UNLOCKING
THE CULTURAL POTENTIAL
OF ATHENS

ATHENS R.O.C.K. EXPERIENCE | 2018 – 2020

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CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

Committed to investing in urban regeneration and to addressing the need for the welfare of Athenian citizens, the city of Athens participated in the R.O.C.K. project as a Role Model city. The R.O.C.K. project, since its operation in 2018, has been a driver of change for Athens, with a distinct focus on capacity building for the local creative communities and the regeneration of urban spaces through cultural development initiatives at the heart of downtown Athens, notably the Theatre Square.

Thanks to the R.O.C.K. project, Athens has supported a great number of innovative initiatives and has shared its best practices with 31 partners in Europe. It has reinforced its European synergies creating, at the same time, a strong local cultural network with the involvement of key city stakeholders such as the Benaki Museum, the U.S. Embassy in Athens, the Athens School of Fine Arts and the Onassis Foundation among many other institutions, museums, foundations and local citizens' initiatives.

Over the course of three years, more than 10.000 citizens have benefited from R.O.C.K. activities and projects, making the R.O.C.K. project a success story, and leaving Athenians with an important legacy: the creation of bold synergies at both local and European level and the gradual regeneration of formerly neglected urban neighborhoods through cultural activities and local engagement showcasing the great potential of Athens to become a friendlier, more resilient and better place to live.

Evangelos Vlachos

CEO
Athens Development and Destination Management Agency

"R.O.C.K. focuses on historic city centres as extraordinary laboratories to demonstrate how cultural heritage can be a unique and powerful engine of regeneration, sustainable development and economic growth for the whole city."

CHAPTER 1
ATHENS IN R.O.C.K.

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How can cities nurture new approaches for access to culture and cultural heritage? And how can they respond to contemporary cultural challenges and develop new strategies?

Athens is a city full of contradictions, connected to many different identities and characteristics. Athens is seen as a glorious city because of its rich cultural heritage and history, as well as a city in constant transformation because of the financial crisis of the past decade. In addition, it has become an international cultural city destination as a result of the advent of mega events, such as Documenta 14 in 2017 that spurred the attraction –and eventual stay– of international artists and cultural professionals because of the growing interest in and inspiration from a city in crisis. Most importantly, Athens is a city that has demonstrated **resilience** and has offered ground for **cultural and social innovation**.[1]

Amidst those distinctive characteristics, Athens played an important part as a **Role Model City** within the R.O.C.K. project by using and sharing its expertise in bringing up alternative strategies and ideas and responding innovatively to city challenges and needs. Why? "...Because the City of Athens has placed a lot of importance on innovation and how it can help the local community bring about change and open up to the world."[2] During the last decade, the city of Athens has actively turned towards its most significant asset: its citizens. Based on a culture of openness and collaboration, the city of Athens has developed different projects that respond to the city needs together with the local populations. This strategy of working together with citizens that has permeated through several municipal policies regarding culture, public space, education, digital development and the improvement of quality of urban life, led to the award of the **European Capital of Innovation** to the city in 2018.[3]

Focusing on the regeneration of urban spaces through culture and cultural heritage, which was one of the main fields of action in the R.O.C.K. project, the city of Athens participated as a Role Model City for **Cultural Heritage Accessibility** and **Democracy and Consultation Processes**. Athens shared best practices, tools and urban strategies that have facilitated soft and firm changes in the city with the support of citizens' initiatives. Among its best practices that underlined the significance of participatory and collaborative methodologies within the municipality have been: the award-winning **synAthina platform** founded in 2013 by Amalia Zepou,[4] former Vice Mayor for Civil Society and Social Innovation of the City of Athens and the **Municipal Market of Kypseli**,[5] which has been managed by Impact Hub Athens since 2017. Both paradigms have indicated a change in policy making for the city of Athens, while the methodology of synAthina is still being tested in various city challenges, such as the refugee management crisis, abandoned urban spaces and culture. However, during the course of the R.O.C.K. project, Athens has continued working on the "co-designing with citizens" approach and has introduced new modes and practices of working together, inviting more players and stakeholders to contribute to the process.

Athens' primary role in the R.O.C.K. project has been that of the Mentor City along with Cluj-Napoca, Eindhoven, Liverpool, Lyon, Turin and Vilnius. Athens shared expertise with and gave strategic advice to three replicator cities, namely: Skopje, Lisbon and Bologna. However, Athens saw R.O.C.K. as an opportunity to re-evaluate its tools and methodologies, re-test and expand them in the city with a focus on the sectors of culture and cultural heritage. Considering how access to culture and cultural heritage has changed significantly in the past decade, the Athens R.O.C.K. team under the guidance of the municipality of Athens and the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency, sought to find ways to support and reinforce the cultural and intellectual capital of the city.

CHAPTER 2

a_   **THE ATHENIAN EXPERTISE**

When Athens entered R.O.C.K. in 2018, the flagship municipal initiatives included: synAthina, Municipal Market of Kypseli, Open Schools, Athens Culture Net, Athens Municipal Makerspace, Athens Digital Lab, Social Dynamo and This is Athens-Polis.

Such initiatives converged to illustrate the city's notion of accessibility, as a way of making space for interaction, participation and cross-cultural dialogue across the city. **Athens' goal was to become a catalyst for cultivating the ideals of inclusion and integration**. At the forefront of this newly emerging identity, the city was now investing in its own self-image. During that time, a lot of cultural happenings took place turning Athens into a "citizens' city" destination as well as a global destination. The challenge was for state and municipal administration to engage more actively with the informal cultural sector, urban actors and city makers and focus on identifying and empowering a new generation of enriched and hybrid cultural activity and exchange that goes beyond traditional perceptions of cultural heritage and mixes regeneration, creativity, social innovation, entrepreneurship and solidarity.

Equally, the above initiatives inevitably have led to challenging confrontations when different administrations take turns. Many of these initiatives were represented by, and led to the formation of, new sectors in the municipality, such as the municipal sector for Social Innovation. Those new sectors that introduced participatory methods to deal with new city challenges and inevitably brought about new working cultures in city governance, gave the space for new city projects to evolve and for public servants to work in new ways.

Athens' flagship examples within R.O.C.K., namely the **synAthina platform** and the model of the **Municipal Market of Kypseli** were explored in depth not only because they brought success stories and great performance indicators to the city but also because they could resonate internationally and be adapted into different local contexts. In fact, the synAthina team has been working towards amplifying citizens' voices and building trust: in a period of crisis, instead of collecting problems, synAthina has started collecting solutions by bringing closer the new intelligence of the city with the municipality.[6] The application of the **synAthina methodology** has led to the co-management model of the Municipal Market of Kypseli, which followed a key consultation process to support, design and promote cultural and open access activities together with the local communities. For the first time, **the co-management of**

a municipal building was trusted to a civil society organization, which already demonstrates today almost three years of successful operation.

This same mentality was applied to the R.O.C.K. project with a focus on access to culture and urban cultural heritage. On top of financial difficulties, Athens has experienced major shifts in its social and cultural identity mainly due to migration and refugee population influx, especially in the past five years. This new reality has led us to reconsider how access to cultural heritage and cultural values should be enhanced. Thus, during the R.O.C.K. project, accessibility was seen as a process of creating an environment for cross-cultural dialogue, interaction and participation.
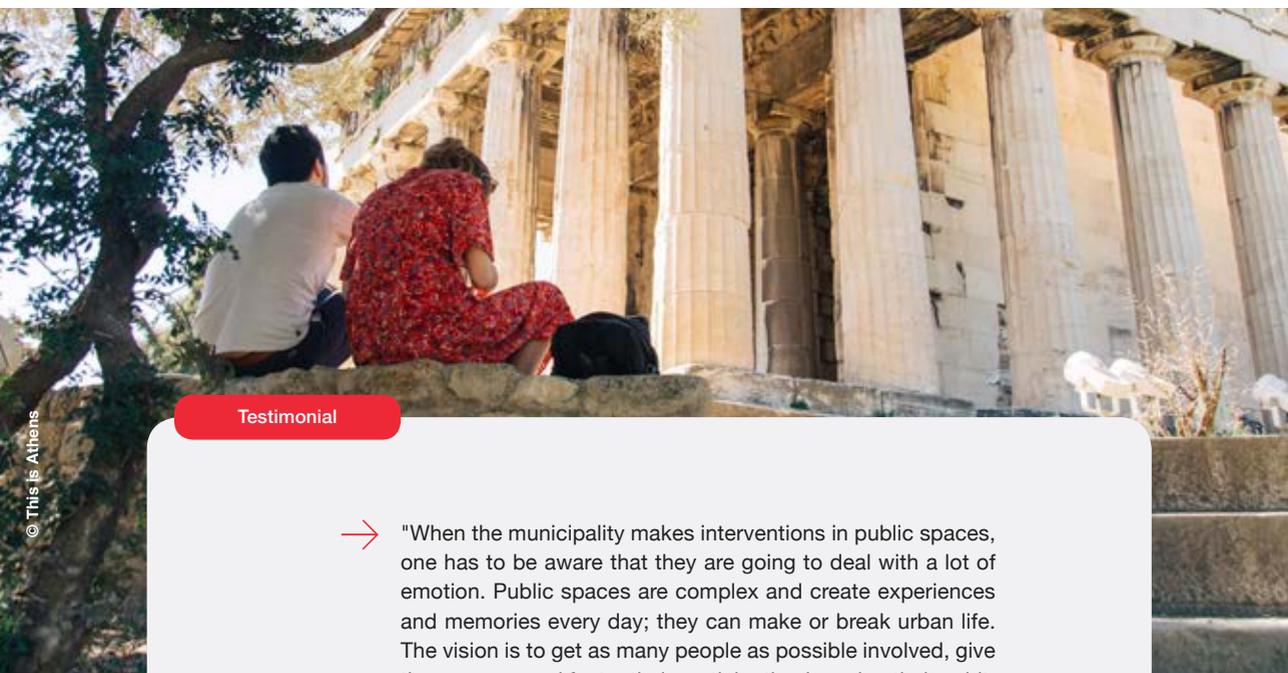
Testimonial

→ "When the municipality makes interventions in public spaces, one has to be aware that they are going to deal with a lot of emotion. Public spaces are complex and create experiences and memories every day; they can make or break urban life. The vision is to get as many people as possible involved, give them energy and foster their participation by using their spirit, time, effort and talent. One has to highlight the importance of developing new projects along with the municipality that are dear to the city because they have been derived from the citizens' proposals. You cannot expect to do everything right straight away. The best spaces evolve by experimenting with short-term improvements that can be tested and refined over many years and reflect the creative energy of the community that makes use of them."

→ **Oriana Antonaropoulou**
Project Manager, This is Athens-Polis, 2017-2019

In an environment prone to social tensions, the municipality operated within the principles of inclusion, accessibility, integration and social cohesion to promote new ways of working together. For example, when Athens was selected by UNESCO as the World Book Capital for 2018, the city redesigned its activities based on various grass-roots, educational, and cultural communities' proposals.

The synAthina methodology of collecting intelligence and sharing authorship of the city with its inhabitants was applied with a focus on empowering the cultural ecosystem of Athens, supporting different cultural civic entities, initiatives that were already happening and paving the way to new partnerships in the city. To illustrate, at a grass-roots level, synAthina through the **Curing the Limbo** project[7] invited citizens and local organisations to co-create city projects together with refugees, the newcomer population of Athens. This modus operandi growing around the city was also in line with the vision and the priorities of the municipality to improve quality of life and strengthen the local democratic process, while contributing to the city's branding and providing the framework and instruments for initiatives to present themselves.

This approach also served well the image of Athens as a contemporary, multifaceted and vibrant city, rich in experiences and narratives which was promoted in the city's main campaign **This is Athens**. More particularly, one component of the campaign, **This is Athens-Polis**, the city's flagship place-making project inviting Athenian residents and professionals to develop urban interventions and co-create the city's identity, formed the basis for the R.O.C.K. project to upscale its model and materialise the **ViZ Lab.** ViZ is a Laboratory for Visual Culture, which is realised in collaboration with the Athens School of Fine Arts and the Onassis Foundation, housed at a formerly re-used shop in one of the most controversial areas of central Athens.

Recognising the way forward of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda (Habitat III), Athens values culture as an accelerator for sustainable urban development. Its Cultural Heritage –diachronic and synchronic– is seen as one ecosystem incorporating societal change. "While historic urban and natural landscapes give communities a sense of belonging, **urban heritage can contribute to sustainable development through creative strategies of urban regeneration and adaptive reuse**."[8]

© synAthina

ΑΘΗΝΑ, Η ΝΕΑ
ΜΟΥ ΓΕΙΤΟΝΙΑ

ATHENS, MY NEW
NEIGHBORHOOD

© synAthina

© Municipal Market of Kypseli

b_ THE INITIATIVES OF THE CITY OF ATHENS

synAthina

Marking a change in social governance models and participatory methodologies to include citizens.

SynAthina, the first municipal digital platform, has collected over 3.900 activities from local citizens' groups and has a network of over 440 community groups and supporters. SynAthina collects intelligence from the city in order to improve its services and design new ones based on citizens' ideas and initiatives. It was founded in 2013.

Municipal Market of Kypseli

Introducing new governance models.

Impact Hub Athens, a local NGO with a big network abroad, has been managing the Kypseli Market since 2017 and has attracted more than 10.000 visitors. It hosts 12 social entreprises and has organised over 150 cultural events. It has created a disadvantaged children's orchestra, organised dozens of educational workshops and developed a wide network of local supporters. It was founded in 2017.

Open Schools

Highlighting participatory methodologies.

25 municipal school buildings opened after school-hours to host over 350 activities for and by the local community. It was founded in 2015 and completed in 2019.

Athens Culture Net

Demonstrating the significance of cultural synergies.

Over 50 local members-cultural institutions are already part of the expanding network and it is an initiative created with an exclusive grant by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. It was founded in 2016.

Athens Municipal Makerspace

Promoting participatory technological, DIY innovation and the Makers' culture.

Initiated by the Designed for Better Learning programme, it has welcomed 4.000 participant teachers and students and 24 schools have been remodeled through using the Lab. It is an initiative with an exclusive grant by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the scientific coordination of TUC TIE Lab by the Technical University of Crete and DAEM, the municipal IT company. It was founded in 2017.

Athens Digital Lab

Introducing participatory smart innovation.

This is the first municipal incubator for smart city solutions developed by citizens, an initiative created with an exclusive grant by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, with the cooperation of Athens Partnership, Cosmote, and Nokia. It was founded in 2017.

Social Dynamo

Building capacity for civil society.

Offering over 300 hours of free mentoring and workshops for more than 150 civil society groups. This is a partnership of synAthina, city of Athens with the Bodossakis Foundation. It was founded in 2015.

This is Athens-Polis

Putting in action participatory city making.

A programme developed by the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency in line with the municipality of Athens' urban development and social cohesion agenda, aiming at exploring new forms of interventions in the city in which civil, cultural and entrepreneurship groups co-create the public realm. An initiative funded by the municipality of Athens. It was founded in 2017 and completed in 2019.

CHAPTER 3

a_ THE MENTORING EXPERIENCE

The three cities working closely with Athens had very specific aims within R.O.C.K. match-making, according to their needs' assessment (WP1, Tasks 1.1 & 1.2), namely:

Replicator city	Vision
BOLOGNA	Bologna aimed to transform the university area in the historical city centre into a sustainable cultural and creative district by improving safety, mitigating social conflicts, attracting visitors and tourists, entrepreneurs and private investment. The objectives were: – to develop co-designed, cultural and sustainable initiatives (green mobility, living labs) in this area; – to increase pedestrian flows and slow mobility with new cultural routes; – to enhance porticoes as a unique spatial experience of the city; – to adopt digital and innovative lighting solutions to improve communication and knowledge-sharing.
LISBON	Lisbon aimed to use its distinctive multicultural features to foster collaborative, participatory and innovative cultural initiatives, encouraging: – re-use of historical buildings, cultural equipment and unused spaces with high cultural potential; – attraction of new talents in the creative industries; – development of ICT infrastructures to promote synergies; – creation of programmes to bridge generational gaps.
SKOPJE	Skopje aimed to transform the historic area around their medieval fortress into a knowledge, culture and technology driven hub. The objectives were: – to promote creative and ICT-supported spatial practices in public spaces by bringing together different stakeholders in creative, collaborative living labs; – to develop innovative working and business models based on collaborative and sustainable economy.

With respect to the three cities' aims, Athens was supportive by consulting and sharing expertise through in situ visits and exchanges of tools. For Skopje, in particular, synAthina was replicated after a series of consultations and workshops with the Athens team leading to the civil society platform **Engage Skopje**, soon to be released in 2020.[9]
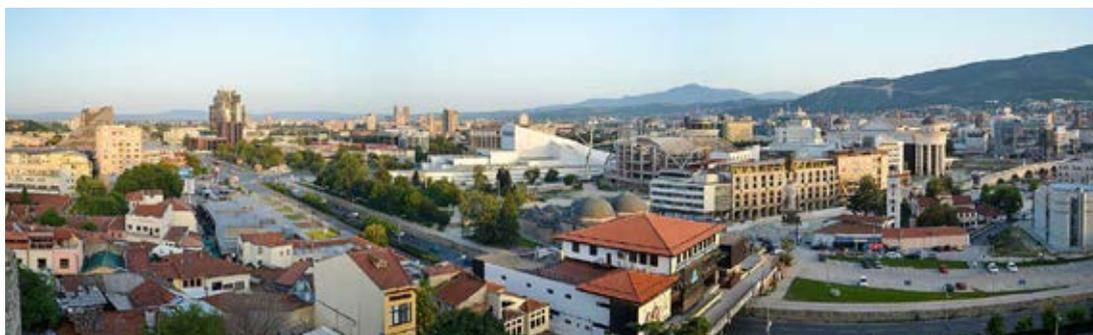
b_ CROSS-CULTURAL EXCHANGE

When Athens entered R.O.C.K. as a Role Model City, all parties soon realised the common challenges that we shared with other participant cities, both mentors and replicators. Similar concerns arose, such as: How is local government policy connected to and assisted by national cultural policy or programmes? To what extent does the municipality get involved in the public-private-people triangle, formally and informally? How can one establish permanent relations of trust with stakeholders on accessibility? What are our action plans for audience development and empowerment? What are the assessment mechanisms in culture? How can we measure impact? And how can a city strengthen SMEs and CCIs to **improve the local creative economy?**

Most cities shared the need to find ways to **combine forces and competences** and build relationships with different stakeholders and cultural actors, making common cause for the cultural development of their local context or specific areas to enhance cultural access. All cities came into the game equipped with valuable experience and expertise and there was clearly a potentially powerful intellectual capital that was worth leveraging, multiplying and disseminating. Hence, although at the beginning, R.O.C.K. was not designed for Role Model Cities to materialise projects, an amendment was passed after the cities met in Cluj-Napoca (June 2018) to promote and facilitate the cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices. Eurocities, ICLEI and URBASOFIA coordinated and supported the request to re-organise the project's priorities and monitored the new making process throughout.

Additionally, a series of cross-fertilisation workshops and focus groups started taking place in different cities, so that both Role Model and Replicator Cities could gather new ideas for the implementation phase. These ideas would **lead to improvements in their local context**, as well as **to the advancement and enrichment of their own practices** related to culture-led regeneration. Issues and ideas relevant to a) digital cultural heritage preservation, b) city-branding and storytelling, c) development of data and technology-based services for cultural use, d) multi-stakeholder approach towards

cultural initiatives and e) a general direction to create horizontally along with the communities, were prioritized and tailored according to the needs of each city. Among the greatly needed exchanges were: sharing techniques of audience development and empowerment; experiences of public/private and other partnerships; reaching out to new publics; co-designing online and physical community platforms and labs; upscaling existing networks, and expanding the notion of Cultural Heritage to respond to current urban and cultural discourses.

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At the same period, in 2018, the city of Athens through its Resilience and Sustainability Office with the support of the British Council, conducted a study on how to integrate culture in its Athens City Resilience Strategy.[10] "**An open and vibrant city**" was the envisioning of "the cultural Athens" and those characteristics would be the key drivers to combine "open" models of governance by the municipality and "vibrant" content and services that make a city alive provided by the local cultural communities. Five distinctive priorities were defined:

1   interconnectivity and collaboration to improve resilience,

2   cultural development in the neighbourhoods of Athens promoting inclusion and creativity,

3   proposing new models for finance in the cultural sector,

4   managing cultural activities, and interventions in the public space,

5   expanding the strategy for Athens as a stay at home destination for residents and as a cultural destination for visitors.[11]

In this context, Robert Palmer, the study coordinator, highlighted that "**Culture is an accelerator to the social dimension of resilience by strengthening the social capital of a city**."[12] Following this approach and in line with the municipality's priorities, the R.O.C.K. Athens' team sought to work on the above priorities and apply them in the local context.

> " Cultural heritage is more than buildings –it is the panoply of cultural resources that demonstrate that a place is unique and distinctive. Culture lies at the core of creative invention. Culture is thus, ironically, about a living way of life that is reinvented daily. "

Charles Landry, *The Creative City* (2008)

CHAPTER 4
WHAT WE DID
Athens R.O.C.K. Case Studies

In line with the R.O.C.K. horizontal framework of urban regeneration through culture and cultural heritage, we asked ourselves several questions, including: How can the municipality of Athens become relevant to its own contemporary cultural needs and eventually to the international communities of cultural practice? How can we increase the city's network capacity? How can the municipality orchestrate and support a cultural ecosystem beneficial to all? How can a city invest in its urban cultural heritage? And, finally, how can a city build upon and review its cultural strategies and synergies while retaining its flexibility to readapt each time current frameworks change?

Seeing the municipality as an open and learning administration body and following the principle "learning by testing and learning by doing", our R.O.C.K. vision has been shaped as a complementary component to the efforts made concurrently with the municipality of Athens at many different levels. Our main approach was to **connect the dots** between already ongoing cultural and city-making projects run by the municipality and independent cultural projects happening in the city, so we could widen the impact in a meaningful way. We focused on testing the methodology of synAthina into the cultural sphere, sharing expertise with the municipality's own and shared initiatives, such as This is Athens-Polis, Social Dynamo and Athens Culture Net. Equally, we leveraged relationships with other strong culture and education stakeholders including the Benaki Museum, the Bodossaki Foundation, the Athens School of Fine Arts, the Onassis Foundation, the U.S. Embassy in Greece and the British Council. Taking into consideration the study of "Athens City Resilience through Culture", we sought to develop an inclusive R.O.C.K. cultural action plan for the city.

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First Stop

Benaki Museum / Pireos 138   →   **Museum World Café:**
Athens   Launching Synergies for Cultural Professionals

© Photo Press: Thodoris & Athanasios Anagnostopoulos

WHEN	November 2018
STAKEHOLDERS	Benaki Museum, U.S. Embassy in Athens, British Council, R.O.C.K., Athens Development and Destination Management Agency, City of Athens Office for Resilience and Sustainability
TARGET GROUPS	Cultural and civil society professionals, leaders of informal groups, private and public stakeholders, businesses and institutions active in the cultural field, Benaki Museum and Museum Conference communities, International Museum Academy Network (British Council), synAthina communities, R.O.C.K. local cultural community, Social Dynamo communities
PILOT AREA	Capture the key challenges that cultural professionals experience; ideas and proposals that will lead to vital and sustainable synergies in the cultural sector in Athens

The Museum World Café took place in the framework of "The Co-Museum" Conference at the Benaki Museum on 29 November 2018 and it was co-organised by the Benaki Museum, the U.S. Embassy and the British Council with the support of R.O.C.K. It gathered around 100 cultural professionals to **encourage dialogue** and **nurture debate** on the issues of collaboration and resource sharing within the Athens cultural ecosystem and beyond. The event was based on the recommendations of the recently completed report "Athens City Resilience Through Culture" (ACRS), the result of a collaboration between the British Council, 100 Resilient Cities and the City of Athens Office for Resilience and Sustainability.

Based on a World Café format, participants had the opportunity to form smaller teams and select one of five topics of cluster-discussion, namely Community Synergies, Creative and Curatorial Synergies, Educational & Capacity Building Synergies, Business & Public/Private Synergies, and Cross–Sectoral Synergies.

© Photo Press: Thodoris & Athanasios Anagnostopoulos

→ "The Museum World Café attracted great interest from diverse stakeholders and exceeded our expectations as organizers. We hosted professionals from fields that had no past connection with the museum world, ranging from activist groups to corporate social responsibility executives. The power of the World Café format was evident in the first few minutes of our event, as participants started working closely together to come up with practical solutions and synergies. The ACRS report and the R.O.C.K. project recommendations provided a very useful framework for the facilitators of the event, who guided participants through the process. Sophia Handaka, as the overall coordinator, was very successful in empowering the osmosis of views, ideas and intentions, through all the preparatory work and material provided to the facilitators and the participants. Overall, the Museum World Café was an impactful experiment that nurtured collaboration and greater networking among the Athens cultural and civil society ecosystem."

→ **Eleni Alexaki**
Senior Cultural and Educational Affairs Specialist, Public Affairs Office, U.S. Embassy Athens

With the support of the conference speakers, who served as team leaders and mentors, as well as five special guests–stakeholders from the Athenian cultural scene, who moderated discussions as anchors, each team exchanged experiences and initiatives, and came up with specific proposals for synergies. The aim was to reach clear, tangible and actionable results.

During the event, all participants shared their stories and input, making a brief overview of what they saw as problematic, challenging or satisfactory in the Athenian cultural sector. In addition, mentors and anchors coordinated the group discussions in order to surface some first results regarding ideas and proposals that could initiate a round of synergies. At the end of the event, representatives from each thematic cluster took the floor presenting their ideas and suggestions and ways to move forward.
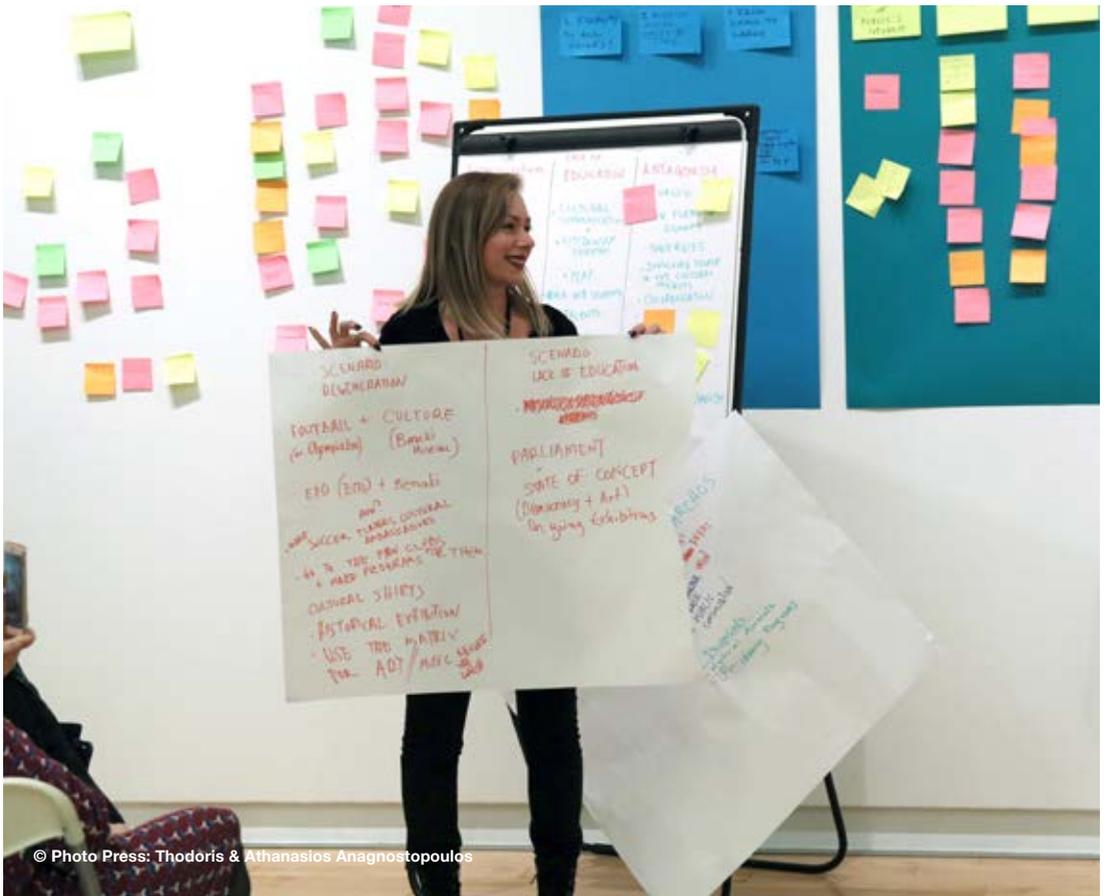
© Photo Press: Thodoris & Athanasios Anagnostopoulos

Summing up the challenges and opportunities that were put forward by the participants, we can conclude to certain first results:

1 Accessibility to culture is essential. Museums should act as social and community spaces and should welcome more cultural activities from civil society actors. Artists are the key mediators.

2 It is necessary to communicate better which leads to sharing a common vision.

3 We need to formulate educational strategies that embrace different communities.

4 It is essential to design capacity building programmes for cultural professionals in order to enable the production of new financial models and partnerships with public institutions in equal terms.

5 The creation of a facilitation "body" (state, municipality, cultural foundations or a cultural reference group of experts) to connect different cultural efforts and facilitate synergies among them would be very useful.

→ "World Café highlighted the need for a more open cross-sectoral collaboration amongst key players in the cultural ecosystem in Greece. Inspired by the Athens Resilience through Culture report, commissioned by the British Council in collaboration with 100 RC, it highlighted the need for a more structured, culturally sensitive urban development approach and pointed out the importance of culture as an accelerator to the social dimension of resilience. World Café fitted perfectly in the context of the CoMuseum conference as it complemented it and addressed challenges and questions which had been undervalued or not sufficiently elaborated in the past. World Café's very open and dialectic nature provided useful and revealing insights into the city's infrastructure as well as a valuable mapping of the independent artistic and civic society initiatives and players across the city."

→ **Maria Papaioannou**
Arts Manager, British Council

2

Second Stop

Serafio
City of Athens

→ **Reinforcing Culture:**
Capacity Building for the Cultural Community of Athens

WHEN	May – June 2019
STAKEHOLDERS	Municipality of Athens – synAthina, Bodossaki Foundation – Social Dynamo, cultural community of Athens, workshop mentors/coordinators, ADDMA – R.O.C.K.
TARGET GROUPS	Cultural professionals & grass-roots initiatives, synAthina communities, R.O.C.K. local cultural community, Social Dynamo communities
PILOT AREA	Capacity Building; reinforcing the cultural capital of the city

The **capacity building workshops** for the local cultural community focused on developing interpersonal and professional skills supporting entry level cultural professionals under the coordination of experienced mentors. The aim of the workshop series was to reinforce the cultural capital of the city and activate coordination and networks between emerging and established cultural organisations. Three key themes were explored, namely:

a)   **Vision – Mission – Goal**
b)   **Business Model Canvas**
c)   **Writing Fundraising Proposals**

Through these basic themes, we sought to explore the challenges and practical issues that the local cultural communities may encounter. More specifically, mentors focused on: the description, evaluation and improvement of current business plans, the design of communication and marketing strategies, fundraising and its methodical use, the impact of cultural events and their upscaling, audience development, the expansion of cultural initiatives to reach a wider audience, the enrichment of cultural synergies, and last but not least, the exchange of know-how. Overall the focus was on learning how to create sustainable and resilient cultural organisations and eventually activities to enhance the cultural identity of Athens.[13]

Testimonial

→   "Our participation in R.O.C.K. gave us the opportunity to expand our capacity building activities in the domain of cultural design and city-making, a domain often lacking such opportunities for organizational development. We were impressed by the inspiration and freshness of young cultural actors and also the diversity of the cultural ecosystem in Athens. Through the training activities we offered on strategy, business planning and fundraising, we hope to have contributed in clarifying the vision, mission and goals of these interesting initiatives, in developing a business notion –essential for the sustainability of every endeavour– sharing at the same time practical tools of funding addressed to the cultural sector. Since successful city making is by default a participative procedure, we consider capacity building as a crucial element in helping cultural stakeholders to become more extroverted and engaging towards local communities."

→   **Rania El Ampasy**
Social Dynamo Project Manager

Serafio
City of Athens → **ATHsENSe_urban.data.lab:**
Public Digital Art Installation

© Dimitris Charitos

WHEN	February 2020 – ongoing
STAKEHOLDERS	Municipality of Athens, ADDMA, This is Athens-Polis, R.O.C.K., Spatial Media Research Group, Department of Communication and Media Studies, University of Athens, Serafio communities
TARGET GROUPS	Athens residents and visitors, artists, designers, architects, cultural professionals, grass-root initiatives, R.O.C.K. local cultural community, fine art, architecture & design students, Athens Culture Net members
PILOT AREA	Reinforcing the creative capital of the city; integration of art projects in public buildings

ATHsENSe urban.data.lab[14] is a multisensory digital art public installation, created by Spatial Media Research Group that explores the concept of the smart city and its human-digital footprint. Sensor kits have been spread throughout the city to collect urban data flows: noise levels, atmospheric pollution, temperature, luminosity and humidity. The installation translates data into visual, sound and kinesthetic experiences at four different sites within the Serafio Complex. Residents and visitors of Athens may add to the unfolding of the artwork by acting as human sensors, expressing their thoughts and emotions by using the respective ATHsENSe web based application. The flow of data serves as the raw material for this art installation, capturing the urban experience of Athens in real time.

All data is being presented in real time at the Serafio building, creating a new narrative for Athens. Visitors and residents of the city are invited to share their input and co-create the city's identity. **ATHsENSe urban.data.lab** aims at unfolding through a series of art and educational workshops based on art and technology addressed to the local creative communities.

The public art installation aspires to: **a)** raise awareness about the impact of digital technologies in everyday life, **b)** highlight the significance of art projects as a vital part of urban development and urban architecture, **c)** encourage creative communities to produce innovative projects, **d)** expand the audience development in projects related to art and technology, and **e)** create new city experiences.

Testimonial

→ "The main objective of ATHsENSe is to creatively experiment with and investigate innovative forms of multi-sensory representations, in order to create an ambience, an environmental composition in Serafio. The installation translates, not easily discernible, environmental conditions into multisensory stimuli, affording an engaging experience for the visitors of the building. Thus, abstract data become intelligible. Furthermore, ATHsENSe supports interaction with citizens and audience that wish to experience aspects of it from afar. In particular, they can actively contribute to the data collection and consequently to the shaping of the artwork, by responding to the ATHsENSe web-based application."

→ **Spatial Media Research Group**
ATHsENSe – Artists

3

Third
Stop

Plateia Theatrou $\rightarrow$ **ViZ Laboratory for Visual Culture**
Athens

© ViZ Lab

WHEN	mid-October 2019 – ongoing
STAKEHOLDERS	Municipality of Athens, ADDMA, R.O.C.K., This is Athens-Polis, Athens School of Fine Arts, Onassis Foundation
TARGET GROUPS	Fine Art students, cultural and art community of Athens, R.O.C.K. local cultural community, Athens residents and visitors
PILOT AREA	Reinforcing the cultural capital of the city; creating new spaces for arts and culture; creating safety feeling in the city by attracting the public to neglected urban areas; place-making

© ViZ Lab

ViZ Laboratory for Visual Culture is a **new cultural space** that turns a historic bar of Theatre Square, Bar Guru Bar, into a hub for studying the visual phenomena of the digital and post-digital landscape. The Lab aims to enhance the dialogue between contemporary art and the public by exploring the digital culture at large. ViZ's main priority is to act as a platform for the new generation of artists and the emerging Athenian art scene.

Theatre Square used to be one of the most popular spots in downtown Athens but has lost its nightlife and economic activity through the years due to the financial crisis and its repercussions on public space. The Square's diverse history has attracted different kinds of activities and uses over the years, one of them being an entertainment hub with the famous Bar Guru Bar playing a central role from 1996 until 2009.
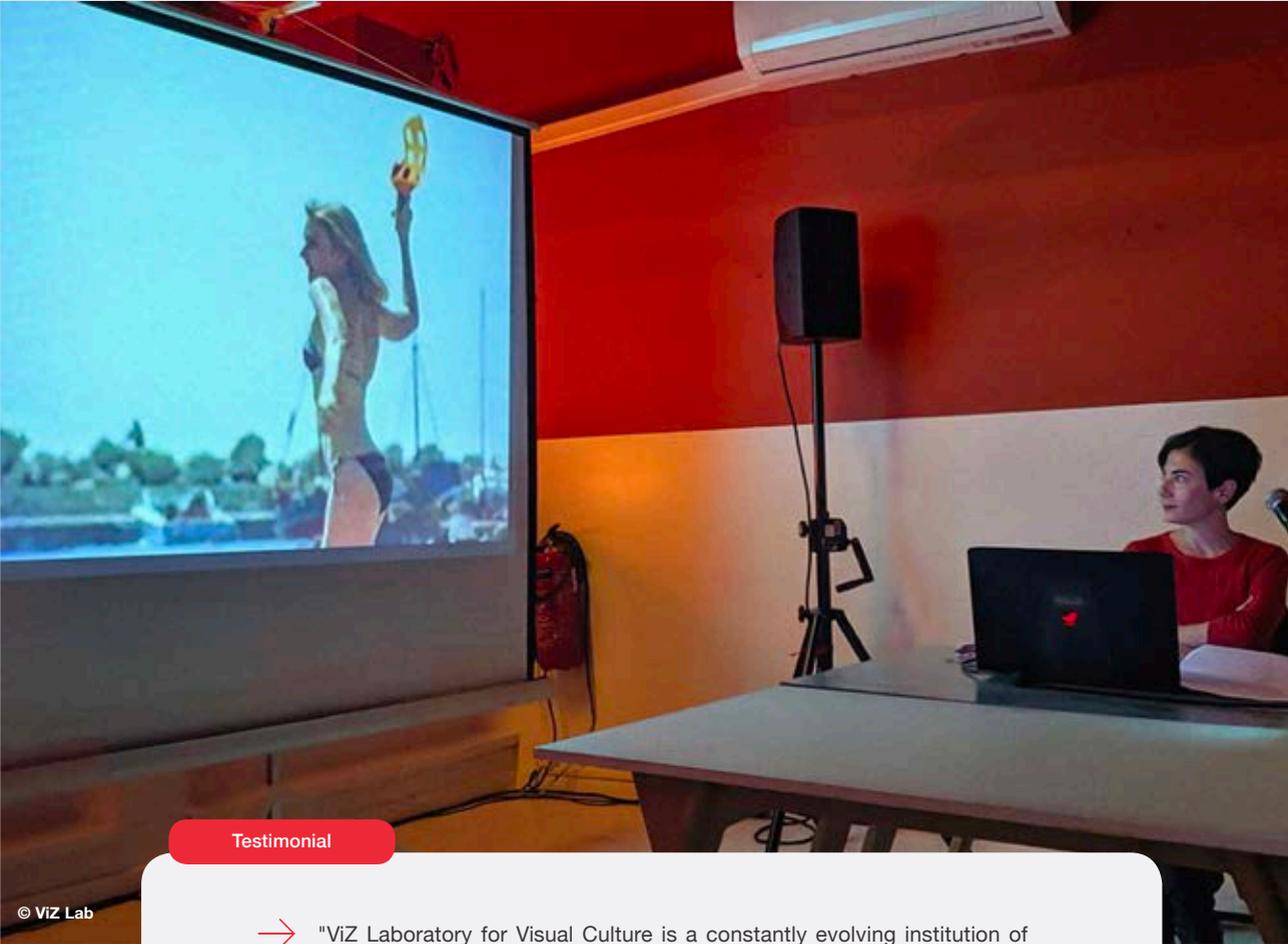
Testimonial

→ "ViZ Laboratory for Visual Culture is a constantly evolving institution of experimentation within the fluid boundaries of artistic production, the public sphere, the urban experience and the education of contemporary art. It was founded as a node of study for the visual culture phenomena in the digital and post-digital landscape, sourcing the ways in which the new generation of ASFA students experience their relation to the Internet, digital culture, computational infrastructures, digital applications, communication and social media.

The activity of ViZ Laboratory for Visual Culture reflects the new educational model of the newly established laboratories, namely the 11th and the 12th, of ASFA. Starting from a post-media approach to the artistic practice, the artistic education explores diverse themes in the public sphere, including: digital and bodily selves, gender performances, global uprisings and the overwhelming societal changes. Since its first months of operation, ViZ Laboratory for Visual Culture has organised an elaborate programme with Greek and international guests. It has presented solo exhibitions and lectures with international artists, experimental exhibitions from ASFA students from different labs, specialised seminars and workshops for students, covering a range of topics from artistic activism to digital game engineering. During the pandemic, ViZ implemented webinars with international artists, such as Rimini Protocoll, and built new digital communication channels to reach a wider audience."

→ **ViZ Lab Team**

In 2018, the City of Athens initiated the project This is Athens-Polis,[15] which aimed at reviving closed and abandoned shops in the city centre by calling the local creative communities to support and embrace the initiative. The call received proposals from many different communities that eventually started inhabiting the former empty shops while the municipality of Athens was providing financial support for the shops' basic operational costs.

The ViZ Laboratory for Visual Culture opened up as a project space for ASFA students and a cultural Lab in mid-October 2019. ViZ has already added value to the neighbourhood by attracting a new audience and creating an arts hub in one of the most problematic areas of Athens. ViZ, a promising place-making project in the Theatre Square area, is already creating a destination-hub that will revive the area.

ViZ is an initiative of the 11th and 12th Laboratories of the Athens School of Fine Arts, initially seed-funded by ADDMA through R.O.C.K. and This is Athens-Polis, which is now powered by ADDMA and Onassis Foundation. The project will continue its activities until December 2020, when it is expected to be re-evaluated for its continuation by all supporting partners.

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Parallel Stop

Athens School of Fine Arts $\longrightarrow$ **City Lab**

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During the same period 2018-2020, the non-profit organisation City Lab in collaboration with the Athens School of Fine Arts, another local partner in R.O.C.K., organised a series of events focusing on architecture, the arts and the city. With an educational and research profile, City Lab is an attempt to produce dialectical knowledge based on already established and/or new channels of communication and collaborative work on different but intertwined aspects of architectural history, theory and criticism, architectural design, urban history, city planning and other visual and performing arts. The initiative involves the design, planning and delivery of intensive, hands-on, collaborative and participatory workshops on different themes. Its main aim is to inform the current academic discourse and systematise the exchange of ideas between agents with diverse academic, professional or artistic profiles on a wide variety of multifaceted phenomena that affect diachronically the evolution and growth of the contemporary city in Greece.

City Lab has brought together more than 340 undergraduate and graduate students of different academic disciplines and 120 members of academic staff from different universities and expertise across the country. City Lab aims at developing a new research and design methodology that combines theoretical and empirical knowledge through symposia and design-based research workshops.[16]

Testimonial

$\longrightarrow$ "The Athens School of Fine Arts pursues a highly extroverted policy of networking and exchange ranging from European countries to Japan. The scientific project R.O.C.K. is particularly important, with its emphasis on the character of the European historical city centres as areas of urban experimentation exploring ways to transform cultural heritage into a tool for regeneration, sustainable development and economic prosperity for the city as a whole. In this context, Athens is an experimental field with great peculiarities, as its historical centre follows a course of rapid transformations, between its historical heritage and contemporary assets, and in the midst of intense social and wider cultural changes and challenges, which have been intensified during the last decade of the financial crisis."

$\longrightarrow$ **Andreas Giacumacatos**
Professor of History of Architecture, Athens School of Fine Arts, Scientific Responsible R.O.C.K.

4

Fourth Stop

City of Skopje → **Engage Skopje – synAthina Replication**

Engage Skopje is a **civil society platform** for local communities leading to problem solving and reform. Engage Skopje came up after a series of consultations with the synAthina team, with the city of Skopje and the local community. A new platform based on the city and citizens' needs will be released in 2020 and will start collecting solutions by active citizens and community groups in Skopje.

Engage Skopje is a replication achievement for the synAthina platform in the R.O.C.K. project. Athens and Skopje exchanged their experience on local communities and shared lessons learnt from the synAthina platform. SynAthina has made its website code open source making the technical aspect of it available to other interested cities and organisations. The open source initiative by synAthina facilitates its adaptability to other web design interfaces and digital tools and opens up the field for municipalities to **co-create shared technological solutions.**

After a series of site visits in Skopje aiming to witness the area and co-develop the local consultation methodology, the city of Skopje took up the initiative to create its own community engagement platform based on synAthina. The combined strategy gave both cities (Athens and Skopje) the opportunity to reflect on the potential and challenges of such endeavors and take the platform a step forward to resonate the current technological and urban needs.

WHEN	June 2020 – ongoing
STAKEHOLDERS	ADDMA, synAthina, municipality of Athens, City of Skopje, SKULL (Skopje Urban Living Lab), University Ss. Cyril and Methodius Skopje, Faculty of Architecture
TARGET GROUPS	Skopje community groups, active citizens' initiatives, City of Skopje, R.O.C.K. local communities
PILOT AREA	New governance models and participatory methodologies by the City of Skopje

→ "Platforms such as the Athens synAthina platform allow people to take action and reclaim ownership of their city. They give a different vision of what the city's role can be, not only focused on their hardware infrastructure, but also able to mobilize the intelligence of their citizens.

R.O.C.K. is a European initiative that reflects this effort and encourages cities to experiment with the creativity of their cultural potential and with new partnerships. During the crisis of the past decade, Athens shifted its administration away from being pure manager of its assets to mobilizing multiple stakeholders and coalitions that kept its citizens engaged and involved in the well-being of their city. Culture was, and still is, key to introduce this much-needed flexibility to the bureaucracy of its city government. By sharing and providing coaching to its agents, the R.O.C.K. initiative helped build confidence in the right direction."

→ **Amalia Zepou**
Vice Mayor for Civil Society and Innovation, City of Athens, 2014 – 2019

→ "Engage Skopje platform is meant to be a driver for active citizenship. It intends to mobilize individuals and citizens' groups to share information of the actions they undertake in city life. On one hand, citizens and the city administration will have an overview of what is going on among diverse city stakeholders and on the other hand, the city administration will be able to plan future activities based on citizens' needs and expectations. The experience of synAthina helped us realize that this is exactly the missing link in Skopje's city life, the link which makes a difference from 'common and ordinary' to participative and engaged citizens."

→ **Toni Masevski**
MSc, Executive MBA. Advisor of the Mayor for Strategy and Development, City of Skopje, R.O.C.K. Project Manager

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CHAPTER 5
WHAT WE LEARNT

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The overall R.O.C.K. methodology testified to the fact that cities working together in a **Mentor-Replicator** relationship works. The combination of different fields of expertise from various partners has given us great insight into other fields that would take us much longer to acquire otherwise. This mutual and transversal **give-and-take** has been beneficial to all 32 partners. Equally, the site visits that have taken place in many countries highlighted the significance of local contexts and the agility of cities to adapt to their needs, when applying best practices from other cities. By actually testing ideas and tools in cities, we have been able to check the endurance of projects and have visual and actual results. This also helped us connect with local communities and stakeholders with whom we shared practices and expertise to realise common projects for the well-being of the city. In addition, R.O.C.K. has given us the opportunity to **produce events and collaborative projects** that will hopefully remain vital and inspiring for the city for the years to come.
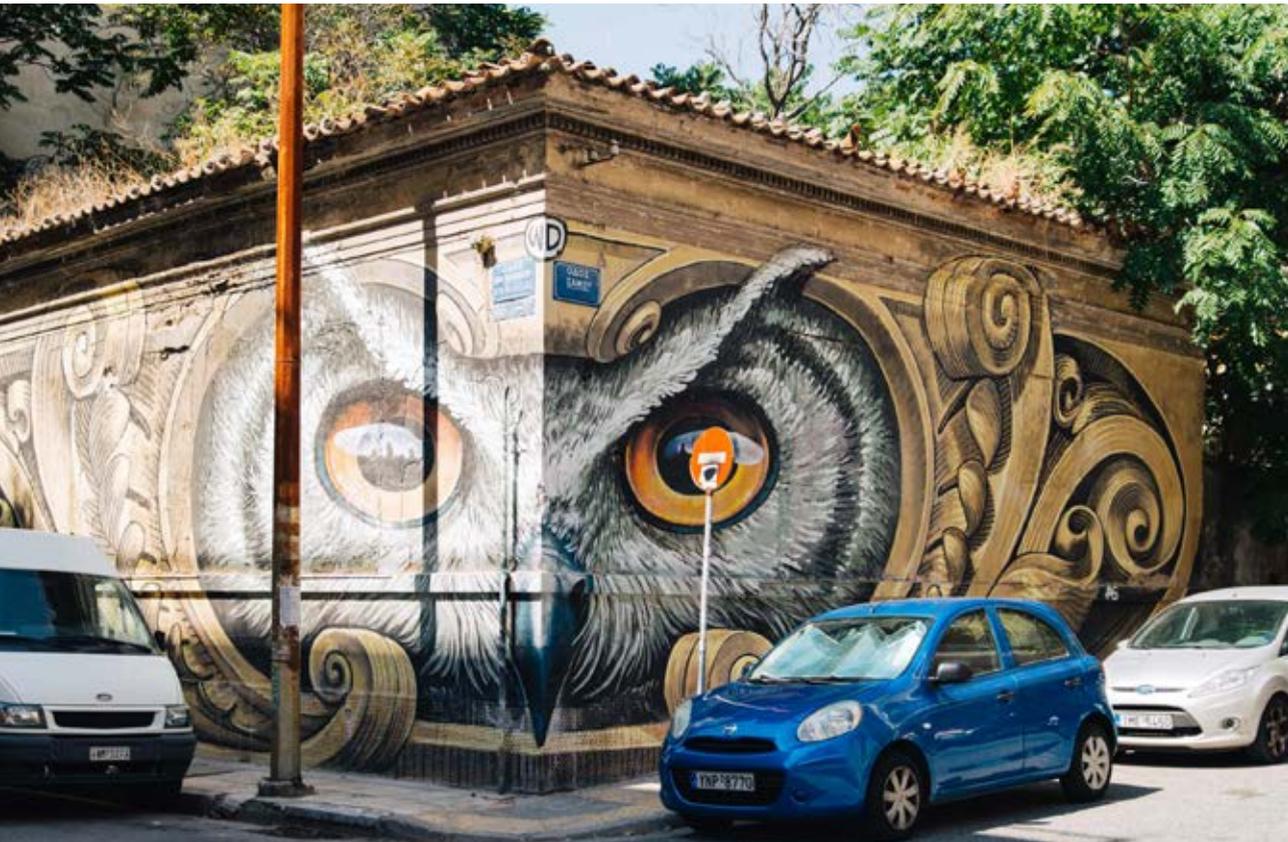
© This is Athens

© This is Athens

Expanding the notion of urban cultural heritage and shedding light on the cultural values and the creative capital of the city, what Charles Landry often says became apparent: that only by understanding history, culture and the DNA of a place can one assess its potential.[17] And these are variables that constantly change. Building upon previous municipal efforts to **create continuity and sustainability of projects** is significant in creating a consistent city identity for inhabitants and visitors to relate. Cultural interventions can unravel different urban potential and opportunities and be an invaluable asset for every city. The use of Culture as a driver for creating public confidence and building trust with communities is vital for cities to grow. This can be leveraged by creating assessment methodologies that can prove that **Culture** and **the creative capital** generate **added value** to cities. We should focus on how cities can become the powerhouse of culture and lead the creative economy forward.[18]

Given the timing of this publication we cannot conclude without highlighting that during COVID lockdown, more than ever, Culture has been valued as a strong resource. Now that we are discussing how to **Build Back Better** with Culture at the centre of recovery strategies, maybe it is time to change the narrative and advocate for Culture not only for what it needs but for what it offers.

Achievements

→ The reinforcement of the **local cultural network** through the R.O.C.K. project.

→ The attraction of **new stakeholders** to create partnerships with the city of Athens (e.g. the Benaki Museum, the British Council, the U.S. Embassy in Greece, the Onassis Foundation).

→ Around 100 participants-professionals participated in the Museum World Café, raising awareness about **access to culture** and **participatory methodologies** in the creative industries.

→ 60 participants sharpened their skills in the series of **capacity building workshops** with the Bodossaki Foundation and formed networks.

→ More than **5.000 people** have visited ViZ Lab for Visual Culture from October 2019 to present.

Impact

→ **Qualitative Impact**
Regarding the **placemaking project** in Theatre Square, where the ViZ lab is located, the character of the area has changed and there are a lot of events attracting new publics. The safety in the area has slightly been improved.

Regarding **cultural collaborations**, we have seen new collaborations in the city that were shaped during the capacity building workshops and the R.O.C.K. networking events.

→ **Quantitative Impact**
Over **10.000 people** have come physically across with one of the above R.O.C.K. activities.

Over **200.000 people** have become digitally aware of the above initiatives through the city's main communication channels.

Challenges

→ Holding continuity of collaborative actions

→ Creating networks among different neighborhoods

→ Fine-tuning among different interests

→ Overcoming rigid bureaucracy

→ Completing ACRS recommendations – although a great potential, now left unexploited

→ Sharing common objectives among R.O.C.K. cities

→ Accomplishing certain R.O.C.K. collaborations

Tips

→ Know your city – Map the stakeholders you want to involve in your project

→ Create bold partnerships that bring in new intellectual forces

→ Always engage both citizens and city inhabitants

→ Learn to listen to your peers and people working in the field

→ Create networks of trust between different stakeholders

→ Find creative ways to surpass bureaucratic obstacles

→ Always consult with other relevant municipal sectors about your project

→ Be ready to change if your initial strategy/methodology proves unsuccessful

→ Work together

Endnotes

1. "Athens, Rising. The city has endured crisis and chaos, and yet is now emerging from the wreckage as one of Europe's most vibrant and significant cultural capitals": https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/18/travel/athens-after-the-economic-crisis.html (Accessed 2 February 2020).

2. "Athens is the European Capital of Innovation 2018": https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/athens-european-capital-innovation-2018-2018-nov-06-0_en & This is New Athens Video: https://youtu.be/oVNpVhR_skg – supported by R.O.C.K. (Accessed on 10 April 2020).

3. *Ibid.*

4. "A profile in bold leadership: Deputy Mayor of Athens Amalia Zepou": https://www.bloomberg.org/blog/profile-bold-leadership-deputy-mayor-athens-amalia-zepou/ (Accessed on 27 January 2020).

5. "Municipal Market of Kypseli: Reinventing the Agora" in *New Governance Models for Creative, Sustainable and Circular Cities* (2019), R.O.C.K project Publication, pp. 6 – 9: http://www.eurocities.eu/eurocities/documents/R.O.C.K.-case-studies-showcase-new-governance-models-for-creative-sustainable-and-circular-cities-WSPO-B9YDX4 (Accessed on 27 January 2020).

6. *SynAthina Lessons Learned.* Bloomberg Philanthropies and City of Athens, 2018: https://issuu.com/synathina/docs/synathina_lessons_learned_2_spreads (Accessed on 17 April 2020).

7. *Curing the Limbo* is an integration pilot programme co-funded by the European Regional Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions Initiative: https://curingthelimbo.gr/en (Accessed on 17 April 2020).

8. *Habitat III Issue Papers, no. 4.* Urban Culture and Heritage, New York, 31 May 2015: http://habitat3.org/the-conference/programme/all/urban-culture-and-heritage/ (Accessed on 15 April 2020).

9. At the time of writing (April 2020), the platform Engage Skopje is in beta version.

10. Athens Resilience Strategy (2017), powered by the Rockefeller Foundation's Initiative "100 Resilient Cities": https://www.100resilientcities.org/strategies/athens/ (Accessed on 17 April 2020).

11. *Athens City Resilience through Culture Report* (2018), p.3: https://www.britishcouncil.gr/sites/default/files/athens-city-resilience-through-culture-full-report-april-2018.pdf (Accessed on 20 April 2020).

12. *Ibid.*

13. "Reinforcing Culture: Capacity Building for the Cultural Community of Athens" (in Greek): https://www.socialdynamo.gr/program/rock/ (Accessed on 20 April 2020).

14. ATHsENSe urban.data.lab: https://athsense.gr/ (Accessed on 20 April 2020).

15. This is Athens-Polis: https://www.polis2.thisisathens.org/en/ (Accessed on 17 April 2020).

16. City Lab: www.citylab.edu.gr (Accessed on 12 May 2020).

17. Landry, Charles & Caust, Margie. 2017. *The Creative Bureaucracy & Its Radical Common Sense*. Comedia: London. Landry, Charles. 2008. *The Creative City. A Toolkit for Social Innovators.* Second Edition. Comedia, Earthscan: London – Sterling, VA, UK.

18. OECD & ICOM, *Culture and Local Development: Maximizing the Impact. Guide for local Governments, Communities and Museums*: http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/oecd-icom-guide.htm (Accessed on 17 April 2020).

City of Athens Projects and Initiatives

→   **synAthina:** www.synathina.gr

→   **Municipal Market of Kypseli:** www.agorakypselis.gr

→   **Athens Open Schools:** www.facebook.com/athensopenschools

→   **Athens Culture Net:** www.athensculturenet.com

→   **Athens Municipal Makerspace:** www.facebook.com/athensmunicipalmakerspace

→   **Athens Digital Lab:** www.athensdigitallab.gr

→   **Social Dynamo:** www.socialdynamo.gr

→   **This is Athens-Polis:** www.polis2.thisisathens.org

→   **This is Athens:** www.thisisathens.org

→   **Curing the Limbo:** www.curingthelimbo.gr

Useful Links

→   **ViZ Laboratory for Visual Culture:** www.vizlaboratory.org

→   **The CoMuseum:** www.thecomuseum.org

→   **The Benaki Museum:** www.benaki.org

→   **British Council:** www.britishcouncil.gr

→   **U.S. Embassy in Greece:** www.mosaiko.gr

→   **Onassis Foundation:** www.onassis.org

→   **Athens School of Fine Arts:** www.asfa.gr

Acknowledgements

www.rockproject.eu