

WHEN IT COMES TO DIGITAL, IT'S STILL ABOUT THE PEOPLE

Key information

- Location: **Nyíregyháza (Hungary)**
- Population: **118 000**
- Involved in URBACT network: **TechTown**
- More information: <http://urbact.eu/techtown>



Nyíregyháza by night

“The most important outcome of the URBACT project may be that the issue of digital economy is stabilised on the agenda of the city.”

Béla Kezy

Mr Kezy. Nyíregyháza has learnt that it takes motivated, committed staff – and links with a broader ecosystem. “It’s not just a building. It’s not just rental offices but providing a whole bunch of services, it’s the community within the building and the commitment of the local government,” says Mr Kezy.

The town is now pursuing the creation of an incubator at the LOGIN park with clearer plans.

The aim is not just to support a few start-ups that deliver Information Technologies services. As Nyíregyháza and its partners have understood, creating new incubation centres and encouraging digital skills in local government and

education is also about a wider change in culture. Alison Partridge, TechTown Lead Expert, says, “Digital is also reshaping traditional industries, environments and business models. It speeds up the way new products and services are conceived, developed, produced and accessed.” While the growth of digital economy opens huge potentials, the risk for a city of dropping behind in this race is just as huge.

“The most important outcome of the URBACT project may be that the issue of digital economy is stabilised on the agenda of the city,” says Mr Kezy. It has also widened the city’s ambitions. Nyíregyháza joined TechRevolution, a new URBACT Transfer Network sharing Barnsley’s lessons, and has other transnational projects on the horizon. “For the current mayor, this was the first transnational project and I think it helped to launch other transnational initiatives, not only in the field of economic development, but the town is now part of an Interreg Europe project on sustainability,” says Mr Kezy.

Following efforts to improve digital skills in Nyíregyháza, URBACT helped look beyond the physical infrastructure, to focus on the social support systems that encourage entrepreneurship.

Nyíregyháza – a county capital in north-eastern Hungary – has an established industrial park, built in 1997 on a former Soviet base. Before joining TechTown, the city had already identified the possibility of creating a digital business incubator at this LOGIN Park, funded by the local authority and other public sources. However, it was not clear how such an institution might be run. After a 2015 central government initiative to encourage computer skills, which included handing out tablets and laptops, the city learnt it was one thing to acquire and distribute assets, but another to use them regularly and establish them as part of the fabric of a town.



Nyíregyháza’s city centre

Digital boost for local business

By exploring its URBACT partner cities, Nyíregyháza learnt practical solutions for boosting its own digital economy. Béla Kezy, TechTown coordinator in Nyíregyháza, highlighted one inspiring visit to a start-up centre created in an abandoned school in Cēsis (LV). Although it was still early days for the Cēsis centre, the visit motivated Nyíregyháza to continue with their own plans. This was given further impetus when Mr Kezy and his colleagues visited Barnsley’s Digital Media Centre in the UK.

Like the facility in Cēsis, the Digital Media Centre is a series of workspaces – but it is a few years older, and has developed into a hub of business activity, from start-up workshops

to conferences, seminars and networking. With the Digital Media Centre as a model, Nyíregyháza improved its plans for an incubation centre, identifying funding streams and, importantly, defining the staff needed. “We can hopefully avoid the fate of similar services in other areas where the infrastructure is being used for other ends, where it has failed or it isn’t helping locally,” says Mr Kezy.

Not only has the Digital Media Centre served as a model, but there is ongoing dialogue between the Hungarian and English cities. Knowledge transfer between Nyíregyháza and Barnsley will continue after the end of the network on how to run an incubator successfully. “The fear was how we would operate it, now we have a good example,” says



Sóstó, saline lake, 6km away from the city centre