

# The creative ecosystem: events and cultural agenda as catalysts

URBACT CREATIVE CLUSTERS - Thematic Workshop

Barnsley, UK, March 17-18, 2011



Barnsley Óbidos Reggio Emilia Hódmezővásárhely Mizil INTELI Enguera Jyväskylä Viareggio

Reporting note

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Cultural events and agendas can not only help to build the local creative ecosystem but also to establish a real connection between cultural policy and economic development policy at city level. Beyond the “put-on-the-map” effect, singular cultural events must be used to establish credibility, by engaging the local creative fabric as much as possible including in post-event activities. Savonlinna (Finland), Óbidos (Portugal) or Viareggio (Italy) are associated with distinctive summertime opera festivals spread through word-of-mouth. There are a number of examples of small and medium towns linked to unique experiences and creative events. Tandems such as Sundance-independent cinema, Sitges-fantastic cinema, Glastonbury-rock music, Avignon-theatre, Montreaux-music festival, Basel-modern art, are very popular.

With such as premises in mind, the fourth and last thematic workshop of the URBACT network on Creative Clusters [2008-2011] was devoted to discussing events and cultural agenda as catalysts in promoting creative-based strategies in local development.

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 cultural policies in promoting what the network is calling the local creative ecosystem.**

Thematic workshops are the cornerstone in the way URBACT Creative Clusters is undertaking its shared learning process. Previous workshops were: “Creative clusters: diversifying local economic base & opportunities to young people”, Ploiesti-Mizil, October 2009; “Creative education: incubating future talent”, Reggio Emilia, May 2010; and “The space of the creative class: urban facilities and strategies for creative entrepreneurs”, Hódmezővásárhely, October 2010.

This time the meeting was organized by Barnsley Development Agency, part of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council. More than 40 participants between local officers, scholars,

experts, cultural managers and even creative entrepreneurs met together during a whole day with the aim to discuss around 10 case study presentations and learn from the local organizer's experience as well.

As venue the Barnsley Digital Media Centre, a new facility providing 72 offices and various meeting spaces for small businesses and entrepreneurs in the media sector. The facility offers advanced business and incubation services to its tenants, as well as virtual offices for home-based businesses.

### An integrated approach promoting the local creative ecosystem



Just after the welcome speech by Councillor Bill Newman and the introductory notes by both Creative Clusters lead partner and lead expert, contributions were organized around three working sessions: linking cultural policy to economic development strategy; the role of cultural and creative hubs and facilities; and the impact of festivals and events on urban centres.

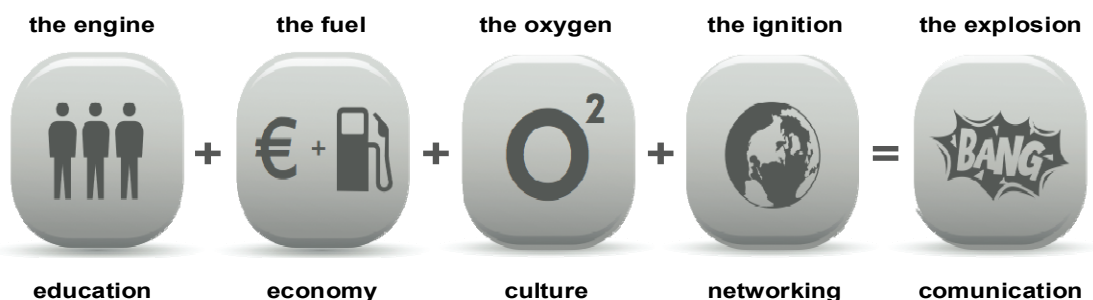
### LINKING CULTURAL POLICY TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Ann Gosse, executive director of Development at Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, was the first speaker with the presentation "**Re-making Barnsley: connecting the cultural agenda**". In last years, Barnsley, a paradigmatic Northern England medium-sized town, has

faced two main challenges. The one from the nineties in building a new local productive model after the collapse of a coal & steel traditional economy, a transition challenge also pushed by the current crisis; and the other consisting in public sector downsizing impulsed by the so-called “Big Society” project now in the UK. In such transition creative industries, which now account a significant 8% of the working population in Barnsley, as called to play a relevant role.

For Anne Gosse culture is taking a central role in the strategy of re-making Barnsley (a clear project-oriented strategy). For instance, in keeping peripheral districts connected to the town centre and promoting a sense of ownership, a renovated sense of place. As a demonstration effect for the rest of city partners, **Barnsley Council has recently integrated the cultural department into the economic development department.** They are claiming a new dialogue among both policies, a sort of mutual contamination over the language of each other.

A second contribution came from **Óbidos**, lead partner of URBACT Creative Clusters. Óbidos is a small municipality of 12,000 inhabitants with more than 1.5 million visitors each year and an impressive cultural agenda along the year. According to Miguel Silvestre, deputy mayor, investment in culture represents 14% of the total municipal budget in Óbidos, compared to 4% of the central state budget in Portugal. A main reason for that is that Óbidos is basically a visitor economy, but it also shows the central role and perfect integration of culture within “Óbidos Criativa”, the integrated local strategy around creativity. In fact, Miguel talked about “**blending culture**”, a cross-cutting factor affecting economy, education, tourism, etc. Thus, the school is envisioned by the municipality of Óbidos as a cultural centre, and the programme for building new schools has been designed with this purpose.



*Chart by Miguel Silvestre, deputy Mayor, Óbidos*

Margarida Azevedo, lecturer at Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Porto, was closing this first session commenting the role of **evaluation as a tool for the cultural sector**. In this sense, several questions were raised: i) the emergence of an audit culture at the cultural and creative sector; ii) why should we evaluate? barriers and enablers, and potential users of the evidence – cultural professions, decision-makers, stakeholders and population; iii) how evaluate the creative sector?, merging and balance creative and conventional research methods, also engaging participants on the evaluation process; iv) evidence use – effective disseminating the evidence.

Dan Sequerra, director of the Cultural Industries Quarter Agency [CIQA] in Sheffield conducted the discussion after these presentations. A first important assumption is to **distinguish the debate on the creative industries from the debate on the economy of culture**. In the former the framework is not just culture and cultural policies. Thus, we are not so interested in Takashi Murakami as an artist but rather as an entrepreneur, who from his holding Kaikai Kiki Corporation, with about a hundred collaborators between Tokyo and New York, designs, produces and sells worldwide everything from his works of art to his line of merchandising products. The scope creative industries is not limited to arts and culture, it extends to fields where creative individuals, managers and technologists meet together. Moreover, the creative entrepreneur comprises much more than people working in cultural and creative industries – here appears the concept of creative-based business model.

So, talking about the creative economy is not as talking about the economy of culture. However culture and cultural life are framework conditions for addressing the creative city. Thus, a common challenge within the whole partnership was to blur the limits between cultural policy and economic development policy at local scale. And this is another major assumption. The need to **cultivate the crossroads 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 emerged:

- What kind of cultural policy for cultural entrepreneurs?
- How to promote a risk-friendly creative economy at local level?
- Are public cultural marketplaces being managed in the right way?, are we properly using them as demand-oriented policies to boost the creative economy? -lights and shadows in public cultural marketplaces.

Since the matter of the creative economy does not overlap completely with the economy of culture, some like Telmo Faria, mayor of Óbidos, openly claim to take the promotion of the creative industries out of the Culture Ministries. The debate is served.

It is remarkable that final report of Creative Metropolises, an Interreg IVC project focused on European capitals, points out that an economic department is involved in all city strategies supporting the creative industries, and the culture department is involved in 9 of the 11 case studies. This means that stronger combination between economic development and culture departments is a framework condition when addressing a development strategy over the creative sector.

In promoting “new dialogues” between different local policies but serving the same comprehensive city strategy, Barnsley has clearly showed us a pathway. Even more recently they have linked into the same city department creative/digital industries and the visitor economy.



*Barnsley thematic workshop*

## THE ROLE OF CULTURAL AND CREATIVE HUBS AND FACILITIES

Three presentations were made on a new generation of urban cultural and creative facilities. The first one about **Emlékpont** (“Remembrance Point”) in Hódmezővásárhely, by his director, Imre Nagy. The Emlékpont is an exhibition place for the history of Hódmezővásárhely between 1945 and 1990. So, the purpose is to display and present the historical overview of the decades of the totalitarian communist era in Hungary, the cultural and social environment as well as the inner mechanism of the “existing Socialism”. The museum is one of a kind not

only in Hungary but also in Central and Eastern Europe. Such period is presented in a number of thematic rooms or exhibition halls, like the “Room of Broken Traditions”; the “White Guard Room”; or the “Room of Violence”. At the time of its inauguration the Emlékpont served as an exhibition as well as an educational-research center too. In some way it is amazing to see how a place devoted to memory (an unpleasant memory) may be a catalyst for creative stuffs in the city.

Next, Linda di Pietro, curator and director of Indisciplinarte, a cultural development agency, presented **CAOS**-Centre of Arts Opificio Siri, a new cultural centre which also intends to act as seminal point for a creativity-based city strategy in Terni, Italy. In addition it is a case of PPP, namely: a public cultural facility operated by a private team (see text-box).

Finally, Russ Hepworth, from St. John University in York (UK) showed us, through its incubation system, how important the physical space is. They have three different facilities specifically oriented to design activities and the creative industries. The organisation is committed to engaging the public and raising knowledge and awareness of design, developing regional designers to encourage a sustainable supportive design community and position and promote the North East as a hotbed of design talent and creativity. Their concept challenges the ‘physical space’ incubation/hub model by concentrating on events and fairs.

Catarina Selada, head of policy research at INTELI-Intelligence in Innovation, and partner of Creative Clusters, acted as discussant. She raised the question of the emergence of a new range of creative-based urban facilities characterized by a number of features such as **hybridation, flexibility, experimentation, interaction, and international scope**.

Now the trend is not promoting just spaces for exhibition or distribution but also for production –the idea of the cultural venue as a working environment too. Which programming for the cultural facility aligned to creative-based city strategies? Hybridation in relation to the programming for cultural facility: not just exhibition, also production and co-production, education, research... smart leisure.

CAOS in Terni fits perfectly this new pattern of the creative-based venue, as well the Buda Centre in Kortrijk (Belgium) that we selected for our 2010 key study visit. Also The Civic, in Barnsley, that we had the opportunity to visit just after the workshop to chat with a group of local creative entrepreneurs. **The Civic**, an iconic former Victorian theatre, is a creative-based facility characterized by flexibility and hybridation. It comprises exhibition spaces and galleries, workspaces for local entrepreneurs plus leisure and retail uses, all ideally connected to creativity in the same venue.

## CAOS, Terni (Italy)

CAOS is a brand new cultural centre consecrated to contemporary artistic production, inaugurated on March 28th in Terni (Umbria, Italy). It is a unique venue in its genre in Italy: a 6000 square metre space, born from the restructuring of an old chemistry factory, that it will host national and International temporary exhibitions, creative labs, a Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, the Archaeological Museum of the city, a 300-seat theatre and a café-bookshop. This new remarkable container will give hospitality to the activities of a working group composed by Indisciplinate and Civita, aiming to a redefinition of the role of the contemporary in the city and in general of Terni's cultural identity (through events as a Festival of contemporary performing arts, a festival of architecture and urban planning, or a project promoting the neighbourhood – Città Giardino- as a cultural quarter).

CAOS is intended, so, as a starting point, as a mean to an objective, an instrument to put forward a reasoning into a project of involvement of the community. The CAOS works thanks to a local network of companies and organisations in connection with the city council and the regional government.

The venue had been initially thought as another static and traditional "museum". Indisciplinate worked to change its final use destination, by means of a process of persuasion towards the institutions and the civil society in Terni, building (in only three years) a reputation based on the success and the strength of an artistic proposal, weaving urban and citizen relations. It pushed through the idea – still uncomfortable, in Italy – of culture and creativity as real factors of social development, and worked to build a net among organisations previously not collaborating: associations, governance, business, and universities.

Caos aims to demonstrate that the process of artistic creation is a process of production. It hosts several spaces and venues dedicated to each "ring" of the cultural production chain, and plans to work in the next years to make a real and integrated system out of all these single inputs. Currently, there are already spaces aimed to training, to production, distribution and documentation. CAOS also manages a system of residencies, sending Italian artists abroad, and welcoming foreign artists in Terni for periods of time.

Our strategy in curating the Caos is divided into 3 steps: ATTRACT, ACTIVATE, NETWORK, linking a passive and an active level of involvement. The Activate section leads to the creation of the project "CREATIVE NEIGHBORHOOD GARDEN CITY" where a group of creative people (architects, sociologists, marketing and communication people, cultural mediators) wants to test a project around diffuse creativity.

*Linda di Pietro*

Today, urban art has no spatial boundaries. And the art centres are no longer strictly cultural spaces, are also spaces for leisure and consumption. Hybridation is a key word these new creative-based facilities. Reasons for promoting **more interaction between cultural policy and urban planning**. Nowadays, cultural policies should have a dedicated spatial strategy at urban level, and vice-versa.



*C3Bar at CCB cultural centre, Barcelona (photo: El País)*

## THE IMPACT OF FESTIVALS AND EVENTS ON URBAN CENTRES

A last session of presentations and debate was dedicated to the cultural event nowadays, and at what extent it might be re-visited in order to enhance its role for feeding the local creative ecosystem. In other words, how to address the cultural event as catalyst in a creative-based local development strategy. In this sense a handful of questions were raised: new aims of the cultural event and new formats; and the pre-event and post-event or how to increase the impact over the local creative fabric.

Patrick Murphy, member of the Barnsley Local Support Group, artist and director of Small World, an animation film festival, pushed all the organizers of a cultural event to look for an **international scope**. A **scaling up strategy** to generate regional and national impact might be actively considered even for a cultural event in a small or medium-sized city. Patrick

shared with the audience a range of tools working in that way like partnerships with big players (Disney in the case of the Small World Festival, among others); the “digitalization of the event”, allowing its diffusion through the smart phone; or the use of viral communication strategies. Finally Patrick Murphy claimed for a significant involvement of the private sector (in a profitable way not only from sponsorship logic) when promoting and developing the cultural event.

Then, Marianna Roscelli presented key messages from *Fotografia Europea Festival*, a mayor international event in Reggio Emilia (Italy). The overall coordination of the event (with a budget of 750,000€, 50% covered by sponsors and private contribution) is managed by the municipality, in particular by the department of culture, which works closely with managers and staff from other services (communication, commerce, historic city, schools) according to a policy of transversality which characterize the “Reggio style” along with an active management of related stakeholders. A sort of “outdoor culture” or “360 degree vision” in delivering public policies as it happens in Reggio Emilia in the field of childhood education.

In spreading locally the cultural big event, Reggio Emilia has learnt to establish a wide **“dialogue” between the city (in a physical way and related to its stakeholders) and the cultural event**. For instance, regarding the *Fotografia Europea Festival*, an off-circuit of informal exhibitions takes place also in shops, libraries, restaurants and hotels, accounting more than 250 informal venues, of which 150 were shops.

A third contribution in this session came again from the UK, this time about the Barnsley-Newham Partnership. Over 60% of the London 2012 Olympic Games’ venues are being built in Newham (East London). Barnsley and the London borough of Newham are working together in a pioneering project with a focus on sharing expertise across a range of fields, including sport, culture and volunteering. A portion of the classic Olympic volunteers will come from Barnsley due to such a partnership with Newham. Behind this, it is the idea of **“amplifying place”** as a way to increase the local impact of the big event.

The last presentation and discussion was centred in strategies to promote **lively city centres**, especially in contexts like the Nordic Countries where an “outdoor culture” does not emerge naturally as in Southern Europe. According to Mari Pitkänen, chair of “Lively Urban City Centre” association, from Jyväskylä-Finland, improving street life [in a way, a framework condition for the local creative ecosystem] is a matter of both **innovative urban planning** plus an agenda of animation and events. A kind of urban planning with the aim at promoting an outdoor culture should blur in some way the limits between **space of consuming, leisure and culture**, and give new roles to the public space, maybe using culture and creative-based programmes to re-activate them.

Of course, urban retail sector, specifically retailers more sensitive to creativity [those that convert their small shop into a creative experience] are behind the new face – more dynamic, inclusive and of urban quality – of Gracia district in Barcelona, Södermalm in Stockholm or Bairro Alto in Lisbon. <sup>1</sup>

## FINAL REMARK

In the course of the discussions the subject of the new relationship between art and the city came out. Firstly the city is not only made as a sum of "architectural artifacts" [Aldo Rossi, "the architecture of the city"]. On the other hand, art in the twenty-first century has left the museum, the private collection, the gallery... Now people also want to consume art or creative activity on the street, at the shopping mall, when watching television, when searching in Google...

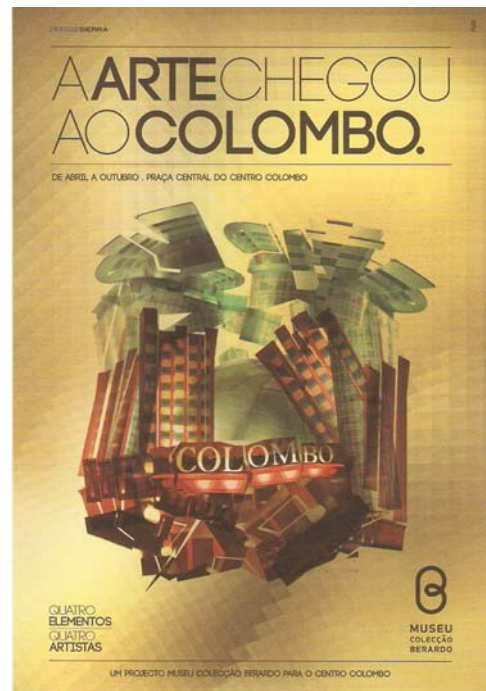
Today cities itself are expected to be scenarios for the artistic or creative event. The concept of public art (**urban art**, street art) is becoming more impact, and goes beyond the strictly cultural policy. But dealing with these concepts requires strategy in order not to fall into the simple reproduction of "cow parades" around the world. In this sense, it is remarkable the urban art programme of the municipality of Lisbon, named Chrono. It consists in the selection of a number of locations in the city, where internationally recognized artists are invited to develop interventions, but at the request of the neighborhood communities involved along with local artists who act jointly in a process of "urban curating", [www.cronolisboa.org](http://www.cronolisboa.org).

Public art or urban art is an attribute of the creative city of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An issue that should be handled within the local creative ecosystem, by interacting, as always, cultural policy, urban planning and development of the creative industries. An sample in understanding this potential of **the city as a broad setting for the cultural manifestation**, at a large scale, is the *European Photography Festival* in Reggio Emilia.

Also it should be admitted that this kind of use of the public space for creative expression may have different motivations. From official cultural exhibitions more or less globalized (cow parades, Botero's sculptures...) to public sculpture revisited (as Jaume Plensa's interventions), underground demonstrations (graffiti...) or creative performances also at the service of corporate marketing strategies, etc. In any case there is a recovery of the "street value". The street as a venue for artistic expression.

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<sup>1</sup> See Remesar, A. and Brandao, P. Editors. *Arte Pública e Cidadania, Novas Leituras da Cidade Criativa*. Caleidoscopio. Lisboa, 2010.



*Lisbon: art in the shopping mall  
Partnership between Berardo Collection (contemporary art) and Colombo shopping centre*

Finally, as related activities, the four thematic workshop included a cocktail meeting with local creative entrepreneurs and a visit to Elsecar Heritage Centre. Located within a former ironworks and colliery workshops, the centre's current ambition is to, according to Helen Ball, head of culture and creative industries in Barnsley, "provide a unique, effective and sustainable setting for heritage, learning, events, retail and commercial activity". Its restored historical buildings now house an antique centre, individual craft workshops, and a 12,000 square feet venue for live music. It also includes Hive Gallery, the first contemporary art gallery in Barnsley whose programming promotes local talent to internationally recognized artists, and Hive Artist Studios.





[Creative Clusters: 4<sup>th</sup> thematic workshop collection of paper presented](#)