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Promoting Employability in Higher Education: A Case Study on Boosting Entrepreneurship Skills

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Abstract: How can higher education increase the employability of university students? We present a case study on an innovative training itinerary aimed to promote the participation of teaching staff to stimulate the creativity of students and enhance their employability skills. Students acquire the entrepreneurship competences by applying the problem-solving methodology to their innovative projects based on sustainable development. The participation in the contest shows a growing importance, with topics ranging from the more technical ones, such as nutrition innovation, science innovation, or sustainability, to the social projects, related to social services, inclusion, or services against gender violence, harassment, and bullying. The percentage of multidisciplinary teams increased from 38% in 2015 to 76% in 2019 and even more in finalist teams, a positive trend in improving soft skills. According to some testimonies, the acquisition of these entrepreneurship competences partially compensates for students' lack of professional experience by enriching their curriculum vitae (CV) and, for some students, lays the groundwork for establishing a real business after their participation in the contest.

Keywords: self-employment; entrepreneurship; seed for startup; transversal skills; employability skills; employability; entrepreneurship education; education for sustainable development; sustainable entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

In the era of digitalization, the potential of bringing growth and development to the countries is boosted by an efficient and smart use of technology and information. Nowadays, developed countries are facing difficult scenarios with a secular stagnation that seem to show an incompatibility between full employment and financial stability [1]. Developing countries face more inequality as they open and globalize [2] and there is a big challenge to confront all negative effects derived from climate change worldwide [3]. Most of the bad impacts from these threats end up having negative repercussions in the job market increasing uncertainty and instability. This will have a qualitative negative impact on job conditions and will increase unemployment in sectors directly dependent on climate such as agriculture and tourism, but also on the most polluting industries or high-carbon activities (and on industries dependent of these sectors) [4,5]. These changes can also be an opportunity to create new jobs, but independently of the balance, which is definitively unknown, the transition period from one scenario to the new one will require specific abilities in the workforce to increase their resilience [6]. In fact, youth is one of the characteristics (among others, such as being a woman or an immigrant) that increases the risk of becoming unemployed [7,8]. Spain has the second highest rate of unemployment regarding countries in the EU, with 14.1% of the active population in 2019, reaching up to 32.5% for the population under 25 years old, surpassed only by Greece with 17.3% and 35.2%, respectively [9]. According to Eurostat, in 2019, some of the main developed countries presented higher youth unemployment rates relative to the national total unemployment (see Figure 1).

Specifically, the EU-28 average of youth unemployment rate (people under 25 years) was 2.25 times the average of the total unemployment rate (6.4%) in 2019 [9]. In the new revisited Agenda 2030, Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals aims to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. This challenge grows with new generations as it is stated that, globally, youth are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults [10].

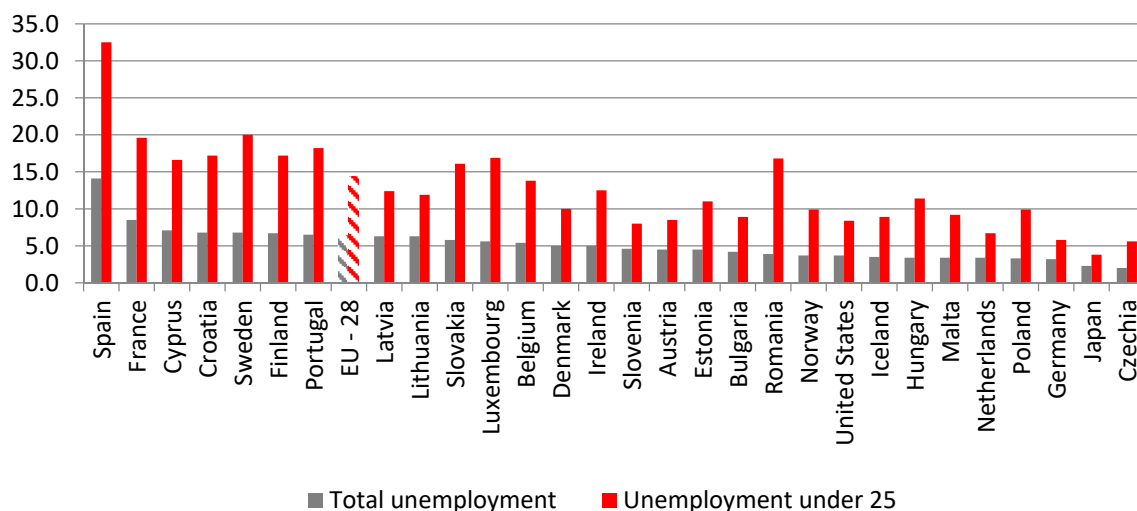


Figure 1. Unemployment rates in terms of active population (%) [9].

The paper by O'Reilly et al. [11] reviews and summarizes five core characteristics regarding youth unemployment in the EU at present period, after the Great Recession:

- Labor market flexibility increases the instability of employment trajectories.
- Skills and qualification mismatches persist despite the expansion of education, which is poorly aligned to the variable structure of abilities required by employers.
- The recession-boosted youth migration that has been more extensive, selective, and diversified than in previous crises.
- Family work history legacies establish new forms of polarization.
- The EU has substantially raised its role in promoting and investing in policies to support national and EU employment initiatives.

Education has been a powerful tool to fight the unemployment and the precariousness of employment and this link between high education and employment has been strengthened after the Great Recession [12]. Some additional reasons that Higher Education should pay more attention to employability and entrepreneurship, highlighted by Moreland [13], are the following. First, globalization and the need for adaptability to changes. A global world implies that students should be more autonomous, be able to adapt to innovations, to work in groups, take responsibilities, have attitudes in favor of maintaining and renewing their skills, and be reflexive (thinking about experiences and perspectives to understand them better and respond with learning and behavioral changes). Second, there are social benefits from hiring university graduates. They can contribute with their high-level skills and understanding by improving their jobs, even if those jobs did not require a graduate person. Third, there is a need for government policy and promotion of self-employment. University students may be unaware of the advantages of becoming self-employed. The links between universities and local business support organizations are often missing. Further, a review of entrepreneurship education literature by Zaring et al. [14] discerned some common patterns: Entrepreneurship education may be associated with economic growth; it is diverse in objectives and methodology; it follows a mix of practical work, opposite academic (classroom) learning; and the

empirical evidence on potential entrepreneurs is ambiguous: Some types of training may reduce the entrepreneurial potential of students while others may increase entrepreneurship, helping students to make better choices.

One of the main initiatives in this area by the European Commission started with the “Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2020” [15], putting the focus on three main actions, where promotion of entrepreneurship in schools and universities was the first of them. They show that entrepreneurship can be learnt and promoting entrepreneurship in schools and universities has a positive impact. In fact, 15% to 20% of young people who go through entrepreneurial programs (that help them develop skills, knowledge, and attitudes) start companies in three to five years after leaving school; otherwise, without the programs, the percentage decreases to 3% or 5%.

In this line, this paper aims to answer the question: How can universities promote the development of the students’ employability skills in higher education? It presents a case study with an experience about an innovative ideas contest in which students work in teams coordinated by a teacher. The competition MOTIVEM team ideas is an initiative of the Universitat de València and ADEIT University-Business Foundation (external foundation related to this university) with the support of the regional government of Generalitat Valenciana (Innovative Entrepreneur Campus) and La Caixa Foundation. This program has been running successfully since 2014 and offers the students of this university the opportunity to present their innovative ideas for entrepreneurship and self-employment with the lemma “MOTIVEM enhances your employability”. This initiative endeavors to promote entrepreneur skills like creativity, innovation, or risk-taking among students, those that may be less developed in the classroom with the formal education and that can be easily replicated in other universities. In detail, students have to propose a project, so their acquisition of competences related to entrepreneurship and self-employment is obtained through learning by doing. The ideas presented have to satisfy a social need, and the problems are solved with innovations related to sustainable development. The strength of this initiative in boosting students’ soft skills is that the contest is not related to any specific subject and all students from any degree can participate by forming teams. This enhances the multidisciplinary work, since teams are encouraged to be formed by students from different degrees taught in the institution and also by students of different level of studies (any academic year in the Degree, the Master, or the Doctorate). Further, ideas arise from real life problems, such as a practical application to certain needs detected in society, helping students to put into practice these skills in a particular context. Students obtain the entrepreneurship competences related to employability skills i.e., innovative thinking, teamwork, problem solving, empathy and ability to build relationships, communicating an idea, and the competition gives them the opportunity of working on a practical project, which can be the departing point of professional experience when it is nonexistent or very scarce.

The article is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review that focuses on entrepreneurship competences. In this part, we have devoted a subsection to address how these competences are specifically reported in the initiative presented. Section 3 describes the case study, explaining the contest in detail and the process of working with the students’ teams, where design thinking is one of the most relevant. Section 4 exposes the results in terms of some quantitative and qualitative analysis concerning participation in the competition and transference actions as an example of best practices. Finally, Section 5 closes the paper with some concluding remarks and discussion of the results obtained.

2. Literature Review: Employability and Entrepreneurship Competences

Apparently, the education level of a person is not the only attribute that makes them well matched to a job [16]. Standard education is becoming less useful to anticipate the specific skills that will be needed in the near future in jobs that sometimes are not still created. Consequently, we need to try to stimulate our students’ competences to be capable to take the opportunities they will run into after finishing their studies and to create their own job opportunities.

There is no consensus in the literature regarding employability and entrepreneurship competences [17]. Some authors establish the difference between practical experiences on learning how to create a startup (coaching, pitching practice, office space, or financing) and academic learning (formal lecture or seminar about entrepreneurship knowledge) [14]. There are several approaches to entrepreneurship competences or how to teach them, although there is a place for a certain agreement on employability skills, the technical and analytical, more related to the job, and the soft or transversal skills, applicable to any job (according to the European Union Commission, UNESCO, or OECD standards) [18]. Other authors use different sources to combine the set of employability competences considered [19]. Further, different agents may have different points of view, where students can be focused on the objective concept of gaining competences while employers on more subjective aspects related with personality traits [20–22].

There are different initiatives aimed to boost entrepreneurship. For example, there is a 3D virtual reality educational environment for entrepreneurship where users are represented as avatars, and they have the ability to move within the world in a similar manner to the real world [23]. Other examples are a tool designed to support collaborative learning within the frame of transdisciplinary projects between universities and business partners or a 10-day summer school to develop initial business plans [24,25]. Among the actions to improve graduate employability, the activities focused on transmission of skills required for employment (which includes training in entrepreneurship and self-employment) received the highest rating by 230 deans surveyed from Spanish universities [26].

Nevertheless, the evidence is not always positive as shown in Nabi et al. [27], which expected to develop students' entrepreneurial intentions in their first year in higher education. Specifically, they focus on entrepreneurial learning and inspiration looking for factors that motivated or deterred them from pursuing an entrepreneurial career path. Entrepreneurial intentions can be reduced or discouraging when the process of creating a business presents an obstacle or difficulties. In Sousa [28], the entrepreneurs identified up to 22 different skills they considered students would need to develop in order to be capable of dealing with entrepreneurship. However, the most highlighted skills appear to be the least developed in the current higher education innovation and entrepreneurship courses. Another point of view is stated by some employers or recruiters who think that the responsibility to make graduates 'job-ready' for particular aspects of their work fell largely to the organization itself, since it is difficult to think of generic training for graduates that suits different professional areas, organizations, or workplace roles [29].

As the program enhances students' employability, it is worth explaining the difference between job placement and employability. Job placement is related to the labor demand of graduates in a particular area, such as physics or mathematics. Employability, with an increasing importance in the curriculum vitae, is related to the graduates' skills to successfully face professional practice [30]. Watts [31] refers to sustainable employability as the ability to remain employable throughout life, including attributes required to be successful in jobs and to manage one's career development. A focus on employability is crucial since [31]:

- It responds to students' motivations when they enroll in higher education.
- It is a matter of policy concern. The government invests in higher education because it contributes to the development of the country's human capital. Higher education also has social equity objectives by increasing access for disadvantaged groups to university studies and helping them being successful in the labor market.
- It reinforces academic values. Employers are more concerned with generic graduate attributes than with subject knowledge. Generic competences are developed through active teaching and learning processes or active extra-curricular activities contributing to a wider student experience.

A survey on employability skills of higher education graduates shows that employers demand observable and non-observable skills and defines them as a bundle that includes general and transferable skills that might be useful in any workplace in addition to the specific requirements of a job or

occupation [32]. The relationship between employability, entrepreneurship, and higher education is analyzed in Moreland [13]. Employability is defined as “a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations” [33]. O’Leary states that employability is related to the study program, the development of soft skills, and the personal development needed to be able to work oneself and inside of a team [34]. The entrepreneurship concept is related to taking risks and applying knowledge into practice through being creative and innovative [35]. Entrepreneurship is “the process of uncovering and developing an opportunity to create value through innovation” focusing on National Commission on Entrepreneurship, 2003 cited in Moreland [13]:

- Detecting an opportunity for innovation with the creation of a startup to address a niche market for which there is demand but does not exist at the moment.
- Generating a product or designing a service that is valuable for the market.
- Being able to develop the skills, abilities, and aptitudes for success.

There are different ways in which higher education institutions try to improve employability: (1) Improvements in the curricula (inviting employers, use of ICT, languages, tutorials to help students adapt to university, double degrees); (2) teaching of business protocols (training in personal attributes such as decision making or problem solving, training in interpersonal skills as teamwork or communication skills, training in entrepreneurship and self-employment such as how to create business plans); (3) job matching (job search forums, practical work experience, internships); (4) learning from the experience of university alumni (activities with alumni, students’ visits to alumni’s companies, occupational observatory) [26].

The first step in being capable of promoting these competences is to train lecturers in those skills, to be able to then put in practice and teach their students the techniques to enhance their entrepreneurship. For that reason, the teachers that participate in the program follow a specific training and to try to adapt their teaching methods to be closer to the companies’ environment, in the sense of solving problems or working in teams [36]. Thus, the initial objective was to transform the teaching practice so that teachers became mentors or coaches that must engage the participating students through learning by doing. Afterwards, in 2014, the contest was established as an additional activity to help teachers put into practice those skills they were trained and enhancing students’ employability, without the express need to link it to a particular subject.

Therefore, the main value of taking part in the contest is related to the experiential learning, the kind of learning that comes as a result of experiencing something. Different methodologies also based on learning by doing were found to be very effective in increasing entrepreneurship skills [37]. This is a powerful way to learn, since the own experience is what makes us learn from our own mistakes. Experiential learning happens when, departing from an experience, students reflect on it and get involved in some abstraction through the integration of those reflections in their prior knowledge and using them as guides for future actions [38]. The method is part of the content, learning by doing. The teacher–student interaction is important for the learning when the teacher encourages the students to devote some effort to valuable activities for their training outside their study program, such as working with the teacher outside the classroom in some project [39]. This gives the students the opportunity to synthesize, integrate, and apply their knowledge. Students realize their own potential to create and innovate. In fact, the University Student Statute states that “the scenario described by the European Higher Education Area promotes a new role of students as active agents of their training process, where the work inside and outside the classroom is taken into account” [40]. Presenting an idea in the MOTIVEM contest allows the teacher to connect with their students from a different point of view to the one shared inside the content of a particular subject. It is a project that both have voluntarily decided to do, and they are willing to devote time and effort. Teaching is not only to give lectures, but rather is anything we can do to help and encourage students to learn [41]. Incentives for students and teachers are not only intrinsic, as the competition had €16,000 in prizes in the last edition,

but also the option of recognition of 2 ECTS credits of participation in university activities for students, so they can incorporate the activity in their academic certificate. To profit from these advantages, students need to present their idea appropriately on time with a written document and a short video.

How MOTIVEM Boosts Employability and Entrepreneurship Competences?

We present and analyze a local program that responds to the strategic objectives of the Universitat de València (Spain) stated in the Strategic Plan 2012–2015, such as raising awareness about entrepreneurship, supporting students to transfer their research knowledge in entrepreneurial business ideas, and promotion of entrepreneurship in the classroom. This is in line with the third mission, where universities are supposed to contribute to the society, aside from teaching and research, which is based on entrepreneurial activities, innovation, and knowledge transfer to society. Employability is a priority for universities since training the future professionals is one of their final goals, so enhancing the full potential and talent of students is a way to increase their possibilities to find a job when they graduate. MOTIVEM contest is an opportunity to boost other competences, different from the specific ones of each area of knowledge or discipline that students work deeply within the different subjects in their study program.

The development of entrepreneurial skills is a good way to increase the real potential of students' entrepreneurship [42]. People highlight the importance of soft skills or 360 degrees competences for employability: Communication, research, options analysis, decision-making, adaptability, flexibility, creativity, or problem solving among others [43]. This also reflects attitude, i.e., being proactive, being able to adapt to changes, being flexible, knowing how to work in a team. Many students are engaged in extracurricular activities to develop skills because they recognize their value for employability [44]. The chairperson of the Teaching and Research Commission of the Valencia Economists Association, Escrivá, states that when training for a professional activity, it is very important to develop competences: Employers give more value to skills than knowledge, since they know that skills allow growing endlessly in new knowledge and capabilities [45]. In the same line, Grotkowska et al. [46] state that higher education is not intended to train workers, it should train persons who have the capabilities to autonomously improve all aspects of their life. According to the employers' opinion, the Universitat de València is in the top three ranking of two areas (Sciences and Engineering and Business, Economics and Law) among the Spanish universities regarding the adaptation of competences to the firms' needs [21], and MOTIVEM contributes to this goal.

In fact, the Catalogue of Transversal Competences key for employability, a project funded by the EU, identifies 12 transversal competences or abilities that are relevant for employability and can be acquired in training-education actions, but also in activities related to leisure or free time. They have been acquired in a specific context or in problem solving and can be transferred to any other context. These transversal competences are intercultural skills and global awareness; flexibility and adaptability; strategic and innovative thinking; organization and time management; decision making; teamwork; empathy and ability to build relationships; problem solving; learning orientation; negotiation skills; leadership; and collecting and processing information [47]. Most of these transversal competences or soft skills are in fact trained in the contest, for example:

- *Strategical and innovative thinking.* The ability to foresee the opportunities to gain a competitive advantage, integrating new methodologies, dealing with problems from a critical perspective, and using creativity to reach original and effective solutions. In other words, thinking out of the box to produce non-conventional ideas.
- *Teamwork.* Considering that the contest requires a minimum size of three students to participate in, it fosters team working. Having the feeling of belonging to a group, working efficiently, and communicating effectively in the group, with an optimal role assignment in the team. It is also important to understand the teammates' different skills, strengths, and motivations, taking into account different ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving, and being open-minded. For this purpose, teacher and students have to apply teamwork methods as brainstorming, reciprocal

feedback, or conflict resolution techniques. Finally, they need to be able to evaluate the progress, contribute with innovative ideas, and encourage the team.

- *Problem solving.* The ability to understand and solve problems without an obvious solution. Being willing to engage with those problems and proceed to evaluate different information or situations by decomposing the problems in their key components, considering several options, and choosing the optimal one. Anticipate the long-term consequences and elaborate an action plan. Develop the faculty to use ordinary elements in a creative way to obtain new and efficient solutions with divergent thinking.
- *Multidisciplinary collaboration.* The capacity to adapt to a professional environment that addresses complex problems and requires collaborative teamwork of people from different backgrounds, such as economic, social, environmental, or legal experts. The contest allows that students from degrees of entirely different areas of knowledge work together, enriched by their complementary views. Thinking critically but, at the same time, being open to different initiatives and approaches, managing priorities, and accepting feedback from the teacher and the team to adapt the strategies considered.
- *Empathy and ability to build relationships.* Being able to practice active listening to others, understand their behaviors and moods by putting themselves in the place of others, imagining the situation from their perspective. This helps for self-reflection and recognition of different opinions, as well as generating confidence and trust. Having personal characteristics like empathy, intelligence, sense of humor, and being sincere are key elements for a positive working environment.
- *Communicating an idea.* To express an idea as simple as possible, to tell the most important aspects about it, and make it understandable to the audience. The capability of communicating ideas that inspire others to follow them with commitment and generate confidence to help their success. Being proactive and able to coordinate teams and reach a common goal through motivating people. To persuade someone of the validity of your idea, for example, a customer to buy your product or a partner to invest in it.

While these are the most important competences developed, some others appear as well. As the contest has a formal requirement on presenting the idea in a short written document and one-minute video, the information has to be presented in a concise way, but at the same time it has to be well explained to be understood by anyone who can read the document (*Collecting and processing information*). The contest is separate from their study program, so students need to find time to work on the idea, and to make appointments with the group and the mentoring teacher (*Organization and time management*). During the competition, the mentor will give students the *learning orientation* they will need to develop the idea and generally; there are also always *negotiation* processes where some students also show *leadership* skills.

These transversal competences, key for entrepreneurship education, are also related to education for sustainable development. In fact, some of the competences are shared by both approaches: The complex problem solving, the importance of novelty and creativity to find new and alternative solutions, the objective of exploiting the business opportunity or trying new things, the combination of new but feasible ideas (since projects will be evaluated), and the importance of teamwork [48].

The importance of soft skills for employability is growing, so it is worth mentioning that the competition is not only oriented to students who are finishing their degree or in the last year when they see closer the beginning of their professional careers. All students can participate, from first year students to doctorate students. Moreover, we expect that the sooner they start developing their soft skills, the more they will enhance them. Improving these competences is the main objective of the contest and any student can have a brilliant, innovative, creative, and original idea to be the seed of a possible startup firm in the future. The participation in the competition helps students to use these learning experiences for enhancing their employability, also contributing to support reflection and development of self-knowledge.

3. Materials and Methods

In this section, we will present the competition MOTIVEM following a descriptive case study methodology, based on the theory we have developed in the literature review section [49]. This type of research allows us to use a holistic view of the program from its organization and teacher training until the final phase with the contests results [50]. One of the advantages of this type of methodology is the possibility of replication [51].

MOTIVEM is organized in the second semester of the academic year (from February to May). However, there is a previous phase of dissemination and recruitment of students conducted by ADEIT staff. The organizers do a perfect job coming to the classrooms and explaining the contest to students in 15-minute talks. This part is arranged with teachers that are accredited in boosting entrepreneurial skills by the training they have received. It seems that students are more willing to participate when they receive the information from an external person. The students that finally decide to take part in the contest have to organize themselves in a team that should be integrated by at least 3 and at most 5 students and they also need to find a teacher-coordinator, who must be a teacher that has been trained in the MOTIVEM School for teachers. The important dates are summarized in Figure 2, where training has been placed above and important deadlines are placed below. In the following subsections, we proceed to detail these steps and tasks.

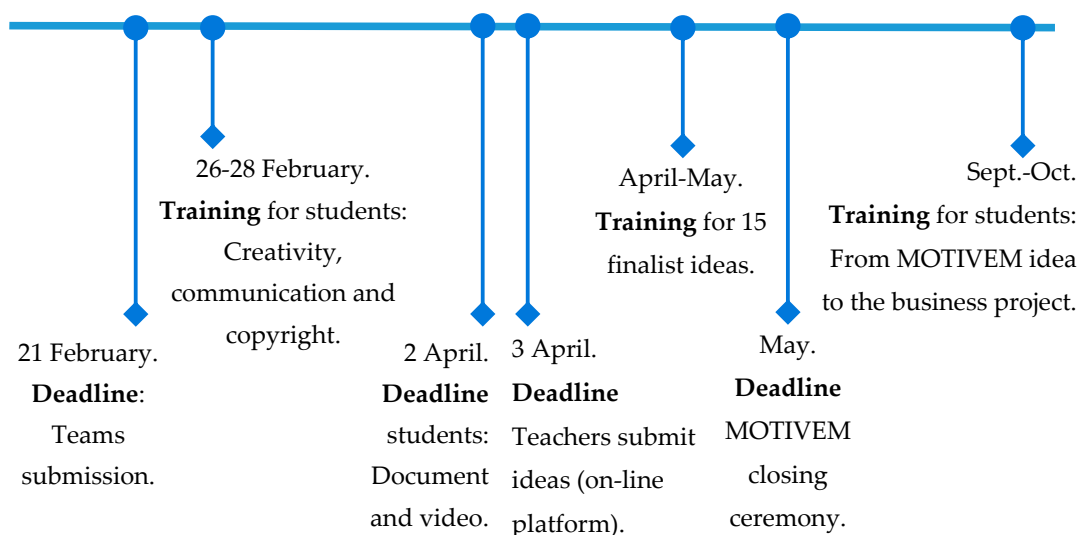


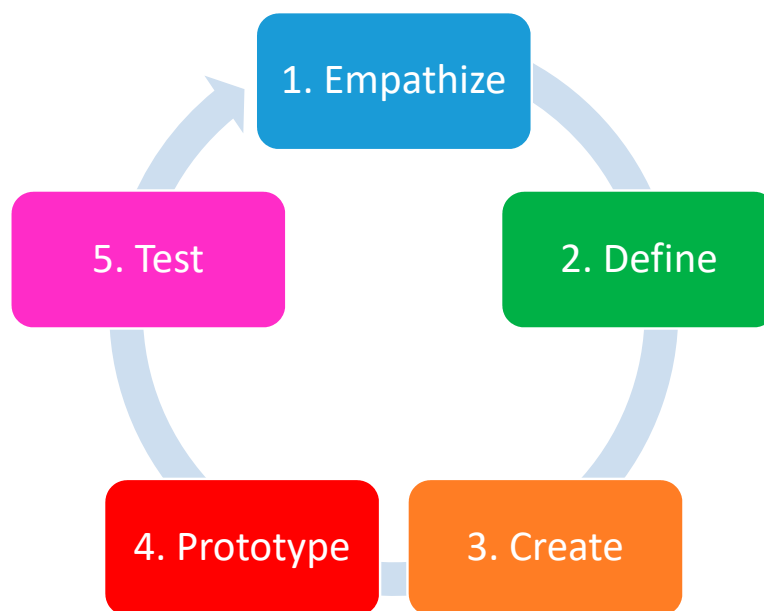
Figure 2. MOTIVEM competition timing in 2019. Own elaboration based on [52].

3.1. Previous Training

The first step is the training of the teachers aimed to coordinate teams participating in the contest. In fact, the MOTIVEM School for teachers started in 2008, six years before the competition was established; that is, at the beginning of the Great Recession. The bad economic situation in Spain was in the minds of the first teachers from the institution that engaged in it, as they feared that their students, although prepared and qualified, might not be able to find a job after finishing their degrees. The MOTIVEM School for teachers is designed as 16 h of instruction in 3 intensive days and 9 h more, which correspond to the coordination of at least one team in the MOTIVEM competition of innovative ideas. The objective is to help teachers to promote the entrepreneurship attitude in the classroom, enhancing the creation of ideas in teamwork and improving the employability of university students. In the school for teachers, lecturers are trained in the design thinking methodology to coordinate students' teams who want to participate in the competition. Moreover, other tools are studied in workshops and practical sessions, such as the empathy map, skills about communicating the idea, or some basic notions about copyright. The objectives of the school for teachers are [36]:

- To stimulate the business spirit and an entrepreneurial attitude among the students.
- To train the teachers in entrepreneurship.
- To enhance the exchange of experiences between professors from different areas involved in business motivation of students.
- To involve the professionals and entrepreneurs in transmitting their knowledge for the learning of university teachers.
- To provide the university teachers with the appropriate tools to transfer their knowledge.
- To create a network of professors and business experts to support the implementation of entrepreneurship teaching practice.

An important part of the School for teachers is the study of the design thinking methodology, both theoretically and implemented with different case studies [53]. Design thinking is a methodology to develop solutions that look for the needs of those who we are designing for. It follows a nonlinear process [54]; depending on the feedback obtained, you can come back to any previous step that needs to be revised (see Figure 3). It departs from describing the final user first, their needs and concerns, looking for empathy. At this step, it is important to avoid any assumptions or bias due to our expectations, beliefs, or prejudices. After, we set the problem that customers are facing. The brainstorming technique is very useful in the second and third step when finding problems and giving possible solutions. It is better to set the maximum amount of solutions and afterwards define limitations, when one of them must be chosen. In this way, we do not discard any solution at the beginning as they can inspire other ways of facing old problems. Then, a prototype of the chosen solution or innovative idea should be made if it is possible. The prototype can help to check the solution and improve it by testing it with the consumers and repeating the process if needed.



Empathize	Define	Create	Prototype	Test
Observe. Interview. Investigate. Bodystorm or role playing. Know your users and be concerned about their lives.	Identify trends or patterns in your information to understand the problems.	Brainstorming! Creativity! Developing solutions to the problems of your users based on your findings.	How can you show your idea? (It can be a rough representation.) Build to think.	Get feedback from your prototype. Learn about the users and the possible solutions.

Figure 3. Design thinking process. Own elaboration based on [53].

In the practical session, interdisciplinary collaboration is promoted, since teachers from different disciplines work in teams to enrich from different backgrounds and ways of thinking. They are expected to put this design thinking methodology into practice with case studies, which implies being creative, thinking outside the box, and also being curious, proactive, and risk-taking. Teachers are asked to participate in outdoor role plays, and they are given material to design and construct prototypes of their ideas.

A training course for students is also organized. It consists of three alternative sessions, one in each campus of Universitat de València, offering the students taking part in the competition the opportunity to participate in a free training by experts chosen by ADEIT. The session is 3–4 h long and attending is voluntary for students and also for the teachers coordinating the teams. It is focused on three topics: Group dynamics to enhance creativity, a workshop to improve their writing skills for the document they need to prepare, and some basic concepts about copyright, to clarify the use of firms' names or music when presenting the idea.

3.2. Developing the Idea

Unless the team has decided the idea before they enroll in the contest, the period of time in which the team can work with the idea is barely a month, from the end of February to the end of March or beginning of April. The organization usually sets the delivery date before the Easter holidays. During this time, the teachers (coordinators of the teams) act as guides or consultants, working with the teams following the design thinking methodology. Collaborative brainstorming sessions with the teams are very useful to get strong and weak points of the innovative ideas, as any other comments or suggestions that can be useful for the teams when they present their ideas. The teams are encouraged to perform an oral presentation of their idea in 1 minute at the end of the session, in a similar timing as the video they have to present, which must be 1-minute long.

Sometimes the students want to participate, but they still do not have any clue about what “innovative idea” they will present. In that case, we have established a short questionnaire to make them think about it and wake up their curiosity:

- What need do you detect in your everyday life? “It annoys me/makes me angry that . . . ”; “I will like to have a service/product that helps me to . . . ” or “It will be useful if . . . ”
- What are you concerned about? Which problem have you noticed and are you thinking about?
- What are your interests? What do you like to do? What are your hobbies? What MOTIVATES you?
- What are you good at? What are your skills or abilities?
- Which sector, area, or activity are you an expert of? Maybe you are not passionate about something, but you have a lot of knowledge about it because is a family business and you are very familiar with it.
- Is there anything you think that can be done in another way?

When we talk about innovative ideas, we are not talking about science fiction; it does not have to be a revolutionary idea, neither use materials or technology that has not been created yet. The main reason that startups are unsuccessful is that there is no market need (42%), whereas 29% run out of cash and 23% have the wrong team [55]. A global entrepreneurship monitor report about the entrepreneurship in Spain [56] based on three sources (surveys made to Spanish population from 18 to 64 years old, another survey of experts in the business environment, and some secondary sources) describes the profile regarding total entrepreneurial activity (TEA), as shown in Figure 4.

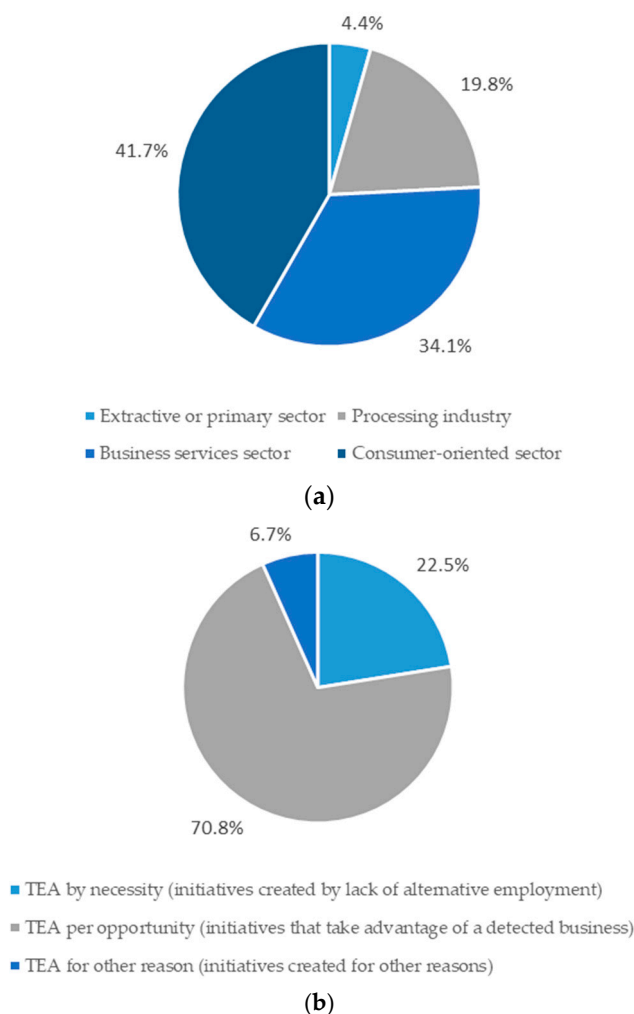


Figure 4. (a) Total entrepreneur activity (TEA) by sector in Spain (2018) [56]. (b) Total entrepreneur activity (TEA) by type in Spain (2018) [56].

The consumer- and business-oriented sectors amount to more than three-fourths of the TEA, and the most common type of TEA is the one that takes advantage of a detected business. Nevertheless, just 12.5% of the initiatives are devoted to fully innovative products or services while 10% are medium- or high-technology-based products or services. Most of the innovative ideas derive from something that already exists but address a new need or are presented in a different and original way, do it more efficiently, or improve a service or product provided to the society (see Figure 5).

On the contrary, if the team has already an idea, they can follow the next advice trying to answer some key questions to develop it:

- Is there any technology or material applied to other things that can be used for your idea?
- Is it feasible? Has it been already done?
- The students must investigate about it, to be sure that their idea is innovative enough.
- At this point, contacting an expert can be very useful to obtain more information to clarify if it is feasible, about the technology needed, the costs of production if it is a good, etc.
- Explore the abilities and skills between team members to find synergies between them and define different roles linked with the idea and its improvement and presentation. For instance, some students can be very good at shooting a video, others in writing to accurately explain the idea, and others in talking to experts or potential users to find out information.

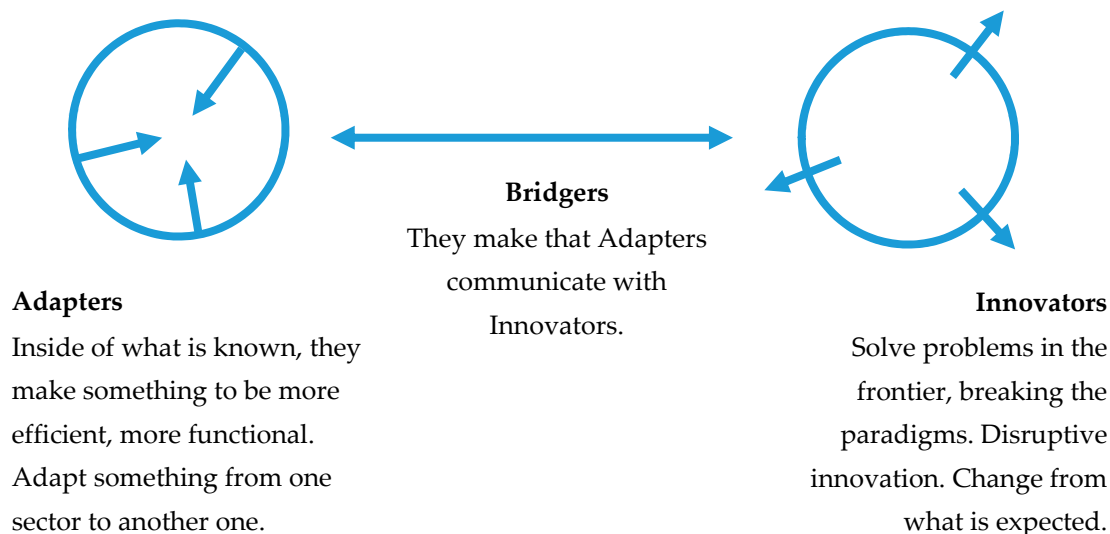


Figure 5. Creative styles (from Michael Kirton) seen in [57].

After defining the idea, every team has to submit two deliverables, one written document presenting and explaining the idea and a video with a similar content in an audiovisual format and summarized in just 60 seconds. The document focuses on why their idea fulfills all the criteria in which it will be evaluated (creativity, coherence, social needs solving, interdisciplinary proposal, and internationalization) with a limit of 400 characters for each criterion and also a free description of the idea at a maximum of 2 pages long. Initially, this document was longer and more detailed but the increase of participants when the additional incentive of 2 ECTS was introduced in 2017 induced the new and more concise format used from 2018 onwards to make the task of the jury more feasible when evaluating the ideas. Each criterion is assessed with a maximum of 2 points [52]:

1. *Creativity*: In the setting or problem solving.
2. *Coherence*: The idea is clearly defined, the steps needed to make it are specified, it exposes the expected results, and comes from the academic training of the team.
3. *Social needs solving*: It solves a shortage or real social need, for which there can be a wide demand in the society.
4. *Interdisciplinary proposal*: Participants from different academic disciplines cooperate to reach the proposed objective and their roles are justified.
5. *Presentation*: The quality of the written document and the video.

Furthermore, the *internationalization* in terms of composition of the team can add an extra 0.5 points up to a maximum of 10 points, if the team includes international students. In this way, the organization tries to promote teams that include the participation of international students, since Universitat de València is the third university in Europe with the highest number of Erasmus students [58]. Obviously, in the globalized environment in which the future graduates will develop their professional careers, the ability to communicate properly with people from other backgrounds, taking into account different ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving from different cultures becomes crucial, contributing to the training of students for being broad-minded and adaptable. Finally, there is a maximum of 6 points for the oral exposition that can be given to the 15 finalist ideas. For the free description of the idea, they should try to answer questions that explain the essential information about the idea, such as: How does the idea come up? What is it about? Which social need does it satisfy? How does it generate value? To which public is it addressed? What characteristics makes it different from other ideas? Which aspects reflects its singularity and originality? What are its strong points? How would it be developed? What resources would it need? (human, economic resources, etc.)? What help would be needed for it starting working? [52].

Note that, although the idea has to be realistic and feasible, it is just the initial stage of an innovative idea; whether it becomes a real start-up or not is a future and optional matter. The teams send their draft to the coordinator, and the coordinator will revise it and suggest some improvements for the final version of the document, before it is submitted.

For the video, the team should discuss the outline with the coordinator. A good-quality video can be obtained nowadays with smartphones and students already have enough capabilities and experience in this area. Hence, the team is in charge of shooting the video and editing it if needed. Obviously, this part is much more creative and involves some of the skills described in the Introduction section. Taking into account the maximum length of the video, the idea has to be expressed in a very succinct way, but, at the same time, it needs to be understood by the receiver who will hear it for the first time. Additionally, as it is a contest, it is important to attract the attention and be original and different from the others to stand out and increase the possibilities of being selected for the final. From our experience, this part is one of the aspects preferred by the students who are not always able to put their creativity into practice in formal education in the university.

All the ideas submitted that fulfill the requirements of the competition are evaluated by the technical commission formed by experts and professionals related to entrepreneurship. The organization communicates the decision about the finalists to the coordinators participating in the competition, since there is an additional and more focused training for the teams who reached the final.

The teachers (coordinators) are offered the possibility of attending this “post-training” course with their finalist students’ teams. On the one hand, there is a session two weeks before the day of the final. They set one training day to prepare the final oral exposition for the jury, which is 4 h long. If some students cannot attend the course, it is desirable that some members of the team do it, so they can afterwards share with the absent teammates all the advice received. On the other hand, one week before the day of the final, all teams rehearse their oral presentation of 3 minutes. Each team is assigned a specific time and they receive feedback from some experts about how to improve their presentation for the final.

3.3. The Final

In the final, every team has to show the presentation of their idea to the jury, which should last a maximum of 3 min. The organization advice is that only one student of the team delivers the presentation, as 3 minutes is very little time. The students can use a PowerPoint presentation to support their message, fake leaflets or fliers of their service, or any hand-made prototype for their presentation. When the presentation finishes, they need to answer any question the members of the jury may ask them. The jury is formed by 9 or 10 people at the least, and they will decide the winning idea of the competition. There is an economic prize that is distributed among the finalists. At the beginning of the contest, there were 10 teams in the final, with the economic amount for the first prize at €4000, the second at €3000, and the third at €2000. The rest of the finalist teams were granted €1000. However, in the latest editions, they have increased the finalist teams to 15, only distinguishing the first prize (€2000) with twice as much as the economic amount that receive the others (€1000). *Ceteris paribus*, this can increase the possibilities for the students to be in the final. The prizes endowments are shared in this way: 75% for the students and 25% for the teacher-coordinator. We consider that this is also an interesting approach. As we stated above, the motivation for lecturers is supposed to be related to intrinsic goals related with boosting the capabilities of their students. However, as there are some extrinsic motivations for the students, it is fair to also recompense the effort, time, and work made by the teacher when the team reaches the final. To avoid opportunist behavior, there is also a maximum of 3 teams that can be coordinated by the same teacher, which can be extended up to 5 if there is a multidisciplinary composition of at least 2 teams among these 5 allowed.

After the competition is finished, all the ideas are presented in a digital catalogue [59] with a brief description about the idea, who formed the teams (students and coordinator), their faculties, and a special mention if they were finalists in the competition. For those who just wanted to engage in

this initial part of exploring being an entrepreneur, this is the end. Conversely, for those who want to go further with their ideas and consider them as an option for their professional future, they are offered the *Business Training for the Development of Business Ideas* (40-hour course that can be validated for 1 ECTS). This training is more focused on the students that are in the last year of their degree or those who have already finished their university studies and want to start working. This course includes the following contents: Application of the Canvas model and empathy map, legal aspects and contracting, communication, creativity, financing, taxation, innovation, marketing, and professional projects. Around 15 students take part in this activity every year.

4. Results

The MOTIVEM contests have been well received by the university community. The participation increased significantly in 2017 from both sides, the teachers-coordinators involved and the students creating teams with innovative ideas (see Table 1). Obviously, as more teachers participate in the School for teachers, there are also able to coordinate students in the contest, so the number of potential monitors increases year by year. The important shift of students' participation seems to be encouraged by the recognition of 2 ECTS that was introduced in 2017.

Table 1. Participation in MOTIVEM contest in number of ideas (teams), students, and teachers-coordinators.

Year	Number of Submitted Ideas	Number of Students Involved	Number of Teachers Involved
2014	70	303	52
2015	94	329	60
2016	92	286	65
2017	164	627	119
2018	151	570	123
2019	168	644	128

The last edition registered 168 teams, the highest number of submitted ideas of any edition of the competition, representing a rise of 140% from 2014. The teams were composed of 644 students, with a gender distribution of 61% of women and 39% of men, and this percentage is maintained if we only focus on the finalists' ideas, for which we can assume that the students from these groups undertake a longer and deeper learning process and are more likely to enhance their entrepreneurship skills. The gender distribution in the contest reproduces a very similar gender distribution in the Universitat de València (UV); that is, 61.63% women for undergraduate level and 60.74% in master on average during the analyzed period [60]. Regarding the teaching staff, 128 teachers coordinated or were collaborators in teams, with a gender distribution of 57% of women and 43% of men.

As stated before, teachers can only coordinate teams if they have been involved in the MOTIVEM School for teachers. Nonetheless, teachers can also participate as collaborator teachers, as long as there is other teacher coordinating who has done the training. The initial program about the school for teachers was promoted by the regional and the state government. Then, it extended to other parts of Spain so that lecturers from other universities could also replicate and participate in similar programs at their universities [36]. Regarding students' participation, they are encouraged to create interdisciplinary teams, with students of different grades, or with students from master's or doctorate studies. Table 2 gives some examples about ideas developed by teams the authors have coordinated from 2017 until 2019.

Table 2. Some of the teams coordinated in MOTIVEM.

Year	Team—Idea	Description of the Idea
2017	NeuHelp	3rd prize award (of 164 ideas submitted), €2000 [61]. Caring service brought to homes offering therapies for old people, especially with neurodegenerative diseases as Alzheimer to avoid the worsening of the disease. Carers will develop a specific and personalized project at medium term for each patient advised by health professionals.
2018	Keepmi	The aim is to install intelligent locker blocks in strategic areas of Valencia, obtaining benefits from their rental.
2019	A past for the future	Events where retired people share knowledge about their life experience with university students from Universitat de València.

Some participants of teams from initial editions wanted to repeat the experience and participated with a different idea in the following editions. Therefore, it seems that the students who participate noticed the skills this initiative helps them to develop and wanted to repeat.

The ideas presented in the contest are very diverse. A broad classification of 12 categories has been made to classify the ideas submitted from 2015 to 2019 according to the general topic they are referred to (see Figure 6). The ideas presented can be profit-oriented (startup or firm) or non-profit oriented (such as foundations or associations).

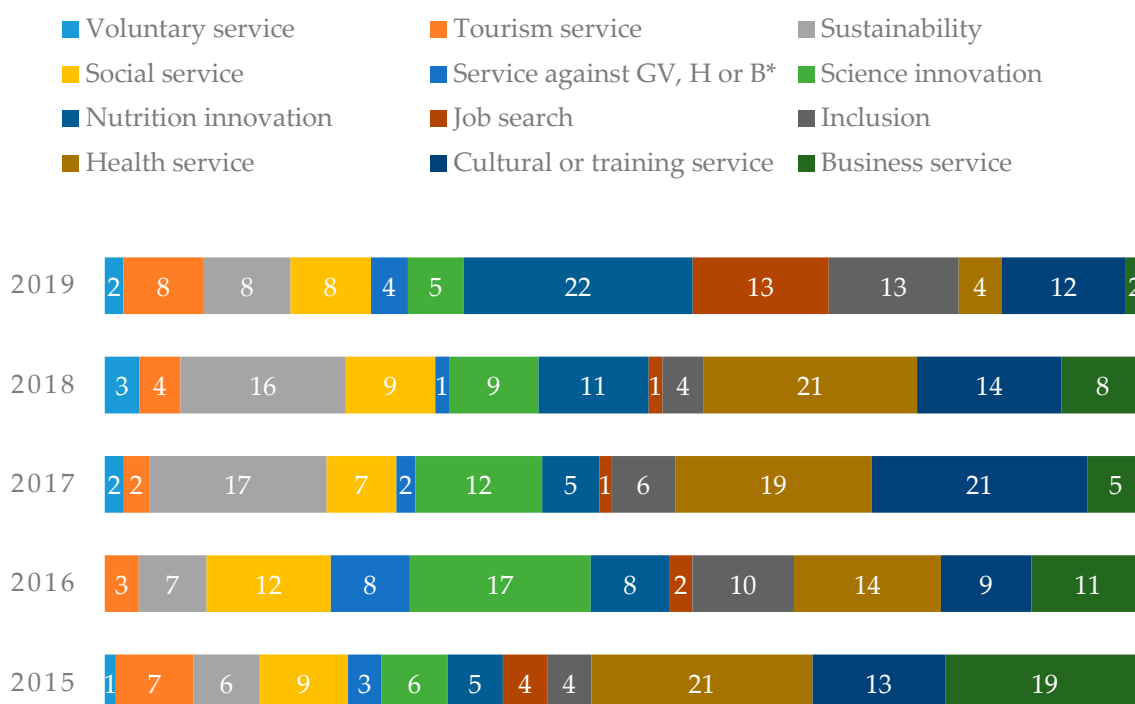


Figure 6. Topics of the ideas presented to the MOTIVEM contest (2015–2019). Own elaboration based on [59,62–65]. * Service against Gender Violence, Harassment, or Bullying. All data shown in the figure are in percentages.

The economic crisis may be reflected in 2015 topics, since business services and job searchers were more important than in other following years. 2016 presents a high concern about services against gender violence, harassment, or bullying, social services, inclusion initiatives, or sciences innovations. In 2017 and 2018, the increase in sustainability ideas is quite important, also reflecting a growing concern about climate change. Also, solutions regarding nutrition innovations or cultural or training services are the focus in these years. Health services ideas are highly important in any year considered,

with the exception of 2019. In 2019, there is an important proportion of service against gender violence, harassment, or bullying, job search, inclusion, or cultural or training service.

How many teams are multidisciplinary teams? Those teams are defined as the ones formed by members (teacher or students) coming from more than one faculty. The percentage of multidisciplinary teams is 38% in 2015, 49% in 2016, 63% in 2017, 72% in 2018, and 76% in 2019, thus showing an increasing trend. The multidisciplinary was encouraged in 2017 when a limitation of non-multidisciplinary teams was included for coordinating teachers. If we focus on the finalist teams, in the first years of the competition from 2015 to 2017, only 30%, 50%, and 60% were teams with more than one faculty involved, respectively. In comparison, for the last years, this has experienced a noticeable increase, with the multidisciplinary finalist teams being at 93% in 2018 and 80% in 2019. This shows a better performance of diverse teams in the last years, which are benefiting from their strength of different approaches and increase their participation in the final. However, notice that students are the ones who create the teams and propose the innovative idea to participate.

If we study this fact more in detail, the number of faculties involved in each team, we can identify different gradations of multidisciplinary teams (see Figure 7). Therefore, the competition has enhanced the collaboration of multidisciplinary teams, giving the students an opportunity to work with other students from different areas, which is not so common since they are usually working only with their classmates that are studying the same degree.

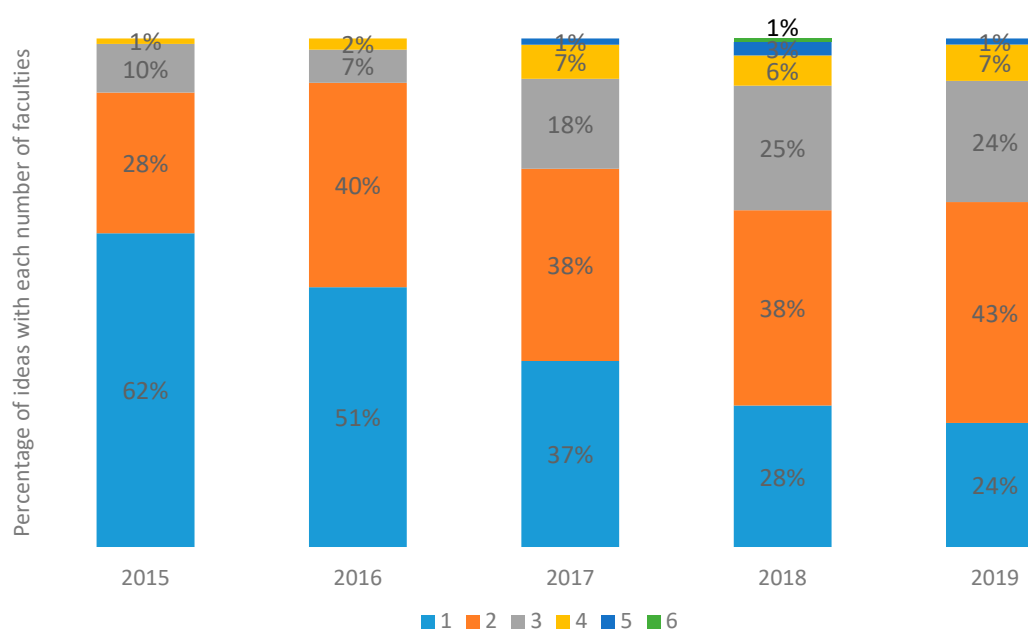


Figure 7. Degree of multidisciplinary teams (measured as the percentage of ideas for each number of faculties involved). Own elaboration based on [59,62–65].

Transference of Good Practices

There was a transference of the experience of MOTIVEM: Trainer's Camp Aula Emprende, in September 2018 [66]. The Trainer's Camp Aula Emprende is an initiative coordinated by the Valencian Regional Government through the General Directorate of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Cooperativism that has the origin in the MOTIVEM program from Universitat de València, managed by its University-Business Foundation ADEIT. The Trainer's Camp Aula Emprende is part of the pilot action approved on May 28 2018 by the Interreg Europe Monitoring Committee to support ten Interreg European Entrepreneurial Regions (IEER) in the transfer of good practice of the Aula Emprende Programme [67]. The project is concerned with *Boosting innovative Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Regions for young entrepreneurs*. This activity organized by ADEIT consists of a presentation of the competition and the previous school for teachers to other European regions with the recognition of the

EU as an outstanding example for entrepreneurship learning and mind-set activation. This activity tries to explain all the methodology applied in the training for teachers and how they work with the coordinated teams. Some teachers coordinating teams in the contest have participated in this activity explaining what the process of working with the teams is. MOTIVEM was finally recognized as the best practice among the ones presented by each of the other European regions; thus, the only initiative that will be replicated in the other European universities of the regions participating in the project.

In fact, the MOTIVEM program is also recognized in the Entrepreneurship map of the Valencian region 2016 [68], where it is highlighted that it can be replicated since it has the experience of seven editions (this was in 2016, it would be 10 editions by 2019). Its methodology, the training program, and the internal coordination between institutions was tested and had supporting material. Opinions from teachers and university students participating in the program have been collected with periodical meetings that helped improving the program. The replicability of the program will be easy and desirable based on the evidence, but it will require funding.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The importance of experiential learning, the teacher–learner experience, and group projects to improve employability seems to be in agreement [69–71]. Although not all students become entrepreneurs, the learning experience and personal development should improve their whole employability perspectives. Experiential learning and work experience are the best methods across different disciplines and contexts [70].

The initiatives described for entrepreneurship education or enhancing employability are very diverse: An annual careers event with employers for networking, study visits to employers and organizations, guest speakers from industry, or mentoring or analyzing international case studies combined with team projects working with real organizations [71,72]. This latter example is based on applying theory in a real-life environment to develop practical skills, where it is also important that the university provides a clear structure for them to work on the projects, similar features to the initiative presented in this paper. Other programs on entrepreneurship education and training focus on the knowledge and skills required to develop a business plan and contribute to the strategic development of an enterprise by implementing a business plan competition and enterprise simulations, that is, a similar methodology as the one proposed in MOTIVEM [73]. Our program is less ambitious as it focusses on the preliminary idea of a business, but at the same time, it is easier to implement.

There is a report with several case studies from UK universities [70] where there are two close examples to the one presented in this paper. First, The Project “pitch” assessment in Aberystwyth University for Geography students with a competition for one of the five “real world” project grants. Students have 5 minutes to present their videos and oral presentations, similar to the deliverables required in this case study. Results show that students were involved with the projects and valued that they were from the “real world”. Second is the venture matrix organized in Sheffield Hallam University, similar to this case study in the sense that it is addressed to many disciplines. Students create their own business or social enterprise across disciplines and study levels, simulating the real world. Thus, multidisciplinary is an interesting feature also stimulated by MOTIVEM. Students report that participating in this activity has given them real-life examples to talk about in job interviews, therefore, as MOTIVEM, it can help students to rise their employability.

We consider that MOTIVEM is helping to enhance students’ abilities that employers value the most [21] as the criteria chosen to evaluate the ideas are very focused on sustainability and what is demanded by companies, like soft skills and employability [13,46]. One of the main skills that is boosted with MOTIVEM program is creativity, which can be defined as doing things in a different way [74]. In the path of learning creativity, teamwork is essential, because it encourages reflection and play [75]. Creativity can be linked with learning ability, adaptability to changes, and also problem solving.

In the contest, students search for a solution to an existing problem, making some process more efficient, or reusing some initially useless output for another purpose. The social needs solving is

essential and directly addresses analysis skills and output orientation. The current economic paradigm has important deficiencies and one of the most challenging ones is to ensure a sustainable development. In fact, in the 2020 edition of the contest, the organization decided to explicitly include the sustainable development goals (SDG) from the United Nations [76] in the evaluation criteria of the ideas and they should be related to the social needs solving.

For students, MOTIVEM is an opportunity to develop their creativity and entrepreneurship [43], to create something from zero, being proactive, and solving a need that exists in the society. Complementary activities to the formal training of university students are undoubtedly an added value for preparing students for the labor market enriching their university experience beyond academia [44]. Usually, students have no previous labor experience, so their participation in these activities could partially compensate for this weakness. In this way, participating in MOTIVEM can be a differentiating element in the CV of any graduate by enhancing their employability and making them different from the crowd [30,70]. The employers are not only searching for experts in their areas, but for flexible and creative employees who are perfectly capable of working in interdisciplinary teams. This training can be applied to existing companies or social organizations to create inclusive and highly participatory economies [34,77].

Another advantage of participating in MOTIVEM is the possibility of creating a startup and considering self-employment as a possible professional future. Training entrepreneurial skills can strengthen the intention of students to establish their own firm and their employability [37,42,78]. Anecdotally, we will describe two examples of a direct positive effect of having taken part in the contest. On the one hand, Sergio Pardo won the first edition of the contest in 2014 with “The Flying Frames”, an idea with audiovisual solutions implemented with drones [79]. His team created a startup, where he worked for two years. He decided to give up the company as the main activity of the firm was re-oriented to the technological development by building customized drones, now UAV works [80], where his colleagues are still working. Although he moved to another job, he is extremely grateful for the opportunity of building a business from zero and working in a startup. In fact, his CV is now enriched with the experience acquired with the contest and the startup. Employers have been very interested in his profile because of that experience and subsequent training as well. On the other hand, Oiko Sports was a finalist in MOTIVEM 2015, and the idea became a real firm [81]. They offer educational training and sports services, counselling, and training for children learning through sports. They were in charge of students’ training about dynamic teams to enhance creativity in the contest edition in 2017 [82].

Teachers also have a relevant role in MOTIVEM in their interaction with students’ teams. To build a good learning relationship, it is important to devote some time to guided group activities before the students start developing the idea [48]. Afterwards, the interaction continues by polishing the idea, motivating them, and finding their strong points in a way that these employability skills so demanded by recruiters are enhanced [26]. However, some difficulties were identified in these three editions through teams’ coordination concerning the timing. Coordinators submit students’ teams with an initial idea that can be modified afterwards and there is barely one month to work on it, ensuring delivery dates do not overlap with exams. Only exceptionally motivated teams finally present the developed idea. Another challenging point is to come up with original ideas as more editions are celebrated. Many students identify similar needs, so their ideas are close to others in previous editions. The organization tries to update the contest and introduce small changes from year to year to solve any detected problem and to continue stimulating student’s participation.

This experience has been developed and improved during the six past editions. In the whole process of evaluating the ideas, MOTIVEM organizers are assessed by public and private professionals that give value to the contest, since they bring their view of the real professional practice to decide which ideas seem more feasible, well developed, and attractive to deserve to be in the final. The description made in the paper allows for its replication in other high-education centers in order to improve the development of entrepreneurship competences or complement possible existing activities.

Finally, an analysis of employment of graduates would be interesting to appreciate the effects of the contest on employability. Unfortunately, the last survey made by the university was to graduates between 2014–2016, the first years in which the contest took place. Although this employment of graduates cannot be considered as measuring employability, since it is difficult to establish an objective measure for employability, the positive effects should be noticed in the long-term [70]. Some business training programs that slightly increase self-employment among graduates a year after finishing their degree do not show a higher general employment rate, which might be a result of a substitution effect [83]. However, students' opinion about their employability can also be influenced by current labor market conditions. A comparative study tested possible country differences that rely on national labor market conditions for higher education graduates using data from REFLEX project [84]. They find that the percentage of Spanish graduates that were satisfied with their study program would have been higher if the labor market situation had been better.

Another limitation of the current analysis may spark future research, where a more detailed database should be collected to extend the analysis of the activity impact in students' behavior, although having an appropriate counterfactual is very difficult. It would be desirable to have more information about the areas of knowledge or faculties of each member of the team, as well as their level of studies (Degree, Master, or PhD) to identify patterns in the ideas submitted. It will be also very interesting to track students after graduated and obtaining their feedback on the impact of the participation in the contest when entering the labor market.

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