

Sofia Local Innovation Lab Framework

Phase 2 – June 2018

The New Generation Skills project, supported by the Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, aims to upgrade existing cooperation mechanisms between its key target group of quadruple helix actors including local municipalities, as facilitators, along with organisations representing local youth, education, and the business sector to create innovative local support schemes going beyond existing fragmented initiatives taking the form of Innovation Labs joined in a transnational network. Interweaving innovation and youth entrepreneurship support will contribute to bridging the gap between education and new generation skills needed for navigating in the changing world of work. Through organic, community based learning programs, this novel support scheme will reach out to the youth, in particular young people (aged 15-29) in transition from education to the labour market, faced with major career decisions, who are motivated, but inadequately skilled to generate new ideas and take the first steps towards socially responsible, transformative entrepreneurship.

This youth focussed innovation support process will ultimately lead to better economic performance, lower brain drain and have a positive impact on the quality of the local working/living environment.

The project builds on the cooperation among 12 partners from 7 different countries in the Danube region.

Introduction:

Sofia Innovation Lab Framework document is designed to be the basis for the pilot implementation and testing of Sofia Innovation Lab. It is designed to strengthen links within the quadruple helix, so that the innovation lab can generate support for the youth in realising their ideas and turn them into ventures.

It is the result of an in-depth process of interregional project cooperation, the respective city experience so far and the reality of the European innovation landscape.

The document is developed in the framework of the New Generation Skills – Unlocking the potentials for business and social innovation in the Danube Region by equipping young people with new generation skills. Sofia Municipality and Sofia Development Association are partners in the project.

The document is developed in two stages – one in late 2017, which is necessary as a guiding document for the pilot action of Sofia Local Innovation Lab implementation, and the current final document, revised and updated after the discussions with the LIAG and the decisions of Sofia Municipal Council.

Objectives:

The primary objective of the Innovation Lab model as 'One Stop Shop' is to support the local youth in their (social) innovative ventures. It consists of a set of services that should be offered by local ILs which are helping the youth in developing and putting in practice their ideas.

More specifically, the objectives of this framework document are:

- To define the model for operation and functioning of Sofia Innovation Lab, including:
 - o Its organizational and governance structure;

- Funding mechanisms;
- Physical infrastructure.
- To identify a portfolio of key services/activities, including:
 - Services provided by the local authority;
 - Services provided by the businesses;
 - Services provided by the academic community;
 - Services provided by the civil sector;
 - Services provided jointly by all stakeholders.

Development resources:

Sofia Local Innovation Lab Framework is developed on the basis of the following New Generation Skills project activities and deliverables:

- Sofia case study on the local innovation ecosystem with a special focus on topics of innovation management and youth support, internal processes/coordination, approach to innovation, uptake of innovation from the youth towards business/academia, synergies among support measures by local actors.
- Transnational peer learning event (linked to 1st TE Workshop) and its conclusion paper.
- A study on EU level best practices on innovation management from beyond the partnership on the most advanced methodologies and approaches to managing innovation at local level with special regard on involving youth.
- Transnational Innovation Lab Scheme, subject to adaptation to local circumstances. The Sofia LIAG discussed and selected elements from the transnational International Lab model and service portfolio for the pilot implementation that are potentially the most efficient and best fit to Sofia local resources and existing initiatives (as described in the case studies and Youth Innovation Agenda).

In addition, the following Sofia strategic documents were taken into consideration:

- Sofia Strategy for the Young People (2017 – 2027);
- Sofia Education Strategy (2016 – 2023);
- Sofia Cultural Strategy (2016 – 2020);
- Sofia Strategy for the Development of Physical Culture and Sports (2012 – 2020);
- Sofia Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization.

This document was consulted with the NGS project Local Innovation Advisory Group and the Consultative Council on Youth Policy with the Mayor of Sofia.

Prioritization of target areas with highest youth innovation potential:

As described in Sofia Youth Innovation Agenda and Local Action Plan, to maximize results the Local Innovation Lab should focus on the two thematic/sectoral priorities set in Sofia Smart Specialization Strategy and key to the city innovation ecosystem. This is important to ensure synergies with the other relevant strategies and instruments of Sofia Municipalities and to build on the strengths of the city and municipality:

- Information and communication technologies (ICT)

Sofia is in a very favourable first position in Europe and 9th in the world as a ICT and business processes outsourcing destination due to the availability of educated human resources and excellent digital infrastructure. ICT therefore is a priority as a sector – the growth rate of digital economy is seven times greater than that of the rest of the economy. ICT can become the basis for the creation and development of ICT innovations and youth self-employment and companies. ICT as a factor - digital technologies are changing the way people communicate, work, shop, learn and have fun.

- Creative and Cultural Industries

The sector of creative industries forms 7% of global GDP and grows annually by 7-8%. Leading areas with over 90% concentration on value creation in the capital city are film industry with 96.75% and software and video games

with 90.35%. In 2014, Sofia was selected as a UNESCO Creative City of Cinema. Cultural and creative industries (according to the definition of the European Commission) are architecture, archives and librarianship, artistic craftsmanship, audio-visual forms (films, TV, video games and multimedia), cultural heritage, design, incl. fashion design, festivals, music, performing and visual arts, publishing, radio. Special emphasis will be placed on the film industry in the context of the selection of Sofia for a UNESCO Creative City of Cinema.

Model of functioning and operation of Sofia Local Innovation Lab

The model defines the roles, structures, and methods for community involvement and includes a portfolio of services to be offered to the local youth. It allows for a closer and better cooperation of innovation actors, establishes synergies between them, and thus reduces the fragmentation of action.

By fostering cross-disciplinary, multi-actor collaboration, connecting youngsters with successful entrepreneurs or initiators of community programs, the Innovation Lab will support youth socially responsible ventures in various fields, especially social and cultural entrepreneurship, but also in the identified thematic/sectoral fields (e.g. creative and cultural industries and information and communication technologies). The Innovation Lab will act as 'One Stop Shops' for Sofia youth to get support for their ideas, in the form of networking, consultation with experienced professionals in the given field of interest, or access to office space and equipment. Through the Innovation Lab they will be able to learn from experience and get additional logistic support for putting their ideas into practice.

The Innovation Lab model describes the operational model by local actors of the quadruple helix and a portfolio of services.

The proposed Innovation Lab model and service portfolio should be tested in the local context of Sofia, leading to eventual necessary adjustments after

the pilot phase to ensure that the outputs become truly useful tools, producing a measurable impact on the local innovation ecosystem in Sofia.

1. Physical infrastructure and equipment

Innovation will need to be catalyzed, honed, and hosted somewhere. The ecosystem is marked by huge heterogeneity of business models and ownership: belonging to universities, NGOs, clusters, companies though linked and networked together. However, as stated in the Youth Innovation Agenda, Sofia needs to make sure there is a public (municipal) physical and virtual space, which is for communal/youth use and has free access.

Implementing Sofia Youth Innovation Agenda and Local Action Plan, the NGS project team with the support of its Local Innovation Advisory Group (LIAG) members, has made an inventory of municipally owned spaces in Sofia, located in the broad city-center, with sufficient room capacity and relatively easy access, well connected by public transport. In addition, preference was given to locations situated close to universities or other places where there are natural gatherings of young people.

Based on this inventory the branch of Sofia City Library located at Serdika Street was defined as a most suitable venue. The venue is about 150 sq. m., with natural light, in a historic building at the heart of the city. A report to amend the purpose of the space and to transfer its management jointly to Sofia Development Association and Sofia City Library for the purpose of establishing and running an Innovation Lab was written and submitted to Sofia Vice Mayor Mrs. Irina Savina. The report will be included in one of the upcoming sessions of Sofia Municipal Council for discussion and vote. After the publication of the decision of Sofia Municipal Council the decision will be enforced and the space will become available.

The space will be equipped with broadband internet connection. In addition, through the budget of the NGS project the space will be equipped with

furniture to allow for minimum 10 workstations and multi-purpose room arrangements for seminars, workshops, competitions, exhibitions, etc. Technical equipment should include several laptops with software, screens, smart board, colour printer and scanner (for poster size prints), multimedia projector and screen, cloud storage space.

2. Organizational and governance structure

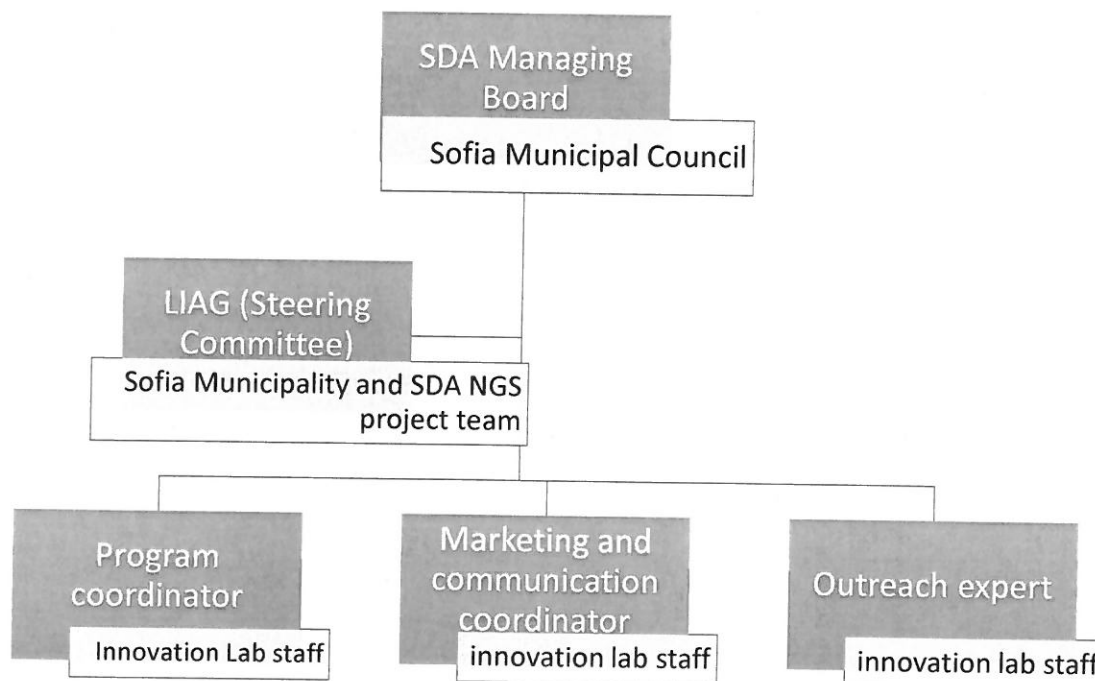
Sofia Innovation Lab will be organized as an independent project under the jurisdiction of Sofia Development Association (SDA). This will secure a balanced structure, which will ensure solid organizational support from the Association and portfolio of activities and services that is independent from political interests.

SDA will be tasked to provide an efficient and independent management of Sofia Innovation Lab testing phase. SDA board consists of cross-party Sofia municipal councilors with the purpose to work on the quadruple helix principle, so it will guarantee solid relationships with the Municipality of Sofia, regional stakeholders, academic and civil structures. SDA has coordinated the development and later the implementation of Sofia Smart Specialization Strategy (RIS3), Sofia Cultural Development Strategy – Sofia – Creative Capital (2013-2023) and other relevant to the action strategic municipal documents. The Association has sufficient financial independence and had built solid capacity to run European projects and large-scale events. The organizational capacity, network, knowledge will tap into the Innovation Lab setting up.

The organizational structure needs to be fairly simple not to hinder the pilot phase. The Innovation Lab management team will consist of 3 part-time SDA staff persons (innovation lab coordinator, communication and marketing manager and outreach manager), assisted whenever appropriate and possible by NGS project team members of Sofia Municipality, to make up a team of motivated, skilled individuals with diverse backgrounds. The overall administration and accounting will be taken over by SDA.

SDA is a non-profit organization with a Management Board of 9 members, the chairperson being the chairperson of Sofia Municipal Council. Although all SDA policies, plans, projects, reports are subject to approval by the board and annual reports are also voted by the Municipal Council, the Innovation Lab will have a separate steering committee, which will coincide with the LIAG members. Sofia LIAG already includes relevant local quadruple helix actors. Thus the LIAG will take an active role in the pilot and will be responsible for the overall Innovation Lab development, coordination and monitoring.

Should there be need, more experts might be invited to join the LIAG and thus guarantee the proper involvement of specific groups and structures. Thus for instance an integration of public schools in the public ecosystem – through the Innovation Lab - is needed, so in case the current LIAG members need further support in this respect, another expert will be identified and invited to join.



Based on these concepts and visions, Sofia Municipal Council passed the following decisions:

Sofia Municipal Council passed a decision number 193 with protocol 51 of 05.04.2018 to secure the functioning of Sofia Innovation Lab. Base on it, an Agreement was signed between Sofia City Library and Sofia Development Association and Sofia Municipality. The agreement covers the rights and responsibilities of all partners in the process of refurbishment of a municipal venue for the purpose of Sofia Innovation Lab, and the way is will be managed.

The venue is given for mutual usage of Sofia Municipality and Sofia Development Association for a period of 8 years to create and manage a Youth Innovation Lab.

3. Funding mechanisms

For the first phase of the pilot implementation the funding for the Innovation Lab is provided by the budget of the NGS project (for the furniture and equipment, and for marketing and communication) and the budget of SDA and Sofia municipality (for refurbishment, staff salaries, administrative costs).

Sofia Municipality provides 25,000 BGN for the refurbishment of the space in addition to the project budget with a decision number 193 with protocol 51 of 05.04.2018.

According to the decision SDA is responsible to pay the utilities and other bills and charges for the venue maintenance.

From the very start different opportunities for additional funding mechanisms will be explored and pursued, as described in Sofia Youth Innovation Agenda and Local Action Plan:

- Review all existing municipal funding programs: Culture program; Europe program; Sports, Youth and Volunteering program; Green Sofia; Fund for Innovations, etc., and evaluate the possibilities to provide public funding for youth innovation initiatives and social innovation.
- Create an inventory, establish working relationships and foster common programming and networking among innovation hubs, youth centers, laboratories, co-working spaces in Sofia.
- Strengthen interaction between the municipality and universities and plan joint activities through the operations of the Innovation Lab.
- Build public-private partnerships around specific topics/challenges to be addressed through the activities of the Innovation Lab.
- Fundraise for financial, technological and other donations and contributions from the business sector.
- Attract non-financial business support in the form of business angels, consultants, mentors and coaches.

The outreach Innovation lab coordinator will be assigned the responsibility for this line of work on a day-to-day basis, while LIAG members and SDA managing board will work on this at the strategic level.

4. Innovation Lab activities

Sofia Innovation Lab will work along several major lines defined to effectively foster youth innovation and entrepreneurship in the context of Sofia. The

selection of the Innovation Lab activities was based on two principles: filling existing gaps (such as free of charge co-working space for a given period, research and data collection, etc.); and building on existing strengths and models that have proven their efficiency and have attracted public trust (such as competitions, hackathons, events, etc.)

At the heart of Sofia Youth Innovation Lab is the Dynamic Learning Package (DLP), developed locally on the basis of a transnational DLP concept, produced by the NGS knowledge project partner Tkalka, Maribor. DLP is an integral part of the Innovation Lab. It is crucial that the DLP mutually intertwined with coaching, mentoring, specialists counselling and networking services of the IL. That is the reason that implementation of DLP and other services is carefully planned to assure proper and permanent coaching support and mentoring as well as specialists counselling support and networking activates that enable youth social innovative ideas to grow and to turn into the socially innovative & socially responsible ventures.

DLP summary

DLP as a learning tool offers young people skills and competences, beyond the curricula of formal education, that drives them towards taking initiative and engaging them in social innovation driven entrepreneurship. The tool targets youth that can significantly contribute to social innovation and sustainable local growth.

DLP is foundational learning tool composed of modules to develop skills and competences generally not available in the formal educational system and identified as being in deficit in Sofia.

It consists of two pathways:

- entrepreneurship, aimed at developing entrepreneurship competences and youth start-ups, including 30 participants in its pilot edition;
- employability path, aimed to assist with catching up skills and improve the career prospects of young people.

The DPL consists of 6 modules:

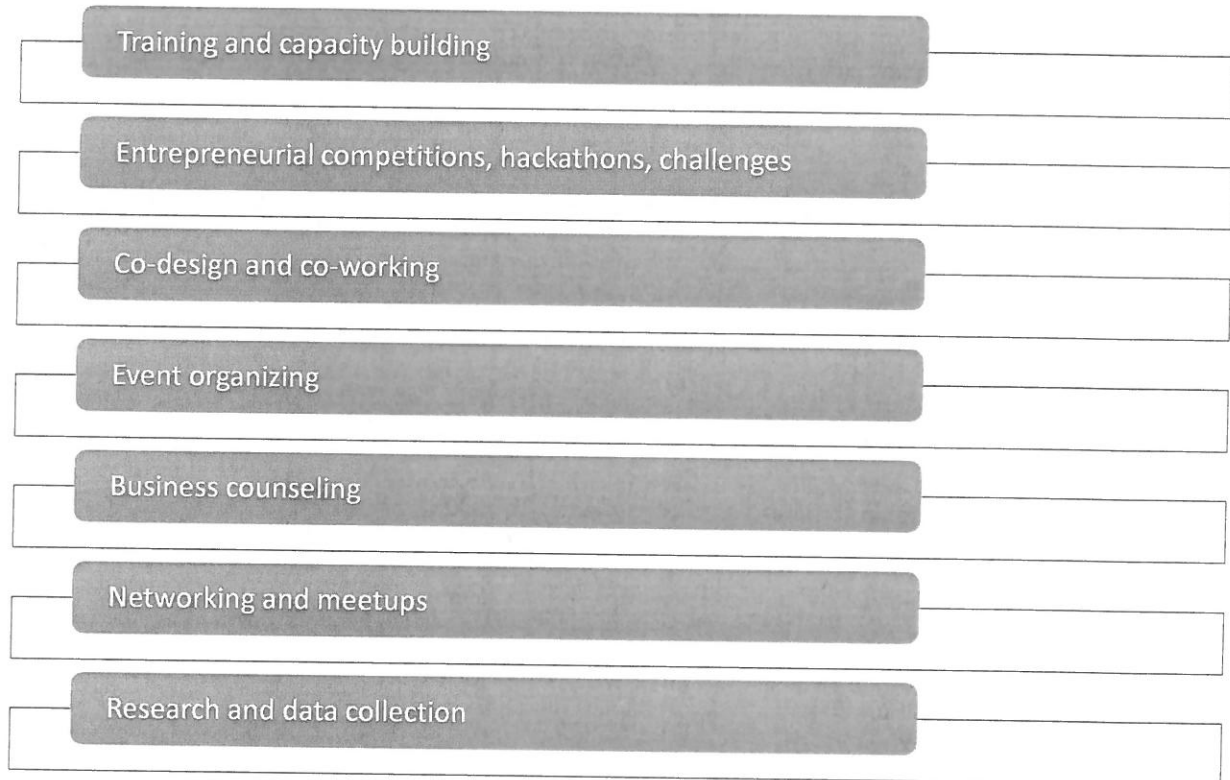
- Start up socially innovative business;
- Business planning;

- Ethical marketing and communications;
- Management and leadership;
- Financial management;
- Presentation and pitching.

SDA is coordinating with Sofia University to accredit the DLP so that young participants who successfully complete the program would receive appropriate university certification.

Further steps will be made to check out the options for Training of Teachers, which would eventually allow partners to scale up efforts.

In addition, the activities selected aim to assist Sofia Innovation Lab to achieve both visibility and tangible successful results during its pilot implementation phase because this is critical for the sustainability of the project.



The training and capacity building program

This programme is central to Sofia Innovation Lab, aiming to provide the tools and capabilities that encourage Sofia young people to imagine and create products and companies, while developing lifelong learning entrepreneurial skills. The program aims to assist lab users to acquire business tools and techniques, and to encourage young people to openly discuss, debate, question, challenge, comment, support and share.

The training and capacity building programme would aim to include and target also teachers in secondary schools and other potential trainers to expand the scope of activity. Other lifelong learning training activities are also envisioned.

As described in the Youth Innovation Agenda, more online and offline free resources and tools are necessary to be collected and promoted, so this will also become part of the activities of the Innovation Lab.

Entrepreneurship competitions, hackathons, challenges

The competition format has fueled major successes in fostering innovation as a catalyst for new ideas. The lessons learned so far show that to be effective, competitions should be framed around a specific challenge. Competitions allow you to draw value from the competition process itself as well, not just the results. Competitions stimulate diversity and are inviting to anyone since they pose no requirements about the legal status, age, number of team members, experience and the like of participants.

Competitions and challenges are a great opportunity to work in the quadruple helix format and to secure additional funding for the Innovation Lab as well, as well as to boost the visibility and the public trust in the Lab activities.

Co-design and co-working

Co-working spaces – defined as membership-based workspaces where diverse groups of freelancers, remote workers, and other independent professionals work together in a shared, communal setting – are effective in business terms and in terms of personal wellbeing. The norm there is to help each other out, and there are many opportunities to do so; the variety of workers in the space means that coworkers have unique skill sets that they can provide to other community members. Connections with others are a big reason why people pay to work in a communal space. Sofia Innovation Lab aims to provide this experience for free for a limited amount of time, and thus to contribute to the strengthening of the innovative city community.

Co-working is a natural match with co-design. Based on evaluation of the needs of the municipal administration, Sofia Innovation Lab will also work on co-design of selected municipal services to better meet the needs and aspirations of the citizens.

Event organizing

The Innovation Lab aims to organize diverse specialized events that deliver different things to different people: innovation fairs and exhibitions, conferences, debates, etc. The major objective of this line of work is to bring together innovators, investors and researchers, including venture capital companies and angel investors, as well as to showcase innovation success by celebrating young entrepreneurs and civic contributors. As described in the Youth Innovation Agenda, we will also explore options how to celebrate and promote youth innovation through participation in trade missions abroad, city participation in international events, etc.

Business counseling

Sofia Innovation Lab will provide free one-on-one or group confidential counseling for young people's small business and startup ventures. Business counseling will be in the areas of business planning, business growth, problem solving, or cash flow management. Counseling will also promote the existing national and European funding schemes and assist potential applicants in developing their applications. Counseling sessions with an expert will be appointed upon request.

Networking and meet-ups

Innovation is increasingly about having groups of people come together to leverage their diverse talents and expertise to solve multifaceted challenges that cross multiple disciplines. To make this happen requires a networking culture that is designed, supported, and modeled, to collaborate effectively with other players and specialists both inside and outside the community, and within specific ecosystems. Networking and meet-ups and match making help identify opportunities, develop plans and capture creative value.

Research and data collection

As identified in Sofia Youth Innovation Agenda, better data collection is necessary to set up a baseline and follow-up tracking analysis of youth innovation, start-ups, skills development, etc. Relevant and up-to-date information determines to quality of policy measures and intervention, problem-solving and futuristic research. The Innovation Lab will conduct and/or gather relevant youth research regarding skills development needs, infrastructure gaps, obstacles and enabler for entrepreneurship. Attending young adults will be surveyed regularly on attitudes. Thus the Innovation Lab will become a source of information regarding youth entrepreneurship and innovation and set up an innovative model of information management.

5. Portfolio of services:

As a starting point for the set-up of Sofia Innovation Lab the NGS project team and LIAG members selected the following set of services that are potentially most efficient and best fit to Sofia local circumstances and existing initiatives.

a. Services provided by the local government

<p>Infrastructure</p>	<p>Infrastructure defined as the basic facilities, services and installations, underlying framework of features required for the operation of the Innovation lab. The lab environment is designed to provide full hardware, software, institutional and scientific support for the proper growth of any good youth initiative that fits the Innovation Lab course of action. The role of the municipality is of utmost importance for enabling youth with proper infrastructure. In advanced version of Innovation Lab, it could also provide equipment for the projects in the two priority sectors: ICT and Creative and cultural industries. The subsidized space provided</p>
-----------------------	---

<p>Funding</p>	<p>by the municipality is the important factor of the overall sustainability of the Innovation Lab.</p> <p>Beside the project funding resources, it is important to find additional sources of funding the Innovation Lab. Sofia Municipality should participate on covering of the Innovation Lab operating costs in the initial phase in order to enable its sustainability.</p>
<p>Providing data</p>	<p>Statistical data on the youth and other related issues in the municipality: data on youth education, economic development, innovation and scientific potential of the municipality etc. The data is needed for targeting and promotion, as well as for challenges for innovation competitions and research purposes.</p>
<p>Local promotion and communications</p>	<p>Local promotion of the Innovation Lab activities is important in order to get an optimal number of youth who want to turn their innovative ideas into ventures. Municipalities should have the central role in promoting the Innovation Lab as a "One Stop Shop" for youth. It is very important to raise the public awareness at the regular basis and attract the support from different stakeholders into the support network but also into the innovation eco system. Municipalities, together with LIAG should use different promotion and marketing strategies in order to attract as many young people as possible.</p>

Administrative and policy support	<p>Municipality administration should support young innovators to connect with other public and private organization operating in the region. Specific support is needed in case young people need additional permits from different municipal departments and structures.</p>
-----------------------------------	--

b. Services provided by the businesses

<p>Funding</p> <p>Donations: software, technology, cloud space, etc.</p> <p>Mentoring and counseling</p>	<p>Provide support to the young entrepreneurs searching for funds and finance of start-up initiatives with the aim of potential recruitment, corporate social responsibility, positioning in the local innovation ecosystem.</p> <p>Stakeholders from business sector can offer their facilities and resources to the Innovation Lab activities, such as web platforms, cloud space, software, specific technologies, equipment, furniture and accessories.</p> <p>The Innovation Lab participants get counselling and coaching tailored to their needs to reach their milestones. In addition, they will be provided with professional consultants (e.g. a marketing expert or a lawyer specialize in Intellectual Property Rights) for specific topics. The coach/counsellor is a facilitator of learning. By coaching, young (social) innovators will have the opportunity to improve their own performance: in other words, coaching service will help them to learn. Proper coaching can help young (social) innovators to</p>
--	---

<p>Internships and employment</p>	<p>ensure that they can handle situations on their own when they arise.</p> <p>The Innovation Lab offers, through its network of stakeholders, a mentoring service with the aim of accompanying the youth during the process of setting up and consolidating their business ideas. Mentoring is provided by entrepreneurs and experienced professionals who share, as volunteers, their time and experience with the young entrepreneurs who start their first business venture. Mentoring is based on establishing a space of trust that allows an objective analysis of the challenges facing the new business, strengthening the skills of young entrepreneurs and favouring their personal and professional development from the experience of volunteer mentors.</p> <p>Stakeholders from business sector, particularly large companies, could offer internships and qualification programs to selected youth who are the participants of Innovation Lab. Models for joint (or "outsourced") internships will also be explored.</p> <p>Employment opportunities are not the core idea of the Innovation Lab, but this opportunity is open for all participants and depends on the current need of private sector for new employees.</p>
---------------------------------------	--

c. Services provided by the academic community

<p>Research</p>	<p>Research organizations and universities could offer research facilities, methodologies and guidance to participants of the Innovation Lab. Youth will have the opportunity to see and learn new facilities that are used for applied research within the research institutions. Whenever possible, the academic partners will bridge the gap by bringing R&D results to young entrepreneurs for their innovative ventures. Institutions from research sector, especial those market oriented, will inform members of the Innovation Lab about new trends, which are in the participants specific field of interest.</p>
<p>Lifelong learning</p>	<p>Sofia Innovation Lab will develop educational offering in terms of professional development, digital skills development, certifications of different groups of Sofia residents apart from youth only, by structuring situations for family engagement, training of trainers, etc.</p>
<p>Joint on-the-job training programmes, accepting credit-eligible courses</p>	<p>Sofia Universities need to offer guidance and establish joint programmes and partnerships with the Innovation Lab so that it can to offer and implement credit-eligible courses. Thus Sofia Innovation Lab can offer a low-risk and convenient way to earn credit toward a university degree for youth at risk.</p>
<p>Internships</p>	<p>Universities can direct their student to apply for internships to Sofia Innovation Lab and/or its stakeholder business partners. Thus the Innovation Lab can guarantee consistence and continuity between the theoretical academic</p>

	<p>knowledge and the hands-on practice, however keeping in mind the general goal of encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation.</p>
--	--

d. Provided by the civil sector

<p>Volunteering</p>	<p>It is up to Innovation Lab to decide what services will be charged but the most of the providers of services should be based on the voluntary work with other interests than directly financial. In addition, the civic sector can recruit volunteers to support the Innovation Lab in its day-to-day operations and promotion.</p>
<p>Awareness raising and advocacy</p>	<p>Civil sector organizations should use their existing connections with other civil organizations and media to raise awareness of the Innovation Lab activities and its importance for youth in the municipality.</p> <p>Innovation lab is a network place, which gets together different stakeholders including the decision makers in the field of social innovation. But the core part of its membership refers to young, innovative entrepreneurs. The management of Innovation Lab should have good insight in the needs of (social) entrepreneurs, the bias they are facing in their work and therefore the Innovation Lab through its civic partners could also act as their "agent" advocating for the better business environment for innovative entrepreneurs. The Innovation Lab could create</p>

	<p>policy papers in cooperation with the partners, recommendations for the supporting schemes to be launched, updates of the University curriculums according to the market needs and many other relevant issues.</p>
--	---

e. Services provided jointly by all stakeholders

<p>Training</p>	<p>Different stakeholders: local government, academia, business, civic sector, should provide qualified personnel for the Innovation Lab training and capacity building programme. The Aim is to design a master program for entrepreneurship and innovation, which allows customization and personalization. Thus for instance cooperation with the civic sector could result in training regarding social entrepreneurship and social innovations. Business partnerships would likely cover the business planning aspects, intellectual property rights and other legal issues, access to venture capital, etc.</p> <p>A special part of the training programme need to be devoted to personal skills necessary in the 21 century: critical thinking and performance skills, including the ability to analyse, synthesize, evaluate, apply knowledge, collaborate productively, think critically and creatively, comprehend and manipulate data, formulate questions, be innovative, and create new solutions to problems that are not yet even currently known.</p>
-----------------	--

<p>Networking</p>	<p>Networking for innovation is not meeting someone who knows three people you know, à la Facebook. It is befriending individuals outside your sphere and engaging them in a questioning exchange demonstrating your genuine curiosity; then applying that knowledge to your own enterprise. It therefore requires the shared efforts of all stakeholders and in return it brings benefits to all as well.</p>
<p>Challenges and competitions</p>	<p>Committed participation of all stakeholders will enable Sofia Innovation Lab to develop high-profile Challenge Programmes and innovation competitions, uniquely tailored to Sofia needs, for solving big problems, building awareness, and encouraging breakthrough innovations. Joint efforts will result in attracting the right participants and mentors, selecting an appropriate challenge, making the solutions visible in diverse sectors and markets.</p>
<p>Special events</p>	<p>To showcase the best innovative experiences and mobilize a wide range of stakeholders in support of successful entrepreneurial development activities, the Innovation Lab will organize a variety of events like innovation fairs, exhibitions, conference, etc. It is critical for the success of this activity that various actors are brought together: local and national government, international and regional organizations, private sector entities, academia, civil society organizations, foundations, and the media.</p>

6. Monitoring priorities for the pilot phase:

During the pilot implementation phase the project team will monitor and evaluate if the sectoral priorities are too broad and if it is possible and/or reasonable to choose smaller segments in each category (ICT and Creative and cultural industries) so that Sofia Innovation Lab could achieve meaningful key performance indicators, create the right resources and become a hub of importance in Sofia/Balkans. Being too broad will immediately compete this place with many others around Sofia. The lack of specific brand will lead to less interest and be based mainly on location convenience.