

## **Report to the CHEC Board : Preliminary visit to Barcelona**

### **Regional development : next steps for CHEC**

CHEC was invited to join a City of Cape Town delegation to Barcelona from 15- 19 June 2009, ahead of the formal twinning of Cape Town with Barcelona. Following consultations with the institutional planners and Directors, it was agreed that the June visit should be used to make firm contacts in Barcelona and to pave the way for a full delegation to visit later in the year. In terms of this agreement, Nasima Badsha and Erica Gillard joined the delegation, which included representatives from the City, Cape Town Partnerships, Accelerate Cape Town and business.

The City of Cape Town's objectives for what they termed the Barcelona Knowledge Exchange visit were to :

- a) pursue bilateral agreements with the City of Barcelona in the following areas: Entrepreneurship, Urban Regeneration, Higher Education and Municipal Markets.
- b) draw lessons from the experience of Barcelona in order to enhance Cape Town's global competitiveness and to better position Cape Town as a global knowledge and innovation hub with a strong focus on Entrepreneurship, as outlined in the Economic Development Strategy and IDP of the City of Cape Town.

A full programme of site visits, presentations and discussions was organised by the City of Barcelona. Erica Gillard had also scheduled additional meetings with people in the university sector outside the City's list of meetings.

Two major areas of interest for universities in the general programme were the Barcelona Activa model to promote entrepreneurship and 22@Barcelona concerned with urban renewal.

**Barcelona Activa** was established in 1986 as a development agency of the City of Barcelona. It is responsible for business creation and growth, the promotion of innovation and human capital development. Its activities include :

- A business incubator, which has been very successful in generating new small business (at least prior to the recession);
- Knowledge transfer from universities to business ventures in various ways;
- Provision of a range of courses for its citizens to gain skills from entry level computer skills to more advanced business courses (these often provided by universities in the region);
- Support for drawing up business plans and finding financial support for those, if appropriate;
- Career advice (including information on higher education opportunities), especially targeted to youth at risk but also available more broadly as a walk in service.

Each of these areas drew on support from universities or were led by universities at the top end.

**22@Barcelona** is an urban regeneration project, which has focussed on strategic areas, including Energy, Med-Tech, Design, Media and ICT. Prior to the establishment of this project, the City of Barcelona has had long-standing strategies to regenerate the city, using funding for the Olympic Games as a springboard. University expertise was used in these initiatives, both as expert advice and in chairing key workgroups, but there was also direct collaboration in development of physical infrastructure for identified university faculties in areas marked for regeneration and innovation. One of the regenerated sites visited had been prepared for the relocation of the media and communication faculty of one of the leading universities as an anchor for a major media hub, which includes the head office of a leading media house, amongst others.

**Focus on higher education.** The visit provided an important opportunity to initiate discussions on potential collaboration in the area of higher education.

- The CHEC delegates received a briefing from Professor Xavier Testar, Director of the “Barcelona Research and Innovation” Programme of the Barcelona City Council, on the higher education system in Barcelona and Catalonia more broadly, with particular emphasis on the role of higher education in innovation and regional economic development. Professor Testar’s presentation will be circulated when it is received.
- The CHEC delegates visited a Science Park attached to the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), which is one of the major research led universities in the region. This Science Park concentrates on interventions at the top end of scientific research. A large building is currently under construction in order to incubate spin-off companies, but the Science Park also works in a virtual context where other initiatives are located elsewhere.
- Contact was also made with the Executive Head of the umbrella body of the 8 public universities in Catalonia (Associacio Catalana D’Universitats Publiques), which is the CHEC counterpart organization. The rectors of the 8 public universities have produced a White Paper, which identifies joint strategies and approaches for the sector including its relationship with city and regional government. They brand themselves collectively as the University of Catalonia. Copies of the executive summary of the White Paper are **attached**.

Professor Testar has agreed to facilitate an in-depth seminar on the role of higher education in innovation and regional development in October for a broader delegation from all four CHEC member institutions. In addition, we propose that CHEC also explore the possibility of collaboration in biotechnology which is an area of strength in Barcelona and Cape Town.

#### **Additional elements of the visit**

- The final phase of the general City-led programme was attendance at an international conference on innovation with addresses by leaders in this field and a competition for young innovators. The 2 entrants from Cape Town won second place in the competition, as well as a prize for the most socially worthy entry.
- In order to make their own contacts, CHEC representatives did not join all of the city-led activities, such as visits to urban markets and provision of berths for large cruise liners.

#### **Follow up visit**

We propose a follow-up visit to Barcelona in mid-October (the exact dates still to be confirmed by Professor Testar). Added to this visit, we propose a visit to Sheffield/Newcastle areas where there are also useful examples, to be hosted by Martin Hall and Chris Brink.

**Nasima Badsha**  
**Erica Gillard**  
**24 July 2009**