

STRENGTHENING THE INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM IN PORTO

Key information

Location: Porto (Portugal)

Population: 237 600

Involved in URBACT network:
SmartImpact

More information:
<http://urbact.eu/smartimpact>



Through its participation in the URBACT SmartImpact network, the city of Porto consolidated its strategic approach to supporting innovation and entrepreneurship in the city. This is a key part of its overall strategy to become an increasingly smart city.

Porto is the most important economic, educational and cultural centre of northern Portugal. It has a historic centre classified as a UNESCO World Heritage site and is an important tourism destination. It is also home to six universities, several higher education institutes, 69 R&D centres and emerging business clusters in the IT and creative sectors, biotechnology and health, and mechanical engineering.

Building on a 'Smart City' approach

Porto joined the URBACT SmartImpact network of cities in order to consolidate and develop efforts it had already taken to become a 'smart city'. In 2004, it created a private non-profit association, 'Porto Digital' to promote Information Communication Technologies projects in Porto metropolitan area. Porto Digital put in place a large-scale fibre-optic backbone and public access Wi-Fi network, before launching a strategy to support Porto as a knowledge-based city.

Margarida Campolargo, Head of Porto Digital's Smart City Unit, explains that the main aim of participating in SmartImpact was "to improve the impact that we are having with our [Smart City] projects on the city infrastructure... We addressed mainly issues of open data, the innovation ecosystem and then a few on policy-making."

Taking part in this URBACT network brought a new way of working to Porto Digital and the municipality. "The fact that we gathered several departments of the municipality [in the URBACT Local Group]... that they started knowing about each other and working with each other had a very positive impact... taking into account [the city's] entire ecosystem and innovative capacity," she says.

SmartImpact also enabled Porto to take inspiration from the other cities in the network. As Ms Campolargo explains: "We learnt, for example, how Eindhoven changed their organisational structure, how Manchester is dealing with their own structure, Dublin and others. And then the networking of course... to have an outsider's vision on what we are doing is very important for self-development."



Meeting for the ScaleUp Porto



Meeting at the Porto Innovation Hub

Consolidating the city's innovation ecosystem

The Integrated Action Plan developed by Porto's URBACT Local Group has the stated aim to create a "sustainable Smart City Urban Platform – not only at a technological level but essentially at an organisational level – ensuring the 'de-siloing' of the present organisational structure."

Its first strand of action is on assessing the needs of citizens, the municipality, companies and entrepreneurs to better direct the smart city approach. A second strand focuses on capacity building and training to support the municipality and municipal companies to design and implement smart strategies. The third strand incorporates and seeks to reinforce three existing initiatives of the local innovation ecosystem: 1. ScaleUp Porto; 2. The Porto Innovation Hub; and 3. Desafios Porto.

Under the ScaleUp Porto initiative, the municipality aims to turn successful entrepreneurs into role models, mentors, experts, teachers and investors for the next generation of innovation businesses. It targets companies which are moving beyond their start-up phase with activities including masterclasses, workshops and business networking events.

The Porto Innovation Hub is a semi-permanent space that offers a regular programme of activities including: exhibitions; talks; group sessions with the general public and schools; and labs and practical workshops with research

bodies. It aims to provide a focal point to demonstrate the potential of innovation in the city's transformation.

Desafios Porto is a competition that provides EUR 250 000 to local innovation projects targeting improved quality of life for Porto's citizens. It aims both to address the city's more pressing challenges and provide an impetus to entrepreneurship.

Providing for long-term smart governance

Finally, the Plan contains a strand of action on smarter governance based around providing a new 'intelligent' layer to city governance to integrate and interconnect the various elements. It includes a new 'urban platform' to provide a logical architecture to data flows within and across municipal services and improvements to the Integrated Management Centre – launched in 2015 – that provides real-time information from cameras and monitors across the city on, for example, traffic flows.

This strand also aims to deliver: an effective open data strategy; 'hackacity' events to test the use of big data for creating innovative city solutions; piloting of new smart city policies; and a new smart city manifesto for Porto.

Margarida Campolargo

Porto Digital

The most important impact [was] mindset change, the municipality seeing and understanding what can happen elsewhere and how we can change [and] evolve. We can put all the technology in there, but it might not solve our challenges unless we really work with the people. Actually we are going to maintain this [URBACT Local] Group after the project closes so this is a very good outcome because people are going to reflect on the smart city strategies way beyond the project lifetime.