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ALBA IULIA AND BENEDITO NOVO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER'S STRENGTHS

Alba Iulia (Romania) and Benedito Novo (Brazil) have much in common, including commitments to working to localise the SDGs. Through the IUC programme, the cities have exchanged knowledge to learn from each other's main strengths across fields such as smart solutions, culture and tourism.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Alba Iulia and Benedito Novo are working in partnership through the IUC programme. The cities have been able to learn extensively through their partnership for a number of reasons. First, many of the challenges faced by either one of the cities are strengths of the other city. Secondly, both cities are firmly committed to working towards the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including in their IUC pairing.

Alba Iulia has extensive experience working in partnership with other European cities. The IUC programme has provided an opportunity for them to expand this collaborative work to non-European cities as well, which has strengthened their knowledge of potential mechanisms to

achieve sustainable urban development. The municipality of Benedito Novo – as part of the Association of Municipalities of the Itajaí Middle Valley (AMMVI) – joined the IUC for the opportunity to exchange knowledge, best practices, and to enlarge the municipality's perspectives on the benefits of international partnerships.

The cities began cooperating in May 2018, and have focused on several key themes: sustainable and smart tourism; smart cities; working in local associations; and financing sustainable urban development, including best practices for attracting non-reimbursable funding, for city branding, and for attracting investments from multinational companies into the smart futures of the cities.



CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Alba Iulia and Benedito Novo are well-suited to working together, as one city's challenges match well with the other city's strengths. Alba Iulia has extensive experience in attracting funding for local development projects, making use of the historic and cultural heritage of the city in its branding, and implementing smart city projects. These experiences – in particular pairing local tourism with smart solutions – are highly applicable to Benedito Novo.

Benedito Novo, for its part, has experience working in collaboration with other municipalities in the region to, for example, establish cohesive tourism routes. In addition, association among

municipalities in the Benedito Novo region is strong, and is leveraged to achieve sustainable regional development and to increase the voice of local governments at the federal and state levels. Alba Iulia is faced with challenges of being a small city located nearby to larger Romanian hubs. The city is thus keen to explore using these sorts of regional collaborations as one way to address its own development challenges.

All of these areas of cooperation require input and engagement from local officials and representatives from across sectors. Involving all relevant staff and municipal teams in the IUC cooperation proved to be a challenge. Not only did these staff have to be involved, but they needed to understand the cooperation, its mission, and be invested in its success. To overcome this, a team of staff from various municipal fields were brought together and given training and capacity-building aimed at engaging them in the implementation of the new ideas, projects and tools that resulted from IUC cooperation. The multidisciplinary nature of the team also worked to overcome “siloed thinking” and ensure that initiatives being taken on in one sector of the local administration bolstered those taken on in others.



Images: AMMVI



RESULTS AND IMPACT

Since they began cooperating in May 2018, the cities have had regular virtual communications, site visits in both cities, and “internships” involving representatives from each city working on site in their partner city. Although both site visits have been completed, one of the internships – for Benedito Novo representatives to travel to Alba Iulia – has had to be postponed due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

The relationship between the cities has led to concrete results in multiple areas, including culture and tourism, as well as smart solutions.

In August 2019, the artist Andréia Dirschnabel from the Benedito Novo region was featured in an international art exhibition hosted by the local government in Alba Iulia. This solidified the cities’ connection, supported tourism in Alba Iulia, and put Benedito Novo and talented Brazilian artists’ work on international display.

Moreover, in February 2020, Benedito Novo signed a Collaboration Agreement with the Romanian company “Life is Hard – Work Soft,” who have made a mobile application called CityHealth, which supports citizen involvement in

local government. Through the app, residents can report problems in the city, and local officials can directly provide residents with information. This is just one smart solution being implemented to support digitisation of local administrative services, and would not have been possible without the connection to Alba Iulia.

The two cities have also collaborated through the IUC on the intersection of these two fields – using smart solutions in the field of culture and tourism. They are collaboratively investigating how smartphone apps and smart businesses can be used to ensure that tourists have access to local stories and culture, whilst also providing the municipalities with the ability to manage their sites more sustainably, to support local businesses and even to link up with nearby towns to encourage longer stays in the region.

These concrete results are complemented by ongoing knowledge-sharing. Through exchanging information about their experiences, the two cities have had the opportunity to learn from one another and expand their collections of possible solutions to a variety of sustainable urban development challenges.

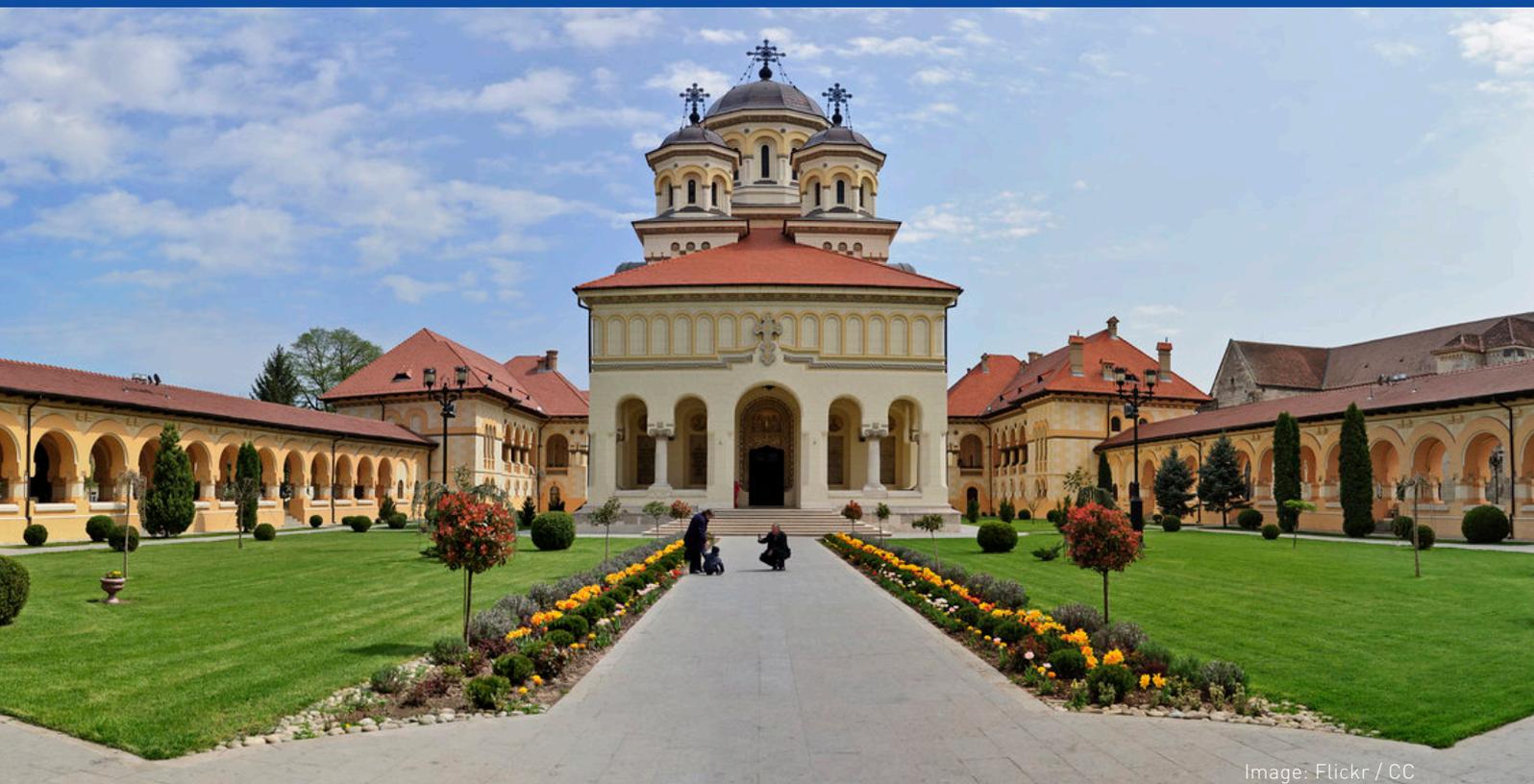


Image: Flickr / CC



LESSONS LEARNED

Both cities found it imperative to have a multidisciplinary team working on their IUC cooperation.

There must be good and deliberate integration between the efforts of various municipal teams, to ensure that each team's work bolsters others' initiatives.

Alba Iulia's local administration has a specific team responsible for designing projects and for pursuing fundraising. This technique helps to ensure that a city can best take advantage of the possibilities opened up by international cooperation.

The sub-regional associations of municipalities in which Benedito Novo is a member are supra-partisan. They instil strong regional identity and cohesion without stalemates or conflicts posed by political party differences. This has made it easier to push forward sustainable regional development initiatives.

It is important to ensure that decision-makers are also mobilised as part of cooperation, as this helps to make sure that projects are continued even after the period of formal IUC-supported cooperation concludes.

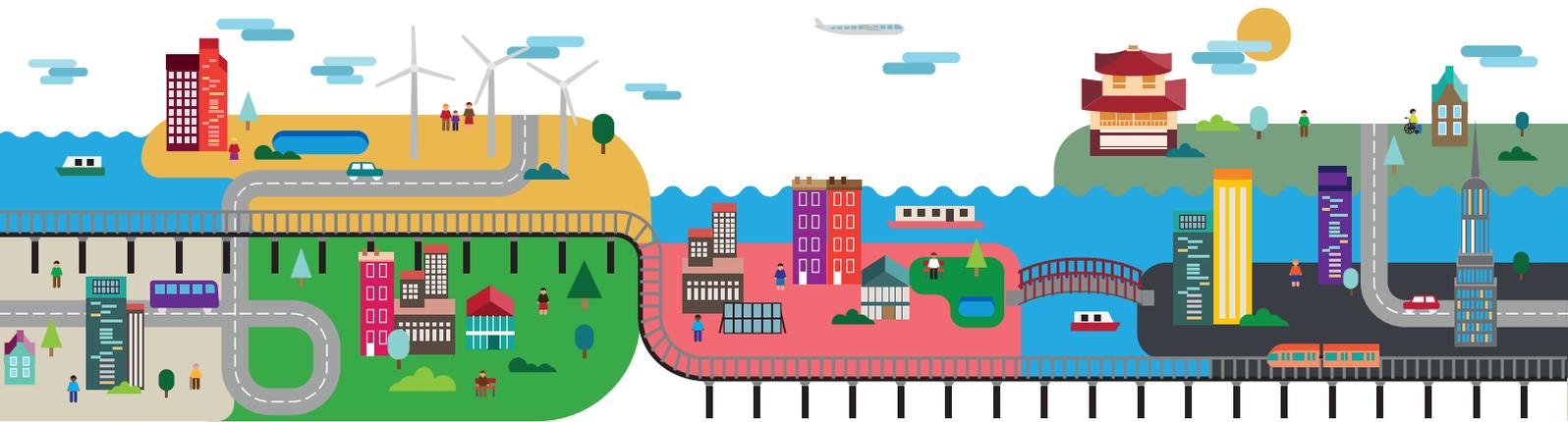


Image: AMMVI

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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