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SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENT-BUSINESS COLLABORATION

Good practice collection of support services for challenge-based student-business collaboration in sustainable entrepreneurship

Good Practice Profile: Demola



DEMOLA

Demola Global Oy

Innovation challenge platform

Est. 2008

Finland

Tampere

Number of employees

13

Geographic scope of activities

International

Type of intermediary

HEI-external

HEI-internal

Hybrid

Intermediary set-up

Single organisation

Partnership of multiple organisations

Intermediation for SBC as

Primary role

Secondary role

Demola is an **open innovation platform** operating internationally, bringing together university students, HEI faculty, leading organisations and companies in challenge projects to create collective impact. Interdisciplinary student teams are invited to develop solutions for challenges of company partners. Demola is run by Tampere-based **Demola Global Oy** (formerly New Factory International Oy), who provides the platform services for regional universities, municipalities, and companies. Demola Global runs innovation projects, designs and publishes project topics, coordinates selection of students and as well as student marketing together with partner universities. Demola experts are actively involved in co-creating results together with the teams.

Background

Demola was founded in 2008 by Hermia Oy, a semi-public Finnish innovation and technology agency and network builder, in cooperation with the Nokia Research Centre in Tampere, and operated together with Tampere University, Tampere University of Technology, and TAMK University of Applied Sciences. The initial focus of the public-private partnership was to provide a collaborative environment for students and ICT and media companies operating in the Tampere region in Finland to co-create product and service concepts. The aim was to build a new culture and processes to boost innovation activities and move “from science-driven R&D to demo-driven innovation”. While Tampere represented the first operational node of Demola, the end of funding through the regional development programme “Creative Tampere” in 2011 and the access to new funding programmes led to internationalisation of the Demola model. By 2012, New Factory International (now Demola Global) was set-up, activating Demola operations in Vilnius, Lithuania and Budapest, Hungary. Around 2015, a turn in internationalisation was seen when major global companies joined the Demola network. Since then, the Demola standardised model and Finnish regional site structure have been expanded to more than 18 countries and are adapted based on local functioning of collaborative innovation systems.

Funding & Financing Model

- × Demola was launched through revenue-based financing between 2008-2011 in the City of Tampere Business Development Programme “Creative Tampere”. In addition, funding was provided by the Nokia Research Centre which also supported the set-up of the demo factory in Tampere, Demola’s first operational node.
- × Revenue is generated through Demola service fees for companies. Main revenue streams come from innovation projects and talent acquisition.
- × In the establishment of Demola regional sites, public sector organisations act as co-creation partners, but also funding agents.
- × Funding received through national and regional funding programmes.
- × Funding received through participation in EU innovation projects such as the Erasmus2027 project “Co-Creating a New Form of Governance in Societal Transition for Healthy Living”, together with a consortium of nine European cooperation partners.

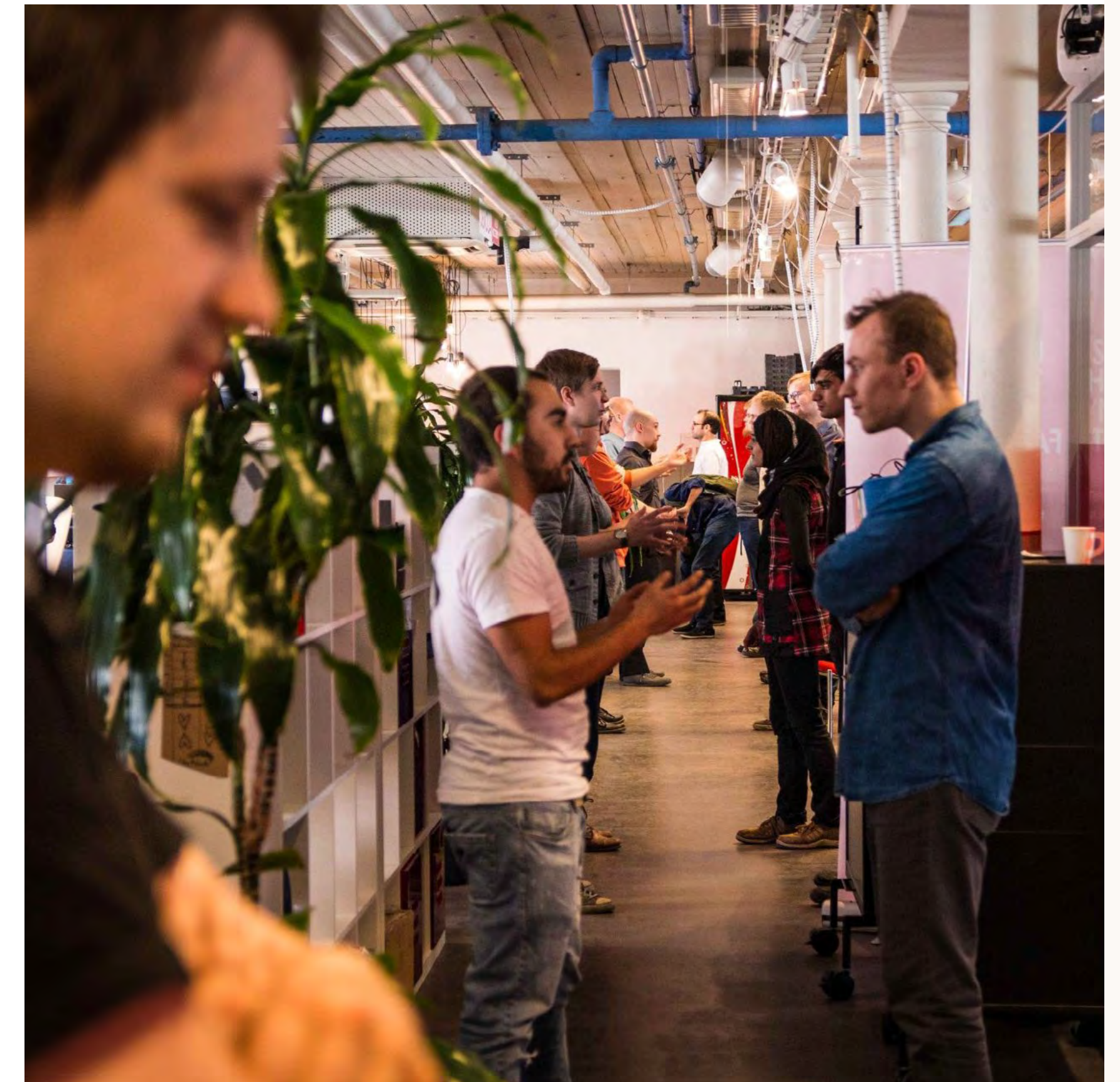
Intermediary Support Services & Activities

GENERAL SUPPORT

- × As the Demola Network Coordinator, Demola Global takes on the role of the Demola model manager and provides the overall co-creation framework including processes, tools and methods as well as training of local operators and facilitators of the Demola model.
- × Facilitation of on average eight-week challenge formats with four key events (kick-off, jams, and final meeting) and three work phases (discovery, ideation and prototyping, refine and package).
- × Provision of the Demola digital platform with option for profile registration as well as showcase of available innovation challenges open for application, filterable by theme, type of collaboration (online or in-person), location and language.
- × Organisation of Demola community events such as coaching programmes, boot camps, milestone events, and alumni meet-ups.
- × Coordination of all marketing and social media communication activities.

COMPANY-SPECIFIC SUPPORT

- × Organisation of open innovation partnerships for companies, consisting of individual Demola projects. For each individual project, Demola facilitates the forming of student project groups which are selected in coordination with the company partner. Demola also administers needed agreements between companies and the project groups and the Demola Network (university partners and local Demola operators).
- × Coordination of the design process of the company case and organisation of subsequent workshops and meetings to support participating company representatives.
- × Support in developing challenge projects that are tailored to the recruitment needs of the company and foster early talent engagement and help build brand awareness.
- × Support and training in showcasing company expertise in the form of mentorship in challenge formats.
- × Provision of tailored services and resources to curate content for companies and the further development of their organisational strategies through trend analysis and scenario building.
- × Offer of Hub Partnership for companies who would like to join local Demola activities.
- × Supporting companies in employer **branding** and creating connections to next generation talent.



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Intermediary Support Services & Activities

TEACHER- AND STUDENT-SPECIFIC SUPPORT

- ✦ Offer of integrating Demola projects into the university curriculum, including building and facilitation of teams, coordination of the online application process, performance and skills evaluation, management of agreements and IPR frameworks, and issuance of verified certificates.
- ✦ Provision of teacher training programmes in Demola regional hubs, with a focus on co-creation methodologies and online facilitation.
- ✦ Offer of the Demola TeamHub supports students in becoming part of interdisciplinary student teams and an international community of innovating students. International collaboration with student peers is supported through progress tracking and time management tools and access to a Demola chat.
- ✦ Team members of student teams own the rights to the solutions they develop during Demola innovation projects.
- ✦ Issuance of Demola certificate that can be added to professional network profiles such as LinkedIn.
- ✦ Support of all student teams through designated Demola co-creation experts who accompany students by providing support in decision making, connecting to experts, guidance through the challenge topic and granting access to background material from previous projects, conveying design thinking, foresight, and systems thinking methodologies.
- ✦ Facilitation of global thematic student groups by Demola co-creation experts who help student teams to meet each other and enter into discussion across individual challenge formats.

Curricular Integration

The nature of the Demola model as a public-private partnership between an innovation agency and three HEIs means that enabling integration of innovation projects into university curricula lies at the core of Demola. Currently, Demola innovation projects can be integrated as part of credited university study courses under the “Demola for Campus” programme. The projects can either be offered as tailored university courses or be incorporated into existing courses and modules. Up to 10 ECTS credits are allocated for a standard Demola project. Students may participate in several Demola projects, however, only receive ECTS credit points once.

International & Virtual Collaboration

- ✦ In the start-up phase of Demola, when co-creation activities were still mostly based in the Tampere region, international students already made up 35% of participating students in innovation projects and focus was placed on cooperation with internationally operating companies. This paved the way for internationalisation of the Demola model.
- ✦ Operation of international Demola Hubs in cooperation with universities to enable in-person collaboration and interaction, but also to connect regional university students and growth companies to global innovation activities and in this way, increase international connectiveness of regional and national innovation ecosystems. Demola Hub Locations include Tampere and Helsinki (Finland), Lisbon (Portugal), London (UK), Tokyo and Sapporo (Japan), Budapest (Hungary), and Windhoek (Namibia).
- ✦ The Demola online platform enables both remote teams and hybrid teams to collaborate and work with each other on innovation projects.
- ✦ Support to participating students is provided via the Demola Chat which can be used as a computer app.



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Impact

VISION & MISSION STATEMENT

The vision of Demola is to build positive futures and develop a global innovation ecosystem. Demola is on a mission to **support students in achieving their full potential** and showcasing and advancing their skills and competencies by connecting them with real-world projects from companies and organisations.

RESULTS

- × Community of over 24,000 students from more than 1,500 universities and 100 countries worldwide who have participated in Demola innovation projects.
- × Cooperation with more than 50 universities worldwide to offer innovation challenges integrated into university curricula.
- × 92% of participating students strongly agree or agree that their participation in a Demola challenge had a big impact on their working life capabilities.
- × Through Demola, around every sixth student participant finds a job or connection that leads to employment.

SUCCESS FACTORS AND ENABLING CONDITIONS

- × Participating students own the rights to their results. From the outset, Demola Global has operated on the terms of students and created fair co-creation processes for them. Demola has recognised a shared IPR framework as key innovation enabler and established a clear working mechanism based on a unified contract framework, consisting of a community code of conduct and team agreements with students and project agreements with companies. Developed challenge solutions belong to student teams and companies receive the possibility to invest in the development of solutions via shared or full licenses or become a shareholder.
- × The launch and development of Demola was supported by the strong culture of cooperation and co-creation between companies, research institutes, education providers, and public administration in the Finnish innovation system. In addition, the Tampere region specifically boasts a history of university-industry collaboration and a willingness for experimentation.
- × One of Demola's most important factors for success has been its culture of continuous internal monitoring and assessment, basing further development on feedback collected from its key users, students and companies. This has allowed Demola to experiment and strengthen and upscale its platform offer over the years.
- × The involvement of important corporate organisations and businesses in the Demola model from the outset helped to attract other organisations and companies.
- × The Demola model features well-defined roles that can be carried out by different agents, leading to successful replication of the Demola model across the world.
- × Strong community and alumni network led to former student participants' desire to get involved in the facilitation and support of new challenge projects as Demola ambassadors, contributing to organic growth as well as internationalisation of the Demola network.
- × Demola has been recognised as an important collaboration concept and has been included as a policy tool in Finland's open innovation platform policy framework. In Portugal, the Demola concept is promoted by the national government as an important tool to innovative university-business cooperation.
- × The Demola model reflects Finnish non-hierarchical culture which has helped to spread a collaboration model based on equality in which students and company staff work together as equals.
- × In some Demola local nodes such as Demola Canary Islands, public funds provided by regional governments are a key success factor for enabling company participation.

DEMOLA

☆ Exemplary Challenge Format: Demola Portugal Initiative

The **Demola Portugal Initiative** is an exemplary internationalisation initiative by Demola to provide a “support system for the co-creation of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship” in Portugal.

Co-financed by Demola Global, the EU-funded Human Capital Operational Program (POCH) and Portuguese polytechnic universities, the initiative aims to connect students with companies to explore future requirements for their products or services and investigate changes in consumer behaviour. In the frame of a 20-week “Teacher Training Program”, a national platform was established to promote cross-polytechnic exchange for academic staff and provide training in co-creation and facilitation methodologies and creation of partnerships with regional actors.

Academic staff from partner universities in Portugal participating in teacher trainings.
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PUBLIC CONTACT DETAILS

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INFORMATION SOURCES

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RESULTS

- ✦ In the first phase (2021-2023) of the Demola Portugal Initiative, 885 academic staff from 14 polytechnic universities in Portugal, more than 3,900 students from HEIs in Portugal and internationally and 600 companies were brought together in challenge projects.
- ✦ Project evaluations of the challenges have shown that students have benefited mostly in terms of improvements in skills relating to communication and collaboration, initiative and self-motivation, as well as gaining practical hands-on experience in the context of their studies.
- ✦ One edition ran from 21 March to 3 June 2022 under five thematic tracks, focused on sustainability, the future of work, and digitalisation. The challenges were divided into two 5-week phases “Present” and “Future”. In the “Present” phase, the students explored problems and opportunities around the challenge theme using the Design Research method. In the “Future” phase, Speculative Design methodology was applied to explore different futures of the challenge topic. For example, in the “Value Creators of Tomorrow” track, the challenge project “Value-Adding Factors of Electric Vehicles” involved four undergraduate and graduate international students with study backgrounds from Engineering to Business Administration and Marketing. Carried out as a remote project, the students collaborated with Portuguese company PKE Automotive in exploring questions related to future key performance metrics and trends of electrification and software.