

RETHINKING INDUSTRIAL TOWNS



“

1 in 5 people in Europe lives in a small or medium industrial town and many of them have retained their productive economy base or have bucked the apparent decline trend.



What is the future for industrial towns? The story told by policy-makers and the media about industrial towns in the UK (and elsewhere in Europe) is often one of post-industrial decline. This narrative translates into policies and redevelopment plans which push these towns into particular types of futures, related to the creative sector or service industry solutions.

But 1 in 5 people in Europe lives in a small or medium industrial town¹ and many of them have retained their productive economy base or have bucked the apparent decline trend.

¹ Eurostat (2016). *Urban Europe – statistics on cities, towns and suburbs – patterns of urban and city developments*. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Urban_Europe_%E2%80%94_statistics_on_cities_towns_and_suburbs_%E2%80%94_patterns_of_urban_and_city_developments

Why this, and what is the reality of life for people in them? With our partners across Europe, the Bright Futures project will carry out research aiming to better understand the hidden characteristics, dynamics and experiences of industrial and post-industrial towns in Europe. The towns in the study are:

- Kajaani (Finland)
- Heerlen (Netherlands)
- Fieni (Romania)
- Velenje (Slovenia)
- Corby (UK).

In the UK the project is being funded by the ESRC and is in partnership with Social Life (a Young Foundation spin out).

We will go beyond the typical narrative about these towns and explore how their social and cultural assets might help a small town survive and thrive.

By exploring labour relationships, semiotics and ways of talking about the town, we aim to develop and influence sustainable policy and development initiatives which align with the lived reality of people living in post-industrial towns.

We will also be establishing social innovation support, based on our research findings, for new and positive practices and alternative development strategies that are sustainable and locally rooted.

“

We will go beyond the typical narrative about these towns.