



## BRIGHT FUTURE

### BRIGHT FUTURE FOR BLACK TOWNS: REINVENTING EUROPEAN INDUSTRIAL TOWNS AND CHALLENGING DOMINANT POST-INDUSTRIAL DISCOURSES

It does not take long to find grim narratives about how post-industrial towns “fails to adapt” to the 21st century. Many of those narratives focus exclusively on economic issues. The BRIGHT FUTURE project, however, set out to translate socio-cultural qualities of small industrial towns into social innovation, with the purpose to adapt and improve both resilience and sustainability. The project examined local narratives in five industrial towns across Europe: Velenje (Slovenia), Fieni (Romania), Kajaani (Finland), Heerlen (Netherlands), and Corby (UK). The project discusses a new urban policy- and research agenda tailored to small industrial towns.

#### THREE TYPES OF INDUSTRIAL TOWNS AS POINT OF DEPARTURE

The distinction between “industrial” and “post-industrial” is not obvious - there are towns with an industrial heritage that still have industrial elements in them. A large part of Europeans live in these areas as opposed to larger metropolitan areas. BRIGHT FUTURE brought forward three types of industrial towns: 1) the historically industrial town, 2) the post-socialist industrial town and 3) the Nordic types.

#### UNDERSTAND LOCAL INDUSTRIAL NARRATIVES TO ENABLE BRIGHT FUTURE POLICIES

One part of the project’s results suggest that it is important for policy- and decision makers to identify which of the types best mirror their town. One of the projects major

conclusions is that policies need to be place-specific. There is a pre-conceived idea that populism and xenophobia in European towns are a reaction to issues like shrinking economies, unemployment or the rise of the creative class. BRIGHT FUTURE argue that policymakers must understand and implement place-specific narratives and policies: industrial narratives. BRIGHT FUTURE uncovered the connection between local industrial narratives and the rise of right-wing populism. Imported stories, narratives and visions (from for instance metropolitan areas or larger cities) are not the way forward for sustainable development of industrial towns.

#### NARRATIVES OF THE GLORIOUS PAST, TOGETHERNESS AND FEAR OF CHANGE

BRIGHT FUTURE used narrative analysis as a methodological tool and after having collected extensive data, three main narratives became evident: “the glorious industrial past”, “camaraderie in the face of industrial decay” and “the fear of change”. The latter derive from stories of “being under attack” from outside forces like metropolitan policies and globalisation and how this undermines communal solidarity. Right-wing populists tend to kidnap these stories for electoral success. Neoliberal policy developments and concepts like “creative industries” and “knowledge economies” felt alien to these communities.

BRIGHT FUTURE has not only outlined what positive qualities industrial towns contain, but also shown ways for policy makers to tap into the right kind of local story and ensure more sustainable developments in a broad sense.

#### PROJECT FACTS

**Duration:** 2017-2020

**Involved Cities:** Velenje, Fieni, Kajaani, Corby, Heerlen

**Partners:** Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, University of Eastern Finland, University of Amsterdam, University of Bucharest, Social Life Limited, The Young Foundation

**Budget:** 1.313.000 EUR

**Web:** [jpi-urbaneurope.eu/project/bright-future/](http://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/project/bright-future/)

**Result interview:** [jpi-urbaneurope.eu/industrial-towns-can-have-bright-futures-if-we-find-the-right-stories/](http://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/industrial-towns-can-have-bright-futures-if-we-find-the-right-stories/)

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