

Publishable summary

ExpaMeco (FIWARE Accelerator EuropeanPioneers)

Description of project context and objectives

The main objective of EuropeanPioneers, an acceleration programme led by the Berlin-based company builder European Innovation Hub (Germany) and its four partners Fraunhofer IAIS (Germany, ThoughtBox (Ireland), Weblify (Poland) and F-Secure (Finland), is to support the Future Internet Public Private Partnership Programme (FI-PPP) by supporting 25 European start-ups in 4 different business areas in the domain of social connected TV, smart city services, e-learning and pervasive games. This will be achieved through promoting and testing the FIWARE platform in real environments where entrepreneurs are encouraged to use the technology's enablers in their product and test it across prospective users. The start-ups or SMEs receive guidance and mentorship from expert individuals in the digital business or relevant fields. This helps the entrepreneurs strengthen their innovative processes and develop strong business models that will contribute and fortify the growing digital ecosystem in Europe.

In order to achieve the aforementioned goals, EuropeanPioneers addresses specific objectives to harbor a successful FI-PPP ecosystem. To do so EuropeanPioneers follows a four-step-approach with the following targets:

Firstly, strengthen the European web entrepreneur and SME ecosystem in media, education and gaming markets. Moreover, seek the need to shape the competitive position, grow sustainable competitive advantages and support economic growth of SME's. Focus is on SME's that are closely related to vibrant ecosystems and encourage their capability to constantly adapt to market changes through proactive innovation. To achieve this, EuropeanPioneers actively support teams in different business areas. This creates a knowledge-culture throughout the EuropeanPioneers accelerator, which has an impact on the overall European Internet ecosystem.

EuropeanPioneers ensured the quality of output by providing SMEs with business skills in a) identifying (so called) Minimum Viable Products (MVPs), b) constantly iterating business models, and c) running lean start-ups, through coaching activities. This is an important aspect in giving SMEs the tools and resources that will help them maintain future quality assurance, a dimension vital for the future regional entrepreneurial ecosystem. This was achieved through delivering training and mentoring sessions that are tailored for each start-ups' technical, financial and growth needs. Experienced members of EuropeanPioneers provided the training and mentoring sessions. But crucial parts are external mentors whose experiences and knowledge is valuable and indispensable.

Secondly, EuropeanPioneers identifies 25 SMEs in total from a wide range of different European countries through the execution of two European-wide, fully transparent Open Calls. The European Pioneers programme worked on developing an efficient process for publishing the open calls and selecting the startups/SMEs with the most potential. Due to its Europe-wide presence and network and carefully carried-out marketing and PR activities, EuropeanPioneers was able to attract a large and qualified pool of applicants for the first and especially the second open call. By selecting a total number of 25 businesses from across Europe, the variety of product and business modeling approaches as well as markets was supported. In addition, EuropeanPioneers made sure to have a constant exchange of executing knowledge and market insights in between the beneficiaries and countries. This already led to cross-border uptake of FI-PPP technologies and platforms.

Thirdly, leverage different specific and generic FIWARE enablers in order to build innovative, scalable products for four different media-related market domains. By doing so, the project set out to build on top of cross-border industries (Social connected TV, Smart city services, Pervasive games as well as E-Learning). In addition, the project focuses on fast deployment, innovation, prototyping and rapid user testing in real markets and situations. The EuropeanPioneers programme supported the implementation of FIWARE enablers by extensive training and workshop sessions, carried out by members of the consortium as well as external mentors. Moreover, the product development and testing included extensive evaluations and eventually implementations of different enablers. These activities were constantly encouraged and accompanied by the consortium members. The training activities carried out during the Welcome and Training Days focused on supporting the SMEs in applying Future Internet technologies for their Minimum Viable Products. The teams were enabled to test and evaluate Generic and Specific Enablers, to integrate Enablers into existing software products and therefore foster the evaluation and take-up of FI-PPP technologies.

And fourthly, ensure large scale testing of the teams' products, developed by testing the Minimum Viable Products based on FI-PPP technology in order to succeed in competitive markets. Web entrepreneurs and SMEs gather feedback on product ideas and prototypes rapidly. Building or improving Minimum Viable Products for all businesses is one major first step carried out during the acceleration program. Constantly iterating those MVPs or beta product versions based on user feedback and executing various iterations was the basis for the achieved success of those businesses. In accordance with the business models chosen by the accelerated SMEs (e.g. some of the businesses have a business to business focus while others are clearly business to consumer oriented) the products were assessed in appropriate user tests. The tests were operated online as well as in offline sessions, when applicable. The broad experience of etventure, the mother company of the coordinating entity European Innovation Hub, with user testing, to identify pain points and customer needs, shared their methods with the SMEs and Web entrepreneurs to help them achieve their goals. The approach that was followed for user testing activities was a very individual one that fit the businesses models, the company stage, the geographic position of the teams as well as their testing needs. For some teams testing meant a rather technical approaching by doing quality tests for the developed software. For other teams, user testing meant to test the developed product with prospective clients. For other teams, user testing meant to attract as many users for the newly developed app and to use them as beta testers.

Description of the work performed and main results

Acceleration Phase Batch 1

The support and coaching of the startups has been carried out in three ways: (1) online/remote, (2) on sight training days, (3) selective visits. This ensured that even though the program is an 8 months-program, that doesn't require the teams to relocate to Berlin, a close relationship was still possible to be maintained.

The online coaching was done through calls, Skype and mail contact. This is a bit more difficult than face-to-face, but high quality could be guaranteed by task agreements that were very detailed in order to rule out misunderstandings. The topics of those coaching sessions range from match-making with investors, marketing and sales-topics as well as team building questions.

The Training Days, which were carried out every 7-8 weeks (December 2014, February 2015 and May 2015) in Berlin in the premises of etventure, were the most crucial part in order to have experts

supporting the teams – and this was not only on the business but also on the tech side (FIWARE). For the first open call, those sessions were always planned every 2 months in Berlin, where all teams were able to meet local mentors and investors. At the same time, all entrepreneurs were provided with in-depth lectures about certain topics, such as online marketing, metrics for Startups, and many more. Further, the clear coaching has been done through all members of the consortium while planning next milestones and checking on their successful completion. The first programme came to an end on July 9th with the first Demo Day in Berlin with around 300 guests.

Visits had been done in order to show the startups also support by joining their office for a day or two. That way, we (as the consortium) were able to see with our own eyes what the team is working on. Traveling that intensively was important even though it's been time consuming. The startups appreciated the direct one-to-one support in their domestic ecosystem. Often, these visits turned into a strong relationship as the personal coaching is always better and allows the team of EuropeanPioneers to closely coach the entrepreneurs.

Second Open Call

After having published the second open call in the end of March 2015, the consortium did some effort to promote the second open call using several different channels and this way managed to collect a total of 661 startup applications from 38 countries, with the majority from European countries and a few applications from overseas. The top five origin countries for applications have been Germany (143), Poland (97), Israel (82), Spain (64) and Ireland (42). The high numbers of applicants from Germany and Poland can be explained by three of the consortium parties being located there and, hence, having strong ties to the respective startup and tech scene. The rise of applications from Israel in comparison to the first call was caused by the growing awareness and network of EuropeanPioneers in general and in Israel in particular.

The field of applicants also covered various levels of maturity. With similar numbers of applications from startups with a beta version (169), idea (140), prototype (130), a full market launch (122) or a MVP (132), the EuropeanPioneers programme was able to evoke interest among a diverse group of startups.

Within the framework of the defined business areas eligible for the second call, the majority of applicants fell into the category of smart city services (364). The other were represented as following: e-learning (195), pervasive gaming (114), social connected TV (59).

At the same time, FIWARE was promoted at all times through the media activities. This included not only online promotion but also attending conferences and events. The number of applications received in the first open call was 265 and was more than doubled in the second open call.

The evaluation of all applications was done through a number of industry experts in order to justify all applications in a similar manner. But since a higher number of applications were to be expected, more evaluators were approached for the second open call so that each application could be screened at least 3 times upfront.

Result of Open Call

Finally, the best 39 startups were invited to the assessment days on July 20th and 21st happening in Berlin with an independent jury. This jury selected 13 teams for the final batch – having a final number of three teams from Israel, four teams from Germany, four teams from the UK, one team from Spain and one team from Denmark.

	Team	Batch	Industry/Business Area	Location
#1	Lingua.ly	2	Social & Learning	Israel
#2	Tracktics	2	Social & Learning	Germany
#3	Pico.buzz	2	Media & Content	Israel
#4	DooWapp	2	Media & Content	UK
#5	Audiotube	2	Media & Content	UK
#6	Splash	2	Media & Content	Germany
#7	CHOPCHOP	2	Media & Content	Germany
#8	Fitfully	2	Media & Content	Israel
#9	INFARM	2	Smart City Services	Germany
#10	Watly	2	Smart City Services	Spain
#11	Rezguru	2	Smart City Services	Denmark
#12	ChangeAlert/ Dignisen	2	Smart City Services	UK
#13	BeaconInside	2	Smart City Services	Germany

Acceleration Phase Batch 2

After the initial Welcome Days for the second batch in Berlin in August 2015, the Training Days, which took place in Tel Aviv, London and Berlin, were the most crucial part in order to have experts helping the teams. In April the Demo Day happening on April 14th, 2016 was prepared during pitch trainings.

Mentoring has been done mainly through experts of certain fields that are part of the network of the consortium partners. The number of mentors joining the program and thus, increasing the wide network for the startups, was growing constantly over time.

Mentors are coming from various ecosystems, but mainly located in Berlin, London, Tel Aviv and the cities where the consortium partners are located (Poland, Ireland, Finland). Mentoring sessions at EuropeanPioneers were always longer than in any other program. The reason for that is the depth that a conversation could possibly go when allowing the participants to build a real connection.

Mentoring at the Training Days happening in early December 2015 was done in two different ways: (a) training sessions with all team members, (b) simultaneously happening individual mentoring sessions with one mentor and one team. The following agenda of the Training Days in London shows the different formats that were chosen to support the teams - individually and in common sessions on topics such as "Measuring success - metrics for startups" or "How to be a great startup CEO". The individual mentoring sessions were done by more than 30 different experts from the London ecosystem. Further to that, the sessions were held at the WAYRA accelerator, the inspiring Tileyard Music Studios as well as the well-known Digital Catapult Centre.

The Training Days in Berlin took place at the etventure offices - mother company of the European Innovation Hub. The format was more or less the same - but with completely different trainers and mentors.

To finish off the second batch of the EuropeanPioneers programme, the Demo Day in Berlin presented the team's success and progress to mentors, investors and influencers (April 2016).

Final results and their impact and use

EuropeanPioneers has supported 25 different teams from ten countries and four different business sectors. The investments have been around 200.000 Euros on average – 4,54 Mio. € in total. This investment was tied towards carefully developed milestones based on the 8 months programme. Payout is in 4 different tranches. Those teams were undergoing personal remote mentoring sessions with EuropeanPioneers on a weekly basis. The online sessions allow start-ups to make the best out of EuropeanPioneers network with FIWARE experts, investors, business experts and the press. This gave them the direction that they need and boosted their businesses because of the increasing traction their businesses are experiencing. Furthermore, EuropeanPioneers is organized several very intense training weeks in Berlin, London and Tel Aviv. All teams were physically present in order to meet mentors of the program, deliver and present set milestones for the funding payout, and receive valuable FIWARE deployment support from the consortium partner Fraunhofer IAIS. Further, investors were invited in order strengthen the important connections for potential follow up funding.

Starting with the second Open call starting March 30th, 2015, EuropeanPioneers was able to significantly increase their reach and established itself as an important player in the European startup ecosystem. In the end of the acceleration, the programme met all milestones initially set in the proposal. 25 young startups benefited from the technologies offered from the FIWARE platform, in order to make their products better. Also, EuropeanPioneers focuses on supporting the newly born FIWARE use case teams in finding the next investment for their businesses in order to grow them further after the program. This was not only done by bringing “friendly” investors to the mentoring weeks, but also by organizing the final demo days for batch 1 and batch 2 in Berlin, where all teams pitched their businesses and their progress in programme to around 300 people, consisting of investors, influencers and friends of EuropeanPioneers. Representatives of the European Commission also attended these events as keynote speakers for sharing the power of FIWARE with the audience.

EuropeanPioneers helped shaping a streamlined European Internet business, in order to maximize exploitation at a global scale. Innovative business ideas have been supported throughout their whole early-stage life cycle. From shaping of the business idea, through a prototypical implementation carried out on top of an existing implementation infrastructure, towards a go-to-market support enabled by bringing together innovative business ideas with venture capitalists, EuropeanPioneers significantly reduced the entry barrier to the FI-PPP ecosystem. Not only because of the funding that was carefully put into the teams, but also the technological support that was offered. This cleared the way for individual exploitation evolving from the SME projects, driven autonomously by the economic interests of successful graduates. Further, EuropeanPioneers had and still has an enormous impact on the European promotion and generation of a brand for FIWARE technologies. The evolved use cases are great examples for other businesses built on FIWARE technologies. Those support the further development of the open source FIWARE ecosystem as well as the adoption of the technologies by further customers in many more countries, since the success stories have been shared widely and will continue to attract more SMEs to use FIWARE.

More information:

<http://europeanpioneers.eu/en/>