Context

Kortrijk is a medium-sized city of 150,000 inhabitants as well as the central place of a conurbation of 280,000 residents. Located in the Flemish-speaking part of Belgium, Kortrijk is also part of the rising Euro-metropolitan area around the large city of Lille in northern France home to about two million inhabitants.

Creativity and innovation are fully integrated into the city’s development and promotion strategy. Art and culture are understood (at the highest political level) as a tool to regenerate places, give urban quarters a "soul", improve cohesion among citizens, and facilitate dialogue and communication.

In recent years the policy focus has moved from an isolated strategy for culture on one hand and design and innovation on the other, to a "spillover strategy" combining culture, creativity and the economy.

The city has consistently invested in the development of a creative economy, especially by supporting large-scale events, such as the Interieur Design Biennale, which has become one of the major design fairs in Europe after "Il Salone del Mobile" in Milan.

Cross-fertilisation initiatives are encouraged in partnership with Howest University College West Flanders, a higher education institute for a number of creative fields (product design, communication and media technology, digital art and entertainment). Howest has recently launched two cross-innovation programmes focusing on “design for everyone” where open design and assistive technologies meet to best cater to the needs of people with disabilities.

Kortrijk City Council is also a member of the "Creative Spin" URBACT Thematic Network, which aims at defining and testing tools and methods to connect CCIs with other sectors of the economy and public/social services in order to stimulate “creative spillovers” and contribute to innovation. It takes part in the new INTERREG IVB project PROUD (2013-15), where design and innovation are integrated in local policies to tackle new social and economic challenges.
Challenges

Through the Buda Fabriek, Kortrijk aimed to tackle specific challenges:

- Redynamise the area of Buda Island and its economy
- The location of Kortrijk amongst neighbouring creative cities (e.g. Lille, Ghent, Antwerp) required launching a large-scale initiative to allow the city to differentiate itself on the map of creative cities, with a view to developing the attractiveness of the area and attract investment.
- Attaining a critical mass in the CCI sector was a major priority (notably to support creative spillovers from CCIs to other sectors). Retaining young talents by offering adequate working spaces was also a core challenge for the city.

Buda Island regeneration – from brownfield to the Buda Fabriek hybrid space

Buda Island is the name of a former industrial area very close to the city centre. Since 2002, a major regeneration process has aimed at bringing citizens and companies back into this part of the city. The city has developed a programme to turn Buda Island into a breeding ground for culture, creativity and artists. One of the major projects was the creation of the Artcentre BUDA, which gathered the five most important local cultural organisations. Buda Island is also home to Design Regio Kortrijk, which aims to introduce design-thinking in other economic sectors in order to create high-value prototypes, services and products.

Buda Fabriek is perhaps the most iconic outcome of the urban regeneration project of Buda Island. Buda Fabriek gathers artists and companies from different fields to allow them to work together. It consists of a meeting and networking place for product developers, academics, designers, artists, schools, students and entrepreneurs. The hybrid space features an exhibition room for artworks, workspaces, and a design incubator (financed in the framework of the INTERREG IVB project PROUD).

Buda Fabriek works at the crossroads of disciplines, for example with the “Green Light District”, a three month-long programme with exhibitions, lectures, workshops and labs mixing creative and green approaches to come up with new solutions to sustainability issues.

Buda Fabriek hosts a Fab Lab (BUDA:lab), a public workplace and a meeting point which allows companies, individuals, students, schools and designers to meet, work and find inspiration in participants from diverse sectors. The Fab Lab was created thanks to the contribution of several partners, including Howest (University College West Flanders). Howest lent its expertise/human resources (for instance, teachers/students run workshops at the Fab Lab on 3D printing, laser cutting, etc.) and also promoted Fab Lab facilities (laser printer, 3D printer, etc.) within its network of students, professionals and companies.

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Budget and financing

Buda Fabriek received substantial support from the city and European regional funding for a total amount of €2435,955; € 974,382 came from the European Regional Development Fund.

Impact

Buda Fabriek has succeeded in interlinking designers, product developers, entrepreneurs, students, artists and academics in cross-innovative collaborations. A good example of such cross-innovation initiatives is 5X5: a project bringing together five designers with five companies to work on new products. The project was launched by Designregio in 2012 and 15 different products and services have been commercialised thanks to the initiative.
Transferability

Kortrijk has developed an original approach to creative place-making due to its proximity to large-scale creative hotspots (notably Lille, Ghent and Antwerp).

The experience of Buda Fabriek in implementing its projects has also shown that shared workspaces are instrumental in sustaining cross-sectorial cooperation.

Sustainability

The successful launch of Buda Fabriek has enticed Kortrijk to develop an action plan to further boost CCIs and creative spillovers in the short and medium term.

The plan has foreseen further investment in the field of culture and CCIs, including notably:

• A business accelerator developed with the Tranzit Youth Centre.
• Shared workspaces to further trigger cross-sectorial cooperation on Buda Island.
• Promote innovation between CCIs and other sectors, with Buda Fabriek as a meeting place and laboratory for projects.

Buda Fabriek is the focal point of this action plan as a catalyst for creativity across the whole city.

Tips

- Capitalising on specific strengths, such as events of an unparalleled scale in the region (Biennale Intérieure and now Creativity Week), to attract attention to the projects on Buda Island.
- Strong focus on youth with practical projects and spaces that allow for interactive experimentation.
- Importance of cross-sectorial cooperation to stimulate cooperation between CCIs and the numerous other SMEs (a strong local characteristic).
- Strong coordination between the city and its partners in order to promote synergies between Buda Fabriek and other local actors (notably Designregio and Howest).

Management level and partners

The main stakeholders are the city of Kortrijk and the Flemish Ministry of Economy. Buda Fabriek has been developed as a project, in which the city of Kortrijk, the Autonomous Municipal Cooperation (AGB Buda, a consortium of all the cultural institutions on Buda Island), Design Regio Kortrijk, and Howest (University College West Flanders) all take part.

The particularity of this place is that its "content" is not strictly defined in advance. The idea is to give its partners (city of Kortrijk, Howest, Artcentre BUDA, etc.) the freedom to propose and experiment with activities throughout the year. The internal statute on which this management structure is based is flexible, so that new participants can join in the future.

Links:
http://www.budakortrijk.be/nl/over-buda

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