give students valuable experience in working with people from different cultures. Opportunities like this at the Lahti campus are a great advantage. (Participant 6.)*

Additionally, one participant had reported a case where some students weren't sure which campus facilities they could use for entrepreneurial work. One used the woodchop room, technically against school policy, to build prototypes for business. In this case, a supervised maker time or dedicated prototyping space with simple, public guidelines would have let everyone know what was allowed and helped turn ideas into real products.

The data showed that there was an accruing pattern here. Table 2 presented the thematic analysis of policy-related issues affecting entrepreneurship at the Lahti campus, highlighting key challenges such as communication gaps, legal complexity and funding limitations.

Table 2. Thematic analysis on policy in the Lahti campus

Theme	Codes	Description
Access and communication	Unclear guidance, info gaps & lack of visibility	Lack of centralized, up-to-date information on grants and contact points/persons.
Process efficiency	Bureaucracy & legal complexity	Legal steps are slow and complicated, needing simplification and guidance.
Funding policy	Missing microgrants, scaling focus & funding gaps	The current funding support is missing for entrepreneurial students.
International collaboration	Exchange value & cross-culture	Internship and exchange programs (Erasmus+) help students gain global skills and open minds.

The identified themes highlighted challenges and opportunities within the Lahti campus entrepreneurial ecosystem. While there were activities and support within the campus, students still had trouble finding the needed information to aid their complicated entrepreneurial steps and getting funding that fit their needs. The analysis showed the need for improvement within the policy to focus on making the information for entrepreneurship accessible, easy to find and simple processes. Moreover, the positive perception of international collaboration pointed to a potential model for strengthening other ecosystem areas, emphasizing openness, guidance and student-centered support.

#### 4.2.2 Financial support

Finance emerged as a critical dimension, shaping the student's ability to pursue entrepreneurial activities at the Lahti campus. According to the interviewees, there was a shortage of seed funding and the uneven availability of grants tailored for student ventures. Several students noted that the financial support offered by the university was available for exchange programs and research, but did not directly address the needs of new startups and businesses.

*I'm not fully aware of the grant opportunities available through LUT and LAB. I only know about StartHub, which offers some funding and mentorship opportunities. (Participant 4.)*

Micro-grant funding remains unavailable. Participant 7, a LahtiES member, emphasized the need for such support:

*The biggest barrier is the lack of sufficient small-scale funding. While organizations like ES and the university do offer some support through small grants, the amounts are often too low to help a business get started. More small grants should be made available, especially for international students who often have extra fees to pay and need more support. (Participant 7.)*

Students also highlighted a lack of guidance on how to seek funding. They seemed unaware of who to contact for support, revealing a key issue linked to funding challenges:

*There is no clear information about what kinds of grants are available, nor is there any consultation offered, unless you go directly to StartHub yourself. Even then, funding tends to go to larger, scalable companies. Smaller businesses, such as those selling homemade products, often do not receive support and must find funding on their own. (Participant 5.)*

Some students had actively sought ways to advance their ventures and reported receiving valuable support through Ladec's free consultations. Many also found StartHub to be a useful resource during the start of their entrepreneurial journey at the Lahti campus. However, none of the participants received direct funding from educational institutions to launch their startups or businesses. Instead, they benefited from indirect support, such as guidance and mentorship provided through LAB's partners. Most participants mentioned financing their businesses with personal savings, while one reported taking out a business loan to purchase equipment. As one student explained:

*If you are a student, you have a student status. That means they won't give you a start-up grant unless you graduate and become a full-time entrepreneur as a profession. I found this out when I applied. Forming a limited company costs around 500 euros and opening a business bank account also has costs, so you need at least a thousand euros. (Participant 7.)*

Despite these challenges, there were emerging solutions. As an example, Participant 7 mentioned their ambition to build a student-led micro-funding initiative, stating:

*One of my projects was forming a VC fund, just to give small grants to people who were starting. Although still in the early stages, this kind of initiative showed promise in helping students access small but essential startup capital. However, such efforts currently lacked structure and broader institutional support. (Participant 7.)*

Table 3. Thematic analysis on finance at the Lahti campus

Theme	Codes	Description
Early-stage funding	Lack of funding & unclear support	Students feel that the financial support for early-stage ventures is limited.
Grant accessibility	Complicated processes & limited awareness	Grant application processes are difficult to navigate and information is hard to find.
External reliance	Partner-dependence & institutional gap	Students rely on external organizations than the university itself for support.
Funding sizes	Scaling focus & big grants only	Available funding tends to support scaling businesses or research, leaving small student businesses behind.

Table 3 highlighted a clear gap in providing the seed funding necessary for students to start and grow their businesses. The table demonstrated the financial struggles within the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the Lahti campus. Many students ended up relying on external organizations for support. The ecosystem supported big ventures, such as organizations, research and startups, but did not have the possibility of funding smaller idea-stage businesses in the students' opinion, leaving the students to rely on their financial support. This suggested that the ecosystem should offer more small funding options that were focused on early-stage needs and were easier for students to access.

#### 4.2.3 Entrepreneurial culture

The entrepreneurial culture at the Lahti campus was one of the key dimensions responsible for the strength of the ecosystem. Students often described the campus as a supportive environment that built a sense of collective effort. According to students, this environment ignited motivation, creativity and the willingness to venture into entrepreneurial ideas.

*I would say that coming here saved my life. I've always been interested in entrepreneurship in general, but my experiences within the entrepreneurial community at the Lahti campus really made a difference. We were able to create something together and it changed me. I was initially interested in starting a company, but I wasn't drawn to the startup culture. However, once I became involved, I was able to contribute to the community, learn a lot and it shifted my perspective on many things. (Participant 7.)*

The feeling of transformation that participant 7 expressed was the ability of the ecosystem to inspire students to embrace entrepreneurship. It wasn't the initial interest of the student, however.

A strong peer network showed as a vital aspect of Lahti campus's entrepreneurial culture. Through the interviews, all of the participants were motivated to act on their ideas and emerged their ideas, but also faced barriers:

*I've been able to network easily through StartHub workshops, seminars and LahtiES events, but DuuniExpo still needs work. As an international student, I want to see clear avenues for growth, yet at DuuniExpo, signs and conversations are in Finnish. I'm hesitant to approach companies for fear they won't speak English, so interactions often end with them directing me to their website rather than a real connection. In contrast, student-led initiatives like Hera are incredibly inclusive. It began as a small community, but it has grown into a wild thing where everyone feels accepted and welcomed online and in person. (Participant 1.)*

Participant 1 highlighted a contrast in the culture, finding the student-led initiatives to be more inclusive, accessible and supportive for international students. Because the events were hosted in English, they consequently offered a real opportunity for networking. In contrast, larger institutional events like DuuniExpo were more difficult for international students to engage with because of the language barrier. This suggested that student-driven activities currently plays a key role in building an inclusive and internationally friendly culture on campus.

Similarly to Participant 1, another interviewee also praised Hera, the female-founded and focused entrepreneurship group at Lahti campus, describing it as inspiring, making the student feel welcome. They emphasized the impact of Hera's event promotion, saying: *The way they market their events made me feel like I had to attend (Participant 2).*

Participant 7 reflected on the role that the community played in shaping the entrepreneurial culture at the campus, particularly through the supportive and easy-to-reach community as a member of LahtiES community:

*I would say that even though the community is small, it offers a unique opportunity. Networking feels easier because there are fewer people. I've been able to connect with individuals who can support my business career. Partly, this might be possible due to my role in the organization, which helped me find the right people. In the beginning, we didn't have many connections, but over time, we've built a strong network in the startup field. (Participant 7.)*

This suggested that the smaller scale of the ecosystem reduced barriers to entry and fostered more intimate, meaningful connections, which could be particularly beneficial for some students starting their entrepreneurial journeys.

Participant 7 noted that while the entrepreneurial society of Lahti campus initially lacked contact in the startup field, they were able to develop a strong network. This progression explained how active involvement in student-led entrepreneurial organizations could be a useful gateway into the broader startup scene. Participant 7 experienced a common theme in effective entrepreneurial ecosystems, which was peer-driven growth and collective advancement, where communities grew through internal leadership and shared experiences. On the academic side, the participants' insights were notably positive. Participant 7 continues to share about their experience with the academic staff:

*For the academic side, everyone was easy to reach out to. We had help from LUT's side and the teachers are easy to approach. They attended the event and we have easy collaboration with them. (Participant 7.)*

This demonstrated the ecosystem's strength in academic integration, where faculty were not only supportive but also participated in and followed the student-led initiatives. Such accessibility fostered trust and bridged the gap between theory and practice. The LahtiES member also highlighted valuable connections with external stakeholders:

*Now we have every other week someone experienced to lecture for us. I've been able to talk with company owners and even VC people. (Participant 7.)*

This regular interaction with industry professionals showed that the Lahti entrepreneurial ecosystem was increasingly connecting with the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem. The connection brought valuable expertise and resources to university students, boosting their experience and better preparing them for real business challenges.

Table 4. Thematic analysis on entrepreneurial culture at the Lahti campus

Table	Codes	Description
Supportive environment	Motivation, transformation & collective spirit	Motivating and transformative culture, where the community creates new perspectives and entrepreneurial confidence.
Inclusivity and accessibility	International friendliness, English language usage, open participation	International initiatives are more inclusive than formal university events, especially for international students seeking connection.
Faculty and academic support	Approachable teachers	Faculty involvement is seen as positive and accessible, caring for student-led entrepreneurship activities.
External engagement	Expert knowledge, startup field access & connections	Having contact with business owners and VC professionals strengthens the ecosystem's ties to the real-world entrepreneurial landscape.

The thematic analysis suggests that the entrepreneurial culture at the Lahti campus is supportive, inclusive, and connected to real-world business environments. The community motivates students and promotes entrepreneurial confidence. The culture is international, which is seen as inclusive to students, helping international students feel welcome, especially compared to the formal university events that can sometimes leave international students feeling left out. On a positive note, the teaching staff's support is strongly appreciated due to their accessible and caring approach to teaching. Additionally, there is access to industry experts and business professionals in the ecosystem, which helps students gain real-world knowledge and useful contacts, further connecting the campus to the startup world.

#### 4.2.4 Human capital

Looking at the entrepreneurial ecosystem's human capital within the university, the term would refer to students' skills, knowledge and experiences, particularly those valuable in building or growing businesses. At the Lahti campus, students were acknowledging the presence of motivated individuals, helpful teachers and access to entrepreneurial knowledge. Still, there were also worries about the uneven distribution of skills and participation among the student body.

Several students were highlighting the teacher's supportive role and how they were shaping the development of entrepreneurial skills. Participant 3 was expressing appreciation for the openness of the teaching staff:

*There is a teacher from the Lappeenranta campus. He sometimes comes to the Lahti campus as well. I love him. He supported me with my business a lot and gave me great advice. (Participant 3.)*

Participant 1 also pointed out the role of educational programs and workshops in building their confidence and skills. The expressed opinion of what benefited their entrepreneurial journey on campus:

*The entrepreneurial experience at the Lahti campus is very hands-on and well-guided. I received feedback from teachers, which was helpful. Being part of StartHub is also helpful for the exposure my business received. Although there is room for improvement, I think LAB is doing a good job overall. (Participant 1.)*

This quote indicates that the involvement of staff and organizations like StartHub reflects an ecosystem where knowledgeable individuals actively guide and support student entrepreneurs. While participants acknowledged that there is still room for improvement, they

also recognized that LAB offers a solid foundation for developing entrepreneurial skills and gaining practical experience.

Participant 1 further described a mentorship experience during an entrepreneurial course, which inspired them to turn an idea into a business:

*Mentoring is impactful. I am grateful for the teacher who guided us. Without him, we would not have come this far. He pushed us to stay committed and not let our ideas fade. His motivation helped us turn it into something much bigger. (Participant 1.)*

Another student commented on the same teaching staff that educated them about the basics of entrepreneurship. They expressed gratitude towards the teaching staff for the support:

*He was super helpful. The entrepreneurship course helped me to understand the basics of entrepreneurship. (Participant 2.)*

While the availability of staff support was appreciated, students also felt that entrepreneurship wasn't integrated enough into academic life. They were concerned about the lack of involvement from the broader student population. Participant 5 noted that not all students are equally engaged or equipped for entrepreneurship:

*I think it depends on the students. Some just want to finish their studies and get a job, they don't care about entrepreneurship. (Participant 5.)*

This engagement gap suggested that while there was strong support from the staff and expertise available at Lahti campus' entrepreneurial ecosystem, the fact is that it may not have been reaching or resonating with all students.

Participant 7 also pointed out challenges in sustaining the community within the entrepreneurial community. They pointed the challenge out regarding the continuity and participation:

*There is still struggle with the amount of people we need, for example volunteers for next year. We need a new board for the ES. (Participant 7.)*

This shows a sign of a structural weakness, while current leaders and participants are benefiting from the entrepreneurial ecosystem, succession planning and consistent engagement remains obstacles for the entrepreneurship society builders. The community is dependent on the continuous stream of active contributors, meaning that every semester there needs to be new students who are inspired to lead and create, otherwise progress could slow down.

Table 5. Thematic analysis on human capital at the Lahti campus

Theme	Codes	Description
Supportive teaching staff	Mentorship, personal guidance & encouragement	Teachers play a critical role in shaping students' entrepreneurial skills and confidence.
Inspirational mentorship	Staying committed & turning ideas into businesses	Mentors motivate students to transform ideas into viable ventures.
Uneven engagement	Limited participation	Some students are disengaged from entrepreneurial activities, showing signs of an uneven distribution of interest and involvement across the campus.
Integration gap	Lack of embeddedness in academic life & limited reach	Entrepreneurship is not yet fully integrated into the wider academic environment, which limits the potential to reach and activate more students.
Sustainability challenge	Volunteer shortage & succession	Long-term engagement is a challenge with difficulty in maintaining leadership and ensuring continuity in student organizations.

The data suggested that the entrepreneurial ecosystem at the Lahti campus benefited from supportive educators and motivated students who were willing to learn. The challenges were in activating a large part of the student population and better integrating entrepreneurship into everyday academic life. To strengthen the overall human capital in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, it needed to increase access to practical learning and create more inclusive entry points.

#### 4.2.5 Market access

The market dimension referred to the accessibility of real customer bases, commercial opportunities and the possibility for the student-led businesses to grow within and beyond the local context. The students were being asked to share some experiences that reflected the value and limitations of the universities in preparing them for the real-world markets.

*I am trying to find my place in this country because I would like to stay. The job market, especially in Lahti, is very challenging for students in design and marketing. It often feels like the only option is to either have a job or create your own business. Starting a business becomes the only solution. This challenge is what motivates many students to pursue entrepreneurship. (Participant 5.)*

The quote reflected how limited job opportunities in Lahti pushed students to start businesses out of necessity. It highlighted the need for better support for students pursuing entrepreneurship as a way to retain talent in the region.

Similarly to Participant 5, another student emphasized how media exposure through the campus significantly boosted their business visibility, calling it a major turning point. They also highlighted the wide range of hands-on experience gained while handling real-life business tasks:

*Our business gained exposure through a school article and a local newspaper, which was a big deal and was the main selling point. I gained a lot of practical experience through entrepreneurship, learning things I would not have figured out on my own. I got to do everything, I knocked on office doors, I did sales and marketing myself. (Participant 1.)*

On the other hand, some students feel limited due to the size of the region. They find that the local market issue is out of their control:

*I can't change the size of the market, so I don't think that issue can be solved. The real question is: how can I attract more customers? What else can I do besides choose a product that fits the local market? (Participant 3.)*

Two interviewees offered their personal business struggles when asked about the challenges of bringing their business to the market from the campus. They compared the campus entrepreneurial support to Aalto university as an example:

*It was more difficult for me to start a business from the campus because, when I arrived, there was no established entrepreneurial ecosystem to support me. There were no connections I could leverage for my business. If I had started my company at Aalto University for example, I believe it would have been easier. (Participant 7.)*

Another student highlighted their struggle with promoting outside the campus. They felt that it was difficult to sell expected amount of product:

*We are currently struggling with promotion. It's difficult to market our product outside the campus. We need funding for promotional materials, but right now we rely on friends and social media. So far, we haven't made any sales through social media and promoting within the campus is also challenging. We tried selling our product in the city at a lower price, expecting to sell eight, but so far, we have sold two. (Participant 4.)*

The students felt that launching their company at another university would have been easier due to stronger networks and support systems. This showed how access to institutional resources and connections played a key role in reaching customers and building a business.

There was a recurring theme in the interview where students did gain exposure to customer validation and initial product testing, but the campus lacked mechanisms to help students connect to real scalable markets, local businesses, national buyers or international partners.

While the Lahti campus encouraged early market engagement through projects and courses, students frequently found that this support didn't go far enough when they tried to turn their business ideas into profitable ventures or when they wanted to scale beyond the campus.

Table 6. Thematic analysis on market access at the Lahti campus

Theme	Codes	Description
Media and visibility boost	Exposure through school media & positive publicity	School articles and connection to news coverage give businesses visibility, acting as a gateway for awareness and growth.
Regional market limitations	Small local market & product-market fit	The size of the Lahti market limits growth and requires students to adapt offerings or find ways to expand beyond the region.
Weak entrepreneurial network	Lack of campus-based contacts & absence of strong support ecosystem	Students feel that Lahti campus lacks an interconnected entrepreneurial ecosystem compared to larger universities.
Marketing & outreach barriers	Limited funding, social media reliance & visibility struggles	Students struggle to promote their businesses outside campus due to lack of funds and professional marketing channels.
Lack of scalable opportunities	Missing links to national/international markets & limited post-project scaling	While campus provides some early validation, there are no strong mechanisms to help students reach real or larger-scale markets.

The analysis table suggested the challenges that entrepreneur students at the Lahti campus faced when they were trying to grow. Some had the opportunity to be a part of university media and got a positive experience from the academic's support, but some also worried about finances and access to professional tools, which caused their ventures to stall. While promoting student businesses was not the academic institution's top priority, it was less likely for student businesses to grow beyond the early stages. This seemed to hinder the student's motivation to pursue the business during studies and in local area. As a result, potential ideas remained small or faded out after initial efforts.

#### 4.2.6 Support structure analysis

The data highlighted the importance of practical resources and campus-level activities that supported entrepreneurship. While these things were appreciated, students also noted several areas where the support could be improved.

Several interviewees highlighted StartHub as their primary entry point for entrepreneurial support on campus. As Participant 4 noted, I only knew about StartHub, which offered mentorship and investment opportunities. Despite this, most students from the interview remained unaware of other formal support structures, suggesting that there wasn't any or that there needed to be better internal communication.

In addition to StartHub, students could get help from LADEC, which was a local organization in Lahti that provided free consultations on legal, marketing and operational issues. Students had utilized this service to consult about their business problems. These external services filled critical gaps but operated outside the university's formal support channels. (LADEC.)

While the Entrepreneurship Society (LahtiES) supported entrepreneurial spirit and offered opportunities for learning and networking, it did not provide structured services like office space, legal advice or personal business coaching for students. Fortunately, the university and StartHub did offer office space and areas suitable for hosting events. However, students were still responsible for finding other essential services on their own through networking and research. Although LahtiES played an important role in building community and encouraging action, it was better described as an entrepreneurial platform rather than a true incubator and that was something that was currently missing from the Lahti campus' entrepreneurial support system.

Students had noted that teachers did provide instruction and guidance on certain courses and this support was highly valued. However, the data showed that such guidance was unevenly distributed. For example, Participant 3 and Participant 1 described how impactful a teacher's advice or mentorship was to their entrepreneurial journey. This kind of personalised mentorship reflected the goodwill of LAB staff, but since it was informal and not systematically offered, many students, especially those outside business programs, remained unaware of or unable to access it. As Participant 5 shared in their interview:

*I study design, so we don't have many courses connected to entrepreneurship. So far, I've had one and it wasn't useful to me. It was online, we had to read some books and submit our experience in entrepreneurship, but there were no lectures. For people who want to start a business, it doesn't help much. (Participant 5.)*

## 5 Summary and discussion

### 5.1 Discussion

The objective of the study is to better understand the key factors influencing student experience, satisfaction and to further enhance the entrepreneurial journey of students at the Lahti campus. The result reveals that students appreciate the entrepreneurial opportunities in the Lahti campus. However, they believe that improvements are needed in certain areas. The interview responses showed challenges due to unclear and scattered information of entrepreneurial-related information. The result includes the effectiveness of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and its reliance on improved communication. Furthermore, enhanced support and seamless integration of entrepreneurship into the overall student experience in the Lahti campus' entrepreneurial ecosystem was requested.

The theoretical frameworks used for the study were Isenberg's (2010) entrepreneurial ecosystem framework, the entrepreneurial ecosystem and regional policy research by Stam (2015) and the EUA study report (2019) on the role of universities in the innovation ecosystem.

The entrepreneurial ecosystem framework (2010) aligns with the thesis goal by helping to identify the key element, which needs more improvement to enhance the students' entrepreneurial journey. As an example, the result showed that while students appreciated the available entrepreneurial opportunities within their campus, reflecting the elements such as infrastructure and supportive culture, the students also reported confusion due to scattered and unclear information. The framework helped to indicate gaps within communication and integration, which is important to building a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem (Isenberg 2010).

The importance of well-connectedness and a multi-actor entrepreneurial ecosystem is highlighted in Stam's (2015) research. The research highlights the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem, while the EUA's (2019) report is used to show the university's role in innovation and how entrepreneurship is a part of it. The comparison shows the differences between the ecosystem's focus, resources and scope - acknowledging the practical limitations of university-based ecosystems in enhancing students' entrepreneurial journey. The students' call for improved coordination and support at the Lahti campus may reflect on the lack of ecosystem maturity and the common limitations of the university-based ecosystem in offering comprehensive and long-term entrepreneurial aid.

## 5.2 Answers to research question

### **What are the key entrepreneurial initiatives and programs offered at Lahti Campus?**

Lahti campus offers a mix of academic courses, student-led organizations and external partnership services to support student entrepreneurs. There are entrepreneurship courses available for students at both LAB and LUT, but they are tailored differently depending on the study program. StartHub is a local partner that provides free mentorship to student members. It is well-known and easily accessible, especially for students who are starting their own businesses. LahtiES, the campus entrepreneurship society organizes networking opportunities for students regularly and hosts events such as hackathons in English. This makes it more inclusive for both international and Finnish students to participate and connect.

One of the most important sources of support in the student entrepreneurial ecosystem at the Lahti campus is LADEC, along with the City of Lahti. These partners help students with legal guidance and provide funding opportunities to strengthen the ecosystem. These are the main initiatives most often mentioned by students when describing the support available for entrepreneurship at the Lahti campus.

Although LAB and LUT provide funding for organizations such as LahtiES and support some entrepreneurial projects, there is no central entrepreneurship office within the universities. Most of the services available are driven by students and supported by local or partner organizations that serve the broader Lahti community.

### **How do students perceive these entrepreneurial initiatives and support structure at the Lahti campus?**

Based on the interviews conducted and the analysis of the data, students value a combination of theory and practice. They appreciate hands-on learning, networking opportunities and the benefits of being part of a small community. This smaller setting allows for easier access to events and one-on-one mentorship, which some, like Participant 7, find encouraging and motivating. However, many students mention an ongoing information gap.

Student claimed they often struggle to find clear and accessible guidance on whom to contact for support. It seems that in the later years of their studies, the students start to discover where to look for help, mentorship or grant opportunities.

**What are the challenges and opportunities for improving the entrepreneurial ecosystem at the Lahti campus?**

For challenges and opportunities, the interviews revealed five main areas that need improvement: policy and communication, finance, culture and continuity, market access and human capital. From the students' perspective, Lahti provides a strong foundation for an entrepreneurial ecosystem, including the freedom to create community events. While these initiatives help students learn, build confidence and network, the campus still needs to close existing information gaps and expand seed funding to open up more opportunities.

The need to strengthen institutional support structures is the key issue. Many student entrepreneurs mentioned that they received no direct help from the university itself, only from external partners. By addressing these issues, the Lahti campus could build a more complete entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports all students in launching and growing their ventures.

**How effective are the entrepreneurial initiatives at the Lahti campus from the students' perspective?**

The evaluation was done in this thesis using Isenberg's (2010) entrepreneurial ecosystem framework. Although there are positive outlooks on most of the dimensions, the result still shows that there are several improvements to be made. Most students mention financing problems being their biggest issue, making finance the biggest barrier to enhancing the entrepreneurial journey at the Lahti campus.

Many praised the culture of the campus's entrepreneurial ecosystem, confirming that the community is growing and impactful. Students are having issues with the market component, as mentioned in the result, some found it hard to reach their expected sales, and most interviewees think that it is difficult to bring the product and business from the campus. Some claim that the market in the region is also too small.

However, students affirm their success in networking on campus. Some are more involved than others, but all reported that they have been able to network within the entrepreneurial ecosystem at the Lahti campus, making this one of the most successful factors of the ecosystem.

The result shows that students lack support in several areas, for instance, information awareness and guidance, and early-stage funding, which is essential as part of the key component that makes the ecosystem strong. Although, the public infrastructure does offer plenty of spaces for events, networking and studying, the student entrepreneurs lack space

to create prototypes to kick-start their businesses. So, the support links to policy, which is determined by the leaders.

The Lahti campus ecosystem has strong human capital, with supportive teaching staff and motivated students that built an entrepreneurship society. The community is growing bigger but also faces challenges in continuing its legacy as the students need people to volunteer and be involved in the years to come.

In conclusion, evaluated against the framework's (2010) criteria, the Lahti campus entrepreneurial ecosystem remains incomplete across the 6 key dimension that makes it strong. There is potential to grow into it, as the environment does benefit from active and enthusiastic students who are driven to create. Supportive mentors are strengthening the culture of the environment, and the academic side does support the activities and LahtiES. The ecosystem has its areas, showing effectiveness. However, the ecosystem faces significant gaps and is currently unable to meet the 6 guiding components of the entrepreneurial ecosystem framework.

### 5.3 Evaluation of the study

This thesis report provides insight into how students experience and view the entrepreneurial ecosystem at the Lahti campus, collecting the data directly from the students who have participated in the entrepreneurship activities, enabling the study to offer a real-life perspective. The thematic analysis helped to identify common patterns, such as the importance of student-led communities, lack of funding and limited access to clear information.

The strength of this study is found in its focus on student voices. It highlights what initiatives are working well and what needs improvement. Interviews gave students the space to express their personal stories and suggestions, making the findings practical. The study combines information about the existing programs and partnerships, which shows how the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the Lahti campus currently functions.

The number of participants was limited to seven. Most of the participants were already active and interested in entrepreneurship. This may have created some bias, as students with no interest in entrepreneurship were not fully represented. Additionally, some students interviewed were international, which could affect how they experience the ecosystem compared to native students.

Ethical standards were upheld in the study as guided in the thesis guidebook of LAB University of Applied Sciences. Before each interview, participants received clear information about the study's purpose and how their responses would be recorded, stored and used.

All participants provided informed consent prior to the interview. To protect their privacy, identifying details have been removed: students are referred to only as Participant 1 through Participant 7 and no information about gender or individual businesses is revealed. Only the author has access to the raw data. Recordings and transcripts are stored and will be deleted after the thesis has been evaluated. Findings are reported respectfully to both the case institutions and the participants, ensuring that individual voices are represented accurately without revealing personal details.

The study was done using the semi-structured interview, a qualitative data-collection method. The approach aligned with qualitative research and is suited for answering descriptive or explanatory questions such as *how* and *why*. The semi-structured interview approach gives structure and flexibility for a deeper exploration of participants experiences. (Azungah 2012, 386–389.)

Bryman and Bell (2011, 467) explains that the semi-structure interview are flexible, which allows the interviewee's voice and interpretation to guide the discussion. The method also for verification and comparison of data gathered in earlier interviews. (Bryman & Bell, 2011, 473.)

Transcriptions enable a more thorough examination of the interviewee's responses and reveals a precise interpretation. The transparency is essential for qualitative analysis that focuses on language, meaning and perspective of individuals. However, the study may be viewed as influenced by the author's biased interpretation of participants' responses, particularly since the raw data are not publicly available. (Bryman & Bell 2011, 481.)

In the data analysis, the same transcription and coding process was applied to all interviews, grouping ideas into consistent categories to identify themes. In addition to interview data, the study drew on secondary sources to provide context and support the findings. These included official LAB and LUT university websites, reports and academic publications on entrepreneurship ecosystems. Sources were chosen for their credibility, relevance and currency, ranging from campus news about funding and events to comparative case studies of other universities to theoretical frameworks from ResearchGate and the Harvard Business Review.

The entrepreneurial ecosystem framework by Isenberg (2010) guided both the interview questions and the thematic analysis, ensuring that each dimension was examined systematically. Although this framework is older, it remains clear and well-established, helping to align coding with recognized ecosystem categories.

By combining checked interview transcripts with up-to-date secondary data and a proven theoretical model, this thesis builds a transparent analysis of how the Lahti campus supports student entrepreneurs. However, because only a small number of students were interviewed, the findings offer deep insights but may not represent every student's experience on campus. Overall, consistent patterns across participants provide credible answers to the research questions.

#### 5.4 Recommendations for Lahti campus

The interviews revealed a common theme, which is the lack of clear and centralized information for student entrepreneurs seeking guidance. An example of an easily navigable and structured entrepreneurship portal can be found in the Aalto Venture Program (AVP) at Aalto University. The AVP provides a selection of entrepreneurship courses, which are open to all students at the university. Their website consists of detailed descriptions, credit information and straightforward enrollment links and processes. This clarity can help students easily find and engage with resources to develop and enhance their entrepreneurial skills. (AVP 2025.)

Another challenge at the Lahti campus entrepreneurial ecosystem is the lack of dedicated grants for student businesses and startups, as discussed in the finance chapter. Without this kind of early funding, many student business ideas remained in the testing phase, even though external partners are often willing to help. Support from StartHub, LADEC and student societies was helpful, but without clear and structured LAB-owned entrepreneurship services, it revealed existing gaps in awareness, access and long-term support. While mentorship and workshops do exist, they were often informal and inconsistent. This made it harder for students to get the help they needed compared to more organized university programs. Good examples of structured support can be seen at LUT University in Lappeenranta, such as the J. Hyneman Centre, an easy-access prototyping lab and the university's strong financial backing for the student entrepreneurship society. (LUT University 2023a.)

Based on these examples, one recommendation for the universities in Lahti is to create a central online portal or webpage on the LAB and LUT websites. This portal could list all available services for student entrepreneurs in one place, such as external partner support (LADEC and StartHub), the Entrepreneurship Society (ES) and list the available entrepreneurship courses and people's contacts.

Another suggestion is to set up a dedicated space, a supervised area with tools and equipment where students can work on prototypes. This space should be open not only to design or engineering students but also to any student with a business idea.

A third recommendation is to introduce a small micro-grant system. LAB could offer financial support to help student startups cover early-stage costs. If funding is limited, LAB could also sponsor the campus ES to organize seasonal events like hackathons or startup grant competitions, which would boost interest and motivation for entrepreneurship among students.

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## Appendix 1. Interview questions

1. Can you tell me about your experiences with entrepreneurship at Lahti campus?
2. Did you benefit from your participation and if so, how?
3. What other resources have been available to get at Lahti campus?
4. What has your experience been with financial support, like funding opportunities, grants or university policies related to entrepreneurship?
5. How do you feel about the entrepreneurial community and culture at Lahti campus?
6. Tell me about your experience in networking and collaboration with other students, faculty, businesses or external partners?
7. What challenges have you faced when trying to start or grow a business at Lahti campus?
8. How easy or difficult has it been to bring a business idea to market from the campus and why?
9. Can you share an entrepreneurial experience that had a significant impact on your personal or professional growth?
10. How do you think the entrepreneurial experiences and ecosystem at Lahti campus will shape your future?