Empowering citizen lead innovation through crowdsourcing, mentoring and crowdfunding

Vaduz, June 18th. 2018
project description
ideenkanal is an entrepreneurial approach to civic engagement

Ideenkanal (eng: Idea Channel) is a tried-and-tested social enterprise accelerator program for people with meaningful ideas. Over the course of a nine months period, Ideenkanal identifies the most motivated social entrepreneurs in a given region, connects them with high-caliber mentors and assists them to finance and publicize the resulting projects via crowdfunding. The focus lies on projects that are at an early stage of development, make a positive contribution to the common good and aim at being financially self-sustaining - in the areas of environment, mobility, technology, social affairs, education, health and art and culture.

Originally initiated as a biennial initiative in the Principality of Liechtenstein in 2010, the Ideenkanal process has since been adapted by various governments throughout the Alps seeking to unleash the creative potential of its citizens. Unlike most other regional development initiatives, Ideenkanal does not offer any direct financial support for the most innovative ideas, but empowers the public to share, select, improve and finance socially relevant and realistic ideas by themselves.

Over the past 11 Ideenkanal, a total of 550 ideas have been submitted. 59 of these ideas have been successfully realized through the help of more than 250 mentors and received a total of CHF 250'000 via crowdfunding. The Ideenkanal ideas have won several international awards and together raised more than CHF 2’000’000 in grants and venture capital.

"The Ideenkanal is about supporting dedicated people with creative and innovative ideas to actually turn them into real projects. The enormous popularity of the Ideenkanal is very pleasing and shows that this new format hits the nerve of our times."

– Markus Wallner, President of the state of Vorarlberg, Austria

Dormant ideas - a huge potential

Again and again - every day, everywhere - people of all ages and origins have ideas for new initiatives. Often it’s just an interesting thought and does not always have to be brand new. Such ideas and impulses represent an enormous, untapped potential, however, for these ideas to be turned into meaningful projects, often a fertile ground is missing. This includes, besides a pinch of courage, the necessary expertise, contact to decision-makers and financial resources. This is where the Ideenkanal steps in: by providing a public platform to engage and self organize around the realization of meaningful ideas combining tools such as crowdsourcing, mentoring, crowdfunding and community building.

"The good idea alone is not enough. It takes ways and means to realize an idea, from idealistic to financial and, above all, the network to spread the idea. And that’s what the Ideenkanal offers."

– Claudia Fritsche, Mentor and former UN Ambassador of Liechtenstein
Fans, Mentors & Crowdfunders - the decisive success factors

Selection process – receiving public feedback and showing commitment

During the first four months of the ideenkanal process, anybody in a predefined geographical territory (i.e. Liechtenstein) can post his or her idea on www.ideenkanal.com in a maximum of 500 characters. From the time of publication, the idea-creators can receive feedback, collect fans and keep updating their ideas. The ten creative minds who collect the most online supporters during this time period, qualify directly for the Idea Camp. From the remaining 30 most voted ideas, a jury nominates ten more ideas for the camp.

What differentiates ideenkanal from other classic selection processes?

Rather than asking for personal qualifications and elaborate project descriptions, ideenkanal is encouraging its participants to share their ideas online, gain supporters and show their passion, drive and commitment. By sharing their ideas with their friends, idea-creators start to identify stronger with their ideas, receive important feedback and grow their network.

Idea Camp - connecting with mentors and developing feasible project plans

The Idea Camp combines mentoring sessions with inspiring presentations and artistic performances. At the beginning of the four-day mini-festival, the idea-creators learn how to present their ideas in a maximum of 60 seconds. On the evening of the same day, the 20 finalists take on the stage and pitch their ideas to a total of 25 mentors. Together, the mentors select five ideas, with whom, over the course of the following two days, they design prototypes, craft value propositions and develop professional crowdfunding campaigns. Finally, the five finalists present their matured projects to decision-makers, media representatives and the public.

Who are the mentors?

Mentors are invited by direct contact, public application and corporate volunteering. Together, they represent the most diverse professional and social backgrounds. Here the executive meets the social worker, the trustee the farmer and the top athlete the artisan. Mentors do not receive any financial compensation and are free to choose which ideas they want to support.

„Innovation is my job and my passion. Beyond implementing ideas for sustainability on a corporate level, I also want to see them set ground on a societal level. For this, the ideenkanal offers the ideal platform."

– Andreas Bong, Director R&D, Hilti AG
Crowdfunding - test ideas for regional demand and attractiveness

After the Idea Camp, the six finalists complete their existing idea-profiles on www.ideenkanal.com with texts, videos and pictures and set a definitive funding target with corresponding rewards. Everyone who wants the ideas to become reality, can help finance the projects during a set time period of 45 days. In return, the supporters receive rewards, like for example, the finished product, or can choose to support the idea with a free amount. If a project reaches or exceeds the specified funding target, the initiators receive the collected sum and can realize their project - if not, the money goes back to the funders.

What are the benefits of crowdfunding?

Through the involvement of the „crowd“, the projects are tested for their regional demand and attractiveness („market proof“), build a strong support network and increase in quality overall. Governments, foundations and venture capitalists see which ideas have the greatest market potential and can subsequently contribute to the overall funding of the projects, positioning themselves as innovative organizations dedicated to strengthening civil society.

Community Building – strengthening relationships and giving back

ideenkanal places great emphasis on creating ongoing networking opportunities for its participants. As a consequence, most mentors engage in long-lasting relationships with their favourite social entrepreneurs and are encouraged to form friend- and business partnerships amongst themselves. Successfully supported project initiators serve as ambassadors in media campaigns and public events and are invited to serve as mentors in future ideenkanal programs. Crowdfunders receive constant updates on the state of affairs, while sponsors and partner organisations such as the Governments of Liechtenstein, Vorarlberg and Tirol, the University of Liechtenstein and internationally known companies such as the Hilti Cooperation and Oerlikon Balzers AG offer ongoing support and possibilities for cooperation.

What is the long term effect of ideenkanal?

Above everything, ideenkanal is a regional development tool. It awakens the entrepreneurial spirit of citizens and strengthens their resilience. It connects innovative minds in a region and fosters collaboration between politics, economy and civil society. And last but not least, it captures a social mood and promotes self responsibility and personal engagement.
Three examples of successfully supported ideas

Wahlhilfe.li – neutral and transparent election recommendations

“I want to know more than their hobbies” – with this statement, Robin Schädler from Balzers, Liechtenstein, convinced the mentors in 2015 with his idea of an online platform, on which state parliament candidates could answer specific questions on current political topics. Citizens should be able to see the answers publicly and answer the same questions themselves, to find out which candidates best match their own views. Shortly after the Idea Camp, Robin managed to secure the necessary funds, partnered up with the Liechtenstein Institute and, together with the mentors, planned and produced a public communication campaign. With great success: in the state elections of 2017, a total of 67 of the 71 state parliament candidates answered the 45 questions and more than 4,800 citizens sought election recommendations. That is approximately 20% of all citizens eligible to vote.
www.wahlhilfe.li.

Free Velo Point – a free, countrywide bicycle renting system

In 2015, Simon Egger was enthusiastic about the idea of a free and unbureaucratic bike rental system in Liechtenstein. He posted the idea on ideenkanal website and received instant public support. Motivated by the enormous positive feedback, he managed to convince the mentors of his idea and with their support launched an architectural competition for the design of the bicycle shelters, received and restored more than 60 old bicycles and was able to persuade the Liechtenstein Post Office to distribute the bicycles equally to the stations on a daily basis. After the first test phase in Vaduz, Schaan and Triesen, the project was expanded to include all 11 municipalities in 2017 with a total of 15 locations.
www.velopoint.li

„ideenkanal was a springboard for us, which enabled us to really get started with our project. Not only in financial terms, but by the massive motivational boost, the collaborations made possible through ideenkanal extensive media coverage, as well as the support beyond the competition, through mentors and the constant encouragement of the ideenkanal team. “
– Simon Egger, initiator Free Velo Point
Alpenpionier - recultivating industrial hemp as a superfood in the alps

„Hemp has to come back onto our plates“ - with this announcement, the team behind Alpenpionier (eng.: Alpine Pioneers) secured the support of the mentors in 2017. Shortly after the Idea Camp, national television stations in Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Germany reported on the plans for recultivating hemp - as the new alpine superfood, an ideal domestic alternative for soy, wheat or animal proteins. Together with the support and network of ideenkanal mentor Nicolas Müller - two time world snowboarder of the year - they managed to raise a total of CHF 90'000 through crowdfunding. In the autumn of 2017, around 15 tonnes of Bio-Suisse certified hemp nuts were harvested from 11 hectares of land in Liechtenstein and the neighbouring Swiss states of St. Gallen and Graubünden. In 2018, cultivation has been extended to 50ha in cooperation with certified organic farmers, launching various new products ranging from hemp-oil to hemp-protein powder and a hemp-cookbook in cooperation with Swiss star-chef Rebecca Clopath.

www.alpenpionier.ch

Adopting ideenkanal - an open franchise modell

The ideenkanal process and all relevant materials (Fotos, Videos, Texts, etc.) are available under a Creative Commons License and can be freely adapted to local needs and requirements. The ideenkanal team offers public service institutions and private organisations tailor made packages for the planning, implementation and post-processing of regional or intrapreneurial ideas challenges. This includes know-how transfer, a personalized webportal, event planning, promotional materials and social media support. The organisational structure behind ideenkanal is a same named charitable public benefit foundation registered in Vaduz, Liechtenstein.

„Liechtenstein is a state that distinguishes itself internationally through its great entrepreneurial spirit and outstanding prerequisites for companies. ideenkanal supports young entrepreneurs in an innovative way, especially if they want to make a positive contribution to the common good with their projects.“

– S.D. Hereditary Prince Alois of Liechtenstein