

Sustainable Innovation 2010

Energy2B - Developing a European Energy-Entrepreneurship Eco-system through students in higher education

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European and national targets are defined in order to meet sustainability goals for the coming decades. For example the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and The Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have spurred the European Union (EU) to reduce CO₂ emissions 20% below 1990 levels by 2020. Innovations in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy are essential to meet these targets. Nevertheless, entrepreneurship in the energy sector – enabling “green” innovations to deliver added value - is still relatively low in Europe. There is a lack of entrepreneurial capacity because of a long-lived tradition for technology push in R&D funding which overemphasizes technological development and under-emphasizes business development and market/opportunity pull.

In order to change this situation, our project focuses on students in higher education as they constitute an important target group to expand innovation, entrepreneurial capacities and activities in the field of sustainability, energy conservation and renewable energy. Currently, in Europe, however, the entrepreneurial ambitions of science and technology students, in particular, are not fully realised and need attention. Therefore, entrepreneurship education with a specific focus on sustainability, energy conservation and renewable energy is a valuable mechanism to stimulate (future) entrepreneurial behaviour in energy-related “green” sectors. This is because current courses are not always available to students or they are delivered in short course format and lack linkages with real-life cases and the support of leading (national) experts from industry and the academic world. Furthermore, dedicated follow-up services to help inspired students to turn their energy-related innovation and entrepreneurial ideas into reality are not widely available.

Our project Energy2B (co-funded by the European Commission - Intelligent Energy Europe; see <http://www.Energy2B.eu>) is an innovation stimulating initiative that targets university students and encourages them to turn energy-related “green” innovation ideas into reality via new business start-ups. The project’s infrastructure will be facilitated by an online web platform, which will enable idea challenges and competitions at local and European level. Ten local competitions for energy-related innovation ideas are offered on the Energy2B platform with the aid of 5 universities in 5 European countries (UK, PT, PL, SI and BG) and several specialist companies (NL, DK, BE, IT). The best “green” energy ideas are selected for dedicated boot camp and follow up services given by energy, business planning and investment experts. A survey will measure the impact of Energy2B on the entrepreneurial mindset and activities of participating students. Due to the online character of Energy2B networking and up-scale potentials are substantial. Therefore, Energy2B is seen as a unique concept to create a distinctive entrepreneurship eco-system¹ in the field of sustainability, energy efficiency and renewable energy across Europe. The rollout of the initiative starts in the second half of 2010. This article will discuss the role of entrepreneurship education in facilitating the creation of an energy-eco system² by drawing upon some of the insights experienced during the rollout phase.

¹ Feters, M., Rice, P., Greene, P.G., Butler, J.S (2010). Eds. The development of university-based entrepreneurship eco-systems, Cheltenham, Glos: Edward Elgar.

² Rolf Wustenhagen and Robert Wuebeker (2010) Eds. The handbook of research on energy entrepreneurship Cheltenham:Glos: Edward Elgar.