



CIVIC PARTICIPATION



Developing the entrepreneurial skills of citizens in rural areas with OTELO



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Ashoka Austria/CEE

Elected in 2012



! PROBLEM

Rural areas today lack open spaces and flexible structures that promote creativity - in companies, local communities, industries and the education system. In Austria, regional development programs fall short of providing citizens with support structures which allow them to experiment, exchange ideas, and act in new ways. In search of acceptance of differences, flexibility, and a creative culture, people often migrate to urban areas, where there is an abundance of jobs, stimulation, and a sense of belonging. This leads to “brain drain” in rural areas.

💡 INNOVATION

Martin is building an empowered citizen base to create a new quality of life for people living in rural areas. He founded OTELO, a network of “open technology laboratories”, spaces designed for and by people to experiment, collaborate, communicate, and exchange with community members about topics they want to take action on. OTELO fosters creativity and an exchange of experiences in rural parts of Austria and links it with urban funding structures. Topics like participation, education, agriculture, social and technical innovations are particularly important.

❤️ MOTIVATION

The strongest impetus for OTELO took place during Martin’s time as a regional manager. After returning to his home village he realized the lack of possibilities in order to make a life in rural areas attractive to young people. Another motivation for Martin was a little 12 year old boy who developed a complex educational game, but received almost no support. That was a huge incentive for Martin to develop a model which supports committed people and provides them with collaborative spaces as well as a nationwide network.

🌍 IMPACT

Founded in 2010, 24 OTELO locations have opened their doors in various locations. Additionally, within one year OTELO developed 17 collaboration projects and hosted more than 150 events on regional innovations. Estimated 20.000 people were involved in these activities – the events stretched from the production of soap to the construction of 3D printers.

🎯 VISION

OTELO has become a role model for the support of communities, creativity and the collaboration between people living in rural areas. In the future, OTELO will make use of its achievements in order to increasingly challenge the conventional notions about the role of rural citizens. Thus OTELO plans to launch additional 20 to 30 locations in the next three years. Recently, Martin also received requests to expand to South Korea and India and is currently developing an according franchise model.

👥 CONTACT

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