



ON BOARD

**Never too young to start:
Instilling soft skills, values & company
cooperation for education innovation**

How young is too young to begin to learn about entrepreneurship? That's the question Tallinn responds to in the context of its involvement in the transnational network-based project called URBACT III "ON BOARD Connecting Cities through education", which involves exchanging Good Practices, success stories and how to deal with challenges at the local level for developing educational innovation. Within the project, which links 6 European cities, Tallinn stands out in its approach for increasing the entrepreneurship of its students, as well as their life skills based on soft values. We think you will be surprised not only by *how* we are doing it in ON BOARD, but by *what age group do we start working* with students.

Tallinn's starting point

The core of Tallinn's educational life centres around a happy student who is aware of her/his strengths, wishes and opportunities. Everybody probably agrees with such a premise. **"Productive learning starts with happy people..."** said Tallinn Deputy Mayor Vadim Belobrovstsev, describing the development directions of education, **"...and with competent and committed educational institution leaders, teachers, support specialists as well as family and educational policy makers. A functioning cooperation network and an inspiring learning environment are the basis for all this."**



Tallinn Deputy Mayor Vadim Belobrovtssev

Because one does not always have to reinvent the wheel to reach one's goals and it is okay to look for inspiration abroad, taking in the experience of partner cities, the Tallinn Education Department enthusiastically signed up to participate in ON BOARD. With the project aiming to a) establish an Educational Innovation Network (EIN) for the cities involved; b) develop cooperation between the local educational system and community; and, c) integrate education in other areas of life, Tallinn set its sights on making kindergarten and school studies more lifelike while introducing entrepreneurship and soft skills to youngsters and teens.



Five other European cities participate: Viladecans in Spain, Nantes in France, Halmstad in Sweden, Albergaria in Portugal and Poznan in Poland. Viladecans is the leader, which means that in addition to the dynamic exchanges of positive experiences during the project and Team Meetings (TMs), when it comes to educational innovation, all ON BOARD cities get to build upon the Good Practice developed by Viladecans, a mid-size city of 66,000 inhabitants. The following gives an overview of what Tallinn has achieved so far.

Education is cooperation

As mentioned above, by participating in the ON BOARD project, Tallinn aims to learn from Viladecans EIN and adapt its Good Practice to its own local needs. Our transnational cooperation network also builds on a variety of projects from all partner cities to promote innovation and creativity, including the development of students' entrepreneurship and cooperation between educational institutions, city agencies, companies, families and other community members.

Tallinn's priorities are significantly similar to the main directions of Viladecans EIN, primarily in the fields of lifelong learning and digital education. Like Viladecans, Tallinn prizes the development of entrepreneurship. Liisi Haas, expert member of the project team, and Field project manager of the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, puts it this way on the benefits of an entrepreneurial attitude in all areas of life – one that is actively being developed and promoted in Estonia: *"Society lasts and evolves thanks to entrepreneurial people, both in business and social undertakings,"* she says. *"Those who work creatively and resourcefully, use their own ideas and look for solutions to problems succeed in the rapidly changing world."*

Haas also spotlights the co-responsibilities that accompany the establishment of a value-based learning environment. *"Entrepreneurship is an approach and attitude that can be developed in everyone, the formation of which starts at birth,"* Haas goes on, with certainty based on experience: *"It is therefore important that valuing and forming entrepreneurship is focused on from early on in a person's life. For this, we must cooperate as a community so that stakeholders such as parents and businesses can support schools in reaching common educational aims."*



One of the work seminars of stakeholders in Tallinn Kopli Vocational School

What are we learning from other ON BOARD cities?

Taking Viladecans' EIN approach for tackling several educational innovation topics such as promoting innovation and creativity through digital learning projects, and developing the entrepreneurship of students in cooperation with businesses and parents, etc., our project team conducted information gathering and analysis about how to best fortify cooperation between education institutions and community. The aim was to establish a cooperation network in Tallinn, implementing Viladecans' EIN in ways that were more suitable for us. Our network would thus provide educational institutions and community members the opportunity to work towards a common goal based on a clearer overview of the institutions and services operating in the area. Participation in the ON BOARD Team Meetings has since provided the opportunity to learn from one another and exchange experiences for pursuing exactly that aim.

Inclusion is the key

One of Tallinn's first ON BOARD activities was forming the URBACT Local Group (ULG). More than twenty educational institutions wanted to participate, with several institutions noting in their applications that participating in the project would provide an opportunity to learn from the best practice of others and gain experience for social involvement and cooperation. Personnel development via international cooperation was also emphasised as a positive expected impact.



First meeting of Tallinn ULG stakeholders

In the end, we invited the following to the ULG, to become the backbone to Tallinn's own EIN: Tallinn Mustamäe High School of Science, Karikakar kindergarten, Pelguranna kindergarten, Tallinn Art Gymnasium, Ehte Gymnasium of Arts, Kadaka kindergarten, Tallinna Õismäe Russian Lyceum and Kelmiküla kindergarten. Other partners involved include: Tallinn Education Department, Tallinn City Enterprise Department, Tallinn City Youth and Sports Department, youth centres, and the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

What was expected of the project?

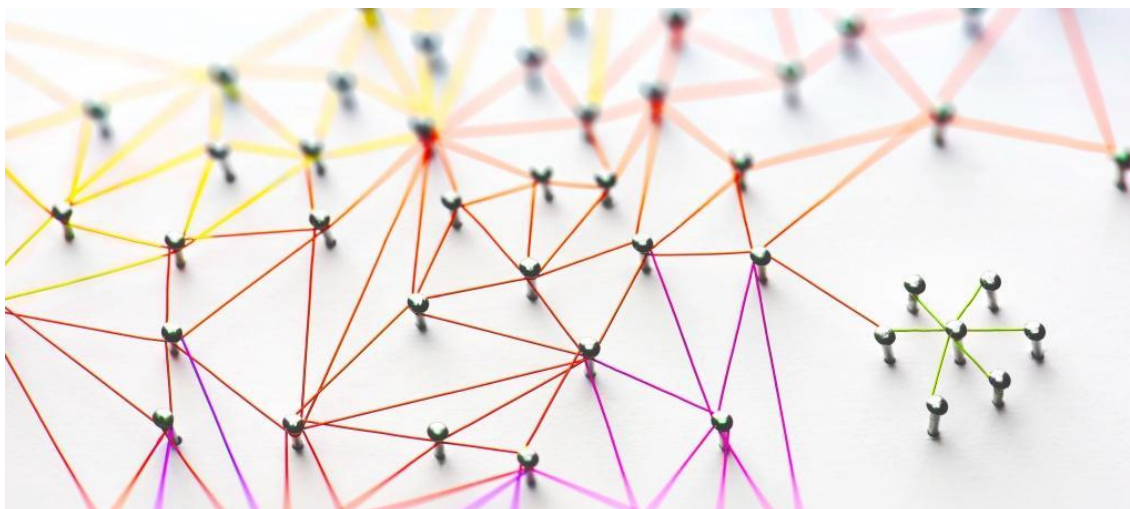
To start with, the ULG work group members and project participants mapped their needs and expectations from the project. Several institutions highlighted concerns about how to get companies to cooperate with schools – and even or kindergartens - on their own initiative.

“The common challenge for our partner cities,” says Liis Tamman from the Sports and Youth Department, *“is involving both parents and private sector organisations in designing education services, and specifically how to get their own early on, pro-active contributions.”*

The local stakeholders have decided that their main interest was to establish a Network that allows developing cooperation between educational institutions, the community and companies. It was agreed that the work group would start gathering regularly to discuss opportunities to increase the entrepreneurial awareness and competence of kids and youths. For this, the project members showed great expectations.

“I am expecting that studies at school will become more interesting and lifelike,” says Önnela Leedo-Küngas, Headteacher at Ehte Gymnasium of Arts, *“and ON BOARD helps show the way for this”* She goes on: *“We do not have to come up with ideas for everything all by ourselves. Now, we receive ideas from across Europe through our ON BOARD partners and we can implement and adapt these in our school accordingly.”*

Because of these early efforts, the schools and kindergartens began wanting to receive more information about developing the entrepreneurship of kids and young people. We answered this call, inviting experts from different fields to give interactive sessions at our meetings. For example, Katrin Kivisild from Innove and Liis Haas from the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry introduced the ULG to the initiatives and programmes that support entrepreneurship development in Estonia. Representatives from Eurobio Lab OÜ (Natura Siberica) and AS Tallinna Vesi came to speak and participate in a joint brainstorming session for identifying possible cooperation options between companies and educational institutions at all levels.



Tallinn's strategy for development visualised

How were the transfer experiences applied in Tallinn?

Several practical ideas and activities caught the attention of our Tallinn team from the international meetings and visits to other schools and companies thanks to our ON BOARD partners' inputs. For example, the project fair and short presentation formats, as Halmstad organised. Educational institutions that participated in Tallinn's own project fair shared their own great experiences, tips on a variety of educational events, and projects carried out with the community to promote the entrepreneurship of kids and young people. The rich variety of initiatives included developing board games for children, inventors' competitions between pupils, and trainings for school teachers to become a part of the nationwide educational programme "Enterprising School".

ON BOARDS's international partnership also offered us real examples of cooperation with companies, creative ways to manage project meetings and EIN network work groups, as well as other joint (and fun) activities for team building. Tallinn has brought home a wealth of takeaways from each city visit. More on our visits to other ON BOARD cities follows.

In February 2019, we attended our first ON BOARD Team Meeting in Viladecans, where we saw lots of interesting examples of educational innovations such as smart classrooms, the active involvement of parents in the planning of school life, and several kinds of e-solutions. This left us with great impressions and full of new ideas.



Head of Tallinn Board of Education Andres Pajula in Viladecans

Tallinn Education Department Head Andres Pajula noted the remarkable cooperation between schools and companies where the companies got the students' help in testing out their products. ***"This surely provides mutual benefit – the companies gain valuable feedback and the students useful experiences and knowledge"***. According to Pajula, such cooperation could be arranged in Tallinn, too.

In December 2019, in Tallinn, following up on the example of the city of Halmstad, Sweden, we organised a project fair where people could learn about the projects shared by the ON BOARD partnering cities and select those to be carried out in Tallinn's educational institutions. The teams adjusted the projects to their own regional and institutional needs and possibilities, which led to concrete ideas to build on. For example, the Northern Tallinn district educational institutions drew from Viladecans' "Emotions" project and decided to work on developing the emotional intelligence of kids.

In continuation, in Albergaria, at the next TM, once again we explored many useful and interesting experiences and projects.



Tallinn team at the international meeting in Albergaria

“From Albergaria, I take with me the notion that to begin cooperation, it is crucial to meet your partners face-to-face,” says Pelgulinna kindergarten headteacher Reelika Täht (right). “I got a great idea for our kindergarten from the project fair here. This project focuses on concentrating attention in kindergartens on the so-called soft values – friendship, family, caring, feelings, emotions. These values tend to be left aside these days because we focus primarily on using technology and smart devices in kindergartens. This project reminded us once more of the significance of soft values.”

Inspiration has also been home-grown. After one URBACT work group training in Tallinn, where the coordinator of the nationwide educational programme “Enterprising School” came to speak, our Ehte Gymnasium of Arts decided to join this programme, which led to our organising the first step - a basic programme training for the school employees and parents. With the “Enterprising School” programme, school management is finding new ways of integrating entrepreneurial studies in the system in order to raise the quality of education and thus enhance the outlook for young people’s success in life.

Inspired by this project, the Ehte Gymnasium of Arts also decided to reform its career education programme. The aim is that by September 2020, the Ehte Gymnasium of Arts will have a brand-new career education system that includes elective courses, mandatory work shadowing, the introduction of various professions in collaboration with parents, and cooperation with companies.

Plenty of visible developments can be seen elsewhere as well. For example, the student councils of district schools have started cooperating amongst themselves. Student councils typically only deal with topics concerning their own schools, but in this case, the project inspired the student councils to cooperate across boundaries. Student council representatives of Tallinna Ehte Gymnasium of Arts, Tallinna Mustamäe High School of Science and Tallinna Õismäe Russian Lyceum met in Autumn 2019 to get acquainted with each other and share Best Practices, to learn from one another and create something new together. As a result, they are leading way in organising a film festival of student productions with the URBACT project schools, scheduled for 2020. Hopefully, such cooperation will continue in the future.



A view on the Õismäe City District

Prompted by the ON BOARD project, the Northern Tallinn district schools, kindergartens and the youth centre also collaborated to organise a joint career week. Here, teachers spoke at their schools and kindergartens about career planning, professions and job positions. In the future, a festival week will take place at the Northern Tallinn youth centre, during which workshops will be held where young people can exchange information and discuss their career visions and the ways for making them come true.

Challenges

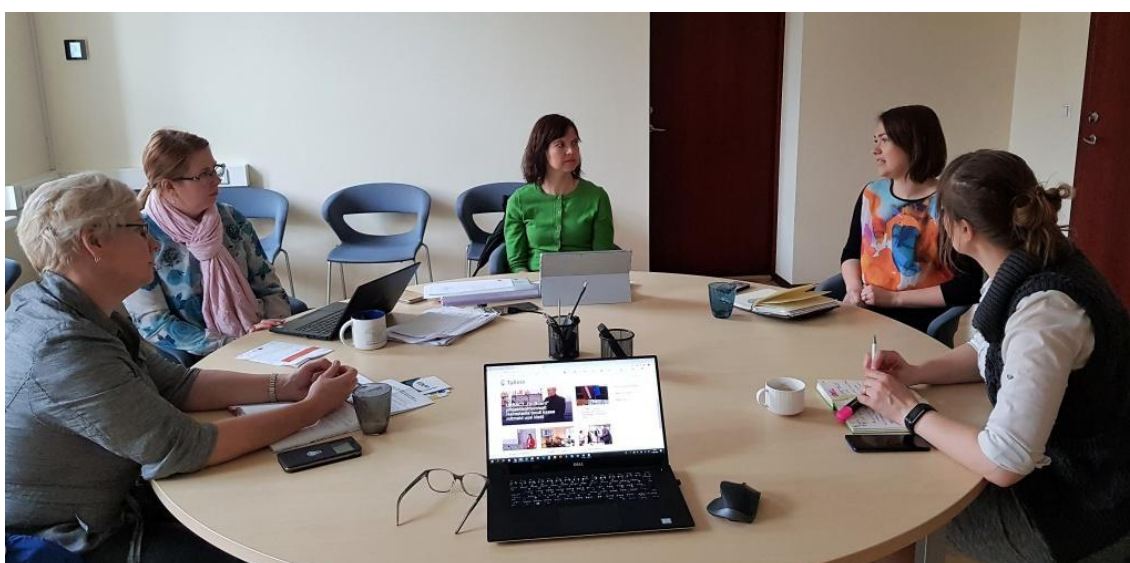
Thanks to the Viladecans Educational Innovation Network methodology, we have successfully launched our own cooperation network in Tallinn. The major challenge, now, is how to maintaining the network's sustainability and stability post-ON BOARD.

Our cooperation network, which is still a work-in-progress, knows that its greatest challenge is in organising communication within the network. On one hand, this is due to the people changing positions; and, on the other hand, it's due to different expectations and the fact that the network parties have not yet developed their own specific roles and responsibilities. More emphasis must be put on improving the efficiency and quality of communication. It is equally important that each person gets a clear, specific role assigned in the network, which will then help them understand the significance of their contributions.

The Viladecans Educational Innovation Network is highlighted as a model example in Europe and has served as the initiative for forming the network in Tallinn. We have adopted its methodology and approach – education is not only the school's concern but should be, and can be, organised by the community as a whole.

There is much to learn

International meetings have provided a wealth of new experiences and initiatives to think about. Participating in the URBACT ON BOARD project has allowed Tallinn to gather new ideas and acquire the experience of European cities in openness, including stakeholder involvement and cooperation development with the community. Positive experiences with activities already underway in Tallinn have been shared with our ON BOARD partners, too. Cooperation between city agencies has improved and education departments in different districts are thinking more along the same lines. Awareness of local and international initiatives and information channels has also increased.



One of the meetings of Tallinn's project workgroup

Indeed, the ON BOARD project has highlighted how to better involve parents and companies, and our cooperation network between educational institutions has been launched. Several ideas on cooperation with companies and how to involve parents in the learning process are also being implemented. The major success so far with the ongoing project has been, without a doubt, the learning about the education systems of other countries and about how best we can apply such acquired knowledge in Tallinn.