

EMPOWER MAGAZINE

SME
CLUSTER
GROWTH
EMPOWERED ENGINEERING

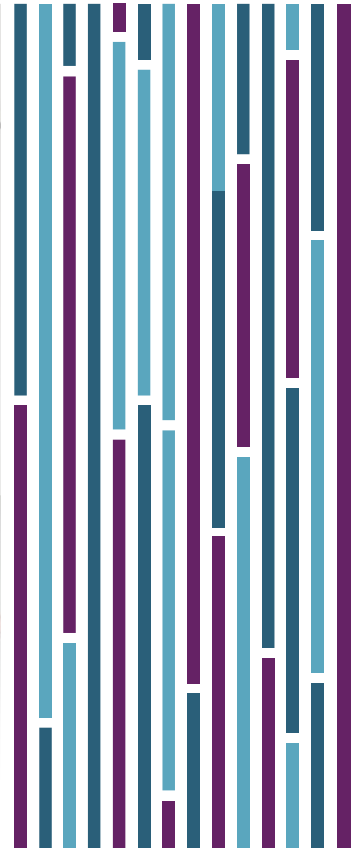
We are delighted to introduce you to the bi-annual magazine, dedicated to SME Cluster Growth. Our far-reaching, European initiative with a passionate team of 9 partners will support small and medium-sized (SMEs) businesses focused on engineering to form clusters to increase competitiveness and growth.

**WHAT IS
SME CLUSTER
GROWTH?**

SPOTLIGHT
on Cluster
Growth Councils

THE STORY OF
GROWTH
OF A GLOBAL
COMPANY

WELCOME TO THE SME CLUSTER GROWTH PROJECT MAGAZINE



As an ambitious collaboration of higher education institutions (HEIs), future skills and business growth professionals and university-industry relationship experts, our drive is to advance engineering SMEs' capacities.

What is in this issue?

Our first issue encourages you to explore the concept, highlighting the motivation and the vision of our project (p. 04) as well as the key activities the consortium will undertake over the next 3 years.

We look at Cluster Growth Councils and their creation and how each will develop a collaboration network and culture for joint innovation across six partner regions (p.06).

To bring some real-life examples into our project, we present two SME engineering case studies. First up is Lucía Abad, Sales Manager at IDIP (part of the [Ingeniería y Diseño Europeo S.A](#) (IDESA group) (p.07) and we also relay the growth story of [Geico Taikisha](#), an auto body paint shop which transitioned from being a SME to a global company. (p.10).

We meet a selection of our project partners (p.13) including Lead Project Partner, University of Malaga (Spain), business professionals Crazy Town (Finland) and the Institut Mines-Télécom, one of France's major educational and research establishments.

We hope you enjoy reading about our work.

The SME Cluster Growth Project Consortium



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INTRODUCING THE SME CLUSTER GROWTH PROJECT

By Samantha Carty

WHAT IS THE SME CLUSTER GROWTH PROJECT?

The ERASMUS+ Knowledge Alliance project, **SME Cluster Growth**, kicked off in early 2021 and continues over the next three years. This forward-thinking project will **support small and medium-sized (SMEs) businesses focused on engineering to form clusters to increase competitiveness and grow.**

It is designed to align the interests of growth-oriented SMEs with an engineering focus together with the regional actors able to support that growth through research and talent provision and access to facilities and knowledge networks.

Utilising localised clusters and networks to empower and drive innovation success in engineering SMEs, **SME Cluster Growth** focuses on cross-border engineering business cluster development, creating synergies across regions, reaching across international markets, adopting new technologies and supporting mutual learning.

WHY SME CLUSTER GROWTH?

The project is very timely. Currently, SMEs constitute 99% of the European business arena and provide employment opportunities for around 94 million people. However, SMEs face obstacles to growth, including finding customers, competition, shortage of skilled staff or experienced managers, limited access to information and intellectual property rights (IPRs).

WHO IS INVOLVED?

The partnership, led by the University of Málaga, Spain, spans nine partners across seven European countries. Under the guidance of Project Leader, Vice President for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship **Rafael Ventura Fernández**, **SME Cluster Growth** recognises the important link between a country's engineering capacity and its economic development. Rafael explains ...



*Engineering is crucial for SME innovation; it's a way for economic and societal development. However, skillsets for the engineering sector highlight the need for 'T-shaped skills', transversal skills, and the ability to recognise future trends and acquire an entrepreneurial mindset to tackle growth challenges. In establishing the **SME Cluster Growth** project, we see an opportunity to enable SMEs in engineering and the people that work in them to bring innovation and growth to a new level.*

Rafael Ventura Fernández
University of Málaga, Spain



WHO WILL BENEFIT?

The benefits will reach beyond engineering SMEs and will also have impact on the Higher Education sector, students, government organisations and businesses within the wider society.

Associate Professor for Entrepreneurship **Todd Davey** with French partner **Institut Mines-Télécom Business School**, explains these benefits:



“

*Our cross-regional and cross-cluster approach to business innovation and growth will contribute innovative and deliverables. Along the way, the goal is to provide tools and resources which both simplify and make it beneficial for engineering SMEs to identify their needs, establish Cluster Growth Councils within our six regions, have consultancy and practice-based learning and set-up a facilities sharing scheme. The **SME Cluster Growth** project will provide opportunities for engineering SMEs to unlock incentives for growth and competitive advantage.*

Todd Davey
Institut Mines-Télécom Business School

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Recognizing the disruption effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on small businesses throughout Europe,

SME Cluster Growth will place a strategic emphasis on enabling engineering SMEs to leverage innovation and tap into regional and international clusters. **University Industry Innovation Network's**, Manager of EU Projects, **Alexandra Zinovyeva** explains...



“

*Addressing the challenges to growth and competition has never been so business critical. We are delighted to partner with like-minded organisations to bring to life the **SME Cluster Growth** project and help support the companies that make up the backbone of our European economy. We want to make it as easy as possible for small and medium-sized businesses to advance and grow their business.*

Alexandra Zinovyeva
University Industry Innovation Network

”



GROWTH FOCUS THROUGH 6 CLUSTER GROWTH COUNCILS

By Adeline Leroy

Following a **successful SME survey spanning 500 engineering businesses** from across Europe, SME Cluster Growth partners are establishing **six Cluster Growth Councils**. Each will serve as a platform to develop closer relationships between Engineering SMEs and universities in order to build joint action plans and strategies, align activities with local and regional issues and innovation agendas to solve their common challenges collaboratively.

SO WHO IS GETTING INVOLVED AND WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM THE CLUSTER GROWTH COUNCILS?

- Growth SME managers
- Incubator and accelerator managers
- Entrepreneurship centre representatives
- HEI representatives
- Regional venture capitalists
- SME Growth experts
- Innovation intermediaries

THE COUNCILS WILL WORK TO 4 KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

1. Increase interactions between Engineering SMEs and universities.
2. Multiply interactions between different clusters.
3. Determine the precise success factors to be adapted with the challenges specific to each cluster.
4. Create a direct impact in each country.

LET'S REVIEW HOW THIS IS GOING TO HAPPEN...

- Each Cluster will launch a Council of 15+ members interested in taking part in each regional cluster (e.g. regional VC, incubator managers, entrepreneurship centres representatives, SME Growth experts, successful SME managers, HEI representatives, etc.).
- Each Council will agree the themes their council will work to address. This will reflect the insights derived from the development of six Regional Growth

Needs Analysis Reports and the interviews and case studies conducted.

- Each Council will develop their vision of cross-European collaboration and how they both add and benefit from strong added value on an international basis.

LET'S PUT THE FIRST SPOTLIGHT ON OUR FRENCH CLUSTER GROWTH COUNCIL.

Led by IMTBS, they are focusing the work of their Cluster Growth Council around two challenges:

- Firstly the need for engineering SMEs to strengthen their relationship with the University and learn innovative ways to work together.
- Secondly to develop European relationships with the five other Cluster Growth Councils. Their Council will comprise stakeholders including SME owners across different engineering segments, the French public bank of investment, the largest professional organisation of French industry and an OPCO (French organisation involved in finance, lifelong learning and applied studies for young people).

We look forward to sharing details of the work of each of our Councils over the coming months. Want to get involved or learn more? Get in touch with us here: [Contact - SME Cluster Growth](#)





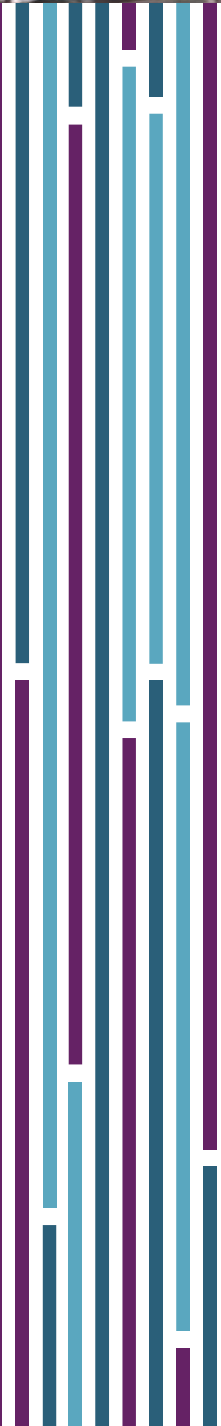
IDESA INDUSTRIAL PLANTS S.L.U. (IDIP) CASE STUDY

By Mario Ceccarelli (UIIN)

As part of the **Knowledge Alliance SME Cluster Growth** project, the consortium conducted interviews across the European Union with rapidly growing Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the field of engineering. The goal of those interviews was to understand the paths to SME growth, whether SMEs cooperated with other SMEs, Universities, or research institutes. The University Industry Innovation Network (UIIN) interviewed **Lucía Abad, Sales Manager at IDIP** (part of the **Ingeniería y Diseño Europeo S.A**) (IDESA group), a Spanish SME that specialises in turnaround executions, modules and skids fabrication, construction services, and tank singular projects. Although a subsidiary from IDESA, IDIP has its own structure.

Since its inception in 2015, IDIP has experienced more than 400% growth in the first three years (2015-2017) and the absolute growth between 2016 and 2019 was estimated at around 1.254,7%, as per data included in the prestigious ranking FT1000. During the interview, UIIN asked Lucía about IDIP's growth strategy and the key success factors behind its growth.

A key factor, Lucía mentioned was that IDIP's growth strategy was the result of new market developments and diversification of its mother company IDESA. IDIP expanded its market after understanding that its clients were demanding not only the supply of vessels, but also additional services such as installation at site, replacement during turnarounds or installation on skids for a direct connection in the plant.



Additionally, IDIP's strategy was designed to increase the share of its market by increasing its action ratio. Indeed, the company started with small projects in Spain and has expanded with projects in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America.

Lucía also mentioned that, when it comes to key success factors, these are reflected in the company's values -passion, technological capability, reliability, strict ethical conduct, commitment, teamwork- and their strategic action lines, safety first, environmental care, quality excellence, high added value, innovation and client focus. IDIP does not pursue exclusively economic profit, but it also wants its clients to experience the company's real performance and inspire trust for future projects.

Furthermore, steady and controlled growth has been another key success factor. Through the years, IDIP did not move onto the 'next level' of business until growth was consolidated. This allowed the company to keep quality standards under control.

In terms of collaboration, IDESA group, has been very active on all fronts. Its current collaborations are ranging from industrial to scientific and university collaborations, including technological centres, clusters, and universities both at a local and EU level. According to Lucía,

With technological centres, i.e. we have developed new welding control processes, new solutions for coatings or optimization of processes by means of digitalization. In conclusion, UIIN asked Lucía to outline some of the most relevant training needs for SMEs that aspire to grow fast.

These ranged from access to capital, and digitalisation to business model innovation training. According to Lucia, Internationalisation is,

“

One of the most important factors in the growth of a SME. In most of the cases growth is linked to broadening the action area of a SME and knowing the market you are entering, its legal framework, potential local partners or how to establish (or not) in that market are key factors to define the roadmap to growth.

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“

Co-operating with universities allows us to have a different point of view as we are involved on a daily basis in the industry, but they are more focused on theoretical and research activities. This brand-new perspective leads us to innovative solutions.

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Lucía Abad
Sales Manager at IDIP

GEICO TAIKISHA:

THE STORY OF GROWTH OF A GLOBAL COMPANY

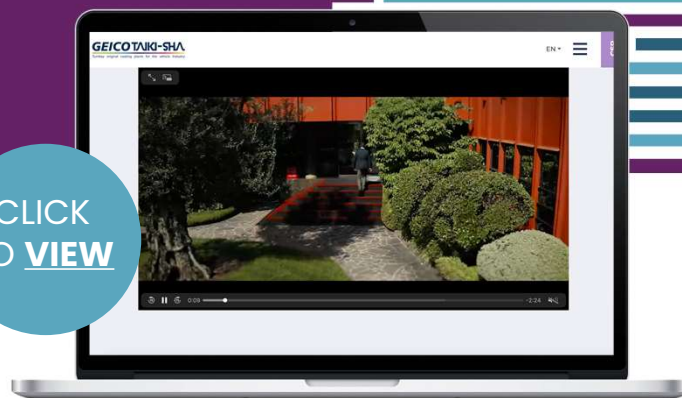
[Geico Taikisha](#) is a world leading family company specialising in the construction of turnkey automated auto body paint shops.

The company was founded as an SME in 1963, by Giuseppe (Pippo) Neri and Giancarlo Mandelli. Shortly after it was established, the first major partnerships formed, giving rise to an exciting period of constant growth but also constant challenges and changes that they had to tackle using an innovative, future-oriented, and proactive mindset.

In 2020, Daryush Arabnia became the Group's Chairman, President & CEO, who at 36 years of age took over the Group after his father's death. In line with his father's entrepreneurial philosophy, the new president will continue the path of innovation with a particular focus on young people to address the challenges of the future of a highly competitive, cutting-edge industry.



CLICK
TO VIEW





UNDERSTANDING GEICO'S GROWTH: INNOVATION AS THE KEY

Current CEO's Daryush Arabnia understands the company's growth because of its adaptable and fast-learning nature. Geico's growth has been challenge-driven, meaning that during their existence they had to search for innovative ways to overcome external challenges, using them as an impulse to go for more.

Geico's growth was because of unfavourable circumstances that occurred over time and that forced the company to quickly learn, adapt, and adopt new strategies. After overcoming periods of external threats such as economic crises that brought down many bigger and older companies, they realized that the key for Geico's success and maintenance relied on establishing an innovation culture within the company. Always having in mind the need to constantly look one step ahead and ensure that all the people inside the company share an innovation mindset, can adapt quickly, and produce new ideas when needed the most.

In line with that, one of the key strategies they applied for achieving the success they have today was to heavily invest time and resources in promoting research and development within the company, despite being in a period of economic global crisis. During this period, they bought intellectual property (brands, patents, etc.) and invested in technology as well as in personnel training and development. Taking this risk in a period where other companies were doing exactly the opposite allowed them to gain competitive advantage when the crisis was over and overtake their competitors with new products and services.

Another key strategy they used was recognizing potential growth opportunities and taking advantage of them. An example of this was accepting the sale of a small part of the company when it would be beneficial, and then buying it back when it was the right time. As well as merging with a former competitor and acquiring two new companies to create synergies that would make them stronger and give them the capacity to establish themselves as global leaders in their industry.



BECOMING GLOBAL

The first milestone of their transformation into a global leader and part of a billionaire group was being able to make business at a larger scale and with dominant globally renowned industry players.

This gave them notoriety and positioned them in another league. After this, their focus was on positioning themselves as an innovation company, placing their goal on sustainable energy developments with initiatives such as their Energy Independence Day and CO2 free day.

With this twist on their strategy as a company, they needed to secure a new level of investment in software technology for digitalisation purposes, as well as acquiring people with the required expertise in the topics.



Daryush Arabnia
Group Chairman, President & CEO





THE CHALLENGES & SUCCESS FACTORS

One of the main challenges for Geico's growth is that the time-to-market in their industry is changing extremely fast. As Daryush describes, their industry is not like other industries such as fashion or mobile phones technology, where new developments can happen in just three months. For the car technology industry, the developments take around six years, whereas market trends can change way faster. Therefore, speed of change and adoption is always a critical challenge.

Another main challenge is adopting a culture of innovation. Managing a company with a multi-country culture and changing the mindset of the company's people was one great barrier they needed to overcome and are still working on especially because Geico is not a start-up, and they have different generations working together that they need to manage accordingly. Along with this, they are working to establish a culture of openness and risk taking.

Key success factors for Geico's growth were staying ahead of the market trends by constantly studying the market and recognizing the different needs over time. According to Daryush, the market trends mean sometimes technology, sometimes organization, sometimes acquisition or selling, becoming part of a group, or getting out of a group, etc.

The key is to be dynamic, able to respond in time and be prepared to forecast what the needs will be in three or five years.



THE IMPORTANCE OF CO-OPERATION & COLLABORATION FOR GROWTH

Throughout Geico's path of growth, co-operation has been critical. Following their culture of openness, Daryush states that Geico is up for collaborating with everybody, especially since they are exploring new projects where sometimes they do not have the expertise they need inside the company. Within this journey they have collaborated with start-ups, universities, and other companies. Additionally, they also take part in networking activities organized by the European Union, like start-up matchmaking, where they go to different countries in search of potential start-ups to collaborate with.

Geico also collaborates with universities, mainly with Italian technical institutions in terms of research and development. According to Daryush, there is still a lot to be done to improve university-business cooperation in this realm, especially since there is a big gap regarding vision and culture between academia and businesses.

In his opinion, universities are structured like boxes which are challenging to get into without knowing in advance who to contact and whether they would be interested in the same challenges as the company. Therefore, he affirms there is a need to build bridges and create more open structures and mindsets for these collaborations to improve.





A LOOK INTO FUTURE SKILLS & TRAINING NEEDS

As a result of their need to keep up with the market pace and changes, constant training is critical, and Geico invests significant resources in it. Every two years the company has an event called “Organizational Assessment,” where they present to all their people the changes in the organization and their strategic projects, to have a unified vision for the direction the company is going to. Furthermore, the company has developed “The Academy”, a six-month program in which they train their employees in four areas:

1. Citizenship, which encompasses the general company courses according to the role the person holds, related to processes, management, projects, communication, etc.;
2. Leadership, where they teach courses based on their company’s values of ownership, execution, delivery, communication, engagement, people management and growth, and customer fidelity;
3. Art skill, where they do technical training and in tools such as AutoCAD or Excel according to the role; and
4. Long term training, which are courses not necessarily related to the company itself, but general knowledge in areas that can be useful for the people and help them open their minds (e.g. Innovation Culture).

They have in-class courses, guided by certified trainers that can be external or internal; and they also have a Netflix-like learning platform, where employees can find their courses of interest. Additionally, they rely on social media spaces such as Facebook Workplace, which they use for short daily training and questionnaires.

Daryush believes that critical skills for SMEs are more related to mindset training than to technical training. Of course, he mentions that technical training is not only important but necessary, but it is rather easy to achieve; while fixing the mindset of a company is hard to achieve yet influences every aspect of the company’s functioning. He points out that not every company has to follow the same mindset, they need to establish what is the one that works for them. In the case of Geico, they have chosen a mindset guided by openness and innovation, thus they invest to make this culture a reality that comes through every company member, from top to bottom.



MEET THE PARTNERS

Our consortium is co-ordinated from [University of Malaga](#), Spain by Vice President for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Rafael Ventura Fernández. Five other HEIs form the partnership. [University of Alcalá](#), based in Madrid are pilot testing and evaluating the Cluster Growth programme while the [University of Bologna](#) will pilot test the Student SME Consultancy and Perspective programme. [IMTBS](#) is one of 13 graduate schools in the Institut Mines- Télécom, one of France's major educational and research establishments. With close links to business and government and expertise in management and entrepreneurship it will work on early-stage research to guide this project.

[Munster Technological University](#), Ireland engages extensively with enterprise and industry in Ireland. In this project, they will coordinate valorisation and capacity building. [Istanbul Technical University](#) (ITU) facilitates the knowledge and technology transfer to industries, through its multiple Techno-Science parks, incubation, entrepreneurship, and innovation centre. It will gather feedback and conduct evaluation towards the end of this project.

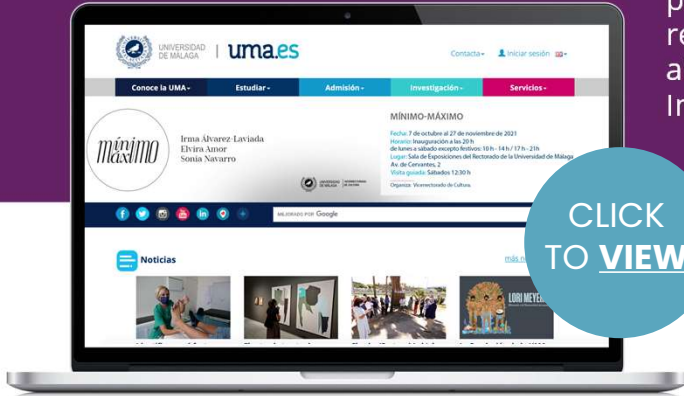
The programme training modules will be developed by Finnish business professionals, [Crazy Town](#) who specialise in promoting university-business-cooperation. Vocational Education Training (VET) service provider [Momentum](#) in Ireland will lead quality assurance and the sharing and promotional activities having experience in helping companies to improve their competitiveness through cluster initiatives, in engineering, food and creative industries. [University Industry Innovation Network](#), (UIIN), Netherlands is a European-wide network that focuses on establishing and improving relationships between education and industry. UIIN will lead the Student SME consultancy and change of perspective programme as well as guide the development of the project beyond its three years to maximise sustainability.

For more information on each organisation and project leader, [click here](#).



MEET THE PARTNERS

University of Malaga (UMA) is one of Spain's premiere institutions for higher learning. Since its foundation in 1972, UMA has rapidly expanded its international presence and prestige. On the international stage, UMA has bilateral agreements with more than 550 universities from all over the world with hundreds of exchange students and exchange researchers each year. It participates actively in international, national, regional and privately funded programmes all of them managed by the Unit of International Affairs & Cooperation.



UMA is also a member of over 100 networks. UMA stimulates educational innovation and research by boosting the quality of its professors and research groups through their participation in international research projects with the support and sponsorship of enterprises from local Technopark (PTA).

The university has a dedicated career centre which fosters the employability of students and young researchers by offering a wide services portfolio including academic, professional counselling, paid internships and fellowships. For this project, University of Malaga will actively collaborate with the Technology Park of Andalucía, a local incubator park to foster SMEs and start-up growth in their region, while helping develop entrepreneurial skills of their students and alumni.

As the project leader, UMA will formally represent the alliance in front of the EACEA. They are also responsible for the overall management, legal and financial responsibility for the project activities and deliverables with the support of their respective partners. UMA will ensure continuous and fluent communication between all partners, the creation of synergies among them and a community building that will remain beyond the time span of the project.

The institution will also have strong presence in other work and provide a supporting role to partners. As the project develops UMA will select students, implement the Consultancy project course module, implement the Change of Perspective programme, and give feedback on the toolkits. Dr. Clara Plata Ríos who works on the project with Project Leader, Rafael Ventura has over 10 years management experience of national and European projects at UMA. She is a partner representative on the Knowledge Alliance, Spanning Boundaries project. Clara brings leadership, passion and expertise to achieve our project objectives.

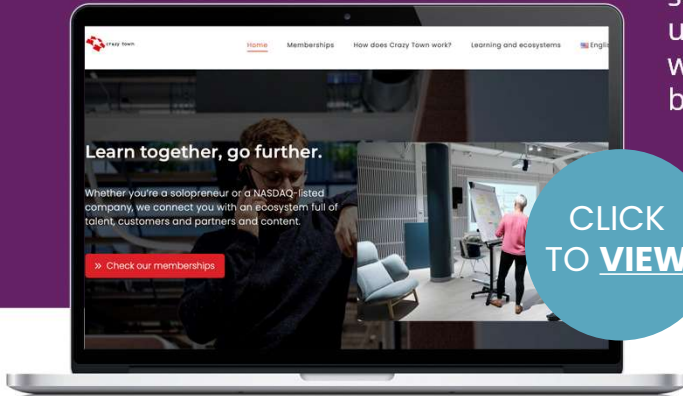
Dr. Clara Plata Ríos



UNIVERSIDAD
DE MÁLAGA

MEET THE PARTNERS

A privately funded innovation hub with four locations in Finland, **Crazy Town** builds entrepreneurial coworking communities that collaborate with universities and hosts training programs and innovative projects. Each of Crazy Town's locations bring together solopreneurs, micro-sized companies, start-ups, and teams from larger organizations who want to co-operate, learn, and grow their business together.



Crazy Town focuses on three elements in its activities: culture, community managers and space. Culture: Crazy Town builds and nurtures a culture that encourages interaction between people, who either work within or visit the Crazy Town community. Crazy Town focuses on people, not organizations, and participants are always seen as individuals. Community managers: Crazy Town manages communities. The main job of the staff is to facilitate interaction between members of the community, as well as visitors and partners. Connecting needs and services together often requires a person whom you know and trust.

Space: Crazy Town has a physical environment designed to facilitate collaboration and networking between people. All locations have flexible space for workshops and bigger events. In the daily life of Crazy Town, hundreds of experts share knowledge and lessons learned and Crazy Town co-leaders create the conditions for members to learn together. Crazy Town has experience in curriculum development and delivery, which stands it in good stead to work in the SME Cluster Growth project team. In concept development, Crazy Town utilizes its experience and best practices of design and delivery of hackathons and other co-creation events, such as idea and challenge campaigns, as practical tools to boost research valorisation and how to involve stakeholders and societal actors. Crazy Town also makes use of its experience from impact training for researchers and staff members.

In addition to this, Crazy Town organizes events and training on various themes. Some of these are open to everyone. On their website you will find events open to all, as well as coaching programs that you can participate in even if you are not a member. All these examples have one thing in common - they happened because Crazy Town's counterparts in the universities were open to new ideas but could also connect with relevant resources and thus deliver quality outputs. Through the SME Cluster Growth project, Crazy Town hopes to accelerate business for SMEs throughout Europe by equipping them with horizontal skills and knowledge.

In the business arena, Crazy Town focuses on two key activities. Firstly, as an innovation intermediary connecting businesses and universities with hands-on trainings, workshops, and matchmaking activities. More than half of the Finnish higher education institutes are their clients, as well as several Finnish ministries and regional developers. They also facilitate coworking and business acceleration where they operate four coworking hubs in Finland with 400 member companies and organizations that collaborate together. The hubs connect their member companies with universities and UBC offering which makes them a good fit for this project. In terms of responsibilities, Crazy Town is the leader of the SME Cluster Growth Mobility & Training Programme phase of the project. They will lead its structuring and co-ordinate the launch of six hot desk/ facility sharing locations as well as produce the final versions of the toolkits and the guidelines. We look forward to hearing more from Crazy Town over the coming months.



Katerina Salmi



Toni Pienonen

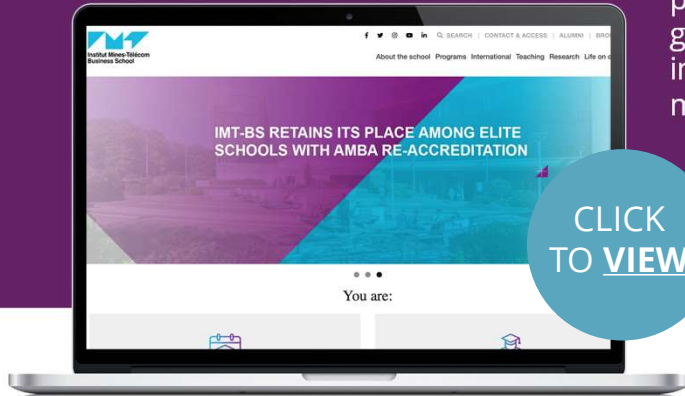


Mikko Korpela



MEET THE PARTNERS

Institut Mines-Télécom Business School (IMTBS) is one of 13 graduate schools in Institut Mines-Télécom, one of France's major educational and research establishments. In addition to IMTBS, the Institute groups many of the country's key engineering schools and plays a central role in developing both ground-breaking and applied research, innovation and education for engineers, managers, specialists, and faculty



The schools of the Institute are acknowledged for their excellence at both national and international levels. Institut Mines-Télécom is a major actor in both the French research landscape and in European research programmes. The Institute combines strong academic legitimacy, close corporate relations, and a unique focus on four key transformative fields of the 21st century: Digital Technologies, Energy, Ecology and Production. Furthermore, IMTBS supports an on-campus small-business incubator from which, over the past ten years, 100 companies have emerged to employ over 1,000 people.

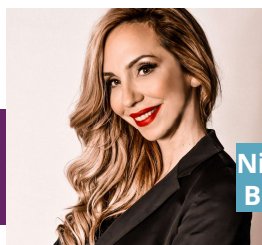
IMTBS has a strong connection to a local network of SMEs in both research and education. Developed within the tradition of French Grandes Ecoles, IMTBS is an educational establishment internationally renowned in its field with close links to business and government.

In addition to undergraduate and graduate programmes, the school offers over 100 executive programmes annually, and its governing body includes executives from global firms such as Vivendi, BNP, Google, EADS, and Orange. IMTBS students are required to spend at least six months of their educational period on in-company work placements, and the school actively develops research projects with corporate partners.

In addition to supporting other partners throughout the project, IMTBS will be leading the second phase of the SME Cluster Growth project to identify the status-quo and co-ordinate the input from all other partners. As part of this work, IMTBS will prepare the methodology pack and instruments, co-ordinate desk research, conduct interviews; share the survey to SME partners, collect case studies, launch a Cluster Growth Council and co-ordinate the final report of the case study collection. We look forward to highlighting their work soon in further e-zine issues.



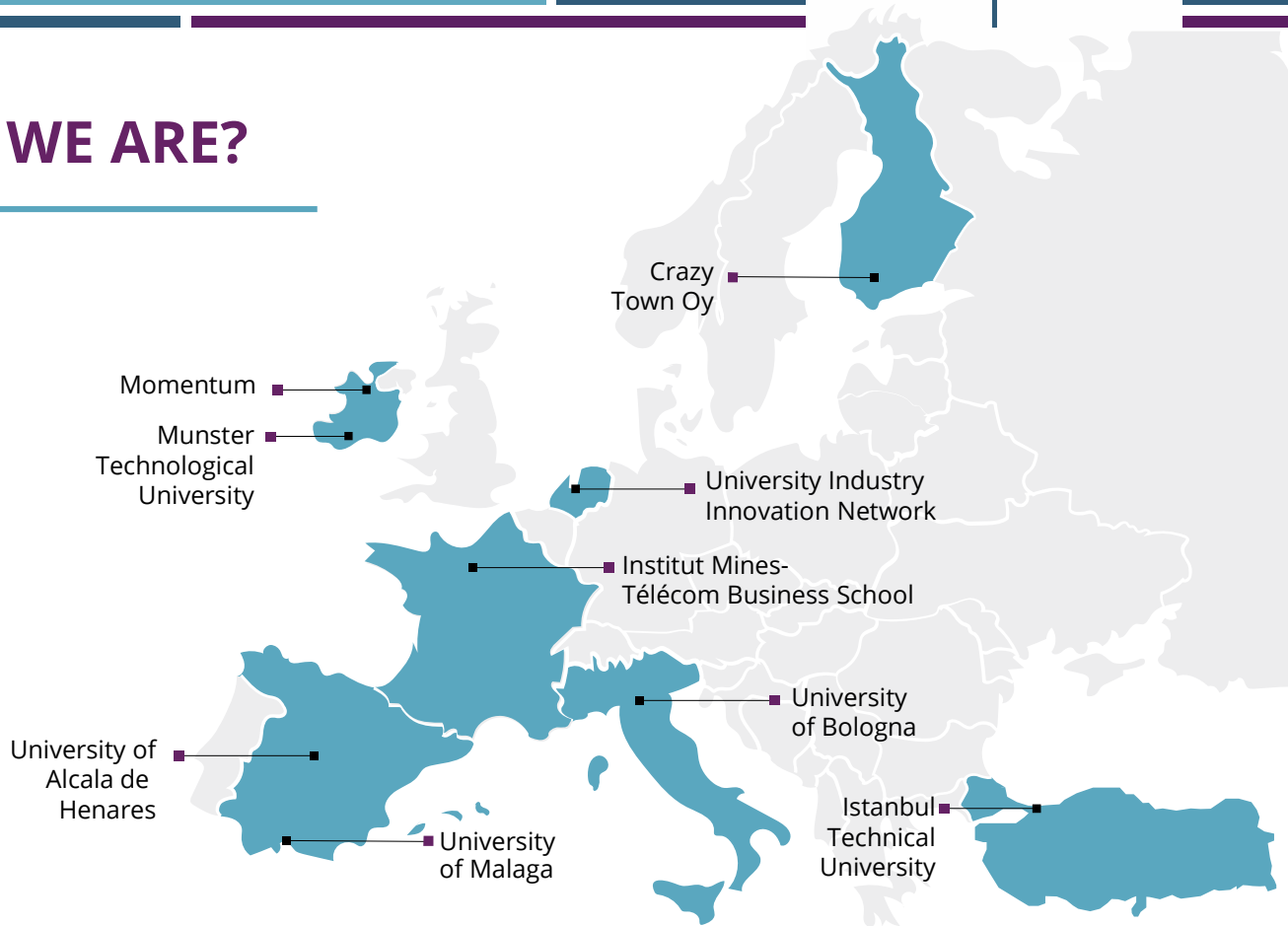
Todd
Davey



Nina
Brankovic



WHO WE ARE?



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journey here



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