PNICube network for the entrepreneurial valorization of university research
PNICube

Network of local networks for innovative entrepreneurship from research

Founded in 2004, PNICube is the Italian Association of Universities, academic Incubators and regional Start Cups. PNICube’s mission is to pursue the entrepreneurial valorization of research through a wide-ranging, local and national, generative pathway of innovative entrepreneurship which main protagonists are researchers and university students.

Unique in Italy and Europe, the PNICube network has 53 associate members, including Universities, academic Incubators, and other organizations that promote innovation and entrepreneurship. Through 16 regional Start Cups, PNICube involves 17 Italian Regions and it is aimed at promoting the creation and development of knowledge-intensive, high social impact enterprises for sustainable progress. A network of networks for sustainable progress.

In its 20 years of existence, the PNICube network has generated 1,088 innovative start-up projects from Universities and Public Research Organizations-PROs (an average of more than 50 per year), distributed by innovation categories as follows: 380 Life Sciences-MedTech; 221 CleanTech & Energy; 339 ICT; 148 Industrial. To date, more than 50% are operating in the markets.

The OECD has recognized PNICube as a best practice for the sustainable development of Italy and its regions. Indeed, the OECD acknowledges the PNICube’s ability to connect local networks in which universities, businesses, investors, and public administrations work together (Report 2019, Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Higher Education in Italy).

PNICube pursues its mission through two important initiatives: the National Innovation Award-PNI and the Italian Master Startup Award-IMSA.

For further information: www.pnicube.it
Promoted by the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI), the main purpose of PNICube is to foster the creation of start-ups/spin-offs from research for sustainable development, through the combination of 5 key sub-objectives.

1. Fostering the creation of research start-ups/spin-off
2. Informing and promoting engagement initiatives directed at the academic community
3. Encouraging the creation of university incubators
4. Exchanging experiences among members and fostering mutual collaboration
5. Acquiring resources directed toward enterprise creation activities
6. Promoting and supporting members in international collaborations
Regional Start Cups
Local networks for entrepreneurship from research

Regional Start Cups are Business Plan Competitions associated with PNICube, they are activated on yearly basis by Universities and Academic Incubators in collaboration with PROs. They support and reward the best innovative business projects that originate from regional research systems within universities and PROs, by stimulating the emergence of knowledge-intensive start-ups.

Regional Start Cups imply the collaboration of Universities, academic Incubators, enterprises, investors and local public administrations over the territories.

The winning projects of the regional Start Cups participate in the national PNI competition.

Young start-ups from the regional Start Cup circuit operating in the markets participate in the national IMSA competition.

Start Cup 2023
The 17 Regions involved in 2023 through 16 regional Start Cups:

Abruzzo, Calabria, Campania, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Liguria, Lombardy, Marche, Molise, Piedmont and Aosta Valley, Apulia, Sardinia, Sicily, Tuscany, Trentino South Tyrol, Veneto.
National Innovation Award - PNI

The National Innovation Award - PNI is the most extensive and widespread Business Plan Competition in Italy. Each year, it rewards the best innovative business projects by selecting them among the winners of the regional Start Cups.

The innovation sectors, established in the PNI Regulation, are related to four award categories “Cleantech & Energy”, “Life Sciences-MED Tech”, “ICT”, “Industrial”.

The initiative engages researchers and university students, connecting them with enterprises, financial organizations and the world of innovation.

**Prizes edition 2022**

- 25,000€ to be awarded to the first-place winner in each of the 4 innovation categories
- 20,000 € to the best project in the field of Climate Change
- Awards and special mentions supported by associate members and partners of the PNICube Association

**Total prize money**

1,500,000€: 500,000€ and 1 million € in services offered by the PNICube network along the entire path from the regional Start Cups to the final PNI challenge
Italian Master Startup Award - IMSA

The Italian Master Startup Award - IMSA, established in 2007, is the only national-based Competition that rewards the market achievements of young enterprises with high knowledge content originating from Universities and Public Research Institutions which are promoters of the regional Start Cups associated with the PNICube network.

The Award is organized on yearly basis by the PNICube Association in collaboration with one of its associate members, which hosts the award ceremony.

**Purposes**

- Giving **visibility to innovative enterprises** that have achieved significant social and economic results during the early years of their lifecycle;

- **Tracking the results obtained** through business plan competitions and incubation activities carried out by the Association’s members and its institutional partners.
The PNICube Board of Directors 2023 - 2025

1. Paola M. A. Paniccia - University of Rome Tor Vergata (President)
2. Giuseppe Scellato - I3P Incubator Politecnico of Turin (Secretariat)
3. Massimiliano Ambra - Rome Biomedical Campus University Foundation
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5. Bernardo Balboni - University of Modena and Reggio Emilia
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9. Francesco Ferrante - University of Cassino and Southern Lazio
10. Monia Gentile – Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies
11. Alessandro Grandi - Almacube srl (Past President)
12. Renato Passaro - University of Naples Parthenope
13. Evaristo Ricci - University of Florence
14. Marcantonio Ruisi - University of Palermo
Partnership e Sponsorship

**Partner**
- InnovUp
  - Italian Innovation & Startup Ecosystem
- Green&Blue
  - Gruppo Gedi
- Asvis
  - Allegato Italiano per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile
- Social Innovation Monitor

**Sponsor**
- A11-Venture
- Cariplo Factory
- eit Health
- Gilead
- Indaco
- Iren
- Intesa Sanpaolo
- iVISION
- Allran
- Persico
- Prysmian Group
- UniCredit Start Lab
- Nobento
Collaborations and Institutional Partnerships

Over time, the PNICube network has developed important synergies with Institutions and Organizations committed to promoting entrepreneurship and innovation, with particular reference to young people, women and "Made in Italy".

In the past year, collaborations and institutional partnerships have been established with:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI)
- Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy (MIMIT)
- Invitalia
- Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS)
- Italian Embassy to the Holy See
- French Embassy in Italy
- Pépite France-Pôles Étudiants pour l’Innovation, le Transfert et l’Entrepreneuriat
- Israel Embassy in Italy
Collaborations and Institutional Partnerships

The most recently institutional collaboration initiatives launched:

- Participation in the Commission’s work for the evaluation of projects submitted to the call promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) for the awarding of the Prize “Innovation that speaks Italian – Italian technological start-ups operating abroad”
- Participation in the works of the “Italia Startup Visa” technical Committee, established at the Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy (MIMIT);
- Protocol with Invitalia aimed at putting in place coordinated actions to support, with incentives, information/promotion activities and targeted services to foster the birth and development of high-innovation enterprises;
- Sponsorship and collaboration with Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) aimed at promoting start-up projects that implement solutions strongly oriented to sustainable development goals;
- Sponsorship and collaboration with and with the Italian Embassy to the Holy See, aimed at promoting the PNICube network’s start-ups that, in different innovation sectors, realize solutions for the quality of life strongly oriented to environmental sustainability and integral ecology.
- Sponsorship and collaboration with the French Embassy in Italy, aimed at promoting the development of the PNICube network’s start-ups through the “International mobility program”; which, in turn, is designed to foster the mobility of Italian students and young researchers aspiring entrepreneurs under the implementation of the Treaty between Italy and France for enhanced bilateral cooperation ("Quirinal Treaty").
- Cooperation with Pépite France-Pôles Étudiants pour l’Innovation, le Transfert et l’Entrepreneuriat aimed at fostering the mobility of students and young researchers aspiring entrepreneurs from the two countries through the above-mentioned "International mobility program".
- Sponsorship and collaboration with the Israel Embassy in Italy aimed at supporting the innovation and internationalization of the PNICube network’s start-ups, also by awarding of special Mentions and Prizes and the implementation of best practices.
PNICube’s Results and Impact

In its 20 years of existence, the PNICube network has generated 1.088 projects of innovative start-ups from Universities and Public Research Institutions (an average of more than 50 per year), distributed by the innovation categories in the competition as follows:
- 380 in the Life Sciences-MedTech sector;
- 221 in the CleanTech & Energy sector;
- 339 in the ICT sector;
- 148 in the Industrial sector.

To date more than 50% are operating in the markets.

The generative capacity of the Network over the past three years:
- With the involvement of about 6,450 researchers aspiring entrepreneurs, more than 2,300 business ideas participated in the regional Start Cups, of which more than 190 made it to the PNI final;
- The Technology Readiness Level (TRL) indicates a technology maturity level averaging 4/5;
- More than 60 young innovative start-ups operating in the markets (from Universities and Public Research Institutions associated with the network) applied for the IMSA Award. Of these, 50% were selected for the Award final.

Following the most advanced approaches on entrepreneurship education (including the recent European frameworks of EntreComp (2016) and GreenComp (2022), which are strongly connected to the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda), the PNICube network represents a concrete opportunity to disseminate and strengthen a culture of enterprise and innovation that combines technical skills and values, with a focus on the values of health, respect for natural ecosystems, combating climate change, responsible technological innovation, personal fulfillment, dignity of labor, and social justice, for a sustainable development from all perspectives.
The past three editions of PNI e IMSA

2020
ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

2021
TOR VERGATA
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI ROMA

2022
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DE L’AQUILA

PNI organizers:

IMSA organizers:
PNI 2020 - Bologna

PNI 2020 was organized by the University of Bologna and Almacube, the University’s and Confindustria Center Area Emilia’s incubator. For the first time since its founding, it was entirely held online on the Ibrida.io platform over two days: Monday, November 30th and Friday, December 4th.

The 2020 edition was attended by:

- 14 Start Cups
- 868 business ideas proposed by 2745 university researchers aspiring entrepreneurs
- 334 Business Plans

To the final Round:

- 65 projects, regional Start Cup winners
- 75% supported by patent («super finalists»)
- Average TRL 4/5
- 341 researchers aspiring entrepreneurs
PNI 2021 - Rome

PNI 2021 was organized by “Tor Vergata” University of Rome and was held, for the first time in Lazio, in Rome on Tuesday, November 30th and Friday, December 3rd.

The 2021 edition was attended by:
- 15 Start Cups
- 727 business ideas proposed by 1815 aspiring entrepreneurs
- 399 Business Plans

To the final Round:
- 63 projects, regional Start Cup winners
- 48% supported by patent
- Average TRL 4/5
- 294 researchers aspiring entrepreneurs
PNI 2022 - Aquila

The twentieth edition of PNI 2022 was organized in L’Aquila by the University of Aquila in collaboration with the Gran Sasso Science Institute and Innovalley on Thursday, December 1st and Friday, December 2nd.

The 2022 edition was attended by

- 15 Start Cups
- 717 business ideas proposed by 1891 aspiring entrepreneurs
- 230 Business Plans

Alla Fase finale:

- 65 projects, regional Start Cup winners
- 48% supported by patent
- Average TRL 4/5
- 294 researchers aspiring entrepreneurs

PNI 2022 News

Special Award Climate Change
The IMSA 2020 Award was organized by the PNICube Association and the University of Verona with the support of Athesis Publishing Group, which was chosen as an innovative partner.

The event, organized as a TV program, was streamed on September 25th on the websites of the daily newspapers L’Arena, Il Giornale di Vicenza and Bresciaoggi, www.premioimsa.it - www.univr.it - www.pnicube.it. Such an event was attended by 10 start-ups.
The IMSA 2021 Award, the fifteenth edition, was organized by PNICube in collaboration with the University of Federico II and with the support of the traveling innovation fair Innovation Village (www.innovationvillage.it) and the European Council for Small Business (www.ecsb.org).

The event was held on September 23rd at the Polo Tecnologico in San Giovanni a Teduccio, Naples, with the participation of 13 startups.
The IMSA 2022 Award Final took place from the main stage of **Italian Tech Week**, the largest Italian event on technology, on **September 30th** at OGR-Officine Grandi Riparazioni in Turin. The event was live streamed on Repubblica, La Stampa, Live Now, and was attended on site by 200 people and **8 finalist startups**.
The IMSA 2023 Award Final took place from the main stage of Italian Tech Week, the largest Italian event on technology, on **September 28**th at OGR-Officine Grandi Riparazioni in Turin.

The event was live streamed on Repubblica, La Stampa, Repubblica, Secolo XIX, Huffington Post, and was attended on site by 400 people and **10 finalist startups**.
For keeping in touch

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Thanks for your attention