

**Minutes of the
FIN-URB-ACT Kick-Off Meeting
– January 21st. – 23rd.**

January 21st.

The City of Aachen welcomed the participants of the meeting – besides the 11 partners and their managing Authorities, numerous representatives of the Aachen local support group attended the afternoon. Altogether, over 70 persons were present on January 21st. in the Savings Bank Aachen to celebrate the Kick-Off of FIN-URB-ACT, which deals with the highly topical theme “integrated urban actions for fostering and financing innovative economies and SMEs”.

After the welcome of Lord Mayor Dr. Linden and Dr. Bräutigam as host of the meeting, Mr. Drubigny expressed in his function as Director of the URBACT II Secretariat the importance of the European cooperation between local structures and wished the partners a fruitful collaboration for the next 2,5 years. To conclude, Mrs. Helff from the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs explained the federal support of the URBACT- Programme.

After Mr. Fiedler as project leader and Mr. Fourquette as lead expert have given a short insight of the project contents, Mrs. Coskun from the regional development agency of the Aachen region could give a general overview about methods and instruments of consultancy and financement of SMEs including practical examples of the Aachen region. In this vein, Mr. Bayer from the Aachen Chamber of Commerce and Industry gave an overview of the structures and services of the GründerRegion Aachen for start ups and medium-sized enterprises.

In the second half of the afternoon, a panel discussion took place with Jean-Marie Beaupuy from the European Parliament, Dr. Alexander Ferstl from the European Commission, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Industry of North-Rhine Westphalia Dr. Jens Baganz, Gordon McLaren from the East Scotland European Partnership, Guiseppe Panebianco from the City of Rome, Manfred Bausch from the Regio Aachen e.V. and Fiona Joyce from the European Saving Banks Group. Together with Dr. Lothar Blatt from the Deutschen Sparkassen- und Giroverband as moderator, they intensely discussed about different possibilities of local partnerships for financing and supporting innovative SMEs.

The participants concluded the day with a common dinner.

January 22nd.

Partnership with managing authorities

The partners began the second day with an introduction in the issue „Partnership with Managing Authorities“ and first discussions. They assessed the diversity of stakeholders and positions as well as the procedures and approaches to provide support. These three hours of discussion showed different experiences regarding communication channels and level of cooperation. Some cities had excellent relations with their Managing Authorities while others were facing common problems and obstacles concerning information flow. Some reasons could explain the constraint like the traditional administrative culture that is not prone to cooperation, the existence of different work habits and competences and sometimes complex structures etc..

The principle of direct involvement of the Managing Authorities in the network meeting turned out to be very effective. The Managing Authorities of the partner cities took a highly active part in the discussions.

Parallel working group sessions

After lunch, the partners split into two working groups:

1. Working Group “Support to small/social projects and businesses”

Gijon, Gliwice, Galati, Edinburgh, Leipzig, Rome, Aveiro, Reims, Maribor

As small scaled SMEs and social projects are seldom main focus of the existing support structures, cities need to play a frontline position to constitute or improve support structures for those businesses. Often however, cities could act more efficiently if they had more detailed information on the real needs of their SMEs. Therefore, this work group has started first discussions on a survey on the businesses' needs to be able to assess in how far further leveraged financial instruments are necessary and how they could be designed to work target oriented.

2. Working Group “Support to innovative/high-tech projects and businesses”

Aachen, Gijon, Edinburgh, Leipzig, Linz, Aveiro

The discussions highlighted important elements for support structures for innovative projects. By pointing out differences and giving reasons for the structures the work group wanted to highlight different scenarios how to structure actors according to the specific local circumstances. For doing so, the work group based its discussions on examples in the respective host city Aachen. Mr. Thomas Wendland from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Aachen provided an insight into the network structure of the “GründerRegion Aachen – Start-Up-Region Aachen” and the different competences of

support structure, such as the 13 technology centres of the region or the co operations with the universities.

After a short revision of the two work groups and outlook, new and future actions of the work package “communication strategy” were explained. A corporate design was introduced to the partners and the common newsletter was discussed. Afterwards, fundamental questions regarding Presage and reporting procedure could be clarified.

January 23rd.

On the last meeting’s day the partners visited the “Technology Centre Aachen” as an important component of the Aachen support structure for start-ups. As part of Aachen’s local support group, the economic development agency of the Aachen Region (AGIT mbH) presented Aachen’s history – from a coal-mining region to a high-tech region – and the relevance of common support and finance structures for a modern region of knowledge. Afterwards, young founders of a company called “Red Team Pentesting”, which is situated in the Technology Centre Aachen, introduced themselves to the partners and talked about their experiences of developing an idea with the support of the university and the different steps to be made in the first years.

The kick-off meeting officially closed.

All presentations given during the Kick-Off Meeting are available on www.urbact.eu/fin_urb_act.