Interview

Startup ecosystem and “green” entrepreneurship on the Island Crete

Sarina Thiele, Head of the Department of Education, German-Hellenic Chamber of Industry and Commerce,
Michalis Katharakis, Head, Technical Institute of Heraklion Chamber & The Team of the startup Crete Hinterland

During the last few years, the German-Hellenic Chamber of Industry and Commerce is closely co-operating with the Technical Institute of Heraklion Chamber in the fields of vocational education and training, as well as in the implementation of projects about the protection of environment and energy saving. The Heraklion Chamber and the Technical Institute of Heraklion Chamber, which are very active institutions and implement important projects, are two essential partners of the German-Hellenic Chamber for projects on Crete. Also in the project GreenTecLab these two organisations are the important contact points for the implementation of the project. The German-Hellenic Chamber and FIAP are closely collaborating with the two organizations.

Technical Institute of Heraklion Chamber (TIHC):

- 20,000 business members from all sectors of the local economy
- 60.000 trainee-hours per year
- 120 different educational programs
- 18 highly educated personnel (Ph.D., MSc., MBA)
- 500 contractors teaching staff
- 10 fully equipped 25-seat training rooms
- 68 years of experience in VET
- 6 Certifications in computer skills, Languages, Welding, Transportation, food handling, work safety
- EVS Certified Member
- Experienced provider in soft skills training and development

Heraklion Chamber (www.ebeh.gr) is one of the largest Chambers of commerce in Greece (one of top five), accounting for more than 20,000 members from all sectors of the local economy. It is an autonomous, non-for-profit institution, established in 1950 as a daughter company of Heraklion Chamber with a Decree from Greek National Economy of Ministry in 1950.

Technical Institute of Heraklion Chamber (TIHC) (www.katartisi.gr) may serve as an excellent partner on dissemination activities in EU projects, including congress or conference organization on the island of Crete, dynamic website development. It can also serve as a partner on Vocational Education and Training delivery in a variety of topics ranging from soft skills development to train the trainers adult learning. As TIHC Works in close collaboration with Heraklion Chamber it also may serve as the ideal partner on business motivation and development in a variety of topics like tourism, food, entrepreneurial skill development and small business cluster development. THIC operates in a national level in the sectors of: Informatics, Tourism & Services, Economy & Business Administration, Transportation & Technical Professions, mechanics and electronics and its activity accounts for more than 60.000 trainee-hours per year in more than 120 different educational programs. TIHC employs 18 highly educated personnel (Ph.D., MSc., MBA) while it is partnering with over 500 contracting teaching staff. TIHC owns 10 recently renovated fully equipped (Wi-fi, overhead projectors, distant learning systems, sound proof) 25-seat training rooms, including 70 computers for trainees and fully equipped metal welding lab, food and beverage lab and electronics lab.

TIHC is implements innovative adult-learning fully participative training models and is certified on computer skills, metal welding, English speaking, transportation, and food handling. Several actions on adult consulting have been also delivered during the last three years that gave TIHC a vast experience on entrepreneurial needs and horizontal skills development. The Technical Institute of Heraklion Chamber works in close cooperation with the Technological Educational Institute of Crete, the University of Crete, The Science and Technology Park of Crete. TIHC has direct access via the Heraklion Chamber in a series of European Networks that supports SMEs with the most important being: The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), Insuleur-Network of the Insular Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the E.U., Arab-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce and Development. TIHC is an examination centre for the IELTS certification exams and an examination centre for the Open University of Cyprus.

Thiele:
Is there already an ecosystem of Startups in Crete? Which actions are implemented by the Technical Institute of Heraklion Chamber in the field of entrepreneurship?

Katharakis:
Entrepreneurship in Crete focuses on 2 main factors: agri-food and tourism. In recent years, it is noticed that young people are tending to make a good use of their skills and talent in order to run new business actions and initiatives. A common characteristic of these new initiatives is the existence of capabilities and knowledge, with which in a contemporary and competitive way, are aiming to be incorporated into the production as innovative and to make business procedures contemporary. Since 1950, the Technical Schools have been offering educational programmes to the local entrepreneurship, which enable the continuous update of knowledge and capabilities under the requirements of market and society. The support for the entrepreneurs as for the initiatives that they take on, requires competitive knowledge and advanced technical efficiency. The Technical Schools contribute to this direction with a lot of educational programmes every year for hundreds of students that trust them.

Thiele:
Which are the challenges that are faced by people from Crete who wish to establish a Startup?

Katharakis:
The decision of activation into the arena of entrepreneurship is indissolubly connected with the risk of danger. Especially when that business activity is taking place in the area of an island, challenges are even bigger considering isolation and the lack of access to central infrastructures, markets and delivery networks. The strengthening of interconnection between research activity and the market is a really important challenge in order to boost the importation of innovation into daily business activities and, this way, help differentiation and surplus value of products to be reinforced.

Thiele:
How does the Technical Institute of Heraklion Chamber support the ideas that distinguished ideas of GreenTecLab Crete 2021?

Katharakis:
The Technical Institute of Heraklion Chamber offers consulting to all the ideas that were presented during the GreenTecLab workshop of 2021. Moreover, they gave the opportunity of participation into free educational programmes to the distinguished participants of the contest and, at the same time, they offered networking between the participants and the network of co-operating businesses of the Technical Institute as well of those of the Heraklion Chamber.

Thiele:
What is the importance of green entrepreneurship in the Cretan eco-system?

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Katharakis:
All economies in our modern world are confronted with the challenges of climate change. In Europe, the European Green Deal has set ambitious targets for an emission-free Europe. The local economies have to adapt to these goals. For Crete, this means that green innovations are needed in the main economic sectors of the island, i.e. agri-food and tourism, in order to enable the Cretan economy to contribute to the European climate goals. It is precisely these green innovations that are needed in local economies that GreenTecLab is trying to initiate.

Thiele:
In 2021 the Project GreenTecLab organized digital Bootcamp trainings and Pitches on Crete. You are one of the teams that participated at the Bootcamp trainings and made a Pitch at the 24.06.2021 in Heraklion Crete. Which are the basic factors of your business idea and was GreenTecLab able to contribute in the implementation your idea?

Crete Hinterland:
In spring 2021, we created a team inside the Evening Vocational High School of Platanias, with an ambition of promoting the hinterland of the Municipality of Platanias. The motivating force for its creation is the love that we have for our land, the land in which we were born, we grew up and live. We want our young people to be proud of their land, to be able to find a job and to stay in their villages. To be educated properly and according to the latest standards in every field and to make their money by cultivating the land of their ancestors, showing respect to the environment and to the island. We want the guests of our land to take back home our experiences that are full of colours, scents, music, tastes, pictures and sound when they'll be leaving. To take back home a piece of the authentic Crete.

Thus, an idea for a social cooperative enterprise with the name Crete Hinterland – Endochora came to life. By being people with no previous experience in enterprises, we didn't know how our idea could be implemented. Then, we were informed about the bootcamp trainings and Pitches in Heraklion, Crete, in the framework of the GreenTecLab Crete 2021 project for which we applied. During the bootcamp trainings about green entrepreneurship, we learnt the basic steps of how it is possible to transform a simple idea to a business proposal and after that, a business product. Thanks to the tools which we were taught, our idea had a business plan and canvas, terminologies that were unknown to us until then. After the completion of the workshops and after our top 5 finish in the contest, the team of GreenTecLab did not stop showing its support to our ideas and to our team. Mr. Manousakis, Mrs. Silke and our Sarina were vulnerable partners throughout this experience!

In Crete Hinterland you are going to find trips in nature, visits to wineries, cheese-making businesses, olive yards, canyon crossing, easy climbs at the footpaths of the White Mountains (Lefka Ori), visits in authentic villages with stops at points of interest, acquaintance with local traditional professions, nights of food tasting, participation in workshops of self-produced products and education seminars. Our goal is, through the activities, to be able to create an efficient guesthouse for young people in the heart of the Regional Unit of Chania, by making good use of abandoned buildings of our municipality.

One year after the completion of seminars, Crete Hinterland – Endochora was an idea that turned into reality and at the moment it has status, headquarters, a business plan, a business proposal and a business product, and it is ready to begin its trip to the magical world of entrepreneurship.

Crete Hinterland Team:
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