



Past - Present - Future



NEW SPIRIT IN OLD-INDUSTRIAL PLACES

Implementation and Assessment Report

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Project context	4
1. Introduction	4
2. Approach: Try-out place.....	5
2.1 The Box	5
Evolution.....	5
Idea.....	5
Goals and target groups	6
2.2 Objective	6
3. Implementation: Industrial Culture start-ups	6
Mine-Art	7
Living Lab Entrepreneurs.....	8
4. Evaluation and transnational added value.....	9
5. Conclusions - Outlook and sustainability	10

ABSTRACT

Creative entrepreneurship is relatively unknown or considered too risky by the local population (which was and often still is brought up with a typical blue-collar worker mind-set)

In order to counter this process Stebo has centralized the goal of fostering creative entrepreneurship within WP T4. In DT4.4.7 a pop-up location which already has strong links with the industrial past (both spatially and thematically) was used as a try-out place for creative entrepreneurs and initiatives who are inspired by both the authenticity and the current needs and developments of the producing industry. It acted as a gathering location where past, present and future meet and are turned into a dialogue by a creative community.

The main results of the pop-up store are the boosted entrepreneurial initiatives which are rooted in the region's industrial culture. A new line of InduCult2.0 products has been designed, combining traditional and modern (industrial) techniques. The results of this pilot action have been 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.

Project context

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 - in which this action takes place - have taken actions to locate that potential in their region, and to build up a creative community around it.

1. Introduction

Creative entrepreneurship is relatively unknown or considered too risky by the local population (which was and often still is brought up with a typical blue-collar worker mind-set). As a result non-metropolitan regions have difficulties in competing with their metropolitan counterparts, yet are forced anyway to make the transit to an Industry 4.0 environment. Producing companies, for example, have difficulties in finding and attracting creative minds guiding them through this transition.

In order to counter this process Stebo has centralized the goal of fostering creative entrepreneurship within WP T4. In DT4.4.7 a pop-up location which already has strong links with the industrial past (both spatially and thematically) was used as a try-out place for creative entrepreneurs and initiatives who are inspired by both the authenticity and the current needs and developments of the producing industry. It acted as a gathering location where past, present and future meet and are turned into a dialogue by a creative community.

The main results of the pop-up store are the boosted entrepreneurial initiatives which are rooted in the region's industrial culture. A new line of InduCult2.0 products has been designed, combining traditional and modern (industrial) techniques.

2. Approach: Try-out place

2.1 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.

2.2 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 neighbouring former mining site and gradually also in the surrounding garden cities.

Within InduCult2.0 Stebo has developed 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. Up till the beginning of the project, a large range of entrepreneurs and associated topics have frequented The Box. However, apart from its location, the link with the industrial past and culture was not always clearly present. Main goal of the project has been to more strongly emphasize that connection and this by offering The Box as a try-out place for entrepreneurial initiatives linking 'old and new', both thematically and technologically. Entrepreneurs developing products and services related to the region's industrial past and future were offered the opportunity to set up, test and showcase their products and ideas.

3. Implementation: Industrial Culture start-ups

In total The Box has been populated for a period of 5 weeks by intra- and entrepreneurs with a thematic focus on Industrial Culture. In both cases a group of start-ups worked together. The search for finding interesting initiatives to crowd The Box, is closely linked to D.T4.3.1 in which Stebo engaged. In a Living Lab locals were motivated to set up a business around Industrial Culture. They went through a three-phased trajectory of inspiration, learning and showing their business models and products. The Box served as the location for the show moment (cfr. Infra).

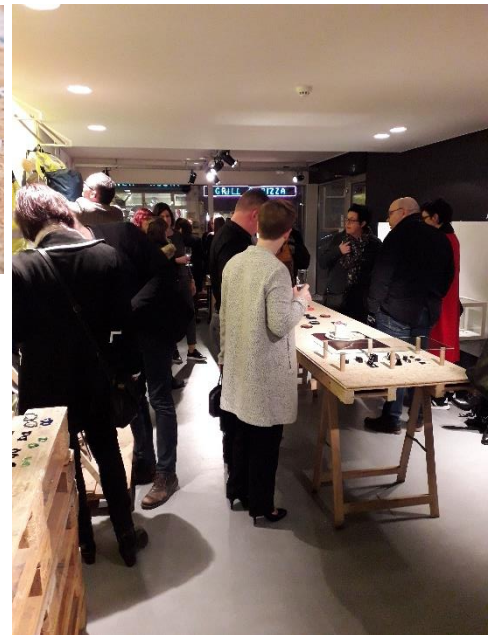
Mine-Art

Mine-Art is one of the numerous voluntary organizations that are present in the former mining cities. It is a non-profit organization set up by a community of ex-miners who wish to gather a creative community (artists, entrepreneurs, volunteers,...) which takes the mining past as a basis for product design. They frequently organize exhibitions to showcase these products. In August 2017 (14/08-27/08), during the event 'Vollebak Vennestraat', a selection of products was presented to the broad public. The products were produced with different techniques/materials (sewing, knitting, ceramics,...) while coupled with modern designs.



Living Lab Entrepreneurs

A second group of The Box inhabitants was found in the participants of the Living Lab (as part of deliverable T4.3.1), combined with a number of (ex-)participants of the Stebo trajectories directed towards stimulating and coaching of business start-ups. During the Living Lab they were inspired by a local designer with international experience, and were coached at Mia-h (fashion incubator) on the use of new technologies. In the latter case there has also been peer-to-peer training by creative entrepreneurs who were already experienced in the use of these machines (e.g. 3D-printing). A new line of InduCult2.0 products, connected to the industrial character and culture of the Limburg region, is the result the learning process on design and techniques. These products were shown to the large audience during (the opening vernissage of) an exhibition, and to a group of producing companies during a meeting and greet event.



A creative community of 5 designers has populated The Box:

Katja Noelmans is specialized in 3D printed objects with a focus on jewelry.

Sofie Hermans is specialized in textile production with a special interest in print designs. One of her print lines is based on the former coal mines of Genk.

Kathleen Bessemans produces ceramics and porcelain objects, thematically related to the former mining industry of the province of Limburg

Leen van de Wouwer combines different materials and techniques in her designs (glass, metal, ceramics, synthetic materials). She is specialized in translating personal (life) stories into personalized designs

Julie Vandenboren has created Pōur. Pōur is a design and product development brand that RE-harvests raw materials to create new circular products and applications. Pōur challenges the concept of waste. ('Redesigning the existing')

This group has contacted other entrepreneurs active in the Vennestraat. Also the link with C-mine (former mining site of Winterslag) and the tourism office has been set-up as a result of the InduCult2.0 project. Two designers joined forces and started a new label.

It can be concluded that The Box has played an intermediary and connecting role between the past, present and future meaning of the region while indicating the potential of Industrial Culture for creative entrepreneurship and awareness raising.

4. Evaluation and transnational added value

A creative community with direct links to the region's past, while looking forward to the future has used The Box as a try-out place. The socio-industrial DNA of the region is thus considered a valuable basis for entrepreneurial initiatives. As such the region's rich Industrial Culture will be activated and cashed upon.

The results of the InduCult2.0 trajectory have moreover contributed to regional and community development of the province of Limburg on several other levels in the sense that:

- The link between the Vennestraat and the former mining site of Winterslag has been reinforced, emphasizing the Industry4.0 connection, while exploiting the industrial past. Consequently the value of The Box as cultural heritage location and show/test area for innovation have been highlighted (especially during the meet & greet with companies).
- A creative industrial culture community has been set up. Even, a new cooperation between two of the designers - Katja Noelmans and Sofie Hermans - was initiated: 'duo wonder'. The creative community more closely interacts with the present merchants and has made contact with the cultural centre C-mine (former mining site of Winterslag).

The Box initiative can be used by other (partner) regions as an inspirational source. 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 - can help partner regions facing similar issues to move on in this topic. For example, a delegation from the Zwickau region (Germany) visited The Box Genk and others in the chain of Boxes in June 2018 as a peering field trip framed within the InduCult2.0 project.

Working on actions to revive old-industrial places through culture and creative industries, has also reinforced Stebo's relationship with existing stakeholders and enabled us to broaden our network with new companies and support organizations active in the industrial sector.



5. Conclusions - Outlook and sustainability

The results of this pilot action have been 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 as well as by offering entrepreneurial training programmes - as such emphasizing the link between the region's industrial signature and its creative entrepreneurship.

Stebo will reach out to 'metropolitan' entrepreneurs, and attract them to the province of Limburg with its network of Boxes.