Alliances for Innovation: the blueprint-project CYANOTYPES

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What kind of project is Alliances for Innovation-project CYANOTYPES?

The CYANOTYPES-project is what's called a Blueprint project. And a blueprint is trying to identify which skills are needed for a particular sector. The commission has funded a number of blueprint-projects for a number of different sectors over the years, but this is the first time that the cultural creative industry has been formally recognized as an industrial sector. So this is something that is very good for us.

The blueprint is one part of the Alliances for Innovation, the other part is the Pacts for Skills. That's the largescale partnerships. In case of the cultural creative industry, there is a group in Europe called the Creative Pact of Skills (CP4S). We work very closely together with them, we have some members in common. So taken together, the CP4S and the CYANOTYPES blueprint-project, they become the Alliances for Innovation under Erasmus+.

What do you hope to achieve with CYANOTYPES?

We have quite an ambitious set of goals for CYANOTYPES. We have only just started, and this will be a four year-project. The format and structure of a blueprint-project is largely dictated by Erasmus+ itself. So a great deal of thought and energy has gone into iterating and revising that structure over the years.

The first thing to emphasize is: this is not a research project. There is research involved but this is action, this is implementation. Let's look at the tasks divided over four years.

- **Year 1:** we are researching our stakeholders. We work out what people want, what people need and what the future skills are that our sector is looking for. Our sector is a very diverse and fragmented, consisting of something like fourteen different sectors. So this step is quite a large task, but it will help us prepare for the second year.
- **Year 2:** we start thinking about building new curricula. And that means co-creating new curricula with lots of different types of stakeholders. This is not a common approach. Universities and other institutions tend to create their own curricula. We have to develop modules or curricula which are co-created by universities, vocational institutions, training institutions and industry. So we have to bring them together, having established what the urgent needs and future skills needs are. What can we upskill, what can we reskill into modular packages? These are critical questions, because we are also tasked with introducing microlearning. This means learning through modular microcredentials. Again, it's a new concept, it's not for everybody. In some sectors it's more widely used than others so that's another level of innovation. And alongside that we have to think: how do we deliver this? So microlearning is a very good way for packaging and making available these skillsets and new competences.

- **Year 3:** then comes a period of eighteen months where we want to pilot this work, in terms of content and the delivery framework. We have something like 25 pilots over eighteen months. So again, that's a lot of work still to come.
- **Year 4:** the last year of the project, or really the last six months, we are developing a skills strategy for the cultural creative industry. When we get to the end of the project, we want to make sure this is sustainable. The sustainability question is built into our approach, so that it doesn't end when the funding stops. We have about 20 partners in this project and we will validate the results with all these partners. We want this to be something that people can use, wherever they are. In essence we want to say: here is the content, here is the framework and here is a way to make your own content. This ultimately can become an instrument that can be used by a region, by an area, by a sector, to tackle the bigger questions on innovation. So we're hoping this is something that can be widely used.

How does this initiative fit into the internationalisation policy of HKU?

HKU has a well-developed approach to internationalisation. We have a long history of working within cooperative European funded initiatives, policy making and also research and innovation projects. One of the reasons we put ourselves forward as a coordinator – not everybody wants that position – is because it allows us to align our institutional strategy with the broader European strategy. We have a focus on innovating education. In this area we have a very strong team at HKU who work on lifelong learning. And this is an area that I think is only going to grow and grow over the coming decade.

We recognize that the kind of urgent skills that are becoming necessary, not just for students or alumni, but also for people who work in the field and elsewhere, are skillsets that are not always on the curriculum. And I think universities such as ours are in a good position to help with these issues, but of course in collaboration with other institutions.

How does Erasmus+ contribute?

Erasmus+ is mostly known for their mobility grants. But of course Erasmus+ also initiates collaberation between institutions. It allows institutions such as ours to participate on a particular topic or particular theme. And to catch up and get to know other people and to align with institutions across Europe.

The blueprint project in particular, I think adds an extra dimension to this type of collaboration. Because it allows us to not simply produce reports or recommendations, but to implement these ideas.

My suggestion would be to look closely to the Erasmus+ programme and to identify where you are interested in. Is there structural support available from Erasmus+ to help you achieve your institutional or organisational goals?

What should future applicants know about participating in Erasmus+?

Putting a successful proposal together is never easy. Anybody who has ever been involved in writing a proposal knows this. In general, just because you put in a proposal, that doesn't mean you will get funded. So your proposal has to be highly relevant, firstly. And perhaps, more than ever, it's very important to pay attention to your consortium partners. Building up the right consortium takes a lot longer than before. It is not hard to find partners, but it is a challenge to find a good balance in partners. What I would urge people to do is give yourself plenty of time to look around and cast a net widely. You want to have a good geographical distribution and need to combine partners from

different parts of Europe, because this is the kind of diversity that is needed. The output of the project should be replicable in every part of Europe.

Also, you cannot underestimate the amount of time you need to write a proposal. If you haven't started, start now. Start thinking about it and don't be shy. At first you might get intimidated when you look at all the forms and you might even think: it isn't possible to fit these words into this textbox. But you'll find a way in the end. I wouldn't sweat the small stuff. It's really not that difficult, it's really quite straightforward and there are very good support channels available to help you with your application.

If you can come up with something that is a good idea and it works with other people that you want to work with, than go for it. And you might not get it the first time, you might not get it the second time, but you will get there in the end!

For CYANOTYPES: the process of thinking about it to submitting the proposals was about nine months. But that includes thinking about the idea and putting together a consortium. The actual writing of the proposal was spread out over a couple of months.

Any other tips?

Make sure that you're undertaking work that is aligned with your institutional goals. Because the work can continue if you've got the alignment right.

Pay attention to the sustainability of your project, from the beginning, not only at the end. How can we make sure that this work continues when the initial funding ends? Because you work with other people, you will almost automatically generate new ideas for future work. Make sure you capture these.

And lastly, there is a reluctance to coordinate these projects. The perception is that it is a lot of work. And that might be true, but it is also one of the most rewarding things you will ever do. So if you are new to Erasmus+, jump in as a partner. Once you have been a partner to a few Erasmus+ projects, then think about coordinating a project.