



## EUROCITIES Social Innovation Lab

26-27 March 2019, Glasgow

Co-learning workshop 3 - Tuesday, 26 March 10.00 - 12.30

Venue: Grand Central Hotel, 99 Gordon Street, Glasgow



### Workshop 3: Inclusion of migrants and refugees in the life of local communities

Case study: **Curing the Limbo in Athens - From apathy to active citizenship: Empowering refugees and migrants**

The co-learning workshops at the Social Innovation Lab in Glasgow will offer participants an opportunity to learn from and capitalise on the lessons learned from recent pilots of innovative approaches to social challenges in cities. Each workshop will examine in depth one case study of urban social innovation. Following the presentation of the case study, participants will discuss the lessons learned and how to apply them to other urban contexts.

Workshop 3 will discuss Athens' urban innovative action to foster inclusion of migrants and refugees, and social mixing with locals through using common public spaces, services and programmes for education, work, culture and voluntary participation in community life.

### Objectives

- Learn from the experience and lessons from Athens' innovation on inclusion of refugees
- Identify success factors that can help the transferability, scalability or replication of the innovative approach to other urban contexts
- Discuss challenges and obstacles in the implementation process and how to overcome them

### Format

The format will be interactive with a strong focus on collaborative learning. The workshop will examine in depth one case study of urban social innovation. Following the presentation of the case study, participants will discuss the lessons learned and how to apply them to other urban contexts, such as in their own cities.

### Structure of the workshop

10.00 - 10.20	<b>Welcome and introduction to the workshop</b>
10.20 - 10.50	<b>Presentation of Athens' case study of urban social innovation</b>
10.50 - 11.00	<b>Individual reflection</b>
11.00 - 11.15	<b>World café round 1</b> - participants split into 3 groups to discuss 3 questions.
11.15 - 11.30	<b>World café round 2</b> - participants swap table to discuss other question
11.30 - 11.45	<b>World café round 3</b> - participants swap table to discuss other question
11.45 - 12.00	<b>Sharing lessons learned in workshop plenary</b>
12.00 - 12.25	<b>Actions to transfer</b> - individual reflection and plenary discussion
12.25 - 12.30	<b>Next steps and closing of the workshop</b>

## Expected outcomes

- One **case study** of an urban social innovation on inclusion of refugees in the community
- Mapping of **factors** that cities could use to transfer and adapt the innovation to their city
- A list of **possible actions** that some cities could take to transfer and adapt the innovation

## Questions for reflection

1. What can you learn from this case study of urban social innovation? What is the added value of this innovative approach?
2. What worked well and why? (identifying success factors)
3. What didn't work so well and why? (challenges/obstacles met in the process)
4. Which elements can be transferred to your city? (transferability factors)
5. Would you consider transferring (parts of) this innovative approach to your city?

## CASE STUDY

**City:** Athens

**Title of the city initiative:** Curing the Limbo

**Topic:** Inclusion of refugees in the local community

**Short description:** A circular 'gift' system where refugees receive trainings and affordable living spaces in return of their work supporting the needs of the local communities and participating in citizen-led activities that improve quality of life in the neighbourhoods. The stage of refugee re-activation is recognised as part of the integration process.

**Year of implementation:** 2018-2021

**Current situation:** Start of pilot implementation

**Link to webpage:** [www.curingthelimbo.gr](http://www.curingthelimbo.gr)

**The challenge:** *How to help recently-arrived refugees get out of emergency shelters and build an autonomous life in Athens (including finding housing they can afford, develop the necessary skills to find a job and become active citizens in their respective neighbourhood)?*

There are currently roughly 30,000 people with refugee status estimated to live in Greece. Most of them have been housed in temporary shelters (nearly 1,000 apartments rented in Athens alone, plus Elaionas camp) without universal access to language classes or job counselling. A survey conducted at the time when the project was designed, showed that very few had the intention to stay in Greece or learn the language. At the same time, their stay in emergency relief structures didn't give them enough incentives to make a life of their own in the city. Meanwhile, they ended up staying in Greece under these circumstances.

Comparing to other local contexts in Europe, the situation of refugees in Greece is particular due to the following reasons:

- Refugees arrived in Greece without the intention to stay. A country they thought of as a place of transit became their destination country. This has affected their psychology throughout their journey in Greece (and Athens).
- Greece never had an integration strategy for migrants and refugees. Basic services at state level, such as language lessons or social housing don't exist. All the needs of refugees arriving in Greece after 2015 were covered by humanitarian programmes,

focusing on emergency relief and living aside their needs related to integration. This has enhanced the state of “limbo”.

- Greece has been severely struck by a 10-year financial crisis with consequences such as very high unemployment, poverty and homelessness. The crisis led to the creation of many citizen-led initiatives to improve quality of life in the city without state support.

Thus, refugees in Greece have been in a state of apathy for a period of up to 3 years. This has created the “state of limbo” which we are trying to tackle through this project. The lack of integration policies (with the exception of some small-scale initiatives led by non-profit organisations) has created a major gap between a population in need of emergency help and a population which needs to build a life in the city.

The lack of employment opportunities, language lessons and affordable housing in the city puts the refugees in a vulnerable situation.

‘Curing the limbo’ seeks to help this transition with a holistic approach to integration. The social challenge we are aiming to tackle is the integration of refugees who have been inactive for a long period since their arrival by connecting them to the local population, who also suffered from long periods of inactivity due to the financial crisis, therefore facilitating the integration process. Going from a state of isolation to building a life in the city.

### Previous experiences

Greece doesn’t have any policy concerning the integration of migrants and refugees. After the 2015 crisis, many temporary shelter programmes were created aiming to provide humanitarian aid to refugees for their short period of stay in Athens. These programmes weren’t integration programmes; they had a different scope of work.

Some of them have received job trainings or language lessons in the framework of small projects offered by NGOs, with limited time duration.

### The solution

Integration policies became an urgent need for the country and the refugee population in the city of Athens. Our ambition was to create an integration model that would be suitable to our city based on our experience of work with active citizens and civil society. We also want to address the long period of inactivity of refugees by connecting them to the residents.

The programme ‘Curing the limbo’ creates a modality of exchange where refugees that receive training, job counselling and housing while they give back to the city by participating to activities and common projects with the locals. At the same time, the connection of all integration pillars with the Athenian neighbourhoods, with trainings taking place in various locations, apartments and jobs being found through neighbourhood networks facilitates integration by connecting both populations directly. Both populations but also neighbourhoods benefit from these synergies, aiming at better social cohesion overall.

### Expected impact

The project aims to provide a holistic and tailor-made approach to integration, rather than a series of parallel, disconnected services provided by different actors. At the same time, trying to find a model for the very pressing need for affordable housing in Athens could benefit refugees but also the local population. Another social need addressed is skills development through a combination of trainings and social activities, while the isolation and state of apathy of refugees is addressed by connecting them to local initiatives. Finally, the city and neighbourhoods can benefit from the collaborative projects of refugees and locals.

## Key actors involved

The idea came from connecting two areas of expertise in the city of Athens: working with refugees during the refugee crisis and working with civil society during the economic crisis. By trying to connect those two populations, the idea of addressing the 'limbo' of the city and the 'limbo' of refugees seemed to work. The city administration called several stakeholders to discuss the idea, which took its final shape when four partners brought in their expertise. Everyone agreed on the much-needed holistic approach to integration and this is how the idea for this project was born.

The project relies on an innovative partnership of the municipality, a university and two international NGOs all bringing their expertise around the same table:

**Athens Development and Destination Management Agency:** this partner is responsible for the financial management of the project and all the communication activities.

**National and Kapodistrian University of Athens:** with the supervision of 8 professors from several departments, the University of Athens is involved in the training programme. Specifically, they supervise language classes (Greek and English), ICT lessons and audiovisual creativity workshops. Two coordinators link with the professors to deliver the classes.

**International Rescue Committee:** IRC is responsible for the job training activities addressed to refugees, e.g. interview simulations, CV preparation, seminars on the local job market.

**Catholic Relief Services:** is in charge of finding the 75 households that will serve as a pilot of affordable housing in Athens. They will negotiate with landlords an affordable rent (in exchange of works to the apartments), while they will support refugees with rent subventions or moving-in costs. They will also provide housing seminars to all programme participants on how to maintain a household in Athens.

**Municipality of Athens:** we are the lead partner, supervising and coordinating the project with the core management team. We are also responsible for the connection between the refugees and the city initiatives through our network 'synAthina platform'.

## Key activities

The programme is addressed to people that have been granted refugee status after 2015, who are aged 18 or older and who speak Arabic, Farsi, French, English or Greek. In order to reach them, we started by communicating with all refugee housing programmes Athens. For example, several organisations work with the UNHCR to rent apartments where refugees have been staying since their arrival in the city, while there is a camp in the city, Elaionas, where more than 2,000 people are currently staying. We got in touch with the social workers, who are in direct communication with the refugees, in order to inform them about our programme and they in turn informed the refugees orally or by giving them our brochures.

Potential participants can come to our information sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays (from 10 am - 2 pm), where they can learn more about the programme. We consider their transportation to our premises a sign of motivation. In the case of the camp, since we didn't have any participants, we decided to hold *in situ* information sessions.

Once informed and registered in the programme, participants go through an intake interview with our psychosocial support team, which helps us better understand the profile of each participant and work together on an individual plan for their participation in the programme.

As for the programme activities, the traditional pillars of integration, such as training, job

counselling and housing, are connected to life in the neighbourhoods of Athens, therefore becoming interconnected with the local residents. Refugees receive support to exit the humanitarian relief shelters and integrate into the city and, in return, they work in collaborative projects with the Greek locals.

The collaborative projects, which will improve life in the neighbourhoods, will also benefit locals and the city itself, which has long suffered from a ten-year financial crisis period. We don't have a collaborative project yet, but some ideas have emerged out of the neighbourhood public events. One of them, for example, is to use a recently expropriated land of 9 acres in the area of Kolonos and turn it into a sustainable social enterprise with locals, refugees and civil society organisations for the cultivation of organic products.

The programme aims to offer trainings outside of the classrooms by helping refugees develop skills in non-traditional ways. An affordable housing model will also be piloted aiming to give incentives to landlords to rent their properties to refugees at an affordable rent.

### **Implementation process**

The project has just started so the innovation has not been fully put into place yet. Other than the five partners of the project, we have been working with many stakeholders in the field of refugee integration and many active citizen groups in order to create synergies for the programme. Our city is the lead partner, therefore many obstacles related to bureaucracy have been delaying the implementation. The process of developing a new methodology is also very time-consuming and challenging. We overcome most problems by working with an action-research methodology, which means that we test a method, evaluate it, and then re-design and adjust it in order to overcome the obstacles.

### **Results and impact**

Since the project has just started, we don't have any results to report yet.

A participatory model of evaluation and an Action Research Methodology is foreseen via a dedicated Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Team with participants of all 'Curing the Limbo' partners. The evaluation covers:

- a. the project's process itself (lessons learnt during implementation)
- b. the beneficiaries' satisfaction & achievements (e.g. language certification, development of common projects, participation of beneficiaries to city's life)
- c. the process of integration in relation to beneficiaries' involvement in the city's life.

Success cannot be measured directly since integration is a long-term process that involves many factors (personal characteristics and expectations, external fluid context, legal regulations). Yet, the project places special attention on how beneficiaries apply the knowledge gained via experimental learning in real life.

Indicative aspects measured:

- punctuality/consistency in lessons attendance and main accomplishments (e.g. certification of Greek/English language & ICT, participation in cultural projects);
- Participation / active involvement to awareness raising about job seeking and housing;
- Development of a realistic, individual action plan for an independent life;
- Willingness to put effort in co-creating projects in the city with colleagues;
- Eager to get familiar with local teams, grassroots initiatives & integration projects;
- Motivation and willingness to participate in city's events and local community activities.

## Testimonials

Participants have just started attending language classes. They all seem eager to get connected with city activities and to meet people in the neighbourhoods.

## Financing

Our initiative is financed by the UIA programme of the ERDF. Athens co-finances the project with 20% of the budget. Major costs include:

- staff/ project management costs
- infrastructure for the 'Limbo Exit Lab' (the headquarters of the pilot social exchange programme, the place where the beneficiaries find a 'menu of options', giving them access to training classes and affordable housing in exchange for their participation in local activities for the benefit of the city, along with active citizen groups)
- household financing costs (for both refugees and landlords)
- seed funding for collaborative actions
- communication

Athens has a very actively engaged citizens community, which emerged from the years of financial crisis. The project relies on this community to a big extent; however some rules and criteria are applied for the project. For example, citizen initiatives are often struggling to survive so our programme is more oriented towards more established initiatives. We also want to make sure that these initiatives are safe to connect with refugees.

Community resources are crucial in many parts of the project, such as mapping city needs, connecting with local networks we wouldn't have access to, deliver our training programme in the neighbourhoods, run a grassroots campaign to find available housing, initiate collaborative projects. We connect refugees to citizen activities to help them develop skills, socialise, get to know the city. We also connect with initiatives that provide services that our programme doesn't include, e.g. craftsmanship and trainings for specific professions.

## Follow-up

Scaling up is already part of our work by connecting our project with the private sector and other stakeholders in the city. We believe that this is a way to ensure its sustainability. Replication is also one of our goals so if the pilot has positive results, we aim to help other cities implement it. Very close monitoring and evaluation of the results as well as the preparation of several operational guides, will allow us to do so.

## Contact details

City of Athens

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## Additional information

Curing the Limbo - Urban Innovative Actions: [www.curingthelimbo.gr](http://www.curingthelimbo.gr)

<https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/athens>



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<http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>