

## Diving into the world of innovation in cross-border collaboration

How do Finnish and Swedish students approach global problems through collaboration? That's the question we set ourselves to find an answer to during the NY Bothnian Arc UF -project. The purpose of the project has been to contribute to increased cooperation within entrepreneurship education in the north of Sweden and Finland. The project has also contributed to increasing awareness of opportunities for young people to work and start companies across borders and to knowledge exchange and cooperation between teachers who work with entrepreneurship education. The project was run together by Ung Företagsamhet Norrbotten and City of Oulu from August 2018 until March 2022. Project was funded by Interreg Nord, Region Norrbotten and Regional Council of Lapland.

One of the project's key activities was to organize innovation camps for upper secondary school students. The objective of the camps was to introduce the concept of innovation to students, but also offer them a platform to expand their networks as well as get insight on their mindsets towards the future.



***Photo description: Project's physical innovation camp brought students and teachers together to innovate around the Agenda2030 in Luleå.***

We have dived into the world of innovation four times during the project. One of the innovation camps was held as a physical event in Luleå and other three were organized as digital events. All camps had current and future-oriented themes with a core focus on entrepreneurship and sustainability. UN's sustainable development goals, future of food, global problems with local solutions and future of travel. Each innovation camp had an overarching theme. To make the process a bit easier for the students, we condensed the theme down into a few concrete challenges for the students to choose from. Students' task for the camp was to come up with a solution to the proposed challenge and pitch it to an expert panel.

Cross-border collaboration is one of the key themes for the entire project, and it was clearly visible in the innovation camps since students worked in mixed groups. An unknown group of people, a foreign language, and a new topic brought both exciting experiences as well as steps outside the comfort zone for the participants. Bringing like-minded and entrepreneurial students together, showed us that young people have great ideas and lot of capacity to come up with sustainable and relevant solutions.



**Photo description: Innovation camps offered an opportunity for teachers to learn more and expand their professional networks.**

Based on our experience during the project, here's our six tips for organizing an innovation event for students.

1. **Choose a current topic**, which also young people have ideas about. Don't overwhelm them, but at the same time, don't underestimate their capabilities.
2. **Set clear goals and structure for the event.** When the event has a clear structure, guidelines, and goals, you don't have to run around explaining the basics of the event. Instead, you can focus on supporting the students through the process, not just instructing them in what to do next.
3. **Keep it simple.** Remember that the topic, people, and language can be already new things for the students. Keeping things simple and giving the students the room for collaboration, is a way to success.
4. **Use tools that help collaboration.** Whether the event is digital or physical, choose tools that enhance collaboration. You might even create a wow effect for them. Our project used for example Miro and Zoom to create a co-creative digital setting.
5. **Motivate them with feedback and awards.** The innovation process takes people outside their comfort zone. Reward them with positive feedback. You can also structure the event to be a competition.
6. **Leave enough room for casual interaction.** Not everything has to be on topic and progressing the project. Sometimes it's totally okay to have time for casual chats. In the end of the day, it's about meeting new people and learning from them.

Working with innovations and entrepreneurship is a great theme for cross-border collaboration. The current challenges and opportunities offer the foundation to build an interesting event for students. Now with various and well-developed digital tools, we can collaborate even without traveling.