

NEWS

PROJECT

Kosice 2.0

📍 Košice, Slovakia

TOPIC

Culture and cultural
heritage

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EXPERT

Kosice 2.0 launches its Urban Innovation Sphere and brings together citizens, start-ups and policymakers to drive change in the city

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How can a City nurture intelligence among its society to improve public service provision and boost economic activity? What could be the role of culture and contemporary cultural infrastructure in expanding the capacity of the city to increase the well-being of citizens? How can a municipality open up its processes for decision making, increase transparency and connect better with its citizens?

Kosice has been facing **low level of civic engagement and a lack of trust to public institutions**. At the same time its **economy has been experiencing rapid transformation** with 60% of its jobs being at risk of automation and its larger employer, the US Steel planning to lay off a quarter of its workers. While many people are seeking opportunities in the country's capital Bratislava, in the neighbourhood countries and in the UK or in the US, a young and ambitious group of City leaders, entrepreneurs, creative makers and thinkers is leading change to the city with a vision to become a European role model for urban innovation.

Their initiative "Kosice 2.0" focuses on the development of an interface positioned between the city government and the society that capitalises on the creative start-up community of the city and its strong ICT sector to improve the well-being of citizens, optimise public service provision and help the municipality to change its decision making mindsets introducing a strong data culture and delivering evidence based policies.

This interface makes use of the city's large scale investments in cultural infrastructure and contemporary cultural heritage developed while being the European Capital of Culture (2013) and consists of a range of well-thought and meticulously designed components that trigger the participation of the society (citizens, entrepreneurs, creative start-ups, policy-makers, city officials) to the development of innovations for a number of challenges the city is facing.

Those activities are developed in a center dedicated to urban innovation, the Urban Innovation Sphere (UIS). It mentors and supports startups, provides micro-grants to creative entrepreneurs, awards and tests prototypes submitted by citizens and provides a platform for networking opportunities for the young generation of start-

uppers.

Today Kosice 2.0 has managed to officially launch its Urban Innovation Sphere (UIS) providing a common space for city practitioners to share, test and co-create innovations and ignite evidence based policies that improve the well being in the city.

The UIS addresses both the challenge of economic transformation and the lack of trust to public institutions by bringing together a diverse group of creative professionals, entrepreneurs and startups and connecting them with the traditional industries and the municipality through its different sub-programs to pilot common solutions that contribute to the city uplift. The Urban Innovation Sphere consists of different elements that together constitute the innovation frontrunner of Kosice 2.0 and have already started delivering results for the city.

The Urban Innovation Accelerator

The Urban Innovation Accelerator is an **intensive three-month accelerator program** that focuses on early stage start-ups and helps them to develop prototypes for innovative products or services with the potential to contribute to the well-being of the city. It consists of a bootcamp phase, an acceleration phase with coaching and mentoring offered by the 16 mentors of the platform and a public event (demo day) where the final results are showcased. At the end, the winning idea receives the prize of EUR 10.000.

It is very important to have a program that highlights not only the best entrepreneurs but also motivates others to start and transform their ideas into projects. - Peter Kolesar

Peter Kolesar, CEO of CIVITTA, a hub for start-ups and innovation related initiatives in Slovakia and in other 17 countries, partner of Kosice 2.0 and responsible for the development of the Urban Innovation Accelerator declares:

In Slovakia and in most countries it is very difficult for entrepreneurs to have access to the public institutions, municipalities and regional governments. Those tend to be more introvert and deal with what is urgent for them and not thinking strategically how to support entrepreneurial ecosystem locally to pilot new solutions for our cities. The Urban Innovation Accelerator is one of the ways offered by Kosice 2.0 to help innovators and entrepreneurs interact with the municipality and work together in common solutions.

The first cycle of the Urban Innovation Accelerator, the Challenger: Urban Creative, started in April 2021 with 15 groups short-listed to participate in a full-day bootcamp. 8 start-ups were then selected to enter the acceleration phase and worked together for about 2 months with the team of experts. The final event, Demo Day, saw the teams pitching their prototypes in front of the jury consisting of the Vice Mayor and the Head of Strategy of Kosice municipality, as well as experts from various fields.



The diversity of companies participated and the multiplicity of products emerged has been a real success. A booking web-portal for the vacant municipal properties; a technological tool that helps large companies or the city government to identify the root cost of their energy wasting in their buildings and reduce their energy footprint; a gaming platform that aims to make Kosice more attractive to the youth community; a shared parking system-app based on AI technology; a computer game that deals with the issue of self-defence;

Radoslav Kozlov, developer of the idea “Social World”, a digital application that helps people with disabilities and the elderly population connect with better services and professional care-givers to help them with activities of daily living, testifies:

I think that the overall initiative has been very important because if you want to create a better place for living you have to concentrate on people who are active and who want to do something for the better. And this has been a great place to test ideas, cooperate with other practitioners, brainstorm and create new partnerships or even friendships.



The winning idea of this first cycle, eGreen City (eZelene Mesto), developed a tool to help the municipality tackle the challenge of energy consumption in their facilities. The team created a technology based on AI that performs as a “digital energy officer” and automatically identifies the amount of energy consumed by the electrical equipment in a building.

Members of the startup, Peter Fecilak and Karol Kniewald state:

We didn’t have experience collaborating with the municipality before this program. This is exactly where the accelerator helped. It kicked-off the meetings with the City and those involved in the management of the buildings and specifically the energy management department. We discussed if this is really a challenge that they face as administrators of the buildings and if our technology could be a solution to their problem.

Most of the start-ups participated in the first cycle are now in the stage of preparing agreements with the municipality so to be able to pilot their products improving several areas of City services.

City Hackathons

City Hackathons are **24-hour creative marathons** that bring together the community of city-makers with IT enthusiasts to experiment around the development of bold solutions that make use of technology to tackle a specific challenges under the guidance of mentors and experts offered by the program. Each time one challenge defined by the municipality board of representatives acts as the theme based on which participants develop

hybrid solutions. In the end, one team receives the award of EUR 5.000 and additional support by the platform to develop further their project proposal.



Marek Lavcak, the person responsible for the organisation of City Hackathons from Kosice 2.0 explains that the first hackathon worked around the theme “solutions for the community” addressing questions such as how to develop tools to support citizens’ communities in Kosice, how to improve communication among its members or how to make it easier for people to join a community group and participate into actions. As Marek states, the problem in the second biggest city in Slovakia is that there are many community activities happening in the city but there are no platforms to collect this information and let people see what actions are taken and how they can be part of them.

As the culture of participation is growing in Kosice we witness the younger generation and people around 30s taking action to improve the environment around them in collaboration with fellow citizens from their neighbourhood. That is something evident in many places in Kosice. Supporting this culture could be really helpful in a process of growth for active citizenship. Marek adds.

Hack for Community event was the first in a series of nine hackathons that will run in the next 3 years under the common name City Hacks. Despite the word hackathon being connected to the IT sector, the City Hackathons invite people and practitioners from all fields to co-create solutions and contribute to the upgrade of the services delivered by the municipality or to the improvement of the quality of life in the city.

The most inspiring thing is to see all those people coming from different backgrounds and facing different challenges in their everyday life breaking down the problems of the city. What is the biggest problem of the community here in Kosice? ..in this first 24-hour hackathon most of the teams identified the problem of communication among the members of the community. How can we be aware of what other people do to support the community?



One of the participant groups designed a chat-app that could help people create instant communities and thematic communication on the go. Another group comprising one municipal officer and 2 persons from the IT sector addressed the challenge of low visibility of community activities. Marian Svekus, municipal officer working at the department of youth and sports at the City of Kosice and also at the youth council of Kosice Region where he supports the work of citizens' initiatives, experimented with his two partners over the development of an application that could make civil society initiatives more visible:

Our first question was, what is the main problem for the community in Kosice? Through the work I do in the municipality and in the other organisations I participate, I see that there are many interesting activities organised by community groups and the municipality itself but there are not so many people involved either because they do not have enough time or the activities do not suit their needs or simply because they don't know what is happening in the city. Many NGOs and community groups do really good work in the field but they lack proper communication. Our idea was to create a digital calendar in the form of an online application where citizens can see what is happening in their community and they can choose where to participate. They can make use of the different filters to sort out which of the activities are more suitable for them and through the app they can connect automatically to the relevant initiatives. Through this app the community groups can have more participants and deliver work with more impact and citizens can have an efficient way of connecting with a community that grows.

The Networking Catalyst Program "East Side Heroes"

East Side Heroes is a support platform in the form of a **series of networking sessions** that brings together people from the start-up community to exchange ideas and offer knowledge and experience around popular topics in the field. It aims to empower the local eco-system of start-ups by bringing it in direct contact with the leading community of businesses, IT experts, cultural organisations, artists, etc. and to motivate professionals at the beginning of their business idea, advise them on how to approach major obstacles or challenges, offer inspiration and nurture opportunities for collaboration.



Peter Tóth
Technical Team Lead
Hotovo

Marek Lavcak, responsible for the organisation of the East-Side heroes sessions, CEO of the start-up hub Eastcubator indicates that helping start-ups to find the right people to collaborate is crucial in their development process:

What we need the most is quality networking, education and a solid system that helps to match the right people with the right businesses. We are working to shorten the time needed for new collaborations to be born. For smaller companies especially from the point of efficiency and the basic principles of a scalable business, searching and finding the right people to connect becomes crucial and could make the difference for a successful start-up.

Five online events have already taken place around the themes of gaming, starting an IT business at a young age, e-sports community, the value of high quality design, crypto and blockchain trends. Every session involves a presentation from an invited expert to the field of the subject announced followed by open discussion and a structured session for networking.

What is more important than the meet ups is the networking session that runs afterwards where people get together to open up a dialogue based on the content of the session and share experiences and common challenges. Thanks to the thematic character of the meet up we can attract people interested in specific fields to one place and then the networking session can provide a natural way for them to meet, exchange ideas and even develop friendships.

Increasing the capacity of the city to improve the well-being of its citizens

Kosice 2.0 invests in building an innovation ecosystem to help change the development trajectory and to boost the economics of the city. The Urban Innovation Sphere works in this direction developing a common ground for city practitioners, start-ups and the municipality that can contribute to the uplift of the well being of citizens with a systematic way.

Oto Hudec, professor at the Faculty of Economics in the Technical University of Kosice, partner of Kosice 2.0, states that

the main hypothesis in the project is that it can realize a change in the city's capacity to influence the subjective well-being of citizens

During the next months more activities are planned to take place such as the **You Innovate! grant program** that invites citizens and community groups through open calls to work over a specific challenge related to public service provision or the **Mobile Urban Lab unit** that plans to visit public spaces in Kosice and engage with citizens to mobilise ideas reaching out to people who are not necessarily part of the innovation ecosystem.

For more information the program has set up a project [homepage](#) which is regularly updated with news and announcements.
 So stay tuned!

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