

Al TEAM di Monferrato Digitale: Roberto, Alfio, Giulio, Guillaume e Sara.

*Ad Andrea, che da mesi mi sopporta e lo farà per tanti anni ancora (spero) ed a
tutti gli AMICI che in questi 5 anni hanno camminato al mio fianco, pochi
centimetri o tante miglia che sia, siete stati parte fondamentale della mia vita:
dal mitico CdM a Bocconi TV, dal beach volley milanese a quello viareggino che
mi ha portata in giro per l'Italia a quello ligure, dalla Milano Fashion Week
all'Ambasciata Italiana a Jakarta.*

*A mia Madre, che espressamente mi aveva chiesto di non farle la dedica, ma
senza la quale niente di tutta questa "avventura bocconiana" sarebbe potuto
accadere*

A mio Padre, sperando tu sia fiero di me quanto io vorrei fossi qui oggi.

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Foreword

Since the 1980s, in Italy and worldwide the formula of the business incubator has developed into the ideal hotbed for promoting technology, business innovation and entrepreneurship, especially among the youth.¹

The idea of researching the project for a sports incubator linked to a specific territorial area comes from personal experiences and contacts at international level in sports such as beach volleyball and in the fields of tourism, culture and the environment.

In the case of a district such as the Alto Monferrato, it has been necessary but also particularly exciting to discover a territory which has turned out to be particularly interesting from the historical, social and economic point of view. Through this process it has been possible to identify its strengths and opportunities, which are not obvious at first sight and which are in fact comparable to those of a big city and its hinterland.

The objective of a sports incubator in Alto Monferrato is to deliver important results for this territory in terms of both social and economic development. The main tool available to that purpose is the regulation available from the Italian central government, i.e. the laws on Innovative start-ups and Certified Incubators. These pieces of legislation introduce new forms of state support, where research and innovations are applied

(1) *Technology Entrepreneurship And Business Incubation: Theory, Practice, Lessons Learned*, Phan Phillip H. Mian Sarfraz A. Lamine Wadid, World Scientific, 2016.

beyond the domain of sports to the environment, healthcare and 21st century hi-tech.

The ambition is to position the Incubator as the local hotbed for innovative and collaborative initiatives, for cultural and economic development. A model which can be exported to similar communities and contexts.²



Picture 1

(2) Change Agents in the New Economy: Business Incubators and Economic Development, Candace Campbell, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, 1988²

CHAPTER 1

Business incubators and entrepreneurship

1.1 Business incubators - A brief history

According to some authors, the first incubator (BIC - Batavia Industrial Centre) was created in the USA by the Mancuso family in 1959³, with the main purpose of renting a large complex of properties to many companies, while also offering various services.

However, the "STUDENT AGENCIES INC" was possibly one of the first organizations to incubate student business enterprises as early as 1942 in New York. That experience was followed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1946, when its President Karl Compton, gave birth to an incubator with real business capital⁴. These pioneering structures fostered businesses, hosting them, giving them various types of support (offices, laboratories, administrative, legal, managerial, etc.).

As business incubators grew in number in America, Europe and the rest of world from the 1980s to today, they also differentiated into private and public, profit and non-profit. Incubators have also evolved in the ability to attract venture capital for the start-up, specialising by economic sector,

³ Carlo Boschetti, Alessandro Grandi, Rosa Grimaldi, *"Risorse, competenze e incubatori di impresa"*, 2003

⁴ *A Brief History of Business Incubation in the United States*, Dinah Adkins, National Business Incubation Association, 2003

as well as providing increasingly advanced services (Networking, Coaching, Mentoring, Tutoring) or playing the role of accelerator.

The first incubators of companies appeared in Italy in the 1980s and they were state-owned, tasked with the mission of promoting the economy of more disadvantaged areas. The main example was the Società per la Promozione e Sviluppo d'Impresa (SPI) which later became Invitalia Spa-Agenzia Nazionale per l'attrazione degli investimenti e lo sviluppo d'impresa, a company entirely owned by the Ministry of Economy. Then the Business Innovation Centres (BIC) were created, incubators based on the model designed by the European Commission in order to support high-tech manufacturing. Similarly, between the 80s and 90s, the Science and Technology Parks (PST), mainly with public participation, carried out incubation of innovative entrepreneurial activities within them. At the end of the 1990s, the university incubators also appeared, to optimise know-how and high technology transfer from universities to business. Private incubators have appeared more recently, mainly in the field of new technologies and the Internet, and geographically are mostly located in the north⁵.

⁵ Social Start-up, Sergio Ricci, Maggioli, 2015

1.2 Business Incubators - Definitions

A "business incubator" is an organisation that provides potential entrepreneurs with services and sometimes with financial resources to support their "business ideas" as well as "product ideas".

The mission of an incubator is:

- To screen entrepreneurial ideas and skills and "shelter" fledgling start-ups from market conditions of extreme uncertainty;
- To provide tools for validating ideas, measuring its business potential business models and business plans;
- To identify and acquire development resources (know-how and capital) quickly.

Therefore, for new and young entrepreneurs, the main benefits from incubators are:

- Market intelligence, validation support;
- Minimising development costs and time to market.

Through the incubator an entrepreneurial idea can become a winner, be showcased to potential customers and funders to support further growth.

Incubators, like any other viable profit or non-profit organisation, define their objectives, as well as every operational and organizational modus operandi.

To be credible and successful they need to demonstrate:

- Deep understanding of the growth path and the competition in a specific industry;
- Interpersonal relationships and skills in "reaching" the various networks necessary for the development of the company.

The source of financing to run an incubator may come from:

- A sort of registration fee to enter the incubation program;
- Commissions for the incubation period (based on duration or results);
- Acquisition of a shareholding in the share capital of the incubated company;
- Revenue from financial supporters and sponsors.

Besides the incubator itself and the incubated companies, additional and complementary business stakeholders are:

- Venture capitalists, who allocate capital in those start-ups from which it is expected an increase in value over time so to achieve a specific capital gain;
- Business angels: they are similar to venture capitalist, the difference being they normally are individuals who offer lower amounts of capital at earlier stages. Their investment normally derives from a personal and direct relationship with the new entrepreneur.

In terms of ownership and control the main types of incubators are:

- a) State-owned or Private;
- b) Profit-oriented or Non-for-profit;
- c) Specialized versus Generalist.

Private incubators can be classified as:

- Venture incubators, i.e. those providing all types of services, with focus on accommodation (office space and services) managerial assistance and networking services;
- Venture accelerators, whose main purpose is to accelerate the development of a new company, focusing on strategic advice, on capital injection and on the launch of start-ups on the market in a short time;
- Venture web portals, where investors can access a vast number of projects divided by sector, size of the investment required and development phase;
- Finally, Corporate incubators are created within a company and often specialize in just one sector, where initial projects, internal or external are supported by various internal stakeholders.

Profit-oriented incubators pursue profitability through a business model based on fees and/or equity and establish very close relations with the risk capital market.

The profit-oriented structures are normally run by individual entrepreneurs, private industrial groups, financial institutions or venture capitalists.

University incubators are emerging as a very successful model. Unlike other types of incubators, they work in close cooperation with research institutes. The main characteristics of these structures are the following:

- Strong focus on scientific research;
- Physical presence in universities;
- Strong emphasis on university subjects;
- Incubation of ideas originating from undergraduate or non-graduate students and researchers.⁶

⁶ *Technology Entrepreneurship And Business Incubation: Theory, Practice, Lessons Learned*, Phan Phillip H. Mian Sarfraz A. Lamine Wadid, World Scientific, 2016.

1.3 Regulation of Business Incubators in Italy:

1.3.1 The “Certified Incubator” and the “Innovative Start Up”: Decreto Crescita 2.0 - 17/12/2012

In Italy, legislation (Decreto Crescita 2.0) has introduced in 2012-3 the model of the “certified incubator” and the “innovative start-up”

The law considers the former as tools for "promoting sustainable growth, technological development, new entrepreneurship and employment, especially for young people"⁷.

The business incubator aims to stimulate innovative business projects, support them through the provision of services, financial resources and a network of contacts, thus increasing the chances that a start-up will remain active for a long period.

The innovative start-up is a “new company, or less than 5-year-old, established in Italy, not listed on financial markets, having technology innovation as its main purpose, more than 15% of turnover or total costs spent in R&D and owning registered intellectual property (IP)”.

Along with these requirements come several benefits, such as exemption from register stamp duty, preferential labour regulations,

⁷ Art. 25, 1° comma, D.L. n. 179/2012 e sue successive modificazioni ed integrazioni

investment incentives and access to credit⁸.

1.3.2 Decreto MISE-22/12/2016 on incubators and innovative start-ups

A few years later, based on observations and feedback, the MISE (Ministry for Economic Development) has updated the minimum requirements of certified incubators.

In order to achieve that status, an incubator must comply with some specific requirements related to premises, management, equipment, and above all must demonstrate track record in supporting start-ups and specifically:

- To be incorporated, also in a cooperative form, under Italian law, or a Societas Europaea resident in Italy, and whose activities and corporate purpose must be the support for innovative start-ups, to foster their birth and development, but also deal with technology transfer and research processes. The activity must be carried out through the offer of dedicated physical spaces (such as co-working) and consulting services;
- To have surface allocated exclusively to start up incubation (at least 500sq. m.);
- Internet speed (at least 10 Mbps);

⁸ *Ibidem*

- Machinery and testbeds for prototypes;
- Active consulting team with relevant experience (at least 15 cumulative years of experience on the subject);
- Contracts/Agreements with research centres, universities, specialised financial partners (banks, venture capital funds).
- The services offered by the incubator must comply with the minimum values indicated in the tables attached to the decree, reaching a minimum total score of at least 35 points in Table A and at least 50 points in Table B (number of applications and number of innovative start-ups incubated; (Appendix n.1).

The legal representative of the incubator must issue a declaration of compliance with those requirements and submit it to the competent Chamber of Commerce, which will update the relevant section on the Register of Companies portal, while the Ministry of Economic Development will examine each year the data.

Certified incubators must keep all documents and documents that prove the truthfulness of the self-declaration of possession of the requirements for at least 5 years from the date of registration in the special section of the Business Register, but if the checks reveal the non-existence of the declared requirements, the incubator will be deleted from the list and will lose the expected tax benefits⁹.

⁹ DL 22/12/2016 as per Gazzetta Ufficiale 20/01/2017

1.3.3 Appendix n.1

Decreto MISE-22/12/2016 on incubators and innovative start-ups: Table A and B

TABELLA A DELLE INFORMAZIONI RICHIESTE PER LA CERTIFICAZIONE DEGLI INCUBATORI DI START-UP INNOVATIVE

(per ognuno dei requisiti la società ottiene il relativo punteggio se indica un valore pari o superiore alla soglia prevista. È necessario compilare tutti i campi fornendo valori assoluti, anche quando inferiori, oltre che uguali o superiori, alla soglia minima)

Art. 25 comma 5 lettere a), b), c), d)

Riferimento al DL 18 ottobre 2012, n. 179.		Requisiti	Valori minimi	Punti
1	Art. 25 comma 5 lettera a)	Superficie della struttura a uso esclusivo dell'incubazione delle start-up innovative (in metri quadrati)	500	15 punti
2	Art. 25 comma 5 lettera b)	Velocità di trasmissione di dati del collegamento internet	10 Mbps	Almeno uno dei 3 requisiti 10 punti
		Presenza di macchinari e attrezzature per la conduzione di prove e sperimentazioni (disponibilità in sede o presso enti convenzionati limitrofi)	Sì	
3	Art. 25 comma 5 lettera c)	Presenza di macchinari e risorse utili allo realizzazione di prototipi (disponibilità in sede o presso enti convenzionati limitrofi)	Sì	Entrambi i requisiti 10 punti
		Struttura tecnica di consulenza attualmente operativa (numero unità di lavoro, collaboratori o professionisti che operino con continuità, equivalenti a tempo pieno – FTE – dedicate in modo specifico al supporto e alla consulenza alle start-up innovative, e caratterizzate da competenze ed esperienze specifiche)	3	
4	Art. 25 comma 5 lettera d)	Numero cumulativo di anni di esperienza in materia di sostegno a nuove imprese innovative maturata dal personale della struttura tecnica di consulenza indicata al punto precedente	15	Almeno uno dei 3 requisiti 10 punti
		Esistenza di contratti e/o convenzioni attualmente attivi con centri di ricerca e università, finalizzati allo sviluppo delle start-up innovative, indicando il soggetto cui fanno capo, l'oggetto dell'accordo nonché le date di decorrenza e di scadenza	Sì	
		Esistenza di contratti e/o convenzioni attualmente attivi con partner finanziari, finalizzati allo sviluppo delle start-up innovative (istituti di credito, fondi di venture capital), indicando il soggetto cui fanno capo, l'oggetto dell'accordo nonché le date di decorrenza e di scadenza	Sì	
		Esistenza di contratti e/o convenzioni attualmente attivi con istituzioni pubbliche (Pubbliche Amministrazioni, CCIAA, finanziarie regionali, ecc.), finalizzati allo sviluppo di start-up innovative, indicando il soggetto cui fanno capo, l'oggetto dell'accordo nonché le date di decorrenza e di scadenza	Sì	

TABELLA B

(per ognuno dei requisiti la società ottiene il relativo punteggio se indica un valore pari o superiore alla soglia prevista. È necessario compilare tutti i campi fornendo valori assoluti, o percentuali ove richiesto, anche quando inferiori, oltre che uguali o superiori, alla soglia minima)

Art. 25 comma 5 lettera e)

Riferimento al DL 18 ottobre 2012, n. 179.		Indicatori del requisito di cui all'articolo 25, comma 5, lett. e)	Valori minimi	Punti
1	Art. 25 comma 7 lettera a)	Numero di candidature (idee progettuali iniziali corredate da un business plan preliminare e finalizzate alla costituzione di una start-up innovativa in seno all'incubatore) pervenute all'incubatore nell'anno civile (1) precedente a quello della dichiarazione, purché registrate formalmente con mezzi elettronici	100	10 punti
2	Art. 25 comma 7 lettera b)	Numero di start-up innovative attualmente incubate in modalità fisica, vale a dire con ospitalità continua presso uno spazio dedicato in sede (il rapporto di incubazione fisica dev'essere disciplinato da un contratto di incubazione, che ne specifica con chiarezza la durata temporale, gli obblighi delle parti e gli oneri connessi)	10	10 punti
3	Art. 25 comma 7 lettera c)	Numero di start-up innovative che hanno terminato il percorso di incubazione alla scadenza naturale del contratto di incubazione fisica nell'ultimo anno civile, purché in stato attivo al momento dell'autocertificazione	3	10 punti
4	Art. 25 comma 7 lettere b) e c)	Numero di start-up innovative incubate in modalità fisica, attualmente o in passato, che coinvolgono cittadini non UE destinatari dei programmi Italia Startup Visa o Italia Startup Hub	2	10 punti
5	Art. 25 comma 7 lettera d)	Numero di collaboratori a qualsiasi titolo (soci operativi e dipendenti) che operano continuativamente nelle start-up innovative di cui al punto 2, escludendo il personale dell'incubatore	30	10 punti
6	Art. 25 comma 7 lettera e)	Variazione percentuale del totale dei collaboratori a qualsiasi titolo (soci operativi e dipendenti) operanti continuativamente nelle start-up innovative incubate in modalità fisica nei due anni civili precedenti a quello in corso al deposito dell'autocertificazione (2)	0%	10 punti
7	Art. 25 comma 7 lettera f)	Variazione percentuale del totale del valore della produzione delle start-up innovative incubate in modalità fisica nei due anni civili precedenti a quello in corso al deposito dell'autocertificazione (3)	0%	10 punti
8	Art. 25 comma 7 lettera g)	Capitale di rischio totale investito nelle start-up innovative attualmente incubate a partire dalla data di decorrenza del contratto di incubazione fisica	500.000 euro	Almeno uno dei 2 requisiti 10 punti
		Fondi pubblici (in forma di equity, semi-equity, finanziamento a tasso agevolato o a fondo perduto) di origine comunitaria, nazionale o regionale ricevuti dalle start-up innovative attualmente incubate a partire dalla data di decorrenza del contratto di incubazione fisica	500.000 euro	
9	Art. 25 comma 7 lettera h)	Numero di brevetti o programmi per elaboratore originario registrati e di domande di brevetto presentate dalle start-up innovative attualmente incubate a partire dalla data di decorrenza del contratto di incubazione fisica	5	10 punti

17A00326

GRIGLIA DI COMPILAZIONE

#	Denominazione start-up innovativa; codice fiscale; sito web; email non PEC	Date inizio e cessazione contratto incubazione fisica (gg/mm/anno - gg/mm/anno oppure "in corso")	N° soci ISV/ISH*	N° soci operativi attuali	N° dip. attuali*	N° collab. (t-2)**	N° collab. (t-1)**	Val. prod. (t-2)**	Val. prod. (t-1)**	Investimenti capitale di rischio (data, origine, importo)*	Fondi pubblici (data, origine, importo)*	Brevetti registrati (data e codice registraz.)*	Software registrati (data e codice registraz.)*	Domande brevetto depositate (data e codice deposito)*
1														
2														
3														
...														

* Inserire N.D. se l'impresa non è in possesso del valore in questione

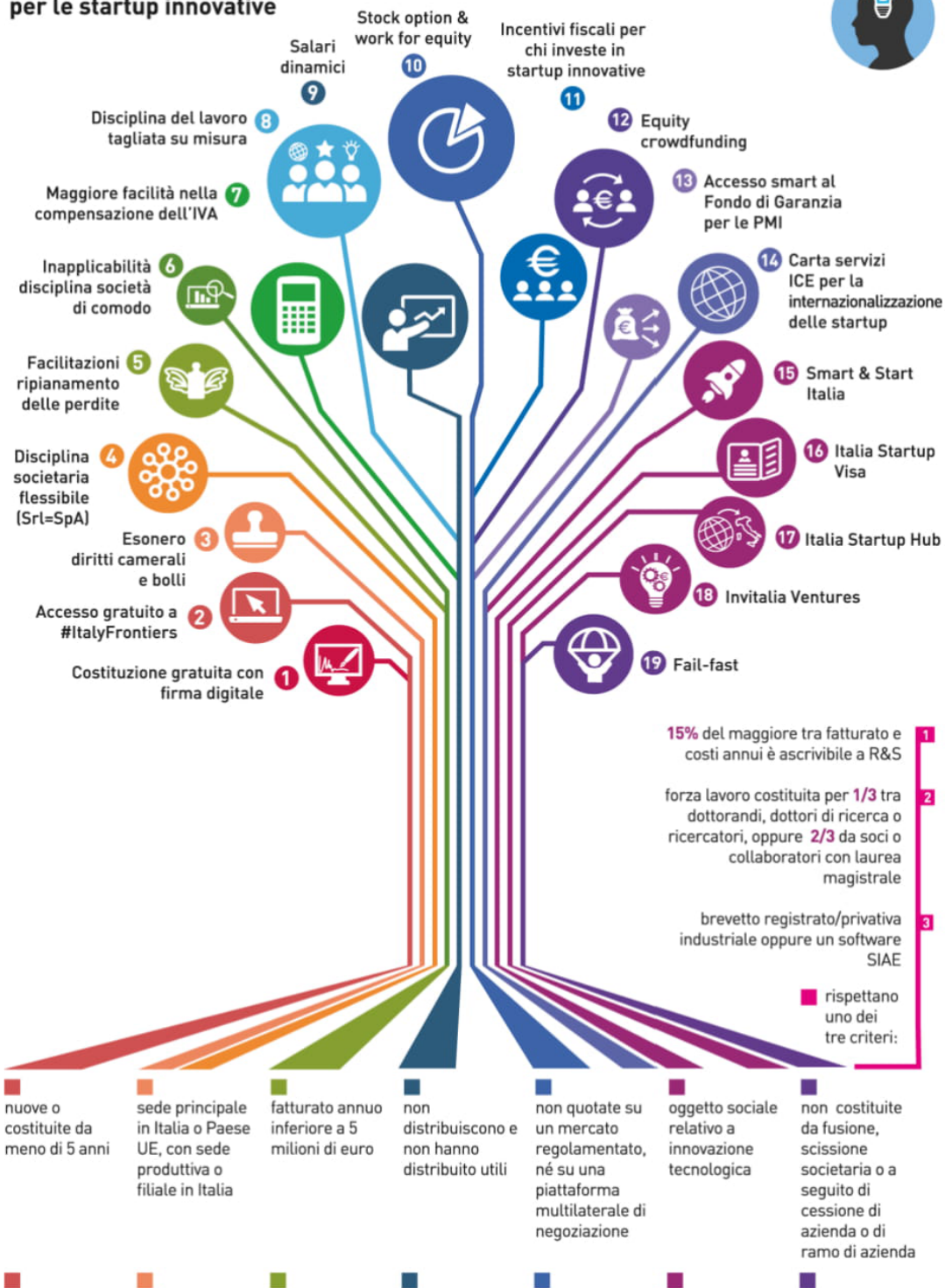
** Inserire N.A. se la start-up non era ancora stata costituita o non era ancora incubata fisicamente presso la società dichiarante nell'anno civile di riferimento

ITALY – LAW AND RULES
Decreto Legislativo 18 ottobre 2012, n. 179 convertito con modificazioni dalla Legge 221 del 17 dicembre 2012
Aggiornato con le variazioni apportate dal DL 28 giugno 2013, n. 76 convertito dalla Legge 9 agosto del 2013, n. 99 e integrato con le indicazioni interpretative introdotte dalle circolari 16/E dell'11 giugno 2014 dall'Agenzia delle Entrate e 3672/C del 29 agosto 2014 del Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico
Decreto del Ministro dello Sviluppo Economico del 21 febbraio 2013, recante "Requisiti relativi agli incubatori di startup innovative"

ITALY - LAST UPDATE OF THE LAW
Nel 2017 il MISE ha aggiornato i requisiti minimi per gli incubatori certificati. Il nuovo decreto ministeriale 22 dicembre 2016, pubblicato sulla Gazzetta Ufficiale del 20 gennaio, aggiorna i requisiti di accesso alla sezione speciale del Registro delle imprese dedicata agli Incubatori certificati, sostituendo il DM 22 febbraio 2013. I requisiti minimi sono stati adeguati alla luce delle evidenze empiriche osservate nei quattro anni di vigenza del regime speciale.

Source: Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico

Le agevolazioni per le startup innovative



Picture 2 (explained in the text)

Chapter 2

Case studies of incubators in Northern Italy and in France

2.1 Economic and operational areas of the incubators observed

In the last few months a number of incubators have been approached to identify success factors, challenges and “best practices” to be repurposed for our project.

The following is a synopsis.

Name	Location	Specialty	Services
WyLab	Chiavari (Ge)	Sports Tech Football Scouting	Co-working Courses/Seminars
Digital Magic	Milan	Digital	Strategic Networking: Angel Network Tech support Consulting
Bic Liguria (Public)	Genoa	From Traditional Incubation to High-tech	Business Planning R&D
I3P (Non-profit, public consortium)	Turin	Hi-tech	R&D
Sport Social Business Lab	Paris	Sport tech Social impact	Expertise/Know how

They were selected based on some specific criteria:

- Private and public incubators, to gauge differences between the two models, especially in terms of support in raising finance, coaching and impact on the local economy;
- The example of the main French sports incubator, in order to leverage European experience;
- Another social impact incubator, located in Liguria, an area close to the Alto Monferrato, in order to assess its economic and social impact in the areas nearby.

2.2.1 WyLab - Chiavari (GE) - Liguria

WyLab was created as a football scouting platform at the beginning known as WyScout in Chiavari, (GE), the 29/06/2015.

It is the only incubator in Liguria specialised in technologies applied to the world of sport and it supports the start-up in the first 4 months free of charge. After that period if the project is considered viable, it is incubated for another 12 months and financed up to 100 thousand euros. At the end of the path the "exit" phase begins. The services offered are co-working, courses and professional seminars.

WyLab was born with the clear intention of establishing a new generation of businesses. Through its know-how, WyScout has become a consolidated and internationally recognized company in the professional football sector.

As stated in the website, the goal of the incubator is to "create a hub for technological development linked to the world of sport and become the reference point for innovative initiatives on applied technology in Italy. We address both the realities that are emerging and those that, already consolidated, need to grow. We believe that the best way to relaunch our territory and the country is to create a place where coworking and incubation are the centre of a new model of economic and cultural development "¹⁰.

Interview with Antonio Gozzi, the creator of WyScout:

What are the results of the first two years since the incubator activity?

«The incubator has an area of 1500 square meters, 700 thousand euros of total investment, 100 applications submitted by sports start-ups of which 12 selected and 8 pre-incubated, per year, in addition to the 100 workers housed in the co-working spaces. "

"We want to show that in Liguria we can do business and innovation and that young people are not as they are usually described - added Gozzi."

Just five full-time employees, but a **great team work**: behind the success of Wylab there is also the unexpected feedback from the 150 co-working stations in via Gagliardo, the former Delpino high school in the ancient heart of the city, but with high-level technological

¹⁰ www.wylab.net

equipment.

"The numbers for this 2018 are extraordinary. We started with a lot of criticism and scepticism, but now we can be considered a case study for support of a territory (Tigullio) and its local skills ", concluded Gozzi. This year, however, it is only the beginning of a complex journey: WyLab has financed 5 start-ups, betting on their success; at the end of March the second "call for ideas" will be held to collect new projects.

The start-ups financed so far are: Wesii, NoiseFeed, Fightec, Math & Sport, Its4Kids (the only non-sports theme). Among the future objectives, there is the idea of organizing an event in Chiavari and invite other sports incubators of all over the world and the financial community of the sector.

This view is confirmed by the new CEO of WyLab, Federico Smanio. He says: "I have always nurtured the desire to make an important contribution to the improvement of my sport, football, which I have lived with great passion both on and off the field, a world still stuck in the past and traditional management models.

Therefore, I could not miss the opportunity to become part of an extraordinary team who has the ambition of becoming the meeting point between sports and technology. The fascinating challenge will be to nurture the talent of sport tech entrepreneurs and allow them to deliver innovation for sports clubs and athletes and bringing value to investors in the sector.

My ambition is to make WyLab a key player in the sports industry, making available to the team and stakeholders my wealth of managerial and sporting experience".

2.2.2 Digital Magics (Milan) - Lombardy

Digital Magics, the most important incubator of Italian digital start-ups, BNP Paribas International Financial Services, BNP Paribas Cardif, Findomestic, Arval Italia and BNL Gruppo BNP Paribas are the creators of the MIA - Miss In program Action, which aims to support the digital talent of women and help grow the female presence within the Italian innovation ecosystem¹¹.

Digital Magics is a certified venture incubator of digital start-ups born in 2003. It Invests in digital start-ups and coaches them during the start-up phase of the company, providing:

- Finance: with an average of 300,000 euros per start-up, against a qualified minority share of the company (from 20% to 49%);
- Strategic and networking support: Digital Magics has a team of 10 partners with consolidated track record in the industrial and financial sectors;
- Technological support: Digital Magics has an internal R&D laboratory, made of developers, designers and marketers, which carries out rapid promotion and technological advisory

¹¹ <http://www.digitalmagics.com/en/>

activities to support start-ups;

- Facilities: available to start-ups there are several facilities such as legal, administrative, financial, communication and logistic support.

Digital Magics therefore stands as co-founder of the company.

In 2013 Digital Magics:

- Was listed on the Italian Stock Exchange and raised capital for over 10.5 million euro
- Has invested over 3.5 million euros in start-ups
- Co-founded 11 new start-ups
- Created Digital Magics Angel Network, an informal network of over 150 investors (private, industrial, financial) to support Digital Magics start-ups
- Launched an Open Innovation program to support the digital innovation of Italian companies (partners already announced: RCS, UVET, Nice).

Interview with Gabriele Ronchini (Founder and CEO, Digital Magics Angel Network):

How does Digital Magics Angel Network work?

The Digital Magics Angel Network is a network of over 100 investors interested in co-investing with Digital Magics in a club deal to support start-ups;¹²

¹² <http://www.filse.it>

Investors are divided into:

- Individual: entrepreneurs and top managers with a passion for digital innovation;
- Industrial: for example, RCS, UVET, Nice who also have Open Innovation agreements with Digital Magics;
- Financial: for example, Tamburi Investment Partners, Banca Sella, Atlante Ventures (Intesa), Unicredit.

"The Digital Magics Angel Network is a strategic asset for the venture incubator, not only because it increases leverage, but also because it reinforces the know-how and the network available to the start-ups."

What is your Open Innovation program?

The Open Innovation program is aimed at Italian companies to support their digital transformation. It combines the industrial experience of the partner with Digital Magics' expertise in the digital field. Digital Magics and the industrial partner create a joint program aimed to:

- Investing in digital start-ups
- Creating digital spin-offs starting from assets in the company;
- Acquiring digital assets;
- Supporting M & A.

What is the 2014-2018 business plan?

"Positioning Digital Magics as an incubator for national start-ups,

with nationwide presence;

Achieving 1000 investors in the Digital Magics Angel Network;

5 new Open Innovation agreements per year;

Investment program for over 4 million euros annually in about 100 new digital initiatives;

Plan for the sale of equity investments (exit) for over 20 million euros over 5 years with a corresponding distribution target of 7 million euros (equal to 50% of expected net capital gains). "

2.2.3 Bic Liguria (Genoa) - Liguria

BICs (business and innovation centres) are business incubators, usually publicly funded, whose traditional and general objective is to promote economic growth at the local level from 1990.

Bic Liguria is focused on the development of youth entrepreneurship.

Interview with Pietro Demartino, director of the Centre:

How was Bic Liguria born?

"In the 1980s incubators were focused on supporting the creation of businesses by local young people, and on the development of companies already existing in the territory. Over time, the context has changed profoundly and from 2005 onwards BIC Liguria has decided to focus on highly innovative start-ups. Thanks to the UNITI project, several technology-intensive university spin-offs have been launched, representing one of the flagships of Genoese

entrepreneurship. "

What is the situation today?

"Recently the number of companies that are part of the incubator have decreased from an average of 60 to about 45. So, we started to offer business planning service as well.

The incubation process lasts three to five years, but what happens when these companies leave the BIC and start competing in the market?

"Around 400 companies have come out of the incubator and are still active in the area and these companies have been able to generate new jobs.

However, there is a certain diffidence towards the incubated companies. Some consider them too weak to compete.

To improve their effectiveness also in the post-incubation phase, the BIC decided to make the selection process extremely rigid: "Where there is a rigid selection, the percentage of success grows. Today the admission of a project is subject to the company structure, the consistency of the profiles, the idea of enterprise linked to the development of the territory.

The offer of incubator services is concentrated on highly innovative and technology intensive companies.

Additionally, there are companies that we have helped outside of the

incubator. Since 2003 to date, BIC Liguria has in fact supported the creation of more than 1500 micro-enterprises in the Ligurian territory - 80% of which in Genoa. These companies represent the backbone of our economy. "

2.2.4 I3P (Turin) - Piedmont

The I3P incubator of the Polytechnic University of Turin is a non-profit consortium company founded by Turin Polytechnic, Province of Turin, Turin Chamber of Commerce, Finpiemonte, Torino Wireless Foundation and City of Turin¹³.

The purpose of this incubator, founded in 1999, is to promote the creation of new high-tech companies leveraging the research centres of the territory.

However, IP3 is also open to external entrepreneurial projects, which confirms the flexibility and openness of the structure, emphasizing that business incubators always aim to evolve with the surrounding conditions.

These factors have contributed to I3P becoming the first incubator in Italy, the fifth in Europe and the 15th among the top 300 incubators in 67 industrialized countries of the UBI (University Business

¹³ <https://www.i3p.it/>

Incubator) INDEX in 2014¹⁴.

Interview with Prof. Marco Cantamessa at the Politecnico di Torino, professor of Management Engineering and Production, President of the I3P of the Politecnico di Torino.

The Coopstartup project helps those with an idea to think like a cooperative entrepreneur as they turn the idea into a business project.

Based on your experience, how can you foster a widespread entrepreneurial culture?

"In my experience, the most important ingredient that makes a difference between success and failure is the entrepreneurship, as ability to perceive an "entrepreneurial opportunity", transforming this initial intuition into a concrete vision, defining a strategic path to get there, implementing it, and then correcting it as you progress, and you get technical and market feedback.

This approach is aimed at creating important companies, which create jobs, and it is very different from the simple (but still appreciable) "self-employment entrepreneurship", whose goal is instead to "give oneself a job." These entrepreneurs cooperate with collaborators, suppliers, customers, and lenders.

Based on the long-term experience of the I3P incubator, can the cooperative model be successfully used to foster research

¹⁴ <http://ubiindex.com/>

spin-offs and, if so, in which specific sectors or situations?

"Today we live in the "knowledge economy" and, in principle, even knowledge-based companies can usefully adopt the cooperative form.

How can existing cooperative companies operating in different markets benefit from the research and the experience of technology incubators?

"Technology incubators are not limited to developing start-ups and providing them with advice. One of the fundamental roles that play is to connect start-ups with the market, because customers determine the success of a company and its attractiveness towards lenders. Therefore, as per the Open Innovation concept, incubators bring together existing companies and start-ups, aiming above all to create business relationships.

For existing companies, interacting with a start-up brings several benefits: working with a supplier that represents the state of the art and that allows you to introduce innovation in the company without having to make special investments.

In addition, the costs of the goods and services offered by start-ups are generally very reasonable and are combined with greater flexibility and availability to follow the specific needs of the customer.

The problem we have encountered most is the lack of experience in interacting with each other; more specifically, large companies have business processes designed to interact with other big companies. I note with pleasure that this interaction was almost absent until 2-3 years ago, while now the visits of big companies to the I3P incubator are a daily occurrence.

2.2.5 Sport Social Business Lab (Paris) - France

Sport Social Business Lab is being launched along the build-up to the 2024 Paris Olympics.

It is inspired by the principles of the Nobel Peace Prize Muhammad Yunus, i.e. the creation of a sustainable business, whose main goal is not the generation of profit but the resolution of a social or environmental problem.

Its mission combines the efficiency and the economic sustainability of a traditional company with the focus on Sports and their positive impact on society and the environment.

Interview with M.me Clara Tourres, Sport Social Business Lab Ambassador in Italy:

M.me Clara Tourres, presented the incubator at the Course in Marketing & Sports Communication, organized by Pop Up Magazine on September 22, 2018 in Naples.

"Meet, share, innovate" is the slogan of this project.

What is the objective of the Sport Social Business Lab?

Its objective is to promote innovative projects of professional athletes once they retire from sports career and to repurpose their expertise to socio-environmental business activities.

We expect many top-tier ventures to emerge from this initiative thanks to the endorsement and the engagement of successful sportsmen.

Sport Social Business Lab is located in the heart of Paris and in May 2018 it launched a call to recruit innovative projects based on solidarity, sustainability and sports for start-ups in 20 countries.

So far 10 start-ups have been selected, which will have the support of industrial partners and business and former sports professionals in order to overcome the initial phase of validation of the business project and become successful.

Who are the sports personalities and athletes involved?

The selection committee was composed by: Etienne Thobois, Managing Director of the Paris 2024 Olympic Committee and former champion of badminton, Taïg Khris, world champion of ramp-climbing, Nicolas Hazard, founder of the global consortium for sustainable economy INCO and of the Nobel prize for peace Muhammad Yunus¹⁵.

¹⁵<http://sport.socialbusinesslab.co/>

What are the 10 projects selected?

These are the 10 projects which have been selected:

- Abdoulaye Ndiaye - YouNus Academy

Former basketball player, Abdoulaye Ndiaye has created a textile company of biological materials.

- Sandra Ribeiro and Marie Ribeiro - Perfect

The E-learning platform for professional athletes of the Ribeiro sisters that offers access to ongoing education to high-level athletes.

- Loïc Gosselin - Gagnant enterprise

Loïc Gosselin, judo world champion, offers consulting services to companies, to improve the performance of the work team, using sport as a tool for cohesion of the working group.

- Gaëtane Thiney - Botoano

The French national footballer and striker, Gaetane Thiney, wants to develop a service that allows each sports club to create their own chatbot on Messenger.

- Nicolas Douchez - Eee

The RC Lens footballer and goalkeeper, Nicolas Douchez in partnership with Mohamed Ghediri, wants to offer environmentally sustainable mobility in big cities.

- Eva Roche - Athlete-Avenue.com

Eva Roche, kayak champion, launches Athlete-Avenue.com, a relationship portal for the retraining of athletes' careers.

- Ugo Legrand, Adrien Bourguignon, Julien Ottaviani and Antoine
-

Jeannin - Yogowo

Ugo Legrand, judoka, Olympic bronze medalist and his team are developing Yogowo, an application that allows you to book a single or group sports session in a few clicks.

- Hubert Auriol - 80 Days Tour

Hubert Auriol is a pilot and multi-winner of the Paris-Dakar. He is planning to develop a new "80 Days Race" with the aim of issuing zero emissions. Alongside this race, this former athlete wants to develop a platform that will highlight the technologies used for sustainable development.

- Marc Bultez - Sports recycling

Marc Bultez, judoka, has founded together with Robin Teinturier, a project that aims to promote second-hand sports equipment, fostering recycling against waste.

- Gaël Levavasseur, Xavier Cappella, Pierre Levavasseur and Olivier Hellard - Partita n'co

The volleyball players Pierre Levavasseur, Xavier Cappella and Gaël Levavasseur with Olivier Hellard have created an application that allows sports fans to synchronize the results and the rankings in their calendar. An easy way to automate the publishing of information about your favourite sports and clubs.

2.3 Assessment and conclusions from the interviews

The experience of the two incubators and sports accelerators (WyLab and Sport Social Business Lab) shows that sports can make a big contribution to the economy but also to culture, tourism and sustainability. Moreover, as a sector at the crossroads between health, and nutrition it is very receptive of research and innovation. Additionally, new business models are emerging around the social impact of innovation and entrepreneurship in general, as per the experience of Adriano Olivetti proposed many years ago¹⁶.

The Digital Magics model is interesting because it is itself listed on the stock exchange, as well as some of the incubated start-ups, while the examples of BIC Liguria and 3IP Piedmont show how old-fashioned state-led models can evolve and prosper by responding to market-led need for innovation and collaboration at local level and partnership between industry and university.

The model of the Sport Social Business Lab is of great interest because retired professional sportsmen and women repurpose their expertise and know-how to the benefit of innovative sport start-ups and promote new equipment, environmental sustainability and health care.

¹⁶ *Comunità concreta. Le opere e il pensiero di Adriano Olivetti, Emilio Renzi, Guida, 2008*

As far as France as country is concerned, we also see the Lab in the context of events such as the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris and the Rugby World Cup in France in 2023. Structures like the Sport Social Business Lab will have several positive fall-out effects on the economy while also strengthening the French sporting sector long term and the international standing of the country.

CHAPTER 3

Socio-economic survey of the Alto Monferrato

3.1 An area called Alto Monferrato

Monferrato stretches from the Po valley to the north to the Apennine ridge to the south. Part of this territory is the Alto Monferrato or even Lower Piedmont, a predominantly hilly region, historically linked to the Genoese. Trade between Liguria and Piedmont, mainly salt, meats and cereal has been flourishing throughout history due to the presence of the ports of Genoa and Savona.

The following discussion will highlight the business opportunities offered by this area considered as a whole, from the borders the Roero in the west (Alba and Asti), to the towns of Gavi in the east, Alessandria in the north, Genoa and Savona in the south¹⁷.

3.2 A history of the economy of the Alto Monferrato

The area's economic development has always been linked to agriculture and to trade because of the convenience of access to the Apennine passages. Over the centuries noble families have built castles, around which the various towns of the area have developed. Since the 1980s, the opening of the A26 motorway and especially of the Ovada exit have encouraged the growth of trade and the

¹⁷ http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/monferrato_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/

relocation of factories from Genoa, in the flat areas of Ovada, Novi Ligure and Alessandria. Since 1960 the wine-growing activity has seen the strong development of high-quality products competing on international markets with the more renowned French wines¹⁸.

However, the production of wine and other agricultural crops has remained concentrated in the towns of Ovada, Cassinelle, Trisobbio, Molare, Rocca Grimalda, etc. because of favourable nature of the soil. In the pre-Appennine areas south-east of Ovada, the municipalities of Belforte, Tagliolo, Lerma, Castelletto d'Orba, etc., post-war industrialisation has led to the abandonment of small rural properties and to demographic decline.

Today in this vast area, industrial activities are changing from production to logistics, while new activities related to "agri-tourism", sports, culture and entertainment have been born. Unfortunately, nowadays these activities are not coordinated and are left to the initiative and improvisation of individual entrepreneurs. Below is a graphic representation of the Alto Monferrato population, by sector of activity, with reference to a nucleus of about 30,000 inhabitants.

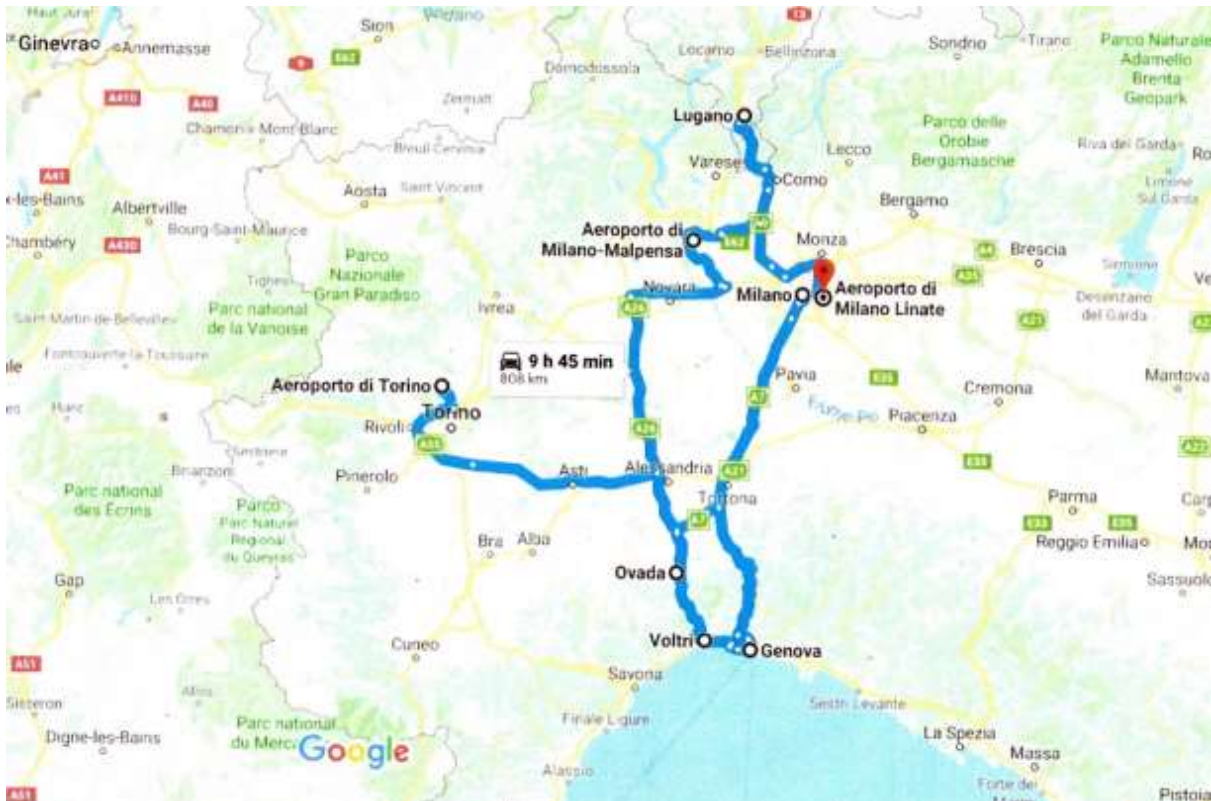
¹⁸ <https://siviaggia.it/viaggi/monferrato-1050-anni-di-storia-fra-vini-e-paesaggi-stupendi/173679/>

3.2.1 The transport network around the Alto Monferrato

The Ovada motorway exit of the A26 is located right at the centre of the Alto Monferrato connecting the whole area (over 20 municipalities) to Turin, Milan, Genoa and Savona. Thanks to the Voltri-Gravellona Toce (from south to north) motorway it is easy to reach Switzerland, while the Piacenza-Torino (from east to west) reaches France to the west and Emilia Romagna and Veneto to the east.

The local railway network connects to the Alessandria hub, which used to be one of the most important in Europe, as well as to the railway stations of Genoa and to the Ligurian ports. All the municipalities of Alto Monferrato are connected by roads and the public road transport service reaches all the municipalities.

The nearest airports are: Cristoforo Colombo in Genoa (about 20 minutes), Linate and Malpensa in Milan (40 minutes) and Caselle/Turin (about 1 hour and 30 minutes).



Picture 3

3.2.2 The transformation of the economic environment

In recent years, the economic landscape of Alto Monferrato has changed. Today, the local economy is focusing on agri-tourism, sports, hospitality and “zero-mile” quality food production. Part of the Apennine territory has been converted to tourist accommodation with the recovery of existing structures, re-purposed into agro-tourism settlements specialized in sports such as horse riding and cross country, MTB, E-BIKE, Nordic-walking, sport climbing, camping, etc. However, the quality of the different structures varies considerably, and personnel need specialised training, especially in terms of language skills.

The agricultural productions are constantly improving: local wines

have gained the European recognition of DOC and DOCG, while in the flat areas the cultivations have been revisited with new techniques, from organic farming to, for example, the production of artisanal gluten-free flours.

A strong impulse towards the sports sector in Alto Monferrato was given by important golf courses: "Golf Club Villa Carolina" in a 200-hectare complex with 36 holes, "Golf Colline del Gavi" with 18 holes and presence. All municipalities have football centres financed by CONI.

3.2.3 Local services

A few kilometres from Ovada, we find good hospitals and first aid services: Alessandria, Genoa, Novi Ligure can be reached through a good road network in all seasons; private facilities provide rehabilitative, aesthetic and diagnostic assistance. Acqui Terme is an historic spa, about 25 minutes from Ovada. All school levels up to senior secondary school are present in the territory and the University of Eastern Piedmont (UPO) is present in Alessandria with various faculties related to mechanics and electronics, law, health, administration, aerospace etc. There are many sports and cultural associations on the territory, but there is no organization of tourism. The OVADESE.NET website¹⁹ shows all the activities in the area and the service sector.

¹⁹ www.ovadese.net/index.php

3.3 Sports practised in the Upper Monferrato area

From visits to the places and from the conversations with the locals, I discovered that one of the most practised sports in the area is road cycling, which sees its origins at the beginning of the 20th century. The Piedmontese champions such as Girardengo, Fausto and Serse Coppi, Negrini (Molare), Defilippis, Beppe Saronni and other Italian champions such as Binda, Bartali, Gimondi and Moser, frequently trained on these roads²⁰ because they offer an excellent athletic training, with little risk for the lack of heavy road traffic. The high quality of air and food quality is not secondary either. Another local sport is the tambourine, practiced mainly at amateur level, which is also played in southern France. Among other sports there are: football, with on average two fields per town, volleyball, basketball, swimming with a pool for each municipality. The Apennines, crossed by several kilometres of pathways between vineyards, woods, lakes and streams, create a very suggestive natural scenery. The number of people practising mountain bikes and off-road motorbikes has been growing for some years and there is a local project called EBIKE for eco-sustainable mobility (bikes and electric bikes). Last, horse riding and hippotherapy are growing, supported by the wide availability of stables in the area.

²⁰ Beppe Conti, "Ciclismo storie segrete", Armenia Publishing Group, Milan, 2003

3.4 Operators in the sport sector

Sports activities revolves around the municipal centres, where football is the number one, followed by road biking, off-road MTB, volleyball, swimming, fitness. The most organized structures are in the Municipality of Ovada, but other towns also offer excellent support as well. On the other hand, adequate tourist accommodation facilities to support the growth of “sports tourism” in the area are scarce.

3.5 Development of the territory from the point of view of the institutions.

From interviews with some mayors of the district, it has been identified a strong desire to revitalize the territory. With the notable exception of the “wine district” around Ovada, the constant demographic decline and the progressive abandonment of land and housing are draining tax resources from Councils, jeopardising the provision of some public services.

There has been consensus that sports and tourism, could help compensate for that²¹.

One input has been to investigate the incentives and awards offered by international organisation for the promotion of “territories” (districts, subregions).

²¹ Interview with Mayors of the Ovada district, 2018

Those opportunities are not fully exploited by these local authorities, while there is a success story in neighbouring Langhe-Roero, whose vineyards have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014²².

²² <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1390>

CHAPTER 4

The ALTO MONFERRATO as the location for a SPORTS INCUBATOR: A SWOT Analysis

In Chapter one we have seen the evolutions of incubators worldwide and in Italy; with specific regard to our country we have identified the various incentives and support measures offered to innovative start-ups and certified incubators by the recent MISE legislation.

Incubator case studies and best practices in Italy and in France, as described in Chapter two, suggest there is a real window of opportunity for projects aimed at sports, high tech, social impact and sustainability, especially if they leverage local resources, capabilities and networks like proximity to research centres and university (IP3) and the support of local institutions (BIC Liguria).

In Chapter Three, we have mapped a general profile of the Alto Monferrato area in terms of its historical, geographical and economic circumstances.

In this Chapter we will carry out a specific SWOT analysis²³ of the area as a suitable location for our innovative project of a sports incubator.

We have identified a number of strengths: transport infrastructure, proximity to universities, research centres, sport

²³ *SWOT Analysis for Management Consulting*", SRI Alumni Newsletter. Humphrey, Albert (December 2005). [SRI International](#).

infrastructure, natural and cultural heritage.

Obviously, we have observed a few vulnerabilities as well, such as lack of unified policies and strategies, need for skills etc. Nonetheless, we have identified development opportunities that an incubator is designed to address by definition; local coordination, skills development, support to local entrepreneurs, attraction of high-tech skills and capital are exactly an incubator's mission. Let's analyse them in detail:

4.1 Strengths: The assets of Alto Monferrato

4.1.1 The strategic position of Ovada: a central location at the heart of the "Industrial Triangle" Milan, Genoa and Turin

As highlighted in Chapter three, Ovada is placed in a strategic position across Piedmont and Liguria, as reflected by its transport infrastructure and network.

Thanks to the A26 motorway exit, Ovada is easily accessible from the three regional capitals of the northwest. It is also close to France and Switzerland and the main airports in northern Italy are at easy reach.

4.1.2 Proximity to universities and research centres and other infrastructure

To quote just a few facts and features of the area:

- University of Genoa: less than 35 minutes from Ovada by train and by car;
- Talent Garden Erzelli: this new structure for research and innovation near Genoa Airport is at 25 minutes-drive from Ovada;
- Polytechnic University of Turin: Less than 1.5 hour-drive from Ovada;
- UPO University of Western Piedmont in Alessandria-Vercelli-Novara: The Artificial intelligence office is in Ovada;
- IIT Italian Institute of Technology: National institute, 25-minutes drive to the Bolzaneto branch specialised in robotics;
- Rivalta Scrivia Technology Science Park: Tortona, less than 25-minutes drive from Ovada and specialised in transport technologies;
- RINA: Certification body based in Genoa and Vignole;
- Italian Institute of Welding: Headquartered in Genoa in the Marassi area, Genoa-Est, 40-minutes drive from Ovada;
- Port of Genoa: Headquarter for the CNR branch on sea technologies;
- Bocconi University and Politecnico di Milano: One-hour drive from Ovada

4.1.3 Natural and cultural Heritage, Sports, at the doorstep of Milan, Turin and Genoa

As seen in Chapter three, recently the economy of Alto Monferrato has transitioned to agri-tourism, sports, hospitality and “zero-mile” quality food production.

Many high-level sports facilities are available with up to 75% spare capacity.

The cultural heritage is particularly rich thanks to the presence of many castles dating as far back as the Middle Age, which are under-utilised as well.

4.2 Opportunities: What do the Strengths mean to the Alto Monferrato Incubator?

4.2.1 Proximity to the Industrial Triangle allows access to first-class resources in terms of:

- specialized scientific laboratories and researchers for training and events;
- external talent and skills that can be attracted in the first years and local talent that can be developed *on site* subsequently.
- strategic stakeholders and advisors, public and private;
- finance; with specific regard to this, besides EU Horizon 2020, the MISE recent legislation creates a diversified set options ranging from:

- Investment incentives;
- Equity crowd funding;
- support from Smart & Start Italy;
- support from Invitalia Ventures.

4.2.2 The first Sports/Health/Culture and Environment incubator in the province of Alessandria, at the centre of the Industrial Triangle

The presence of sport infrastructure, unspoilt landscapes, vineyards and cultural heritage within or less than one-hour drive from Milan, Turin and Genoa, means a very large addressable market²⁴ of specialised sport, health, sustainability start-ups that can be recruited and, just as importantly, their end-customers.

Elsewhere in Northern Italy there are various certified incubators, including the specialised Sports Incubator WyLab. However, this one in the province of Alessandria would be the first complying with the most recent MISE decree of 2016 and local businesses in the fields of sports, health and environment will participate and support the initiative, while receiving fast-track access to the innovation and research produced within the incubator.

²⁴ Steve Blank and Bob Dorf, *The Startup Owner's Manual*, K & S Ranch, first edition (March 1, 2012)

4.3 Weaknesses

4.3.1 Local accommodation facilities

In Chapter three we have noted the growth of sports tourism in the Alto Monferrato (Note), however adequate facilities are scarce. The public sector support appears to be absent at the moment; most new initiatives are led by very small private businesses and the quality of some structures is clearly driven by spot demand from Booking.com or Airbnb, leaving quality standards very inconsistent. without a general strategy within the territory.

It is therefore necessary to:

- Investigate the involvement of external players with the skills to design that strategy and redevelop a touristic-receptive system;
- Create a "network" for the accommodation and leisure facilities;
- Their refurbishment at scale, as new companies (start-ups) would also bring new residents and drive new economic activities in the area.

4.3.2 Local stakeholder fragmentation

As we carried out interviews with residents we have also observed:

- Lack of collaboration between and within municipalities, associations and "Pro-loco";

- Conflicts and duplications among sports events and initiatives;
- Lack of strategic skills and orientation to excellence.

4.4 Threats: Skills and Public Funding

4.4.1 Attraction of external skills

The limitation in suitable accommodation might represent a constraint to that, which in turn could impact on the development of local skills as well.

4.4.2 Reliance on Public Institutions and Funding

While the new Italian legislation and EU funding are an attractive and available option, the ability to engage local entrepreneurs and private investors will be a test for the economic viability of the project in the long term.

SWOT - Conclusions

Overall these elements support the idea of an entrepreneurial project in Alto Monferrato Roero and Gavi centred on sport and tourism, driving research and innovation in sports, healthcare and environmental sustainability technology, giving a strong impulse to the economy of the territory.

The Lower Piedmont is a territory with historical links with Liguria, a link between the Alps and the Mar Tirreno; its location features and

capabilities create strong new economic opportunities for the inhabitants, for businesses, for institutions.

Innovative project such as the "THE SPORTS INCUBATOR" may provide exactly the "catalyst" to realise a very high potential for development. An incubator leverages a common local, external and international objective, i.e. high tech led regional development, and the financial resources needed to set that process in motion. This dissertation clearly shows a potential to leverage local assets to achieve that mission, therefore, it becomes an element of strong integration *par excellence*, the single biggest weakness and threat can be turned around exactly by creating this incubator; a clear signal to all the local government representative who has shared an appetite for change during one to one interview.

It could be argued that, in due proportion, the Alto Monferrato has a development potential similar to other areas (Ireland in the 1990s, Malaga in the 2010s, Portland, Oregon in 2015-18²⁵) that have managed to create a unified strategy to remove local bottlenecks to the attraction of external investment and leverage their local strengths to develop a high tech led, socially inclusive economic development.

²⁵ http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/1349/1/WRAP_Crafts_twerp_867.pdf;
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jaynejung/2011/10/24/the-top-five-smartest-city-in-spain-and-why-the-us-should-care/>;
<https://www.business2community.com/brandviews/upwork/why-silicon-valley-techies-are-rushing-to-the-pacific-northwest-02076366>.

CHAPTER 5

The Alto Monferrato Sport Incubator: sports, health, technology, environment as catalyst for local development and social impact

Having assessed the feasibility of a new certified sports incubator in the Alto Monferrato, there appears to be a very favourable context of opportunities, where strengths can be maximised, while addressing weaknesses and threats.

This final chapter discusses the merits of what it should look like in term of vision and mission, concept/core business plan, location and organisation chart, promotion/testing and feedback and physical premises.

We will use the Lean Start Up²⁶ approach and the Business Canvas framework²⁷ to define the concept of the incubator as its core business plan; the promotion element of the marketing mix will describe how the concept will be tested and potentially improved or pivoted based on the feedback.

²⁶Eric Ries, The Lean Startup:How Constant Innovation Creates Radically Successful Businesses, Penguin UK, 6 Oct 2011

²⁷ Osterwalder, A., Pigneur, Y. Creare modelli di business. Milano, Edizioni LSWR, (2010)

5.1 Vision

- The Vision of Alto Monferrato sports incubator is:

To realise the potential of this territory by promoting sporting activities for leisure, personal health, better nutrition and a better lifestyle to a wide social audience. The natural landscape, history and culture of the Alto Monferrato are an ideal setting for those activities.

5.2 Mission

Accordingly, the pillars for implementing that vision are:

- Acting in synergy with local, national and international stakeholders (universities, research centres, government institutions and investors, sports institutions);
- Creating a network of companies and services for economic growth and lifestyle improvement in the area;
- Allowing incubated companies to be successful by delivering superior products and services, delivering a higher quality of life for customers and locals. At local level the youth and the elders will be the biggest beneficiaries of the incubator's activity. The former will benefit from new life-long learning opportunities, access to high technologies and the heritage of their birthplace; the latter will enjoy a richer and more stimulating daily routine through the “buzz” created by the presence of new activities and visitors.

5.3 Concept/core business plan: Business Canvas

This model has been introduced by Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur²⁸, and it is a system to summarise visually a business as a whole. Although it has been devised as an independent framework, in the experience of most innovation stakeholders it is used in conjunction with Eric Ries' Lean Start Up²⁹ approach, where the situation of extreme uncertainty leads to various iterations Idea-Build-Test. The Business Canvas, as a visual synopsis of the business, can guide any start up, including new incubators, through the Idea-Build-Test cycle. When a business idea is still at the concept stage, as in the case discussed here, the Business Canvas is the starting core of a Business Plan.

5.3.1 Alto Monferrato Sports Incubator Business Canvas;

The following is a summary/synopsis for the project. Each section will be explored in further detail in a dedicated paragraph.

²⁸ Osterwalder, A., Pigneur, Y. Creare modelli di business. Milano, Edizioni LSWR, (2010)

²⁹ Eric Ries, The Lean Startup:How Constant Innovation Creates Radically Successful Businesses, Penguin UK, 6 Oct 2011

<p>Key Partners</p> <p>Who are your key partners/suppliers? What are the motivations for the partnerships?</p> <p>Local Institutions (Local Government Universities etc.) and Businesses for Strategy Alignment</p>	<p>Key Activities</p> <p>What key activities does your value proposition require?</p> <p>Networking, Start-Up Scouting, Fundraising</p> <hr/> <p>Key Resources</p> <p>What key resources does your value proposition require?</p> <p>Suitable spaces, Coaching Skills, LP's: Liquidity Providers</p>	<p>Value Proposition</p> <p>What core value do you deliver to the customer? Which customer needs are you satisfying?</p> <p>1) Supporting and fostering Start-Ups in the fields of Sports Tech, Leisure and Culture, Sustainable Lifestyle (Health and Food).</p> <p>2) Developing local economic potential.</p> <p>3) Creating a strong Innovation Ecosystem with successful exits.</p>	<p>Customer Relationship</p> <p>What is the relationship that the target customer expects you to establish?</p> <p>Mentoring, Financing, Driving local economy, Visibility</p> <hr/> <p>Channels</p> <p>Through which channels that your customers want to be reached?</p> <p>Calls, Scouting. Attending Demo Days at Universities. Events and Institutional Networking. Social Media</p>	<p>Customer Segments</p> <p>Which classes are you creating values for? Who is your most important customer?</p> <p>Start-Ups, Local innovative PMI, Local Government</p>
<p>Cost Structure. Which key resources/activities are most expensive? Lease, related bills, Salaries/Consulting fees, Laboratories/Materials, Marketing</p>	<p>Revenue streams. For what value are your customers willing to pay? Fees. Shareholding in recruited start Ups at time of exit</p>			

Key partners:

Who are your key partners/suppliers? What are the motivations for the partnerships?

- **Local Government** such as Regione Piemonte, Provincia di Alessandria, who should provide institutional support, regulatory guidance and possibly funding support.
- **Local Universities and Research Institutions** such as UPO University of Western Piedmont, the Italian Institute of Technology and the Rivalta Scrivia Technology Science Park. These should provide technical expertise, advise and training especially in the areas of Artificial Intelligence and Transport technology.
- **Business:** The local Chamber of Commerce, the Alessandria branch of *Confindustria* but more importantly: the CPMI, Federazione PMI e STARTUP INNOVATIVE (Confederation of SMBs and Innovative Start-Ups) who is leading the project. These entities are meant to provide Start Ups and Innovative PMIs with support services available to standard members, so to create synergies with the existing entrepreneurial ecosystem, while avoiding duplications.

Key Activities:

What key activities does your value proposition require?

- **Networking:** intense dialogue and relationship building with Key Partners to maintain alignment and secure ongoing support.
- **Start-Up Scouting:** Identify and select locally, nationally and internationally start-ups to be recruited in the domains of Sport Tech, Foodtech, Leisure, Culture and Tourism Services, Sustainable Lifestyle (Health and Food).
- **Fundraising:** Identifying, approaching and engaging with Investors specialised in the same domains as the recruited Start-Up.

Key Resources

What key resources does your value proposition require?

In order to become a “certified incubator” and to implement its Value Proposition the incubator needs:

- To have surface allocated exclusively to start up incubation (at least 500sq. m.);
- Internet speed (at least 10 Mbps);
- Machinery and testbeds for prototypes;
- Active consulting team with relevant experience (at least 15 cumulative years of experience on the subject);
- Contracts/Agreements with research centres, universities,

specialised financial partners (banks, venture capital funds).

Value Proposition:

What core value do you deliver to the customer? Which customer needs are you satisfying?

- **Supporting and fostering Start-Ups and Innovative PMIs in the domains of Sports, Leisure/Culture and Sustainable Lifestyle (Health and Food).**

The incubator will provide services at “Seed level”: basic Research and Development know-how, laboratory and prototype to MVP testing facilities, business consulting and mentoring, coworking space to new businesses (beyond the “Idea” stage) in the field of Sports Tech.

Such a “hot-bedding” infrastructure should allow the hosted Start-ups to develop and launch sports technologies like for example electric bicycles. These can be used in the local countryside tracks and become the platform for leisure services such as “cultural routes” including visits to heritage sites, wine tasting, and “gastronomic experiences” based on organic products, local traditional cuisine but also new food tech solutions developed at the incubator.

Similar offerings can be developed starting from football related technologies, to be tested and applied at local level, using the local infrastructures identified in Chapter 3 and 4. In

this case initiatives such as Academies, Training Camps, competitions etc.

should attract increasing numbers of visitors from Italy and abroad, which should drive, as in the case of cycling, development in Leisure and Culture (Tourism) for Sustainable Lifestyle (Health and Food). Therefore, the plan is to recruit and develop innovative businesses in these sectors as well.

In this context the key player is the Service Start-Up “Ovadaland”, which is setting up to provide a unified platform for services around Sports, Leisure, Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Lifestyle (Health and Food). It will be somehow the “operational” agency for the Alto Monferrato Incubator, coordinating and offering a single point of access and contact between all users (citizens, customers, visitors, sports enthusiasts) in the area and all the services and products available.

- **Developing local economic potential:**

As suggested above, Sports Tech should drive Tourism-led economic growth in Alto Monferrato. As observed in the SWOT Analysis in Chapter 4, the area has all the pre-requisites (geographical position, proximity to first class resources in research and consulting, ideal natural settings and rich sports infrastructures) to support this economic growth process.

- **Creating a strong Innovation Ecosystem with successful**

exits:

The expectation is that the most successful innovative business can be scaled commercially, from local to national and international level, thanks to the wider exposure gained with sports enthusiasts and visitors from Italy and world-wide.

This should create an opportunity for large exits, high returns for early investors and should create a self-perpetuating cycle of investments, commercial scaling and exits, i.e. a strong Innovation ecosystem.

Customer Relationship:

What is the relationship that the target customer expects you to establish?

- **Incubation:** Provision of Infrastructure
- **Mentoring:** Provision of various forms of know-how
- **Financing:** Provision of various channels of access to finance
- **Driving local economy:** Provision of a local market to test/sell their products/services
- **Visibility:** Getting exposure to stakeholders such as Customers, Funders etc.

Channels:

Which channels are you using to reach your customers?

Calls on Website and Social Media are cost-effective but slightly inefficient unless coupled with active Scouting by specialised

professionals with extensive networks and sector-specific experience. Attending Demo Days at Universities is planned, as well as Events and Institutional Networking as that creates synergies in terms of Key Partners and Key Activities.

Customer Segments:

Which classes are you creating values for? Who is your most important customer?

Local Government, Universities and Research centres, Investors are at the same time Suppliers/Partners and Customers as they benefit from the incubator success in terms of political visibility and local economic development, academic excellence and financial returns.

However, Start-Ups, Local innovative PMI are the key customer, without a constant recruitment “deal flow” all other customers/stakeholders would lose interest in the incubator.

Cost Structure:

Which key resources/ activities are most expensive?

- **Lease and related bills, Salaries/Consulting fees, Laboratories, Materials:** These are the building blocks of the “certified status”. They are essential in stage 1 (build). A strategic contribution has been offered by the Tagliolo Castle

(Castello di Tagliolo) which has offered the incubator free premises.

- **Marketing:** These are essential in stage 2 (launch and testing).

Revenue streams:

For what value are your customers willing to pay? How would they prefer to pay? How much does every revenue stream contribute to the overall revenues?

- Management fee to Liquidity Providers: roughly 15% of total revenue.
- Fees to incubated start-ups for services provided but not affecting shareholding in the Start-Ups: roughly 40%.
- Shareholding in recruited start Ups at time of exit: roughly 45%

5.4 Organisation:

The Board of Directors will include founders, investors and subject matter experts such as former sports people. It will appoint a CEO that will report into it and will be responsible for implementing the business plan and the assigned objectives.

Besides the typical support functions of Finance and Administration, there will be the two key structures:

- 1) The Sports, Tourism and Culture Committee.

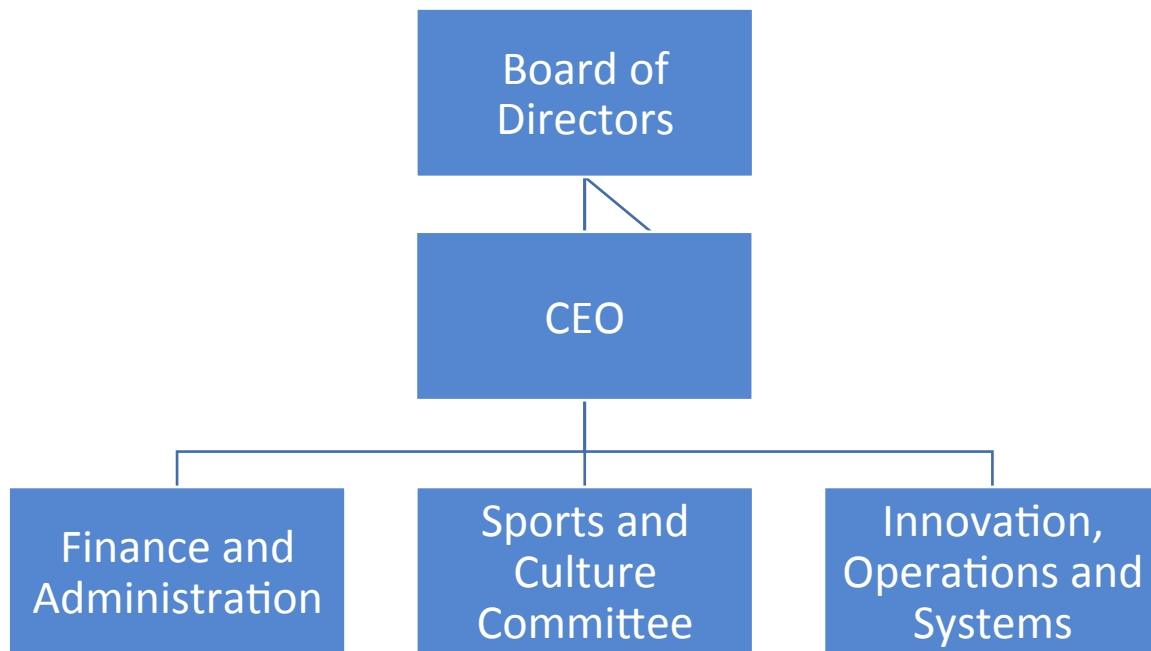
It will include one representative for each sport practiced on the territory (cycling, football etc.) and one responsible for the area of Tourism and one for Culture. This committee will be in charge of producing the offering in terms of Sports, Tourism and Culture, i.e. the training being available, the sites to visit and the cultural programs (history, food & health, sustainability etc.).

All representative will have demonstrated track record (academic titles and certified experience) in their respective fields of expertise.

2) Innovation, Operations and Systems.

It will include a minimum of 6 members with a master's degree and proven experience and skills supporting the building, training and coaching of incubated start-ups. It will play a leading role in the development of all the activities of the incubator.

Innovation, Operations and Systems will collaborate with the Sports, Tourism and Culture Committee in a "matrix" model, where representatives of both bodies will work towards the same objectives, i.e. recruiting an adequate type and number of start-ups delivering innovative products and services in cycling; these solutions will be integrated into the existing Sports and Tourism services in order to maximise revenue.



Picture 4

5.5 Concept Testing and Promotion

As stated at the beginning of this Chapter, according to the Lean Start Up methodology a business idea needs to be built and tested to assess either its viability as it is or to be pivoted. The following initiatives to create awareness and promote the incubator, are designed with that goal in mind.

5.5.1 Creating awareness about the incubator at local level

That should deliver two main results:

- aggregation of businesses on local topics and challenges;
- creation of a networking system among various stakeholders such as associations, cooperatives, consortia, private companies, other incubators, innovative SMEs, innovative

start-ups, institutions.

The effectiveness of the incubator awareness campaign will be measured by the number of companies/institutions involved.

In order to create the incubator core around sports, the first stakeholder to be engaged will be CONI (Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano), with its Federations and the related financial support instruments. The second step must be to contact the other International Federations in order to undertake a dialogue based on research and innovation.

Lastly, the incubator will have to be the glue between all the local Sports Associations, in order to engage and recruit certified experts and instructors and to organise promotional events.

Since the vision of the incubator is to develop the potential of Alto Monferrato through sports the fastest way to build an operational capability would be to engage with a school that has an agreement with CONI for certifying immediately a network of accredited trainers. An example could be the Italian School "EBIKE Amateur Sports Society a.r.l." with headquarters in Cuneo in Italy.

5.5.2 Promotion

The incubator and its activities will be promoted with local, national and international events, and, if possible, the endorsement of local sportsmen or famous former athletes, especially cyclists, who have used the areas of Alto Monferrato as a training ground.

One idea is the celebration of the 100th anniversary since the birth of Fausto Coppi. Such an event should be celebrated in the area where he was born, thus attracting international interest around the territory and the project of the incubator.

This type of events would involve sportsmen and women who practise ground sports in the area, the inhabitants and the productive sectors of handicraft, tourism, culture and entertainment, with beneficial effects for the economy.

An important media contribution may come from the local television start-up "TELECITY".

"Telecity", located in Castelletto D'Orba, broadcasts to Genoa, Milan and Turin but has limited content and advertising revenues.

This could be a great opportunity and resource for the incubator and the incubator itself could promote the revamping of the television service, by offering new content for programs and advertising around sports, culture, environment and tourism in Alto Monferrato. Digital recording and broadcasting could be leveraged for use on social media, thus potentially reaching global coverage.

Social networks will be one of the most important ways to promote the incubator's activity, they will be used to receive inputs and to share back the research and the innovation produced for the local community and the external stakeholders. Cutting edge information technologies will add significant value to the social media platform in terms of aggregating content and understanding the customer usage

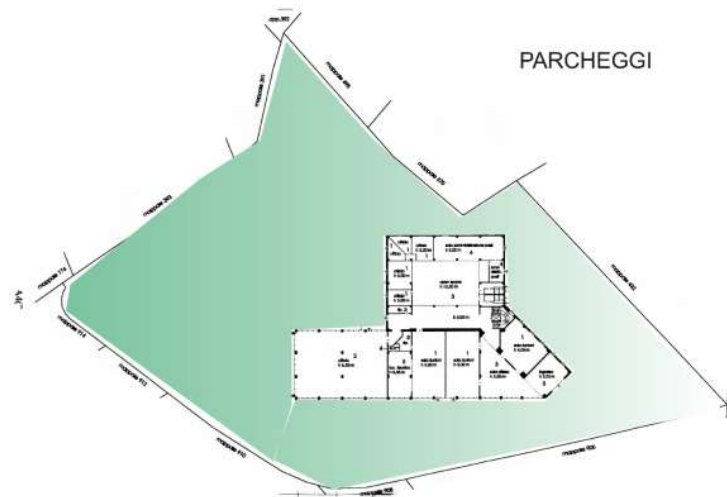
and reactions. To this purpose, it is considered interesting to contact the department of artificial intelligence of the UPO University of Alessandria and Vercelli.

A key envisaged element will be a multimedia platform for the relations with all citizens of the area, active 24 hours a day, where all initiatives for both residents and tourists will be updated.

5.5.3 The Physical premises

In order to optimise the cost structure as described in the Business Canvas, the location that has been identified after a careful assessment of other structures available, their size, location, state of use, costs, visibility, etc.

The chosen location is ready to use with minimal renovations and it is located in Belforte, municipality at the foot of the Apennines and located at the Ovada motorway exit of the A26. This site is within easy reach from the three main cities of the North West industrial triangle, Genoa-Turin-Milan. The property in question has an interesting setting for the incubator, as it responds to its needs in terms of square metres and quality of the hospitality structures for sports-tourism, leaving space for innovative SMEs, innovative start-ups and training and planning of events of all kinds.



PIANO STRADA
 OVADALANDS mq 750
 BIPS mq 750
 8 Startup mq 500



Picture 5

CONCLUSIONS

Business incubators have evolved in Italy and worldwide into the ideal environment for promoting technology, business innovation and entrepreneurship.

Recent regulation from the Italian central government, i.e. the laws on Innovative start-ups and Certified Incubators introduce new forms of support for new and young entrepreneurs.

Lately ³⁰ the notion of “impact” has emerged as a new focus for the whole innovation ecosystem, advocating for investment in new ventures producing a positive impact on society and the environment.

In that context, it has emerged from primary research and interviews with some Italian and European incubators (Wylab and Sport Social Business Lab) that sport is coming under attention as a “hot” area for innovation, making a big contribution to culture, tourism and sustainability. Moreover, as a sector at the crossroads between health and nutrition, it is very receptive of research and innovation.

So, we identified a real window of opportunity for projects aimed at sports, high tech, social impact and sustainability, especially if they leverage local resources, capabilities and networks like proximity to research centres and university and the support of local institutions.

³⁰ Brian Trelstad, Impact Investing: A Brief History, *Capitalism & Society*, Vol. 11, Issue. 2, Article 4, 2016

Discovering the Alto Monferrato district has been particularly exciting and interesting not only from the social and economic point of view but also, more interestingly for its natural and cultural heritage. Through this process it has been possible to identify its strengths and opportunities: the transport infrastructure, proximity to universities, research centres, sport infrastructure; they were not obvious at first sight and in fact are comparable to the hinterland of a big city.

Obviously, we have observed a few vulnerabilities as well s, such as lack of unified policies and strategies, need for skills etc. Nonetheless, we have identified development opportunities that an incubator is designed to address by definition, such as local coordination, skills development, support to local entrepreneurs, attraction of high-tech skills and capital.

As long as the incubator manages to get the key local stakeholders (entrepreneurs, local government) and investors and consultants from the nearby Industrial Triangle, the Alto Monferrato has, *mutatis mutandis*, a development potential similar to other areas, (Ireland in the 1990s, Malaga in the 2010, Portland in 2015-18) that have managed to create a unified strategy to remove local bottlenecks to the attraction of external investment and leverage their local strengths to develop a high tech led, socially inclusive economic development.

The vision of the Alto Monferrato incubator as a catalyst for

sustainable economic development in sports, leisure and culture needs to be supported by a very pragmatic and agile

Approach, Lean Start Up style.

Accordingly, we have chosen the Business Canvas as the core for business planning.

The key strategy will be to establish synergies with local, national and international stakeholders (universities, research centres, government institutions and investors, sports institutions) so to maximise opportunities from the territory (transport and sports infrastructure, natural landscape etc.) while minimising the threats from lack of coordination among local institutions and associations and lack of hospitality infrastructures.

The initial communication campaigns will be key to create excitement and to recruit the initial core of supporting organisations and individuals. Social media and a dedicated technology platform will play an important role to engage with the local population, candidate start-ups, potential investors and of course the future visitors of the Alto Monferrato.

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