

Prototyping Innovation Policies with(in) cities

Innovation Area:
Music Led Innovation

Debrecen, Hungary



How does “prototyping...” work?

This City Case Description is the outcome of a policy prototyping exercise within a city ecosystem. Once the ekip research team has explored a policy area and its connection to cultural and creative industries (CCIs) and innovation, we ask: what would this mean in a local city context?

Together with local stakeholders, we test how a draft policy recommendation might stimulate innovation. Using Portfolio Sensemaking, stakeholders simulate an innovation portfolio, analyse the strengths and gaps of the local support system, and identify what resources are needed to realise the portfolio.

Debrecen Context & Area of Focus

Debrecen sees itself as a capital of music in Hungary and hosts Campus Festival, the country's largest. It has roughly 600–700 active performers, a large and growing university (8,000+ international students), and a live municipal grant scheme.

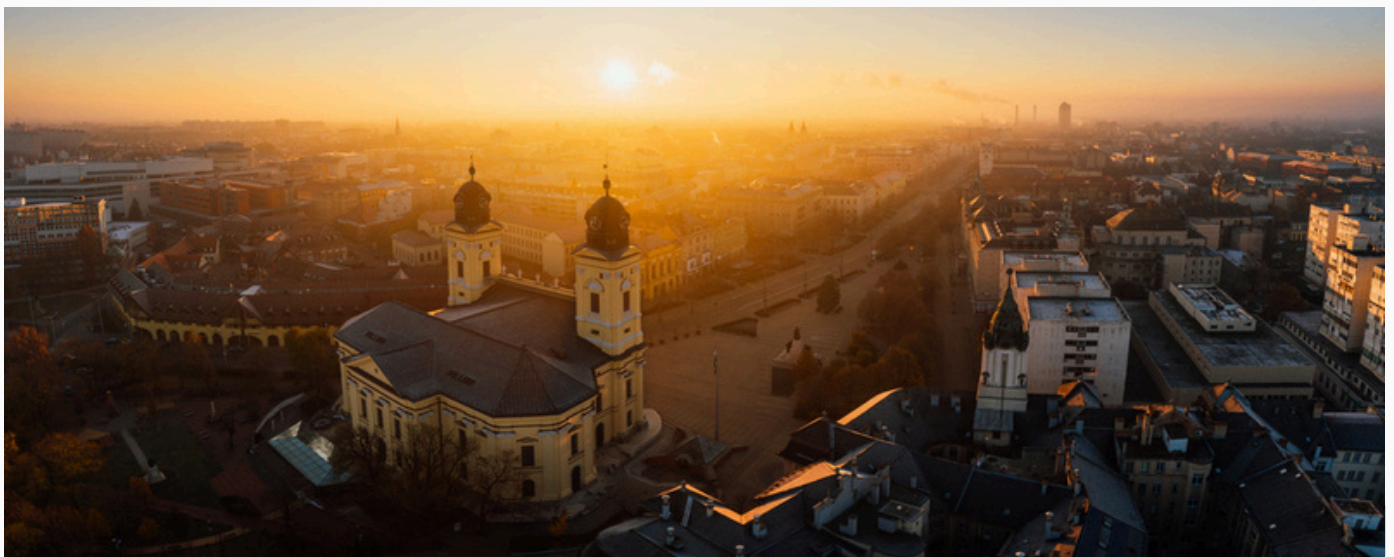
But the scene is fragmented: performers are unorganised, the 2019 city music strategy has been forgotten, and the Popular Music Roundtable meets only once or twice a year as a “nice-to-have” rather than a working body.

A provincial, stay-at-home mindset limits live attendance, and there is no dedicated music department in the city.

Uniting Debrecen's live-music scene around a shared agenda — using the city as a “playground” — so it can see itself, coordinate, and grow.

The immediate step is to make the Popular Music Roundtable regular and wider, producing a real action plan and reviving the 2019 strategy.

The work spans audience development, education, shared communication, community-building, and sustainable events — aimed at a more livable city that retains young talent.



Portfolio sensemaking

(MUSIC) SCENE UNITED

Uniting Debrecen's live-music actors around a shared agenda — using the city as a "playground" — through a regular, widened Popular Music Roundtable that delivers an action plan and revives the 2019 music strategy.



Scope — City level: Debrecen's music scene, framed by the city's livability, competitiveness, and well-being.

Time — From a short-term uniting of stakeholders (~6 months) to a ~20-year horizon.

Subareas — Education; community building; research; policies & regulations; infrastructure.

Main actions — Make the Roundtable regular and wider; deliver an action plan and revise the 2019 strategy with funding and clear ownership; build a shared communication platform and event map; support venues, organizers, and rehearsal spaces; embed music in curricula; launch audience-development research.

➤ Key aspects of the portfolio ➤

Support needed: more private and municipal funding (incl. participatory budgeting and crowdfunding); regulatory change (e.g. removing the "no music after 10pm" rule); a youth-focused communication channel.

Success indicators: a functional, widened Roundtable within 6 months; an adopted, funded strategy; more organised performers; more live events and audiences reached; student and talent retention.



Who was there?

A BROAD MIX OF STAKEHOLDERS CO-CREATED THIS CASE

CCI ORGANISATIONS

Local music community space
Event organizers
Student-led music festival



BUSINESSES

Campus Festival
Made in Debrecen Festival
Underground metal festival



ACADEMIA

University of Debrecen (Innovation Center; Art
Center of the Faculty of Humanities)



LOCAL AUTHORITIES

City Cultural Department



OTHERS

Local music blogger
Local music artist



Analysis

THE LOCAL INNOVATION SUPPORT SYSTEM

What exists

A municipal grant scheme for music (including rehearsal-room renovation), strong anchor institutions (Campus Festival, Made in Debrecen, the University of Debrecen with its Art and Innovation Centers), a 2019 city music strategy, and an established Popular Music Roundtable. Commercial backbone (instrument and record retailers) and an active local media layer.

What's Weak or Missing

Coordination is the core gap: no dedicated music department, an informal Roundtable meeting only once or twice a year, and a strategy left without an action plan, funding, or clear ownership. Performers (~600–700) are unorganised with no formal platform. Audience-development and culture-participation research is absent. There are no international network links, and a "no music after 10pm" rule constrains the live scene.

Structural Constraint

Low municipal incentive to invest: the ~2% company contribution owed to the city is withdrawn by central government.

Assessment

The assets exist but are uncoordinated. The system needs connective infrastructure — a regular, widened Roundtable, a shared communication platform, diversified funding (private sponsors, participatory budgeting, crowdfunding), and regulatory change — rather than new institutions.



Conclusions

& RECOMMENDATIONS

Debrecen has the assets of a strong music city — festivals, a large university, performers, a grant scheme, and a strategy — but they are uncoordinated. The decisive gap is governance, not resources: the 2019 strategy is dormant, the Roundtable is informal, and performers are unorganised. The workshop identified a critical, time-limited window: engaged stakeholders, a live grant scheme, and an existing strategy ready to be revived. If nothing is done, the risks are brain drain, a fragmenting scene, and another workshop with no follow-up.



“*“We always had the festivals, the venues, the musicians, but never a table where we sat together. The workshop showed us that uniting the scene is the real work.”*

Szabo Dora, SOFAR Sounds, Debrecen

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Recommendations

- Make the Popular Music Roundtable regular and wider, with a functional body in place within six months.
- Revive and revise the 2019 strategy into a funded action plan with clear ownership beyond the vice-mayor's office.
- Map the ecosystem — performers, venues, resources, and sponsors — to make the scene visible to itself.
- Build a shared, affordable communication platform and event map.
- Diversify funding through private sponsors, participatory budgeting, and local crowdfunding.
- Pursue regulatory change, starting with the "no music after 10pm" restriction.

Critical success factor

Act bottom-up and start now: unite the scene before building structures, and ensure follow-up so momentum becomes a funded action plan rather than another forgotten document.

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“The 2019 strategy didn't fail because it was wrong, but because no one owned it. The recommendation we take forward is to make the Roundtable real, give it a mandate, and start ASAP.”

Balint Mira, University of Debrecen

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Our methods

THE INNOVATION PORTFOLIO POLICY CANVAS

The Prototyping Workshop Methodology and the Innovation Portfolio Policy Canvas guide local stakeholders to analyse their local ecosystem, make an inventory of actors and resources, identify and create a potential innovation portfolio and analyse their local innovation support system.

THE OPSI MODEL

The OPSI-model (Open Public Sector Innovation OECD) is adapted to analyze the innovation character of the policy area. Participants explore whether the policy involves new legislative measures or is more exploratory in nature, allowing for a deeper understanding of how the policy might influence the local ecosystem

THE LIEPT MODEL

The Lund Innovation Ecosystem Portfolio Tracking (LIEPT) model is a tool that provides a framework for tracking changes in innovation portfolios in ecosystems where impact and growth happen not in one organisation but in many. This relies on collaborative efforts by many stakeholders.

What is ekip

The ekip partnership funded by the European Commission consists of 5 universities, 4 consultancies, 4 creative and cultural organisations and 4 cities. Together we develop innovation policies for the cultural and creative industries in Europe. We do that in various ways: through research, consultations and interaction with people in the sector at policy labs and focus groups and assessments in city ecosystems.

Want to know more? Want to do it in your city?

Would you like to explore the topic further? You can even host your own session in your city! It's an empowering and insightful way to bring together local stakeholders across sectors and disciplines for a focused discussion on a topic of shared importance. The ekip method and approach are open for anyone to use including a Facilitator's Guide and templates available in the ekip Knowledge Bank under [Tools and Methods](#).

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Disclaimer:

Each City Case Description reflects the views of workshop participants. It is a perspective from one city context, intended to inspire and ignite action



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