



CULTURE

for Cities and Regions



IncredibOL! : Bologna's Creative Innovation



- Entrepreneurship
- Cross-sectorial collaboration
- Education & Skills
- Employment
- Innovation
- Economic growth



Context

Located in the North-central Italy, **Bologna** has 386,171 inhabitants. The city's university, which was founded in 1088 and is Western civilisation's oldest, attracts enough students to balance the city's ageing population.

Ranked first in the Italian Smart City Index, Bologna boasts a vibrant cultural life and an emerging creative economy. In 2012 there were approximately 1,500 cultural companies and more than 25,000 creative companies, representing 8% of all companies in the region. The cultural and creative sectors sustained 77,000 jobs, or 4.5% of the total regional employment.

At the international level, Bologna is also heavily involved in projects and networks in the field of culture. It was awarded the title of European Capital of Culture in 2000 and became UNESCO Creative City for Music in 2006.

The economic recession led the city and the Emilia-Romagna region to consider the potential of cultural and creative industries as an innovative economic driver. Since 2014, CCIs have been a priority of Emilia-Romagna's Regional Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation (RIS3ER).

Challenges

Cultural and creative industries are flourishing in Bologna, but the sector remains fragmented and its professionals often lack managerial and organisational skills, which results in unsustainable businesses with a low turnover and profit margin. Moreover, the student city suffers from brain drain as creative graduates move to other regions. The main challenge for Bologna is therefore to retain its talent, offering young people opportunities to build a creative business or a cultural organisation at the local level.

IncrediBOL!

IncrediBOL! is a project based on a network of public and private partners and designed to boost the local cultural and creative sector. Young entrepreneurs in the CCIs are offered a range of financial and in-kind benefits to help them establish and grow their businesses. In doing so, IncrediBOL! aims at retaining the region's creative talents and promoting CCIs as a driver for innovation.

Every 12 or 18 months, IncrediBOL! launches an open call for innovative projects in the CCI sector. Partners of the network select those presenting a long-term vision and a sustainable approach that could best benefit from support during their start-up phase. Winning cultural and creative professionals receive from the partners tailor-made advice on managerial and legal issues as well as training and consulting assistance to cope with the general lack of entrepreneurial skills in the sector. IncrediBOL! provides a constant feedback and evaluation to the winning projects throughout their incubation.

In addition, the municipality of Bologna has set up a helpdesk which coordinates the project and supports the winners.

Former IncrediBOL! winners remain in the network so that the Bolognese community of CCI professionals never stops growing, enlarging a fertile network and supporting the recognition of CCIs as a motor of innovation for the city and region. Supported projects include very diverse activities such as experiments of urban re-use for urban development; a design studio; a fab lab and a web platform to bring together designers, producers and consumers.



The project that started at city level in 2010 is currently running its fourth edition and has been integrated into the city council's programme for the 2011-16 mandate.

Since 2013, it is also supported by the Economic Development Department of the Emilia-Romagna Region, through an agreement that identified it as a key cluster organisation for the region's CCIs ecosystem.

Financial assistance is also provided to creative entrepreneurs in order to expand their activities nationally and internationally. By providing facilities and services, IncrediBOL! values non-monetary resources that are essential to establishing a cultural or creative business.

Budget and financing

As it is based mainly on non-financial support measures, IncrediBOL! is able to work on a limited budget.

It was launched in 2010 with a €32,000; half that came from Bologna City Council and half from the State Department for Youth and the Association of Italian Municipalities.

In 2011-12, €40,000 was allocated to IncrediBOL! through Bologna City Council's budget (50%) and the bank foundation Carisbo (50%).

For its third edition in 2013, the project received €300,000; half was granted directly for the IncrediBOL! project and half for the development of the local design and audio/video sectors, which was made available for specific actions aiming at the development of local design and audiovisual. It was financed entirely by the Emilia-Romagna Region thanks to funding from the Ministry of Youth Politics (GECO2).

IncrediBOL!'s budget for 2014 was €150,000, co-financed by the Emilia-Romagna Region (€102,000) and Bologna City Council (€48,000).

However, the non-financial part of the project has been estimated at more than €500,000 in the form of rents, consultancy services, promotional activities, etc.

Impact



After four years of activity, a fast-growing creative community is developing in the city and region. The increasing number of applications (an increase of more than 30% in 2014) emphasises the creative and cultural sector's growing interest in and awareness of IncrediBOL! It also reveals the relevance of the initiative in relation to the needs of CCIs locally.

Since 2010, 64 creative projects have benefited from IncrediBOL!'s support.

Through its network of 23 partners, IncrediBOL! has widened dialogue opportunities between creative professionals and other economic sectors, fostering spillover effects between CCIs and traditional businesses.



Sustainability

From a small-scale initiative, IncrediBOL! has enlarged its scope to the whole Emilia-Romagna Region, acquiring a regional dimension which will be strengthened in the coming years.

Having encouraged several creativity-based actions for micro-urban regeneration, IncrediBOL! is now widely recognised as a pivotal element in developing policies for the cultural and creative industries in Bologna and Emilia-Romagna. It is thus integrated in both municipal and regional plans for culture and innovation, ensuring the continuation of its activities.



Tips

-  Promote integration between public administration departments: introduce interaction, flexibility and creativity.
-  Overcome the low level of awareness about CCIs: build the CCI community to generate trust.
-  Better understand needs: involve CCI actors from the very beginning (not everything is about financial support).

Management level and partners

IncrediBOL! is managed by the Economic Development and the City Promotion Department of Bologna City Council. The coordinating office is located in the city and has its own staff.

Private partners contribute up to 30% of the budget and provide in-kind support in training and consulting.

The public-private partnership includes education institutions such as Bologna University and Academy of Fine Arts; the regional development agency ASTER; professional associations (e.g. craftsmen, architects, accountants...); private consultants covering various fields. Emilia-Romagna Region, which is the main funder of the initiative, funds up to 40% of the initiative.

Private partners contribute up to 30% of the budget and provide in-kind support in training and consulting.

Such a network of public-private partners allows the local government to engage in a meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders and to work on horizontal collaborations rather than top-down relations.

Links :

www.incredibol.net

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Funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union

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