Impact investments, business accelerators and social innovation programs in the primary sector: experiences from ECOSTAR and SIMRA projects

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1. Impact investments  
2. ECOSTAR and SIMRA projects  
3. Incubators and accelerators  
4. Final remarks
A raising awareness on job creation in new forest activities

- 4.4M Euro forest projects (2015)
- 5.7 Billion Euro payments for watershed protection (2015)
Development new markets in the forest sector: 2 main constraints

- Capitals
- Entrepreneurship (business competence)
  - Land
  - Public support
  - Legislative framework
  - …

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Impact investments = investments made into companies with the intention to generate social and environmental impact alongside a financial return: is a combination of investors' financial objectives with their concern about Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues.
Growth of Impact investing (in broad sense) by Region 2014–2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>Growth over period</th>
<th>Compound Annual Growth Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>$10,775</td>
<td>$12,040</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$8,772</td>
<td>$9,723</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>$722</td>
<td>$1,098</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia/New Zealand</td>
<td>$148</td>
<td>$916</td>
<td>247.9%</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia ex Japan</td>
<td>$45</td>
<td>$52</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>$7</td>
<td>$474</td>
<td>6689.6%</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$18,276</td>
<td>$22,890</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proportion of SRI Relative to Total Managed Assets → 26% (Europe → 53%)

Source: Global Sustainable Investment Alliance (GSIA)
2016 Global Sustainable Investment Review

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ECOSTAR Erasmus+ KA project: the partnership

Manchester University & RICARDO Energy and environment

Ecosystem Marketplace

Fledge, the conscious company accelerator

UP Madrid & NepCon

University of Brasov, & Forest Design

University of Padova, & ETIFOR

1st step
Training Needs Assessment in EU

Entrepreneurship gaps in 14 forestry departments:

• Evaluation of university commitment to entrepreneurship education: medium-low

• 80% of respondents consider that entrepreneurship could be a useful field of study within their university curriculum

• 27% with specific courses made available by their university (12% within their faculty/school)
More info at:
www.ecostarhub.com/reports/

2nd step: an e-course
aimed at guiding students and professionals to acquire high level entrepreneurial skills by working with private sector, to convert innovative ideas into successful business plans for impact investments, in the field of natural resources

https://www.ecostarhub.com/
• 4 partner Universities
  • UNIPD, Italy
  • Madrid, Spain
  • Brasov, Romania
  • Manchester, UK

• 15 e-moderators (1 coordinator, 1 assistant coordinator, lecturers: initially trained for consistency in the approach)

• 150 learning hours/student (30 direct online interaction with e-moderators/lecturers)

• 6 to 7.5 ECTS

• 5 online e-modules + assignments

Evaluation of participants’ performance:
  25% active online participation
  25% mid term evaluation
  50% final examination
Participants:
• 171 involved participants & lecturers
• 156 enrolled participants
  - 67% students formally enrolled in a University (BS, MSc and PhD)
  - 33% non students (e.g., entrepreneurs)
• 135 active participants
• 69 participants who completed the e-course (51.1 %)
• 26 nationalities (9 EU countries)

Level of satisfaction (anonymous evaluation form):
• 93% of participants are satisfied, the e-course met their expectations
• 78% of participants think there is not much duplication/repetition of contents with other courses

ECOSTAR
NATURAL TALENTS

E-LEARNING COURSE
ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND PRODUCTS:
FROM IDEAS TO BUSINESS

The first international course that helps you value nature!
An online course providing continuous interaction with top international professors, experts and company directors specialized in the fields of forestry and ecosystem services and products.
The course guides you to create innovative business ideas in the following sectors:
• natural capital
• economic evaluation
• sustainable investments
• wild forest products
• payment for ecosystem services
• forest certification
• carbon market
• ecotourism

www.ecostarhub.com/e-learning-course/

First edition
Oct-Dec 2017
150 learning hours
(40 hours of e-modules)

Second edition
Feb 2019
Registration open
Oct 2018
Objectives

SIMRA’s overarching objective is to fill the significant knowledge gap in understanding and enhancing social innovation in marginalised rural areas by advancing the state-of-the-art in social innovation and connected governance mechanisms in agriculture and forestry sectors and in rural development in general. This objective will be achieved by blending diverse theoretical positions into a coherent explanation of spatial variability of social innovation, encompassing its empirical diversity (complexities and various dimensions), co-constructing a novel evaluative toolkit, and developing improved knowledge of determinants of success in order to answer the question of how to support enhanced governance and social innovations, addressing specificities and priorities of social needs and new social relationships and collaborations, especially in marginalised rural areas across the EU.

http://www.simra-h2020.eu/

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3rd step: the Nature Accelerator

Business idea

Hackathon → Start up → Incubator
(logistic, technical assistance, …)

2-3 years (mortality of 50-70%)

Hackathon → Start up → Accelerator
(partners, seed money, …)

Example

http://fledge.co
Example

3rd step: the Nature Accelerator

THE NATURE-ACCELERATOR

www.ecostarhub.com
University of Padova incubator

No organization can thrive without innovation. Without knowledge, there can be no innovation.

The Nature Accelerator selects and invests in early-stage impactful startups that are developing innovative and sustainable solutions.

Agriculture  Forestry  Natural Resource  Ecotourism
Scouting
Dec 2017 – 15th March 2018
250+ applicant from 49+ countries
15th-30th March 2018
66 shortlisted and interviewed
16th April 2018
8 start-ups selected

8 startups
Intensive training
8 weeks (June/July 2018)

W1: Hack your business model
W2: Market Analysis
W3: Marketing
W4: Funding
W8: Demoday
WP7: Pitch preparation
W6: Corporate culture and communication
W5: Financial Planning
Final-event

Demo day
Pitches to potential investors
(19th July)

170 participants

Some final remarks

• All start-ups (but 1) approached by investors willing to invest on them
• Follow-up activities and further developments already going on (company developments, new project proposals…)
• New online training program from Feb. 2019
• The Nature accelerator to become a permanent program for nature-based initiatives
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• Still **great emphasis on provisioning services** by policy makers, academia and forest institutions

• **Several examples of niche, very innovative cultural services**, rarely the outcomes of formal educational programs run by the forest schools

• To promote these services we need to integrate our **curricula** with topics related to entrepreneurship creation → a **new role of public institutions** as **partners, facilitators, promoters**, … with a set of new tools that can create jobs and smart opportunities for the sustainable development of forest resources…

…but public institutions are not always open and reactive to a rapidly changing world

Presentation available on the web. Search for “pettenella”