

URBACT CREATIVE CLUSTERS

Final Conference, Óbidos [Portugal] June 9th, 2011



CREATIVE FOOTPRINT: The next big step will be a lot of small steps

Under this challenging title and with clear emphasis on dissemination, the final conference of the URBACT project on CREATIVE CLUSTERS took place in the historical village of Óbidos, lead partner of the network. The meeting structure was conceived as a video game, with different levels corresponding to the main pieces of what we call the local creative ecosystem, namely: creative-based ideas and businesses; new urban facilities for the creative talent, always setting people at the core; or ways of governance creative-based local strategies. That is a range of cutting-edge issues in urban policies. Of course a session was especially devoted to highlight a sample of Local Action Plans from CREATIVE CLUSTERS' city partners. More than 120 participants were registered for this one-day conference.



Kick-starter

The opening session of the event was chaired by the Mayor of Óbidos, **Telmo Faria**. His speech was characterised by a strong sense of leadership and ambition where creativity was considered a driver of economic, social and political regeneration. The Mayor demonstrated how the small town of Óbidos, in the framework of the URBACT Creative Clusters network, was able to combat some common assumptions: the attraction of the creative class is not only viable in megacities and core cities but also in small and medium-sized towns; the concept of 'creative industries' is much broader than the concept of 'cultural sector'; the focus on the human factor, and not only in the technological dimension is essential in a creative development strategy; creativity is

an horizontal concept and must be disseminated through companies, public bodies, schools and the community. Moreover, the Mayor advocated the need to monitoring and evaluating the implementation of creative-based strategies through the use of specific methodologies: the "**creative footprint**". The same day of the conference Telmo Faria spread these ideas in an article in one of the major newspapers in Portugal, *Público*.

Roberta Comunian, University of Kent, was invited to make a key note presentation on "Lessons from Small and Medium-sized Cities in the Creative Economy: Networks and Sustainability". The scholar advocated that a more grounded and sustainable understanding of the creative industries is needed, with a view to **surpass several myths**, such as:

to have a creative city and grow creative industries, you need flagships cultural development and icons; creative industries are a strong business sector, that will lead alone to local economic growth for our cities; and we can plan and engineer the creative city with policy initiatives, events and consultancy specialists.

Moreover, she defended that creativity can be a driver for the development of small and medium-sized cities, with the presentation of the case study of North-East of England. In small territorial areas, the sense of belonging, the quality of life, the contact with nature, the social dimension of networks, the role of policy makers and regional infrastructures are very important in the context of local creativity.

Level 1 - The idea

Upgrading simplicity: from ideas to solutions

The main message of this panel was that simple ideas can originate big projects. Filip Meuris and Jan Despiegelaere were introducing the **My Machine project**, in Flanders [Belgium]. The initiative aims to promote creativity and **cross-pollination throughout all levels of education** (primary, higher and secondary levels), and is intended to create prototypes of objects based on the imagination of young children, www.mymachine.be, linking in this way pure creativity with applied design and manufacturing. The partners were aware of this project in the study visit to Kortrijk (BE) organised in 2010 under the URBACT Creative Clusters network. Launched in 2008 the programme now involves 32 primary schools, 16 secondary technical schools and four HOWEST (the design school of the University of Ghent in Kortrijk) degree courses, bringing together more than 1,200 children, high school students and University students. "My Machine" has been awarded by UN has one of the best education and creativity projects in the World.

José Carlos Mota, from the University of Aveiro (PT) made the presentation "Making More with Less: the Ideas Bank",

emphasizing a specific project of civic participation in the framework of urban development, focused on what he called "**tactical urbanism**".

<http://ruadasideias.blogs.sapo.pt>



Level 2 - Doing

Human solutions: you are the answer

This session was centered on the presentation of on-going projects in the area of culture and creativity. The first speaker, Federico Riboldazzi presented the company **TIWI**, located in Reggio Emilia. TIWI produces digital contents and is

specialized in creating motion graphics videos, “making things simple”, <http://www.tiwi.it>. Then, the **Creative Industries Incubator ABC** in Óbidos was described by his director, Filipe Montargil. The incubator aims to attract companies of the creative sector by offering favourable conditions in what concerns innovation and competitiveness.

http://www.pt-obidos.com/?page_id=880

At the moment, the space integrates 11 companies connected with design, tourism, geographic information systems, editing and publishing, as well as jewellery. Some of them were actively engaged in the conditioning works of a former warehouse in Óbidos as venue of the URBACT conference. The ABC incubator complements the offer of the Technology Park of Óbidos with the possibility of housing creative industries in a very short period of time.

Finally, Patricia Valinho spoke about a project oriented to the promotion of the Portuguese culture – “**Uma Casa Portuguesa**”. At the moment the initiative is centred on a house located in a small town in Portugal that intends to be a “living lab” of local products, <http://www.umacasaportuguesa.pt>.

Level 3 - Atmosphere A creative cloud: for a community storm

This panel was focused on the favourable conditions for the establishment of local creative ecosystems. Three speakers made their contributions. **Paola Amato**, senior official, presented the creative-based strategy of the **city of Terni** [Italy], based on an urban regeneration project anchored on culture and creativity. Then **Cristina Coelho**, from the **Guimarães European Capital of Culture 2012** Foundation [Portugal] described the creative economy agenda of the programme of the European Capital of Culture, emphasising projects such as the Digital Lab, the Urban Creativity Lab, ephemeral artistic creations, etc.

<http://www.guimaraes2012.pt/index.php?lang=2>

Codruta Cruceanu, consultant from Romania and former involved in the British Council programme on creative cities, spoke about a recurrent issue in URBACT Creative Clusters, namely “Setting People at the Core in Creative-based Urban Strategies”.

Telmo Faria, Mayor of Óbidos



URBACT CREATIVE CLUSTERS a shared learning itinerary for three years

Under the umbrella of the URBACT II programme, eight small and medium-sized cities in Europe [Óbidos, Barnsley, Reggio Emilia, Hódmezővásárhely, Mizil, Enguera, Jyväskylä and Viareggio] plus the Portuguese think tank INTELI got together to form the Creative Clusters network, as one of the programme's forums/laboratories intended to promote innovative local policies. Between 2008 and 2011, they have jointly explored the options to put into practice one shared vision: the creative driver in local development is also functional outside the context of main urban hubs and core cities, and it is to allow to impulse a leapfrogging in terms of social and economic development for small and midsize towns, as well as an opportunity to re-think rural development. As a start, such an assumption laid on the possibility to transfer a range of so far considered urban attributes – such as accessibility, cultural life, tech. facilities, competitive clusters, global networking – to middle-sized towns. In a larger perspective, the challenge was to envision creative industries and creative-based business models in building the post-crisis economic landscape, avoiding the fashion-effect when addressing that question.

This learning-by-interacting process has resulted in a baseline study, two major conferences, four thematic workshops, two key study visits and the production of a Local Action Plan in each of the participating cities. Moreover, a particular effort has been made on dissemination beyond the partnership through newsletters, position papers and articles. All these activities have been thematically structured in five working areas:

- Creative industries within a new cluster reading of the local economy.
- Attracting and retaining creative professionals and entrepreneurs.
- The space of the creative class.
- Events and cultural agendas as catalysts.
- Incubating future talent: creative educational environments at local level.

Level 4 - Space Creative spaces: living hard, working creatively

The theme of this session was centred on the nature of creative spaces, where creative people can live and work. **Jarkko Könönen**, researcher at the University of Jyväskylä (FIN) presented his vision on the features of creative spaces capable of attracting talent to small cities. He advocated that creativity supporting spaces are not only physical, but also mental and virtual.

Then, **Rui Horta**, a well-known Portuguese choreographer presented the trans-disciplinary arts organisation - **Espaço do Tempo**, which supports various national and foreign contemporary performing artists, located in an old convent, Convento da Saudação, in the small town of

Montemor-o-Novo,
<http://www.oespacodotempo.pt/en>.

This initiative is very active in the international scene, but has also an active role in working and interacting with the local community by collaborating with schools and local associations.



Level 5 - Zoom Action Plans to Cities of Action

6

The final conference was a perfect occasion to present a sample of the **Local Action Plans** developed during the project by some of the network cities. Far from simply reproduce global receipts on the "creative city", these strategies are embedded on their local background and potential related to culture-creativity-business, and they have been fed by the work of specific Local Support Groups.

Catarina Selada, head of policy and research at INTELI, chaired this session. She introduced Miguel Silvestre, deputy Mayor of Óbidos [Óbidos – creative economy], Ann Gosse, director of development at Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council [Barnsley – remaking the Northern England mid-sized town], Pirkko Korhonen and Tony Melville, Jyväskylä City Council [Jyväskylä – cooperation and cross-pollination, marrying culture and wellness] and Mauro Bonaretti, general manager of the municipality of Reggio Emilia [Reggio Emilia – città dele persone].

Such as Local Plans have also benefited from the networking activities carried out between 2008 and 2011 and the **interchange of core competences between the participating cities**. For instance, the ability of Óbidos to turn small size into an asset for a comprehensive local policy facing the challenge of the creative economy. Innovative education policies as an engine factor for local creative ecosystems, as it happens in Reggio Emilia, Óbidos, Jyväskylä or Barnsley. Smart place branding or re-branding, enriching local backgrounds with the contemporary, where Óbidos, Jyväskylä and Barnsley make up impressive cases. Or the not always easy coordination with other supra-local communication strategies, like one can see in Viareggio-Versilia, Jyväskylä-Central Finland, Enguera-Caroiç or the relationship between Óbidos and the West region in Portugal.

Other key messages along this period have to do with the importance of packaging specific support measures for attracting and retaining creative professionals and

entrepreneurs, and the relevance of encouraging networking and relations at local level, where Barnsley has been an inspiration. The ability to frame the creative industries within a new cluster reading of the local economy – Jyväskylä. Or the delivery of a new generation of urban facilities that meet the needs of the so-called creative class, a challenge where city size does not matter again.



Level 6 - Commitment Governing the local creative ecosystem

Engagement of elected people and key policy decision makers has been a distinctive feature in URBACT Creative Clusters from the beginning. In this line a **round table** was organized under the moderation of Dan Sequerra from CIQA Sheffield - Creative Industries Quarter Agency, with the participation of Telmo Faria, Mayor of Óbidos; Emile Proscan, Mayor of Mizil (Romania); Arto Lepistö, Jyväskylä Deputy Mayor, and the Mayor of São João da Madeira (Portugal). Leadership, stakeholder management, new formats for citizen participation and open innovation in local policies were some of the issues discussed.

Following with politics, Fernando Freire de Sousa, of the Expert Working Group on Cultural and Creative Industries of the EC, spoke about the recent initiatives of the EU in the area of creativity such as the **Green Paper** on Unlocking the Potential of Cultural and Creative Industries and the European Creative Industries Alliance.

URBACT Creative Clusters: key messages

7

Finally, **Miguel Rivas**, the URBACT lead expert working for the network during these years, highlighted a range of key messages that have emerged from this collective work. According to Rivas few urban issues deal so deeply with both space -physical dimension- and economy as creative industries. And that is why a number of innovative cities are creating a sort of meta-projects or local creative ecosystems. If we try to understand such a process of promoting creative friendly environments, six working areas can be recognized.

1. Creative industries within a new cluster reading of the local economy. A new cluster reading of the local economy is a starting point where to frame the development of new emergent realities, knowledge and creative-based, like the new media clusters in Reggio Emilia and Barnsley or the wellness cluster in Jyväskylä. But also creative-based issues such as design are a functional driver to contribute for giving mature industries a new potential for growth. So we are not talking about just **creative industries** but also **creative jobs** and **creative-based business models**.

2. Attracting and retaining creative professionals and entrepreneurs. A strategy on creative industries requires designing **specific support packages**, combining financial, logistics and advisory support measures specifically adapted to the creative entrepreneur. The capitalization of experiences from partner cities underlined the added value of tax reductions [“Tax free Óbidos”], real estate facilities, soft financial tools covering intangible assets, venture capital systems or linkages to business angel networks.

The concept of **alliances** -a recent innovation of the European industrial policy-DG Enterprise and Industry- is proving particularly useful in dealing with emerging and strong clusterized productive realities like mobility or creative industries. It means a more open and horizontal way of doing things in order to establish closer links between innovation, financing and cooperation

Finally, **making connections** and **networking** is a key function strongly demanded from local creatives to the local governments and agencies. Barnsley, in the UK, goes further trying to create among creative professionals and entrepreneurs a sense of ownership towards the range of events and venues promoted locally by the Council.

Jarkko Könönen, University of Jyväskylä



3. The space of the creative class as new urban working environments. For the URBACT lead expert there is no true creative-based strategy in local development without a specific spatial strategy. At this point **different scales should be considered** from urban planning to architectural design. At spatial planning level, creative issues can be a driver for city centres revitalization [re-making Barnsley, Città Giardino cultural quarter in Terni, Buda district in Kortrijk], development of new central places [Lutakko area in Jyväskylä] or better articulation city-countryside [Óbidos beyond the historical village or the Reggio Emilia master plan "Reggio Territorio Esteso"]. When addressing such as strategies some drivers have to be considered, namely: i) the continuum private and work life/space in creative professionals; ii) or a balanced mix of retail/leisure/work/housing land uses. Also, in the perspective of concrete delivery of spatial-based strategies and place marketing initiatives, several cases from partner cities underlined that coordination with the supra-local scale of administration is a crucial and complex aspect.

Understanding the nature of a wide range of new functional creative hotspots will inform to us on some key trends about the new working environment. In this sense, hybridation, flexibility, interaction, experimentation, international scope... are defining the space of the creative class no matter the kind of location. The continuum place of production and place of consumption is incubating the notion of "extended workplace". Linking heritage to the contemporary is another highly demanded value for those seeking some differentiation, thus giving full meaning to Jane Jacobs' opinion that "old ideas can sometimes use new buildings but new ideas must use old buildings". Otherwise, the creative industries are one of the driving forces in getting the industrial space [or the productive space] back to the city, from a traditional suburban pattern, as the experience of Silicon Roundabout in London or the Digital Hub in Dublin are showing.

URBACT Creative Clusters has also stressed the importance to **avoid elitism** and to make different visions and interests over the creative-based facility. Moreover, there is a common recognition on the relevance

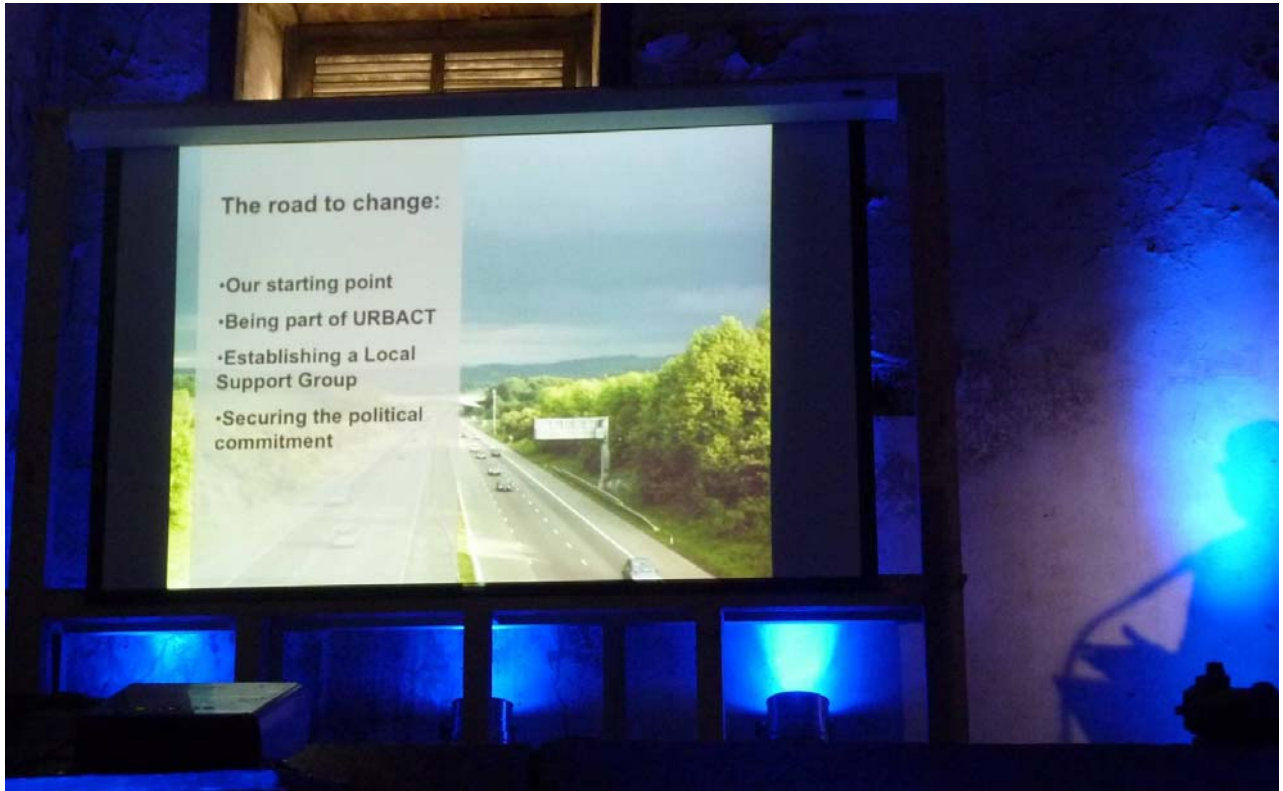
of running new formats in promoting and managing the creative-based facility, involving the private sector, like in the case of Buda Centre in Kortrijk or CAOS in Terni.

Finally, we should care on the risk coming from an urban imaginary promoted along creative-based programmes and inspired by a too much globalized iconography with the effect of a certain homogenization of the urban landscape. Here we should have in mind the Jane Jacobs' words.



4. Cultivating the crossroad between cultural policy and economic development policy. The cultural agenda does not just provide amenities for the creative class but is called to take a catalyst role or at least to act as framework condition when promoting the local creative ecosystem. Here a number of relevant questions must emerge: what kind of cultural policy for cultural entrepreneurs?, how to promote a risk-friendly creative economy at local level?, in which direction the cultural event should be re-visited - new aims, new formats, scaling up strategies? Are public cultural marketplaces being managed in the right way? are we properly using them as demand-oriented policies to boost the creative economy?

Some, like the Mayor of Óbidos for the Portuguese case, openly claim to take the promotion of the creative industries out of the Culture Ministries. The debate is served.



Presentation of Barnsley Local Action Plan

5. Innovative education policies as engine factor for local creative ecosystems. The experience of partner cities – Reggio Emilia, Óbidos, Jyväskylä, Barnsley and Hódmezővásárhely - shows that cities with a solid strategy in creative economy are also developing innovative education systems.

Particularly the Reggio Emilia approach, which is a world-class benchmark in childhood education, is the result of combining teaching methods, architecture [school design], direct participation of families and children, related firms and dedicated public agencies [Reggio Children], leading to the concept of “the educational city”, a local ecosystem focused on education. In fact they are performing for years with the concept of open innovation.

6. Governing the local creative ecosystem. It is no wonder that a successful creative-based strategy requires leadership and a powerful shared vision. However, the forms to deliver leadership have to evolve, towards a strong commitment for active stakeholder management and participation resulting in the co-design of local public policies, and the spreading of micro-policies and project-based agreements. Such a horizontal or

relational way to perform policy-making can be clearly observed in Kortrijk [Belgium] selected for one of the URBACT Creative Clusters’ study trips.

The art of combining different visions and expectations requires the acceptance of some risk derived from the permeability of organizations or the upsetting of hierarchies. In such a **re-definition of the power balance in public policies** usually makes elected officials afraid to loose grip on the capacity of decision.

Finally some comments on communication. Basically, **branding the creative place** should act as a link in the chain of a creative-based local strategy, not the starting point or just a matter of labelling. Cities identities can be re-built around creative-base narratives linking local backgrounds with the contemporary. Within the partnership, Óbidos, Jyväskylä and Barnsley are perfect illustrations of innovative branding rooted in local backgrounds. Leaving rhetoric apart these cities have addressed an internal debate on what should mean creativity and the creative driver for them. As a pathway just to mention that a trend in the practice of city branding is to mix into the same communication strategy two dimensions, a

unique urban experience along with a functional business place, but always upon local background and potential.

The conference was organized in a special place, an old building that will be rehabilitated with the aim of hosting creative industries and artists. An original atmosphere was created in an interaction between the degraded space and new technologies and creative solutions. Around 20 speakers and 120 participants attended the event, public authorities and universities, schools, creative companies, cultural organisations and creative experts.



A report by Miguel Rivas, URBACT lead expert for Creative Clusters, and Catarina Selada, head of policy and research at INTELI Intelligence in Innovation

URBACT II

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development.

It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal challenges. It helps them to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 181 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants

www.urbact.eu/project

