

## Endless “Aha”-moments: Exploring innovation culture in Uganda

Students from Aalto and Makerere Universities worked together and explored coworking and innovation culture in Uganda. During the Aalto group’s field trip to Uganda, they teamed up with an innovation and entrepreneurship center at Makerere campus to have one place for multidisciplinary collaboration, creativity, and students taking ownership.

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Aha-MAK is a project journey through coworking and innovation in different cultural contexts. It’s based on the collaboration of three teams from Makerere and Aalto Universities. The collaboration formed around several questions: How do students meet and work together? Where can students show their projects? How does it feel to share ideas freely? By exploring these questions they discovered that there seemed to be a lack of spaces at Makerere campus where people from different backgrounds can interact and share knowledge with each other.

The culture of coworking in Uganda has its own characteristics. During the Aalto team’s field trip to Uganda, they wanted to learn about them. Active listening, observing and participating were their best companions when interpreting and adapting into the new context. The Aalto team explored it by interviewing local students, community leaders and experts, and visiting coworking initiatives. They tested their findings at the innovation and entrepreneurship center (MakEIC) at Makerere campus. The team combined their knowledge, planned and hosted workshops together with students from Makerere, collected feedback and engaged students in the design of the center. This resulted in students taking ownership of the center and many of them starting to develop their existing business ideas further.

***“What would you do if you were a goat and a car was coming to you at a high speed?  
You should first be a goat to know what to do.”***

- Stephen Mukiibi, head of the Department of Architecture and Physical Planning at Makerere University

One of the main learnings for the Aalto team was that community is the most important element in successful coworking initiatives: where there are motivated people, there is creativity and innovation. A large and beautifully designed space is not a necessity. Sometimes chairs, tables and freedom to do whatever the heart desires is the perfect setting for creative coworking. The MakEIC at Makerere has a motivated group of students and professors managing it. The Aalto team believes that through the collaboration of these talented people the center will continue to be self-sustained.

***“The community becomes the oil for your engine”***

- Bruno Ruganzu, founder of Ecoart Uganda

The student team from Aalto is working on this project on the Sustainable Global Technologies Studio -course at Aalto University. This project is part of the Problem Based Learning East Africa initiative that brings together university students from different disciplines to work on societal challenges. The initiative is funded by the HEI ICI programme of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and facilitated by Aalto Global Impact.

Find out more about the project through Instagram [@ahamak](https://www.instagram.com/ahamak) and the website [www.ahamak.com](http://www.ahamak.com), or contact the team directly for questions, interests and collaboration!

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