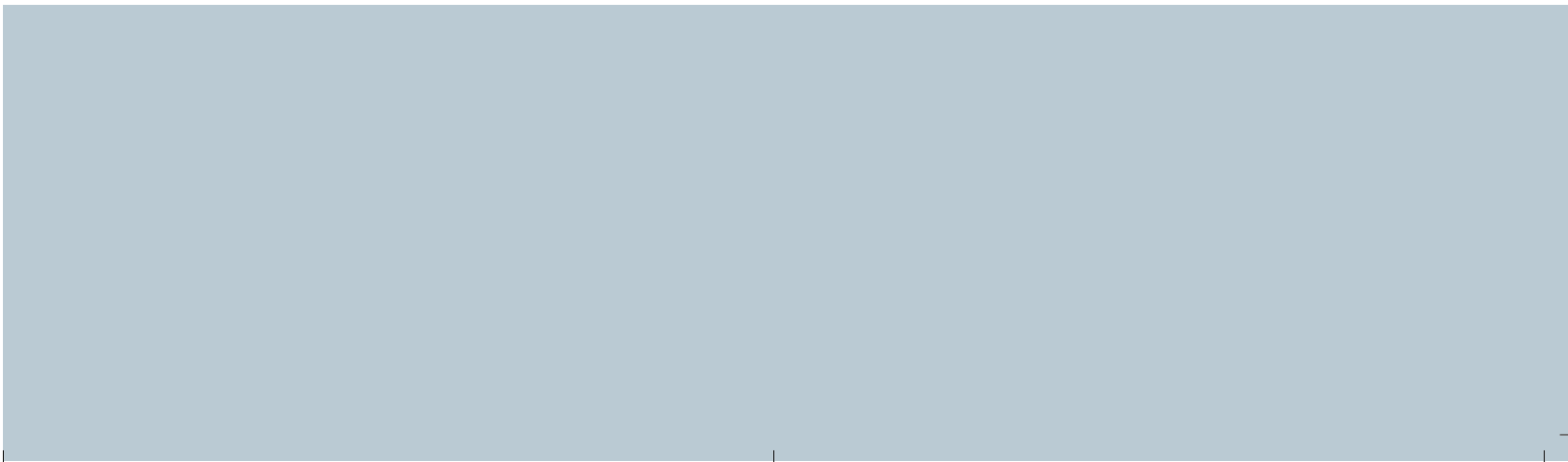


Brought by the stork – with a business plan in the sling



RAMON OLLÉ

«Northern countries» still stand for entrepreneurship and innovation. It is not random that reputed multinationals such as Ikea and Nokia came out of these thriving ecosystems. We are talking of systems that know how to take advantage of knowledge generated there and resources devoted to it – structured, efficient and competitive systems.

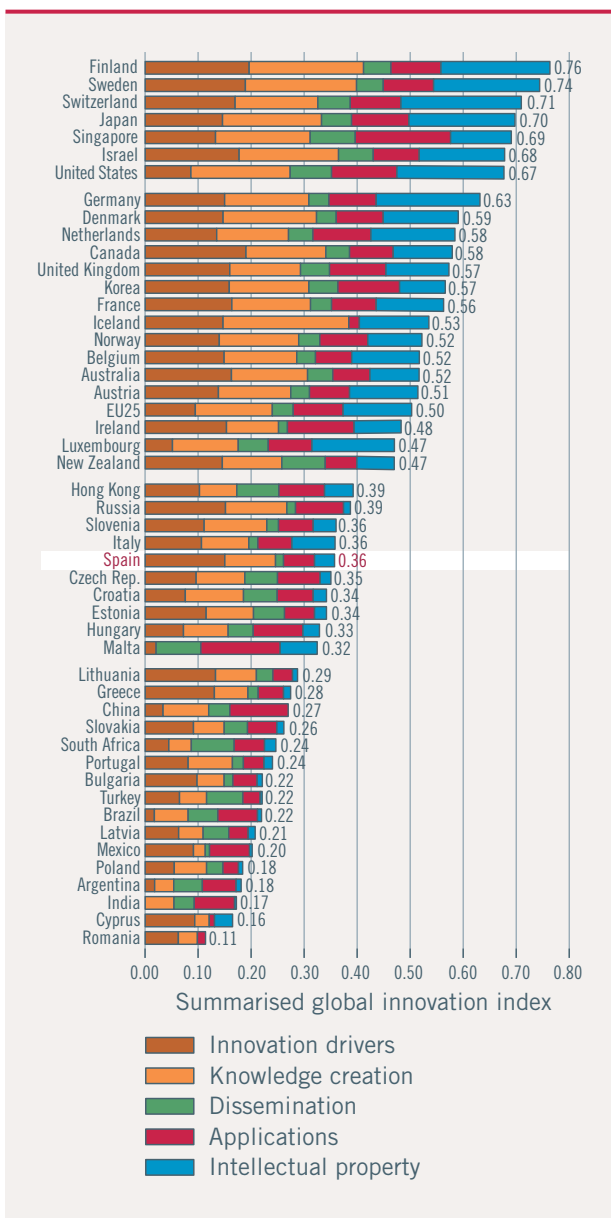


According to the latest study by the European Union, the Global Innovation Scoreboard 2006, Spain is below the EU25 average regarding innovation, and much farther behind the countries that have been leading the ranking for some

years. Finland, Sweden and Switzerland are above Japan and the United States (cf. chart 1). This index places them also at the head of the world's most competitive economies and those with the highest income per capita.

Promoting entrepreneurship not only means stimulating the creation of new businesses, but we also need to create favourable environments to allow consistent overall growth of such local initiatives.

Chart 1. Global innovation results



Source: Global Innovation Scoreboard, 2006.

▲ Spain is below the EU25 average regarding innovation and much farther behind the leading countries.

Promoting entrepreneurship requires the creation of favourable environments to allow consistent overall growth of local initiatives as well as a focus on the quality of entrepreneurs and the support they get from their environment.

But especially, apart from worrying always about the number of entrepreneurs we have, we should also focus our attention on the quality of these entrepreneurs and the support they get from their environment. How many entrepreneurial initiatives have been left halfway? Why? Were they provided with adequate funding when they needed it? Was the business idea competitive enough in a global setting? To have ideas is quite easy. What is more difficult is to develop and grow them.

The idea of quality vs. quantity as to entrepreneurial activity generated in our country is clearly reflected in chart 2. The evolution and consolidation of inbound migration to Spain has been a key factor in the economy and the creation of new companies.

In any case, it has to be said that this indicator analyses a gross rate that does not account for the profile of the business created nor its size or the scalability of its core business, a great intrinsic value for technology-based initiatives.

The transformation of our territory into a «little simile» of Northern ecosystems not only requires a general unanimous agreement of all stakehold-

ers but also a good deal of common sense by which research and innovation are linked to a real business rationale.

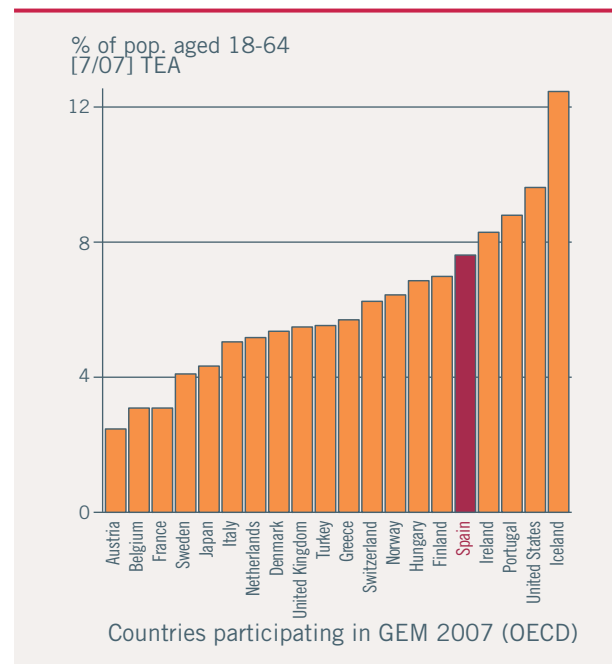
It is commonplace to find mini-company programmes for secondary schoolchildren fully integrated into the school system and allowing pupils to set up a real business. Entrepreneurship education initiatives require a strong commitment by business, public authorities and other stakeholders.

In my opinion, to build up a culture socially committed to entrepreneurship, primary education needs to be addressed first by creating a consistent curriculum during the whole schooling period. Hence it is about knowing how to pass on to the youngest the satisfaction of leading one's own project, teaching them the value of risk, ambition and autonomy.

Entrepreneurship education has been restricted to business schools, occasionally trickling down to university. The awareness-raising task carried out by institutions such as the MIT, Stanford and Delft universities is admirable. It is therefore obvious that public acknowledgement of the need to «educate and grow» entrepreneurs becomes necessary. It may well be true that all babies are brought by the stork – but not with a business plan in the sling! It is thus a matter of public and private social responsibility to foster such ambitious identities unafraid of risk.

This is neither new nor alarmist. Countries like Ireland, the UK, Belgium and Norway have been working for years in finding solutions to this, and entrepreneurship education is in fact becoming increasingly present on the political agenda of the EU. Some of these countries have understood that stimulating the economy requires capacity-building of the youngest. In fact, it is commonplace to find mini-company programmes for secondary schoolchildren fully integrated into the

Chart 2. Entrepreneurial activity in OECD countries participating in GEM 2007



Source: Global Innovation Scoreboard, 2006.

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school system and allowing pupils to set up a real business. We are talking about thirteen, fourteen and fifteen-year-old who «play» generating wealth and satisfying market needs. At the same time, they develop a part of the skills they will later need to succeed in business: teamwork, leadership, analytical ability, planning, communication skills, etc.

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All in all, these learning by doing programmes have a long history and the support of interna-

tional networks like the Junior Achievement Young Enterprise standing for their success. According to a survey by this organisation on 10,000 pupils from 25 European schools, the rate of schoolchildren who were seriously thinking of becoming entrepreneurs after doing the mini-company course raised from 63 to 84% – a complete success.

Such entrepreneurship education initiatives require a strong commitment by local business – usually sponsoring student initiatives or groups – as well as public authorities, NGOs and other stakeholders, with the devotion and time this requires. We must not forget that the flexibility and reaction such programmes are met with at schools and by teachers is eventually decisive for their proper implementation and generating positive effects. Unwillingness to learn for life or mere

scepticism towards new educational concepts often hamper such little change.

The importance of entrepreneurship is met with another distinctive component – technology. In Spain, different business schools already feature technological components to improve business management, but few have a comprehensive view of technology applied to any business field (operations, finance, marketing, R&D, etc.). It is here where engineering schools ought to play a relevant role, not only as a source to create technology-based companies – which provide clear added value to the market – but also as organisations creating technical professional profiles able to manage and lead companies.

The future requires technomangement and the passion to «create» at the service of society.

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