**TechTown - Project Scoping for URBACT III**

**EU level context**

Governments and business are successfully investing in, and growing, digital and tech jobs in Europe's large cities. Places like Stockholm, Berlin, London, Dublin, Warsaw, Tallinn and Barcelona are buzzing with people creating new digital businesses and companies developing exciting new technologies. Some smaller cities have thriving start-up scenes as well. Those with a technical university are attracting and developing “tech talent” and embedding digital solutions in older industries.

But the Digital Economy also poses challenges and some cities - particularly medium sized cities close to tech capitals or clusters - are in danger of losing out to their larger counterparts.

**Local challenges and opportunities**

Barnsley is one of these cities. A medium sized city in Yorkshire, North of the UK with a population of approximately 230,000 across a metropolitan borough, it has invested significantly in economic development over the last decade and a half, including infrastructure projects and the highly regarded and successful Enterprising Barnsley business support programme (part funded by Barnsley Council and ERDF). The programme has helped local companies to create over 1400 jobs since 2010. Additionally whilst nationally there was a little change in private sector employment between 2013 and 2014, Barnsley saw the largest increase in the area and it tops the table with 9.4% growth. A particular focus has been to grow the number of knowledge economy jobs with programmes and projects to support this agenda; over recent years the city has seen strong growth in the creative and digital industries. It is currently mapping the impact of work in this area and exploring new actions which may contribution to continued growth.

One of the key challenges for Barnsley and similar sized cities is supporting businesses to find the talent to fill highly skilled roles in the digital and technology economy as well as attracting and retaining talent to start new businesses in this sector, and filling digital and technology roles in the wider economy where there is also increased demand. As the digital and technology economies in neighbouring cities, as well as that of the capital, continue to grow this creates further pressures for city level economies which have to compete with city centres and their accompanying lifestyle offer, higher salaries, connectivity to higher education and larger knowledge based communities. Additionally, national and regional incentives and programmes for growth and inward investment focus heavily on larger cities. .

**URBACT III - TechTown Project**

We want to explore further the role and viability of digital and technology clusters and how benefit may be gained from major city initiatives to benefit job creation and growth in small and medium sized cities. We want to explore whether there is potential for spillover from stronger city level digital economies, examine how clusters can work at medium sized city level and look collaboratively at new ideas and actions to help support all businesses access the digital skills they need in order to start and grow.

**Partner profile**

We are interested in working with medium sized cities which have similar or related challenges to those outlined above. We are particularly interested in cities close to, or affected by, the technology clusters in larger neighbouring cities - notably but not exclusively Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Brno, Budapest, Dublin, Eindhoven, Helsinki, London, Munich, Paris, Stockholm and Tallinn.