

CASE STUDY

REPORT

Skills for a green future

PROJECT

Cluj Future of Work

📍 Cluj-Napoca,
Romania

TOPIC

Jobs and skills in the
local economy

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Cluj Napoca

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website



1. Short project description

Cluj Future of Work is tackling the vulnerability of the local economy to emerging technologies and automation with a series of actions targeting different groups, from aspiring entrepreneurs in cultural and creative industries to the local Roma community. Being among the fastest growing city in Europe and having quadrupled its GDP per capita in the last decade, Cluj Napoca is looking at the future of work as the field in which innovative actions can be tested in order to be competitive at European and global level.

With around 20% of the workforce currently employed in the cultural and creative industries, this sector was chosen by Cluj Napoca to test ambitious training programs, such as Culturepreneurs, which is fostering the creation of new enterprises in the sector and that is creating a widespread culture of innovative entrepreneurship at local level. Its modules on business essentials, developed in collaboration with a series of clusters, universities

and knowledge centres active in different fields such as arts and design, film production, management and digitalization, are currently included also in the local universities' curricula and are contributing to creating new partnerships among stakeholders active in different fields.

The Culturepreneurs programme trained 69 aspiring entrepreneurs, who used the knowledge on business essentials and on specific topics targeted by thematic modules (Custom Design, Innovative Audiovisual Contents, Gamification) to refine their business ideas and put them in practice with the machinery of 3 Labs on CGI&VFX, Design Development and Work 4.0 and Machine Learning hosted by CREIC, the Regional Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries. The Labs, equipped with innovative equipment, will be gradually opened to schools, universities, research centres and enterprises to be used as a playground for testing innovative ideas, services and products in different fields. The Work 4.0 and Machine Learning Lab is also used for retraining professionals of sectors at risk because of the rising of digitalization and automation, with a specific training program co-designed with local enterprises and clusters.

Cluj Future of Work has also improved the conditions for the employability of the residents of Pata Rat, an informal settlement located in the suburbs of the city in a landfill area. The UIA project fostered a participatory process in the area, which raised some of the most urgent points on which intervene in order to promote the access to decent jobs (such as the installation of a wi-fi connection in the area and sanitary infrastructure during the Covid emergency, or giving free access to a bus line connecting the area to the city centre) for the residents. Furthermore, the project is supporting the launch of start-ups on informal work carried out by eight aspiring entrepreneurs of the community, chosen after the launch of a public call.

Acting on different levels and groups of residents, Cluj Future of Work has created a tangible impact in different sectors of the local society, stimulating a wider reflection on the long-term perspectives of jobs and skills needed for balanced growth of the local economy.

2. Cluj Napoca and Just Transitions

What are the implications for Cluj Napoca?

The reconversion of Cluj Napoca's local economy is a long process that had a significant impact on the whole urban context. The promotion of green and digital transition didn't have effects only on the regeneration of structures and public spaces but fostered also new models of collaboration between public and private sector.

The collaborative definition of new sets of skills needed for the cultural and creative entrepreneurs of the future, carried out as preparatory action for the modules of the Culturepreneurs programme, made clear how the connection between social and environmental sustainability is crucial for creating new opportunities for growth for the city. The action of skilling and reskilling of the local workforce needs to take into account the evolution towards a different model of production, where automation is playing a decisive role in improving the design and the quality of local products (such as furniture and craftsmanship), but within organizational Work 4.0 models which are leaving no one behind.

The creation of new jobs in sectors related to sustainability and circular economy, such as the construction work or the collection of unused materials, is a priority also for promoting active inclusion of deprived groups, such as the residents of Pata Rat, and for switching from informal jobs to formal employment.

The reflection on the future of work carried out by Cluj Napoca is showing how acting on guiding sectors of the local economy, such as cultural and creative industries, can have a ripple effect on satellite activities but also for reinforcing a wider perception of open and collaborative innovation which can attract investors and innovators in different sectors, from manufacturing to digital and cultural production.

What barriers does the city face in the transition to Green Jobs, Skills and Businesses?

Cultural and creative jobs and informal jobs may look very different from each other but share some elements in common such as being characterized by a considerable level of insecurity. At the same time, these jobs are completely undocumented in Romania and no official figures on the number of people involved are available.

In addition to that, cultural work is not only considered invisible but also not necessary for the local society, especially in times of crisis such as the current Covid emergency that made these aspects emerge in a powerful way.

However, the green transition can be seen as an opportunity for improving the quality of the contribution that these jobs can give to an evolving economy, developing new services and functions able to show the importance of new skills and innovative businesses. For example, the use of virtual reality and animation tools in architectural studios (one of the possible uses of the machinery installed at the CREIC's Labs) can support innovative forms of planning or the use of Work 4.0 equipment for making the design and the production of furniture more sustainable on the medium and long term.

The informal jobs share similar issues, but the main barriers to the creation of green jobs need to be tackled with integrated strategies fostering social and economic inclusion of the deprived groups, such as the local Roma community. However, acting on activities which are historically involving many residents of the city's informal settlements, such as the collection and recycling of unused materials, can be crucial for making circular economy a driver for the transition to formal employment.

3. How does the UIA Intervention promote Just Transitions ?

Cluj Future of Work is promoting just transitions in Cluj Napoca with a series of actions involving different sectors of the local society. First of all, the project promoted among different groups of residents (students, aspiring entrepreneurs, employees and employers, deprived groups) a reflection on how the future jobs will look like promoting the definition of future scenarios and the organization of art exhibitions and open innovation competition. The creation of local culture on the future of work is contributing to making local civil society more resilient to rapid changes, as made tangible by the Covid emergency, but is also highlighting the relevance of sustainable services and products to be produced locally on the medium and long term.

The business acceleration programme Culturepreneurs contributed to the collaborative creation of new sets of skills for cultural and creative aspiring entrepreneurs, accelerating their business ideas which included in many cases direct reference to green transition. Among the entrepreneurial projects selected for receiving additional support for internationalization and marketing, Velemets is upcycling second-hand clothes with a design touch, while Anadora Lupo created unconventional metal chairs, which are stackable, foldable and mountable in different shapes and sizes. These ideas clearly show the evolution of creative skills to sustainable production, setting new standards and interesting examples which may be replicated by other cultural and creative workers at urban level.

The creation of the Labs at CREIC can be considered as an important accelerator of ideas and projects on urban sustainability on medium and long term, giving the opportunity to students, aspiring entrepreneurs and local enterprises to test innovative solutions which can innovate local productions and productive process with a multiplier effect at regional and national level.

Cluj Future of Work focused also on informal work in order to involve also deprived groups in the debate on the future of work. For the local Roma community living in an informal settlement located on a dump site, the evolution towards formal job opportunities and the connection with the employment landscape of the city can be part of a collaborative effort towards a just transition. The attention on the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainability is tangible in the actions carried out for the local Roma community, such as the creation of a new bus line connecting the area to the city centre in a sustainable way or the acceleration of sustainable business ideas of potential entrepreneurs residing in Pata Rat.

This approach to skilling and reskilling, where the social justice and climate justice elements are aligned, is an important feature in Cluj Napoca, identified as point 4 in our study Roadmap.

4. Keys to success

Cluj Future of Work is a positive example of how a city can tackle several issues on the role of jobs and skills for local economy, fostering a transition that is just for all. Here are some essential elements:

a. An effective model of co-management

The Municipality of Cluj Napoca and the Cluj Cultural Centre managed the project with an original form of co-management that was aimed at fuelling the action on the future of work with inputs from representatives of

cultural and innovative industries active at urban level, but keeping an international network of relations with cultural actors and innovators. Some of them, as the Austrian agency Time's Up, were involved in delivering future scenarios workshops, guiding local stakeholders, potential entrepreneurs and residents in a visionary reflection on different aspects of future of work. The initial objective of turning the Cluj Cultural Centre into the Urban Innovation Unit of Municipality by the end of the project was the driving force that fostered testing of innovative solutions, but also an adaptive and resilient management style that made the project impactful at different levels.

b. The active collaboration with the local partners

The delivery partners of Cluj Future of Work represent different actors of local cultural and creative industries, from industry and tech clusters to film industry and universities. The creation of a positive context of collaboration was seen as an important element to put their thematic knowledge at disposal of the city, for instance identifying future skills needed at local level and identifying topics and knowledge to be included in the curricula of Culturepreneurs. The establishment of new forms of mutual collaboration is an important factor, in view of the consolidation of the curricula for aspiring entrepreneurs in cultural and creative industries to be durably included in local universities' training programs.

c. A mix between action and reflection on the potential of cultural and creative industries

Cluj Future of Work was an opportunity for rethinking the future of cultural and creative sector and its role for the society and the economy of the future. Even though the pandemic clearly showed the lack at national level of structured frameworks for supporting one of the sectors that suffered most, the spontaneous action of support to local hospitals and medical centers called Un Singur Cluj (One Single Cluj), which was carried out by the Cluj Cultural Centre and involved many cultural stakeholders of the city, showed the impact of the sector also on unexpected parts of the society and a strong potential for contributing to a just transition.

d. The participation of deprived groups

The participatory process carried out in Pata Rat was an important step to highlight the needs of the local Roma community but also to share vision and ideas on how to promote a transition towards formal jobs in a sustainable and inclusive way. The support to employability of this particular group of residents, whose subsistence was related for decades to the collection and recycling of unused materials, show how these past experiences on aspects related to circular economy can be the starting point for the active inclusion in the local job market, fostering the creation of small enterprises. The road towards just transition is made also of concrete support to people who can emerge from their community and set an example of how the future of work can be just, inclusive and sustainable for all.

5. Upscaling and replication potential

Even though the connection between the cultural and creative industries and their impact on sustainability and environmental transition is only implicitly affirmed by Cluj Future of Work, there is no doubt on the fact that the future of work will be greener everywhere. At the same time, it is undeniable that innovative industries can promote sustainable solutions, also in the cultural and creative sector which is not usually considered as fundamental but can foster a positive change in civil society.

However, some of the activities implemented in the framework of Cluj Future of Work, such as the Culturepreneurs programme or the set of activities for the residents of the informal settlement of Pata Rat, have a strong potential in terms of replicability for other cities willing to explore innovative mechanisms for skilling and reskilling as a basic element for just transition.

The creation of a business acceleration program combining business essentials and thematic modules, whose curricula are developed by practitioners and business representatives who are aware of the current and future trends of their respective sectors, is an effective mechanism to combine sharing of practical notions and testing of innovative solutions.

Empowering deprived groups with new sets of skills can be crucial not only for guaranteeing their access to formal jobs, but also for the creation of more sustainable jobs in circular and green sectors at urban level.

