

URBACT Good Practice Summary

Summary of Good Practice for Heraklion, Crete, Greece

1 Introduction

The city of Heraklion is the capital of the island and administrative region of Crete and is one of the Mediterranean region's most fascinating and vibrant cities. Its location at the crossroads of three continents makes it a very important and influential city. For more than 3,500 years we have played a vital role as leaders in the region's cultural, technological, strategic and economic history.

2 The problem

Heraklion faces many challenges that are common to modern cities of today. These include environmental issues, reducing a city's carbon footprint, increasing the quality of life, dealing with an ever increasing digital divide, especially among the elderly and the poorer citizens, as well as a need for a more participatory model of government. These problems have only been exacerbated by the economic crisis that began in 2008 that has forced employees to be laid off, businesses to close and an increased number of people to leave the country. Heraklion's economy is dominated by tourism, which has seen declines from economic ills across Europe and social unrest by austerity-battered Greeks.

In order to be able to remain competitive as a major city in the region, Heraklion required a strategic plan that would find a way promote its assets and at the same time deal with the issues described above. This had to be done not in an isolated manner, where the stakeholders within the city operate independently of one another, but in a participatory manner, where all stakeholders work together with a common goal and vision.

3 The proposed solution

Over the past few years, city officials, as well as public and private organisations have cooperated more closely to help promote and make the most of the assets of the community. Heraklion has a very specialised economy which focuses on agriculture and food, tourism, environment and energy as well as ICT and new technologies. The community also has an exceptionally specialised workforce to support this economy.

Based on these specialisations, a strategy to promote and support these assets has been developed which embraces the concept of the smart city. This "Heraklion: Smart City strategy" embraces smart city principles and is used as a tool to develop the city into a Smart city.

This smart city strategy has culminated in the formation of the "Heraklion: Smart City" Committee, the first of its kind in Greece, which is chaired by the municipality. The committee includes representation and participation from experts of most of the city's institutions including research and education, business and transport. Its purpose is to facilitate the collective management of the city's strategic goals.

4 Measureable Results

The results and milestones that have materialised from this strategy are many. These include:

- Creation of the country's largest Wi-Fi network with tens of thousands of unique users and data traffic exceeding 6 TB per month during the summer months
- Implementation of the Municipal Fibre Optic Network providing network connectivity to over 60 schools and a myriad of public services serving over 18,000 students and 5,500 public servants.
- Creation of the Roadmap of Public Works and Projects which includes many projects that have come to fruition as a result the strategies that have been put into place.
- Tourism is growing with record-setting numbers at both the city's airport and sea port for 2016.
- Volunteer programmes that have a participation of over 180 members with the organisation of several events per month since 2014 providing for both social support as well as green initiatives.
- The Municipality of Heraklion's portal (www.heraklion.gr) is the central location from where all e-services and e-government is offered. It is the second most visited municipal portal in the country during the summer months and third during the rest of the year.
- Multiple web sites and apps through which visitors and citizens alike can interact with the city as a whole.
- Opening of the Sustainable Urban Development Strategy, a European funded programme for green and sustainable urban development.

5 Timeline

The following is a timeline of milestones that have been achieved over the years:

- 2007 – beginning of the municipal free access Wi-Fi network of Heraklion
- 2009 – Signing of the Charter of Obligations of Municipal Authorities to Citizens in the Knowledge Society
- 2011 – Signing of the Covenant of Mayors
- 2011 – Convening of the first Heraklion: Smart City Committee
- 2012-14 – Awarded as one of the Smart21 intelligent communities of the world by the Intelligent Community Forum for 2012, 2013 and 2014a
- 2015 – City Council Decision for the formation of the Smart City Committee
- 2015 – Completion of the Municipal Strategic Plan 2015-2019
- 2016 – Completion of the Heraklion: Smart City Strategy
- 2017 – Opening of the Sustainable Urban Development Strategy