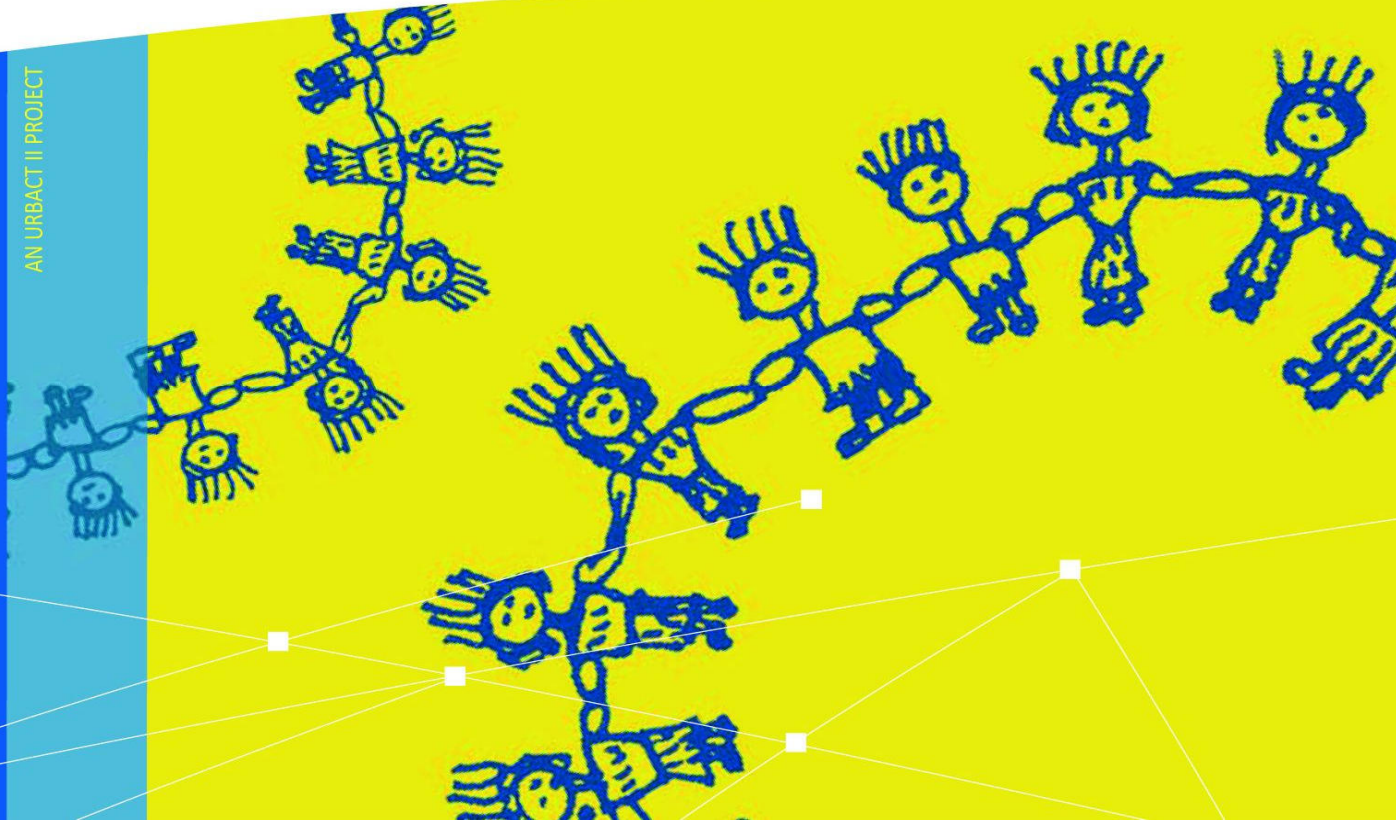



Lead Expert's Report on Meetings in Dębica

May 2011

AN URBACT II PROJECT



 <p>TOGETHER Territories of Coresponsibility</p>	<p>URBACT II</p> <p>LEAD EXPERT'S REPORT</p> <p>1-6 MAY 2011</p>	<p>Report from visit to Dębica</p>
--	--	---

1. Socio-economic Background

Dębica is an old industrial town in South East Poland lying on the main cross-European highway that traverses Poland via Krakow and enters Ukraine by Lvov. With a population approaching 50,000, Dębica, located within a wider county - 'Powiat'- of 130,000 people, stills retains its previous industrial character. It is the home of a huge tyre producing plant owned by the US multi-national Goodyear which employs 2,300 workers; has several paint producers in the region including the Swedish owned Tikkurila which employs 400 people; a smaller factory making meat products; and several new companies on an old industrial estate on the edge of the town. In the service sector, the largest employer is the main hospital with 500 staff.

Building and manufacturing accounts for 48% of the local employment, a far higher proportion than in most parts of the European Union, with the private services sector having a significantly lower proportion of employees than is common elsewhere in Europe. While its economic structure remains heavily reliant on manufacturing, the unemployment level is 9% and is lower than in the wider region. While this figure is high for Poland, it is below the current EU average and is relatively low compared to some other European countries.

The town is situated in the Sub-Carpathian region, the most underdeveloped and poorest part of Poland. The signs of the shortcomings inherited from the Stalinist era are not hard to find. Most obviously, public infrastructure remains in a poor condition. A dilapidated railway station;

an old bus station; poor communications for both pedestrians and road traffic across the main railway tracks effectively dividing the town in two; cracked pavements; badly maintained roads with poor drainage: this is a town whose infrastructure bears the hallmarks of the past.



2. Recent Developments

However, there have been important achievements over past few years. Thus, there are rows of tidily maintained private houses and newly-renovated blocks of flats. More generally, the availability of European Structural Funds has been crucial.

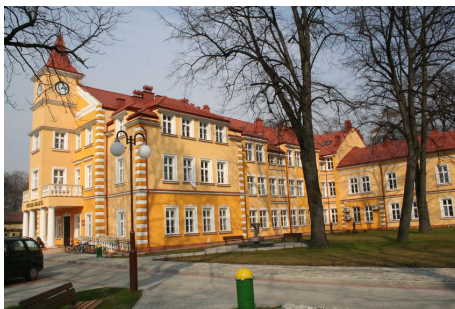


European money has been used to renovate the sewage and water system of the city, while more recently the changes in European Regional Development Fund eligibility rules have meant that these funds have been used to improve the old housing apartment blocks, with many having new windows and heating systems installed, along with exterior insulation as major energy efficiency improvements. European funds have been used to build a huge swimming complex with both a 50 metre and a 25 metre pool. Along with the Igloo stadium this forms part of a major sporting complex for the city which both gives modern facilities to local people and helps attract national sporting events to the city. School playgrounds have been renovated and plans are underway to rebuild a number of schools, one partly designated as a training facility to be eligible for EU funding.

There has also been the development of shopping malls on the edge of the city which inevitably rely on car usage, while an old industrial plant making fridge freezers which closed has been sold off in plots to individual companies and entrepreneurs. While much of the large area remains derelict, some companies have moved on site and begun to open up new units.

3. The Role of the Council

The municipality has twenty-one elected councillors and a directly-elected Mayor. Pawel Wolicki was in office from 2007-2009 but after disagreements with the council he stood down, only to win re-election as Mayor in autumn 2010.



The municipality has a staff of 150 people and a relatively small budget of 120 million zloty, approximately €30 million. It has responsibilities in education, social care, planning and economic development, housing, culture and sport, as well as legal and financial affairs.

The municipality shares many of these responsibilities with the county – ‘powiat’ – while it also receives financial support from the Sub-Carpathian region. There are seven municipal companies which have responsibility for heating, energy, housing, water supply, cleaning and communications.

▪ **Culture :**

There is a significant role in the council’s activities which is given to both sport and culture. There are three council-run cultural centres. Elzbieta Kesik is the Director of the largest Cultural House, which puts on classes in dance, performing arts, singing and aerobics. The other two concentrate more on drama and painting. More than five hundred young people take part in these classes during the year while the Cultural House cooperates with schools. In addition it hosts broader cultural events which attract participants from across the region, such as the weekend dance contest with 1500 people taking part. During our visit on 3rd May the House staged a dramatic Polish opera ‘Halka’ by Stanislaw Moniuszko performed before a packed audience of one thousand. While the main operatic roles were taken by eight professional artists, the accompanying support was all voluntary. The classical music was played by the Dębica youth orchestra while the two choirs and dancers – one adult troupe, one children’s- provided the colourful supporting cast. This was a truly combined effort with the municipality and its cultural centre offering the venue and technical support, while a number of voluntary and civic cultural associations worked together with professional artists to stage the production. As Elzbieta said,



“this production reflects our general philosophy. We work with associations. We give associations our staff and equipment. The opera is one example of our integrated activity.. People should always integrate and co-operate and not compete. The URBACT project can help this and establish new priorities for activities in the town.”

▪ **Social Care :**

The town has gradually developed its social care role. The main day care centre for elderly people is based in a modern building near the city centre. It opened over a year ago and takes 40-50 people a day.

In terms of co-responsibility, some of the activities are suggested and organised by the users themselves e.g. barbecues, when the users also get sponsorship from local bakers and butchers.



The needs of those with mental disability or psychiatric disorders are met in a day centre which was formerly a works hostel. Here a range of activities are undertaken, tailored to meet the distinctive, different needs of the users. Activities vary from needlework and embroidery, arts and crafts, painting, to computer usage. Some users are trained in the small kitchen to prepare food and a number of them are given the responsibility to run the cafeteria's budget. In all, ten users are given this responsibility for sales and accounts on a rotating basis.



During our visit, the suggestion was made that a pilot action could be to compare the work of this facility with similar establishments in Mulhouse and Trento, near Pergine.

4. The Future

The Mayor is pleased with the developments that he has brought about over the last few years. With regard to future infrastructure, he sees two main capital projects as his priorities. Firstly, the town has to improve access to the main trans-European motorway which goes from Berlin and Dresden to Lvov and where direct links to the centre of Dębica need to be established. Secondly, the railway needs to be improved so that speeds to both local airports are increased, freight cargo times enhanced and also new tunnels and bridges built across the railway tracks so that the railway no longer acts as a barrier cutting Dębica in half.

More generally, Mayor Wolicki has a very clear strategy for the city. He uses the strap-line, 'Dębica: The Open Town' by which he means open for everything from investment to sport, culture and people. He sees it as particularly important that the town is open to Europe where he promotes the Europe of Towns initiative.

"Four years ago, we had one twin city. Now we have got twelve, with five more waiting to be signed."

For the Mayor this is not a formal exercise. Wolicki is looking for practical co-operation at citizen level with managers of cultural centres, social workers, teachers and others going on exchanges to learn best practice and new thinking.

“I would like every child in Dębica to have at least one free school visit abroad. Five hundred pupils have gone over the last three years.”

5. URBACT and the Local Support Group

The Mayor chairs the Local support Group of the URBACT TOGETHER project. He has helped to give it some impetus after a difficult start during the period of political uncertainty. Currently, the group has 21 members, although the afternoon meeting which the TOGETHER partners had with the group was much smaller. The group has a marked preponderance of elected councillors and senior council officials and managers within its membership. The local URBACT co-ordinator Kasia Rokosz has managed to mobilise senior personnel around the project but the engagement of civic organisations and citizens remains limited. Perhaps, in part, this reflects the relative weakness of voluntary and community associations within the town.



The LSG has held three meetings since November 2010. Within the project it has organised eight focus groups: with a group of elderly people, an unemployed group; the scouts; a group of young people; the fire brigade, teachers; the police and a group for those people with psychiatric disorders. In a number of instances there were misgivings within the groups, while when issues of ill-being had been written on post-it notes and clarification was requested on the precise meaning, sometimes nobody wanted to admit they had written the note.

The LSG had held discussions on what it sees as potential priorities for the town. It remains to be seen how this corresponds to the ideas coming out from the focus groups and the third ‘mixed’ meeting. One of the doubts that has been raised is how to fund pilot actions when budgets are so restricted.

However, Kasia and her colleague Monika have made swift progress in the development of the project over the last three months. The data from the focus groups is now being entered onto the Council of Europe software system and will soon be analysed. Some final focus groups are being organised while the third ‘mixed’ meetings of the focus groups are being planned. These will look at the outcomes of the focus groups and suggest potential pilot actions. The fast progress that is being made, combined with the top level political support for the project within the town, means that by the time of the Salaspils meeting at the end of June, the results of the focus groups and proposed pilot actions will be available.

Jon Bloomfield – 23th May 2011