

Two entrepreneurs thoughts of Ülemiste Smart City

Over 40 students, teachers and entrepreneurs from six different countries visited Ülemiste Smart City (ÜSC) in mid January for three days. ÜSC is the largest Smart City in the Baltics and the biggest privately owned business campus in the Northern Europe. The study tour was part of the project, which aims to support creation of a new network through knowledge transfer and innovation in multicultural environment. This is realised by the close cooperation between educational institutions, enterprises and sector organisations from Norway, Island, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. The study tour was the first out of total of three and was focusing to study and create new services for the Ülemiste Smart City. The aim of the Study Tour 1, named as “Creative Entrepreneurship” - was to organize creative entrepreneurial activities. Through the meetings, seminars and lectures experiences/ good practices and knowledge for the development of entrepreneurial mindset and knowledge between the International partners and experts were shared. In addition, new service proposals were created by interviews performed by students to companies and entrepreneurs, and were presented at the end of the study tour to the companies and authorities of the ÜSC. This article collects the interview results of two entrepreneurs, Laura Sildmäe and Heili Politanov, as part of the project results. The focus of this article is on the relationship between ÜSC and the companies.

Laura Sildmäe is a managing partner of Move My Talent relocation company operating in Ülemiste Smart City. Laura’s and her team customers are companies and foreign individuals moving to Estonia for work. The main services of Move My Talent consist from licences and visas for immigration and practical arrangements of settling to Estonia, for example accommodation and kindergarten arrangements. In short, the company is offering a full service package for a work based immigration to Estonia. During the Move My Talents five years operation in Tallinn, the attitude against work based immigration has changed. Laura tells that, “at the beginning, five years ago, there was no need for foreign employers.” Couple of years ago, the changing attitude towards helping foreigners to move to Estonia was initiated by the local headhunters, recruiters. According to Laura, their message was clear, “the pool of local employees was getting empty, so companies started to make talent buy-in from other companies. So, instead of fighting by the salaries, companies wanted to start look beyond the borders for talents.” This was game changing to her company.

Heili Politanov, owner of the restaurant Juur and having also two cafes outside Ülemiste Smart City, has been running the restaurant for almost two years. Silver Spoon and White Quide Recommendation awards winning Juur is dedicated to renew Estonian gastronomy by their innovative menus. Years ago, after establishing the cafes, she was invited to ÜSC to establish a restaurant. However, by that time her intention was not to grow her business, since she didn’t feel to have a reason for it. “You have to have a mission inside for doing that”, Heili explains. But, like in many success stories, after a while she met a right minded chef to be a partner for establishing a high ambition restaurant to ÜSC. According to Heili, “the mission of the restaurant Juur is to go back to the basics of the food - the food that our parents have been eating. We start to forget the food that is growing around us.” Heili

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continues, "at the same time I had been getting more interested about food and I had been getting to different fairs, seminars. I've been bringing an alternative thinking to the meaning of the food. These ideas had been in my mind earlier."

Both Heili and Laura started their business elsewhere in a small scale, but are grown since by an organic way. Both entrepreneurs are really passionate about their companies and are acting according their values. Common for both of them is also the novelty of their companies in Estonia. They have an unique approach in their area of business, possibly since they both are seeking and innovating new services and products followed by their passion. For instance Heili explains her passion to coffee: "We had a cafe roaster, we wanted to treat coffee as vine to bring out different variety of beans." In restaurant Juur your coffee is served from a large wine glass. The food courses are also served with a innovative twist to provide a unique flavour.

Both entrepreneurs saw Ülemiste Smart City as an interesting opportunity before moving there. Both mentioned ÜSC to be an unique spot of different companies in Estonia, having the potential for a customer base and the innovative atmosphere and - probably the most - feeling of a community. Laura explains: "we came here by coincidence. I read Ülo Pärnits (ÜSC creator and visionary man) article, that one thousand Indian IT specialists were coming to ÜSC. As we already had some small scale operation in Ülemiste, I contacted Mr. Pärnits and got an invitation to have a meeting with him. The meeting lasted several hours, ending up that we made a deal. So, we rented a room and started the collaboration. This collaboration has lasted until today." ÜSC is a attracting position for Move My Talents operation, since "it is an attractive location for growing companies, especially for IT sector companies hiring teams and talents abroad", Laura explains.

One fascinating aspect of both of the entrepreneurs is their attitude against their country. Even though Laura has been living years abroad, something made her to come back and start her business in her home country. "We are patriots, proud and happy to serve our country", she explains, and continues, "Ülemiste Smart City is offering more than just premises and growth opportunity for your business. Community." The same attitude and feeling of a community can be heard in Heili's observation of ÜSC. "These people (in ÜSC) want to create something new together. The city has been built from scratch, out of nothing. There are creators, innovative people, new thinkers around us. They are into the ideas of what they are doing, always ready to think over." Heili summarises her thoughts about the mental support of community. And adds, "in the community everyone has their mission. Soulmates. That's why we are there."

The same spirit of Ülemiste Smart City innovativeness can be seen also in both entrepreneurs, Heili and Laura. They both are piloting new services and products constantly. Heili is dreaming about piloting a city greenhouse concept. "It's a smart greenhouse, which adjusts temperature and adds water automatically", she tells. The target would be to grow own ingredients, like vegetables for the Juur restaurant. Also she is dreaming about the evening time life to Ülemiste city. "Our restaurant will be part of the evening lifetime in ÜSC, it's already calculated into our business plans." There's a promise of more active evening lifetime, since "there will be soon close to one hundred rental apartment housing build in the neighbourhood, with four new buildings coming in addition." Heili has innovative plans also with the restaurant kitchen, as she is already making pilots with a fermentation processes.

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Also Laura is piloting new services. Together with the International House of Tallinn, her pilot project includes training and workshops for immigrant spouses. The pilot projects intention is to train, network and help them to find a suitable job from Tallinn and Estonia. "The purpose of the project is to tackle the problem of terminated contracts after immigration", Laura explains. "The international contracts are usually terminated by the reason rising from the family reasons. In practice, the spouses are not getting integrated to the Estonian society well enough. One of the root causes for this is the lack of suitable job for and missing networks in Estonia for them." By the project she's hopeful to improve the quality and sustainable results of relocation.

While explaining the success of their companies, Heili and Laura mention their uniqueness in Estonia. Heili's approach is to provide fine dining by local ingredients. "Not the best beef comes necessary from Brazil, the drinking water should not come from Italy, 1000 kilometers away. This made us boiling inside", she explains. On the other hand, Laura's Move My Talent hasn't faced competition in Estonia so far, but she is already getting ready for it. She wants to grow Move My Talent to other locations in Estonia. She's ensuring the quality of the service by growing her company organically. "Doing our work in right attitude, and people in mind. Not the profit in mind, but customers best interests in mind", she claims. The attitude of serving customers locally in Ülemiste has brought both companies far. The challenge for them both is to maintain the same quality while growing, since every recruitment for them is a risk. To overcome these challenges the constant growth of ÜSC community and growing customer base should help. Overall, ÜSC offers for both companies a promising platform for growth, and they praise the collaboration within ÜSC for their success.

The question, "do you recognise yourself as a 'woman entrepreneur' or just 'entrepreneur?'" made Laura and Heili to wonder. For them there's no difference between men and women entrepreneurship. However, they both admit that there might a different story in other sectors of industries. "I'm just an entrepreneur, there's no difference from my point of view. I don't feel a difference, I just do it. I don't think about it, it's not an issue", Heili answers and continues, "but, I'm sure there are also different stories about this topic." In addition, Laura points out that some women entrepreneur communities have been established, like Facebook groups for networking.

As a summary, both entrepreneurs feel that Ülemiste Smart City has been, is and will be offering a promising platform for their business and their growth. They both highlight the community of creative, smart people around them, and praise the collaboration with the authorities of ÜSC. Even if I asked several times to name some negative things about the ÜSC, all they came up was the poor arrangement of parking and commuting traffic rush hours. This issue came up also from other companies interviews during the study tour. For the fast growing Ülemiste Smart City, this is a constant problem and is also recognised and preventive actions established by the authorities of ÜSC.

Overall, for me as a foreign visitor, the attitude, mentality and feeling of the collaboration inside Ülemiste Smart City was tangible. Everybody was willing to invite different parties to the collaboration and willing to pilot new services and practices. One idea that ÜSC should consider for increasing its collaboration and liveliness, could be a common Development HUB in the heart of ÜSC. The HUB would be a piloting laboratory for new ideas, services and products for companies. The HUB would be hosted by universities and the practical

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operation would be run by the multidisciplinary student teams. The student teams would be also entrepreneurs and, during their studies, their task would be gaining revenue for their company by selling their services to companies. Besides of offering liveliness to ÜSC e.g. by weekly events and piloting services to companies, students would learn entrepreneurial skills by running a real company during their studies. The HUB would grow-up skilled generation of ÜSC employees and entrepreneurs.

The interview with the entrepreneurs and our visit to several companies revealed the promising smartness and attitude of Ülemiste Future City people to bring it forward.