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## Interaction among national experts for the entrepreneurial learning, within pan-European network

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### Abstract

National experts for the entrepreneurial learning in transitional Southern and Eastern European countries, so called Pan-European Network, are well connected in their efforts how to improve individuals' creativity and their business results. Different forms of formal education and other ways of short trainings are necessary for their success, but permanent interaction among expert is also of great importance. Small research shows how experts can improve their communication and how they exchange their experience by mean of building Central Cooperation Point.

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### 1. Introduction

Entrepreneurial learning is essential for both improving persons' creativity and their business performance. The research performed by Cruz and others (2009) was primarily focused on the effect of educational programmes for entrepreneurs on their innovation improvement and business success. The results obtained lead to recommendation that the educational centres and institutions which organise the programmes should give preference to specialised education for fostering entrepreneurial spirit. Interaction among experts for entrepreneurial education in Pan European Union seems to be of relevance for the accelerating entrepreneurial learning. The survey was focused on perception of national experts,

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who coordinate regional entrepreneurial learning, in group of south-eastern countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo/UNMIK, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Turkey joined the process in 2009 and is included in the Survey. Kosovo was under Transitional UN administration until its Independence Declaration on 17 February 2008. (further on: SEE countries, today: Pan European Group-PEG). They have expressed their needs of interaction, and survey shows the importance of such interaction. The objective of survey is identification of systematic exchange of knowledge and experience in the Pan-European Network in policy development of entrepreneurial learning (Griben, 2006) by defining a model of the interaction among the national expert teams. Inquiry interviews included a sample of all the eight countries of the Pan-European Group, cooperating in the implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises, and the relative policies index in small business. The need for interaction is evaluated while a unique central interaction point is defined during the research. Common interest of the group of SEE countries is synthesized in order to improve the entrepreneurial learning development by means of interaction among the experts. Development strategy of the Centre for entrepreneurial learning of the Pan-European Network, enabling its long-term sustainability, is described together with the related activities and way of financing.

## **2 The interaction problems among national expert teams for entrepreneurial learning development, in the pan-european network**

With a view to create a functional model for better entrepreneurial learning, national experts for the development of entrepreneurial learning in the countries of Pan-European Network were interviewed. One of objectives of the field research was to make a contribution to the improvement of knowledge and experience, concerning entrepreneurial learning development policies. Two hypotheses were established, starting the research:

(H1) The entrepreneurial learning within the SEE countries could be improved by creating a Central Cooperation Point.

Since 2003, the countries of the pre-accession region mutually cooperate in implementation of the principles of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises. The first hypothesis implies that the implementation shall be followed up jointly, by means of SME Policy Index 2007.

In the first report of the SME Policy Index for the SEE countries 2007, the evaluation of the two key fields covering entrepreneurial learning (the first principle: education and entrepreneurship and the fourth principle: training for entrepreneurial skills) clearly indicate that the development in this area is slow, with markedly poor understanding of entrepreneurship as key competence at all the levels of education.

The first joint Report has also indicated the interest of the countries for systematic exchange of knowledge and experiences in entrepreneurial learning development policies aiming at long-term economic competitiveness strengthening. An intensive cooperation on joint gatherings, workshops and regional conferences has indicated the need to create more dynamic ways of information interexchange that was used within this paper as a result of preliminary research.

The research of individual opinions of the National Coordinators of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises is carried out in eight countries, on the needs of interaction in entrepreneurial learning development. The National Coordinators are the experts working on entrepreneurial knowledge upgrading in their countries. The analysis of the research results will confirm or reject the need to create a model for central exchange of knowledge and best practices in entrepreneurial learning. The research will indicate the forms of entrepreneurial learning contributing the most to the national competitiveness increase. The research of experts' opinion will serve as an input for the web portal making for central exchange of information. In this way the Second Hypothesis for this research has been set out.

(H2) An Interaction Model may be realized through a dialogue portal, that enables dynamic access of the key experts' teams in each individual SEE country.

The Second Hypothesis assumes that the results will indicate that it is possible to realize a dynamic access of the experts' teams of the eight countries of the Pan-European Network by means of dialogue portal. Based on the theoretical knowledge of the problem area guidelines for defining web portal for central exchange of information in the field of entrepreneurial learning have been determined. The research has been carried out by the opinion survey method (individual questionnaire) and in-depth interviews, researching on subjective opinions (specific and habitual) of the National Coordinators of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises in each of eight countries in the Pan-European Network, about cooperation problems in the field of implementation of its two principles related to entrepreneurial learning.

National Coordinators are responsible and competent persons nominated by the respective state administrative authorities of their countries to the European Commission in Brussels. The National Coordinators' main tasks are coordination and implementation of policies enclosed in the principles of the EU Charter with the key stakeholders in the SME sector of their countries.

### **3. Presentation of the research**

Data were collected by help of Questionnaire and in-depth interviews with national coordinators of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises in SEE countries. Pan European Group of countries consists of eight countries in Southern and Eastern Europe. The small sample of only eight persons (National Coordinators) imperatively introduced the need for in-depth interviews. The inquiry, and afterwards the in-depth interview with experts has given data on entrepreneurial learning problems in individual countries, as well as the attitudes of experts concerning the need of interactive and more dynamic cooperation among them.

The Questionnaire contains 23 questions of closed type with offered answers for one or more possibilities (the first and the third group of questions) and of open type and intensity (the second group of questions). Questions are of the Likert's type intensity with five offered answers, from the markedly favourable (1), favourable (2), neutral (3) to unfavourable (4) and markedly unfavourable (5). These are at the same time numerical evaluations of certain indicators inquired by the Questionnaire.

Questions are being put in a way that each question represents a relevant indicator. Their mutual complementing has to be a clear confirmation or rejection of the hypothesis. Having in mind the purpose and the objectives of the research, the target population for interviewing were the National Coordinators of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises from each of the eight countries composing the Pan-European Network, since they are persons responsible for coordination and follow-up of entrepreneurship policies implementation by means of the related SME Policy Index at the national level with key institutional stakeholders in the economic system of their countries. By selecting a sample of eight National Coordinators of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises, all the eight SEE countries composing the Pan-European Network were enclosed, representing thus an integral coverage of the basic statistic group, although by passing to the Small Business Act of EU (EC, 2008), in its process of implementation were enclosed the EU Member States and the SEE countries. However, only eight countries of the SEE continue to apply the SME Policy Index in regular two-year cycles as a method of progress of SME policy implementation of each country separately and jointly, for the entire group composed of eight included countries.

Information for the empirical part of the research were collected by the Questionnaire in the period from 20 March to 10 April 2011, and by in-depth individual interviews from 22 to 24 March 2011 in Istanbul, at the meeting of all the national coordinators of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises. All the requested national coordinators participated in the inquiry. It may be established that the feedback concerning the size of sample, comprising all the members of the basic rally, is 100%. The method of an

intentional sample (Sovic, 2004) was applied in the research, since only national coordinators according to the researchers' decision were selected and it is necessary to know the basic rally and its characteristics.

### *3.1. Elaboration of the Questionnaire*

Questions from the first part of the Questionnaire were supposed to give an answer that would provide an insight into entrepreneurial learning problems in target countries. According to the answers from the first part of the Questionnaire general information on national coordinators of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises were obtained. From their answers to the question concerning the type of institution they are working for we have learned that five of them are working in state administration bodies, and two of them in state agencies.

From the answers offered to the question on the competence and scope of the institutions the national coordinators are coming from it is learned that they enclose in their scope:

- a. adoption of national SME policies and strategies;
- b. implementation of SME measures and activities;
- c. implementation of SME education training;
- d. Information and promotion of SME entities;
- e. Preparation and implementation of EU programmes and projects in the area of SME.

Concerning duties performed by national coordinators of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises, six of them are officials at the level of civil servants, and two of them (Montenegro and Turkey) at the level of state agencies in charge of development and implementation of measures and activities in SME.

The question related to years the national coordinator of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises is performing his/her task, was supposed to provide information on the continuity of the follow-up of the SME policy implementation in each of the eight countries of the Pan-European Network. Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and Kosovo's representatives have 10 years of experience, while Montenegro's representative has seven years of experience and Macedonian representative has only two years of experience.

The question concerning the number of key national stakeholders included in the implementation of the principles of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises that the national coordinators are monitoring in the economic system of their countries was meant to provide information on comprehensiveness of policies implementation by key national stakeholders monitoring within the economic system related to the SMEs development. The number of national stakeholders whose activities are being coordinated ranges from 30 to 50, this being a verification of the high level of institutions' involvement and networking. By this is obtained a good survey of proper implementation capacity at the entire national level. This also points at the relevance of the task of national coordinators. By this is also achieved the relevance of the observation of the existing situation in the implementation of national policies in the area of SME in all eight countries of the Pan-European Network.

In the second part of the Questionnaire, by the answers to an open question concerning possession of strategic documents for entrepreneurial learning development in all the countries, it is learnt that four countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia) have no strategic documents for entrepreneurial learning development.

The remaining four countries possess strategic documents for entrepreneurial learning development whereof derive their visions, surveyed in Table 1.

Table 1. Entrepreneurial learning visions from strategic documents of the Pan-European countries network

	Strategic document	Vision
Montenegro	Strategy for life-long entrepreneurial learning 2008-2011	Development of entrepreneurial spirit through accelerated improvement of entrepreneurial way of thinking within society systematically and with effective actions.
Kosovo	National Strategy for entrepreneurial learning and improvement	In accordance with the policies of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises further improvement of entrepreneurial education and learning, pupils, students and adults, in formal, as well as in no-formal education; improvement of teaching services providing and specialized institutions to enable knowledge and skills acquiring to the small entrepreneurs.
Turkey	Strategic Plan of the National agency for development and industrial organization for SME sector (KOSGEB)	Entrepreneurial culture development throughout the country and the increase of the number of successful star-ups.
Croatia	Strategy for entrepreneurial learning development 2010-2014	Entrepreneurship as a key competence at all levels of formal, non-formal and informal education.

Strategic documents for entrepreneurial learning development were adopted by Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo and Turkey. The research also included the question what areas of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises are considered priority and suitable for mutual cooperation improvement. Graph 1 shows the evaluation of their importance concerning economic competitiveness strengthening.

Graph 1 – Ranking of the most important fields of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises for the improvement of the cooperation among the countries



Priority areas evaluated exceptionally important for long-term economic competitiveness strengthening in their countries are the following:

Area 8 - Strengthening of small companies technological capacities;

Area 1 - Education and entrepreneurial learning;

Area 4 - Availability of vocational training for entrepreneurial knowledge and skills acquiring;

Since not a one of ten areas of the EU Charter has got an evaluation lower than 3.5 according to Likert's scale it may be concluded that all ten areas are considered relatively important for the

strengthening of each country's economic competitiveness. It also contributes to the growth of economic competitiveness of the pre-accession region.

To achieve the research goals set up by this paper the results achieved by the evaluation of the first and fourth area are important since related to the entrepreneurial learning policies considered exceptionally important for further economic competitiveness strengthening.

National coordinators of the EU Charter, asked to evaluate the major barriers to the entrepreneurial learning development in their countries, related to the key areas of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises:

1. Education and entrepreneurial learning;
2. Availability of vocational training for entrepreneurial knowledge and skills acquiring, have evaluated the indicators as is shown in Graph 2.

Graph 2 – Ranking of the biggest barriers for the entrepreneurial learning development

Deficiency of corresponding national education structure	2,88
Deficiency of entrepreneurial spirit	2,88
Deficiency of research that would support creation of entrepreneurial learning	3,25
Deficiency of the curriculum materials	3,75
Domination of traditional education programmes	3,63
Existence of entrepreneurial learning policy	3,13
Financing	3,63
Implementation of policy and activities for entrepreneurial learning	3,25
Misunderstanding of entrepreneurial learning importance	3,63

Lack of corresponding financial resources, inappropriate educational structures, domination of traditional education programmes and lack of understanding of the importance of entrepreneurial learning were evaluated as exceptionally important barriers. Relatively uniform reached level of the biggest barriers to entrepreneurial learning development indicates their equal importance for entrepreneurial learning improvement.

The answer to the question how the entrepreneurial learning can be recognized as key competence in a particular country of the Pan-European Network in formal and informal education provides an average evaluation of 3.0 to 3.75 according to the Likert's scale.

The average level of 3.13 means that the entrepreneurial learning as key competence is merely recognized and that it exists in a national framework curriculum.

The achieved level of 3.75 on the Likert's scale to the question whether in the country exists systematic education for entrepreneurship in the function of life-long learning tells us that the need of its introduction has been recognized, but there is still enough space for the improvement if the achievement of systematic education is concerned.

The answer to the question on the existence of entrepreneurship as key competence in elementary school shows a relatively low level of 2.13 achieved on the Likert's scale. It may be concluded that entrepreneurship as key competence does not exist in elementary schools' curricula and is introduced only at the pilot level.

To the second question on entrepreneurship as key competence at the level of secondary school education is achieved an average answer of 3.00 according to Likert. Through a deeper insight during interviews with national coordinators it is learnt that the level of recognition is fragmented to individual pilot projects. A stronger impact of systematic introduction of entrepreneurship in the curricula in the secondary school is only imminent.

By this part of the Questionnaire is enabled an introduction into the question put to national coordinators on the form of cooperation that would best improve the exchange of knowledge and experience in entrepreneurial learning development in the pre-accession region.

Graph 3 – Ranking of forms of cooperation that contribute mostly the exchange of knowledge and experience in the area of entrepreneurial learning

Annual international conferences, congresses, and similar.	3,13
Meetings of the appointed members of the expert group aiming at knowledge exchange	3,38
Appointment of national experts in joint working group	4,38
Interactive knowledge and experience exchange among experts,	4,75
Periodical workshops and round tables	4,38

To the question what form of cooperation would best improve the exchange of knowledge and experience in the area of entrepreneurial learning in the pre-accession region the appointment of national experts to the joint Working Group and an interactive exchange of their knowledge and experiences, as well as periodical workshops and round tables are ranked as the most efficient.

Graph 4 – Ranking of the most efficient method of interaction among the Pan-European network’s countries

Possibility of active daily communication	2,88
Possibility of written exchange of relevant documents	4,13
Possibility of permanent dialogues among experts	4,50
Possibility of the experts’ more active approach to the common interactive web site	4,63
Networking of the countries interested in cooperation in entrepreneurial learning	4,63

The possibility of experts’ access to the joint interactive web site is the most efficient way of interaction (value 4.63 according to the Likert’s scale). Follows the networking of the countries interested in cooperation in entrepreneurial learning. The possibility of permanent dialogue among experts is evaluated as considerably efficient.

Graph 5 – Ranking of the most efficient place of cooperation for the exchange of knowledge and experience on entrepreneurial learning

Appointment of the already existing institution (chamber, state agency)	2,75
State administration body in one of 8 countries	2,00
Economic institution at the proposal of one of the countries	2,50
Independent institution (regional centre) with the seat in one of the countries	4,63

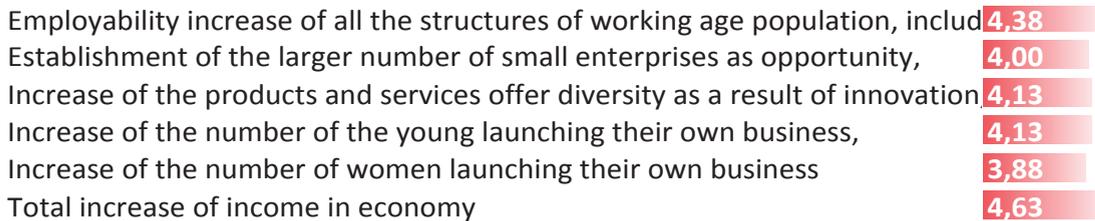
Of the offered possibilities the most efficient place for cooperation on which would be exchanged knowledge and experience in entrepreneurial learning among 8 countries, evaluated on the Likert’s scale by 4.63, is an independent institution, the Centre with the headquarters in one of the countries of the Pan-European Network.

The question related to systematic evaluation of training and education at the level of business entities in small enterprises shows that at the national level the need for training has been recognized and has been agreed among relevant government bodies, social partners and education institutions. Better known English name of these analyses is Training Needs Analysis (TNA) that implies identification of needs for employees' training with purpose to provide training appropriate to the existing problems in the company and lack of knowledge and skills of labour force needed for its settlement.

The level 2.88 achieved by the answer to the question whether instruments for the research of needs for improvement at the level of business entities exist suggests that their stability is fragmented and reduced to pilot projects. Systematic monitoring carried out by the Croatian Chamber of Economy at the level of its member companies appears only in Croatia. The Agreement between the Ministry of the Economy, Labour and Entrepreneurship of the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian Chamber of Economy on the implementation of the project of training needs analysis is implemented at the level of project of 2008.

A question concerning the evaluation of the interest of an individual country for mutual improvement of cooperation in the pre-accession region in the implementation of entrepreneurial learning policies aiming at long-term strengthening of the economic competitiveness. Evaluations of the interviewees are shown in

**Graph 6.** Evaluation of the expressed interest of the pre-accession countries for cooperation



The offered answers are at the same time indicators of the economic competitiveness. Since the ranking of their importance is uniform, (from 3.88 to 4.63 according to Likert), it may be concluded that just the areas described by indicators contribute the most to long-term strengthening of the economic competitiveness.

**Graph 7.** Level of formal education that contributes mostly to entrepreneurial learning improvement



It may be concluded that a significant contribution to the entrepreneurial learning improvement would have the level of high school education, 4.88 according to the Likert's scale. Follows the secondary school education with a high evaluation of 4.63 and elementary school education with 3.63.

The result is directly correlated to one of the set objectives of the research that the entrepreneurship is considered as key competence in all forms of education. Pursuant to the results of research it is related to the introduction of entrepreneurship as key competence in curricula of formal elementary school, secondary school and high school education.

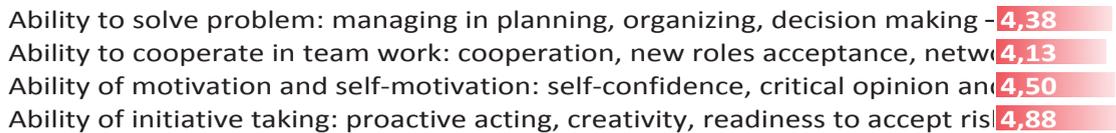
The third group of questions from the Questionnaire related to forms of entrepreneurial learning that contribute the most to the economic competitiveness strengthening.

**Graph 8.** Forms of education that contribute mostly to the strengthening of economic competitiveness



Finally, it may be concluded that according to the forms of entrepreneurial learning formal education (4.88 according to Likert) and informal education (4.25 according to Likert) contribute the most.

**Graph 9.** Contribution to the entrepreneurial learning development as per pedagogic character



To the entrepreneurial learning development, as per pedagogical character, strongly contribute entrepreneurial skills such as undertaking initiative, proactive operations, creativity, readiness to assume risks, and capability of new ideas implementation. These entrepreneurial skills have a strong impact, level 4.88 on the Likert's scale.

Characteristics of a person, such as motivation and self-motivation, self-confidence, critical opinion and independence, contribute to entrepreneurial learning development by the intensity of 4.50 according to Likert. Managerial skills in the domain of problems settlement, such as getting along with planning, organizing and decision-making, follow with the achieved level of 4.38. Not less important were evaluated (4.13 according to the Likert's scale) social skills including capability of cooperation in team work: cooperation, new roles accepting and networking.

Correlation of entrepreneurial learning and different phases of entrepreneurial enterprise life cycle was given by the answers to the last, 23<sup>rd</sup> question of the Questionnaire.

It is evaluated, according to the phases of the entrepreneurial enterprise life cycle that entrepreneurial learning contributes the most in case of entrepreneurial enterprise launching, evaluation 4.38 according to Likert. It is comparably necessary in the phases of strengthening, planning and growth. In the maturity phase the contribution of the entrepreneurial learning becomes weaker. Its ranking is shown in the Graph 10.

**Graph 10.** Phases of entrepreneurial ventures' life that contribute mostly to entrepreneurial learning development



If the results achieved by this research are compared with the results of researches of Gorman, Hanlon and King (1997), their congruousness is visible. The forms of formal education contribute the most to the development of companies in the phase before the business enterprise launching. Informal forms of education contribute to entrepreneurial competitiveness in considerable measure in the phase of planning and business enterprise growth. In the maturity phase education needs are reduced.

#### 4. Conclusion

Statistical indicators were used while formulating research synthesis and defining future common cooperation in the Pan-European Network, on the basis of field research. In-depth interviews, with all the national coordinators of the EU Charter for Small Enterprises, from all eight countries of the pre-accession region, were used as a supplement to the Questionnaire. Four most important objectives, relevant for the entrepreneurial learning improvement, aiming at long-term economic competitiveness strengthening, were singled out.

- 1) Entrepreneurial learning can be improved by creating a central point of cooperation as an independent institution with headquarters in one of the countries of the Pan-European Network.
- 2) Interaction of national expert teams for entrepreneurial learning development may be efficiently realized on a joint web site enabling permanent dialogue among the members of the expert group for the purpose of knowledge and experience exchange.
- 3) Different forms of formal and informal entrepreneurial education contribute mostly to the strengthening of economic competitiveness.
- 4) Entrepreneurship, as a key competence in creativity development, should be included in curricula at all levels of formal education: from elementary schools to higher institutions.

One of the objectives of the research was to improve creative knowledge that may be directly applied in developing countries. The main results of the research was identification of the interest and needs among experts, to create a unique centre for the exchange of the latest knowledge and notions in the area of entrepreneurial learning. The research has given theoretical basis for implementation, application and development of the central point of cooperation, as the independent institution with headquarters in one of the countries of the Pan-European Network. It has also provided necessary theoretical grounds and possibilities for future scientific research and scientific prognosis of future entrepreneurial learning development, at least in SEE countries.

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