Report to Sten A Olsson's Foundation for Science and Culture

I received the Sten A Olsson's scholarship just prior to my departure for San Francisco in January 2015. The duration of my stay went on until late May, when I finally returned home to defend my thesis and hand it in. Below is a brief report of my stay and the results. The scholarship has been used to finance the data collection for my research.

The stay in Silicon Valley

After some brief sightseeing of San Francisco I quickly got settled in to the small, legendary and extremely expensive tech-town of Palo Alto, in the heart of Silicon Valley.

The main objective on-site was to perform a data collection for my thesis. That is, to interview business incubators and to attend SCANCOR (The Scandinavian Consortium for Organizational Research) at Stanford. Early on I managed to get an internship with Vinnova (Swedish Innovation Agency) at Nordic Innovation House (an international incubator focusing on soft-landings for the Nordics). This would later prove to be key in my data gathering, allowing me to observe incubators up-close while also providing me with network opportunities leading to interviews all over the bay area.

In California, days are long and the work is hard. Add thesis writing, interviewing actors, attending seminars and lots of events in to the mix and the burden gets heavy. However, not a single day looked alike nor passed me by in boredom. I got to meet many interesting people and get a first-hand view of the innovativeness in the renowned valley, surely an invaluable experience that I will never forget.

Results

I started out thinking that a benchmarking of all incubators in Silicon Valley would be possible. I realized shortly after starting out that this was an impossible dream. The variables were just too many. To perform a thorough benchmark, one would have to a lot more time than what I had to work with. Much like the amount of variables, the sheer amount of business incubators was also overwhelming, rendering a large-scale benchmark impossible.

Hence, my research took a turn for the back-up plan. That is, to explore incubator usage of evaluations post incubation on their companies in academic literature and Silicon Valley practice. This research area would later prove to be a lot easier to perform and yield some interesting results.

Among these results, three larger points were discovered.

- The vast majority of post-incubation tracking was performed through simple forms and surveys.
- Incentives to track and evaluate post-incubation companies are often connected to specific structure of the business incubators themselves.
- All interviewed incubators shared the same problem with response rates from alumni companies.

During the interviews and the following analysis, it became apparent that most actors shared similar tracking methods, channels, incentives and problems. Despite this, no academic literature provided any best practices on how certain types of incubator should evaluate and track. Instead literature simply stated that more extensive research was needed. So in my conclusion, creating a best practice for incubators depending on incentives is a natural next step. This would help both novel and seasoned business incubators, which in turn would add to the job creation and growth in society.