



Conference Report

UAS4EUROPE Croissant Event 2022

Entrepreneurship and skills through applied research

On Monday, 30 May 2022, UAS4EUROPE hosted its first post-pandemic live Croissant Event at the Mission of Switzerland to the EU in Brussels. Together with 50 participants from the research and innovation sector within and beyond Brussels, this edition of the Croissant Event presented the opportunity to link to the EU Knowledge Valorisation Week (29 March 2022 - 1 April 2022) on the role of applied sciences and fostering entrepreneurship and European innovation leadership with societal impact.

The current societal challenges and global crises underline the need for resilient and adaptive societal actors that are capable of finding solutions and ensuring a broad-based and inclusive implementation. UAS are uniquely placed within their regions to tackle such challenges through their specific mandate to support regional economic development by adapting their education and research activities to changing needs. UAS are thus key institutions in diffusing IP and match knowledge with societal needs. They do so by covering all four missions of higher education institutions (education, research, knowledge transfer, service to society) while nurturing the entrepreneurial mind-set of its students, researchers and industry partners.

Key takeaways

- **Material support** (e.g. office space) is a good starting point for young entrepreneurs to initiate their ideas.
- Obstacles for young entrepreneurs are the **difficulties to access information** of funding sources and the **need to take risk** to start something from scratch. Reaching out to peers is helpful to overcome such challenges.
- UAS combine the two pillars of teaching skills and combine their curricula with real-life labour market experience through **practice-based models**.
- Through project-based curricula and business acceleration services, UAS foster young entrepreneurs from the start. However, UAS often lack the right to accredit **PhD programmes**, which is crucial to pursue research.
- Europe can only be an innovation leader, if the full potential of its societies is addressed. For this, we need to overcome **gender biases**, starting from an early age on and re-design the image of entrepreneurial role models.



Welcome address by H.E. Ambassador Rita Adam, Head of the Mission of Switzerland to the EU

Following a networking breakfast with the panellists and conference participants, the Head of the Mission of Switzerland to the EU, H.E. Ambassador Rita Adam, officially opened the Croissant Event by stressing the **need for cooperation** among like-minded countries. This is especially true in the context of research and its role in addressing global challenges, such as supply chain disruptions and climate change. The Ambassador underlined the willingness of Switzerland to achieve the status of an associated country to Horizon Europe, the EU's framework programme for research and innovation.

In this context, UAS4EUROPE serves as an example of how our societies can be stronger together through connecting the strengths of our universities of applied sciences. Also in Switzerland, strong UAS act as the cornerstone of Swiss innovation leadership in Europe.

In light of the (upcoming) European Innovation Agenda, the Ambassador referred to UAS4EUROPE's [innovation action plan](#), in which a dedicated group of UAS leaders and entrepreneurs formulated twelve concrete recommendations to make a single market for European innovation a reality.

In conversation with young female entrepreneurs

With Kaisa Koskinen from Naturested and two co-founders of CAPSULE App, Nadia Wabra and Nanna Hejndorf, we welcomed three female leaders from Finland and Denmark who outlined the stories of their companies and the challenges they faced in starting their own business.

While Kaisa always wanted to become an entrepreneur and based her company, which offers educational services to nature as a starting point of sustainability, on this objective, Nadia and Nanna (together with their all-female team) had a precise idea, which pulled them into the start-up scene. Today, CAPSULE App, which will be launched in summer 2022, aims at helping everyone in creating their digital wardrobe with the goal to consume clothes in a responsible and sustainable manner.

While all of them studied at UAS, their experience was somewhat different. Kaisa felt like being on her own and did not know where to start and how to pursue her desire to become an entrepreneur, Nadia and Nanna could count on the support of their UAS from the start as their UAS leadership believed in their idea and offered the necessary office space to the entire team without questioning them in every step of their way.

Despite their different backgrounds, Kaisa, Nadia and Nanna all needed to tackle **similar obstacles**. Throughout their journey of building their own companies, it was hard to convince oneself and others of the need to take risks. Furthermore, information on available mentoring programmes and funding sources was and still is hard to find.

All of the entrepreneurs recommended their peers to reach out to networks and exchange platforms.



Panel Discussion

The objective of the panel discussion was to reflect with the panellists on how higher education institutions and other research actors can better foster and promote the broad entrepreneurial skillset that Europe requires to remain a resilient and prosperous innovation leader. In light of the fact that **85% of founding teams are male**, special focus was laid on the topic of female entrepreneurship. For this discussion, we invited the following speakers:

- **Prof. Dr. Andreas Altmann**, Rector, MCI | The Entrepreneurial School®
- **Prof. Dr. Lina Gálvez Muñoz**, MEP, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) & Member of the Panel for the Future of Science and Technology (STOA), European Parliament
- **Franziska Mattner**, Researcher & Podcaster in Female Entrepreneurship, Munich University of Applied Sciences & Strascheg Center for Entrepreneurship
- **Ingrid Rigler**, Deputy Head of Unit “Innovation and EIT”, DG EAC, European Commission
- **Dr. Luciana Vaccaro**, Chairwoman of the UAS4EUROPE Governing Board (06/21-05/22)

The panel was moderated by **Otto Bruun**, Chairman of the UAS4EUROPE Management Committee between June 2021 and May 2022 and Deputy Head of the SwissCore office in Brussels.

Possible structures of entrepreneurial UAS

Professor Gálvez Muñoz opens her address by stressing that entrepreneurship requires **flexible skills and labour experience**. These two pillars are intensively addressed by the formation at UAS. One example is the **Management Center Innsbruck (MCI)**, which was represented by its Rector, Professor Andreas Altmann. The application process at the MCI follows a strict focus on what the aspiring student has achieved so far, i.e. in terms of local and entrepreneurial engagement and what he/she aims to achieve in the future. Once admitted, students learn how to apply knowledge in the “real” world through **close industry collaboration** throughout the entire curriculum. A study programme can be finished by submitting a thesis that builds on a practice-based internship.

A **project-based curriculum** in close collaboration with the rapidly changing needs of the local and regional labour markets is a trademark of UAS. This also includes office space and matchmaking platforms for young entrepreneurs. What makes the MCI stand out, however, is their initiative to fund and invest in start-ups that evolve among their students with a focus on pre-seed investments to secure the necessary patents for IP protection.

According to Professor Altmann, the main bottleneck of entrepreneurial activities is the **risk aversion of public authorities**, as well as the full **right to accredit PhD programmes at UAS**, which is crucial to pursue research. This is complemented by Luciana Vaccaro, who underlines the importance of overcoming punishing risk and failure of students, e.g. exam failure.



Addressing gender stereotypes

In order to fully exploit the entrepreneurial and innovation potential of our societies, it is crucial to address and defeat gender stereotypes and biases from an early age on. Currently, **only 15% of founding teams are female**. At the same time, women teams are confronted with a lack of trust from private investors, according to Professor Gálvez Muñoz. All of this is complemented by research data that shows that women lack self-confidence in their endeavours. This is why Franziska Mattner launched her podcast “fIVE - the podcast on female entrepreneurship”, in which she regularly offers a platform for female leaders to present their ideas, projects, companies, experiences and backgrounds. Both Franziska Mattner and Dr. Luciana Vaccaro stress that we need to **re-invent the image of an entrepreneur**. While everyone knows Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos, the most infamous female entrepreneurial researcher nowadays is Marie Skłodowska-Curie who received her Nobel Prize a century ago. Only a few people know that CERN, the most famous research infrastructure, is currently led by a woman, Dr. Fabiola Gianotti. This is only one example out of many.

The panel shares the assessment that **gender biases** need to be addressed from childhood stage on in order to allow for a reinvention of the entrepreneurial image.

Initiatives by the European Union

A thriving entrepreneurial landscape is only possible if the right **framework conditions** are being put in place by national governments and on an international level. Both the European Commission and the European Parliament are working on this through several initiatives, a few of which have been presented at the Croissant Event.

- The **European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT)** aims at turning research results into market products through its **Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs)**, which bring together organisations from businesses, education and research in several sectors. Among others, the EIT offers education courses that include entrepreneurial skills and which already counts some 4000 graduates. Complemented by business creation and acceleration services and innovation-driven research projects, the EIT is Europe’s largest innovation ecosystem, bringing together approximately 3000 partners.
- The **HEI Initiative**, managed by the EIT, aims at helping higher education institutions to build the capacity for effective and sustainable innovation capacity and entrepreneurial education. With a pilot phase between 2021 and 2023, followed by its main phase until 2027, the initiative is built on annual calls.
- With the **European Skills Agenda**, the European Commission published a five-year plan to foster individuals and businesses to develop the skills needed to tackle challenges such as sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience. Through its twelve actions and four building blocks, the Skills Agenda calls to join forces through a pact for skills, to ensure that people have the right competences to tackle societal challenges, to support people in their lifelong learning pathways and to unlock the necessary investments.

The Croissant Event was greatly appreciated by all participants. Inspired and motivated delegates as well as the UAS4EUROPE team are looking forward to the next Croissant Event.



UAS4EUROPE - Who we are

UAS4EUROPE is an informal network founded in 2016 that represents more than 450 Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) from 24 European countries. The network aims to strengthen the voice of UAS in Europe in the field of applied research and innovation. UAS4EUROPE is a networking platform for exchanging knowledge and for reaching out to European Institutions and other R&I stakeholders to ensure a better integration and visibility of UAS in Europe's research and innovation policies and programmes.

More about UAS4EUROPE: www.uas4europe.eu

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