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## Creative clusters in low density urban areas: A case study approach

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## **Creative Clusters in Low Density Urban Areas: A Case Study Approach**

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### **Abstract**

*The development of creative clusters is only considered viable in big cities and metropolis. However, this paper tries to demonstrate that creativity can become a driving force for the development of small and medium-sized urban centres and even rural areas, alongside with studies that have been carried out in countries such as USA, Canada or the UK.*

*The methodology used is based on a case studies analysis centred on two small urban communities: Óbidos, in Portugal and Barnsley, in the UK, that are developing local public policies oriented to the formation of creative clusters in their territories.*

*These are places characterised by endogenous natural, historical, cultural and symbolic amenities, with a strong local government oriented to promoting the attraction of talents and the emergence of creative businesses through the creation of specific creative and cultural infrastructures and support schemes. Moreover, the proximity to an important urban hub seems to be also relevant.*

*Considering the dichotomy between amenity and job-based theories presented in the literature, and besides the complementarity between both approaches, we tentatively deduce that in low density urban areas and rural places the amenity-based theory best suits reality.*

## **1 – Introduction**

Creativity, knowledge and innovation have become the main driving forces of regional economic, social and cultural development.

Both in academic literature and in policy documents, creativity is considered essentially an urban phenomenon because human, economic and institutional resources are generally located in the big cities. However, the attraction and retention of talent, namely of the creative class (Florida, 2002), to small urban centres and rural areas could be a solution for their economic revitalization, reversing de-population and desertification trends.

This work intends to respond to the following questions: *Are creative clusters viable in low density urban areas? Can creativity become a driving force for the development of small urban centres or even rural areas?*

The research approach is based on a case study methodology centred on the analysis of two European examples of creative small urban environments: Óbidos (Portugal) and Barnsley (UK). A conceptual model and a set of analysis dimensions were defined as the background of this benchmarking exercise.

The paper begins by presenting a literature review on the conceptual framework of the notion of ‘creative clusters’, so as to present the role of creativity in low density urban areas. Then follows the description and comparison of the case studies based on the pre-defined analysis methodology. Finally, some conclusions are extracted emphasizing the critical success factors of low density urban areas in the implementation of creativity-based strategies.

This investigation represents work-in-progress and is being developed within the “Creative Clusters in Low Density Urban Areas” network, supported by the URBACT II Programme of the European Commission. The project is led by the Municipality of Óbidos (Portugal) in a partnership with eight cities from Spain, Italy, Hungary, Romania, United Kingdom and Finland and the Innovation Centre INTELI (Portugal).

## **2 – Conceptual Framework: Creative Clusters**

The interest in clusters can be dated back to the seminal work of Alfred Marshall (1919) on industrial districts in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was followed by the research of several Italian authors such as Bagnasco (1977) and Becattini (1990). The original rationale for industrial districts lies on the creation of external economies that arise from geographical

proximity between firms with similar characteristics. A pooled specialised labour market, a huge offer of intermediate inputs and support services, and the short-distance information flows justify the efficiency gains derived from agglomeration.

In the 1990s the cluster concept experienced a revival through the work of Michael Porter. For the author, clusters are geographical concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions (for example, universities, standards agencies and trade associations) in particular fields that compete but also co-operate (Porter, 1998). The clustering phenomenon is a source of competitive advantage to the entrepreneurial fabric due to productivity gains, innovation opportunities and new business formation<sup>1</sup>.

Alongside other sectors, there is some evidence suggesting that creative industries<sup>2</sup> also cluster geographically (Lazzeretti et al., 2008, 2009; NESTA, 2009). However, the specific characteristics of creative clusters detach them from the traditional industrial clusters analysis<sup>3</sup>. Creative clusters can be defined as “places that bring together: a community of creative people who share an interest in novelty but not necessarily in the same subject; a catalyzing place where people, relationships, ideas, and talents can spark each other; an environment that offers diversity, stimuli and freedom of expression; and finally, a thick, open and ever-changing network of inter-personal exchanges that nurture individual’s uniqueness and identity” (De Propriis, 2008). Evans (2008) presents the concept as “places to live as well as to work, places where cultural products are consumed as well as made (...) they are open round the clock, for work and play (...) they feed on diversity and change and so thrive in busy, multi-cultural urban settings that have their own local distinctiveness but are also connected to the world”.

Thus, besides benefiting from agglomeration economies (Marshall’s specialization thesis), creative industries also take advantage of urbanization economies (Jacob’s diversity thesis)

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<sup>1</sup> Besides clusters, other territorial innovation models have been proposed by several authors, such as: ‘local production systems’, ‘innovative milieu’, ‘regional innovation systems’ and ‘learning regions’.

<sup>2</sup> The most popular definition of ‘creative industries’ was introduced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in 1998 in the United Kingdom. The famous report *Creative Industries Mapping Study* defines creative industries as those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. Advertising, architecture, arts and antique markets, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, television and radio, performing arts, publishing and software were the 13 sectors considered in the mapping exercise.

<sup>3</sup> Traditional cluster analysis has been mainly focused on historical sectors or high-technology industries, inducing the definition of cluster policies oriented to the creation of “industrial districts” (Italy), “centers of expertise” (Finland) or “competence centers” (Germany).

since it is the close location of diverse industrial sectors which explains higher productivity and long-term growth through cross-pollination of ideas, technologies and knowledge<sup>4</sup>. According to Lorenzen and Frederiksen (2008), “the case of creative businesses differed in that they are driven by the externalities that arise not only from specialization in particular industries and occupations, but also from the positive externalities that arise from the diversity of cities themselves (...) with their diversity of industries, forms, workforce, and skills, as well as cultural diversity, cities can be centers for coordination among diverse knowledge bases, and their geographical proximity promotes knowledge flows, the spread of ideas, and new forms of entrepreneurship”.

This approach represents a shift from the analysis of creative industries and businesses to the additional consideration of the human factor (creative people, talent) and its creative habitat (creative place, territory), emphasizing the advantages of diversity and variety. The so called creative cities (Landry, 2000) are becoming poles of attraction of the creative class due to their diversified, vibrant and tolerant physical and social environment, distinctive amenities and quality of life. According to Florida (2004) and his popular “3 Ts theory” (Talent, Tolerance and Technology) “creative centers (...) are thriving because creative people want to live there ... companies follow the people – or, in many cases are started by them (...) what creative people look for in communities are abundant high-quality experiences [and] an openness to diversity of all kinds”.

Due to these different perspectives, Storper and Scott (2009) have been developing a huge amount of research work about the relation between human capital, amenities, creativity and urban growth. The basic question is: *do jobs follow people or do people follow jobs?* They present several shortcomings associated with the amenity-driven population dynamics<sup>5</sup> which advocates that the location choices of individuals with high levels of human capital are made principally in response to features of the urban environment or amenities. Moreover, the concentration of these workers in specific places positively affects regional economic growth in the form of entrepreneurial and creative dynamism, high levels of innovation and the expansion of technology-based sectors. On the contrary, the authors advocate that urban growth is directly associated to the economic geography of production, postulating that “it is

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<sup>4</sup> In similar vein, some authors presented the concept of ‘related variety’ which is defined in terms of industrial sectors that are related because of shared or complementary competencies in a cognitive basis (for example, Asheim et al., 2007).

<sup>5</sup> The authors associate this theory to three main contributions: Florida’s creative class theory (2002, 2004); the research of Glaeser and Co. focusing on a widely ranging set of amenities that underlie urban growth; Clark’s notion of the city as an entertainment machine (2004).

production and jobs above all that drive urban prosperity, then it follows that the supply of social, material and economic amenities will be very largely endogenous to the urban growth process rather than an exogenous driver” (...) “among the preferences that play a role in individuals’ location decisions we must surely count those for relevant employment and remuneration” (Storper and Scott, 2009).

These theoretical and academic ideas are having a direct and increasing impact on the definition and implementation of urban policies by regional and local authorities. In this vein, public policy initiatives oriented towards the promotion of creative clusters can be based on a business-oriented approach or/and a people-oriented approach (Florida, 2002; Trip, 2008; EC, 2010). On one hand, a business-oriented approach (“traditional cluster perspective” - EC, 2010; “business-climate” – Florida, 2002) focuses on the *creative production milieu*, proposing measures and conditions favorable for the development of creative businesses as generators of jobs and wealth, such as subsidies or tax incentives. On the other hand, a people-oriented approach (“occupational perspective” - EC, 2010; or “people’s-climate” - Florida, 2002) is centered on the *creative consumption milieu*, being oriented towards improving the qualities of the cities as a way of attracting creative talent which, in turn, induces additional investments by companies and the emergence of start-ups enhancing job growth and rising income.

According to Trip (2008), “these two perspectives are not completely exclusive (...) creative city policy in practice also tends to combine both approaches”. Moreover, “working, living and leisure in the creative city largely overlap so do the production and consumption milieus of the creative economy”.

The notion of creative clusters lends itself well to strategies of culture-led urban regeneration that have been a feature of post-industrial cities in Europe (Flew, 2010). In fact, one of the motivations behind creative cluster development is the redevelopment of derelict industrial sites that served old crafts production (e.g. textiles, ceramics, jewelry, metal crafts) towards the creation of “cultural quarters”, “cultural districts”, “creative hubs” or “innovation hubs” (Cunha, 2007).

These are mainly fusion spaces, in which prevail a mixture of cultural and creative functions and activities from production to consumption and exhibition, from the visual and performing arts to music and digital media, including also leisure and entertainment elements, residential

complexes and retail spaces<sup>6</sup>. Arabianranta in Helsinki (Finland), The Digital Hub in Dublin (Ireland), 22@bcn in Barcelona (Spain), Museum Quarter in Vienna (Austria) and the Cultural Industries Quarter in Sheffield (UK) are recognized examples of these projects.

### 3 – Creative Clusters in Low Density Urban Areas

According to different academic studies and public policy documents, the emergence of creative clusters is only viable in large cities and metropolis (Florida, 2002; DCMS, 2006).

Nevertheless, some countries have already begun to put on their agenda the role of creativity as a driving force for the development of *low density urban areas*, it being recognized that “while much of the attention of those concerned with culture and regeneration has rightly been focused upon the core cities, it would be a mistake to assume that *smaller towns and cities* do not have a role to play” (Wood and Taylor, 2004) and that “the understood wisdom on the essentially urban nature of the creative industries is complemented by their increasingly significant role in the economic development of *rural areas*” (BOP, 2008).

In this context, *low density urban areas* match the OECD (2005) concept of ‘intermediate regions’ and ‘rural regions’ with the remoteness/proximity duality proposed by the EU (2008). In fact, the OECD classification of regions presents three different categories based on the share of a region’s population living in rural local units (defined as local administrative units with a population density below 150 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>): rural regions, with more than 50% living in rural local units; intermediate regions, where between 15% and 50% of the population live in rural local units; and urban regions, with less than 15% living in rural local units. The approach of the EU introduces in the OECD classification a new concept of remoteness, based on the driving time to the closest city<sup>7</sup>: predominantly urban regions; intermediate regions close to a city; intermediate remote regions; predominantly rural regions close to a city; predominantly remote rural regions.

Thus, intermediate regions close to a main urban hub represented 36% and predominantly rural areas close to a city 13% of the EU27 population in 2004 (Table 1). These constitute the focus of our analysis.

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<sup>6</sup> Besides these common characteristics, it is important to stress the diversity of these creative places, leading to the proposal of several tentative typologies: Evans (2009), Mommaas (2004), Costa et al. (2009).

<sup>7</sup> A region is considered close to a city if more than a half of its residents can drive to the centre of a city of at least 50.000 inhabitants within 45 minutes.

**Table 1** - Characteristics of predominantly urban, close to a city and remote intermediate regions and close to a city and remote predominantly rural regions

	Predominantly Urban	Intermediate			Predominantly rural			EU-27
		Total	Close to a city	Remote	Total	Close to a city	Remote	
Average annual % change in population, 1995-2004	0.29	0.31	0.31	0.24	0.02	0.10	-0.18	0.25
% of regions with a reduced share of national population 1995-2004	55	44	44	48	64	54	81	54
GDP per head 2004, EU-27=100	127	84	84	71	70	71	68	100
% of regions with a reduced share of national GDP 1995-2004	57	55	55	52	64	59	72	58
Population density in 2004 inhabitants/km <sup>2</sup>	552	112	114	65	40	51	27	113
Access to flights	1 059	475	483	215	237	286	114	685
Number of NUTS3 regions	416	475	454	21	393	249	144	1 284
Share of NUTS3 regions in %	32	37	35	2	31	19	11	100
Total population in 1000s	215 022	184 143	178 463	5 680	90 506	64 516	25 990	489 671
Share of population in %, 2004	44	38	36	1	18	13	5	100

Source: EU (2008)

The attraction and retention of talent, particularly of the creative class, in low density urban areas depend, largely, on the quality of life and the quality of place, which figure as the main explanatory factors for the so-called “urban exodus” (ESPON, 2006). People are increasingly looking for alternative lifestyles to those prevalent in the big cities, giving priority to the well-being associated with sports, healthy food, preservation of the environment and sustainability, and to the sense of community and local identity.

Therefore, the presence of amenities becomes a differentiating factor of the places sought by the creative class, which are affirmed as ‘special places’ imbued with an original atmosphere. These endogenous assets can be classified into the following categories: natural amenities (warm climate, distinctive and picturesque countryside with topographical diversity such as valleys, rivers, lakes, mountains and forests), historical and cultural amenities (architectonic and archaeological heritage such as castles, churches, aqueducts and bridges, and intangible heritage such as memories, testimonies and legends), symbolic amenities (community spirit, neighbourliness and sociability, identity, authenticity, civic associations) and built amenities (health and social services, hotels, restaurants, bars, meeting spaces, museums, art galleries, studios, events, etc.). According to Granahan and Wojan (2007), “despite an urban affinity, the creative class – perhaps more able and apt than others in the workforce to choose where to live based on quality of life considerations – can be drawn out of cities to high-amenity rural locations”.



The importance of built amenities alerts us to the need for the existence of a minimum critical mass and density which enable the availability of the basic services necessary for the population, which can come from the dynamism of the surrounding town or region or from the proximity to a relevant urban centre<sup>8</sup>. Besides this, it emphasises the importance of local development policies which could make favourable conditions, infrastructures or support programmes (such as incubators, live-work houses, specific financing systems) available inducing the attraction of talent and the development of creative businesses.

Moreover, the presence of the creative class can, in itself, generate amenities: “a place that attracts artists and designers may appeal to people who like communities (...) and people may be drawn to a community by the restaurants, stores, and other consumer services that develop in response to the consumption patterns of the creative class” (Granahan and Wojan, 2007).

However, there are differences between the “urban creative class” and the “rural creative class”, which is demonstrated by the fact that low density urban areas attract mostly talented young families, midlife career changers and active retired people (Granahan and Wojan, 2007). Besides this, the talent that live in rural areas tend to belong to a higher age-scale and to be married with children compared to urban talent. Nevertheless, according to a study carried out by Morel Research, younger people are also increasingly seeking rural areas due to the low cost of housing, the better quality of life and the presence of quality schools, which is clearly facilitated by the use of information and communication technologies: “businesses can now start up in small communities even if they are hundreds of miles away from big cities” (BBC, 2008).

In fact, the entrepreneurial spirit of the creative class induces the development of creative businesses, and the presence of creative activities tends to attract more innovative companies and projects. Quoting NESTA (2007), “many in-migrants tend to be entrepreneurial; they arrive with new ideas and seek to implement them”. In the same vein, “places with a higher concentration of creative occupations actually have more creative activities” (Granahan and Wojan, 2007).

Moreover, creative industries provide innovative inputs for other areas of activity in local economies such as agriculture, handicrafts, furniture, textiles, tourism and gastronomy, promoting their development and prosperity. The effects of knowledge spillovers derived from geographical proximity provide the transfer of information, technologies, innovative

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<sup>8</sup> Proximity to an important urban centre is pointed out as being a competitive advantage of low density urban areas in the attraction of talent (anyway, it is one of the characteristics of almost all “intermediate regions”).

business models and organization forms to the overall economy. Furthermore, findings suggest that there is a strong tendency for individuals with artistic and creative skills to work in other areas of activity (NESTA, 2008). In addition to this, several sub-sectors of the creative industries, such as architecture, design, advertising or software sell the majority of their products and services to other businesses.

Statistical and econometric studies centred upon the reality of low density urban areas of the United Kingdom, USA or Canada corroborate the presented thesis, demonstrating the existence of a positive correlation between the presence of amenities, immigration, size of the creative class, job growth and the development of small local economies.

As an example, Granahan and Wojan (2007a) demonstrated that in 2000 (as in 1990), about 11% of non-metro counties ranked as creative-class counties in the USA, and that counties high in natural amenities are more likely to be creative-class magnets. Moreover, creative-class non-metro counties tended to gain jobs over the period at a faster rate than their metro counterparts. In more recent work of Granahan et al. (2010), tests confirm that the interaction of entrepreneurial context with the share of the workforce employed in creative class is strongly associated with growth in the number of new establishments and employment, particularly in those rural counties with attractive outdoor amenities.

Also in the UK, the report of 2008 “Creative Industries in the Rural East Midlands” of BOP Consulting postulates that although creative industries in rural areas still contribute in a smaller proportion to employment than creative industries in urban areas, it is certain that this trend appears to be reversing itself in the so-called ‘fastest growing rural areas’, in which the relative size of the creative sector is approaching the average in the UK. As an example, in 2005, 3% of employment in the rural districts in the East Midlands was related to creative industries, and its respective growth was 20% between 2001 and 2005, compared to a growth of 8% in the overall economy.

#### **4. Case-Studies: Strategies towards Creative Clusters in Low Density Urban Areas**

##### **4.1. Analysis Methodology**

The methodology used for this case study research can be broken down into the following phases: definition of a conceptual model, establishment of a set of dimensions of analysis and drawing of conclusions. The empirical work was based on the collection of bibliographic elements, direct observation and field interviews.

Based on the theoretical insights and empirical studies on the emergence of *creative clusters in low density urban areas* presented, five important dimensions of analysis can be identified (Table 2):

- *Governance* is a transversal dimension and central in the promotion of creative clusters in small urban frameworks. It is related with leadership and management of places, but refers also to the coordination of actors, innovative and creative policies and public participation.
- The *natural and built environment* dimension refers to the natural, architectonic and archaeological heritage, which are important components to attract creative people. This encompasses the architecture of the place, the urban landscape and image, the climate, the public spaces, and other tangible and natural aspects of an urban framework – *natural and historical-cultural amenities*.
- The *social and symbolic capital* dimension is strongly linked with the community and its social interactions and also with the immaterial component of the place. This dimension is related to the local population who live and work in towns and midsize cities, and who originate the social atmosphere of the place - the '*genius loci*' and to the intangible heritage such as memories and local identities – *symbolic amenities*.
- *Economic activities and cultural facilities* dimension is associated with the business climate, enterprises, entrepreneurship level, local economic activities and knowledge, cultural and creative infrastructures – *constructed amenities* (health and social services, hotels, restaurants, bars, museums, art galleries, events, etc.).
- *The connectivity* dimension is a critical driver for success of creative urban and rural contexts since it fosters cooperation between creative workers, activities, resources and territories (rural and metropolitan frameworks). This dimension encompasses both virtual (digital communications) and physical accessibilities.

**Table 2** - Creative clusters in low density urban areas - Conceptual model



This methodology supports the development of benchmarking exercises comparing the case studies and extracting its global characteristics and best practices with the objective of validating, in a tentative basis, the possibility of developing creative clusters in low density urban areas and the amenity-based approach.

In this context, it is important to underline the limitations of the present methodology regarding the reduced number of case studies analysed and the lack of collection and interpretation of quantitative data.

#### **4.2. Case Study 1: Óbidos (Portugal)**

##### Context

The municipality of Óbidos is situated in the Central Region of Portugal, West Inter-Municipal Community, in the district of Leiria and it is divided into 9 *freguesias* (civil parishes). It covers an area of nearly 142 km<sup>2</sup> and has 10,875 inhabitants.

Based on distinctive endogenous assets, a privileged geographical position and public policies concerned with culture, creativity and innovation, Óbidos aims to become an unique place to live, work, learn and interact. The local amenities make this town extremely appealing for touristic development; however, there is the intention to link tourism and cultural consumption to an effort of attracting cultural production through a strategy focused on creativity.

## Governance

Based on the mayor's strong leadership and a qualified local government, there is a formal strategy in Óbidos for it to become a creative, eco and healthy town.

Since 2002, the local authority has been seeking to implement a development strategy that combines culture, tourism and economy with the aim of improving the regeneration and diversification of the local economy, anchored in a powerful marketing strategy – the 'Creative Óbidos' brand. The most visible part of this approach is the organization of public events that attract a significant number of visitors and tourists to the historical town (e.g. International Chocolate Festival, the Baroque May, the June Contemporary Art Month, the Opera Festival and the Óbidos Christmas Village). These events have drastically changed the perception of the 'museum town' and have reflected a strong organizational capacity along with the involvement of the local community and associations. Besides this, the impulse given by the support activities to entertainment and culture events have become an important lever for development due to the creation of specific technical teams and the generation of activities in the areas of theatre, acting, sculpture and painting, among others.

Furthermore, the municipality has been promoting public policies and actions regarding the creation of favourable conditions for the emergence of a creative economy, namely in sectors such as arts, architecture, design, digital technologies and gastronomy. In 2009, a 'Target Plan' was formally presented that framed the programme 'Creative Óbidos' focused on the attraction and qualification of talents, job creation, wealth growth and improvement of quality of life. This strategic document established a set of anchor projects in some priority areas more oriented to creative production, besides the continued bet on a cultural environment of excellence and on high quality tourism.

One of the main strategic lines of the plan is centered on creative entrepreneurship. The local government launched a set of support infrastructures and financing schemes oriented to the attraction and retention of talents and companies. A technology park was specifically built to house businesses linked to the creative economy offering material advantages (tax incentives, microcredit), excellent working conditions and quality of life. An incubation space called ABC complements the offer of the technology park with the possibility of lodging creative businesses in a short period of time. The infrastructure is installed in an old convent and integrates at the moment 10 companies connected with design, editing and publishing, jewellery, geographical information systems and tourism.

Moreover, the intention is not only to attract companies but also to provide favourable facilities to induce its workers to live in Óbidos. With that objective, local public policies in partnership with the private sector are launching an urban regeneration programme comprising the refurbishment of old houses in order to create ateliers, studios, co-working spaces, and live-work houses to national and international artists, designers, researchers, etc.

This creative impetus also intends to keep traditions and the symbolic and immaterial capital of the town, linking heritage, knowledge and innovation. For example, a ‘Network of Research, Innovation and Knowledge’ was created oriented to produce in-depth historical knowledge of Óbidos and to provide these contents to the public through interactive and user-friendly instruments. The concern with the preservation of cultural heritage is always present in the public development strategies, namely through the experimental use of new technologies.

For the management of relevant local initiatives it was adopted an agency model through the creation of municipal companies: *Óbidos Requalifica* and *Óbidos Patrimonium*. Public and private partnerships were also promoted, such as OBITEC, the Óbidos Association for Science and Technology, which involves the town of Óbidos and the municipal company *Óbidos Requalifica*, as well as higher education institutions, training companies and business associations.

Inter-municipal cooperation is limited due to the lack of a common regional strategy and to the rivalry between municipalities. However, Óbidos has been participating in several networks with other towns and cities at national and European level, not only as a way of attaining critical size but also to enable international affirmation. We can highlight the national networks ECOS – Energy and Sustainable Construction and Creative Economies and also the European URBACT network “Creative Clusters in Low Density Urban Areas”.

#### Natural and built environment

The municipality has a diversified geo-morphological context, which includes: a coastal strip with a number of beaches, the Lagoa de Óbidos (the Óbidos Lagoon), a unique natural landscape with its paddy fields and rural settlements.

The town with medieval roots surrounded by castle walls has an exceptional set of historical (e.g. the town gate, the judicial stone pillar) and religious monuments (e.g. the Misericórdia Church, the São Pedro Church and the São Martinho Chapel). Among these, there are traditional architecture houses in fascinating alleys that testify different periods and styles.

Besides the walled town, the municipality includes small rural villages alongside contemporary architectural projects designed by renowned architects.

### Social and symbolic capital

Óbidos has a strong iconic image that is recognised at both national and international levels: the medieval walled town. In fact, the local identity is rooted in its historical past and cultural heritage, but it is also defined by the natural landscape and the melting pot of secular traditions and rural lifestyles, which are still alive and very important for the regional economy. Óbidos has an intangible and symbolic consecrated heritage marked by memories and identities of different eras: from kings and queens to the elite who chose the village as a refuge.

A creativity-friendly climate is reinforced by the exploration of rural-urban relationships, the potential of a qualitative lifestyle, a strong community sense of place that is an outcome of relevant social networks and projects and an attractive environment. There is also an important associative spirit represented by several local communities, music bands and civic associations.

### Economic activities and cultural facilities

Tourism has acquired an increasing importance and is currently one of the main activities of the municipality being responsible for a large percentage of employment, as well as a wide range of services such as hotels, residential tourism, golf projects, restaurants and handcrafts. In addition to this, the agricultural activity is also very relevant, especially horticulture, fruit and wine. In what concerns the industrial sector, food processing, construction and furniture should also be underlined.

Due to the intention of developing a creative cluster in Óbidos, several infrastructures for entrepreneurship were built, as already referred, as well as a number of new cultural infrastructures, such as Casa das Rainhas (Óbidos Story Centre), São Tiago Bookshop, Casa do Arco, a network of museums and galleries (Municipal Museum, Parochial Museum, Abílio Mattos e Silva Museum with two contemporary art galleries: Nova Ogiva Gallery and Casa do Pelourinho Gallery) and a Centre of Interior Design (Maria José Salavisa Centre). Besides these built amenities, Óbidos has a strong cultural offer, in its various forms - music, dance, theatre, painting, sculpture and large entertainment, which attract a significant number of visitors and tourists to this historical town.

There was a large investment in the construction of new school complexes, based on new

concepts linked with creative and open-minded education, besides the already existing specialized schools and training centres: Tourism and Hotel School of the West – Óbidos, Óbidos School of Advanced Studies of Tourism (ETUR), Pontinha Food Training Centre. At about 20 minutes away from the centre town we can also find the School of Arts and Design of Caldas da Rainha.

#### Connectivity

Óbidos is located near important urban centres such as Caldas da Rainha, Peniche and Alcobaça, which allows for it being classified as an ‘intermediate region’ (EU, 2008). Besides this, it is well connected with the metropolitan areas of Lisbon, the Portuguese capital (less than one hour), Porto (about two hours) and Coimbra (1 hour and 20 minutes).

Its centrality in a regional and national context allows it to benefit from a good physical connectivity, which is partly due to the major highways A8 and A15 and the IP6 road. The town lies also at a short distance from the Lisbon International Airport, about 45 minutes by car.

To increase virtual connectivity the municipality has provided hotspots and public spaces with free Internet access.

### **4.3. Case Study 2: Barnsley (UK)**

#### Context

Barnsley is a metropolitan borough in South Yorkshire that was created in 1974 when 14 smaller urban and rural districts were amalgamated. At the present, it covers a diverse area of 320 Km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 218,000 people (82,000 in town) and it is characterised by an urban core and a rural hinterland divided by the north-south line of the M1 motorway.

The town developed a regional reputation as a historic market place which grew as a result of its significant industrial importance centred on coal mining and glass-making. When this industry closed effectively in the mid-90’s, the local economy was severely damaged, which caused severe difficulties to the community. Since then, there was a strong effort and commitment to boost county economic and social renaissance, taking advantage from its location in regional economy.

#### Governance

Strong political leadership in Barnsley is widely recognised. The council has engaged local



people in the development of a clear strategic vision: to create a culturally inspiring, dynamic and thriving “21st Century Market Town & Borough” through a sustainable growth. Given that, the local strategy is embedded on its endogenous assets, such as: the historic reputation as a market town; the local industrial tradition; its strategic location between the Sheffield and Leeds economies; the surrounding countryside; and the advanced technology companies already located in the borough.

In 2002, the Council has launched a high-profile participatory campaign called ‘Rethinking Barnsley’ that led to a regeneration programme named ‘Remaking Barnsley’. This programme has mobilized over £400 million of public and private investment and is committed to creating a thriving and enjoyable urban environment. Quality architecture set within an exciting and imaginative public realm, arts, culture and urban living are all part of this vision alongside trade and employment.

Barnsley’s creative industries vision resulted in ‘The Creativity Works/Creative Networks’ programme designed for supporting the development of a *creative and digital industries cluster* in Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham – the South Yorkshire coalfield area. Launched in 2003, this programme was supported by ERDF resources and was managed by Barnsley Development Agency on behalf of the programme partners: Barnsley MBC, Doncaster MBC, Rotherham MBC and the Arts Council England.

Built upon the success of the ‘Creativity Works’ project, the council reinforced the idea of putting culture and creativity at the forefront of its economic agenda, betting clearly in the creativity of their workforce that will underpin the growth of 21st century knowledge based industries. Several support infrastructures and facilities were created, such as incubation work spaces, new and alternative gallery spaces, platforms for installation and public realm work.

Following a programme developed by the Barnsley Development Agency oriented to research the needs of the local creative community, in 2006 ‘Creative Barnsley’ was formed, a social enterprise dedicated to networking and promoting local entrepreneurs and creative workers.

The Barnsley Council had adopted a comprehensive strategy for promoting effective citizen and community consultation and participation, principally via ‘Local Strategic Partnerships’ (LSPs). A LSP is a single non-statutory, multi-agency body that reflects a new mode of governance to deal with community key issues bringing together the Council as strategic leader and its partners from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. ‘One

Barnsley' is one of the twenty LSPs and is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the Community Plan that sets out the strategic vision of the borough.

In terms of regional cooperation, there are some successful examples of partnerships among the four South Yorkshire authorities: Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield, such as multi-area agreements, regeneration partnerships, formal company structures and cooperative working arrangements. Moreover, Barnsley has been participating in some European networks supported by EU Territorial Cooperation Programmes (namely URBACT), such as “Creative Clusters in Low Density Urban Areas” and “Building Healthy Communities”.

#### Natural and built environment

Barnsley has a variety of landscapes ranging from high moorlands to urban areas and arable lowlands. The west part of the Borough, predominately rural, is centred on the small market town of Penistone and includes parts of the Peak District National Park. The eastern part includes a number of smaller towns and villages of the former coalfield areas where 80% of the Borough's population lives. The town of Barnsley itself lies roughly in the centre of the Borough. Besides the natural heritage, there are idyllic villages and historic market towns with important monuments and buildings such as the pinnacle tower of St Mary's Church, the Monk Bretton Priory, Cannon Hall, the Stainborough and the Wentworth Castle.

#### Social and symbolic capital

Barnsley's local distinctiveness stems from its past economy, settlement pattern, historical character and culture. The traditional market towns and the former mining settlements with their strong communities have shaped the identity of Barnsley. Barnsley has a strong sense of community constructed on a long history of informal and formal networks. This is reflected in the large number of community groups that are involved in providing a wide range of activities such as environment, community, employment, safety and health projects. The Community Partnerships are recognised as a pioneering model to engage local residents in community projects and initiatives such as regeneration and the renewal of their neighbourhoods.

#### Economic activities and cultural facilities

Advanced manufacturing and materials is one of the region's key clusters, employing over 40,000 people and bringing together world-leading companies, support organisations and expertise from areas such as steel, metals and alloy processing, through to manufacturing high-tech products for sectors including aerospace, automotive and household appliances.

There is also a significant food and drink sector with a strong research base which employs a high number of people.

As referred, Barnsley wants to develop a reputation as a home for creative and digital businesses. The Digital Media Centre (DMC) nearby Barnsley College Centre provides support for entrepreneurs and start-up businesses in the creative and digital media. The Business and Innovation Centre (BBIC) supports the development of innovative technology and knowledge based businesses. Under the project of the Creative Barnsley network, artist studios were also opened in the Elsecar Heritage Centre - CB HIVE STUDIOS, as well as a new contemporary gallery - HIVE GALLERY.

The town already provides access to leisure and cultural facilities, as for instance: the Metrodome leisure complex, an increasing mix of pubs and restaurants or some fashion outlets. The Civic, one of the Barnsley Development Agency projects, offers access to a broad and diverse selection of arts events and activities and provides creative workspaces. Barnsley has a long tradition in brass bands originally created as social clubs for its mining communities and it is also home of a number of independent theatre companies, specialising in non-mainstream drama and performance as well as over 300 local societies and clubs. Besides that, the borough's cultural infrastructure comprises museums, galleries, archives and libraries. There is a range of cultural events like the All Barnsley Diversity Festival that contributes for the local vitality.

Barnsley's education system is changing. The 'Remaking Learning' programme aims to improve standards, and to increase employment skills, through a borough-wide infrastructure of Advanced Learning Centres and the continued development of Barnsley College that has a Business Solutions Centre and the Barnsley Campus of the University of Huddersfield.

### Connectivity

Barnsley has a central position in the Northern Growth Corridor at the heart of the UK. It is located close to three city-regions: about 30 minutes by car from Sheffield (19 kilometres to the south) and Leeds (40 km to the north) and 1 hour from Manchester, which allows it to be classified as an 'intermediate region' (EU, 2008).

It enjoys fast access by road, air travel and rail. It is served by three major roads: the M1 motorway just one mile from the town centre creating fast efficient links to London, Leeds and other major UK cities. The M62 and M18 motorways are also only 20 miles away providing links to Hull, Grimsby and Manchester. Within 60 minutes of Barnsley there are

five international airports: Robin Hood Airport Doncaster Sheffield, Manchester Airport, East Midlands Airport, Leeds Bradford International Airport and Humberside Airport.

Moreover, the new Barnsley's Transport Interchange provides national railway connections and bus links. Besides that, the city is developing walking and cycling strategies and infrastructures.

In what concerns digital connectivity there is a regional project, 'The Digital Region' to provide an open broadband infrastructure which will cover the city, towns and villages of Barnsley, Sheffield, Doncaster and Rotherham and serve a population of over 1.3 million people, 546,000 homes and 40,000 businesses.

#### **4.4. Comparison of the Case Studies**

Through the characterization and analysis of the case studies, we can conclude that in Barnsley and Óbidos the governance dimension is critical to carry out local development strategies. A top-down approach was the starting point in both cases, but public-private partnerships play an important role in the development of such strategies (Table 3).

The creative strategies developed in both cases are based on the endogenous assets – local amenities. In the Óbidos' case, the distinctiveness started from its historical heritage and natural landscape, while in Barnsley the framework was its industrial background.

In both strategies, one of the key drivers was the development of support infrastructures for creative businesses and start-up spaces (incubators, creative residences and business parks) fostering the attraction of creative workers and residents.

Furthermore, there is a strong commitment to improve wellbeing and quality of life of the territories analysed. This endeavour takes also advantage from the strategic geographic location of both cases, near by major urban centres with good physical and virtual accessibilities.

**Table 3 – Synthesis of the case studies**

	<b>Óbidos</b>	<b>Barnsley</b>
<b>Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong leadership</li> <li>- Creative strategy driven by the local authority</li> <li>- Starting point: cultural thematic events in the historic centre</li> <li>- Clear strategic vision: “Creative Óbidos” Target Plan</li> <li>- Management model based on municipal companies</li> <li>- Support infrastructures and specific schemes for creative companies and talents</li> <li>- Promotion of public-private partnerships</li> <li>- Limited inter-municipal cooperation</li> <li>- Participation in national and international networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong leadership</li> <li>- Creative strategy driven by the regional and local authorities</li> <li>- Starting point: regeneration project of the urban centre</li> <li>- Clear strategic vision: “Creative Barnsley” Local Development Framework Core Strategy</li> <li>- Management model based on a Local Strategy Partnership – <i>One Barnsley Agency</i></li> <li>- Support infrastructures and facilities for creative activities, companies and talents</li> <li>- Promotion of public-private partnerships</li> <li>- Cooperation between smaller urban authorities and Regional Development Agencies</li> <li>- Participation in national and international networks</li> </ul>
<b>Natural and built environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Distinctive and diversified landscape</li> <li>- Predominantly rural region with small rural villages and a major urban centre</li> <li>- Unique natural landscape that includes beaches and a lagoon</li> <li>- Remarkable historic, cultural and religious heritage from different eras and styles</li> <li>- Traditional architecture alongside contemporary projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Distinctive and diversified landscape</li> <li>- Predominantly rural region with small towns and villages and a major urban centre</li> <li>- Unique natural landscape that includes parts of a national Park</li> <li>- Historic market towns heritage</li> <li>- Industrial heritage</li> <li>- Traditional architecture alongside contemporary projects</li> </ul>
<b>Social and symbolic capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Renowned iconic image: the medieval walled town</li> <li>- Local identity rooted on its historic past, secular traditions and rural lifestyles</li> <li>- Consecrated intangible and symbolic heritage</li> <li>- Diverse civil and commercial associations</li> <li>- Improvement of wellbeing and quality of life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regional reputation as a significant market town and as an important centre of coal mining</li> <li>- Local identity rooted on its past economy and industrial tradition</li> <li>- Historic character and community spirit largely shaped by the mining activity</li> <li>- Several community groups and formal Community Partnerships</li> <li>- Improvement of wellbeing and quality of life</li> </ul>
<b>Economic activities and cultural facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tourism and related services as the main economic activities</li> <li>- Very relevant agriculture sector</li> <li>- Significant industry of food processing, construction and furniture</li> <li>- New infrastructures for creative entrepreneurship and technology based businesses</li> <li>- Several cultural infrastructures and an intense cultural agenda</li> <li>- An assortment of knowledge infrastructures, namely specialized schools and training centres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very important advanced manufacturing and materials sector</li> <li>- Significant food and drink sector</li> <li>- Relevant retail and leisure market</li> <li>- New infrastructures for creative entrepreneurship and technology based businesses</li> <li>- Several cultural and leisure infrastructures</li> <li>- An assortment of knowledge infrastructures, namely the University Centre</li> </ul>
<b>Connectivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Town in an intermediate region</li> <li>- Located in Portugal’s Central Region and near important urban centres</li> <li>- Well connected with the two major metropolitan areas</li> <li>- Good physical connectivity mainly by car</li> <li>- Short distance from one International Airport</li> <li>- Increased digital connectivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- City in an intermediate region</li> <li>- Located at the centre of UK and close to three city regions</li> <li>- Fast efficient links to London, Leeds and other major UK cities</li> <li>- Good physical connectivity mainly by road but also by train</li> <li>- Proximity to five international airports</li> <li>- Increased digital connectivity</li> </ul>

## 5. Conclusions

The development of creative clusters is only considered viable in large cities and metropolis. However, through the analysis of some theoretical and empirical studies and through the qualitative results of the case studies explored, we can tentatively deduce that creativity can function as a driving force for the development of small and medium-sized urban centres and even of rural areas.

Nevertheless, as demonstrated, this assumption is not generically applicable to all low density areas. These places are characterised by the presence of endogenous natural, historical, cultural and symbolic amenities where a high quality of life and a strong community spirit prevail. Besides pre-existing local assets, public policies have an important role to perform, namely through effective leadership and the launching of development strategies with strong civic participation. Combined with entrepreneurial spontaneity, it is necessary to create a set of constructed amenities not only oriented to tourism and cultural (and creative) consumption, but essentially to cultural (and creative) production. The creation of support infrastructures and specific schemes, such as cultural and creative infrastructures, urban regeneration operations, and innovative education and training programmes are some examples of these interventions.

Moreover, it seems that the proximity to an important urban centre [the integration in intermediate or rural regions close to a main urban hub – EU (2008)] and good physical accessibilities are essential as a way of accessing to some relevant services and of maintaining linkages between ‘rural talent’ and the social, cultural and personal networks of the big cities. The development of information and communication technologies, the emergence of virtual networks and the increasing mobility of people, mainly of the creative class, reinforce this phenomenon despite the importance of face-to-face contacts and local connections to the indigenous community of residents. This fact contributes to the creation of a shared identity, sociability and neighbourliness, avoiding processes of social gentrification and inequality prejudicial to local and regional development.

It is also important to stress that these considerations are not commonly applicable to all segments of population and all types of creative people: low density urban areas attract mostly talented young families, midlife career changers and active retired people (Granahan and Wojan, 2007) alongside with married people with children, the so called “new rural residents”

who look for alternative lifestyles. This is why the OECD (2006) refers to a ‘new rural paradigm’ and ESPON (2006) to an ‘urban revival’.

Thus, considering the dichotomy between amenity and job-based theories presented, and besides the complementarity between both approaches, we advocate that in low density urban areas and rural areas the amenity-based theory best suits reality. According to Granahan and Wojan (2007a) “while developed with major metropolitan areas in mind, the creative class thesis seems particularly relevant in rural areas”.

Concluding, it is important to reinforce the risk of policy transfer and emulation of the development of creative clusters (from the regional, to the local and to quarter levels) all over Europe and internationally. The serial replication of this phenomenon can be avoided if creative strategies are anchored in historic precedents (‘path dependency’), in the symbolic value of place and space and in cultural heritage. According to Evans (2009), “there is a need to build on competitive advantage based on distinction/niche markets and a diversity of creative clusters, the links between ideas/design and manufacturing, as well as the diverse histories/heritage”.

This paper has demonstrated the need to deepen the study of urban and rural relationships within the scope of the European territorial system and its relation with culture, creativity and innovation. Since this research is an on-going process, future lines of investigation must be oriented towards the analysis of additional case studies, namely within the partners of the URBACT “Creative Clusters in Low Density Urban Areas” network, and the use of quantitative techniques.

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### **Web-sites**

[www.cm-obidos.pt/](http://www.cm-obidos.pt/)

[www.creativebarnsley.co.uk/](http://www.creativebarnsley.co.uk/)

[www.barnsleydevelopmentagency.co.uk/](http://www.barnsleydevelopmentagency.co.uk/)

[www.ciq.org.uk/featured-projects/cesy/funded-projects/](http://www.ciq.org.uk/featured-projects/cesy/funded-projects/)

[www.allthatbarnsleydreams.com/](http://www.allthatbarnsleydreams.com/)

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