URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting integrated sustainable urban development. It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, re-affirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal changes. URBACT helps cities to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT II comprises 550 different sized cities and their Local Support Groups, 61 projects, 29 countries, and 7,000 active local stakeholders. URBACT is jointly financed by the ERDF and the Member States.

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URBACT II

JOB GENERATION FOR A JOBLESS GENERATION, URBACT II CAPITALISATION, APRIL 2015

CASE STUDY

Supporting young creatives in Thessaloniki: a bottom-up approach
Supporting young creatives in Thessaloniki: a bottom-up approach, URBACT II Capitalisation, April 2015

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CASE STUDY

Supporting young creatives in Thessaloniki: a bottom-up approach
This case study is part of a bigger capitalisation initiative set by the URBACT programme for 2014–2015 with the objective to present to cities local good practices about:

- **New urban economies**
- **Jobs for young people in cities**
- **Social innovation in cities**
- **Sustainable regeneration in urban areas**

These four topics have been explored by four URBACT working groups (workstreams), composed of multidisciplinary stakeholders across Europe such as urban practitioners and experts from URBACT, representatives from European universities, European programmes and international organisations working on these issues.

The case study on Thessaloniki (Greece) is one of the concrete results of the URBACT workstream ‘Job generation for a jobless generation’, after collection of data, a study visit, and interviews with local stakeholders.

It explores the practice the city put in place to fight youth unemployment, actions implemented, achievements and challenges, success factors, and conditions for transfer to other cities. The first part of the case study summarises the key points of the practice, while the second part (analytical template) provides more details for those interested in transferring the practice to their local context.

*We hope this shall be an inspiration for you and your city!*

**The URBACT Secretariat**
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Thessaloniki, Greece’s 2nd largest city with about 1 million inhabitants is known for its university life and renovated waterfront. Its creative sector is also an important part of the city’s identity. Thessaloniki faces a crisis as youth unemployment in the area is one of the highest of the EU: according to the Hellenic Statistics Authority (2014) the region of Central Macedonia has a 60.4% unemployment rate in the 18–24 age group, while Thessaloniki’s youth unemployment is 43.8% for 18–29 year olds.

In the creative sector, opportunities exist but young professionals face a difficult reality and multiple barriers. As a result, a group of people from within the creative community decided to take action. In partnership with the municipality and other actors they started the Creativity Platform\(^1\) (CP). The CP soon started operating as a broker for the creative community. Working as a non-profit organisation, it created conditions of trust and developed capacity-building activities and direct support (seminars, workshops, matchmaking events, etc.) for the city’s young creatives. This has meant that workers, entrepreneurs, start-ups and existing businesses in the cultural and creative industries sector have been able to access support. The municipality has been supportive. It has used the ideas, it has acted as a

\(^{1}\) http://www.creativityplatform.gr

\(^*\) Nicholas Karachalis is Lecturer and Researcher in Cultural/Tourism Development and the City
co-organiser in events and has created a feeling of trust among the members of the CP within local strategies. But it has also understood when to step back and let things happen.

Since its inception five years ago the Creativity Platform has delivered an interesting range of initiatives which, taken together, have started to grow jobs from the ground up. Some of these are highlighted here. The practice is of particular interest to other EU cities seeking to gain economic, social and cultural value from freelancers and micro enterprises operating in the creative industries. It demonstrates that, even in the midst of catastrophic economic situation, good things can grow.

**NETWORKING AND BUSINESS SUPPORT**

Perhaps the most important work of the Creativity Platform is the information and capacity building activities it organises.

**Crunch events (Creative Brunch)** organised at the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art are a good example bringing together creatives and briefing them on specific fundraising opportunities through a networking event. These were organised within the European Youth Capital 2014 event and each attracted more than 100 participants.

**Handpeak** is an on-line platform2 aiming to promote local creators and crafters. The overall aim of the project is to highlight the importance of creative community for the city of Thessaloniki. Through this platform any visitor or inhabitant of the city is able to find young designers, shop-owners and businesses within a short walk.

**CREATIVITY FOR.TH, Creative Walk and Valaoritou area** To date, ‘Creativity for Thessaloniki’ was probably the most emblematic initiative.

> 74 studios, ateliers, creative agencies and businesses that are based in the historical commercial centre of Thessaloniki were visited by 4,000 people in a single weekend. There was important media coverage and suddenly the wider public realised that many young people do interesting things in this sector.

Alexandra Bozini

Developed in 2012/2013, it delivered a conference, seminars, a website for the creative community and an ‘open doors’ weekend for offices/art spaces. This ‘Creative Walk’ was an opportunity for creative professionals to present themselves to one another and to the city.

According to Alexandra Bozini, architect and member of the organising team, “74 studios, ateliers, creative agencies and businesses that are based in the historical commercial centre of Thessaloniki participated and were visited by 4,000 people in a single weekend. There was important media coverage and suddenly the wider public realised that many young people do interesting things in this sector”.

Handpeak Project: Paraskevi Kokolaki – Yiantes, Design and manufacture of handmade jewellery and accessories. Source: Spyros Tsafaras

Handpeak project: Marina Konstantinou, Fashion Design – Manufacture of handmade clothing and accessories. Source: Spyros Tsafaras

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2  https://www.facebook.com/handpeak?fref=ts
The Creative Walk took place in the area of Valaoritou where there are concerns about the effects of the rapid regeneration of the area and the threat of becoming dominated by the nighttime economy. A map in the form of a symbolic ‘diamond’ indicated the presence and importance of the creative sector in the area. This also triggered a conversation on the future of Valaoritou.

Apostolos Kalfopoulos, independent curator, art critic and lecturer in architecture and owner of Dynamo Project Space which co-organised the ‘Creativity for Thessaloniki’ event, feels that “the cultural sector in the area became visible to the city officials, the wider audience and to the inhabitants”. Paraskevi Tarani, architect and founding member of the CP reflects on participant feedback: “For some of the offices and the professionals this was the opportunity to expand their professional network and meet possible clients or business partners; things work differently in this sector as networking and proximity are key business factors”.

“The idea was simple”, says Vivian Doumba, co-founder of the CP, “we noticed that many of the region’s producers are not using labeling but are interested in the gastronomy market, so they need support in packaging/branding. We provided a list of young designers within a ‘meet your designer’ concept”.

This initiative was planned in collaboration with the Thessaloniki International Fair organisation during the Agrotica 2014 fair for agricultural producers and farmers. It led to 157 business contacts being made and the interest from the producers was high (see Figure 1). This is a practice that is also being transferred to the hotel sector, with hoteliers ‘adopting a young designer or architect’ to help build their identity, furniture, etc.

GOVERNANCE FACTORS: IT’S ALL ABOUT CAPACITY BUILDING, STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND TRUST

The way Creativity Platform works has had a very positive effect on the younger generation of creative professionals in Thessaloniki. The ‘bottom-up’ mentality creates conditions of trust that a public sector initiative or a private office would not necessarily be able to create. At the same time the city supports the initiatives in various ways: as a co-organiser of its events, by providing space for meetings or seminars, by ensuring publicity (e.g. broadcast of their activities through the municipal TV channel) and by committing itself to implement the ideas that have been included in the Local Action Plan (LAP) of the URBACT My Generation at Work network. One of the most recent steps at the beginning of 2015 taken by the municipality was the agreement signed with the Anna Lindh Foundation for the support of Creative Entrepreneurship and Social innovation. The LAP will include some of the...
initiatives of the Creativity Platform as they have been acting as members of the Local Support Group.

For some of the final beneficiaries the effects are significant:

Christianna Vei (27 years old) is a typical example: she and her sister started their own studio as crafters and make shoes – her parents were in the same business and they decided to revive their parents’ business. “Our shoes are made in a very traditional way by hand, therefore our production is limited. Most of our sales are made through the Internet to other countries such as the UK and although demand is high, it is still difficult to make a living ... The main difficulty is linked with the fact that there is no information/mentoring or networking opportunities with other young entrepreneurs. Until my involvement in the Creativity Platform and my presentation during the My Generation at Work network’s workshop I hadn’t realised that this kind of support was available. The unemployment office programmes are of no use to me ...” 7.

**WHY IS THIS WORKING AND WHAT ARE THE THREATS?**

Unlike some of the support structures for job generation for young people, this particular effort is making a difference for young creative professionals in Thessaloniki. In Greece most decisions are made based on a top-down approach but the development of the Creative Economy sector of Thessaloniki is following a different path. The CP became an intermediary for new partnerships, while the end-users are mostly young professionals who access support to meet employers or to work with each other. In addition, as young creative professionals are usually extravert and willing to co-operate, the city has much to gain. However, change management within the CP is not easy. Poor decisions could lead to ‘institutionalisation’.
and thereby threaten existing group dynamics. It is an open group, there is no hierarchy or operational chart. This loose structure and informal approach are success factors. It may be difficult to develop and grow the platform and maintain this.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OTHER EU CITIES?

The best practice here is the way that the municipal authority is opening up to a group of young professionals who have spontaneously taken the opportunity to act as a broker. The project is low cost and of high-efficiency. For young creative professionals this kind of support cannot be found elsewhere as there is no specific policy for this group at national or city level.

There are perhaps seven factors which are crucial to the success so far and which could be useful to other European cities:

1. Tailored approach: A strategy to tackle unemployment cannot be based on a ‘one size fits all’ formula; it is not always appropriate to apply a generic employment policy to all sectors but it is necessary to understand the particularities of each case. Creative workers/professionals form a diverse group but most work on the basis of short contracts or have an uncertain income.

2. Co-creation: Opening a discussion with the young creative professionals in the city centre has many advantages. Some of the solutions that can help them don’t cost much and are based on clever approaches. For the city their support also means that fresh ideas, events, entrepreneurial opportunities etc. are developed and promoted. This is a very low cost initiative with important results.

3. Using young talent: Young creatives are also important to neighbourhood management and in the case of the Valaoritou area, the Creative Walk was an opportunity to engage citizens and businesses in a discussion about the area’s future and the threat of the night-time economy taking over. The advantages of creating the conditions for the creative community to be present in the city-centre and share its ideas with other actors are significant.

4. Bottom-up The end-users themselves are participating in the planning and discussions of activities; nothing is imposed upon them. For all parties involved the ideas and projects are based on a learning process where everything is gained through participation and experimentation.

5. Flexibility The threat of institutionalising / over-managing can have opposite outcomes as artists and creatives don’t feel comfortable to operate under a strict managing regime or a public body. In this case, the municipality was able to understand the dynamics of a spontaneous group of people without intervening. Key individuals and politicians were able to understand the dynamics of the group and support them.

6. Suite of integrated initiatives Specific activities such as linking the designers with the Agrotica exhibition through the Agrodesign initiative and the ‘Handpeak’ project could be transferable to other cities.

7. Visible results Despite the fact that the creative workers/professionals only account for a limited proportion of the city’s workforce, their effect on the city’s cultural identity has multiple positive outcomes. For a medium sized city like Thessaloniki the maintenance of a vibrant local art scene is a strategic priority.

Unlike some of the support structures for job generation for young people, this particular effort is making a difference for young creative professionals in Thessaloniki. In Greece most decisions are made based on a top-down approach but the development of the Creative Economy sector of Thessaloniki is following a different path. The CP became an intermediary for new partnerships, while the end-users are mostly young professionals who access support to meet employers or to work with each other. In addition, as young creative professionals are usually extravert and willing to co-operate, the city has much to gain.
ANALYTICAL TEMPLATE OF THE CASE STUDY
### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF CITY</th>
<th>Thessaloniki</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REGION AND COUNTRY</td>
<td>Central Macedonia, Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEOGRAPHIC SIZE</td>
<td>Thessaloniki is a coastal city with a population of 1,035,240 inhabitants (FUA). The municipality of Thessaloniki is home to 342,766 inhabitants in the city-centre. Thessaloniki faces a pressing challenge; youth unemployment in the area is one of the highest of the EU: the region of Central Macedonia has a 60.4% unemployment rate in the group 18-24, while in Thessaloniki the rate is 43.8% in the ages 18-29 according to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2014).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1. PRACTICE DESCRIPTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ONE-LINER DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE</th>
<th>A bottom-up creative agency by young professionals in order to confront the financial crisis and create links with employers.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAIN REASON FOR HIGHLIGHTING THIS CASE</td>
<td>The Creativity Platform (CP) in Thessaloniki was chosen as a case study for the URBACT ‘Job Generation’ workstream as an example of a spontaneous bottom-up initiative by a group of young artists and cultural entrepreneurs which is leading to job generation and opportunities. The practice has developed through partnerships with key actors of the city and is now delivering results in the context of the URBACT My Generation at Work network. Although the activities of the CP are not exclusively addressed to youngsters, most of the members and end-users belong to the age group 20-40 and many of them face survival problems due to the financial crisis. The projects that have been initiated by the CP aim at building capacity and creating opportunities for young professionals to receive support in their businesses, to get networked and to develop their skills. In many cases the CP acts as a broker, e.g. in the Agrodesign project which is aiming at creating partnerships with businesses from the agricultural sector. The way it is being managed is particularly interesting as it grew organically and is run by members of the creative community on the basis of a bottom-up approach within a non-profit organisation scheme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Thessaloniki a different path is followed regarding the support of young creative professionals. Thessaloniki has recently emerged as city of design, photography and film-making and hosts a large community of young creative workers and professionals in its city-centre. The Creativity Platform (CP) was created in order to link this group together and create work opportunities, confronting the difficult situation and poor employment opportunities in the sector after the financial crisis. At the beginning, the initial planning of the CP centred on the development around Valaoritou area (a former manufacturing area in the city centre), but now its focus has expanded to almost the whole city centre of Thessaloniki and the metropolitan region. The main objective was to create the circumstances for young creative workers and professionals to be able to create and sustain their jobs, support each other, share expenses and create the conditions for a wider synergy on a city level regarding the creative economy. According to the Creativity Platform’s website it aims to:

- Function as a scientific and research observatory, by focusing on the mapping of the creative economy and the assessment of its dynamics and prospects.
- Establish a dialogue forum on the cooperative planning of an integrated cultural- and creative-economy strategy, by activating everyone involved: artists, institutions, agencies, producers and intermediates.
- Function as a networking and collaboration platform, both for the enhancement of the local creative community identity, as well as for its outreach, by connecting the community with creative economy poles from other countries.
- Develop and evolve supporting tools, as well as tools of ongoing training and information of the creative community, on issues related to its empowerment and financial viability.

Furthermore the Platform was created in order to lobby alongside with other organisations (e.g. Dynamo Project Space) in favour of a local strategy for creative industries; this has partly been achieved as in the summer of 2014 the Centre for Creative Economy was created by the municipal authority, with the CP being one of the founding partners.
Although the need to confront the difficulties of the sector was the main motivation of the CP, it also has wider targets such as activating dialogue on the creative economy of Thessaloniki and especially of the city centre. Networking and capacity building activities are the top priorities; workshops and mentoring activities are organised on a regular basis. It also operates as an observatory and therefore its members have been working on mapping and monitoring the creative sector. More particularly, these are its main projects until now:

**Creativity for.TH** was the most emblematic project and was developed between November 2012 and June 2013 in cooperation with Dynamo Project Space, Peirama and Thessaloniki’s Deputy Mayor of Culture and Tourism. It focused on the creative cluster established in the Old Commercial Centre of Thessaloniki, known as ‘Valaoritou area’. Through the organisation of nine pilot actions the creative sector was promoted and discussed, thus attracting media coverage, participants and visitors. The most characteristic activities were the Creative Walk, a weekend with open offices/art spaces, the launching of a beta version of the on-line ‘be-creative’ tool, seminars and networking events (e.g. Open Coffee).

**AgroDesign** is an umbrella-project for the collaboration among the creative industries of Thessaloniki and the agricultural and food-processing sector. The Agrodesign project was developed by the CP at the end of 2013. Within a ‘meet your designer’ concept in order to help agrofood companies with branding/packaging solutions, this initiative was planned in collaboration with the Thessaloniki International Fair during the Agrotica 2014 fair for agricultural producers and farmers. The first steps were successful and will continue opening up to a larger group and offer more services. The project is developed in collaboration with Pakhuis De Zwijger, an institution based in Amsterdam, which aims at the support and enhancement of creativity and the support of Creative Industries Fund NL. Thessaloniki International Fair and HELEXPO are also partners and supporters of this project. In the same field and more particularly in the field of wine marketing, a Black Sea project was developed with ‘Peirama’ art space.

Another important partnership involves a Local Music Economy Network developed in partnership with the Berlin Music Commission, the Berlin Club Commission and supported by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. During the visit of the German partners in Thessaloniki the CP organised a special Music Walk, which led to networking and synergies between German and Greek music professionals.

**Handpeak** is an initiative supported by an on-line tool which allows any visitor or inhabitant of the city to meet young designers, shop-owners and businesses within a short walk. Moreover, Handpeak intends to offer specialised tours promoting the creative industries of the city. The first custom designed tour took place in October 2014, during the visit of 12 famous tourist bloggers, leading to worldwide coverage. The bloggers were invited by the municipality to Thessaloniki after the TBEX event in Athens.

**Crunch events (Creative Brunch)** are open networking meetings that include briefing/training on available fundraising opportunities (e.g. finance tools, marketing, Creative Europe, etc.) The first 4 meetings have been organised within the framework of the European Youth Capital 2014.

Finally, two of the most important achievements are connected to CP’s collaboration with two institutions. First, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding contract with the Macedonian Contemporary Art Museum which includes the use of an office space and the conference room of the museum in exchange for knowledge/support in issues the CP is specialised in. Secondly, the foundation of the Centre of the Creative Economy (which is still not in full operation) by the Municipality has come as a result of their partnership with the CP which also holds the role of founding member and partner. Two future ideas concern a Thessaloniki Design Shop and an Incubator space for the creative sector.
### 1. PRACTICE DESCRIPTION (CONT’D)

#### INTEGRATED APPROACH

The approach is clearly connected to the particular characteristics of the city centre of Thessaloniki, but also to the wider strategic priority of the city to support the idea of a creative city. Initially, most of the members and projects were connected to the area known as ‘Valaoritou’. There, since 2010, old warehouses, manufacturers and shops are giving way to new cultural and leisure uses. Quickly, the scope of the CP expanded to the whole city centre. Both during the events but also in particular projects, issues such as citizen’s participation, neighbourhood empowerment, the upgrading of arcades, etc. were discussed on the basis of articulating specific proposals. The pilot mapping project of the creative economy of the city was also based on a wider social and economic approach towards urban regeneration. Employment opportunities and common projects regarding the support of creative professionals has been the priority.

#### TARGET AUDIENCE

The end-users of the activities of the CP are mostly young creative professionals of the city, where special attention is given to start-ups and young entrepreneurs. CP activities are not uniquely aimed at young creative workers and professionals but have also opened up to other sectors: the inhabitants of particular neighbourhoods, city visitors, individual enterprises, the tourism industry, agricultural producers etc.

Through URBACT’s My Generation at Work network, which is based on a wider partnership of universities, youth organisations and NGOs, members of the Platform have been involved in youth employment issues as part of the Local Support Group activities.

#### MAINSTREAMING OF GENDER EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

There are no specific objectives, but efforts are made to meet gender equality standards. The Creativity Platform members/end-users are mostly female.

#### TIMEFRAME OF THE PRACTICE IMPLEMENTED

The idea of a network amongst creative professionals of the city centre has been discussed for many years but it was not until 2010-2011 that the group started meeting and organising projects and events in partnership with other stakeholders.

**2012**

CREATIVITY FOR.TH was the first large scale project of the CP including the Creative Walk, the launching of a digital platform, networking events (e.g. ‘open coffees’), educational workshops and seminars.

**2013**

In 2013 a Black Sea project was developed by Peirama in collaboration with CP.

The same year a partnership with music organisations from Berlin led to a Music Network and a Music Walk.

The CP joined the URBACT My Generation at Work network.

**2014**

The Agodesign initiative is launched during the Agrotica kick-off of cooperation with the Creative Industries Fund NL and Pakhuis de Zwijger.

The CP starts a partnership with the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art.

The Handpeak initiative is launched.

The Centre for the Creative Economy is founded by the municipal authorities (CP acts as founding partner).
2. POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

2.1 NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND CITY FRAMEWORK

In his book ‘City of Ghosts’, M. Mazower describes the importance of Thessaloniki not only for the Greek but also for both the Jewish (once ‘Jerusalem of Europe’, the Jewish community will almost completely vanish during WW II) and the Ottoman history. Its multicultural atmosphere, although not so evident today, can be traced in the buildings, the street names, the habits of the older generations of the city. Thessaloniki, the second largest city of Greece, has developed a specific identity regarding its cultural sector. It has built the most important part of its cultural infrastructure in the preparation phase of the European Capital of Culture event in 1997: part of the industrial buildings of the waterfront have been turned into a museum/leisure cluster— the regenerated waterfront of the city is one of the most recognisable and valuable assets of the city. Nowadays the state doesn’t provide support for cultural industries; public organisations (orchestras, theatres, museums, festivals) are struggling with budget cuts, a fact that affects the cultural image of Thessaloniki.

The last five years Greece is facing a severe financial crisis, but some first signs where already visible earlier in specific areas: the whole region of Central Macedonia – the second largest region of Greece— has been suffering from de-industrialisation and high rates of unemployment. With an regional unemployment rate that has been above 30% the last few years and an increase in flexible, insecure working positions the region has been witnessing a very difficult challenge. The city of Thessaloniki is the capital of the region; the financial crisis has stroke the city in a severe way.

The Municipality is facing difficulties in supporting its cultural events (e.g. Demetria). It must be noted that there is no metropolitan governance structure, a fact that makes the confrontation of specific problems even more difficult. The city hosts a quite extensive number of creative professionals, mostly graduates of the university of the city (and a quite high number of which undertake Master Studies abroad). Nowadays most of them face survival issues and many architects, designers, actors, etc. are under the poverty threshold. The problem is wider as Thessaloniki is facing a very high unemployment percentage amongst the youth. Despite the efforts on a local level e.g. the establishment of a Municipal Employment Observatory, the capacity of the local government is rather low in this field.

An on-line survey was carried out during the first stages of My Generation at Work on the views of young inhabitants of Thessaloniki on the employment market and their personal situation. The survey (104 participants) pointed out the fact that creative professions were in the top choices for more than half of them. Another interesting fact is that a very large proportion of the participants thought that co-working spaces could be helpful for them (see Kourakli et al, 2014)

Improving Thessaloniki’s image and connecting it with design, photography, cinema, architecture and the creative economy in general is set as strategic priority. The City Council has actively promoted the idea of Thessaloniki as a Creative City and the Creativity Platform has been supported from its very beginning, while the Region of Central Macedonia has also used its Structural Funds in order to fund specific cultural events (Film Festival, Moni Lazariston festival, the Thessaloniki Biennale, etc) or infrastructure (Music Hall). In the regional S3 (Smart Specialisation) the Creative Economy is set as a priority due to the pressures of the CP (lobbying for a strategy on a regional level is one of the CP’s priorities). Apart from that the city achieved to host international cultural events such as WOMEX.
Youth employment is a priority both on a municipal and regional level. The Municipality operates an Observatory for Unemployment since 2014 and is supporting partnerships with universities, NGOs such as Ergani, youth organisations, etc in order to maximise its effect. URBACT’s My Generation at Work network also serves this particular partnership through the Local Support Group and the produced LAP is expected to add to this as it offers specific directions and actions towards the confrontation of youth employment.

Regarding the creative sector, although Thessaloniki is characterised by its vibrant cultural life, there hasn’t been a coherent strategy for its support. The current city government has been actively promoting both the image of a creative city and, at the same time, has been trying to develop a policy to support the creative professionals. Branding Thessaloniki as a city-break destination for young cultural tourists has been set as a priority. The Establishment of the Centre for the Creative Economy was the most recent step: although not in full operation yet it is expected to act as a local agency for the creative industries of the city by offering business support, providing information and building collaboration on a local level. The Centre is based on a wider partnership between public and private bodies.
3. Design & Implementation

3.1 Practice Design and Planning

The initial formation of the CP started unofficially in 2010, as the financial crisis started affecting the city and many difficulties occurred for the designers, artists, etc. entering the market. At the same time the empty shops/spaces in the city centre (especially around Valaoritou Street) were seen as an opportunity for many of them; soon a creative cluster was formed. The then newly elected Vice-Mayor of Culture and Tourism, Spiros Pengas, as newly appointed Vice Mayor read a Master thesis written on the creative economy of the city-centre and decided to invite young and active members from this community who would like to come up with fresh ideas and contribute to their realisation. By that time some of the people already knew each other but this gathering led to the idea of the Creativity Platform and its realisation.

The need for a network/specific strategy in order to support and sustain the creative economy of the city and link its different parts together has been evident for many years. After the crisis broke out, the need for specific actions became stronger. The municipality through Spyros Pengas supported the idea and helped out in the formation of the goals and the initial projects. Furthermore, the team took advantage of previous research done mostly in the context of graduate and master studies. Some of the members of the Platform have been involved in research projects that indicated this need and some first ideas were already documented. After the success of the first projects, many new ideas are being discussed and implemented.

There was no pilot or other similar initiative. Still research work that was carried out at universities/research centers indicated the need for support structures for the creative sector of Thessaloniki.

Panos Remoundos and Paraskevi Tarani were the first ‘unofficial’ coordinators of the group: working on a part-time level in research projects at the local university they had the responsibility of planning the first steps. Soon a wider group was formed and partnerships were developed. NGOs such as Peirama, Dynamo Art Space, Pakhuis de Zwijger and public institutions such as the MMCA, the Thessaloniki International Fair, etc. soon became basic partners. Apart from direct partnerships the also contribute to wider regional strategies (e.g. Smart Specialisation S3) or to events/initiatives of other organisations (e.g. Black Sea Programme of Peirama or the Creativity Lab within the SHAPES of the Hellenic Center of Research and Technology). The municipality was particularly supportive through all the stages by offering space (e.g. the conference room at the city hall) for meetings, by co-organising the events, by offering media coverage through the TV-station and its website and through (limited) financial support for expenses. It also supports the Local Support Group of the URBACT My Generation at Work network and has expressed its commitment for the implementation of the Local Action Plan. The latter includes some of the ideas of the Creativity Platform such as the Creative Brunches and the operation of co-working spaces.
3.2 MANAGEMENT

The management structure within the CP differs from an agency or a large NGO. It is an open group, there is no hierarchy and as this is a bottom up initiative, management structures are quite loose. Still members hold roles (e.g. director, financial officer, etc). There is an annual management meeting where budget issues, assignments, future planning etc. are discussed. Besides that specific working groups are formed for each project and have regular meetings (a project manager is assigned to each one). The overall operating model is based on networking and most of the meetings are organised in unofficial spaces (cafés, etc.). The main management tasks of the projects are carried out by the team of co-founders (6 members) and the project development is spread among the co-founders, the associates of the Creativity Platform as well as external collaborators who are interested in helping with the projects and supporting the local creative community. For each project the working group holds the responsibility for the development and implementation of activities, financial management and publicity.

The operation of the CP is project based. Specific ideas for projects are developed in sessions or through the Internet with the help of skype/social media. Communication among its members is being done through a closed social media group. The main goal is to have transparency in each step and problems are dealt with during meetings with the whole group. The lack of leadership could create problems in its future operation.

3.3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM

Monitoring is carried out by the members of the group after the completion of each project (until now there is no monitoring method foreseen for the CP apart from its financial control).

Targets are set for each project: participation figures, new contracts, website visitation, number of participants, new start-ups etc are being measured depending on the nature of the initiative.

Community
Core group / founding members ................................................................. 6
Members / close collaborators ................................................................. 22
Participants in CPs annual meetings (average) ........................................... 50

Social Media
Creativity Platform site visits ................................................................. 2230 visits
(78% new visitors)
FB page Creativity Platform ................................................................. 1560 likes
FB page Agrodesign ................................................................. 325 likes
FB page Handpeak ................................................................. 780 likes

Projects
Creative Walk participants ................................................................. 78
Creative Walk visitors ................................................................. 4000 appr
Music Walk participants ................................................................. 10
Music walk visitors ................................................................. 15
Creativity For.Th seminars' participants ........................................................ 150
BeCreative entries ................................................................. 80
Agrodesign cluster (designers / products) ........................................................ 9 / 40
Agrodesign contacts made ................................................................. 157 producers / 50 professionals
Agrodesign mature cooperation requests ........................................................ 72
CRunch participants (average) ................................................................. 100
Handpeak creative professionals participation (pilot/goal) ........................................................ 9 / 40

Spill over effects
Collaborators / interns of CP who found job through CP ........................................................ 7
Professionals who promoted their work through CP ........................................................ 190
Collaborations that were created through CP ................................................................. 15
Professionals who benefited from networking through CP ........................................................ 250
### 3. DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION (CONT’D)

#### 3.3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM

There is no official evaluation approach followed but an annual results report is presented to the members. Special attention is given to financial control. For each project separate evaluation is carried out depending on its specific characteristics.

#### 3.4 GOVERNANCE: PARTNERSHIP, PARTICIPATION, MOBILISATION AND EMPOWERMENT

The decision making process is informal (see management part).

On a local level the main partners are Dynamo Project Space and Peirama (both are non-profit organisations). The Municipality, the International University, the Goethe Institute, the British Council and The Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art (MMCA) have been supporting the initiative. The latter offered office space to the CP. The Thessaloniki International Fair (TIF), the Hellenic Center of Research and Technology (EKETA) and the Thessaloniki Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) are also important partners. Furthermore partnerships have been established with organisations in other European cities such as Berlin (Berlin Music Commission, Pfefferberg) and Amsterdam (Pakhuis De Zwijger Creative Industries Fund NL). Finally, there is close collaboration with many smaller businesses, art spaces, etc.

Since the initiative is not heavily funded it is based on partnerships such as the one with the Museum of Modern Art., the URBACT My Generation at Work network, etc.

The creative professionals are committed to the idea of opening up to the neighbourhood. Many activities such as the Creative Walk are designed on this basis of participation and dialogue with the local community and stakeholders.

As mentioned above, the city supports the project without though intervening in its operation. There is an exchange of ideas on a regular basis, while their partnership will be upgraded within the newly established Centre for the Creative Economy. Spyros Pengas, vice-mayor, was the key person who got the team together and encouraged them, but he also stepped back when necessary. At the beginning of 2015 the municipality signed an agreement with the Anna Lindh Foundation for the support of Creative Entrepreneurship and Social innovation.

The end-users of the activities of the CP are mostly the creative professionals of the city, while special attention is given to start-ups and young entrepreneurs. Depending on the activity, interest has been spread among other sectors, professionals, inhabitants, etc.
4. INNOVATIVE ELEMENTS AND NOVEL APPROACHES

The key innovation is connected to the high level efficiency of the initiative and its organic bottom-up character which is its main strength. Furthermore, the end-users and participants acknowledge the fact that the support in networking, matchmaking with potential employers, education, funding, etc. is of vital importance in times of financial crisis. Moreover, the opening to other sectors (agriculture, tourism) in the context of an employer focused approach and the establishment of links that affect their work/businesses has positive impacts both on the employment in the sector and on the city. The use of information and evidence from the community of creative workers and professionals is a very strong advantage for the programming and effectiveness of the CP’s activities.

The strength of the CP is that the ideas / solutions are generated within the context of its operation. External partners and collaborators have a different effect on the operation of the CP. Partners that are linked to the Creative sector, such as Dynamo and Peirama, provide new ideas and approaches both on an artistic and managerial level. Other larger organisations had a catalytic role in the implementation of particular actions such as the International Fair with Agrodesign. The role of the municipality is considered as positive by the members of the CP as they receive support in terms of publicity (e.g. broadcast of their activities through the municipal TV channel).

The approach can be considered as innovative both on a national and a European scale. Especially regarding the Greek context where bottom up approaches are not so common, the fact that such an initiative comes from the community in order to find solutions regarding unemployment is very unique. The way the municipality and other local stakeholders take advantage of the dynamics of the CP can be seen as a different approach towards the unemployment problem – especially if the particular circumstances of the creative sector are taken into account.

One of the main strengths of the CP is that its members have training/experience in visual communication; hence, its visuals are of high quality and are used effectively for each initiative. Video, social media, etc. are used in such a way that the projects become appealing to the wider audience and the group has gained recognition on a city level, and attracts media coverage. Other openings to actors of the city are related to tourism, agricultural production, etc.

Internationalisation is achieved through projects such as the funding through the Stimuleringsfonds and the partnership with Pakhuis de Zwijger, the Black Sea project, etc. The newly established Centre of the Creative Economy of Thessaloniki is seen both as a result of their pressure towards the city authority along with other organisations and an opportunity to re-work the CP role and goals within the city.

The opening of the municipality to a group of young creative professionals without trying to control it and the dialogue that was developed are the most innovative aspects of the partnership. The project based approach which is a movement towards co-production for each idea is also quite unique for the sector and the city of Thessaloniki.
## 5. FUNDING

### 5.1. FUNDING

There was an initial (small) personal contribution by each founding member but for the rest the CP relies on projects, private contributions and micro funding. Generally, there were many difficulties according to the managing group as the specific particularity of the CP is that it has to rely on limited resources, sponsors and voluntary work. The annual turnover does not exceed €10,000. ERDF/ESF contribution is indirect and very low as part of other projects. For example the Creative Walk was funded by the municipality with €5,000. This year the revenues come from the Youth Capital Event 2014 which is co-financed by the European funds (€5,000) and from the StimuleringsFonds (€9,500) for AgroDesign, while additional amounts are found through sponsors. It has to be noted that the members of the platform offer voluntary working hours e.g. visual communication is being planned and managed by one of the associate design offices. Two more projects where CP participates as external collaborator are:

a) Black Sea WinExports (Preparing the conditions for penetration of the Black Sea wines in the International Market €110,000). The programme is run by Peirama with collaboration of members of the Creativity Platform.

b) The Inspire project (200.000 Euro) of the Macedonian Museum of Modern Art is funded through the Regional Programme (ERDF)

Since the Creativity Platform is depending on different funding schemes, for each one a different path has been followed. For example, regarding the StimuleringsFonds fund a competition bid had to be drafted. The Crunch meetings which are being funded through the Youth Capital event had to be submitted as a proposal. Handpeak has been designed within the CP and for the moment brings no revenues — still the interviewed participants said they would be willing to pay for such a project.

Other actors have been sponsoring activities and events, however one cannot refer to strong private sector leverage.

### 5.2. OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME

The Creativity Platform is not a final beneficiary of a European programme but is part of the URBACT and Youth Capital Programme. Peirama through the Black Sea programme and the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art have been receiving funding through ERDF.

### 5.3. MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA – IF RELEVANT)

NR

### 5.4. COHESION POLICY OBJECTIVE (IF RELEVANT)

NR

### 5.5. LINK TO EU 2020

There is an indirect connection of the case study to the context of the Europe 2020 inclusive growth strategy and its main objectives: these include the achievement of a 75% employment rate and 20 million fewer people in/at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The case study is not directly linked to a national employment policy, but it refers to the local specificities and challenges of Thessaloniki.
### 6. PROJECT ASSESSMENT

#### 6.1. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The CP hasn’t got any fixed income. Most of the funds are directly connected to a particular initiative or project; this means that there are no permanent financial flows. Although its bottom up approach is its main strength, the CP’s operation under a loose management scheme can also be a threat regarding its financial sustainability. The final beneficiaries that were interviewed also indicated the need for permanent support concerning the issues the CP advocates.

Therefore it is proposed that next steps concentrate on new partnerships and ways to attract funding, either through EU or public funding schemes or through alternative means of financing (crowdfunding, etc.) New ideas involve the operation of a Thessaloniki Design Shop with the support of the Municipality (this can also create revenues), the operation of a co-working space for young creative entrepreneurs, the extension of the focus of the Platform to other parts of the city-centre, etc.

#### 6.2 ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

One of the main difficulties is connected to the lack of income which affects the frequency of activities and programming. Apart from that, the coordination of the projects has not been easy as different people form temporary networks. A specific difficulty is connected to the large number of people involved in the organisation and the voluntary status of its members. Generating revenues through their activities has been discussed but is not received well by participants. The CP has to deal with constraints regarding its further development.

#### 6.3 PROJECT OUTPUTS & RESULTS

Unlike the limited support structures regarding job generation for young people, this particular effort is making a difference for some of the young creative professionals. CP is a group that represents their needs and has effects on their businesses. The end-users constitute a quite extended group, apart from the creative professionals: for example more than 4,000 people visited the Creative Walk and the website has been visited by 2,230 unique visitors. Although each project has a different scope/participation rate, it is estimated that 190 professionals had the opportunity to promote their work through the CP while at least 250 professionals have found some kind of support through the CP. Although the nature of creative work is not connected to full-time jobs 7 collaborators were able to find a new job through the platform.

As in Greece most decisions are based on a top-down approach, the development of the Creative Economy sector of Thessaloniki is—to a great extent—following a different path. The fact that the CP has followed a bottom up approach seems to be working better within the creative community. Agrodesign, Handpeak, seminars and other initiatives did have direct positive impact in terms of improvement of working conditions and new opportunities.
### 7. Success Factors, Lessons Learned, and Conditions

#### 7.1. Success Factors

Five Success Factors that can be mentioned:

- A city cannot apply a generic employment policy to all sectors but it is necessary to understand the particularities of each case. Young creative workers and professionals don’t feel comfortable under a strict management context and are dependent on networks; the CP created conditions of trust and is therefore effective in approaching this group.

- Involving young people from the creative community in the discussion for the future of the city has proved to be very efficient; fresh ideas and initiatives were planned and implemented. Their skills and talent in visualising ideas have added value for the city.

- The bottom-up approach followed within the CP and the decision making procedures through open meetings proved to be effective. The choice of experimenting with different ideas gives the initiative the characteristics of a learning process. Street events, gatherings, guided tours, workshops, etc. lead to stronger relations among its members and networking/partnerships/business opportunities.

- The way partnerships were formed with key actors of the city (Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, International Fair) led to projects that were mutually beneficial without creating extra financial or bureaucratic costs. The key success factor here activating everyone involved: artists, institutions, agencies, producers and intermediaries.

- Regarding spatial effects and especially neighbourhood management, this group is important and in the case of the Valaoritou area the Creative Walk was also an opportunity to discuss the future of the area, the threat of the night-time economy taking over, and the possibility to involve inhabitants and businesses in the conversation.

#### 7.2. Lessons Learnt

- The advantages of creating the conditions for the creative community to be present in the city-centre and share its ideas with other actors are very important. The creative sector is not introvert; creating links with other parties can be very efficient for the neighbourhood or the city.

- The local authorities must not try to manage or control this kind of initiatives but form a partnership. The end-users themselves are participating in the planning and discussions of the activities; nothing is imposed upon them. For all parties involved, the ideas and projects are based on a learning process where everything is gained through participation and experimentation.

- Supporting a spontaneous group of young people turned out to be a good practice. Regarding the creative sector the threat of institutionalising / over-managing can have the opposite outcomes as artists and creatives don’t feel comfortable to operate under a manager or a public body. According to curator Thouli Misliroglou: “flexibility is the key advantage of the CPs organisation”.

- Specific activities such as linking the designers and other creative professionals with employers through the ‘Agrodesign’ initiative or the ‘Handpeak’ project could be seen as best practices that could be transferable to other cities.
### 7. SUCCESS FACTORS, LESSONS LEARNED, AND CONDITIONS (CONT'D)

#### 7.3. TRANSFER

Since many of the members and collaborators of the Creativity Platform have studied in the UK or elsewhere in Europe or Northern America, they were inspired by similar clusters and initiatives (e.g. Open House and Design Walk in London). Their participation in the CP and their presence in the central areas of Thessaloniki are connected to their willingness to participate in local policy decision making processes. Regarding its transfer to other cities in Greece or abroad, connections have been made with cities and similar initiatives in Germany, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, etc. Within Greece it is seen as an innovative idea that could work for other cities as well.

#### 7.4. TRANSFER CONDITIONS (TRANSFERABILITY)

Cities with a strong creative sector could learn from the example of Thessaloniki. The bottom-up approach is more appropriate for this sector because of its particularities. Offering young artists and creative professionals the opportunity to implement their ideas and learn from each other can have multiple positive effects on their work. One of the most important advantages is that it is a low cost solution. Apart from job generation this also affects the city's cultural and creative sector as a whole, the image (city brand) and tourist appeal. Financial support proves to be not as important as the formation of an initial team and the creation of trust among the stakeholders. Furthermore, programming is essential as participation has to be kept at high levels and participants need to be activated.
ANNEX

FURTHER INFORMATION

Creative Walk’s films:
http://youtu.be/mGvMDZP2XMU (in Greek) and here: http://youtu.be/p4ZudARudb0
My Generation at Work Thessaloniki film:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tnSL868sWQ (english subtitles)
Creativity Platform promotion film:
http://vimeo.com/82401582 (english subtitles)
www.creativityplatform.gr
www.becreative.gr
www.agro-design.net
www.handpeak.gr
https://www.facebook.com/handpeak?fref=ts
http://www.creativethessaloniki.gr/about

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EXPERT WHO DID THE ‘CASE STUDY’

Nicholas Karachalis
karachalis@gmail.com
# URBACT II PROJECTS

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*Fast Track Label
URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting integrated sustainable urban development.

It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, re-affirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal changes. URBACT helps cities to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT II comprises 550 different sized cities and their Local Support Groups, 61 projects, 29 countries, and 7,000 active local stakeholders. URBACT is jointly financed by the ERDF and the Member States.

www.urbact.eu