

Connecting cities
Building successes



Creative education: incubating future talent

URBACT CREATIVE CLUSTERS - Thematic Workshop

Reggio Emilia, Italy, May 06-07, 2010



Barnsley Óbidos Reggio Emilia Hódmezővásárhely Mizil INTELI Enguera Jyväskylä Viareggio

Reporting note

Miguel Rivas
URBACT lead expert for Creative Clusters

Why education in a project on urban economic development? It was noticed during the preparatory phase of the URBACT network on creative clusters, in 2008, that some city partners working seriously with creative-driven patterns were also developing innovative and creative local education systems at primary and secondary levels. Others like Jyväskylä in Finland or Kortrijk in Belgium (the latter selected for a key study visit) were working in this way at the higher education level. Those cities are incubating the talented local people of the future.

When investigating such a key finding during the preparatory phase of Creative Clusters, and given the fact that we addressed the question from the urban policy not from pedagogy or education policy, it was raised the question of how to frame education within a city model. In other words, **how to align a local education system to long-term local development strategies**. That was the main theme of the second thematic workshop of URBACT network on Creative Clusters [2008-2011].

In approaching the creative cluster as a creative-driven articulation at local level of policy making in the fields of: the economy, culture, education, urban planning and design, branding and communication and governance; the workshop was focused on the role of education and innovative education policies as engine factor for local creative ecosystems.

Thematic workshops are the cornerstone in the way URBACT Creative Clusters is undertaking its shared learning process. A first workshop were: “Creative clusters: diversifying local economic base & opportunities to young people” (Ploiesti-Mizil, October 2009); and two others are scheduled on “the space of the creative class: urban facilities and strategies for creative entrepreneurs” (Hódmezővásárhely, October 2010) and “the creative ecosystem: events and cultural agenda as catalysts” (Barnsley, March 2011).

This second thematic workshop was organized by the Comune di Reggio Emilia in close collaboration with the local agencies Reggio Children and Reggio del Mondo and the Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia. The latter offering the workshop venue. More than 40 participants between local officers, scholars, experts -including pedagogues-

and even creative entrepreneurs met together during a whole day with the aim to discuss around 13 case study presentations and also learn from **Reggio Emilia's own experience, by the way a world-class benchmark in childhood education.**

An integrated approach promoting the local creative ecosystem



In her opening speech, Councillor Luna Sassi, introduced Reggio Emilia as a combination of social development, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit. Thanks to it the city passed of being one of the most depressed areas in post-war Italy to one of the most advanced systems of small and medium enterprises in the country. On the other hand, Paolo Cagliari, from the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, stated that **education is much more than a citizen right for the Emilian city, and it is approached as an strategic competence.** At that point half of the educational system for children between 0 and 6 years old in the city is directly managed for the Municipality of Reggio Emilia.

After opening session, contributions were organized around four working sessions: creativity in the school - trends and the role of local governments; business models on creative education and creative education spinn-offs; university facing the creative economy; and promoting the local creative ecosystem in medium-sized towns, as a sort of comprehensive final session.

CREATIVITY IN THE SCHOOL. TRENDS AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Romina Cachia, from the European Commission's Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, took the role of keynote speaker for reviewing the survey "Creativity in Schools in Europe", since she is one of the coordinators of the report based in more than 10,000 questionnaires from teachers (see the text-box below). Then attention was focused on the two benchmarks in URBACT Creative Clusters regarding creative education in primary and secondary levels, namely: Reggio Emilia in Italy and Óbidos in Portugal.

Reggio Emilia itself is a model, as such recognized at worldwide level, where creativity, open innovation and the physical learning environment play a central role. That was commented by Emanuela Vercalli, from Reggio Children, a public-private partnership where the City holds the majority, with the mission to innovate and disseminate over the Reggio approach to childhood education.

In improving the school system, Reggio Emilia is using **open innovation** methods. That is collecting inputs from stakeholders in a 360° circle around the school, combining teaching methods, architecture [school design], direct participation of families and children, related firms and dedicated public agencies as Reggio Children.

Also stimulating **creativity at early ages** is a key feature in the Reggio approach. And it also means to promote **creative learning environments**. Schools are carefully designed in Reggio Emilia for a long time. Courtyard ("the piazza della scuola") is the heart of the school, but several *ateliers* and even the school kitchen are also places for creative learning. For Reggio creativity has much to do with interaction. For them creativity is basically about making relations (see the concept of "lateral thinking" by Edward de Bono), about creating connections.

Underscore not only the fact that the Reggio context has sparked off experimentation in the sphere of education, with the experience of the infant-toddler centres and preschools associated with the pedagogy of Loris Malaguzzi, but also that the Reggio territory has been the subject of a rich and important system of economic-social experimentations. Through the years, this has given rise to the system of municipal pharmacies, the healthcare system and the development of its hospital, as well as the micro industries of the mechanical sector, which were able to rise out of the closure of the Reggiane mechanical industries and transform their know-how into a new entrepreneurial opportunity. Probably a **strong civic tradition** in all Emilia Romagna region is behind this favourable attitude to experimentation and stakeholder involvement.

Finally another key – but connected to the open innovation approach - that is important to bring up is **communication**. The power of communication has allowed to Reggio Children to grow as a spiral, generated by the research with the schools. Thanks to this meeting of energy, continuous experimentation and partnership with the territory (stakeholder involvement) get started. Ambitious communication strategy has therefore strengthened and expanded the network of Reggio Children.

Creativity in Schools in Europe: a Survey of Teachers.

Authors: CACHIA Romina, FERRARI Anusca, KEARNEY Caroline, PUNIE Yves, VAN DEN BERGHE Wouter, WASTIAU Patricia. A JRC-IPTS report.

The final report on Creativity and Innovation in Compulsory Education is already available. The study was set-up by the Institute of Prospective Technological Studies on behalf of both DG Education and Culture of the European Commission and the European Schoolnet (EUN), a network of 31 Ministries of Education in Europe and beyond, under the 2009 Year of Creativity and Innovation. It ran from 2008 to 2010 and aimed to provide a better understanding of how innovation and creativity are framed in the national and/or regional objectives and applied in practices of education at primary and secondary level.

The report is based on a wide questionnaire submitted by more than 10,000 teachers from the 27 Member States of the European Union. Teachers in Europe believe that creativity is a fundamental competence to be developed at school and that Information and Communication Technologies and digital tools can enhance creativity. An overwhelming majority of teachers (96%) also believe that creativity can be applied to every domain of knowledge and to every school subject. However, even when a big majority of teachers (88%) believe everyone can be creative, and that creativity is not solely a characteristic of eminent people, the conditions for favouring creativity are not equally provided in Europe.

Only 40% of teachers have received some training on creativity. Also conflicting data on the use of new technologies. If 80% said they believe ICT can be a great support to the spread of creativity, only 36% received training on the use of ICT in the classroom. Were also investigated different ways of creative teaching and transmission of knowledge, but the adoption of a textbook is largely predominant form so far (76%)

Online copy available here: <http://ipts.jrc.ec.europa.eu/publications/pub.cfm?id=3900>

Inspired in some way by the Reggio approach, the **“School of Óbidos” programme** was presented in the workshop by Ana Sofia Godinho, Óbidos Town Councillor in charge of education. Firstly, the Óbidos programme opened up a new way of approaching school architecture in Portugal with the result of three new schools complexes built between 2008 and 2010. The programme was also a response from the local level to the problems of education in rural areas. But specifically is a key piece within the “Creative Óbidos” strategy.

In this sense, the programme is an attempt to re-invent the space of education. For instance, introducing the concept of community school, in a way of re-visiting the idea of the civic forum, where culture, leisure, sport and health [all the new complexes are equipped with music room or a dentist facility] are resources that can be found in the new schools and

which can therefore overcome the former idea of educational space. As a result, one of these facilities, the Arcos complex, has been awarded by the OECD-Centre for Effective Learning Environments, entering its 2011 compendium of the best schools in the world.

Like in Reggio Emilia, architectural design is supporting an educational programme focused on creativity. They call it “a more constructivist educational system”. The complexes built within the “School of Óbidos” system are based on a deep reflection [one single architect, Claudio Sat, has worked in the design of the three new schools] about how space can be an active element for a new education system more innovative and creative, a programme beyond the classroom.¹

The discussion time served to bring up a number of **key remarks** connected to the main theme of the workshop:

- First note that innovation and creativity are fundamental concepts in modern society that are not always integrated into the existing educational model.
- It is feasible (even from the budget point of view) a positioning of local governments within their national educational system. But it requires a very clear political choice. Thus, in Óbidos, 35% of the total local budget is devoted to culture+education. As a result Óbidos is making decisions on teacher selection, curricula and teaching methods related to the new schools they have promoted. Likewise the municipality of Reggio Emilia is running 50% of the primary schools in its territory.
- Creativity is a potential asset in every child and a potential force in society. 88% of teachers in Europe think that everyone can be creative. But the ambient is a key point to stimulate creativity. Here cities can play a role, and the built environment matters.
- For some cities like Reggio Emilia or Óbidos education is perceived as strategic competence. They are leading to the concept of “the educational city”, a local ecosystem focused on innovative and creative education.

BUSINESS MODELS ON CREATIVE EDUCATION. CREATIVE EDUCATION SPINN-OFFS

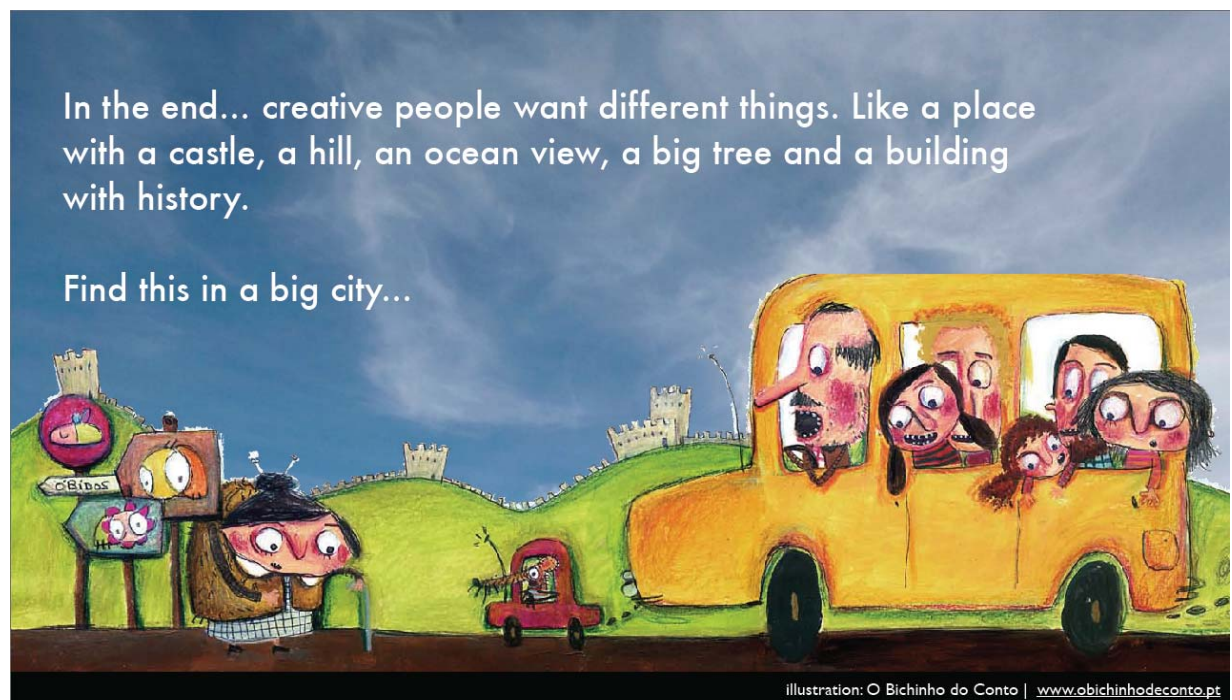
Three case studies were presented for discussion during the second working session devoted to creative education as emerging business sector. O Bichinho de Conto (Óbidos, Portugal), Tiwi from Reggio Emilia and Reggio Children.

¹ Sat, Claudio. 2010. *Schools of Óbidos*. Óbidos town council; Faria, T. et al. 2010. *Escola Municipal de Óbidos, um ensaio para o futuro*. Óbidos town council.

Although the aforementioned public-private agency **Reggio Children** is a non-for-profit organization, it is a very good example on how to capitalize the know-how accumulated by Reggio Emilia in the field of innovative childhood education. The experience in the field of education has become an area of excellence in Reggio Emilia, because it is supported by an ongoing and extensive process of research and communication at the international level, resulting in frequent visits by international study groups to Reggio Emilia. This highlights the importance of the local context in stimulating innovation, but also of the need to fuel innovation through research in order to generate positive spin-offs in the economic sphere and local economic development.

According to Emanuela Vercalli, chief for international relationships and exchanges, all this knowledge potential and local expertise have been properly channelled through Reggio Children, generating revenues that come back in part to the community. Thus, the range of Reggio Children's activities includes research and training, through the new educational centre Loris Malaguzzi, publishing in the field of pedagogy, consulting or development of projects in partnership with private companies like Max Mara, IKEA, Lego or Alessi. Since 1994, 170 study groups with over 25,000 participants from all over the world have attended stages in Reggio Children.

"For readers from 0 to 200 years old, reading at the top of the hill" was the title of Mafalda Milhões' presentation, from **O Bichinho de Conto**, a multidisciplinary team relocated from Lisbon to the village of Óbidos, and devoted to editing projects and children's illustration. Also relocated from the big city, this time from Milan and Bologna to Reggio Emilia, it was presented **TIWI**, a start-up producing digital contents, especially video and motion graphics for learning purposes.



Both case studies showed evidence in a number of relevant questions:

- Creative education as an emergent industry – edutainment, clustered with design, digital contents, etc.
- Existence of relocation processes of talented entrepreneurs from big urban hubs to middle-sized towns. This is an opportunity window for well positioned middle-sized towns in current “creative destruction” times that will arise a new economic landscape. Creative industries require more flexible conditions for location.
- In attracting and retaining these creative entrepreneurs, local governments should emphasize on: i) preserving life standards at affordable costs; ii) making connections among creative nodes and people at local level; iii) and promoting public marketplaces and partnerships for innovative products and services related to education.

UNIVERSITY FACING THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

Both creative entrepreneurs and creative industries demand a curricula adaptation in higher education to the emerging creative economy. In general University is a key component of the triple helix boosting cluster developments. In fact, it plays an important role in local economic development strategies as a whole. Besides the case of University cities like Jyväskylä in Finland, here a relevant question is **how to link small or midsize towns with creative-based strategies to the University system**. The lessons from Creative Clusters partners are varied. So, through a specific agreement, Barnsley, in the UK, hosts a part of the Huddersfield University campus dedicated to design and digital issues. Óbidos has set up a framework contract with the University of Coimbra to develop an ambitious research plan on range of themes previously selected by the Municipality. Also the small town of Enguera, in Spain, hosts summer courses of the University of Valencia.

The third working session was opened by Tony Melville, senior lecturer at the University of Jyväskylä, with the presentation “breaking down disciplinary borders: Jyväskylä a Finnish university town”. Education is a key driver to explain the successful **Finnish model**, even at local level. Particularly the role of University promoting entrepreneurship and creativity, by **breaking down disciplinary boundaries**. Hence the importance of cross-discipline University institutes over the faculties.

Jyväskylä has decided to focus on the sector of high education, promoting the so-called **EDUcluster** in Central Finland. In a population of 130,000 inhabitants, students are 47,000, of which 22,000 in higher education. There are three universities which encourage the presence of foreign students and researchers. Many courses are entirely taught in English. The approach is far from the traditional academic, with specialized institutes, like the one devoted to music therapy combining different seemingly unrelated disciplines ranging from music, medicine and psychology to ICT.

Then, Nicola Bigi, researcher at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, continued with the theme spinning-off and **networking** on new media. He has recently mapped the creative and cultural industries in Reggio Emilia, and found that paradoxically networks and links between creative entrepreneurs were more consistent at the international level (or with colleagues from Milan or Bologna) than those established between them locally. Finally, Catarina Selada, head of policy research at INTELI-Intelligence and Innovation, a Portuguese think tank on innovative spatial development, made a brief introduction to the European Commission's Green Paper on Cultural and Creative Industries ["Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries"] as well as the presentation "creative people: profiles, training challenges, spaces, mobility".

FINAL REMARKS: PROMOTING THE LOCAL CREATIVE ECOSYSTEM IN MEDIUM-SIZED TOWNS

Chaired by Serena Foracchia, director of the local agency Reggio nel Mondo, a last working session was scheduled with a more comprehensive approach. Fabrizio Montanari, researcher at Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia, told about the role of Festival in local economies, as introduction in some way to the forthcoming thematic workshop of Creative Clusters devoted to events and cultural agenda as catalysts. For Fabrizio the cultural event is suffering of proliferation and consequently trivialization in some way. The first film festival was in 1932 in Venice, and today there are 150 festivals of this kind. So, the meaning of the cultural event should be re-visited in a way that it should clearly connect to the local identity and background, and provoke interaction with people who lives in the city-venue.

Setting people at the core was the main message of Manuela Vaccari, social cohesion department of Reggio Emilia Municipality, in her speech about "The **meaning of citizenship today**". Partners from URBACT Creative Clusters were rather interested to learn how Reggio Emilia promotes civic virtues and common ethical background with the result of a more active citizenship. In other words, how create **societal "glue" factors** at local level, besides education.

As example, Manuela talked about participatory planning and stimulation of citizen's creativity in the redevelopment of the area around the railway station. This is a declining area, with problems of intercultural conflict and insecurity. The local administration has conducted a participation experience with the purpose of improving living conditions in the neighbourhood and promoting behaviours of "active citizenship". Explore together the issues and find workable solutions together (co-design of local measures). It has come to the signature of micro-agreements for coexistence, rules and responsibilities between citizens and public administration. Structural renewals were planned, from urban furniture to street lights, but also cultural events and exhibitions. Participation in this sense has given rise to the emergence of self-managed city-labs such as "immigrant drama", "theatre of women" and so on, revealing a close link between active participation and creativity.

Next contributions of Hódmezővásárhely (Hungary) and Mizil (Romania) showed us the value of **micro-strategies** to boost some changes in conventional education or simply to embed creative-based strategies with the local background.

Hódmezővásárhely has performed the best creative school contest in the Creative Clusters partnership. Such competition, under the title "my city over the next 15 years", was described by the city official Anikó Varga. Students aged between 11 and 18 years old took the opportunity to participate individually or in groups and in a variety of creative expressions: drawings, paintings, poems, sculptures, musical pieces... The jury was composed of local artists and personalities from the world of culture. 44 works from eight different schools finally arrived. And the winners had the opportunity to join the key study visit to Kortrijk (Belgium) with the rest of Creative Clusters partners. In fact, the Southern Hungary city is considering seriously the children's view as an input when building local policies and strategies. They are **integrating children imagination into strategic local planning**.

Petronela Sturz, presented the case of the "**children clubs**" in Mizil, which carry out extra-curricular activities, beyond the classroom, for children between 5 and 18 years old, throughout the whole year, even during the holiday season. They are cultural and artistic activities, but also technical-applied. Mizil offers this kind of creative education free of charge, with the support of the Ministry of Education and funding from sponsors and specific projects.

Musical teaching in Enguera [Spain], the setting up of creative urban communities in the web 2.0 or the way Barnsley [UK] is dealing with community-based projects around creativity are also examples of creative-based micro-strategies taken from URBACT Creative Clusters.

As conclusion, if we were interested at the beginning on how local education systems could be aligned to long term local development strategies, we have learnt from Reggio Emilia **how to frame education within a city model**; where the new brand concept of the "educational city" has emerged.

By the other hand, the impressive "Escolas d'Óbidos" programme shows evidence that the Reggio approach can be transferred to other different contexts, and in that case as an active component of a solid creative-based development strategy. "Schools of Óbidos" is a comprehensive local scheme which not only deals with the school curricula but also with new school designs. In building such programme the city is using open innovation methods, collecting inputs from all the stakeholders around the school, like in the Reggio approach, namely: a world-class benchmark in childhood education resulting of the combination of innovative and creative teaching methods, architecture [school design], 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.

The working day ended in *La Fonderia*, a former industrial complex now home of the internationally renowned ballet company **Aterballetto**. Workshop participants were able to attend a live performance of contemporary dance.

The day after visits included the international centre Loris Malaguzzi for children education and Reggio Children space with a particular focus on the Atelier *Raggio di Luce* www.raggiodiluce.eu (see also cover image of this reporting note) and Play+ space, a partnership of Reggio Children with private companies for the development of new collections of furniture for children.

During the URBACT workshop, the Annual Week of the European Photography was inaugurated. www.fotografiaeuropea.it



UNA CITTÀ TANTI BAMBINI

MEMORIE
DI UNA STORIA PRESENTE

ONE CITY, MANY CHILDREN
MEMORY OF A PRESENT HISTORY



[Creative Clusters: 2nd thematic workshop collection of papers presented](#)