The "MolenGeek" Tech Ecosystem

Providing work space and training opportunities for young entrepreneurs to develop IT projects and/or services

BELGIUM

Title of the practice (in original language)	"MolenGeek" l'écosystème tech
Who is/was implementing the practice?	MolenGeek (project and leading organisation)
Which other organisations are/were involved in the practice?	• ACTIRIS (Brussels Regional Employment Agency) • Bruxelles Formation (Official body responsible for vocational training in the Brussels Region) • l'Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) • Samsung • Google • Innoviris (Brussels Institute for Research and Innovation) • Digital Belgium • Small Medium Enterprise (SME's) in the Brussels region
What are/were the main objectives of the practice?	The main objective of MolenGeek is to develop the entrepreneurship skills of young people through the promotion of, and accessibility to, new technologies. This is achieved through the creation of work space and training opportunities to allow young people (jobseekers and those not in employment, education or training aged between 18 and 25) to develop their digital skills, IT projects and/or services. In addition, through InnoGeeks – an awareness raising programme involving schools – MolenGeek introduces young people (11-18-year olds) to coding, robotics and safety on the internet.
When was the practice implemented?	MolenGeek was founded in May 2015 with the launch of a series of events promoting new technologies and entrepreneurship. In March 2016, MolenGeek opened its first coworking space and in March 2017 opened its Coding School.

Who is/was targeted by the practice?	Target group depends on the study programme: • Coding School is for young people (specifically job seekers and young NEETs in the Brussels Capital Region) who are aged between 18 and 25. • InnoGeeks is for young people enrolled in education, who are aged between 11 and 18.
What activities are/were carried out?	MolenGeek offers a training programme (Coding School) that aims to train young people in new digital professions, in particular, web and mobile development. The programme includes workshops and face-to-face meetings to give an insight into the challenges of self-entrepreneurship (how to set-up a company, how to prepare a business plan, what are the legal considerations, etc.). Work space is available to individuals to allow them to create and develop IT projects and/or services. The MolenGeek Coding School is split into two types of training programmes: short-term (one to five days) and long-term (up to six months). **Short-term** Developed in collaboration with ACTIRIS, the short-term training programme is designed to facilitate the acquisition of 'priority' digital skills. These priority skills are selected by ACTIRIS in line with needs of employers working in IT services/digital sector (i.e. Photoshop, HTML, Javascript). The training is free for job seekers aged between 18 and 25 based in the Brussels Capital Region. Each training cohort consisting of six individuals. **Long-term** Developed in collaboration with Bruxelles Formation (in the framework of the Youth Guarantee action plan in the Brussels Capital Region), l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, Samsung and Google, the long-term programme is divided into three months of theoretical learning and three months of designing projects. The long-term programme starts with an information session, promoting digital professions. Candidates are assessed via an online coding test followed by an interview to identify individual skills. A one-day interactive session determines the profiles and abilities of the candidates to be placed in working groups. The first two full weeks of the training programme are planned to allow trainees to feel motivated to learn computer programming via a self-training framework. The long-term programme is free for job seekers (aged between 18 and 25) based in the Brussels Capital Region. Those with a Job Training Contract – Brussels Training certificate, a professional training contract recognised by Bruxelles Formation, are specifically targeted to participate. These contracts cover many professions (office, technical and industrial), both in basic training and development. Individuals with or without an academic background or IT/digital prerequisites, are welcomed to acquire the fundamental skills to find a job in the IT sector or create their own start-up company. **The 'Factory'** MolenGeek invites companies to develop their websites and IT/digital applications, through the coding school. It offers students their first experience to work on a digital project for a company. Companies pay less for the service, however they are involved in the training of students through the development of soft skills, essential in finding employment or launching a start-up. **Raising Awareness among schools** In collaboration with Innoviris (Brussels Institute for Research and Innovation), MolenGeek launched a pilot project in 2018 with schools called InnoGeeks. The project, targeting 800 school pupils, introduced coding, robotics, safety on internet and entrepreneurship.

What are/were the sources of funding?	Financing of MolenGeek comes from private sponsorship (such as Google with a Google.org grant of over EUR 200 000), Digital Skills Fund (federal government funding supporting the acquisition of digital competence with an estimated grant EUR 500 000), Brussels Capital Region (in the frame-work of the Youth Guarantee action plan) as well as through the 'Factory', which develops applications and sells them to companies.
What are/were the outputs: people reached and products?	**People Reached** • MolenGeek has 800 members, 130 of which participate in activities every day. • In 2017, the Coding School long-term training programme trained two classes of 16 and 13 young people. All participants from both training groups either found a job, started an entrepreneurial project, started a new training course in IT or found an internship. • In 2018, 120 people registered for the long-term training programme. • 50 short-term Coding School groups, each with six participants (300 participants in total), will be organised throughout 2018 and 2019. **Products** • MolenGeek organises four events each year, each attracting around 80 participants. These events called 'Hackathons' take place over the weekend with the aim of introducing and promoting new technologies to beginners, particularly young people, and encouraging the creation of new start-up projects. • More than 25 start-ups have been launched with the support of MolenGeek programmes. For example: 　– E-Contest, which is a Belgian start-up which offers e-sport tournaments online; 　– Molenbike, a bike delivery service that focuses on local and eco-friendly products; and 　– Alohanews, a participative media that shares interviews and articles.
What are/were the outcomes: medium-term results or effects?	MolenGeek represents an interesting way to create trust between young people, employers and public institutions, thus supporting socio-professional insertion of young people (especially low-qualified young people and NEETs) thanks to the opportunities offered by new technologies. As a result, MolenGeek is working on opening a new project in the municipality of Schaerbeek, Brussels (due to open in second half of 2018). This will provide training around community management, copywriting, videos and post production. Coworking space will be available for individuals to use as well as introducing programmes for start-ups interested in the digital/IT service sector.
What are/were the lessons learnt and success factors?	**Lessons Learnt** • Companies are finding it difficult to recruit individuals with specific IT skills. In response to this, MolenGeek is currently developing special training in partnership with these companies. The idea is to co-create tailor-made trainings and support the recruitment of young people. **Success Factors** • Students gain new digital skills, which in turn they can share and use to support their peers in the coworking space when collaborating and sharing ideas.

- The 'hands on approach' during the training programme allows participants to apply what they have learned in the theoretical part of the course to 'live' projects. These projects, submitted by companies, provides valuable work experience and a taste of work life.
- There is no real hierarchy within MolenGeek. Each person holds responsibility to take care of the working space and equipment. It helps young people to develop a sense of responsibility and creates a sense of community.

What are key sources of information?	Website: https://molengeek.com/