

iPlace

Leaded by the Municipality of Amarante
(Portugal)

The project focus areas for defining future economic activity for all partners, and aligned with the objectives of the Urban Agenda of the EU and the UN Sustainable Development Goals are:

1. **Digital transition:** The partner cities will focus on digital innovation in their existing economic activity areas to become more competitive - in practice it means that the more traditional sectors for example furniture production can be made much more efficient and profitable with new digital processes such as using new UX design software or developing digital platforms for supply chain management etc. Alternatively, as partners identify a new niche for economic activity during the project process, they can 'future proof' their new economic development strategy by identifying the digital development elements that will be foundations for building local capacity in the new niche/sector.
2. **Start-up ecosystem:** Each partner city will examine the current ecosystem in their city for start-ups and in particular how start-ups can be engaged to address problems experienced by employers and businesses in their cities. In practice it will mean that conversations will take place with businesses to understand how they engage new start-ups to innovate and what possibilities there will be to create opportunities for start-ups to work on solutions for business problems. This will not just happen - it has to be planned as a project output. The project will add value to a process which require building a culture of trust between start-ups and the established business community with activities such as meetups, hackathons and business idea pitch competitions.
3. **Low carbon local economy:** There are many instruments and methods available for cities to measure the emissions of their economy and how these can be practically reduced. This also presents new economic opportunities in itself such as new forms of energy, packaging, advertising etc. The partner cities can monitor how proposed new economic activity will lessen their dependency on fossil fuels and other high carbon substances in the supply chains of their local businesses.
4. **Cultural catalysts:** Many great business ideas are drawn from local cultures and mythology. There is a strong link between the experience and activation of local heritage/culture and nurturing of creativity among inhabitants (Amarante is a good example). All partner cities will implement project activities to experiment with local events that stimulate creativity.
5. **Inclusive growth:** This is the requirement that any future local economic strategy should be designed to be 'inclusive' and benefit all sections of the local population. The aim is to focus on the direct benefits (i.e. actual deliverables such as training, new job experience and interventions to enable access to opportunities) more than to just highlight the indirect benefits (where we can argue that all economic growth in the city is beneficial for the population and businesses if more money circulates in the local economy). Big multinationals in the tech industries are now all emphasising this requirement.

In the end the 'i' in the name of our project - iPlace - refers to the project actions undertaken in our small partner cities that will instigate/stimulate innovation (which should be understood as the integration of new ideas into existing practice or to develop completely new practices based on inspiring ideas). The above focus areas will assist greatly. Our project concept is written as a process proposal - i.e. how by using what URBACT offers (and requires as outputs) in a systematic way, the project becomes a pathway for small cities to make significant progress with this principal goal/strategic objective to become an innovative city and work place.