



Past - Present - Future

CREATING PIONEER & CULTURAL SPACE IN OLD-INDUSTRIAL PLACES

Concept Paper ‘Retail pop-up in an industrial heritage community’

Version 1
07 2017



T4.4.1



Reporting Period 2



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1. Introduction

The InduCult2.0 partnership aims at reviving the cultural spirit of long-standing industrial regions in Central Europe. While capitalizing on the tangible and intangible cultural assets of the industrial past, present and future, regions mono-focused on industrial production are supported to position themselves as attractive places for a.o. working and living. The project set-up comprises regional partners from 8 Central European nations and two academic partners. For more information see also www.inducult.eu or www.facebook.com/Inducult2.0/.

The creative community is a specific target of the InduCult2.0 project. Indeed, the transition towards Industry 4.0 has or is starting to emerge in the producing industry regions as well. In order to adapt to these developments, creative potentials based on the rich historic pioneering culture of peripheral industrial areas need to be stimulated. The partners engaging in thematic work package 4 will locate that potential in their region, and build up a creative community around it. Old-industrial places will serve as the background for this scene - as décor for living labs, ateliers, etc...

Within WP4 Stebo centralizes the goal of fostering creative entrepreneurship. In DT4.4.1 a pop-up location which already has strong links with the industrial past (both spatially and thematically) will host creative entrepreneurs and initiatives who are inspired by both the authenticity and the current needs and developments of the producing industry. In other words: it will act as a gathering location where past, present and future meet and are turned into a dialogue by a creative community.

2. Context

2.1 The socio-industrial landscape

An analysis of the European industrial landscape shows that during the past decades two different 'industrial habitats' have emerged (during several transformation periods):

1) Metropolitan areas:

In big cities (such as Antwerp, Brussels, Gent) we have seen typical manufacturing industries being replaced by creative and innovative industries, fed by young and hip urban youngsters and potentials. In these areas is a high demand for fast and high risk projects (large ad hoc capital investment). New and innovative ideas are produced and financed there every day by an extensive force of skilled self-employed 'wizzkids' who are willing to take these risks and to actively engage in this competitive environment. In other words: there is a good match between the demand and offer side, reached by specific approaches: pitching, seed capital, meet and greet, investors and start-ups, It creates a business atmosphere for BtoC activities.

The sociological image of the metropolitan areas is very hip and trendy and therefore attracts many youngsters, also from the peripheral areas. Entrepreneurship and self-employment are all built into its DNA.

2) Peripheral areas:

Peripheral areas are equally typified by a long industrial past. The history of the province of Limburg is also characterized by industry. The industrial episodes have intensively shaped the identity and culture of the region. The mining activities for example have caused the appearance of a typical blue-collar worker mentality, unique living environments (garden cities), a feeling of solidarity, ... Migration has played an important role as well since the region was transformed from a mono- to a multicultural context, with migrants bringing along their own culture, habits, culinary traditions, ...

Currently the industrial environment is in transition. The 'traditional' manufacturing context gradually gets more crowded with new types of industries. Service related industries as well as circular and sharing economy are coming up at a major speed, and are replacing the traditional manufacturing industries. This offers opportunities that can be cashed by (amongst others) intra- and entrepreneurs.

Contrary to the metropolitan areas however, entrepreneurship is not characteristic for peri-urban regions. Diversity in companies, as is mostly the case in metropolitan areas, leads to more diverse business opportunities. In most cases the peri-urban region is however build up around 1 company (e.g. automotive). Also, the population has not developed the reflex to start a business. On top of that, there are not many low-risk locations where entrepreneurs are able to test their business (start-ups). This also has a negative effect on attracting creative entrepreneurs (and ideas) to the region.

2.2 The Box

Evolution

The Box is an initiative developed by Stebo in Genk (province of Limburg). It is currently spread out in the other Belgian provinces, under the auspices of Stebo. As such, a chain of boxes was created.

The Box is situated in the Vennestraat, a former merchant street of the Winterslag Mine. Through its location it is strongly linked to the industrial past and its heritage community, but to the industrial future as well. C-mine, located only a few tens of meters from the Vennestraat, is turned into a cultural hotspot where creative economy has earned its place (creative entrepreneurship and education are present at the site). And the neighboring garden city of Winterslag is still populated by ex-miners and or their families/children.

The Box was set up in close cooperation with the municipality of Genk, in order to bring back the vibrant atmosphere that used to typify the mining merchant street:

- Through continuously welcoming new entrepreneurs and their products, new and a broad range of visitors have frequented the Vennestraat. This has resulted in new dynamics.
- Also, a cooperation with the existing merchants, restaurants,... and the 'guest' entrepreneurs is in some cases set up.
- Guest entrepreneurs are also stimulated to permanently settle in the Vennestraat and to fill in one of the available vacant sites.

Idea

The Box is a fully equipped pop-up store (central heating system, lights, WiFi, alarm system, kitchen,...). It offers entrepreneurs the opportunity to present their ideas/products to the general public without having to build in the risk factors starters are generally confronted with (e.g. high rent and set-up costs). Access to markets is also improved for (initially small) businesses as entrepreneurs will become more confident once their initiative receives positive feedback.

What makes The Box even more unique is that, contrary to a regular pop-up initiative, its venue stays unchanged. It is the products, ideas and brands that 'pop up' every week or maximum every two months.

Goals and target groups

The main goals of 'The Box' are to promote entrepreneurship and skills by boosting innovative ideas. If they wish so, starters are trained by professional coaches of Stebo's 'Starterslabo'. All the administrative procedures required for the setup of a pop-up initiative are moreover taken care of by Stebo so entrepreneurs do not have to work their way through legislation when starting their business.

The Box welcomes starters or (semi-) professional entrepreneurs with an innovative idea on catering, selling products or a mixture of both. As such a combination of well-known brands and new authentic creative products are presented to the public. The attractiveness of the concept for the former group lies mostly in the chance to communicate in person with its buyers - contrary to a webshop - without having to minimize the time spent on creating new products. The Box itself can be considered a 'shared good' for entrepreneurs.

3. Objective

It is clear that 'The Box' is a low-risk location offering entrepreneurs the chance to test their business ideas. Through its location it has a strong link with the industrial past and its heritage community, but it is also connected to new industrial trends. Indeed, (participatory) initiatives on creative and circular economy are being developed in the neighboring former mining site and gradually also in the surrounding garden cities.

Within InduCult2.0 Stebo wants to develop an approach that capitalizes on these assets and at the same time maximizes the role of The Box as a gathering location where past, present and future meet. Today, a large range of entrepreneurs and associated topics frequent The Box. However, apart from its location, the link with the industrial past and culture is not always clearly present. Main goal of the project will be to more strongly emphasize that connection.

The approach in other words is based on what has already been achieved, but will more clearly invest on the transition towards Industry 4.0 trends which is gradually manifesting itself in and starting to characterize the former mining region.

4. Concept

Something old, something new...

In The Box entrepreneurial initiatives linking 'old and new' will be more clearly centralized:

Entrepreneurs who are developing products and services related to the region's industrial past and future will be offered the opportunity to set up, test and showcase their products and ideas. One of the possible candidates is an ex-miner who brings together products related to the mining past and future (e.g. coal mining beers, fashion based on miners' clothes,...).

The mix between past and future will be maximized by combining entrepreneurs working with traditional and new technologies. This implies breaking the borders between craftsmanship and industry related manufacturing. An example could be to combine a traditional ceramicist with someone operating a 3D-printer, laser cutter, or hologram device, while asking them to develop a similar product yet with different techniques.

Starters and entrepreneurs can be found in the many (ex-)participants of the Stebo trajectories directed towards stimulating and coaching of business start-ups. The numerous voluntary organizations that are present in the former mining cities are also crowded with creative initiatives, linked to the industrial past. In many cases they have not yet been stimulated to take these ideas a step forward. Offering them the 'stage' to present these ideas/products in The Box, creates a creative community with direct links to the region's past, while looking forward to the future.

The search for finding interesting initiatives to crowd The Box, is closely linked to D.T4.3.1 in which Stebo engages. In a Living Lab locals are motivated to set up a business around Industrial Culture. They will go through a three-phased trajectory of inspiration, learning and showing their business models and products. The Box will serve as the location for the show moment (cfr. Infra).

Showcase

Entrepreneurs will have the opportunity to stay in The Box during a certain time period - with a minimum of one weekend.

It will be strived for to make this exploitation coincide with other events/initiatives rooted in the region's Industrial Culture as much as possible. Of course The Box will also be opened up to the target groups when events are not taking place.

e.g.: 'Vollebak Vennestraat' event (mid August - mid September)

During one month folk festivities are set up at the Vennestraat, supported by all merchants, restaurants,...of the street. At this occasion the multicultural character of the Vennestraat - a direct result of the mining past - is maximized and showcased. During the festivities The Box will be open for the public, attracting a huge audience which will have the chance to get acquainted with the concept of Industrial Culture and with its opportunities for local entrepreneurs and inhabitants in general.

5. Results

1. The link between the Vennestraat and the former mining site of Winterslag will be rebuild and reinforced. This time it will more strongly emphasize the Industry4.0 connection, while of course maximally exploiting the industrial past. Consequently the value of The Box as cultural heritage location and show/test area for innovation will be highlighted.
2. A creative industrial culture community will be set up and attracted to the region. It will closely interact with the present merchants, entrepreneurs and multicultural offer -creating a dynamic atmosphere and facilitating community development.
3. The socio-industrial DNA of the region will be considered a valuable basis for entrepreneurial initiatives. As such the region's rich Industrial Culture will be activated and cashed upon.

The results of this pilot action will be achieved within the timeframe of the InduCult 2.0 project. But there is no doubt that they will continue to have an impact on the province of Limburg also after the project end. The link between past, present and future will be maintained by the creative industrial culture community that is created during the project. Stebo will moreover continue its efforts to support that community through offering The Box as a showcase location (DT4.4.1), as well as by offering entrepreneurial training programmes (D.T4.3.1).

6. Transnational added value

In many Central European regions, including several of the partner regions, finding new meanings for old-industrial places has proven to be a difficult task. At the same time creative entrepreneurs are moving to the urban areas since attractive locations to set up their business are non-existing. Within InduCult2.0's thematic WP 4 the partnership goes into these questions and develops pilot actions to counter these issues and to boost creative communities in non-metropolitan areas. Stebo actively engages in this work group. While peering and sharing experiences with the colleague partners, Stebo will gain the necessary inspiration and knowledge to turn the described concept into practice.

The Box initiative can be used by other (partner) regions as an inspirational source as well. In first place it can serve as a best-practice (or blueprint) example of an initiative which has created a dynamic atmosphere in an old-industrial context by investing on entrepreneurship. In second place, an evaluation of its efforts within InduCult2.0 - on how to revive the once so powerful pioneer spirit and to reinforce the link between past and innovative industrial settings - will help partner regions facing similar issues to move on in this topic.

Abstract

The European industrial environment is in transition. The ‘traditional’ manufacturing context gradually gets more crowded with new types of industries. Service related industries as well as circular and sharing economy are coming up at a major speed, and are replacing the traditional manufacturing industries. In many Central European regions, including several of the partner regions, finding new meanings for old-industrial places in an Industry4.0 context has proven to be a difficult task. At the same time creative entrepreneurs are moving to the urban areas since attractive locations to set up their business are non-existing.

Within InduCult2.0’s thematic WP 4 the partnership goes into these questions and develops pilot actions to counter these issues and to boost creative communities in non-metropolitan areas. In that respect Stebo will use ‘The Box’ as a try-out place for creative entrepreneurs who are developing products and services related to the region’s industrial past, present and future. The Box is situated in the Vennestraat, a former merchant street of the Winterslag Mine (Genk). Through its location it is strongly linked to the industrial past and its heritage community, but to the industrial future as well. However, apart from its location, the link with the industrial culture is not always clearly present. One of the goals of the project will be to more strongly emphasize the role of The Box as a creative gathering location where past, present and future meet.

The approach in other words is based on what has already been achieved, but will more clearly invest on the transition towards Industry 4.0 trends which is gradually manifesting itself in and starting to characterize the former mining region.

As a result a creative industrial culture community will be set up and attracted to the region. It will closely interact with the present merchants, entrepreneurs and multicultural offer -creating a dynamic atmosphere and facilitating community development. The socio-industrial DNA of the region will be considered a valuable basis for entrepreneurial initiatives. As such the region’s rich Industrial Culture will be activated and cashed upon.