



Economic Strategies and Innovation in  
Medium sized Cities



European Union  
European Regional Development Fund

Connecting cities  
Building successes





## A word from the Lead Partner

Welcome to ESIMeC – a thematic network of nine medium sized cities that will work in partnership to develop innovative economic strategies to promote sustainable economic growth.

Working in isolation is no longer possible in an ever more globalised world. To remain competitive, towns and cities across Europe must work together. Exchanging knowledge, information and good practices, through the URBACT II programme, will ensure they remain innovative, creative, vibrant and modern. This need for closer collaboration has only been heightened by the recent economic crisis.

The nine ESIMeC partners share the same priorities and aspirations: to capitalize on the assets and specificities of medium sized towns to ensure they define and consolidate their role in Europe’s economic development and competitiveness.

By placing their main asset, their people, at the heart of their strategies, the ESIMeC partners will identify how workforce development can be the main driver for economic recovery, growth and resilience.

**Daniel Garnier**  
ESIMeC Lead Partner

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

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## A word from the Lead Expert

As Lead Expert for the ESIMeC project, I am very excited by the prospect of supporting the network cities to develop an effective response to the economic downturn.

During the Spring of 2010 I have toured ESIMeC’s nine partner cities with the lead partner. We’ve been asking the cities questions like: what was the main impact of the recession? What strategies have been adopted? What obstacles to recovery exist? How can ESIMeC contribute to removing them?

The conclusion is that workforce development and positioning are the key.

ESIMeC sets out to boost the economies of medium-sized cities which often have more limited resources than larger conurbations and are faced with major challenges. Their size often lends them a better quality of life, which can attract qualified jobs, and make it easier to get key players involved quickly. However, their sometimes weak academic and economic tissue means they can have a hard time keeping new graduates and attracting high value businesses.

The crucial issue is how to become more attractive internationally and promote workforce development so they can attract and retain 21st century businesses.

**Alison Partridge**  
ESIMeC Lead Expert

Alison Partridge is a founding member of Aurora, an award winning European consultancy founded in 2002. Aurora works with statutory agencies and NGOs to develop, implement and evaluate programmes that address their policy priorities. Alison is an EU affairs expert with more than 20 years experience of European policy and programmes, across the voluntary, statutory and private sectors. She specializes in European project management and fundraising.

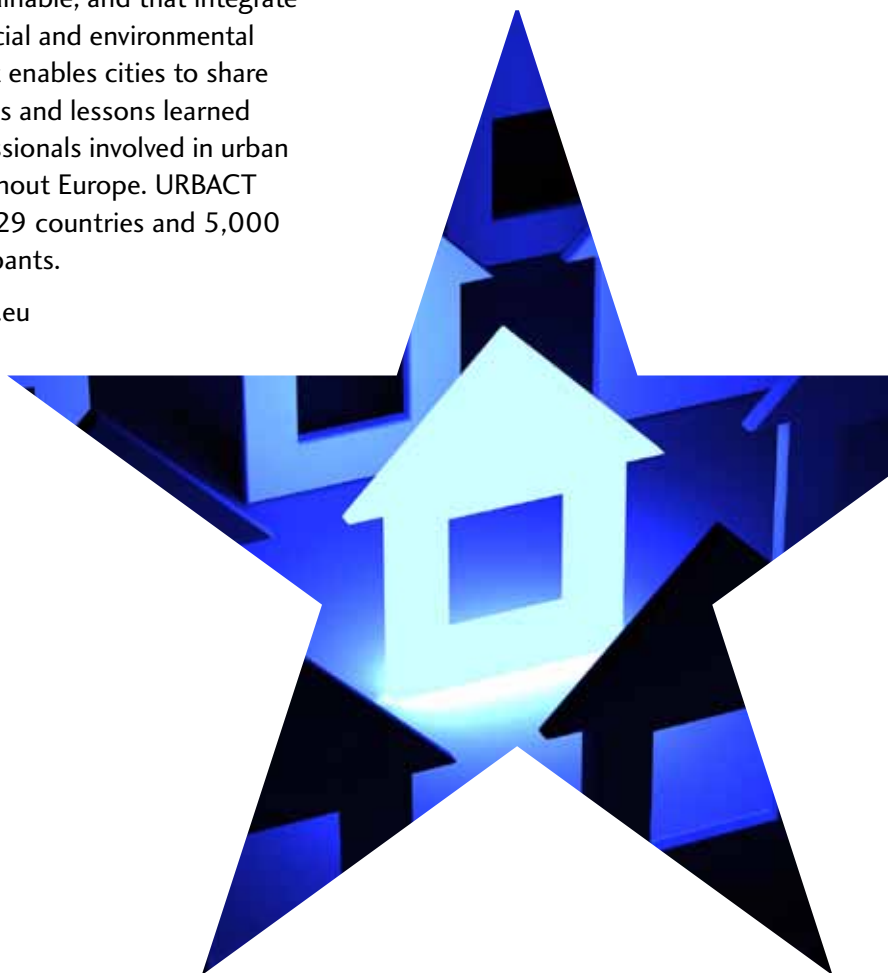
# About URBACT

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 255 cities, 29 countries and 5,000 active participants.

<http://urbact.eu>

Connecting cities  
Building successes



# Introduction

With the vast majority of people in Europe living in medium sized towns and cities, these towns and cities have a key role to play in Europe's economic development and competitiveness. But they often struggle to define what their role should be and what position they should occupy in Europe's economic fabric. Should medium sized cities merely service their local residents or can they really contribute to national and international growth?

The recent economic crisis has shown that in times of recession, medium sized towns and cities tend to be affected more adversely, as they often do not have the same level of economic and social resilience as large metropolitan areas.

A significant rise in unemployment and lack of capacity to absorb the newly unemployed, a reduction in number of businesses (downsizing, relocation to large conurbations, or bankruptcy), a dependence on one or two key sectors, and the reduction of spending power with its consequences on local businesses and public sector are some of the main impacts of the crisis on medium sized towns.

Medium sized cities also have a series of barriers to overcome to achieve

sustainable growth: lack of qualified workforce to meet the needs of current and future employers, out migration of qualified workforce, lack of entrepreneurial culture and confidence, lack of experience in partnership working, poor image by outsiders, and national expenditure programmes favouring large cities.

But medium sized cities have some very important assets and they must capitalise on those to secure a sustainable future: a better quality of life and a cleaner environment, a good transport infrastructure and lower levels of congestion, the availability of land for development, the ability and flexibility to act more quickly and to deliver pilot projects.



# ESIMeC

ESIMeC (Economic Strategies and Innovation in MEdium sized Cities) aims to create a network of medium sized cities which will develop innovative economic strategies to help these and similar cities cope better with the challenges of sustainable economic development, particularly in an economic downturn.

Based on the particularities, assets and needs of the partners, the network will explore more closely the role of medium sized cities in post crisis economic growth. It will focus on long term sustainability rather than short term solutions.

This is potentially a vast subject area and in order to establish a clear focus the network will concentrate upon demand led workforce development strategies as an instrument of sustainable economic recovery in medium sized cities. This is based on the premise that only by developing a highly skilled workforce can cities be in a position to attract and retain high value businesses and develop and maintain the innovative and entrepreneurial culture so pivotal to sustainable economic growth. This in turn will help to improve the image of medium sized towns, a barrier often cited.

ESIMeC will also explore how different tools – such as partnership working and positioning – can and should be used to facilitate workforce development.

It will explore the long term role of medium sized cities in this field and address a series of questions including:

- Which of the multiple actors in economic development need to be involved in developing and delivering effective demand led skills strategies?
- How can medium sized cities engage the right people (including industry, government and universities) effectively in this debate?
- How do we forecast new and constantly evolving employer skills needs in medium sized towns – particularly in new sectors such as green technologies and the knowledge economy?
- How can a skilled workforce help medium sized cities position themselves to attract and retain high value businesses?
- How can medium sized cities ensure that workforce development is progressed alongside major flagship economic development (or regeneration) projects in order to derive maximum benefit for citizens?

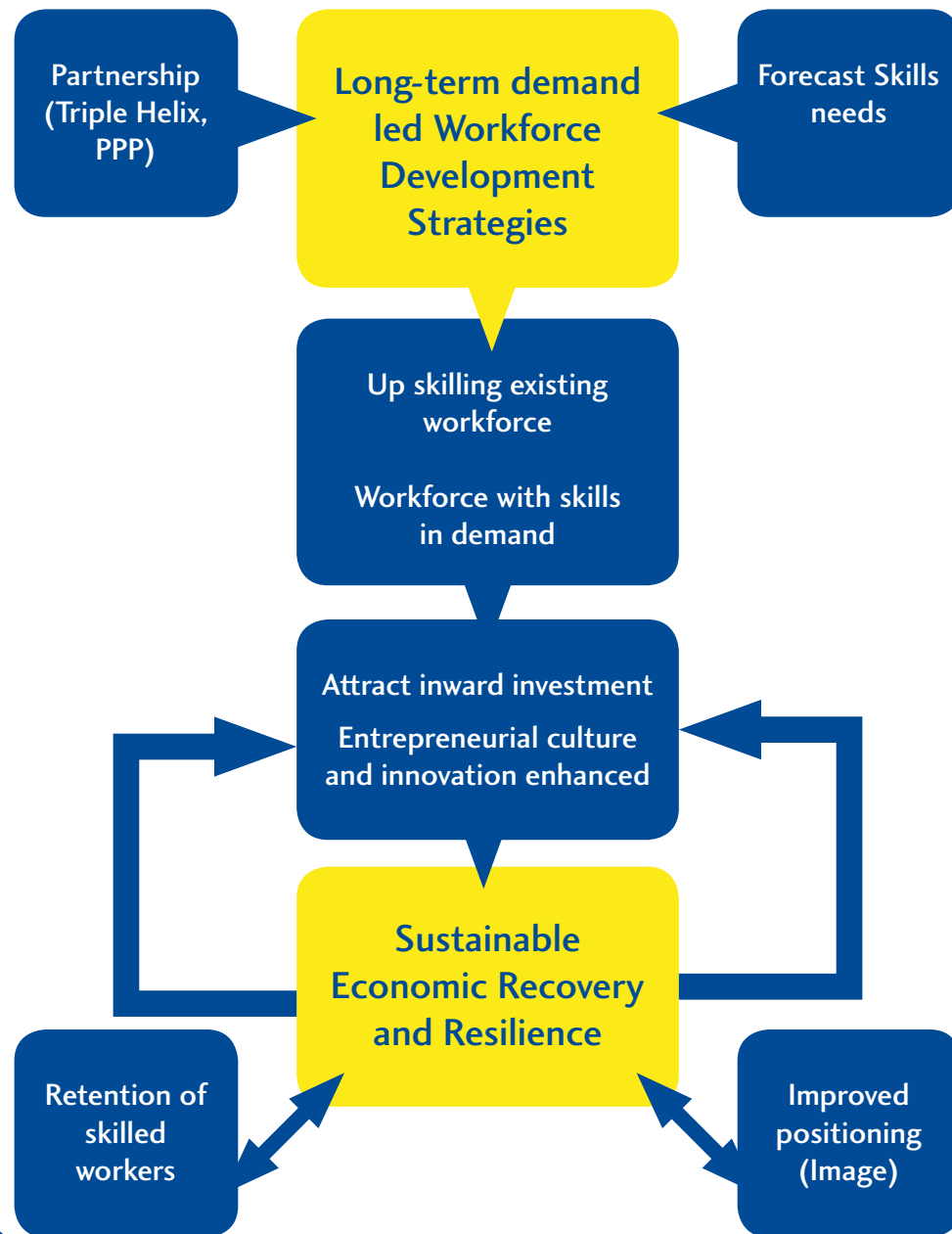
- How can medium sized cities help their businesses and citizens understand and value the potential of higher education and skills?
- Would including workforce development advice in business support services offered by cities help them to meet the skills needs of employers?
- How can medium sized cities fund workforce development in a context of contracting public sector budgets?

Each partner city will establish a Local Support Group which will create a Local Action Plan identifying key medium term priorities, projects and potential funding.

The partners will use the learning generated through transnational activities to inform their local actions and to support policy-makers and managers of operational programmes. They will also create a set of key principles for local leadership looking specifically at sustainable economic growth in medium sized cities to ensure that findings are transferred outside the network.



# ESIMeC Virtuous circle of sustainable growth



# ESIMeC partnership

The nine ESIMeC partner cities are all medium sized towns and cities where the main impact of the recession has been rising unemployment, particularly amongst young people. They all have a high proportion of micro-businesses and cite similar employment sectors, particularly knowledge-based businesses, as offering growth potential. Whilst some ESIMeC cities are home to a university, out migration of qualified young people is often a problem and, without exception, partners see workforce development as a key instrument of sustainable post-crisis economic growth.



# Albacete, Spain



Albacete is the most largest town in terms of population of the Castilla-La Mancha region, with 171,000 inhabitants. It is located in south east Spain and benefits from a strategic location in the main corridor linking Madrid to the Mediterranean coast.

The economic activity of the town is concentrated in 3 main sectors: manufacturing, construction and services. The very dynamic construction sector had been since 2000 the driving force behind the economic development of the town but it was also the first to be affected by the recession. This was combined with a gradual decline of the agricultural sector which used to be one of the region's key activity. Although manufacturing and construction are important, Albacete can be described as a city of services. The town experienced a huge and rapid

economic growth over the past 15 to 20 years followed by serious and deep decline during the current economic crisis. The unemployment rate is nearly 15% and there is a major mismatch between the skills in the workforce and the needs of local employers. Albacete sees much growth potential in green technologies and the city is driving demand in this sector by retrofitting municipal buildings to increase energy efficiency. It aims to remove dependency on fossil fuels and move to 100% renewable energy sources by 2012. However the training and education providers do not currently offer skills and qualifications in this field and do not seem able to react quickly to the evolving needs of employers.

## Albacete's key challenge

Develop multi-agency partnerships for sustainable economic growth and workforce development in emerging high skilled sectors, and in particular green technologies

## Albacete and ESIMeC

### Expectation

Albacete will use ESIMeC to boost its position as a centre of excellence in green technologies. It hopes to learn more about demand led workforce development strategies to help it

develop the appropriate skills and qualifications for this new employment sector.

## Contribution

Albacete will be able to offer its experience of participative decision making as well as its experience of developing and maintaining a strong Business Innovation Centre and Science and Technology Park and incubators with close links to the university.

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## Some Local Support Group members

**Science and Technology Park**

**FEDA** – Federation of businesses

**CEEI** - business innovation Centre

**AGECAM** - Energy Agency for Castilla-la-Mancha

**UGT and CCOO** – trade unions

**University of Castilla-la-Mancha**

**Chamber of Commerce**

**Institute of Renewable Energy**



# Basingstoke and Deane, United Kingdom



Located 80km west of London, the borough of Basingstoke and Deane comprises a large urban centre surrounded by small villages and large areas of countryside. It covers an area of 635km<sup>2</sup> and has a total population of 165,000 inhabitants.

Basingstoke is an old market town that underwent rapid growth in the 1960's when it was designated as an "expanded town" and chosen to house large numbers of London residents. The town capitalised on this rapid growth and its strategic location and attracted a significant number of multinational companies that still have their headquarters here today. This contributed to the development of a strong and diverse local economy and the town is not reliant on any particular sectors for its employment.

The town is involved in many multi sectoral economic recovery plans at local, sub regional and regional level. Whilst it has a relatively low unemployment rate at 5%, there are concerns about the mismatch between the skills in the workforce and those needed by existing and future employers. The town does not have its own university but is close to many good universities. It would like to embed a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in its citizens as this is seen as crucial to sustainable recovery.

## Basingstoke's key challenge:

Redeveloping an unfit for purpose and dated business park while ensuring the town has the right levels of skills to meet the needs and demands of existing and future employers.

## Basingstoke and ESIMeC Expectation

Basingstoke will use ESIMeC to learn more about how other medium sized towns adapt to economic change and to try and ensure it can use the recovery period as a springboard for sustainable economic growth. The ESIMeC exchange will help Basingstoke to look at how to close the gap between the changing skills needs of employers and the skills and qualifications in the workforce.

## Contribution

Basingstoke has a large amount of experience in business support and economic recovery. It has for example developed its own venture capital fund – which offers loans to viable businesses during the downturn. Basingstoke is also keen to share its experiences of marketing / positioning and partnership working.

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## Some Local Support Group Members

**Basingstoke College of Technology**

**Hampshire Economic Partnership**

**Innovation and Growth Team**

**Basingstoke Innovation Centre**

**Federation of Small Businesses**

**South East of England Development Agency**



# Besançon, France



Located in Eastern France, close to the Swiss border, Besançon is a city of 120,000 inhabitants. The town dates back to the Roman period and has always maintained an important administrative, legal and military role.

During the “Trente Glorieuses” (1945-1975), Besançon underwent important economic and demographic growth. It became the French capital of watch-making.

Nowadays, the local economy is dominated by public and private sector businesses. In 2008, 37% of employment was in the private sector while 32% was in the public sector. Manufacturing jobs have declined with the departure of the some of watch-making industry. However, an important knowledge-based industry, particularly in high precision engineering, was established. There is still a wide range of local firms

working in sectors such as health, car manufacturing and new technologies.

During the recession, Besançon has seen the closure of several company subsidiaries. Public sector finances are under enormous pressure and there are real problems with youth unemployment and disaffection. The city has a large youth population and needs to make the most of this important asset and offer training and employment opportunities.

## Besançon’s key challenge

The development of la Cité des Arts, a multipurpose arts and cultural centre, and ensuring the town has the right levels of skills to develop a large creative and cultural sector through working with local education providers.

## Besançon and ESIMeC

### Expectation

Besançon will use ESIMeC to learn more about how to use cultural industries as an economic driver. Its local action plan will concentrate on the development of a cultural quarter and will explore how to ensure that the workforce has the right skills and qualifications for the new employment opportunities there.

## Contribution

Besançon has a large amount of experience living with a large student and youth population. It is also currently working on cluster development, an area of interest to other partners.



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## Some Local Support Group Members

**Franche Comté Regional Council**

**Regional Directorate for Cultural Affairs**

**Regional Art School**

**Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

# Bistrita, Romania



Bistrita is the administrative capital of the county of Bistrita-Nasaud, located in north east Romania. With a population of 82,500 inhabitants, it is an important learning centre with 7 university faculties attended by a student population of over 7,200. It is also an important historic centre with heritage sites dating back to the Middle Ages.

The town's economy is quite diverse and relies on sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, distribution and tourism. The town's businesses include electro-technology, textile, glassware, plastics, food processing and heavy machinery.

Bistrita has 40% of its workforce still employed in manufacturing although this sector is in decline. It is home to several large industrial areas but has seen a sharp increase in unemployment during 2009/2010 (rising from 2%

to 9% in the 12 months to March 2010). This has further exacerbated the structural economic issues and led to a huge reduction in spending power.

## Bistrita's key challenge

Bistrita is developing a brand new business park and wants to ensure it has the adequate skills strategy to respond to the needs of current employer and potential future occupiers of the park.

## Bistrita and ESIMeC

### Expectation

Bistrita is involved in ESIMeC because it wants to learn about how other cities have adapted to structural economic change. It is particularly interested in public private partnerships, skills development and development of mixed use business sites. As a first time user of structural fund programmes it would also like to see how other cities have dealt with project management.

### Contribution

Bistrita is home to a number of large companies and has developed a positive relationship between the private and public sectors where local employers want to participate in the town's long-term vision.



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## Some Local Support Group Members

**Labour Force Agency**

**National Council of SMEs**

**SC Leoni SRL** – major local employer

**Europe Direct**

**Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

# Charleroi, Belgium



Charleroi, located 50 km south of Brussels, enjoys a strategic location within one of the most developed regions of the European Union and is located 40 km away from Brussels. It is an important road, waterway, rail, and air transport hub.

Charleroi is a French-speaking city and, with a population of 201,590 inhabitants, it is the third largest Belgian city.

Charleroi lies in the centre of a large coal basin called the Black Country but coal mining has now completely stopped. It was once an important glass-making, chemical, steel and electro-engineering centre but the local manufacturing has slowly moved to high-tech and highly specialised techniques as well as biotechnology. The majority of Belgian aerospace and aeronautical industry is concentrated near the airport. The presence of

large multinationals reflects a long and widely recognised tradition for savoir-faire. The development of new business parks such as the Aérople Activity Park has attracted new high-tech businesses.

Charleroi has an unemployment rate of 24% - more than double the national average. It also has a lower qualified workforce than at regional level with 50% of people seeking work not having further or higher education. At the same time there is a shortage of skilled workers for technical occupations to meet the needs of local employers.

## Charleroi's key challenge

The entire redevelopment of the town centre to turn Charleroi into an important centre for retail, culture and leisure and ensuring the local workforce has the right levels of skills required by the new employers through re-skilling and up-skilling opportunities.

## Charleroi and ESIMeC

### Expectation

Charleroi aims to use ESIMeC to learn more about how best to move from being a convergence region to a competitiveness region. It is particularly interested in exploring other funding models to support sustainable economic development. It is also

interested in looking at how to position the city and improve its image to support sustainable economic recovery.

## Contribution

Charleroi has successfully developed its airport to turn it into an international hub and subsequently established a cluster focusing on aeronautical industries.

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## Some Local Support Group Members

**Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

**IGRETEC - economic development agency**

**FOREM - employment agency**

**Charleroi Airport**

**UCAC - retail association**

**Trade Unions**



# Cherbourg, France



The Communauté Urbaine de Cherbourg, also known by its acronym CUC, is the intercommunal structure bringing together the city of Cherbourg-Octeville and some of the towns nearby. Cherbourg is located in northwestern Normandy in France, in the Manche Departement. With 88 209 inhabitants, it is the biggest urban centre of the Manche Department.

Cherbourg is a maritime city located at the entrance of the English Channel. The port of Cherbourg is inside one of the world's largest artificial sea defences. It concentrates a lot of military and civil activities, such as sailing, cross-channel traffic, cruises, or trade. The maritime side of Cherbourg also expresses itself in La Cité de la Mer, a unique complex dedicated to the deep sea and its conquest, which is located in the old transatlantic harbour terminal.

The Urban Community also boasts a university area as well as research

laboratories, commercial and industrial areas, and a science and business park (Technopole Cherbourg Normandie). The economy relies mainly on major sectors like nuclear or maritime industries, even though new activities are emerging like tourism, creative industries, and green technologies.

Cherbourg has seen a long term structural decline in maritime and associated industries. It is home to a large nuclear sector employing 7,000 people. The crisis has reduced cross channel freight by 27% between 2007 and 2009. Visitor numbers were also down by 8% during 2009.

## Cherbourg's key challenge

Cherbourg would like to develop an integrated and sustainable strategy focusing on maritime industries and what skills development measures and programmes it will need to implement to support those industries.

## Expectation

Cherbourg would like to be able to harness the knowledge, technological expertise and skills of some of its employers (particularly nuclear) to the benefit of the local economy. It will use its Local Action Plan to develop an integrated and sustainable economic diversification and growth strategy linked to the demand led skills agenda. There will be a particular focus on maritime industries.

## Contribution

Cherbourg has been experiencing structural decline for several years and will be able to share its learning with other ESIMeC cities. It has good practice experiences in the development of several emerging sectoral clusters. At the same time the city works with an employer group on skills and employment issues and will be able to use this group to explore options for forecasting future skills needs.

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## Some Local Support Group Members

**House for employment and training**

**Tourist Office**

**Technopole**

**Chamber of Commerce**

**Regional Council of Lower Normandy**

**City of Cherbourg - Octeville**

**Council of Département de la Manche**



# Debrecen, Hungary



Debrecen, situated 220 kilometres from Budapest, has almost 205,000 inhabitants and is the second largest city in Hungary. The city has a rich history dating back more than six centuries. It is the cultural, administrative, research and economic centre of the region.

Debrecen is an important university town and also a place for conferences and research seminars.

One of the main economic successes of Debrecen is that it could develop a long-standing and productive co-operation between the academic, business and public sectors. As a result, spin off companies, research competences and incubator facilities have developed. Moreover, Debrecen is developing a new health and well being industry.

Since 2004 Debrecen has its own international airport and sees this as an opportunity for further development.

Debrecen is experiencing a decline in traditional industry (food and agriculture) although these still play a major role in the economy. It is home to an internationally renowned university with 30,000 students but the higher and vocational education offer is not always linked to the needs of the workforce. There is also a high incidence of young (qualified) people leaving to study or work outside Hungary.

## Debrecen's key challenge

Although Debrecen enjoys some excellent research and academic facilities the training offered does not always match the needs of existing and future employers in the city. Using public-private-academic partnership, Debrecen aims to develop a skills strategy that will address the city's future needs.

## Debrecen and ESIMeC

### Expectation

Debrecen is in receipt of large amounts of ERDF funding from the convergence programme. It is keen to learn from other cities how they have managed to reduce dependency on EU funding. It will also explore how to link the training and education offer to current

and future employer needs, particularly in the knowledge economy.

## Contribution

Debrecen brings a large amount of experience to ESIMeC particularly in terms of university-industry-municipality cooperation. The university has an excellent track record of spin off companies, research competences and is home to an incubator.

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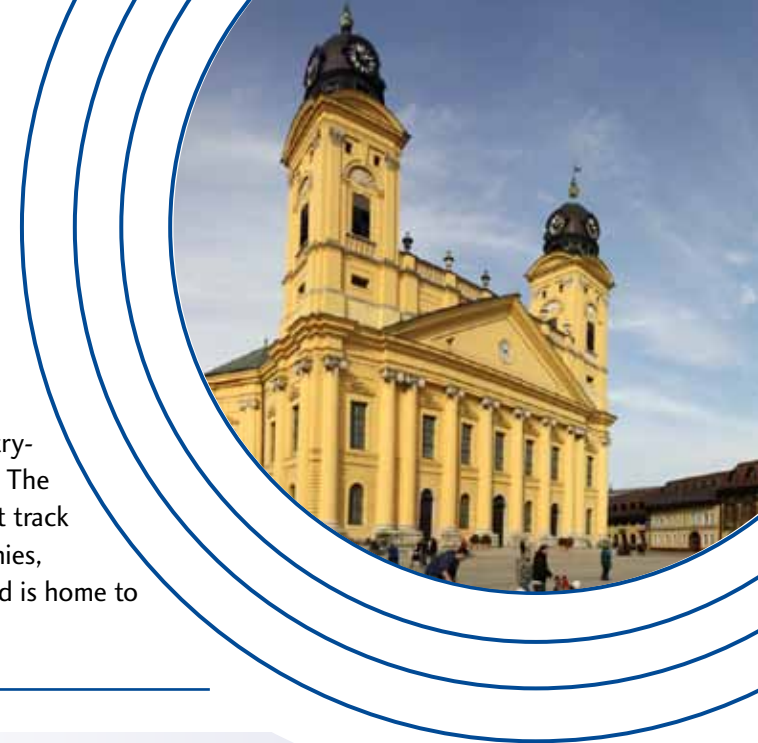
## Some Local Support Group Members

**Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

**North Plain Regional Development Agency**

**University of Debrecen**

**Technology Transfer Office**



# Gävle, Sweden



Gävle is located on the Baltic Sea about 160km north of Stockholm with a population of 94,352. The city is the logistic hub of central Sweden with good transport and communications infrastructure. Gävle has a diverse economic base with both major international companies and small and medium businesses. It also has a large student population attending the University of Gävle, established in 1977.

The technology Park of Gävle is home to a significant number of growth companies including a world leading GIS cluster. However, one in five of the adult population is employed by the municipality. There is a low level of education and a culture of dependency on employment in traditional industry. The municipality has recently launched a long term vision for the City which focuses on the 5 themes of leadership and

cooperation; quality of life; skills, innovation and entrepreneurship; infrastructure and communications and pride in the city. This is the result of a long term and comprehensive civic engagement and consultation process.

## Gävle's key challenge

Use innovation and the knowledge economy to raise aspirations among the town's population and improve the perception of higher education and workforce development amongst businesses and society to ensure the right level of skills to meet the town's development plans.

## Expectation

Gävle wishes to use the post crisis period as a springboard for accelerated adaptation to economic change – i.e. as an opportunity to achieve a step change rather than slow structural adjustment. It is keen to learn from other ESIMEC partners what they are doing to promote innovation and entrepreneurship and how they are instilling a culture where higher level education and skills are valued by society and business.

## Contribution

Gävle brings a wealth of experience to the partnership – particularly recent experience of developing a comprehensive future vision for the city. It is home to a globally renowned GIS cluster which has been part funded through ERDF. It will also be able to offer experience and expertise on how to adapt to structural decline of traditional industry by developing a new business structure and a culture of enterprise.

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## Some Local Support Group Members

**University of Gävle**

**Chamber of Commerce**

**Confederation of Swedish Enterprise**

**Företagarna (SME)**

**Employment services**

**Gävle Technology Park**

**Regional authority**



# Sabadell, Spain



The city of Sabadell is located in the Region of Catalonia (Spain). With a population of over 207.000 inhabitants, it is the fifth largest city in Catalonia.

Sabadell enjoys a strategic location in the middle of the main productive area and surrounded by technological centres and universities yet only 20 km from Barcelona.

Sabadell's economic activity has changed in only a few years. From an economy dominated by the industrial sector during more than one century, it has become a city in which the majority of its workforce is employed in the service sector. Nevertheless, the industrial segment still plays an important role in its economy.

Sabadell is experiencing a decline in traditional manufacturing industry (particularly textiles) with a rise in the services sector. It has high

unemployment (17%) and a huge rise in temporary employment contracts with 87% of all new employment contracts in January 2010 being temporary. The construction sector has been particularly badly affected by the downturn leaving many unskilled and qualified young people unemployed.

Sabadell is represented by Vapor Llonch, a municipal organisation responsible for the development of Sabadell since 1991. It aims to promote the development of the territory, applying criteria that seek to correct social and economic imbalances.

## Sabadell's key challenge

Sabadell aims to be a knowledge economy city for the 21st century and to achieve its goal it needs to develop an extensive business support offer that will include workforce development as a key element of its strategy.

## Sabadell and ESIMEC

Sabadell is interested in developing a knowledge based economy based around cluster and SME development. It is in the process of developing an integrated business support offer, including how to help businesses with workforce development issues and ensure that the city is able to respond to the evolving needs of new employers.

## Contribution

Sabadell has a local agreement for sustainable economic recovery which has been developed with a wide range of stakeholders and this experience will be invaluable to other partners. It is also regional lead in the food and health cluster – sectors with potential for sustainable growth.



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## Some Local Support Group Members

**Chamber of Commerce**

**Bank of Sabadell**

**Trade unions**

**Design University**

**Catalan Polytechnic University**

**Sabadell Savings Bank**

**Ramon Llull Design University**

A large, bright yellow five-pointed star is centered on a solid blue background. The star is slightly offset to the right and top. In the upper right corner, there are faint, semi-transparent grey silhouettes of birds in flight.

[www.urbact.eu/esimec](http://www.urbact.eu/esimec)