

Can European cities adapt to the Europe 2020 challenges?

It will be hard work, but yes, they can!

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The new European 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable, inclusive growth and how it may impact cities and urban development

In the same year as Europe slowly starts to awake from the nightmare of the worst economic recession since WWII, the sovereign debt crisis and a troubled process of reformulation of institutions, Europe kisses goodbye to the missed Lisbon Strategy that intended to make it “the most competitive economy in the world” and sets new hopeful goals for the present decade that should guide it towards a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth until 2020.

While the designation chosen for the new strategy, Europe 2020, still rings kind of science fiction to most (in the line of titles such as 2001 Space Odyssey or Space 1999) the goals it sets are expected to be feasible in real life, something that however has not been achieved with its predecessor, the Lisbon Strategy, with its most popular target – a 3% of GDP investment in Science and Research – still far in the horizon for most Member States. Can such goals as a 75% the employment rate, the reduction of school drop-out rates to less than 10% and the same 3% of GDP investment in science and research, be reached this time, and are they compatible with additional goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% (or even 30%) compared to 1990 levels, and reduction of poverty, by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion?

If they can – and for all that believe in the European project the only possible

answer must be, “yes, we can!”, albeit with differentiated levels of conviction – for sure a lot of innovation and a lot of changes, in a lot of different aspects, will be required. And as we well know European, Gary Hamel, once said “*don’t tell me that change will come from the top – I have never seen the monarchs setting up a republic*”. And at the basis of Europe’s governance structure, directly influencing all aspects of the lives of over 60% of its population that lives on them, we find the traditional engines of innovation, change and growth in our continent – but also the spreaders of pollution and magnets for all the poor and excluded – now, once again, called into battle: the European cities. Can cities – and therefore Europe – grow smarter, sustainable and inclusive all at once? Yes, they can – and some cities are proving that already – but, oh my, it’s a tough challenge, indeed.

Introduction – the Urbact cities are already fighting the Europe 2020 war

The Europe 2020 strategy may have seen its birth this year, but European cities have been for long trying to conciliate the need for local innovation, that creates jobs and economic growth, with sustainable development that is felt on the quality of life of its inhabitants and a permanent fight against social inclusion. The URBACT programme, the programme of the European Union for sustainable urban development, when born in 2002 immediately focused on the sustainable and social dimensions, as well as the economic dimension of urban development, and when the renewed URBACT II programme was launched in 2007, three thematic poles have been created, that exactly map the growth priorities of the 2020 strategy: Cities, Engines of Economic Development and

Job Creation (the smart dimension); Cities, Social Inclusion and Governance; and Cities and Integrated Social Development.

URBACT supported projects are grouped under the Thematic Poles in accordance with their focus, but most projects have a transversal nature since – as now it has been “mainstreamed” into EU policies – it is nearly impossible to tackle urban development, or any form of development, from just one dimension.

A good example of this approach is the project UNIC (<http://urbact.eu/en/projects/innovation-creativity/unic/homepage/>) which due to the relevance of its approach has been considered as a FAST TRACK project by the European Commission, meaning that the initiatives stemming out of the project are given particular priority by the Commission.

The UNIC project aim is to allow all European cities and regions impacted by economic transition – from a traditional economy with strong “heritage” value conveying cultural identity, towards a sustainable innovation economy – to anticipate, prevent and address the economic, cultural and social consequences of these changes and to begin moving effectively towards a sustainable innovation economy linking research and education, economy, culture, social, environment and urban promotion. Gathering local authorities, local stakeholders and managing authorities responsible for support programmes in 9 European cities, the project has initially – within its development phase, from April to October 2008 – assessed local policies and practices, in particular towards SMEs, and will – in its implementation phase – contribute to the development of Local Action Plans (LAP) for company support in the regions involved, using European, national and regional funding sources. The LAPs have now been formally signed by the City Mayors and counter-signed by the Commissioner for

Regional Policy on the past 20th of May 2010 in Brussels, and the cities should now move into implementation of its policy priorities, outside of the scope of UNIC and making use of other Community sources of funding, benefiting from its “Fast Track” label. The signature of the Regional Policy Commissioner into these cities LAPs is also a sign of the commitment of the European Commission into the implementation of these priorities in these cities.

While UNIC is not alone in this race for finding smarter, sustainable and inclusive growth models – other URBACT projects such as ESIMEC, for Economic Strategies and Innovation in Medium-sized Cities or CityRegion.Net, addressing the role of cities in integrated regional developments, are also cutting across these 3 dimensions of growth in their quest for new local measures and policies – the sectoral focus of UNIC, grouping towns in which decay of its main industrial sector, ceramics, has at once caused economic recession, left strong unsolved environmental issues and caused social exclusion, forcing cities to address all these issues in parallel, makes it a clear case study for the role that cities may play in the success of Europe 2020 strategy.

Is it possible for cities to grow smarter, sustainable and inclusive? The UNIC example

"A squalid ugliness on a scale so vast and overpowering that it became sublime"

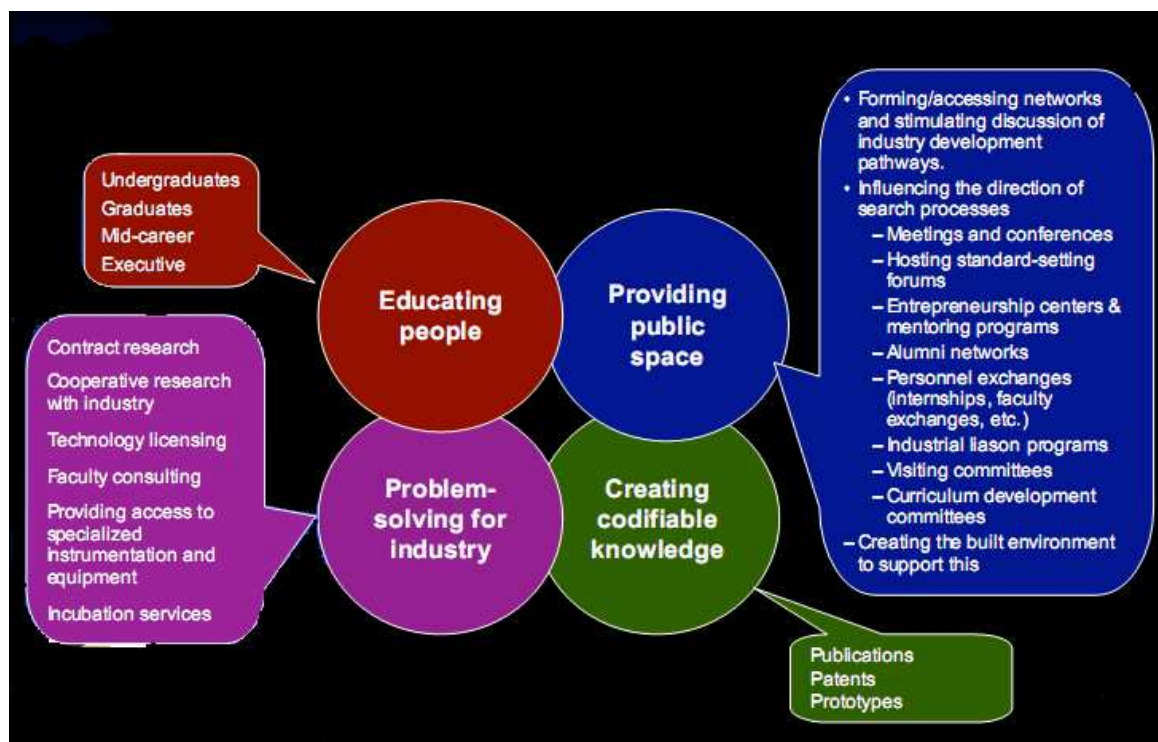
The landscape described in this sentence from Arnold Bennett's 1907 novel "The Death of Simon Fuge" is none other Stoke-on-Trent, also known as "The Potteries", the heart of the UK's ceramics industry and one of the 9 cities members of the UNIC Thematic Network a project that is looking for innovative ways forward for cities that have grown, economically, culturally and demographically around the ceramics sector.

The vision from Arnold Bennett reflects well what ceramic cities used to be: dirty, ugly towns with a skyline made of chimneys that continuously spewed black smoke to the air. The UNIC project is about what Ceramic Cities want to be: innovative, dynamic and inclusive cities, that have overcome their economic dependence on a single, and inevitably declining, traditional sector, while reinforcing the unique cultural heritage that such a sector has left them with, such as the “Delft blue” color or the luxury image inevitably associated with “Porcelaine de Limoges”. The principal challenge will be to put forward the policies to be carried out to staunch the decline: to increase “traditional know-how”, to support new initiatives in innovation, to work on a better match between heritage and innovation in order to offer a new image of the cities and thus to

reinforce their “attractiveness” while offering living conditions, professional and personal development perspectives likely to “gain loyalty” from inhabitants and companies, and also attract new ones.

In order to do so, UNIC cities must build on their competitive factors, often related with their tradition and heritage to set the context and stimulate the creation of local knowledge (thus becoming “smarter” cities), namely through intervention – direct or indirect – in 4 areas, as pictured below: provision of public space, educating people, creating and disseminating knowledge and contributing to problem solving for industry. Public research centres and universities are key players, as they can contribute to all four.

Picture 1 – New knowledge creation dimension (“Becoming smarter cities”)

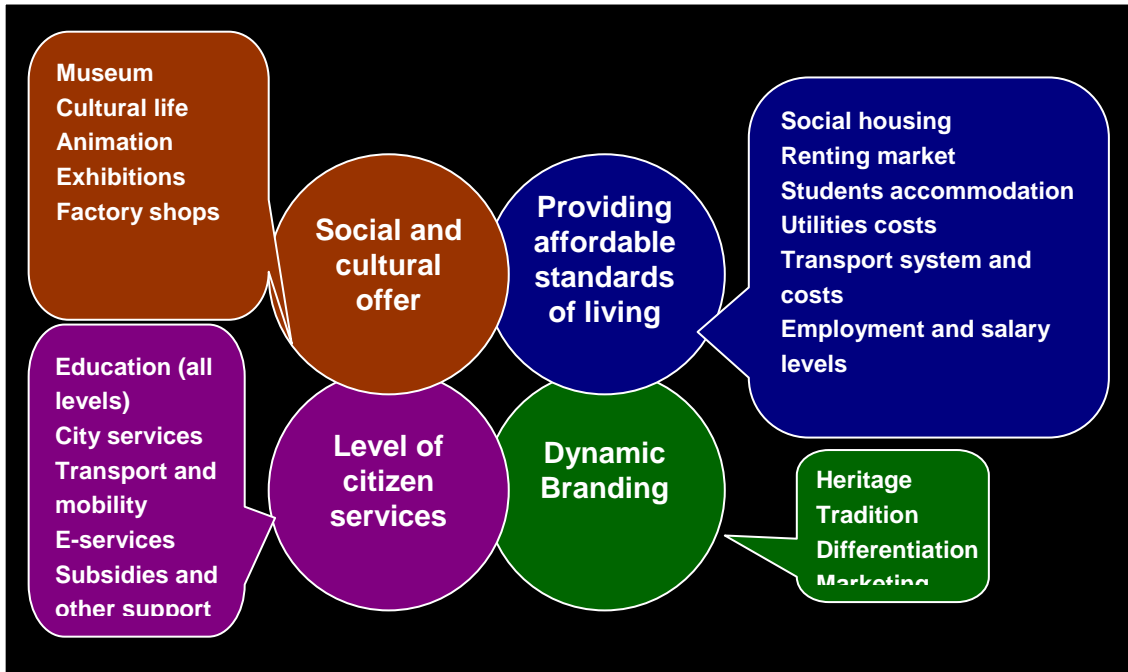


A city that is not able to provide competitive offers in the 4 components above will not be able to foster the creation of knowledge, or to become smarter, and will lose the possibility to follow an innovation-led growth path – which is possibly the only sustainable path for growth in Europe.

But for a competitive affirmation of cities and regions in a dynamic context, another dimension must also be considered, important for the attraction, retention and inclusion of talents (the “City as an inclusive centre of attraction”), which are in turn

also vital for knowledge creation: the “inclusion (and retention)” dimension, through intervention in another 4 areas: capacity to offer social and cultural life, affordable housing, appropriate and universal level of services, and a dynamic and attractive “brand” and image.

Picture 2 – New identity creation dimension (“City as an inclusive centre of attraction”)



The two dimensions – “**Smarter cities**” and “**Inclusive cities**” – are not absolutely independent. On the contrary, quite often an intervention in one area causes an effect in the other, while some efforts lay in-between these two dimensions. This “grey area” between the two dimensions above-mentioned is in itself a third dimension for intervention, referred within the scope of the UNIC project as “**Integrated Urban Approach**” that is linked with **sustainability** actions.

All the UNIC cities have already started their path towards becoming “smarter”, sustainable, inclusive cities, and the goal of the UNIC project is to help them in going further into that path, in particular by sharing experiences and

practices and by mutual learning that can then be reflected in their local action.

How the local action plans of UNIC cities may contribute to Europe 2020 strategy

The 9 partner cities within UNIC have presented their Local Action Plans, for evolving into a next dimension in terms of knowledge and innovation, inclusion and sustainability, in May this year. These Local Action Plans are now in the process of implementation and provide a good illustration of how European cities can contribute to Europe 2020 strategy, along the 3 dimensions defined for growth, as can be seen from the following examples.

The 9 Local Action Plans from the UNIC cities include more than a 100

Creating codifiable knowledge for smarter cities: Limoges “Pole Européene de Ceramique”

Limoges has set up as a priority to strengthen its position as European centre of research on ceramics.



actions intended to promote innovation at local, strengthen industry competitiveness, address urban integration of ceramic material

Limoges has set up as a priority to strengthen its position as European centre of research on ceramics.



Such goal will be pursued with the launch at the end of 2010 of the European Centre of Ceramics (ECC) which will bring together on the same site (on ESTER Science Park) the ENSCI (National Industrial Ceramics Engineer School), the SPCTS laboratory (Ceramic Processes and Surface Treatments Sciences) and the GEMH laboratory (Heterogeneous Materials Study Group) and that is expected to become a reference for European research in the sector.

in the city, develop the cities' cultural and tourism potential and promote cities' image.

Some of the actions are already on the ground, while others will start to be implemented in the near future, often with resource to structural funds.

Integrating local industry with artists and residents, for greater inclusion through cultural events: Stoke-on-Trent British Ceramic Biennial



The "grey" city of Stoke-on-Trent has come up with what has become one of the most thrilling events in British vivid cultural life: The British Ceramics Biennial, a cultural but also economic event organized every two years at "the Potteries".

This event, described in by The Guardian newspaper as "although the current climate discourages daring, a sign that the will and potential are still present in the Potteries" is not only a showroom for local ceramic companies, but also an opportunity for craftsmen, artisans and individual designers to mainstream their work close to the great public and larger companies and thus contribute to their economic inclusion.

The actions planned by UNIC partners aim specifically at the Ceramic sector but often have a broader reach, and include initiatives in sustainability, training and education, cultural and tourism fields with an impact at all levels of city life. The results already achieved confirm that while the challenges are high, and traditional sectors such as ceramics will need to

continue to pursue their innovation path in quest for increased competitiveness, changes in the cities environment are already visible.

Such visible aspects include the renewal of several streets and public buildings in the Spanish city of Castellón making use of energy efficient ceramic material or material built from recycled waste, contributing

Promoting sustainability and innovation: Aveiro Sustainability Park

Aveiro's Sustainability Park includes 199.000 m2 of the noblest areas of the city (including a "green" area of 220 hectares) and that are suffering an integrated intervention with the desiderata to make a better place to live, visit, study and work.



One of its main areas of concern is mobility and with well defined objectives to increase and promote cycling and other uses of sustainable modes.

A significant portion of this area has already a Wi-Fi coverage and the "Sustainability Park" includes also an area that will have the functionalities of living lab, where local innovative companies can install their products and have the local population testing and helping to improve them.

at the same time to technological development, industry strengthening and sustainable urban development. Or Stoke-on-Trent and Aveiro massive programmes for vocational training of staff made redundant by the shutdown of ceramic factories, with excellent success rates in terms of employment in other sectors. Or also Delft dynamic marketing campaign, built around the Delft Blue famous image, that has been contributing to the attractive image of the town for tourists as well as students and migrant talents.

Conclusions – yes we can, but the way ahead is definitely challenging

The Europe 2020 strategy offers us a vision where knowledge intensive companies develop green and sustainable technologies that contribute for improving the quality of life of not only some, but all or most of Europe's citizens. For cities such as Limoges, Stoke-on-Trent or Castellón, which until only recently have based their growth in the once polluting, low tech, blue collar "low qualifications and low wages" based, ceramics industry, this meaning coming from a long way back and requires an in-depth transformation process.

Is it challenging? Yes, it is, and for sure that some cities will be able to deal with it quicker and with more success than others. The reassuring part is that such

a process has already started, even before the first lines of Europe 2020 strategy have been drafted in Brussels office. Projects such as UNIC, started in 2008, and other Urbact projects are the clear sign that cities are committed to innovation and to an urban development and growth as smart, sustainable and inclusive as it possibly comes. The fact that they decide to do it in networks of cities means that they realize that cooperation and knowledge exchange are the way for all of them to move ahead faster and steadier, which is something that nobody will disagree with.

Can they do it? In UNIC we believe that, yes we can, and all the achievements so far point in that direction. See you in 2020, as for now we have work to do.

URBACT II

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 300 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants

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