Better orchestrating voluntary resources alongside public services

Case study on how outcomes of service delivery can be boosted by insight, brokerage and design

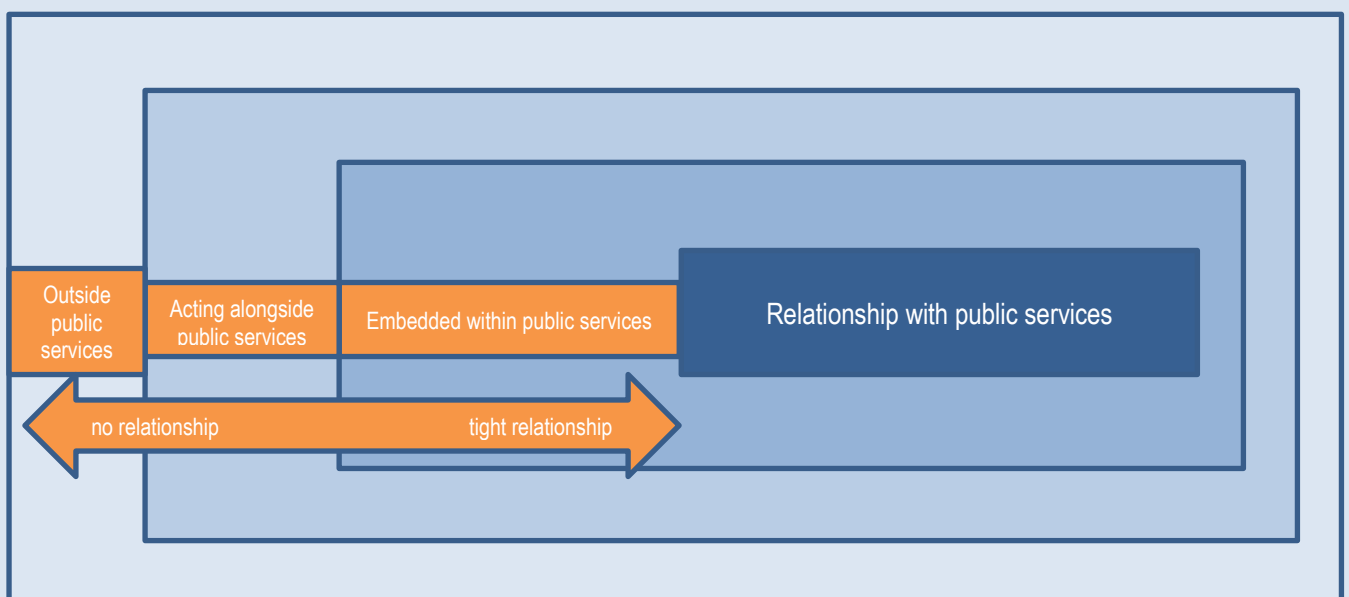**Case study based on the CHANGE! study visit held in Amarante, Portugal, on 16-17 November, 2016**

| Outside public services | Acting alongside public services | Embedded within public services | Relationship with public services |

no relationship — tight relationship

chart based on Nesta

Ferenc Szigeti-Böröcz
@CHANGEurbact
www.urbact.eu/change

I. Introduction: why CHANGE! partner cities met in Amarante?

Amarante (56 000 inhabitants in 2011) is a town in the Porto District, in northern Portugal. The city is nestled in the valley of the Tâmega River and situated in the agricultural lands of the Minho region, providing a gateway to the famous Minho Valley. The proximity to Porto means a significant challenge for the city, as many young people leave Amarante to find opportunities in larger cities, mainly in Porto.

Creating opportunities and attractions for the younger generation are therefore a key priority for Amarante, and this is reflected in their aim to focus the CHANGE! Integrated Action Plan on the transformation of existing, structured services and resources according to the new insight already gained through a social innovation mapping process, and to make the whole service delivery more efficient by organising social actions in or alongside public services (especially for elderly and young people). As a result of having and implementing such an action plan, Amarante intends to see better city governance mainly regarding social inclusion.

The municipality of Amarante has a strong vision, in which community engagement, co-creation and social innovation plays a crucial role. This is why the Municipality of Amarante has made serious efforts so far to unlock the collaborative capacity of the city and to have better community engagement.

Firstly, to gain a better insight into the local collaborative capacity, to recognize the local good practices related to social innovation, in 2013 the Municipality of Amarante, in partnership with the Social Entrepreneurship Institute mapped out social innovation potential of the city.

This essential mapping process was initiated by the "Social Network" (54 organisations), which works in partnership among county authorities (public sector, semi-public and private) in order to better react to local needs. The partnership is now a part of the Local Council of Social Action (dealing with topics like local government, local development, health, education, employment, social security and social economy).

As Amarante has already made some essential pioneering steps to unlocking the collaborative capacity of the local community, it was an inspiring location for the CHANGE! partner cities to explore the first pillar of the *Collaborative Framework* during a study visit on 16-17 November, 2016.

On the above link you can explore how this model – created by Collaborate - identifies the different stages, aspects and dimensions of collaboration in public services through 30 inspiring initiatives from the partnership and beyond. The first pillar is about insight, brokerage and design, and although every action aiming to redesign public services can be analysed through all stages of the framework, in Amarante we focused mainly on these three aspects.

II. How can outcomes of service delivery be boosted by insight, brokerage and design?

This was the main question of the study visit, which was firstly explained along the Collaborative Framework by the Lead Expert, secondly discussed through both Amarante' and other partner cities' practices.

Generating deep insight into the needs to create meaningful outcomes

Looking outside our own realities and going beyond what we already know is always inspiring and in most cases fruitful - not only regarding public services, but in public policies in general. However, related to social services it is indeed crucial in these challenging times with emerging demands and austerity measures. Since public authorities typically know less about the real needs of their citizens, mapping not only social needs, but assets, capabilities, resources and networks in communities is an essential, but often missing first step of re-thinking public services.

And this topic is more burning than ever (a fresh URBACT BLOG *article* summed up the key political and societal consequences behind the Brexit and the US elections, i.e. the emerging gaps between large dynamic cities and "*stagnating or shrinking small towns and 'backwater' rural areas*").

Many parts of the public sector have generated a rich evidence base about the effectiveness and impact of the services they deliver, but in many cases they are just convinced that they know the real needs. There is a growing evidence base that they may not and the system is full with failure demands, generated only as a result of an intermediate organisation not taking the right action, or simply re-work because of bureaucratic complication. Public service providers are also often reluctant to consider service re-design due to the lack of knowledge, weak leadership and administrative obstacles.

So how can we break the ice? How can we break this "vicious cycle of need" which too often places the citizen in a position where it overemphasizes its needs while qualifying for services, and place the system in a position when it just delivers a standardized service to passive recipients and not active citizens? And how to involve more and new people into action, how to find the unusual suspects? Literature offers some great and inspiring examples, let's see some of them:

Ethnographic research: the previous case study (check the network's library on www.urbact.eu/change) of the CHANGE! network explained how Participle used this method in Swindon, UK to provide more joined-up, cost-effective services that address the whole person and able to meet complex needs. However, the first report on Troubled Families Programme (which was based on this method) also identifies a number of areas where this multi-agency programme was not as successful as expected before.

In another context, this method was successfully used by the Hungarian Maltese Charity in Veszprém (Hungary) turning a fully degraded and thus almost hopeless residential building (where basic infrastructure was switched off, elevator was stolen, and police did not dare to step in, etc.) into a liveable place by buying flats for community developers, who step by step started to change norms and behaviours from inside.

Peer-to-peer generated insight: neighbourhood volunteers are core elements of many active ageing/elderly care initiatives across Europe, simply because elderly has bigger trust in other elderly, thus not only their engagement is more effective in this way, but (older) neighbourhood volunteers as peers can really solicit their needs, wishes and aspirations, thus a more responsive service can be built on. For the same reason the Circle Model was also co-designed based on a peer-generated understanding about what elderly people really want. Within the Connected Care model Turning Point recruits and trains people from the local community to work as Community Researchers during neighbourhood development programme as it is vital that the Community Researchers have access to the most marginalised groups.

Social network analysis (SNA) can be an efficient tool in smaller neighbourhoods to investigate social structures and visualize them through sociograms (e.g. SNA can show the important role of informal connectors – the postman for instance - within the local community.

Many cities around Europe recently have realized the importance of collaboration and started in the last years to „listen well" to their citizens to channelize their wishes and ideas and able to hear silent voices. Pecha-kucha events, matchmaking events, idea contests or other meetings where randomly selected citizens have the opportunity to participate as part of their civic duty in the city administration are being organised. These democratic innovation platforms are also forms of getting insight, however not necessarily linked to the reform of public services (the most famous example is perhaps the G1000 concept piloted firstly in Brussels).

One of the CHANGE! partner cities, Gdańsk intended to collect citizens' ideas in the frame of Club of Gdańsk. Within this initiative civil servants and NGO representatives work together to exchange ideas, brainstorm and identify fundamental values for the city in an open and transparent way, with an equal voice for each participant and in a real framework of co-creation.

During the study visit in Amarante partner cities also highlighted some useful practices already used by them in the past or to be used within local activities during the lifetime of the project:

In the frame of the Urbact Local Group (ULG) activities Eindhoven organises "Awkward Dinner Parties" to sit down different people next to each other and thus create unlikely connections among local community members. This is a key step how Eindhoven intends to stimulate the social basis, which is the core topic within their Integrated Action Plan.

The Danish city Aarhus has been running a ground-breaking pilot initiative since the beginning of 2016 related to personal budget to be used with job-ready registered unemployed citizens (the first attempt in this field in Denmark). According to the first outcomes, the whole pilot is somehow about getting insight related to what jobseekers really want as a service. They spent these personal budgets - for the first sight surprisingly – to get a face lift or driving licence for example, because as they reported, these seriously raise their self-esteem.

In the frame of the Urbact Local Group activities Nagykanizsa (Hungary) will organise a local social innovation contest to collect new ideas how to re-think social services regarding youth and/or elderly.

Often old techniques work, if they are handled well through a new, truly cooperative attitude. Amarante for example used questionnaires and organised local meetings to improve a deprived neighbourhood.

Forlì (Italy) has made serious efforts to gain a better insight of the needs of service users. The municipality divided its territory into "ecological units", groups of neighbourhoods, which are not linked to administrative borders. In most of the areas, meetings were organized with different participatory tools: Open Space Technology, Theatre of the Oppressed, Future scenarios, world cafe, neighbour-guided walks, etc. These round tables aimed to collect the local residents' opinions and views regarding their own neighbourhood, as well as their development needs, including social services.

The new service delivery needs municipalities as brokers of innovation

In the new service delivery public bodies should often act as brokers, mediators, network enablers and facilitators of innovation. This requires not only strong political support, but new skills and behavioural change from a democratically accountable body.

This new type of leadership is not about "*striving to control what is uncontrollable*", but it is about creating the conditions for stakeholders including citizens as equal participants to effectively and creatively shape public policies for greater social impact.

This is a shift in attitudes, not a specific method. The municipality should be able to knit together disparate partners with distinct interests to get shared values. For this, collaborative leadership and the ability to speak the same language is needed. Most urban initiatives under the domain of public services could be analysed from the brokerage point of view: the question is how to make a win-win-win situation by letting stakeholders go "responsibly" (e.g. instead of maintaining vacant spaces, the city can establish an initiative enabling citizens to occupy and temporarily use these slots creating a social benefit and reduce public costs at the same time).

A core question here is what to do in case of weak leadership? Learning, capacity building can be an efficient answer, so participating for example in an URBACT network. Not only because it provides learning opportunities, but also because in the frame of the CHANGE! network for example there is a possibility to organise trainings for local leaders (e.g. facilitative leadership for social change) as well as for stakeholders. This way weaker local communities also can find change-makers within the project lifetime, to build a change process on!

Social design: empowering people at local level to invent solutions together

From the perspective of open government the most important factor is the interaction between the end-user and the front-line officer, this is the point where public value is generated. By putting the end-user into the centre of the design process, design thinking is essential in public service reform. Design thinking is about finding solutions unconventionally, together with the end-users, for a process which encompasses learning by doing, and constant feedbacks (loops) between these two elements (learning and doing).

Comparing to more hierarchical, top-down way of working in public administration, social innovation practices tend to be looser, more flexible, involve more people, feature more animation techniques, are more interdisciplinary, find new ways of involving users and citizens and encourage thinking out of the box. They deploy evidence based methods and often use techniques like benchmarking to identify good practices in the specific fields.

Cities of Service, which is a vibrant network of cities engaging citizens to address local needs, requires a comprehensive co-design of public services in the frame of a service plan, focusing on high impact areas though meaningful partnerships, cross-sector collaboration and best practices.

The award-winning GoodGym is simple, but very much user-driven idea: through pairing running enthusiasts with older local residents it creates a novel social connection that can help meet low-level needs. It is a great example of „new initiatives "designing in" social solutions to hitherto professional problems which can be a powerful way of reducing demand for acute health and care services downstream.

Talking about great and inspiring initiatives shades a core question from the "other side": what changes collaborative service delivery requires from civil servants? Besides mentioning an often highlighted practice from a Dutch city called Amersfoort ([Amersfoort's Free Range Civil Servants](#)) it is worth mentioning that CHANGE! can also provide small trainings including for example design thinking workshops for partner cities" staff.

III. What we experienced in Amarante

CHANGE! partner cities got to know six inspiring examples in Amarante. They are different regarding their target group and sector, their scale and purpose. There is however one issue which interlinks all of them: they represent initial steps to share responsibilities, and thus paving the way for more collaborated public services.

1. Firstly, to gain a better insight into the local collaborative capacity, to recognize the local good practices with most potential related to social innovation, in 2013 the Municipality of Amarante, in partnership with the Social Entrepreneurship Institute, elaborated a mapping process. The result of this mapping process was the selection of some good ideas that were invited to a social innovation contest. The owners of the best project ideas had the opportunity to participate in a training session, and the best three ideas got further mentoring too. The process did not tackle public services directly, however it had an impact on this field as well.

The mapping process was initiated by the Social Network (54 organisations), which partnership among county authorities (public sector, semi-public and private) was born in 2003 with the aim to better react to local needs. The partnership is now a part of the Local Council of Social Action (dealing with topics like local government, local development, health, education, employment, social security and social economy).

Secondly, in line with the results of the above mapping process, a set of local innovative projects have been launched. For example[, Amarra-te Urban Innovation Lab](#) was established as a pilot project with the aim to activate citizens and involve them into bringing new ideas to life, mainly linked to the revitalisation of the city. Collaboration was partly covered by these project ideas, for example a community garden was initiated as well.

According to Andre Costa Magalhães, a young and committed city councillor the mapping process was a great success, elaborated by a very small budget, however, the mentoring process for example turned out to be a failure due to the municipality' small capacity and experience on this field. But more importantly it created a strong and sustainable platform to empower citizens, which enables the municipality to try new collaboration techniques.

2. Through "[University of Amarante Seniors](#)" the Municipality tries to respond the challenges of the ageing society. This is a typical third age university, offering non-formal education and recreational activities in various themes (sports, music, drama, languages, local history, practical issues related to health, law, etc.) for local elderly people to increase their mental and physical well-being. This is a preventive action as elderly remaining more active reduces the needs towards social and health systems. The city council provides the space for free and organisational costs including a staff member. Teachers are volunteers and participants pay a very small amount for the courses.

3. Amarante has fresh experience on participative budgeting, which was focused on young people (14-30 year old people living, learning or working in the city). Amarante made an open call first in 2015 for young citizens to make proposals. Most probably the marketing around the initiative was not well-prepared as only 5 proposals arrived. The winner was about installing free city bikes. In 2016 the marketing was much stronger, using iconic youngsters from the local society for example. The whole process gained greater publicity and the city hall received 21 proposals. The winner of the voting procedure was about the re-creation of local legends during cultural activities.

4. One of the strongest initiatives in Amarante is the unique [Casa da Juventude](#) (youth centre), which is rather different from the typical community centre as it is the only privately owned and managed youth centre in Portugal, located in a superb building in central Amarante. The building itself was renovated in the frame of Structural Funds, but as the municipality did not find a suitable function for it and thus it stood abandoned for a while, finally the

centre got it for free (and the municipality pays overheads as well).

The story of the centre started in 1993 as a regular NGO promoting healthy lifestyle, mainly outdoor activities for young people. It is very much up to its charismatic leader, Miguel Pinto that the organisation moved forward and completed a dream. In 1997 within European Voluntary Service projects the NGO started to deal with social issues and to focus on volunteering. In 1999 the first fair trade shop in Portugal was opened managed by the NGO. In 2000 the NGO widened its volunteering activities by starting to organise international summer community camps. In 2008 the recent centre opened, including a hostel and a bar. Through the centre the NGO started to share its values with the local community in another level (civic participation, sustainability, healthy lifestyle, fair-trade, human rights, promoting volunteering). From 2010 the centre has also been functioning as a centre for handicapped people, for organic farmers, for elderly and for youth living in risk. Based on its values the organisation drafted a youth action plan, which was later on approved by the city. During the years the centre brought 1,6 million € to Amarante through 72 approved projects. Besides paying the bills, the municipality does not support the organisation directly. 40% of its budget is covered by EU projects, 55% comes from the hostel and the bar, and the rest is by other sources.

The centre also assists students who want to set up businesses and provides counselling services to local young people as part of the social services of the Municipality. In line with the municipality's vision on innovation, the centre has become a place of creativity for the city centre.

5. Since 2010 a local branch of the globally known and appreciated charity Habitat for Humanity has been operating. Habitat for Humanity helps rebuilding houses for those disadvantageous people who still have the capacity to pay back a reduced, no-interest monthly fee adequate to family income. Supported families also have to contribute with working hours in construction in their own home and other Habitat homes.

"Building houses, communitys, hope…"

To provide this special, discounted beneficial loans for clients Habitat for Humanity is constantly searching tax deductible donations of money and materials, organising volunteer labour and running fundraising campaigns. In Amarante 16 families have been benefitted so far by this initiative.

6. Invest Amarante is a brand new institution founded by the municipality to boost the local and regional economy. Through innovative working methods like design thinking they deal not only with business development, but they intend to revitalise the city centre as well by – for example – establishing co-working spaces. In addition to this, Invest Amarante is also working on creating a social innovation hub in the city.

IV. Joint implications for policy making

Amarante is a great example of how to start a new dialogue with residents to create better local policies and generate socio-economic benefits for such a small city. Trust, as glue for collaboration, seems existing in Amarante, and political leaders understand that collaborative public operation can create strong political benefits as well.

It is also obvious that in Amarante there is a great pool of different resources available to be mobilised on a much greater extent alongside public services. And this is the point, referring mainly to brokerage and design within the Collaborative Framework.

What is missing in Amarante regarding collaborative public services is to systematically thinking over how these existing resources, people' great volunteering efforts could be directly embedded into public services to make them more collaborative and efficient.

The lack of this "bridging" effect is resulted in that the city has not been able to tackle the enormous, untapped potential of the community yet. And all of this is well-reflected on the local case studies presented above. Hopefully CHANGE! network can boost the local knowledge enabling the local community to create these bridges!

For example, regarding Habitat for Humanity, which is of course a great initiative, but the relationship with the municipality seems weak and thus possible synergies are lost. A much stronger brokerage role in this field from the city hall might lead to greater outcomes. How can the city create stronger links between Habitat's projects and the existing social services? As a facilitator (or broker) can it mobilise local companies to help poor families selected by Habitat (within their CSR activities)? Furthermore, Habitat does not provide any follow-up activities, but it could be done easily by social workers within their regular work. Also, the integrative character of Habitat's work and thus the social impact could be fostered if the municipality would provide basic training for the Habitat beneficiaries.
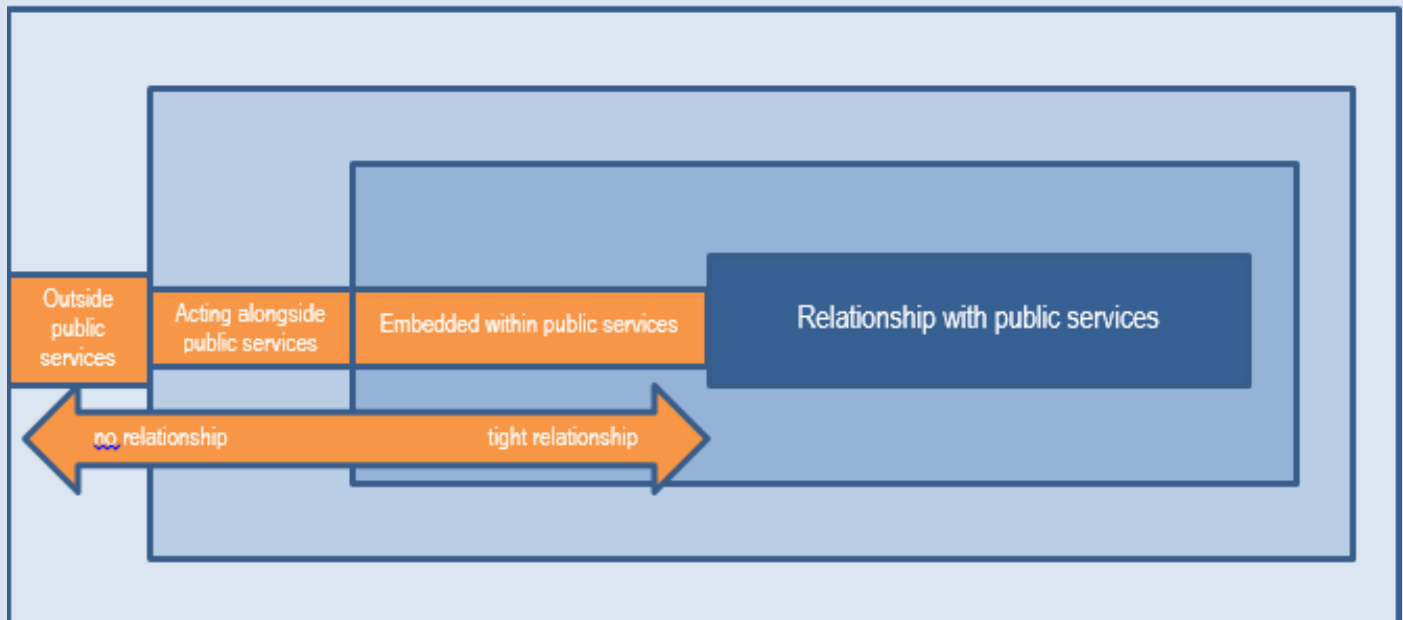
Regarding the also excellent University of Amarante Seniors, the main question is how to move forward to a more preventive, more complex, 21st century ageing service? This also belongs to the question of "brokerage". The University can sustain strong social bonds, but around the newly established relationships a more complex service could be built up, for instance about taking care of elderly' practical needs (a good example can be the Circle Concept analysed by the network before).

Connecting different services to support prevention can be initiated by the municipality too, for example in the frame of a 'city-card' that would offer incentives as well (e.g. spending X hour at the university generates a free hour in the swimming pool or other services, but a local time credit system can be a strong incentive as well).

More simply, coordinating among different public services can generate added value to the University as well. Europe-wide experience on third age universities show that for example talking about crime prevention with the involvement of the local police, or about everyday financial issues with the involvement of a local banks are important topics for elderly.

The municipality showed self-criticism regarding the failure they faced within the participatory budget initiative. This is already a great outcome by the way. But the key question with regards to brokerage here is why the youth council does not manage the whole process, which, by the way, exists in the city? That would be a more profound example of sharing ownership.

And last, but definitely not least: the case of the youth centre. It is amazing what amount of resources this centre is able to mobilise. Is it possible to channelize these local or foreign resources, in the form of different social actions, more directly and consciously to make social (public) services more efficient?

Relationship with public services

Outside public services | Acting alongside public services | Embedded within public services

no relationship ← → tight relationship

A key exercise for Amarante's Urbact Local Group is thus to put existing local initiatives on the above chart and make joint visions how to "upgrade" them and define new actions, and thus place all of them "closer" to public services (e.g. to transform the University of Amarante Senior to a more complex service).

Creating opportunities for young people is a key priority for Amarante. With regards to the network's main theme, the overall policy challenge in Amarante is to create more efficient social services that would involve volunteers and encourage them to take responsibility in directly addressing residents, especially young people and the elderly.

When combined with the training and expertise of professionals, volunteers (especially if they are peers or near-peers) can create better experiences for service users. Facilitating peers and near-peers to share knowledge is an efficient and innovative way to make public services more collaborative. Peer support type of activities can be powerful in connection with many groups of society, especially youth and elderly.

To launch new social actions based on existing resources (e.g. youth centre), to transform the lives of young people by channeling available volunteer

resources alongside public services seem a high impact area in Amarante and also these actions can be tested in relatively small-scale, thus they can act as quick wins and can be a strong pillar of the local Integrated Action Plan.

Regarding youth, there are various examples how time and energy of peers, near-peers or other volunteers can effectively improve opportunities and outcomes for young people. Volunteers can act as tutors or mentors to improve students' attainment at school and life, or teach new skills to enhance young people's future performance.

Previous CHANGE! case studies and presentations from the UK (check the network's library on www.urbact.eu/change) highlighted some successful, but still developmental cases that might be adapted in Amarante too, based on existing resources.

Code Club for example is a network of free, volunteer-led, after-school coding clubs for children aged nine to eleven. The Access Project is also relevant: it aims to increase the number of children from deprived backgrounds who attend the most selective universities by matching students with volunteer tutors. Another example is Team Up, which deploys volunteer university students to support secondary aged students from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed academically. And last, but not least it might worth

analysing how SPICE Time Credits established local time credits around schools.

As peer or near-peer-support is well evidenced at making a difference to young people's lives, in general, demand is high everywhere in Europe from schools for social action. *It's good that demand is high because there is significant value in schools being people powered, drawing in the best of a local community's assets to mentor bringing a range of benefits such as experience, networks and unusual voices, new skills and more (Vicki Sellick: People helping people, Nesta, 2016).*

In addition, we all know that it is relatively easy to mobilise volunteers to support young people, and this area can also attract significant level of corporate engagement (CSR, pro-bono, etc.).

Supporting social actions tackling young people in Amarante through a letting them go attitude (brokerage) has the potential, which might effectively demonstrate how these actions can improve the quality of the service provided, reduce demand for services, open up innovation and thus help to build up stronger communities.

The case of Invest Amarante proves that the city council is aware of the fact that an intermediate body can be much effective "bridge" in specific cases. With regards public services, this bridging role should be done by the municipality through its service provision, and for this, "brokerage" is an essential mind-set to be learnt and practiced by Municipality of Amarante, in connection with youth.