

KIRON Leonardo Laudation 2016

Dear Vincent Zimmer,
Dear Marcus Kressler

You are both most welcome here and we are very proud of having you here with us today.

You are the founders of KIRON....

KIRON provides refugees worldwide with **the opportunity** to graduate with an accredited university degree, free of charge.

This innovative education model is designed to overcome the obstacles refugees face in accessing education –

- Money,
- Formal certificates,
- Language,
- College capacity etc..

The KIRON principle is simple...

- Partnerships with the best online course providers and universities
- Newest educational technologies
- A Scalable educational model in an international context

All a student needs in the beginning is a smartphone.

KIRON has identified and selected excellent, freely accessible English MOOCs (Massive open Online Courses) that is online Lectures f.ex. from excellent course providers such as Harvard, MIT, RWTH Aachen etc. and clustered these in 4 study tracks:

- (1) Business & Economics
- (2) Computer Science
- (3) Engineering and
- (3) Social Sciences

If students successfully run through these programs in 2 years they can switch to fully accredited and renowned Partner universities where they can complete their BA or MA degree.

This way KIRON has built a bridge from online further learning regardless of location to the real learning world of universities and their teaching excellence.

From the view point of the NCP we would say this is rapid prototyping in intellectual capital formation. Maybe also a chance for demographically battered countries to fill up their reservoir of professionals in IT, engineering and knowledge intensive services. But it is especially a humanitarian task.

The German weekly newspaper “Die Zeit” wrote: (Übersetzung PP)

“What would happen if this really works?”

If KIRON manages to educate refugees and place them with top employers?

If a location-independent education and training institution, succeeds which does not look at the past, but rather assesses the present.

What would happen...

...**if** education is enabled for all, whether rich or poor, whether with children or without, whether in the city or in the countryside – If all this doesn’t matter as long as the applicants are intelligent.”

What would happen in our educational system - would this imply a new and better concept of education and especially of university?

So we can see, that you are currently drilling holes in thick wood (as we say in a German metaphore) meaning to address the fact that the goals and challenges facing your endeavour are not simple but quite sophisticated.

But this is a future perspective and the functional side of the coin!

To us – speaking of the Leonardo Jury - **the outstanding social innovation and the humanitarian side of the coin is of special importance.**

Having made an Interview with Vincent Zimmer (Founder) and Hila Azadzoy Head of Academics in February this year and visting your headquarters a couple of times, ...

...to me the most stunning fact with KIRON is that this pioneering social Innovation network is crossing borders and **building bridges** between **political** and **human needs** and between **traditional regulatory systems** in a speed that is truly remarkable.

Some facts:

KIRON was founded in 2015,
In October 2016, the first 300 students participate in the pilot batch with their studies, over 4000 have applied.

This remarkable performance is facilitated through a team of around 60 people from different fields, including educational experts, entrepreneurs, IT specialists, and psychologists.

The KIRON team benefits from the support of around 300 volunteers and works in consultation with a pool of over 70 professors/entrepreneurs from all over the world.

You have created ...

- **Study Hubs**
- **Buddy Program:** with volunteer students from local universities
- **Mentoring Program:** mentors help students prepare for their future career, serve as role models, and give insights into organizations..
- **Organized psychosocial support**

In all of these activities you have developed remarkable creativity –its buzzing in your Berlin Headquarters “Palais am Festungsgraben”

We are especially fascinated by your contribution to make a difference for the **life of people:** (who by the turbulences in our current world are excluded from learning)

Humans in despair were at any time at the heart of your deepest concern.

Stimulated by your personal encounters with young people having disastrous experiences as refugees you defined your purpose and took action in 2015.

In founding KIRON University you aim at developing a solution for people who are desperate to study but the circumstances of their life allow no fulfillment of this wish.

- You **re-launched blended learning** by transforming it from classical learning methods to an orchestrated way to combine online (MOOCs) and offline learning in a quasi-institutionalized setting.
- You were aware that you **needed established institutions to accept results** from two year's online studies to give students from KIRON a fair chance in their formalized third year in a University partnering with you.
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- You **merged crowd funding** with help of nextstartup with generous support by foundations and public institutions. This mirrors your unconventional way and boldness to combine knowledge sharing and join forces for a truly humanistic vision.
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- You **recruited voluntary supporters** but at the same time **established a professional team** to master this complex system of legal restrictions, academic accreditation, hardware and software solutions,
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- You designing accepted courses with relevant components and handle the different interests of all involved.

It is in acknowledgement of this extraordinary example of setting a new agenda for learning in times that endanger so many people not only in their physical self but also in their intellectual development..

...that the International Advisory Board of the Leonardo European Corporate Learning Award proposes the laureateship "Young Leonardo 2016" to you for: (Let me cite from the Jury Protokoll) - for

1. Creating learning and education opportunities free for everybody no matter of race, nationality, gender, age
2. Contributing to tearing down walls among different educational systems among problem areas between Islamic and Western Culture World

3. Intensifying awareness of educational necessities for all humans even in traditional educational systems
4. Linking private sector sponsoring with public sector funding
5. Embedding educational research and labor market integration concerns in the process

This way your social initiative and the institutionalized organization KIRON truly embodies the core of educational enlightenment, helping us to see in dark areas of our modern world

....or to put it in **simple words of one of your students:**

Kashif Kazmi:

“There is no difference between a blind man and uneducated man. Both cannot see! “

Thank you for visioning a new humanitarian potential of learning and education

Marcus Kressler and Vincent Zimmer we congratulate you to this remarkable achievement and wholeheartedly wish you much further success with KIRON