

Nobel's legacy drives Stockholm's success

Written by Staff reporter

Wednesday, 16 December 2015 03:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 16 December 2015 03:13

The legacy of Alfred Nobel is more than just dynamite and the prizes awarded in his name. It's also about innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. These are values still visible in Stockholm, Nobel's birthplace, with a multitude of cutting edge tech startups, like Spotify, Mojang and Skype.

Indeed, the Financial Times recently called the Swedish capital a "unicorn factory", for having more billion-dollar tech companies than any other in Europe, beating far bigger cities, such as London and Berlin.

Naturally, these achievements should not be taken for granted. So how can the Stockholm region continue to be a beacon of innovative entrepreneurship? And how should the legacy of Alfred Nobel and other pioneering inventors be passed on to the next generation?

The answer is partly to be found at Help a Scientist (Forskarhjälpen), a project for young students within the Nobel Museum. What makes the project unique is that the youngsters actually help out with real research.

Anna Johanna Lindqvist Forsberg, education officer at the Nobel Museum, explained that the project aims to continue to inspire people – especially the young – to develop their own creativity by telling the story of Alfred Nobel, the Nobel Prize and the Nobel Laureates through different activities at the museum.

"By allowing school students to contribute to real research in collaboration with scientists, and thus to let them influence the contemporary and make a difference with their work, we can continue the legacy of Alfred Nobel," Forsberg said.

The project has been run four times, each time with a different theme. The current one is called the App Hunt. Together with researchers at Mobile Life, a department within Stockholm University that explores novel technology, the youngsters explore how people use and interact with new tech and develop mobile applications.

Help a Scientist is financed by the Swedish Foundation for Strategic Research, an organization that aims to support research in natural science, engineering and medicine in order to strengthen Sweden's competitiveness. The project also collaborated with universities and companies.

Teachers and pupils who have participated in the projects say that helping with real research made a big difference. In evaluations they say they learned more about science in general and that they enjoyed participating in the project, Forsberg said.

"In Help a Scientist, most of the help from the school students have been in the form of collecting samples, but the scientists stressed that the students also helped with new, creative ideas and perspectives which have been very

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useful," she said.

Another project attracting interest is CodaRica, which teaches children to code.

"We teach children to program because we think believe it's important to understand the technology that surrounds us," said co-founder Sanna Nilsson. "In the past it was important to learn to read and write because society was built on words. Today's society is structured on code, and therefore it is equally important to learn programming at an early age."

Among the firm's products is CodeQuest, an app that allows children to build their own website with HTML and CSS code.

Nilsson and her partners have also created what they claim is the world's first digital children's book about coding, called "My First Website: Cody Coder's Guide To HTML", which received international acclaim.

"We believe that ideas are born when we have a greater understanding about how the world works – when you can find solutions to the problems," she said. "If we can empower the Swedish people with the skill to program, we believe that Sweden can continue to innovate more and continue to create technical solutions that the world loves."

Such comments bode well for the future of both Nobel's birthplace and the rest of the world.

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