



Zoom-in I

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How an exemplary city/university partnership gives birth to a wellbeing FabLab

A bottom-up dominated adaptation to the needs of migrants and
refugees in building a 'Coventry for all'

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Key concepts: from respect to trust, common culture, creating connectivity, concrete actions, a wellbeing FabLab, adaptation to needs, conscious change process, multi-stakeholder interventions, evolution towards new concepts, self-reflexion.

Table of Contents

1	Executive summary	2
2	Coventry City	2
3	Social responsibility of universities to their territory	4
4	The FabLab – the magnifying glass of this partnership	7
5	The analysis	7
5.1	Respect before trust.....	8
5.2	Cocktail beings	8
5.3	Doing rather than where we come from	8
6	The mission of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations.....	9
7	The FabLab – proof of partnership	10
8	The FabLab and the trainings	10
9	Three key types of players in the success story	11
10	Taking into consideration the needs of the participants (transport, language, other responsibilities)	12
11	Adapting ambitions to the needs of the participants	13
12	A Migrant Friendly City or a My Friendly City?.....	13
13	Adapting to participant’s needs through the capacity for change and innovation within the project	14

1 Executive summary

The deep and intricate relations between Coventry City Council and Coventry University have blossomed to produce a very original use of the FabLab, which is usually more concentrated on technical innovativeness or employment and is generally open to all. For MiFriendly Cities it has been working on the technical competences of migrants and refugees and it has appeared that such intensive work, has transformed its vocation in part towards **wellbeing and social relations**. The FabLab has become a lens, a magnifying glass of the challenges in the programme, and being a laboratory, has initiated changes and improvements leading to innovatory co-working within the programme. Migrants and refugees are invited to learn new skills which are economically important for the West Midlands, whilst also supporting community-led integration in a very unique way, which has become a centre point for the MiFriendly cities programme in its piloting of many actions in an innovative way. It has also made evident, that several of the work packages have to function in unison, in order to render the services needed to this type of population.

MiFriendly Cities is a programme, financed by Urban Innovative Action (UIA), as one of three in the EU working in this sensitive area of migrants and refugees. This programme concentrates on the positive asset value of each and every person living in Coventry and the West Midlands (Wolverhampton and Birmingham), bringing with them the culture and life experiences and competences of their country of origin, thereby enriching the West Midlands to become a friendly and prosperous area for all to live.

Very often newcomers to a given area are not seen in a positive light and are understood to be intruders in an already established community. Part of the MiFriendly Cities programme is dedicated to persuading everyone, that migrants and refugees are valuable residents and bring with them the power of work, of wanting to be part of the community and contributing to its wellbeing.

2 Coventry City



*Sunairah Miraj,
Programme Delivery
Manager
(Migration/MiFriendly
Cities)*

We are a city at the heart of the country – in more ways than one – and a city that has continually reinvented itself over the years to rise to fresh challenges. We are a city that has gone from being the birthplace of the motor car to leading the way in driverless technology. One that has gone from ribbon weaving to high tech advanced manufacturing including developing low emission vehicles and driverless technologies on both a national and international scale. We are a city that's home to award winning universities and famous brands such as the London Electric Vehicle Company (LEVC) and Jaguar Land Rover – which is spending £1bn on cutting edge research that will help lead the way for others around the world.

We are a proud multicultural city, known globally for our work in peace and reconciliation – a city with an inspiring, world famous history and a bright future. The most twinned city in the world through the theme of peace and reconciliation. We will be European City of Sport 2019, UK City of Culture in 2021, and a Commonwealth Games Host City in 2022. We are home to top sport with Wasps, Coventry Blaze, Wasps Netball and the Sky Blues and fantastic events like the Godiva Festival and Motofest.

Being digitally connected is key to the future success of our city and communities, with people being connected as well as networked to services, leisure, culture, education, training and jobs through the physical changes we are making. The Council is bringing in new, streamlined ways of working

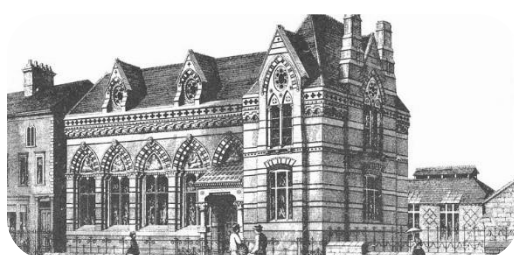
and making more use of technology to deliver services in new ways – helping residents to do more for online and to do business with us when and how they want.

Our workforce headcount has reduced by over 40% since 2010 and with these resources and budget pressures, we need to challenge the way we work and make some difficult decisions about our future services. We've already changed how we deliver services, like libraries and youth services, using innovative approaches to work more closely with our partners and volunteers. But we need to do more to mobilise our communities to help each other and move away from traditional models of delivery. *Sunairah Miraj CCC*

Coventry has a long and proud history of welcoming people to the city from all over the world. These people have brought new skills and expertise with them and have been proud to make Coventry their home. In recent years people have come to Coventry from Syria, Afghanistan and Iran and from a number of European and African countries. Coventry has the largest Syrian resettlement programme in the West Midlands region, and also a large asylum seeker population. Today, Coventry has a population of over 350,000, the city is approximately 7 years younger than the average for UK cities, due in part to the influx of up to 53,000 University students living in the city each year. The 2011 Census tells us that 1 in every 5 people living in Coventry (21%) were born outside the UK, and over 35% of births in 2011 were to non-UK born mothers. Whilst many migrants come to live and thrive in the city, more can be done to support the more vulnerable migrants, and, in particular, asylum seekers and refugees. The MiFriendly Cities programme has helped the city to secure the future of support for migrants in Coventry. The three-year programme will facilitate the contribution of refugees and migrants to the city's civic, economic and social fabric and will recognise the value host communities bring to enable integration. As well as introducing new initiatives, the project intends to bring further coordination and a boost to existing migration networks, supporting the work of the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP) and the region's two refugee and migrant centers, which between them support over 300 people each day. (Coventry Migrant Needs Assessment 2018).

The Mifriendly Cities project directly aligns with the City's Economic Growth and Prosperity Strategy:

Coventry will be a City that delivers sustainable and inclusive economic growth enabling all of our residents and businesses to prosper
(Economic Growth and Prosperity Strategy for Coventry 2018 – 2022).



Coventry University, as one of the city's anchor institutions, is heavily invested in supporting the Growth and Prosperity of the city, which aligns with the 176 year history of the University as an integral part of its local community. The University first opened as the Coventry School of Design in 1834 (in a former ribbon factory at the Burges) with a central mission of providing core skills to the community. This community ethos remains today in the institutions work-based learning, business-backed teaching and community university collaboration.

The University provides local leadership and coordination in delivering skills, research and innovation; support for enterprise; engagement with businesses and regeneration of infrastructure. CU Group has invested widely in infrastructure, technology, local enterprise and social capital, which have all contributed to the enhancement of skills, innovation, employment, inward investment and positive community impacts in the West Midlands region. The University's Vice-Chancellor is heavily involved in local growth and regeneration activities in Coventry. The University's dedicated lead, Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Group Strategy, Dr Clive Winters, and his team lead on the University's response

to, and engagement with, local strategies for growth in all geographical areas where CU Group has a presence. Coventry University has been an active partner in forming new collaborations to support a wider economic growth agenda. The formation of West Midlands Combined Universities (WMCU) between Birmingham City University, Coventry University and the University of Wolverhampton is one example, which brings added value through capacity to maximise the scale, breadth and depth of partnerships with Local Enterprise Partnerships, local businesses, Further Education Colleges, schools, and the wider community.

3 Social responsibility of universities to their territory¹



Sinead Ouilon, Programme Leader, the City University Initiative / FabLab Director

In 1997, the Dearing report was published and represented the first comprehensive review of the higher education system in the UK since the Robbins report in 1963. It made 93 recommendations with eight key messages. One being, that higher education institutions play a more significant role in 'the future economic and social wellbeing of communities, and the changing structure of the economy' (Dearing: 1997). Dearing's idea that universities should respond to the local economic and social wellbeing of communities is now, more than ever, relevant as local authorities (LA) are forced to relinquish many of their services in the prevailing landscape of austerity. In this climate of fiscal constraint and university expansion, universities have a significant role to play in promoting meaningful engagement that works with local communities to address their needs, as opposed to implementing a 'top down' model that rides roughshod over the considerations of those with the least power to inform opinion on, or benefit from expansion plans. Indeed Universities bring a wealth of economic, social and cultural benefits to cities and regions, primarily as employers and purchasers of goods and services. Universities for example, contribute over £3.9 billion to the economy (Universities UK).

In recent years, the idea of the socially engaged university has come to the forefront in the institutional missions of UK universities. Alongside an exponential rise in student numbers, British universities are also physically expanding, with universities undertaking considerable enlargement programmes on a scale not seen since the 1960s. At the same time, Local Authorities (LAs) are imposing severe financial cuts to services as a result of ongoing austerity. This raises fundamental questions about the role that universities, as anchor institutions, can play in responding to local social and economic pressures in their localities.

A number of definitions on the relationship between universities and their wider communities have been adopted and are conceptualised and operationalised differently across the higher education sector (Mtawa 2016). The National Co-coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) assert that **'engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit'** (NCCPE 2017). This definition emphasises that engagement should be a two-way process of reciprocal exchange. This paper adopts the definition developed by Watson, which defines community engagement as something which: **'presents a challenge to universities to be of and not just in the community, not simply to engage in "knowledge transfer"'**

¹ After many years of promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility, which seems to enable private companies to have CSR strategies, several attempts have been made to promote the idea of Territorial Social Responsibility, a concept developed over 20 years ago by REVES (<http://www.revesnetwork.eu>), a European network of regions and cities for the social economy. Since then this concept has developed, solidarity areas have been officially recognised in France by the government and the idea of socially responsible territories has even been included in the work plan of the Polish government for the development of the social economy.

but to establish a dialogue across the boundary between the university and its community which is open ended, fluid and experimental’ (Watson 2003:16)

This definition fits with the ethos of the Coventry University which has a long history of community university engagement in Coventry, dating back to its establishment in 1843 as the then Coventry School of Design, which opened in a former ribbon factory to provide core skills to the community.
Sinead Ouilon CU

In many European cities, the relationship between the city and its universities/polytechnic’s and other higher education institutes is often difficult, because these institutions are generally dependent on central government financing and decisions. Several attempts have been made to link them more into the global development of local areas, among others through an URBACT network² and most recently in the UK through the UPP Foundation Civic University Commission, a major new independent inquiry into the future of the civic university, examining how universities can most successfully serve their place in the 21st Century. The Coventry case appears to be unique in this respect, as the structure created in the city was a municipal initiative, established 176 years ago, foretelling the excellent relations that the city and present-day university have. For example, Coventry University local impact in numbers:

- 30,000 students, accounting for 1 in every 7 students in the West Midlands region. With 10% of students from Coventry, 39% from the Midlands of the UK
- 3,000 staff inject more that £82m into the UK economy, of which close to 50% (£37.7m) is retained within Coventry
- One in every 25 jobs is supported by the University and one in every 46 jobs is with CU Group
- Averaging over £30m in capital investment over the past decade and a planned additional £300m in the next 4-5 years
- 70 businesses are hosted in the Coventry University Technology Park, employing over 1,200 people, supporting an estimated £70m GVA annually
- Coventry University Enterprises has supported 48,917 SME’s to date
- Coventry University Social Enterprise, supported the establishment of 15 social enterprises in 2017/18, the highest number ever achieved amongst UK universities.

As evidenced above civic universities are a huge asset for their home cities. They are catalysts for social mobility, investors in infrastructure and providers of extensive employment opportunities. They are magnets for human capital and inward investment. They attract a youthful, cosmopolitan population which can drive local enterprise, creativity and cultural vibrancy. But for universities to be a force for good in their local cities they need to be connected into their social, cultural and economic life.



Professor Mike Hardy, Director of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University explained:

“We have taken a critical look at how connected we are, or are not, with our host City. Historically, Coventry University and the city of Coventry were well connected and shared a mutually beneficial relationship. But over recent years, Coventry University’s growth and success within a changing, global higher education sector has seen a re-positioning and refreshed outlook. New horizons have opened and new sources of income generated. One consequence has been a changing relationship with the City; we are still close,

² <http://urbact.eu/eunivercities>

but for some parts of our work, daily life on campus has become disconnected from the wider city of Coventry.”

Civic universities can be major contributors to their local economies and have a stake in their success. Their role in helping to build strong communities through mobilising expertise and collaboration can help revitalise urban neighbourhoods and research issues that support city planning and development, as well as the work of the third sector. Importantly for the University there is also a huge capability and resource in the community from which the university can learn and gain. Getting the two-way relationship and exchange right could transform potential and reconnect in a really positive way.

Encouraged by both the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, the team at the Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations, led by Professor Mike Hardy and Sinead Ouilon have developed an innovative social innovation engine to further re-examine and improve the interface between the city and the University. It has taken as its core focus the challenge to create a university that is relevant to all parts of the City.

‘The Coventry City-University Initiative’ links research from the Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations into a social innovation engine that identifies and implements potential solutions to the vulnerabilities exposed by the research. It does so in a way that is unique from other initiatives by fusing knowledge and experiences from local citizens and partner organisations with academic excellence. The output of this fusion, is a citizen driven approach that co-creates and implements innovative social, economic and environmental programs that are designed to tackle (from the bottom up) the challenges that can both impact and create vulnerability within our communities.

Mike Hardy said: ‘The initiative aims to provide opportunity for re-thinking the model for higher education. The project is designed to reach out to those who have not had a good experience of education, or may not feel that the University has little to offer them. We need to place more emphasis on reciprocity, mobilising the resources of both sides. Cities that have been able to associate themselves with a positive narrative of transformation are more resilient and socially sustainable, even more competitive. Those who have allowed a negative narrative about themselves to emerge face much more serious problems to deal with the current global challenges.’

The City University Initiative within CTPRS mobilized Fab Lab as a mechanism to engage a local city ecosystem of actors in supporting citizen self-mobilisation as an approach to building resilience within vulnerable communities. Further supporting and capacity building within these communities to respond to pressing urban challenges such as, ageing population, unemployment, isolation and digital exclusion.

The Fab Lab (fabrication laboratory) facility is based in a city centre shopping arcade and provides access to a range of equipment and tools, with the aim to support people to make “almost anything”. Fab Labs encourage the sharing of information and ideas to develop the integration of different cultures, backgrounds and ages and to partake in creative problem-solving through the art of making and designing. In the Fab Lab there is access to 3-axis CNC milling machines, 3D printers, Printed circuit board milling, Microprocessor and digital electronics design, assembly, and test stations, Equipment and materials for sewing and casting, Computer aided design (CAD) modelling, Laser cutter and an upcycling furniture factory.

The output of the fusion of research from CTPSR and a practical community maker space, is a citizen driven approach that co-creates and implements innovative social, economic and environmental programs that are designed to tackle (from the bottom up) the challenges that can both impact and create vulnerability within our communities.

The programs align with the sustainable development goals and aim to build social, economic and environmental resilience within cities.

Digital fabrication technology, also known as additive or augmented manufacturing will play a significant role in the future. Some assert that by 2024, 50 per cent of all manufacturing companies will have 3D printing operations in production; 40 per cent of all surgeons will practice with 3D models and 50 percent of all consumer business will have revenue-bearing 3D printing operations. The fourth Industrial Revolution (4ID), characterised by next generation technologies that include artificial intelligence, autonomous transportation, robotics and additive manufacturing including 3D printing, are set to bring profound societal changes. Some have argued that these innovations will create a ‘perfect social storm’ as inequality grows at a catastrophic rate, unemployment increases and even the most underpaid jobs are threatened by robotization. In this context, spaces such as Fab Labs will play an important role in mainstreaming the use of digital fabrication technologies, providing the skills needed to help ensure that people are not ‘left behind’ by the 4ID. When these spaces also provide a sense of community and enable marginalised communities to feel like valued members of society they become even more important as sources of social resilience.

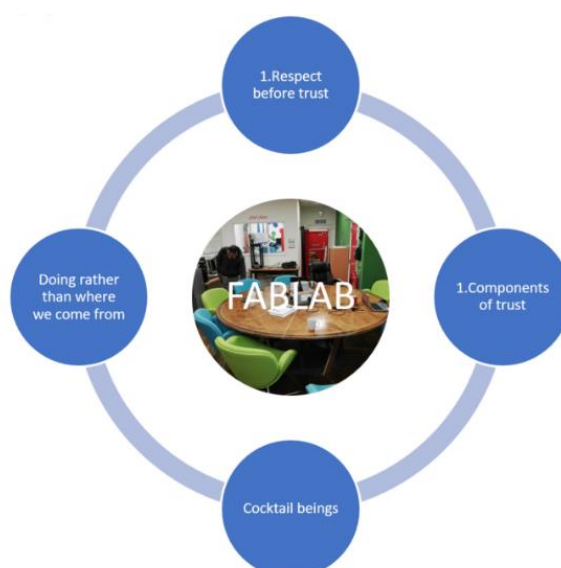
4 The FabLab – the magnifying glass of this partnership

This Zoom-in is an in-depth deep dive into this very local reality will show, that the partnership of Coventry with Coventry University is unique, but reproducible, as these two very large institutions are complementary. As stated by Peter Barnett (CCC, Head of Libraries, Health & Info Service (Migration) “the city becomes more friendly because it understands whom it is befriending” and this is due to the capacity of Coventry University to help the city to understand itself.

The ensuing chapters will try to show the developments of this complementarity, through the lens of the FabLab, co-created by both institutions. The process starts with an analysis of the relations built in the FabLab, according to the author, and goes into the conditions for success in creating the ‘Coventry for all, West Midlands for all’ reality.

5 The analysis

What is most important? Our origins, or what we do together at the present moment in order to create our common future?



5.1 Respect before trust³

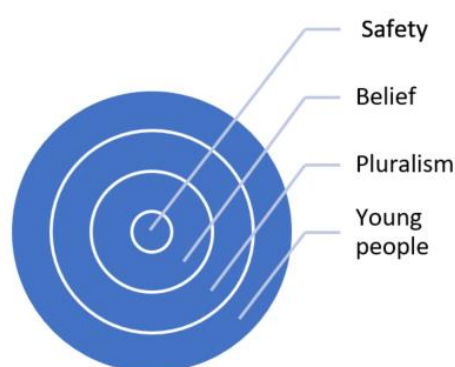
Living together implies purposeful relationships. Any relation is based on respect, which must come, before all other things, from the way in which we behave. So, it can be from the “doing” that our identity stems, giving us a role in our local community. The round table in the centre of the FabLab⁴ (see above) has been made by participants, showing what they can do when they work together. This gives room for trust, which like peace is a natural state that you need to harvest and nurture, rather than to oppose it to aggression as in the case of trust or even war in the case of peace. People have to lock into communities of trust.

Components of trust:

- 1) Whom do you trust? Importance of **recognising a competence** (being capable),
- 2) **Integrity** is important. Have set of values – they walk they talk,
- 3) **Benevolence** – concerned about you, extend to others (integrity, honesty),
- 4) **Predictability** – do people react and respond in the same way (reliable) (to be recognized by how I behave).

5.2 Cocktail beings

Guaranteeing safety will allow us to concentrate on the future and therefore on young persons. Exchanges over theories of living together, which divide us into “integrated” or “assimilated” persons have never resolved the question of how to go about our everyday tasks collectively when we interact. This requires safety as a fundamental condition. Can this be achieved at a moment when terrorism, in the name of religious convictions, threatens our societies? A **belief** is the capacity to have views which are nearly always a little different from the next person. Through respect and trust, mentioned above, we can conclude that having many different and even divergent views makes up what society is, what



an area of a city is, what neighbours in a given street are. This **core of diversity is an asset**, which should be protected and developed especially by concentrating on the younger generation.

This does imply, that describing who we are becomes very much like a cocktail: a mixture of drinks made up in a specific way, and often shaken. Are we not all a composite collection of different origins, backgrounds, languages and religions? However, what makes the world go around is how we act and what we do, especially together.

5.3 Doing rather than where we come from

In many cities universities and the city in which they are have a rather complicated relationship, as they are independently financed, governed by different levels of public authorities and often have very different timescales. In Coventry the “doing” has always been very important, perhaps due to the fact that the University, in its original form, had been created by the “city fathers” to help the development

³ Analysis done on the basis of conversations and desk research with Prof. Mike Hardy, who runs the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations of Coventry University, Si nead Ouilon, the director of the FabLab and many members of the team (see Annex 1)

⁴ <http://www.covfablab.org.uk/>

of Coventry (see the time line of Coventry University⁵). The relevance of Coventry University can be symbolised, in the case of migration and refugees by the establishment of the Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations.

6 The mission of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations



Professor Mike Hardy describes the beginnings in the following way: “The Vice Chancellor of the university asked me to come and build the missing link. One was the health sector and the second was the automotive sector. But there was still a missing link. It did not tell the story of social relations, which were important in Coventry as an emerging city, and secondly the story of peace and reconciliation. Following the race riots in 2001 and the beginnings of unsettled relations between faith groups, the university wanted to be **relevant**. If the university was to shine, it had

to develop a distinctive niche: niche dominance is something you cannot copy, it comes from something which is already there. Distinctive philosophies. One of them is **being relevant to the city**”.

Being relevant was also fostered by the city itself. Co-working with Martin Reeves, the chief executive of Coventry City Council⁶ and governor of the university, Prof. Hardy was surprised to hear, that the analysis of Coventry itself, as **an asset-based city of the future**, was dependant on four major facts:

- 1) Coventry was **close to Birmingham**, the second largest city in the UK,
- 2) Travel time to **London is only 57 minutes**,
- 3) Coventry is a City of **Peace and Reconciliation**,
- 4) Its characteristic is that it is **multicultural**.

This fostered the idea, that for the University to be relevant, it would have to gain the trust of this multicultural society, by getting to know it, by understanding and being able to support and help its functioning. The Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations identified that in Hillfields, a district of Coventry with 110 nationalities, one of the main hurdles to development was the lack of computer literacy, even though there were many courses, trainings etc. The diagnosis showed that the reason for this was the language question. All the trainings were being done in English.

At the same time, in the University there were thousands of students from all over the world speaking different languages. Bringing the two populations together the Centre for Trust developed a whole system of training in computer literacy in 40/50 languages: “**That’s relevance!**” says Prof. Hardy. It is also gaining the trust of many different groups and communities by doing, from these activities the Fab Lab was developed to further expand the digital and social engagement of different communities from across the city.

This incredible richness has been followed through by one of Professor Hardy’s key collaborators, Sinead Ouilon⁷, who is missioned to develop community driven social innovation projects in the city, building up in a permanent fashion the trust with all stakeholders.

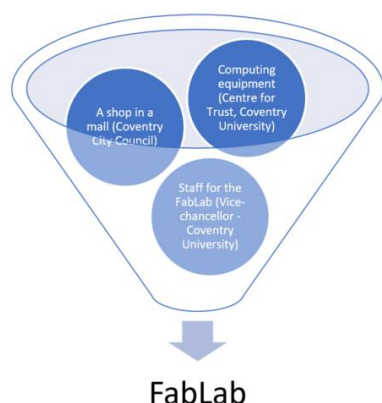
⁵ <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/the-university/175-celebrations/our-timeline/>

⁶ Martin Reeves is Chief executive of Coventry City Council since 2009

⁷ Sinead Ouilon is Programme Leader, the City University Initiative / FabLab Director

7 The FabLab – proof of partnership

Sinead Ouillon, from the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (Coventry University) was searching how to implicate the University in the life of the City of Coventry, in accordance with the mission of the Centre. She describes the process in the following way: “When I first went to Mike, the



director of the Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations to ask if I could set up this digital fabrication facility, he immediately recognized the value of such a space and invested in the equipment. The City council, also believing in the potential then provided a building in the city centre shopping mall and the university provided support to set up the facility from Coventry University Social Enterprise and the vice-chancellor’s graduate scheme supported the first staff member”.

This is proof that the “doing” capacity is not only a win-win situation, but allows the unthinkable to become reality, even between such big structures as the municipality and the university.

As says Prof Hardy: “It’s all about catalysts. 50K of investment. The best investment I ever made. I wasn’t doing it because we are an IT or engineering faculty. We’re not. We’re about social relations. How you can fuel the relationships with something positive.”

8 The FabLab⁸ and the trainings



This amazing story only symbolises the close collaboration of Coventry University with the City. The creation of the FabLab was made possible by intensive lobbying by Sinead

Ouillon of many partners, most of whom are members of the Coventry Partnership (60 organisations). Added to this, the situation in the city concerning emptying shops, due to the economic crisis, lent itself to the possibility of offering an empty space to the FabLab. This has in turn led to the creation of almost a small hub of NGO’s in the vicinity, offering multiple services to all residents. Such as the coffee tots café and learning space for parents and their children, ArtsSpace a community arts company, the shop front theatre and Langar aid.

The FabLab was created on the basis of the need for “relevance” of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations of Coventry University. A lot of work had been done by postgraduates supporting NGO’s working to help migrants and refugees. Work commenced on analysing how accepting communities are regarding migrants. To be able to work with people coming from elsewhere trust must be present. It does not come about automatically. So, the university started to invest in the local communities, where lies the essence of the building up of trust.

“It’s not a research project but a building the community project which included thinking positively about the migrant situation which is not going away. Coventry will continue to be a place where migrants find solace, dignity, where eventually they will find jobs. It’s a good story I think.”

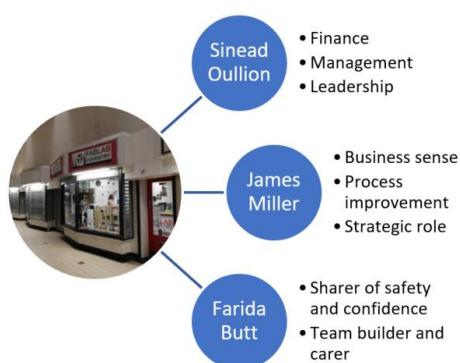
Mike Hardy.

⁸ “Providing access to the tools, knowledge and financial means to educate, innovate and invent using technology and digital fabrication to allow anyone to make (almost) anything, and thereby creating opportunities to improve lives and livelihoods around the world.” – Fab Foundation

9 Three key types of players in the success story

The success of the training delivered in the FabLab is obviously mainly due to the participants themselves, and the staff present. However, it has to be underlined that MiFriendly Cities joined the DWP programme⁹ initially to pilot the digital fabrication course, launch the skills agenda and work in partnership with DWP, to broaden the scope of this programme and have a more strategic focus as a city to support refugees and migrants into work. MiFriendly Cities were also able to provide the DWP with an innovative skills activity which addresses and is in line with the digital skills agenda for the West Midlands. The result of this partnership allowed the partners to learn from the 10-week programme in order to develop a structured programme for clients to fully utilise the opportunities available within the project.

The initial analysis has shown that the success and improvements of the training could be said to be the result of a strong collective effort between three persons, the director of the FabLab, the programme director for Interserve and the main person working face to face with the participants.



The key “every day present” person was Farida Butt who spent the most time with the participants. It was her who delivered the initial inductions and introduction to the course. She also took most of the ESOL classes and was responsible for the UK culture and integration elements of the course. She also took on the role of coordinating the participants and being the main point of contact for them. She would chase people who were running late and be the one that was made aware of any non-attendance for whatever reason. She played the role of social worker,

mother, confident and friend, which was seen as vital to a group of rather closed up persons initially: “Day 1 they were very quiet...whispering between themselves. Day 2 they were brought to the FabLab, still very quiet. By the end of the week, completely different people. Chatty, open with me. Person from Eritrea talked about his 25 years in the UK. Very basic language capacity. Feeling comfortable is the essence. Spaces like this encourages you to mix...” explained Helen Lewis¹⁰ in an interview.

The level of care and relationship building on the programme was not originally intended. However, the presence of a continuous person was of high importance. The ‘mother’ and ‘friend’ as opposed to teacher role developed particularly with the educational visits, which allowed for downtime and abolished the hierarchy of the classroom situations.

Visits would finish with a coffee or ice cream. A WhatsApp group for the participants included Farida, and this has been used as an ongoing way to keep in touch.

⁹ DWP funding was to deliver a 10 week Refugee Workshop programme to support Eritrean Asylum Seekers in Coventry in partnership with Jobcentre Plus. The DWP offer was generally a blank canvas to create the programme, with the following as a preliminary framework:

- Specific programme for Eritrean Asylum seekers
- Up-skilling on benefit conditionality (with JCP staff)
- Motivation and understanding work culture, DWP/ employer expectations,
- Recruitment processes and sector specific focus relating to current job opportunities
- Digital up skilling
- Industry based ESOL provision

¹⁰ Helen Lewis: FabLab Manager

“It is very good at exposing people to new technology - says a Fab Lab resident entrepreneur - so they can learn about the possibility of things, but where I see it having the best impact is in sort of like a creative therapy. A lot of the people that come in they have mental health problems or they’re struggling with unemployment and they seem to get a lot of comfort and social contact from coming in here. And from what I can see in terms of numbers, but in terms of the day-to-day, that’s where I see the Fab Lab having the biggest impact on the city. It’s almost like a refuge, just to help people get back on their feet and give people a break from the chaos or whatever is going on back home”.

This broker role is seen as so important, that it should be reproduced in other cities, wanting to do similar courses.

The overall supervision and functioning is guaranteed by Sinead Ouillon, Leader of the City University Initiative and director of the FabLab, working directly for the Coventry University Centre of Trust, Peace and Social Relations. She does a lot of lobbying, links in the FabLab to other events and logics and is the person making sure that the spirit of the FabLab is always maintained. Obviously, her financial role, to keep the FabLab ticking over is absolutely vital. The challenge over time of this FabLab, is that unlike the 500 others, its main result are not technical capacities, but supporting wellbeing. Only a handful of FabLabs in the world have this orientation and it puts the question of the financial feasibility of the FabLab in the centre.

The third person is James Miller, the MiFriendly programme director at Interserve. His role was meant to be that of a mentor to help the participants to access the job market in the companies, mobilised by the employment brokers. In wanting to do good he expected to be able to fulfil the promise of mentoring towards employment very quickly. However, the language capacity of the participants became an unsurmountable obstacle, which could not be overcome rapidly. The participants did not have the language capacity to benefit from a 40-minute mentoring session. This brought him and the team to reflect again on what the needs of the participants were and how they could be satisfied.

10 Taking into consideration the needs of the participants (transport, language, other responsibilities)

The first aspect was to get closer to the needs of the participants concerning their level of language capability so a system of priorities (RAG) was proposed:

- If you are red, you have to do everything in the programme,
- If amber, more concentration on English,
- If green work more on employment skills and match with employers.

Given the specific needs of the course, they would require a staggered delivery in each of the partner cities (Coventry, Wolverhampton and Birmingham). This would allow other MiFriendly City partners to participate in parts of the course, as their competences are very much needed at this stage by the participants: “legal health checks”, introduction to social enterprise, home makeovers.

“This would create a wraparound service for the persons we are trying to get into employment – says James Miller¹¹ - That’s what this project is about – looking at what other WP do – what is unique is mixing the WP”.

The aim of the Work Package 4 is to get participants into employment and maybe this element has to be more adapted to the needs of the participants on one hand, bringing in the other MiFriendly Cities

¹¹ James Miller: Interserve – Programme Director – MiFriendly Cities

programme partners, with their specific competences, producing the mix of services, which correspond more closely to the needs of the participants, than do the work packages (WP) of the programme itself. On the other hand, the programme takes strongly into consideration transport difficulties (timing, cheaper tickets etc.) as well as the other responsibilities that the participants may have (family or employment).

Language autonomy or employment?

One of the participants, originating from Jordan, but of Syrian origin, had spent the last 20 years in his country of origin repairing mobile phones and other electronic equipment. His language capacity was limited to the most fundamental English, not allowing him to be autonomous in the job market. The employment broker of the program in Wolverhampton Raymond Simmonds from the Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC) managed to directly fix a meeting with repair shops in the city. It would appear that repairing mobile phones within a competent already existing team, may not require autonomous language capacity, but a lower level, would be acceptable. In this way the pathway to autonomy could perhaps be shortened and the participant would be in employment, improving his language capacity in a hands-on environment.

11 Adapting ambitions to the needs of the participants

The FabLab training has shown that it is possible to bring the planned actions closer to the needs of the participants. The paradox is that this implies that the stakeholders of different work packages have to each participate in each other's work, differently than it was planned and expected. This allows the programme, in its defined ambition, to treat migrants and refugees as assets to the welcoming cities, to be more efficient, to be more helpful and to render more cutting-edge services to the population. Other work package leaders have observed what has happened in employment area (WP 4) and are proceeding to do the same in their areas of specialisation and competence. This innovatory approach to this programme appears in itself to be very original, even though it implies much more coordination and effort from all the partners.

This innovatory approach has in addition provoked at least two major interrogations concerning the future:

- should the MiFriendly Cities programme, idea, concept be a permanent one or just temporary,
- the question of the level of language capacity.

12 A Migrant Friendly City or a My Friendly City?

Professor Hardy is convinced that the crisis we are living through is not one only concerning migrants and refugees: "It's not migration which is the issue...but the difficulty in managing the pace of change. If we stay with migrants it's exclusive. We have to have a destination which is inclusive. We don't have a migration crisis. We have a difficulty of coping with change. We need to define the city and its resilience around that. One of the most visible, powerful changes is migration. There are lots of others, aging city, unemployed youth, which are the consequence of change".

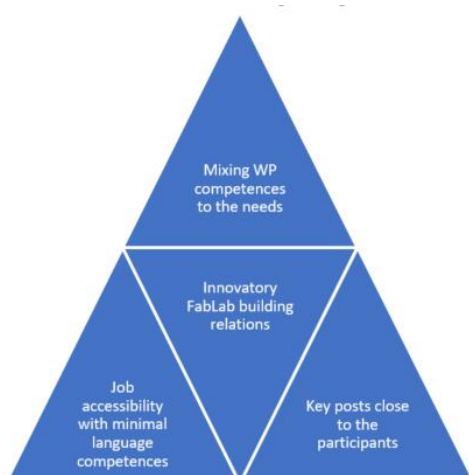
So, change is the major issue, where especially Coventry has a long history of adaptation, which can be symbolised by the bombed cathedral and its vocation as a city of Peace and Reconciliation. If that is not dealing with change then what is?

This implies, that other efforts have to be made in the city to allow a collective appreciation and participation of the change factors (aging, youth, unemployment, Brexit, etc.) of all the residents, especially those who are not newcomers. This would allow as large a part of the population as possible

to feel that the ensuing changes are a natural part of their lives, and not something imposed from outside. These actions, complementary to the MiFriendly Cities programme could maybe be initiated within it, as the understanding of the challenges has deepened and become more mature.

This maturity has come about also because of the incredible partnership between the city and Coventry University. This concerns of course the FabLab as a particular example, but can go further. The Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations has already identified that the computer literacy of the Hillfields area can be increased by using students from the university to train residents in their own languages. The employment of persons in the job market may therefore also be a question of an efficient networking, creating teams of people with diverse language capacities, permitting access to financial autonomy more rapidly. Professor Hardy is himself convinced that the challenge is not in learning the dominant language, but in being active in the society we live in, through work, the language question not being a condition, but complementary to the capacity to work.

13 Adapting to participant's needs through the capacity for change and innovation within the project



The original partnership between Coventry City Council and Coventry University has created this unusual FabLab, where the MiFriendly Cities programme has been able to test itself and draw a whole series of conclusions, which fit exactly into the principles guiding the Urban Innovative Actions programme of the European Union, which is based on the precept of wanting to find out what works and what does not work.

In this case, the focalisation on this small unit has allowed the programme partners to:

- understand the needs of the participating persons much more deeply,
- find out that the main effects of the FabLab are not the technical competences acquired but the different components of wellbeing; social relations, orientation in the city, fighting loneliness, exchanging information, using language...
- understand that the planned work packages correspond to the capacities that different structures and institutions may have, but that delivering what the participants need, requires the participation of numerous work packages inside one particular action,
- the staffing of specific actions is a key to success. If the modular trainings are to be duplicated to try and encompass as many migrants and refugees as possible there are quite well-defined human resources to be put into place: a relationship builder, a general manager and a methodological expert as a minimum,
- entering the job market requires a serious follow-up capacity from the different stakeholders.

Work on this Zoom-in has brought up a key question on which the programme as a whole will have to reflect. Namely the question of language. The programme has been built on the supposition that learning the English language, in this case, is the key to anyone's participation in the local community, as it permits social and professional integration and mobility. The experiences of Coventry University show that this is not necessarily the case. The asymmetry of language capacity should be compensated by using many of the languages existing in local communities, says Prof. Hardy. The lack of language

capacity remains a real handicap, especially in the professional world, however maybe it should not be a sine qua non condition in the approach to the job market.

The speed with which persons can become autonomous because they have jobs and earn money should maybe become a feature of how the “Coventry for all/West Midlands for all” motto can be achieved more efficiently and quicker as the essential question remains the trust and relations, which must be built.

Annex 1: list of participants in the preparation of this Zoom-in without whom it would be a much shallower representation of reality

Jit Thakor	CCC	Project Manager – MiFriendly Cities
Raymond Simmonds	RMC	Project Manager / Employment Broker – MiFriendly Cities
James Miller	Interserve	Programme Director – MiFriendly Cities
Sunairah Miraj	CCC	Programme Delivery Manager – MiFriendly Cities / Migration
Helen Lewis	CTPSR (CU) / FabLab	FabLab Manager
Sinead Ouillon	CTPSR (CU) / FabLab	Programme Leader the City University Initiative / FabLab Director
Michael Hardy	CTPSR (CU)	Executive Director
Kevin Taylor	CTPSR (CU) / FabLab	FabLab Skills Trainer
Peter Barnett	CCC	Head of Libraries, Health & Info Service (Migration)
 Special thanks to Nicole Twamley	CCC	Assistant Communications Officer – MiFriendly Cities & Migration



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Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Based on article 8 of ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

UIA projects will produce a wealth of knowledge stemming from the implementation of the innovative solutions for sustainable urban development that are of interest for city practitioners and stakeholders across the EU. This Zoom-in, written by a UIA Expert, captures and disseminates the lessons learnt from the project implementation and the good practices identified. It is part of the capitalisation and dissemination activities of the UIA – Urban Innovative Actions Initiative.