Applied Research Partnerships with Developing and Transition Countries
Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences and Universities of Teacher Education

Foto: Daniel Pittet

Project title

Impact of Open Innovation Models to achieve a Sustainable Value Chain : A Sino-Swiss Applied Research

Thematic focus
Open Innovation, Sustainable Innovation, Crowd Sourcing

Year
2010

Project location
Hangzhou, China

Swiss Institution
HES-SO Valais-Wallis

Partner Institution
Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China

Description

"Made in China" : does it really mean a less qualitative product for a European consumer ? What if this consumer could directly communicate its needs in term of sustainable products to the Chinese producer in order to develop a sustainable innovation together ?
The goal of this applied research project is to propose an online open innovation platform to Chinese producers exporting to Europe. On this platform, www.atizo.com, producers will be able to communicate directly with an European community to receive creative ideas on how to diminish the environmental impact of their products.

Our Swiss partner, Atizo, is a start-up with an active community of about 25'000 innovators. They have already been certified by the KTI in Switzerland.
Research projects on open innovation have mainly been focused on a national level. This applied research project intends to better understand the motivation and barriers in an international and intercultural environment.
The environmental aspect is also key in this project : small steps and case studies are really important to prove the feasibility of such an open way of considering R&D between China and Europe.

Development relevance

Europe has become in 2008 the biggest export market for China. Europe has an influence and a responsibility on the goods that are produced by the Chinese manufacturers for the European market and on how they are produced.
The multinational companies are increasing their regulation and requirements toward China. The Chinese producers are answering on a reactive way to these new regulations.

Introducing an open innovation approach could possibly help existing companies or ventures to find new opportunities to produce more sustainable goods in a proactive way and contribute to a balanced global development. Crowd sourcing helps developing innovative solutions in a shorter period of time, while been closer to the market needs.

Visit before the opening of the Swiss Pavilion in Shanghai

Main features of the project

In Spring 2010, the first part of this applied research project consisted in finding the right company in China. During a precedent applied research project on open innovation in Switzerland, one of the main learnings was that the partnership is key. It was difficult in Switzerland to find the right company. But in China due to the cultural differences, it was worst. Many companies have been contacted by a Swiss student, Andrea Gribi, doing her master thesis in Hangzhou. She finally found a company interested in sustainable innovation, which is exporting to Europe and ready to participate.

"InnovAsians is a development and manufacturing company located in Hong Kong. InnovAsians' business is the development and manufacturing of eco lifestyle products including textile products and garments or those of its customers along responsible supply chain parameters, while at the same time creating an awareness of renewable materials, organic chic and eco natural in textile and garment manufacturing. InnovAsians was founded in 2007 by Lizette Smook. " Source : www.innovasians.com.

The second phase of the research project will begin in automn 2010 with the publication of the question on the Open Innovation platform. This is also a crutial part to help the company to formulate the issue in order to get the maximum out of the community of innovators. A Chinese student, Wang Pengfei will write his master thesis in Switzerland on this subject.

A conference on Open Innovation will be held in Belgium this automn, the Chinese professors together with the Swiss professors will participate. The Chinese partner will then have the opportunity to visit the University of Applied Science Western Switzerland and to meet the Swiss team. This applied research project is due to deliver results until the end of 2011.
The expected results are the following :

- Direct involvement of the consumers in the development of more sustainable products made in China and sold in Europe
- New polices in China to guide the exporting companies in the implementation of open innovation models to achieve sustainable development.

For more information, please do not hesitate to contact : joelle.mastelic@hevs.ch

Bags made from events' banners by InnovAsians.

These banners are normally thrown away after the event. Bags are designed and sewn in Macau.

CarbonTeeshirt.com (100% organic cotton)

The t-shirts are produced in climate neutral manufacturing facilities, using sustainable energy generated from solar power and wind power.