URBACT CITY FESTIVAL . NICOSIA

The Battle for Talent

Why will people choose your city?

Talent City Mission Lab · 60 minutes · Day 2

Facilitated by Tiago Ferreira

#URBACTfest

urbact.eu/city-festival-2026

URBACT CITY FESTIVAL
29-30 September 2026 - Nicosia, Cyprus

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SETTING THE CHALLENGE

Cities compete for people now

Not just investment

The decisive question has shifted from “how do we attract companies?” to “why would anyone choose to stay, return or move here?”



YOUR MISSION TODAY

“Your city is losing talent. You have 60 minutes to redesign why people should stay, return or move in.”

Our objectives

- **Move beyond city self-promotion** and ask a deeper question: **why would people choose to stay, return or move to your city?**
- **Learn from the Talent Sparks**, capturing transferable lessons from URBACT cities and connecting them with your own experience.
- Use the **Talent City Canvas** to turn individual reflections into a shared discussion about what cities should **START** and **STOP** doing to attract and retain talent.
- **Build consensus within mixed city teams** and identify the most important START and STOP priorities.
- **Bring the collective intelligence of the room together** to shape the **Nicosia Talent Cities Manifesto** — a shared set of principles and actions for cities competing for talent.

HOW THE 60 MINUTES FLOW

The Mission Lab

00:00–00:05	**Setting the challenge** — framing, objectives and the Talent City Mission.
00:05–00:20	**Three Talent Sparks** — short story per network.
00:20–00:45	**Talent City Group Work** — mixed teams work together to identify the key takeaways.
00:45–00:55	**Talent Cities Marketplace** — Quick pitches from each group to the plenary.
00:55–00:59	**Nicosia Talent Cities Manifesto** — What to start and what to stop.

The Talent City Canvas

Six fields to redesign how your city attracts, retains and grows talent. Not a strategy document, a working canvas you fill with your team.

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The Talent Cities Canvas

1 Talent we need

Who do we want to attract, retain or bring back?

2 Reasons to stay

What creates attachment, opportunity and belonging?

3 Reasons to come

What makes outsiders notice and choose the city?

4 Hidden assets

What does the city already have but underuse or under-communicate?

5 First experiment

What can be tested in 90 days?

6 Transfer potential

What could other URBACT cities adapt from this idea?

WHERE THE LESSONS COME FROM

Three URBACT networks

Future STEAM Cities

Strengthening digital and STEAM skills to help cities foster innovation, digitalisation and talent attraction and retention.

C4Talent

Helping cities build stronger local startup ecosystems to attract and retain young talent and reduce brain drain.

Residents of the Future

Supporting small and medium-sized cities to tackle depopulation through digital transformation, economic diversification and stronger city attractiveness.

TALENT SPARK 01

FUTURE STEAM CITIES

Carla Semedo, Aveiro (PT)

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Leendert Bjerg, Kolding (DK)



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AVEIRO CÂMARA MUNICIPAL TECH CiTY

Funding:
AVEIRO STEAM CITY
UIA
European Union
European Regional Development Fund

Future STEAM Cities

Future STEAM Cities

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AVEIRO CÂMARA MUNICIPAL TECH CiTY Alytaus miesto savivaldybė Kolding Kommune OULU PŁOCK

AVEIRO - What we did?

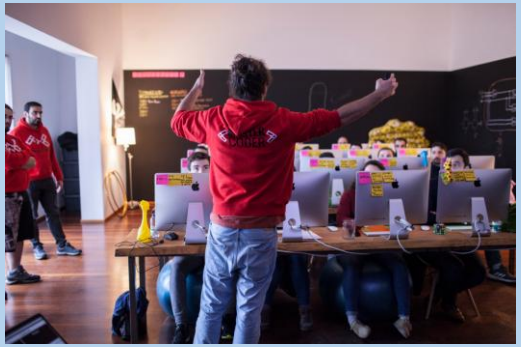
EDUCATION





TRAINING





TECH, SERVICES & APPS

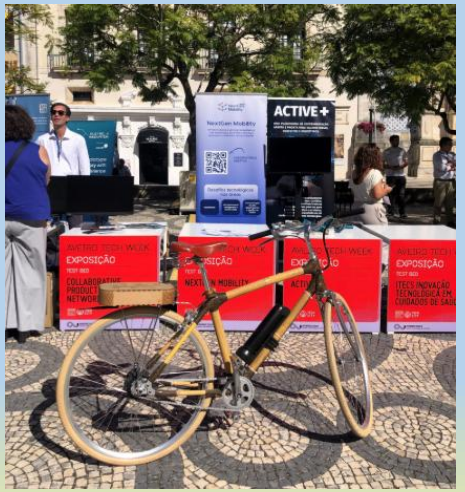




CHALLENGES







TESTING ACTIONS







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Learnings and takeaways

Learnings

- From pilots to pathways
- From local success to European responsibility
- From education-focused to city-led STEAM

Takeaways

- Courage
- Patience
- Generosity





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KOLDING

65.000 inhabitants

4 Universities
4.500 students

Companies seeking
technical talent



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KOLDING - pathway



KOLDING HACKATHON 2026

Project Title: Axeltorv Urban Intelligence

Using Mobility Data and Machine Learning to Understand Urban Engagement in Kolding

Project Idea and Core Vision:

This project is not only about pedestrian movement or predicting traffic. The deeper purpose is to understand why people pass through Axeltorv but do not emotionally engage with the space for longer periods of time.

The idea developed from observing several real-world patterns:

- The city is known for design and history, but Axeltorv does not strongly communicate historical storytelling, emotional identity, or social warmth through urban experience.
- People come more during events, but events alone do not create sustainable long-term engagement.
- Kolding has a significant number of students, workers, elderly people, and internationals with limited budgets.
- Kolding also has approximately 10% international population, but the city center does not strongly reflect multicultural identity or affordable diverse social experiences.

The project explores whether urban design, affordable multicultural businesses, historical storytelling, seating culture, artistic identity, and social gathering opportunities could increase emotional engagement and retention in the city center.

Main Research Question:

"How can mobility behavior and stay duration data help understand and improve social engagement in Axeltorv?"

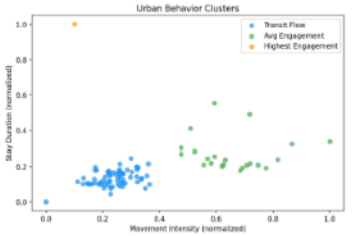
Datasets Used:

1. movement_stats_hourly.csv
2. stay_duration_stats_hourly.csv

Project Methodology:

Step 1 — Data Understanding
Step 2 — Data Cleaning and Preprocessing
Step 3 — Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA)
Step 4 — Feature Engineering
Step 5 — Machine Learning Modeling
Step 7 — Recommendations

confirming that most days Axeltorv functions as a pass-through space rather than a destination.



Visualizations confirmed these patterns: line charts revealed clear peaks in movement during morning and evening commute hours with sharp drops in dwell time; heatmaps showed weekend afternoons and event days as the only consistent high-engagement windows; bar charts highlighted a persistent gap between movement volume and stay duration across most weekdays, reinforcing the transit-dominant behavior.



Core Conceptual Insight:

The clustering model revealed that Axeltorv repeatedly operates in high-movement but low-retention states, suggesting the square functions more as a transit space than an emotionally engaging destination.





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TALENT SPARK 02

C4TALENT

Dávid Bartók, Nyíregyháza (HU)





Challange

The brain drain phenomenon → refers to a region's permanent loss of skilled workers and students.

How can smaller cities attract and retain talent by creating thriving local conditions for entrepreneurship, innovation, and quality of life?

- **Entrepreneurial ecosystems** – how cities can create favourable conditions for starting and growing local businesses;
- **Talent attraction and retention** – how they can better understand and respond to the factors that influence people's decision to stay, return, or move;
- **Place branding for talent** – how cities can communicate their authentic identity and strengths to attract residents, investors, and professionals.





MAIN OBJECTIVE

Increasing the attractiveness of Nyíregyháza – especially its career opportunities – for young talents

SO1 – Increasing the growth rate and competitiveness of local SMEs

Providing support for local SMEs

- SME interview series
- Supplier programme and database
- "Learn from multinational companies!" Programme
- Business Park
- SME Audit and Academy
- Key Account Management

SO2 – Increasing the number of new businesses and their productivity

Supporting new entrepreneurs

- Multifunctional entrepreneurial community space
- Launchpad service
- Mentoring programme

SO3 – Increasing the number of young people who stay/return

Convincing young talents to stay/return to Nyíregyháza and/or start their business here

- Youth Portal and Outreach Programme
- Presentation of local success stories
- City scholarship
- Employer city brand
- Entrepreneurial training programme
- Integration support for new residents

Convincing young talents to stay/return to Nyíregyháza and/or start their business here

Action title:	**3.1 Youth Portal and Outreach Programme**	**Action owner:**	Nyíregyháza Industrial Park Ltd
Context:	It is important for the companies and institutions operating in Nyíregyháza that after **talented young people** complete their studies and gain a few years of experience, they **return and settle here**, contributing their knowledge to the continuous development of the city and its businesses. It is only possible to motivate them to do so by **maintaining regular contact**.		
Horizontal priorities relevant to the action:	NR		
Description:	The purpose of the Youth Portal is to keep the city in contact with its talented young people, even when they are currently studying or working elsewhere. Users registered in it can (1) find out about **job offers** that match their qualifications, (2) learn about local **cultural events**, and (3) **form an opinion** on the city's development ideas and **formulate proposals through surveys**.		
Stakeholders:	Negotiations are taking place with the Vocational Training Centre in order to **reach young people who might potentially be interested in being part of the database** – an **attractive value proposition** is needed to ensure high participation. Colleagues of the Nyíregyháza Industrial Park Ltd are visiting schools to gauge the students' interest and identify the best way to promote registration.		
Estimated costs:	9 800 EUR	**Links to objectives:**	SO3 Increasing the number of young people who stay in or return to the city
Readiness:	**20%** | 40% | 60% | 80% | 100%		

TALENT SPARK 03

RESIDENTS OF THE FUTURE

Nicolas Gibbe, Saint-Quentin (FR)



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The challenge: young people leave to study

- Limited local higher education
- Skills gaps in emerging industries



Talent attraction starts with a credible local pathway

Study • first job • long-term future

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A connected response

LEARN HERE

New engineering education linked to local skills needs

WORK HERE

A Totem Building for innovation, incubation and business links

BELONG HERE

Housing, welcome services and greener public spaces



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What changed our approach

2,500

citizen contributions to the Saint-Quentin 2050 vision

6 ULG meetings

between 2023 and 2025



Attraction becomes credible when residents help define the promise

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00:20 – 00:45 · IN YOUR TEAMS

The Talent City Group Work

- Take individual notes during the Talent Sparks using the Talent City Canvas.
- During the group work, build on the Talent Sparks and your notes in the Talent City Canvas to create, together, a list of what cities should START and STOP doing to win the battle for talent.
- Choose your group's main START and STOP ideas and prepare to share them with the plenary, contributing to the Talent City Manifesto.

01:25 – 01:30 · BEFORE YOU LEAVE

The Nicosia Talent Cities Manifesto

COMMIT TO

One action to start

The single thing you will begin the week you get home.

COMMIT TO

One practice to stop

The habit that quietly pushes talent away, ended.

Your conclusions will shape the Nicosia Talent Cities Manifesto. Coming soon!

CALL TO ACTION FROM NICOSIA

Take it home

APPLY

Use the Canvas

Run the Talent City Canvas on your own city's real talent challenge.

TEST

90-day experiment

Launch one first experiment within 90 days of the Festival.

SHARE

Tell the community

Report back to the URBACT community on what actually transfers.

URBACT CITY FESTIVAL . NICOSIA | THANK YOU!

Talent is drawn by opportunity, belonging, quality of life and a future.

Now go and give people a reason to choose your city!

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URBACT CITY FESTIVAL . TALENT CITIES MANIFESTO

Talent Cities Manifesto.

Co-created by 50 urban practitioners at the URRBACT City Festival Nicosia 2026!

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TALENT CITIES MANIFESTO (1/4) - INTRODUCTION

People may move for opportunity. They stay when opportunity becomes belonging.

Talent policy cannot be reduced to attracting graduates, filling vacancies or promoting a city. **A Talent City creates the conditions for people to stay, return, arrive, contribute and build a life**.

For small and medium-sized cities, this means competing differently: not by trying to become smaller versions of big metropolitan areas, but by mobilising what they already have identity, proximity, community, quality of life, local businesses, education and the power of belonging.

Talent is not something a city captures. It is something a city enables.

TALENT CITIES MANIFESTO (2/4) – CITIES MUST START…

1. **Listening before acting**. Create genuine dialogue on equal footing with young people, residents, people who have left, newcomers, employers, education providers and communities.
2. **Building on the assets we already have**. Start from the strengths, identity, networks, companies and quality of life that make each city distinctive. A university can be an asset, but it is not a prerequisite for becoming a Talent City.
3. **Connecting education, companies and people**. Build stronger bridges between education and employers, with practical pathways such as scholarships, training, work experience, entrepreneurship and longer-term career opportunities.
4. **Turning return and belonging into a strategy**. Develop structured initiatives for young people and former residents. Keep relationships alive with those who leave and create real reasons, rational and emotional, for them to return.
5. **Supporting the whole talent journey**. Move towards simple, integrated, one-stop support for people arriving or returning: housing, administrative and legal support, education, employment, entrepreneurship and social integration.

TALENT CITIES MANIFESTO (3/4) – CITIES MUST STOP…

1. **Stop defining talent only as graduates and highly skilled professionals**. Talent exists in different skills, professions, backgrounds and life paths.
2. **Stop excluding people who do not fit the traditional profile**. Talent strategies must also create opportunities for vulnerable groups and those too often left outside economic development policies.
3. **Stop assuming that cities know what people need**. Listen, test, learn and co-create instead.
4. **Stop producing shiny but shallow, tourist-style campaigns**. Replace generic place marketing with targeted, evidence-based and data-driven action.
5. **Stop treating jobs as the whole answe**r. Jobs matter, but so do housing, education, community, culture, relationships, purpose and quality of life.
6. **Stop ignoring brain drain**. Understand why people leave, maintain relationships with them and transform departure into the possibility of future return.

TALENT CITIES MANIFESTO (4/4) – CONCLUSION

A Talent City is not simply a place where people can find a job.

It is a place where people can imagine a future.

Attract with opportunity.

Retain with quality of life.

Connect through belonging.

A big thank you to the nearly 50 participants who co-created this Talent City Manifesto, and to the cities and experts from the three URBACT networks, Future STEAM Cities, C4TALENT and Residents of the Future, with a special thanks to Béla Kézy and Mónica Nagore, whose experience and ideas helped inspire this collective work in Nicosia.