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# BOLOGNA-AUSTIN: WORKING TOGETHER TOWARD MORE SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT CITIES

The City of [Austin, Texas](#) and the [Metropolitan City of Bologna](#) are engaged in an 18-month city-to-city pairing. Through this collaboration, staff from both cities committed to increase access to expertise and share knowledge on [climate change resilience](#), the [circular economy](#) and [community engagement](#), actively involving local stakeholders.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Italian city of Bologna was paired with Austin, the only US city participating in the inaugural pairing activities of the IUC North America programme.

The first study visit took place in March 2017, during which a delegation from Bologna had the opportunity to learn more about the innovative measures Austin is putting in place in the fields of climate resilience, the circular economy, and smart city development. It also gave the visiting delegation the chance to participate in the SXSW City Summit, allowing them to meet civic leaders and creative innovators of all disciplines from across the globe, to discuss, learn, and strategise on pressing issues.

A first result was achieved when a delegation from the Italia-Texas Chamber of Commerce visited Bologna and met local institutions.

The second study visit, which took place in June 2017, allowed the cities to continue the knowledge exchange process, starting with Bologna's experiences in co-creation and civic engagement, food policy, climate adaptation and the circular economy.

Both cities share similarities and at the same time different challenges and approaches. The aim in both cities, however, is the same: to be positive agents of change and to move their communities towards sustainable development.



## CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

[Austin](#) is the fourth-largest city in Texas and the 11th most populous city in the US. The city is the cultural and economic centre of the Austin-Round Rock metropolitan area, which was the fourth-fastest-growing city in the United States from 2010 to 2015. More than 65 percent of the energy consumed in Austin comes from [renewable sources](#), and the city has developed an innovative [plan for resilience to climate change](#), similar to Bologna. Austin has a creative startup culture and is one of only nine cities in the world with membership of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's [Circular Cities Network](#), a global network of cities pioneering the application of circular economy approaches to address urban challenges. It is, as Austinites playfully describe their city, "a blueberry in a raspberry pie."

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The collaboration engendered new ways of thinking, led to innovative ideas, and helped both cities to better understand how different cultures solve similar problems.

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[Bologna](#) is the capital and largest city of the Emilia-Romagna Region, a Metropolitan City comprised of 55 municipalities and over 1 million inhabitants. It is an important crossroads for national transport, a creative city and growing in popularity as a destination for tourists. Bologna is Italy's second most important location for [innovative-tech startups](#) and the Italian city with the highest ratio of invention patents to number of companies. Emilia-Romagna is the third Italian region in terms of the number of firms that have invested in [green technologies](#). In June 2017 Bologna hosted the G7 Environment event, an occasion for the Italian Metropolitan Cities to sign the "[Bologna Charter for the Environment](#)."

This charter identifies the goals to be achieved in the coming years, in line with the UN 2030 Agenda: from waste to air and water quality, energy transition to sustainable mobility, biodiversity to the circular economy. It totals eight macro objectives which are to be included in the metropolitan agenda for sustainable development.

Both Bologna and Austin are dynamic university cities with the presence of diverse communities, where the mixture of creativity and technology are driving forces for innovation.

Although Austin may have a similar climate to Bologna, the two cities have very different landscapes. Austin is a newer and more suburban city that is highly dependent on motorised vehicles. Bologna is much older, more densely populated, and relies less on cars for inner-city circulation. These two drastically different



landscapes encouraged the staff from the two cities to rethink their understanding of each cities' functions and barriers, encouraging them to [think outside of their internal silos](#).

Both cities are working to increase their resilience to changing climate conditions and to create a collaborative network of businesses, organisations, and entrepreneurs that will foster innovation and economic opportunities.

In early 2018, staff from Austin and Bologna went to each other's city to visit municipal stakeholders and devise ways to collaborate. These visits provided the opportunity to build relationships and jointly reflect on the concepts learned.

Through this process, the two cities agreed to focus on three "Thematic Areas of Cooperation":

1. Circular Economy and Innovation
2. Climate Change Resiliency
3. Community Engagement



# RESULTS AND IMPACT

Below are the five priorities for the collaboration:

## #1 EXPAND ON EXISTING ENTREPRENEUR PROGRAMMES:

The two cities discussed opening up opportunities for collaboration between entrepreneurs in Bologna and Austin, fostering innovation exchanges, particularly for young entrepreneurs engaged with the circular economy, green technologies, nature-based solutions, and eco-design. This would enable the exchange of specialised skills, allow innovative ideas to be developed, and provide the opportunity to learn from a range of sustainable business experiences. A first meeting already took place in Bologna, with participants from the Chamber of Commerce of Bologna and the Italia-Texas Chamber of Commerce. A second meeting is being scheduled.



## #2 STRENGTHEN UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION:

In close connection to #1, develop a relationship between the University of Bologna and the University of Texas, as well as with the cities, to identify research themes, topics, and projects for collaboration. The circular economy and smart city development will be focal areas, with the aim to develop a joint project that encourages the transformation of waste into raw materials. The project will include social aspects, business models, and eco-design approaches. The two cities are planning researchers' long-term visits and workshops.

## #3 KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES EXCHANGE ON CIRCULAR ECONOMY:

Austin will draw on Bologna's experience in creating a "Library of Things" and the Circular Economy Toolkit for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), while Bologna will consider creating a Reverse Pitch Competition similar to Austin's programme and improve local platforms based on the example

of Austin's Materials Marketplace. This will raise awareness and increase the competitiveness of businesses, as well as provide new services to startups and community members, encouraging reuse and repair and discouraging disposal and consumption of resources.

## #4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

In light of rapid economic and territorial growth, and to achieve the vision engendered by Imagine Austin, Austin's Office of Sustainability proposed the creation of a Sustainable Design Lab, a physical space to facilitate cross-department discussions and collaboration on sustainable urban design initiatives. Austin will look to create a community engagement space similar to the community design centre in Bologna's central library. The programme will provide materials, space and engagement tools for community members and staff to collaborate on public space design. Bologna wishes to deepen the innovation processes that Austin is proficiently applying, in particular the use of platforms for community engagement.



## #5 METRICS FOR CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCY:

Both Austin and Bologna have already developed a Climate Change Resilience Plan. Austin is considering applying metrics for climate change resiliency like those of the City of Bologna (number of gallons used per person per day, for example). Bologna is studying Austin's Urban Forest Plan and will adapt and transfer contents into its nature-Based Solutions Masterplan.



## LESSONS LEARNED



The IUC pairing between Austin and Bologna has great potential since both cities have a vibrant creative and technology environment, are major business locations and have innovative start-up facilities. Having common challenges and opportunities, as well as common priorities, enables cities to achieve long-lasting results.



From the start of the pairing, both cities involved all relevant stakeholders: city departments, regional and local organisations, research and educational institutions, companies, policy-making agencies, associations, and the media. This led to a growing interest and support throughout the cities.



The pairing process has activated connections and laid the foundations to start and reinforce trade relations. This led to great interest and facilitated the support from the city and local stakeholders.



The learning and exchange process engendered new ideas and ways of thinking, widening the focus of thematic areas, encouraging us to think outside of our internal silos and creating a collaborative environment.



The IUC team always accompanied the delegation, helping to prepare and implement the study visits, enriching the exchange and facilitating the learning process. This has been of great support and added value.



The political support for the IUC initiatives is particularly high. During both study visits, in Austin and Bologna, key decision makers attended meetings. This helps to generate broad support within the city administration and among local actors.

## THE IUC PROGRAMME

The International Urban Cooperation (IUC) programme enables cities in different global regions to link up and share solutions to common problems. It is part of a long-term strategy by the European Union to foster sustainable urban development in cooperation with the public and private sectors, as well as representatives of research and innovation, community groups and citizens. Through engaging in the IUC, cities will have the chance to share and exchange knowledge with their international counterparts,

building a greener, more prosperous future. The IUC programme is an opportunity for local governments to learn from each other, set ambitious targets, forge lasting partnerships, test new solutions, and boost their city's international profile. Its activities will support the achievement of policy objectives as well as major international agreements on urban development and climate change, such as the EU Urban Agenda, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement.



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