URBACT supporting the re-use of good practice across EU cities: 6 successful transfer stories

In early 2014 URBACT launched a suite of **pilot transfer networks** to explore a new way to support peer-to-peer learning amongst cities. The aim was to test the feasibility of a new type of URBACT network, built around the potential transfer of an established example of effective city practice or policy. The URBACT programme's core interests of exchange and capacity building were at the heart of these pilots.

Each transfer network focused on an established good practice. The model consisted of the 'giving' city, where the good practice had been developed, and a number of potential 'receiving' cities that were interested in transferring it to their own context.

A short summary of each project is provided in the following sections.

Lead Partner: Udine (IT)

Partners: Brighton and Hove (UK), Edinburgh (UK), Klaipėda (LT), Poitiers (FR)

Duration: December 2013-March 2015

Total Eligible Cost: EUR 400 000

ERDF Contribution: EUR 285 762

Website: www.urbact.eu/healtly-ageing

Promoting healthy ageing from Udine to Edinburgh: the Healthy Ageing network

In **Udine (IT)**, a city of 100 000 people in Northern Italy, almost a quarter of its citizens is aged over 65. The local authority, working in partnership with other stakeholders (including older people's groups) has adopted a strategic approach to this demographic shift. Key steps have involved the production of a Healthy Ageing Profile, using Geographic Information System technology (GIS) to map the location of the city's older population – and to influence planning decisions related to services such as bus routes and local health care services. Udine also adopted the Vancouver Protocol (World Health Organisation guidelines for active ageing planning) to gauge older people's views and inform investment decisions.

The most compelling aspect of the project was its strategic, holistic approach led by the municipality but also involving key actors across the city, including older people themselves. Although some of the 'receiving' cities had taken steps to address this demographic shift, none had done so as comprehensively as Udine.

Partner cities saw participation in the network as an opportunity to learn from others and to share their own good practices. They also identified with Udine's technical mapping mode, an opportunity to improve their own service design, informed by accurate population mapping.

The activities undertaken within the project included online mapping work of the city's older population, engagement of older people and service providers through the Local Support Group and the chance to share their own good practice by hosting a partner workshop.

In terms of overall results, although partner cities did not adopt the Udine model in its entirety, all of them have transferred key elements of it. The most popular was the GIS mapping model, the development of which was supported by the University of Udine. Some partners also adopted other actions. These included the Camminamenti walking groups and the intergenerational project with local students (a series of activities which brought students and older people together, including verbal history and horticulture groups).

As the 'giving' city, Udine also acquired new ways of improving its service offers to older people. For example, they learned how a more varied programme of activities from **Brighton (UK)** (like Tai Chi, line dancing, 'Knit and Natter'), can be used to engage with occasional service users.

Edinburgh (UK), Scotland's capital city, came into the Healthy Ageing network with a strong older people's partnership already in place. This included well-established forums for engaging older people and an emphasis on preventative services, underpinned by a strong strategic planning focus.

As a result of the project, Edinburgh has adopted the Udine mapping model. An intern recruited to pilot this work has now been employed within the local authority and the resulting mapping work will feed strongly into localised planning required through the legislation on the integration of health and social care in Scotland. This mapping activity is also being extended to cover all age groups.

Reducing the carbon footprint of public canteens: from Sodertalje to Mollet Del Valles through the Diet for a Green Planet network

The food chain accounts for some 31% of the EU's carbon emissions. The Diet for a Green Planet Network addressed this through public procurement, planning and influencing functions. Specifically, the network addressed the related issues of unsustainable farming practices, declining levels of local food sourcing and unhealthy eating amongst vulnerable groups – children and older people.

The giving partner, **Sodertalje (SE)**, mobilised the buying power of the municipality to instigate positive changes in the local food system. A catalyst for this was the national policy permitting one free meal per day to all school children. This legislation promoted the reintroduction of kitchens in schools, which also converted cooks into people who prepared food instead of opening pre-packed lunches. The municipality sought to drive up the use of locally sourced organic food in schools – without any budget increase. Between 2010 and 2014 organic food increased from 18% to 51% of produce used. The municipality also sought to reduce levels of meat consumption, as part of a wider healthy eating campaign. Over the same period, meat consumption in schools fell by 24%.

The Sodertalje approach involves building the capacity of school cooks, for example, through improving their meal planning and culinary skills. It has also involved parents (many from migrant backgrounds) in the planning and making of school meals, which assists integration in a highly diverse city.

Diet for a Green Planet utilised a varied mix of methods including a range of exchanges and work-shadowing (for example involving school cooks) to deepen the transfer of experience amongst key stakeholders.

In two of the 'receiving' cities, **Molétai (LT)** and **Łomża (PL)**, the project has been instrumental in shaping mindsets towards what can be achieved by using procurement to influence the local food system. A third receiving city, **Mollet Del Vallès (ES)** managed to take the Sodertalje concept further.

Located in Catalonia, Mollet Del Vallès has a population of 52 000 and a total area of 10 834 km^2. A large rural area (800 hectares) accounts for almost 50% of this footprint. Although the local community had fought hard to protect this area from development, historically there had been no link between its ecological food producers and public catering establishments. Inspired by the innovative Sodertalje model, Mollet Del Vallès city leaders saw an opportunity to strengthen these links through the Diet for a Green Planet project. The aspiration was to support ecological producers, promote 0 km food supply and encourage healthier eating in public canteens, particularly within schools and care homes.

Some important contextual differences influenced the way in which Mollet Del Vallès approached the transfer opportunity. For example, in Catalonia the school canteens are run by parents' groups, rather than by the schools themselves. This meant that these groups had to be persuaded by the benefits of adopting the Swedish model.

Mollet Del Vallès activities as part of the project have included mobilising a cross-sectoral Local Support Group, exchange of experience between various stakeholders (including public sector cooks) and the production of a local handbook. The latter is a mixture of recipes using local produce.

In terms of results, the city has adopted a new catering policy in accordance with the Diet for a Green Planet concept. The central element of this is a new procurement model allowing the public administration to buy local, seasonal and ecological products. The big procurement change includes giving 90 out of 100 points for food quality, rather than the cheapest offer, as it was before.

Three schools have been engaged and have already decided to convert their conventional school canteens into ecological ones from September 2015. This meant close working links with Gallecs producers, located on their doorstep. Furthermore, Mollet de Valles will transform the two kitchens of the public institute for disabled people from Autumn 2015.

Tools for the temporary use of vacant buildings: from Bremen to Rome through the TUTUR network

The TUTUR pilot network focused on finding new temporary uses for the growing number of vacant sites and buildings in Europe's cities. Specifically, the network supported the transfer of tools for temporary use for these gap sites, bringing together a variety of city stakeholders (planners, architects, arts groups, local businesses, residents, etc.) to seek solutions together.

The project looked to the city of **Bremen (DE)** for its example of good practice. There, a dedicated independent agency, ZwischenZeitZentrale (ZZZ), was one of the first temporary use programmes established by the municipality in cooperation with an NGO. The ZZZ has worked with at least 50 vacant properties of different scales and nature: from small shops of 30 m^2 up to industrial areas of 4 500 m^2, totaling approximately 10 000 m^2 surface in buildings and 80 000 m^2 of brownfields across the whole territory of Bremen, engaging a great variety of users in the use of these spaces.

Rome (IT) and **Alba Iulia (RO) have been the 'receiving' cities of Bremen's practice**. In Alba Iulia there was no legislative mechanism for dealing with vacant land and property, so the TUTUR project has helped put the issue on the policy map locally. In that city, the key local results have included a digital platform for underutilised buildings and an official roadmap for the organisation of cultural events in these spaces.

In fact, for both 'receiving' cities, the mapping of abandoned properties – in both the public and private sectors – represented an important starting point, particularly as it mobilised a wide range of stakeholders. The results achieved showed the temporary reuse of sites and building is achievable, even in urban environments as complex as **Rome**.

Traditionally, the re-use of empty properties in Rome was confined to squatting. Illegal and precarious, it formed part of a political movement committed to addressing housing inequalities. As such, the concept of the city authority actively embracing and supporting temporary usage through the planning system was something of an anathema.

Following political changes in June 2013, the city authority became very interested in developing new policies and governance methods that would also support 'bottom-up' regeneration strategies. In this new context, the ZwischenZeitZentrale model of Bremen, supporting temporary usage seemed like a valuable opportunity.

Guided by a Local Support Group developed with the URBACT network and focusing on the city's III District, the temporary use of three public properties was achieved during the pilot. The first was the re-use of the unfinished *Viadotto dei Presidenti* as a public space, cycling lab and exhibition space. The second was the revitalisation of the *Viale Adriatico* market, an underutilised local food market co-designed with citizens as a public space, playground and local food distribution space. The third was the theatre of the Don Bosco School, abandoned for twenty years and reactivated as a neighbourhood cultural centre.

The TUTUR experience has helped build trust between the administration and citizens, by providing a collaborative platform and methodology. Residents have a better understanding of the planning process whilst professionals have been exposed to processes which generate practical and speedy results. The focus on a particular neighbourhood made the community mobilisation easier, and in District III the 'TUTUR methodology' (digitised mapping of empty buildings, brokered stakeholder engagement, collaborative planning process, etc.) is now established. As a result of this positive experience, there is an interest to introduce it to other parts of the city.

Gastronomy as an economic driver: from Burgos to Alba Iulia through the Gastronomic Cities network

The city of **Burgos (ES)** has used gastronomy as a driver for local economic development, promoting growth, generating jobs and stimulating competitiveness. This provides a good example of how a thematic cluster – in this case food-related – can become a focal point for urban development. Culture, tourism, and gastronomy, together with agriculture, food and wine production, were emphasised in the main city development document, 'Plan Estrategico Burgos 2020', which aimed to develop an innovative, creative economy.

The Gastronomic Cities pilot transfer network had four 'receiving' cities with varying levels of experience relating to food and tourism. None of them had explicitly focused on gastronomy in the way that Burgos had.

Burgos, as a 'giving' city, also benefitted from its involvement in the project by developing a baseline strategy which

identified targets linked to the development of the gastronomic concept. Through sharing their good practice with other cities, Burgos was able to refine and enhance its model. Within the other cities, levels of awareness were raised about the potential importance of gastronomy to the local tourism and economic development sectors.

Alba Iulia (RO) was one of the 'receiving' partners. The city had already established a growing tourism economy, built around its Romanesque heritage assets, in particular the Alba Carolina fortress. The city recognised that the development of gastronomy in the city provided a potential added value.

Alba Iulia learned a great deal from their exposure to the Burgos approach. The potential of this sector to create additional jobs

and businesses was clear through its attraction of additional visitors. The Burgos model also underlined the need for a strategic approach involving all relevant stakeholders.

Alba Iulia hosted one of the project meetings, which provided a good platform to kick-start this change process, providing a focal point for the variety of sectoral stakeholder. This coincided with the city's development of a tourism app during the pilot period, which includes all relevant information on activities including local food facts.

The most important transfer legacy for Alba Iulia related to the culture shift within the sector. Traditionally, the HORECA (HOtel, REtail and CAtering) sector in the city was atomised, with little or no collaboration between businesses. Through exposure to the Burgos model, the evidence of commercial collaboration was evident. Consequently, as a result of this project, businesses in the sector have come together to participate in the development of a city-wide model that extends beyond their narrow business interests.

Open innovation to solve city problems: from York to Syracuse through the Genius:Open network

The Genius:Open network addressed the topical issue of how cities mobilise all stakeholders to help solve the problems they face. It operates on the principles of open innovation, which assumes that no-one has all the answers and that we need spaces, tools and techniques to engage citizens and other stakeholders effectively.

The project builds on an award-winning approach designed and developed in **York (UK)**. *Genius York* provides a platform to engage citizens – online and in real life – to generate solutions to the city's problems. These are framed as challenges and the steps include an ideas generation phase, a hackathon to generate and distil potential project ideas, then the prototyping of the products or services.

York, as a 'giving' city, has generated a wide range of solutions to problems as diverse as support for dementia, reutilising public spaces and assisting young people at risk of dropping out of school. Within the partnership there were varying degrees of experience with open innovation concepts and tools.

Genius:Open underlined the importance of bilateral links between the 'giving' and 'receiving' cities, through a series of workshops. This was complemented by all cities participating in one of the York hackathons and the launch of individual challenge processes in each receiving city.

York cited a number of benefits from sharing its good practice with others. One of these was the discipline of using clear and plain language to describe what is potentially a complex and jargonised process. Project participation also encouraged York to revisit the balance between virtual and actual stakeholder events, as it underlined the varying levels of Internet access amongst stakeholder groups.

Lead Partner: York (UK)
Partners: San Sebastián (ES), Syracuse (IT), Tallinn (EE)
Duration: December 2013-March 2015
Total Eligible Cost: EUR 324 997
ERDF Contribution: EUR 239 657
Website: www.urbact.eu/genius-open

All three receiving cities have now adapted the Genius model for use in their local contexts. Each partner has piloted the process with a different thematic focus, reflecting city priorities. In some cases this required significant alteration such as in **Syracuse (IT)**, where the online challenge tools were less useful because Internet use was low.

Located in Sicily, Syracuse is a city with a rich archeological and cultural heritage. Poor infrastructure, weak transport links and high levels of unemployment are amongst the challenges its 120 000 residents face today. In particular, the Mazzarona neighbourhood has high levels of poverty and matching levels of cynicism among local people about prospects for a better future.

Local project leaders adapted the Genius process, developed in York, to the local context. This involved mobilising citizens to collaborate and tackle challenges. This requires high levels of trust, skilled facilitation and effective processes. The stated challenge (agreed in an open process with residents) was to "unveil the Great Beauty of La Mazzarona and contribute to its revival, restoring dignity and creating new opportunities and services to meet the needs of the residents but also to attract the rest of the city".

Compared to the York model, Syracuse relied more on face-to-face activities – including group work and surveys – to mobilise the local community. A breakthrough was to invite residents to participate in a bike tour, which triggered a debate on the state of the neighbourhood.

This open innovation process generated a range of ideas that are now being implemented in the city. These include the Giano Svelato pilot project providing guides and tours for tourists and the MazzaParco project which aims to get retired residents (mestieri) and young people, together to create new parks in La Mazzarona, building job capabilities amongst the young people.

Participation has changed mindsets in Syracuse. The city authority has moved to a more collaborative governance model, which includes a permanent 'collaboration table' to allow constant dialogue between communities, other stakeholders and the council. The authority is also revising the Master Plan to be a 'Citizen-Led Master Plan' putting citizens at the heart of process.

Promoting civic participation in placemaking: from Dun Laoghaire Rathdown to Pori through PlaceMaking for Cities network

The expert-planning culture prevalent in many parts of Europe has frequently resulted in the creation of city spaces that were irrelevant, unworkable or both. This top-down model is now increasingly challenged, as citizen expectations rise and participative tools and technologies support wider stakeholder involvement. Municipalities also find that working with citizens reduces costs and can enhance the quality of urban spaces.

The PlaceMaking for Cities pilot network explored the transfer potential of bottom-up approaches to placemaking developed in **Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County (IE),** which has a long established tradition of community engagement. In recent years Dun Laoghaire Rathdown had combined this tradition with emerging placemaking concepts developed in the United States (in particular, the Project for Public Spaces network).

The Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County established a number of good practice principles relating to community-based placemaking which included:
– Focus on working with, and not for, the community;
– Developing tools to manage resistance to change;
– Creating visible quick wins;
– Encouraging collaboration across local authority departments and between those departments and communities.

Within the network, the tools used to facilitate the transfer of knowledge on good practices included a peer-review process and the recording of the transfer experience through logs (project diaries). Overall, the project identified – and overcame – a number of challenges which routinely affect the transfer of good practice. These included skepticism of professionals responsible for the design and maintenance of public spaces to adopt different practices and a lack of capacity as well as concern among citizens to express themselves in public and to take responsibility for how public spaces are used. The

difficulties associated with adapting practices that work in a different country, such as exploring the technical aspects of the practice and then thinking of ways it could be adapted to the local context, provided valuable opportunities for learning and development of professional practice among the project participants.

Each of the participating cities adopted elements of the good practice model on offer.

In **Albacete (ES)** the capacity of local traders was developed to plan and implement a range of high profile events aimed at increasing footfall and trade in local shops and restaurants. A total of nine events were created ranging from fashion shows, where local youngsters were the models and traders provided the clothes, to urban gardening, storytelling and food tasting sessions. Enabling traders to plan and implement such a programme of events was a completely new approach towards using public spaces and has made a lasting impact.

Some of these actions were repeated by the trades association in 2015. This was possible because PlaceMaking for Cities was successful in transferring knowledge on placemaking. The experience of actually doing it has built new relationships between traders and the municipality and also between the trades and residents association which had not previously collaborated on initiatives.

In **Eger (HU)** the transfer of good practices resulted in an extensive dialogue with stakeholders on community-led activities that would utilise the central squares. One of the outcomes is that the local arts college will run regular exhibitions in the squares showcasing the work of students. In addition, the municipality purchased a mobile stage and sound equipment which local groups can hire free of charge. A local group has taken on the administration of this resource and a range of music, theatre and dance performances are being organised.

Involvement in the PlaceMaking for Cities network was an opportunity for **Pori (FI)** to challenge established practices of top-down design, implementation and maintenance of public spaces. Building on the experience of an earlier URBACT funded project[1], officers from the municipality practiced techniques for community engagement they had learned about in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown. Specifically, it provided an opportunity to actively engage the local community in the planning process and to test how local people could lead the use of an unbuilt public square located on the riverside near a relatively new residential area comprising apartment blocks.

Their approach included the use of gap sites as exhibition spaces, a mural competition, temporary planting and seating arrangement to illustrate how the space could be used in future, as well as the use of pop-up structures to host events and to stimulate public debate. It also saw the use of knitting as a mechanism for engaging stakeholders and linking planning and participation in an innovative way.

In terms of legacy, the Pori for All project ("Kaikkien Pori") will continue to involve residents and other stakeholders in the integrated improvement of five suburban residential areas in the city. At the end of the project the "P4C-container", used as a pop-up space, was purchased by the Art Department of Aalto University (PUPA) and repainted by a core group of the local residents. It was displayed in the final event and will be used in other development sites of Pori in the future.

Overall results and key learning points

Across Europe, cities face the same challenges. In many cases, a city will have devised a solution to a problem another city faces. Consequently, it is important that cities have structured opportunities to transfer knowledge and experience of effective actions. This is the driver behind the development of these URBACT pilot transfer networks.

An important lesson from this URBACT transfer experience is that the learning is never entirely one sided. Consistently, the giving cities reported benefits from their involvement. The need to codify and explain ways of working that were, at times, quite entrenched, was a useful starting point. Often this required the 'giving' cities to review and reflect on their own practice, and re-examine why approaches had evolved in a particular way.

Opening those practices up to the analysis of peer cities was another valuable opportunity for the giving cities. Often, this raised questions about the practice that had not been considered before and in several cases that practice was modified as a result. As we noted earlier, Udine and York were two cities that reported tweaks to their original model on the basis of the engagement with receiving partners.

A third benefit for giving partners was the cachet of EU wide recognition as a good practice city. The benefits of this status was cited as being helpful in a number of ways. Internally, it

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1. http://urbact.eu/sure

provided leverage to encourage city leaders to actively support the work. Externally, it helped position these cities in different ways, including their efforts to attract other financial resources to their city.

A separate, but equally important lesson, relates to the good practice itself, and the importance of articulating it very clearly, so that observers from other contexts can fully understand it. For the URBACT programme, this has confirmed the need for an introductory phase (a standard practice in URBACT networks) where cities can ensure that they have fully grasped the concept before they proceed to the next stage.

It is important to note, as the external evaluation of the transfer pilots confirms, that every project achieved some level of good practice transfer. There were no cases where the original approach was transferred exactly as it had operated in

the 'giving' city. Good practice transfer is about understanding, adapting and re-using. Certain behaviours make this more likely to happen.

For the 'giving' cities, this includes the ability to analyse, reflect and explain. It also requires coaching competence, and the centrality of this coaching relationship is an important finding from this pilot process. For the 'receiving cities', the behaviours that work well for them include curiosity, good listening and analysis skills combined with a willingness to adapt.

The pilot transfer networks have provided a significant learning curve for the participating cities but also for the URBACT programme. It is one that has been valuable and with tangible implications for the new programming period, where the sharing of good practices will become another important exchange platform.