Rethinking local policies

An Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform event

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Ghent, Belgium

interregeurope.eu/event/rethinking-local-policies

Summary: With 170 participants, more than 20 speakers, numerous good practices and visits to some of Ghent's highlights, 'Rethinking local policies' was a rich event that provided plenty of learning and networking opportunities. For two days we have explored the **topic of local sustainable development throughout integrated approaches**. The event had four workshops running in parallel: **spaces for innovation**, **spaces for entrepreneurship**, **modern green districts** and **bringing back nature to the city**. In this report we present the main learnings and good practices.

Contents

Why Ghent?

With 'Rethinking local policies', we provided insights for European policymakers on integrated approaches when defining policies for our local territories. This governance model is complex but brings benefits especially in today's fast-moving world. Ghent is an inspiring example, where the municipal government is 'evolving towards a government that cooperates, reaches out and interacts with societal actors and residents in a constructive manner. It is an answer to the question: **What kind of local government do we want to be and to what extent do we need to organise ourselves differently for this?**' (*Mathias De Clercq, Mayor of Ghent*).

The Interreg Europe community met in Ghent to be inspired by the examples of the success stories of this city, while reflecting on the role of local authorities towards reaching their main mission: increasing the quality of life of local residents as a whole.

1.Spaces for innovation

Fab labs: a policy tool for place-based challenges

Local administrations have a vital role to play in offering **the 'physical spaces' for innovation**, as well as **the 'policy space'** in the form of support programmes to boost entrepreneurship.

FabLab and Makerspaces are **flexible policy tools**. They can respond to multiple policy challenges and have various goals (promote STEAM education, entrepreneurship, university-industry collaboration, applied research or upskilling/reskilling). They can support the local innovation ecosystem by providing a low-cost space for SMEs' prototyping or they can have a very clear mission to address local societal challenges.

Multiple goals and target groups

The goals and target groups are not exclusive and often many exist in parallel within one space. It is therefore important to keep the plurality in mind when designing such a space or when considering to transfer a good practice from elsewhere. This is the principle behind the **STEAMhouse Phase 1** (Urban M project; presenter: **Laura Veart**). STEAMhouse is an space combining co-working spaces and makerspace. It focuses on developing science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics skills to create innovative products and services in Greater Birmingham and Solihull city region (UK). **Fab Lab Lisboa** (Urban M project) was born in 2013 in a central location of the city, turning a disabled food-market into a fully equipped lab for digital makers, where all kind of users from students to professionals can access knowledge and resources to prototype their ideas.

Key partners for societal goals

Local authorities can rely on Makerspaces to achieve **social, innovation or entrepreneurial goals of the territory.** They can also be good project leaders, fostering international collaboration, or securing funding to the region. An interesting example is the **Food FABLAB - A Shared Productive Unit for AgriFood Sector** (Agri Renaissance project; presenter: **Marco Alves**). The Food FABLAB is a shared innovation infrastructure that allows private companies to test, conduct internal R&D activities, licence, and manufacture food products. It is a service provided by TAGUSVALLEY, a science and technology park located in Centro region, Portugal.

Complex funding models

Makerspaces use a mix of public funding (local, national or EU funds). Many spaces also have a commercial model where revenue is generated through renting rooms, hosting events, providing training/incubation/accelerator programmes or selling goods through an affiliated shop/bar/restaurant. Some spaces also use a membership fee model. Often the income from commercial activities is used to cover the costs of non-for-profit activities with social goals (youthwork, integration of disadvantaged groups, local community building, etc).

Stakeholders' involvement

A top-down approach does not work because **successful makerspaces require a sense of commitment and co-ownership from the community**. All players should be involved from the start, including the creatives and communities for whom the space is designed for. Furthermore, before investments are made, it is vital to listen to the target group regarding what type of premises and equipment they need. The **Radiona.org / Zagreb Makerspace** (Urban M project) is an initiative to promote the maker's culture and science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM) in Zagreb, Croatia. In addition to access of specific technologies and digital equipment, the makerspace also promotes a sense of community, diversity, and provides mentorship and networking opportunities.

Space to the youngsters

FabLabs and makerspaces are **excellent for tapping into the innovative ideas of young people** as they provide a space for creation and creativity. It is recommended to offer some financial support/stimuli because young people often lack resources to finance their ideas. Such support could take the form of a grant (ranging from few hundred to few thousand euros) for purchasing materials for prototyping projects. This is the case of **Protolab** (FOUNDATION project; presenter: **Łukasz Bonarek**) - a good example of what are the benefits of providing equipment, workshops and mentoring to innovative students and entrepreneurial teams.

We had an insightful study visit to **DeKrook Ghent**, which is home to the public city library, labs and offices of Ghent University and the imec research center for nanoelectronics and digital technology.

Images of the workshop and the study visit at DeKrook, Ghent

Innovation centres for local and regional economic development

An **innovation centre** is a building or group of co-located buildings that provides collaborative spaces for innovative companies, start-ups, research centres, venture capital companies, Fab Labs, training or learning centres, start-up accelerators and/or incubators, and/or not-for-profit associations. Innovation centres often aim to **reduce fragmentation and to promote collaboration within a particular innovation ecosystem**.

Success factors for designing and implementing innovation centres are to **secure political support** and e**nsuring funding** and financial sustainability. Participants in the workshop agreed that it is important to use a **mix of public and EU fundings** (regional, national, and European) for building the infrastructures. Taking advantage of competitive funding calls is essential. **Private funding** is also needed for balancing running costs and can be secured through service delivery and renting spaces. Private funding can also sponsor equipment, services, and events/contests.

Good practices

Business and Shared Services Centre (INNO INDUSTRY project, presenter: **Ricardo Gonçalves**) aims to promote information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the City of Fundão, Portugal. The creation of the collaborative space was the result of a quadruple helix leadership to address the region's high unemployment rate and brain drain. The collaborative space has successfully attracted international and private companies.

Digital Innovation Room Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Next2Met project, presenter: Jennifer Billowie) consists of 6 collaborative spaces throughout the rural region of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany. The initiative is coordinated by the Ministry of Energy, Infrastructure and Digitalisation and provides physical spaces for start-ups and creative and knowledge workers.

Valletta Design Cluster (Design4innovation project, presenter: **Joanne Attard Mallia**) is a government-led initiative by the Valletta Cultural Agency in Malta. It was created in 2018 to transform an old abattoir into a space for culture and innovation. The Valletta Design Cluster offers various facilities, including a makerspace, studios for creative practitioners, project labs, a conference hall, a roof garden, and a coworking space, fostering collaboration among artists, creatives, and entrepreneurs.

The workshop concept and overall moderation were ensured by **Marc Pattinson**, **Arnault Morisson** and **Laura Varisco**, Policy Learning Platform thematic experts.

Images of the workshop

2. Spaces for entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship and economic development in cities

When entrepreneurship and economic development find well their place in an urban integrated approach, great ecosystems can emerge. 'Spaces for entrepreneurship' workshop provided inspiration and good examples of FabLabs and Makerspaces, but equally engaged participants in a debate on how to 'build a start-up city' (starting with concrete examples from Tartu, Amsterdam and Szombathely).

Strong planning and partnership

Successful policy support for entrepreneurship in cities require strong partnership and willingness to collaborate among **multiple players** (national and local government, R&I institutions, clusters, SMEs, etc) as well as dedicated management and leadership. The type of the support instrument, the cultural context and the size of the city, while also relevant, take secondary importance. Developing an **urban integrated approach to entrepreneurship takes conscious planning and time**. A useful tool in the planning phases is the Interreg Europe peer review service that brings in external expertise.

Embrace failures

Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation means that **the city government needs to embrace failures**. Onboarding and offboarding stakeholders as well as the public are both important when it comes to new public initiatives. That is especially true in the case of innovative approaches where there is always an inherent risk of failure. **While failure is always uncomfortable, it is the key for being a startup minded city**. This mindset helps to retain and motivate the entrepreneurial people within the city.

Unique approaches

While accelerators, co-working spaces, fab labs, innovation hubs and technology parks are known tools for fostering entrepreneurship in the city space, there are some inspiring cases that are not yet well known.

The Business Improvement Districts (BID) model used in Amsterdam is a form of area-based collaboration among enterprises with the goal to improve the social or economic well-being of a street or a district. The benefit of such self-organised collectives is that they can sometimes manage resources more effectively and efficiently than either state or market can. The Amsterdam experience has shown that two important components for BIDs are funding (e.g. extra stimulus or subsidy condition for pooling private resources) and the intermediaries who manage the BIDs.

2. **Business Finland** has taken a completely different approach where the government collaborates with large international corporates to create innovative ecosystems around them. The government matches the millions put in by the corporate to this initiative

Good practices

Zero Waste Lab Plein 40-45 (ABCitiEs project, presenter **Hennie Loos**) An alternative waste processing system at a market organized by a business collective.

Street management Amsterdam (ABCitiEs project) Business Improvement Districts in Amsterdam can

apply for a municipal subsidy to hire a 'street manager' to represent the businesses in the area.

Tartu – testbed of good thoughts (ESSPO project) While more and more cities are setting up testbeds, it is also important to clearly communicate what the city is willing to offer to SMEs and R&D institutions. The

City of Tartu has an open partnership approach towards SMEs and local industry players.

sTARTUp Day Business Festival (Innova Foster project, presenter: **Kaili Ojamets**) Since 2016, sTARTUp Day has become the biggest startup festival in the Baltics. For the city of Tartu with roughly 100 000 inhabitants the event is an important pillar of the local startup and innovation scene. It has also been greatly beneficial for the city's image and international visibility. From the onset the organization of the festival has relied on tight cooperation between stakeholders of the local innovation ecosystem: accelerators and incubators, science parks, R&D centres, universities and the city government.

Firstport - Scotland's agency for start-up social entrepreneurs and enterprises (RaiSE project) Starting in 2007 as Scotland's social enterprise development agency, Firstport is an organisation responding to the needs of social entrepreneurs rather than prescribing start-up services. Now operating as a social enterprise itself, it distributes seed funding and accelerator support for early stage social enterprises, advice and training, innovation incentives and place-based programmes.

The overall event experience was enriched with a **study visit to the local Timelab**, a recent initiative in Ghent, a workplace for art, technology and society. **Timelab** consists of a FabLab, an artists-in-residence programme, social research and get-togethers where artists, experts and other interested parties can meet, exchange ideas and find inspiration. The workshop concept and overall moderation were ensured by **Rene Tõnnisson** and **Mart Veliste**, Policy Learning Platform thematic experts.

Images of the study visit at Timelab, Ghent

3. Modern green districts

Territorial transformation

'Modern green districts' focused on **the redevelopment of derelict industrial areas into comfortable, sustainable, and low-carbon districts**. These are intended to provide a stronger sense of community, overcome car-centric urban design, enable active mobility, integrate renewable energies, and enable circular economy. For this, **several sectoral policies had to be combined**, not only energy and mobility, but also environment, waste management, and sustainable housing.

The workshop looked at three **inspiring case studies of territorial transformation**:

1. **Stockholm Royal Seaport** (presenter: Christina Salmhofer) - one of Europe's largest urban redevelopments, the seaport area has been redeveloped in a collaborative and holistic manner and is 100% fossil fuel free. It is designed with a 'five-minute city' concept, so all key amenities are available with sustainable modes of transport. The district has new low-energy houses, with integrated renewables, and a sophisticated waste management system.
2. **Utrecht's Merwede District** (presenter: **Bart Claassen**) – The Merwede district will be a new district in Utrecht, of around 6,00 houses, built to be sustainable and climate adaptive. The district will be car-free, with limited parking spaces, clustered logistics, and an intricate bike and pedestrian network to encourage active transport.
3. **Gent Oude Dokken** (presenter: **Agnieszka Zajac**) – Gent's old docks have been redeveloped to become a citizen-focused district, with sustainable housing, businesses, schools, and public space. The district has integrated renewables, a district heating system, biomass boilers and circular waste management.

The event included a study visit in the Oude Dokken neighbourhood, under the insightful guidance of our host, **Agnieszka Zajac**.

Images of the study visit at Oude Dokken

Participants also looked at sectoral solutions at district level: shared mobility, shared electricity production and consumption, and renewable district heating, with a particular focus on citizen-owned solutions

Key messages

The discussions revealed the benefits of thinking and planning at district level, with key messages to take away:

Good governance
Integrated sustainable urban redevelopment requires greater co-ordination, planning and communication, not only between departments, but also with citizens. This needs specific resources: time, money and skills. This is particularly challenging for smaller municipalities. It also is necessary to **go outside of traditional methods**: governance is typically quite rigid, it's all about processes and stability, while innovation and change are needed. It's important to bring together a **team of innovative people** able to push change through.

Capacity building
Public bodies need new human resource strategies to train local staff in the skills needed to take on the bigger and more ambitious projects that will be needed to overcome our societal challenges.

Integrated policy and funding instruments
Such transformation needs **funding for place-based initiatives**, not sectoral ones. Integrated urban, or non-urban, development should become the new norm, to make better use of limited resources and achieve higher impact from public interventions.

Political support is vital
Use the team of innovators to explain the vision and clearly explain how it solves political challenges. Set a long-term, integrated vision and promote it widely to avoid backsliding between elections. Ideally, implement projects in a step-by-step process so there is always something to show as success for politicians.

Bring citizens on board
This can be a challenge, but they need to be seen as a partner in the transition, not a challenge to be managed. Make them co-owners of the transformation by involving them in planning, and implement shared projects such as shared mobility and shared energy generation.

The workshop concept and overall moderation were ensured by **Katharina Krell** and **Simon Hunkin**, Policy Learning Platform thematic experts.

4. Bringing back nature to the city

Nature and biodiversity

With 'Bringing back nature to the city' we explored how local and regional authorities can reach the targets of the **EU Nature restoration law** and the **Global Biodiversity Framework**. In an engaging mix of presentations, discussions, working groups and a site visit, the participants explored various nature restoration measures:

- save pollinators,
- remove pollution,
- rewild natural areas or
- provide blue and green infrastructure such as riverbanks, lakes, parks, green belts, urban forests and trees.

The workshop also looked at the **potential of derelict sites including former landfills and old industrial areas**, and at **actions to support biodiversity**, including planting of wildflowers and indigenous species.

An interesting **site visit to Captain Zeppos park** in the Oude Dokken and the reopened waterway at Reep exhibited the implementation of Ghent's Green Structure Plan and the city's **approach** to blue-green infrastructure. This was possible under the careful and insightful guidance of Tom Beyaert (City of Ghent).

Key learnings

Not only large scale
Nature restoration is not limited to large scale projects such as parks and riverbanks but can take place everywhere with small urban furniture, green façades and roofs or wildflower meadows in parking lots. **Urban planting in the city of Cork** is an interesting example in this sense (**INTENSIFY** project, presenter: **Emer O'Callaghan**).

Work with stakeholders
Best results can be achieved through targeted work with stakeholders: information and awareness-raising actions, training and education, handbooks and guidelines. In Brussels, **design workshops for peri-urban nature** were carried out with students (**RENATUR** project, presenter: **Johan Laeremans**).

Participatory processes engaging stakeholders and citizens are key to success of bringing back nature to the city and maintaining it on a long-term basis. Budapest's **green infrastructure booklets** from the **RENATUR** project (presenters: **Beata Stefanics** and **Natalia Szecsenyi**). The Municipality of Budapest aimed to promote the development of urban green infrastructure, the work of professionals, decision-makers and the provision of information to citizens. The publications present easy-to-understand and applicable proposals that not only facilitate planning, but also enable the wider application of innovative and climate-friendly solutions in developments and investments, even at a smaller community level.

Good communication

There is a fight for space in an urban context among different interests, ownerships and land-use regulations (i.e. nature vs. housing), which requires communication of benefits of nature restoration and eco-system services. **Databases and monitoring tools** support better understanding and communication of impact of nature restoration measures such as on improvements of air quality or the situation of the tree canopy.

Good governance

Interweaving of different urban functions (utilities, traffic, green infrastructure…) calls for careful planning and collaboration of various urban services and different administrative levels (strategic, technical, and operational).

River restoration

Interesting good practices were showcased: Pilsen's river restoration endeavour of **Lobzy park** from the **EURE** project (presenter: **Eva Brejchová**), **uncovering of rivers** in Breda (**WaVE** project, presenter: Hans Thoolen) and sustainable use of water in Porto (presenter: **Mariana Cruz**).

The workshop concept and overall moderation were ensured by **Astrid Severin** and **Magda Michaliková**, Policy Learning Platform thematic experts.

Images of the workshop and study visit at Captain Zeppos park

The value of being part of Interreg Europe

The **Policy Learning Platform** is based and nurtured by knowledge coming from the **Interreg Europe community**. People working on public policies come together, share experience and are open to learn from each other. They believe in the power of joining forces and in the win-win character of interregional learning for better policymaking on the ground.

They have been contributing for more than five years now to our joint initiative, the Policy Learning Platform. They have shared their experience and expertise by participating in events, peer reviews, publications etc. They have unconditionally supported the promotion of the Platform and contributed to spreading the word about our services across Europe. They dedicated time, efforts, and passion to this mission of facilitating the access for policymakers to relevant knowledge, expert support, and our continuously growing network of professionals. At the same time, they have certainly gained knowledge, experience, built a solid network of like-minded European colleagues in a friendly environment. And they benefit from the services of the Platform anytime. We very much value their contributions, and in Ghent we thanked them by celebrating a representative group of active community members, encouraging all participants to contribute and profit from the growing energy of this lively community.

'*We reach higher by stepping on each other shoulders rather than stepping on each other toes.*'

Jan Nylander, a community member

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