



This is a story about Innovation in Education and the adventure of the **Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha** on the ON BOARD Transfer Network, experienced and shared with five European cities from different countries, Viladecans (Spain), Poznań (Poland), Tallinn (Estonia), Nantes (France), and Halmstad (Sweden), with the aspiration to learn together.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”

Nelson Mandela

Once upon a time...

The city of Viladecans, a municipality in Spain, very close to Barcelona, faced a number of problems in the area of Education, specifically with many young people leaving school before completing compulsory education, low levels of family involvement in the school life of their children and young people with difficulty in returning to school after they had abandoned it.

These are the same kind of problems that concern communities and policy makers in many European cities, including Albergaria-a-Velha, given that they are often also associated with unemployment, social exclusion and poverty.

What to do to change this situation? The Mayor and Executive Councillors of Albergaria-a-Velha decided that Education should be a priority in terms of investment and in its activities, similar to Viladecans. Taking the Educational Innovation Network (EIN) of Viladecans as a model, the Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha, thus joined the URBACT initiative “ON BOARD Connecting cities through education” with the aim of creating its own solutions.

Not all things were going to be easy, despite being able to use the EIN approach for developing innovative activities in schools and having support from URBACT. We in Albergaria-a-Velha knew there were going to be significant technological, financial, operational challenges. But we also intuited that perhaps the biggest challenge was going to be how to get different people from different sectors in our city to all be “on the same page”, to work together for innovation in education. This is the essential part of our story.

Learn together... to work together in Education Innovation

LEARN TOGETHER: these are the two most important words in the ON BOARD project, we came to know early on.

No mistake about it, the exchange of knowledge and the sharing of good practices between our six cities has led to the concept of **educational collaboration**, with the **participation of different stakeholders**, involving the entire city of Albergaria-a-Velha in the process of educating our young people in an innovative way.

The Municipalities are vehicles of educational innovation and from the very first moment the EIN was well received by the executive councillors of the Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha. They participated in all activities with great interest and were thus able to engage an impressive range of influential local agents: School Boards, Parents' Associations, the Coordination and Regional Development Commission for the Centre of Portugal (CCDRC), The Intercity community of the Region of Aveiro (CIRA), the University of Aveiro, the Science and Innovation Park (PCI) of Aveiro, local associations (SEMA – Business Association) and regional (AIDA-Aveiro District Chamber of Commerce and Industry), economic agents and entrepreneurs from different areas with the purpose to create our EIN.

Indeed, Teachers, Parents, Young and Business actors together with the Education Department have defined a strategy **aligning all community efforts in one direction**, promoting significant projects for the development of young people and the city, where **schools share knowledge with each other and with the community**, right as Viladecans' Educational Innovation Network does. Albergaria-a-Velha is transferring the Good Practice with the support of URBACT's ON BOARD project, led by Viladecans. Everyone has a voice to improve the education of young people in the city!



ON BOARD Policy Declaration | Local governments' commitment to the transfer of the Educational Innovation Network.

Though we will not have a Foundation to manage the EIN as they have in Viladecans, the Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha, working through its Education and the Economic Development Divisions, in collaboration with the Communication staff, will run our Local Educational Innovation Network. Its joint work in teams, in collaboration with stakeholders, will put the project in motion.

“It Takes a Tribe”... How to get different people from different sectors to all work together? In Albergaria-a-Velha this is what happened:



Our URBACT Local Group of stakeholders, shown above, have been present from the beginning in the activities and meetings. These collective efforts demonstrated an interesting dynamic in our creating the EIN: ***“It seems that we are creating a tribe!”*** noted businessman Ricardo Pinhão. With URBACT ON BOARD providing the transnational impetus and Good Practice, we were able to consolidate different views and different sectors to move ahead towards a common goal.

The Group showed its first results in the outlining of the Municipal Education Agenda 2019/2020, which includes activities that were thought and programmed with the consensus and opinion of all local education agents.



URBACT Local Group meetings

URBACT facilitating the transfer process

Many of the instruments used in URBACT are in themselves learning tools - diaries, transfer plans and stories, peer reviews, the dynamics in transnational meetings -, which facilitate the monitoring and transfer process.

The monitoring is continuous and regular, which gives us the opportunity to obtain feedback from other countries and allows us to improve ideas and project strategies that we are developing in our city. It is a very interesting methodology that puts local agents debating issues in a constructive way, which makes them feel part of the change. The support of URBACT and the team of Viladecans was a crucial factor in accomplishing the goals we set ourselves.



Diary Entry developed by Teacher Hugo Carvalho, on the 4th Transnational Meeting in Tallinn

A huge asset that came from ON BOARD was our leadership in organizing the transnational meeting and the marketplace, as shown above. An enriching experience because we shared, at a transnational level, the innovative projects being promoted in Albergaria-a-Velha, but also showed these to our own local community and agents, so they could know what is done in the different schools, which is not always shared at a city level.

One project our URBACT local group, selected to implement in Albergaria was the Halmstad “Smart Brain”. The Local Group discussed how to adapt it and put it into practice, directing this activity to the classes in which school failure is most pressing. This contributed to the local plan to combat school failure, in straight collaboration with the Intercity community of the Region of Aveiro (CIRA).



Pictures of the projects on the market place at the 3rd Transnational Meeting in Albergaria-a-Velha

Learning along the way, too

In our journey there have been several key learning for the transfer process of our city, as a result of the transnational meetings, not only the projects already mentioned, but also specific learning for members our tribe as they participated in transnational meeting and visits to schools and companies and entities in civil society:

From Viladecans, *“the excellent collaboration, planning and sense of belonging between the different stakeholders”* (Nuno Ferreira – Project Coordinator, at the time).

From Halmstad *“the concept of a classroom for the future (classroom lab), as a way to prevent educational failure. In this classroom teachers and children are comfortable, they have physical spaces to relax and concentrate; they learn how to make good use of digital means. It was very interesting to see in loco digital assets and books living side by side in mutual complementarity”* (Dora Gomes – Teacher and ULG Member).

From Tallinn *“the key role of non-formal education, that provides a great offer of activities to the children, without pressure of formal education, allowing them to experience different learning, in an environment where the sense of belonging and active participation in the community is lived”* (Ana Sofia – ULG Member).

What's next?

As a result of this project, the URBACT Local Group will continue as a creative community, as an Educational Tribe, in order to support local education, in an informal way. Our Tribe will include current members and stakeholders, with the possibility of expansion, and will contribute to the strategic plan of the municipality in this area.

Initially, we planned to integrate the members of the local group in the Municipal Education Council. However, considering the formality of this structure, as defined in the Portuguese law, with its already designated entities, we considered it more advantageous to create our own independent creative community. Even so, there will be a link between the work carried out at the level of the Educational Tribe and the Municipal Council of Education, as in these meetings there will be an agenda for sharing objectives and results.

One of the next steps to debate and work within the URBACT Local Group will be the periodicity of the meetings of our “educational tribe” as well as the definition of some operating rules.

Currently, the internal cooperation between the Municipal Division's Teams is being strengthened. We established more synergies to find means and financing projects to put into practice **information learned in the transnational meetings**, namely in the integration of the principles of the new learning environments, in the recently rebuilt "Escola da Avenida". Here, the school equipment has wireless coverage in all the classrooms, interactive screens, tablets and areas for the development of creativity, such as the library with technological experimentation and laboratories.



Some of the equipment present at Escola da Avenida

At the same time, for the next 3 years, the municipality, in partnership with Inovaria (Association of Companies in the area of Software and Computer Development in the Aveiro Region), the schools in the municipality and the members of the URBACT local group – educational tribe, will promote the Scratch4all project, which aims to implement actions related to robotics and technology (with the hiring of a new staff member to implement the project) and the acquisition of computer equipment for schools. This project reinforces the existing collaboration with this partner from previous years, who is also responsible for the Tech@school project, which consists of taking professions linked to new technologies to schools.

Paths ahead

“In the meetings of the URBACT local group, work is already being done to have a network of innovation in education, at the municipal level, in the near future and after the conclusion of the ON BOARD project ... I already foresee the Open Space classroom, enriched from a technological point of view ... I also foresee a hard way to go to change mentalities and practices (almost secular). I am also sure that the future of education depends on innovation” - Dora Gomes (Teacher) – Member ULG

The main difficulties we faced during the ON BOARD project are linked to budget difficulties for major investment projects (acquisition of computer equipment for schools, e.g.), also the low level of digital skills of teaching staff and the lack of technological, financial and human resources in schools, because they are more difficult to solve, since they are barriers that are directly linked to central government. At a local level, the main difficulties we have faced are a lack of innovation mentality among some educational agents, low involvement of families in school activities and possible changes in the URBACT Local Group's (ULG) directions. We believe that we are already tackling some of them.

It is important to mention that one of the challenges to be overcome is to keep the creative community – educational tribe functioning after the end of the ON BOARD project. The Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha should continue to invest in this area with differentiated funded projects that enhance the involvement of educational agents. Although it is necessary to gather other resources and resort to other projects to finance certain initiatives that meet the objectives of the municipality, it is a challenge that we want to continue to invest in.

In the present situation that we all live, imposed by Covid-19, the biggest challenge is finding solutions to deal with the closed schools and the need to continue teaching. One of the problems that were uncovered with this situation was the lack of computer material for some students. To get around it, the Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha created a Municipal Bank of Digital Resources, composed of donations from the community of unused computer equipment.

Looking to the future

Innovating in education, to meet the real needs of 21st century students, is what motivates the Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha in this transfer process. The path taken, with the support of partners, URBACT and our educational tribe, lead us to believe that it is possible to create an informal participatory and creative community, where learning and working together brings benefits and synergies with added value to the community, Education, economic agents, families and the city.



“The best way to predict the future is to create it”

Peter Drucker