

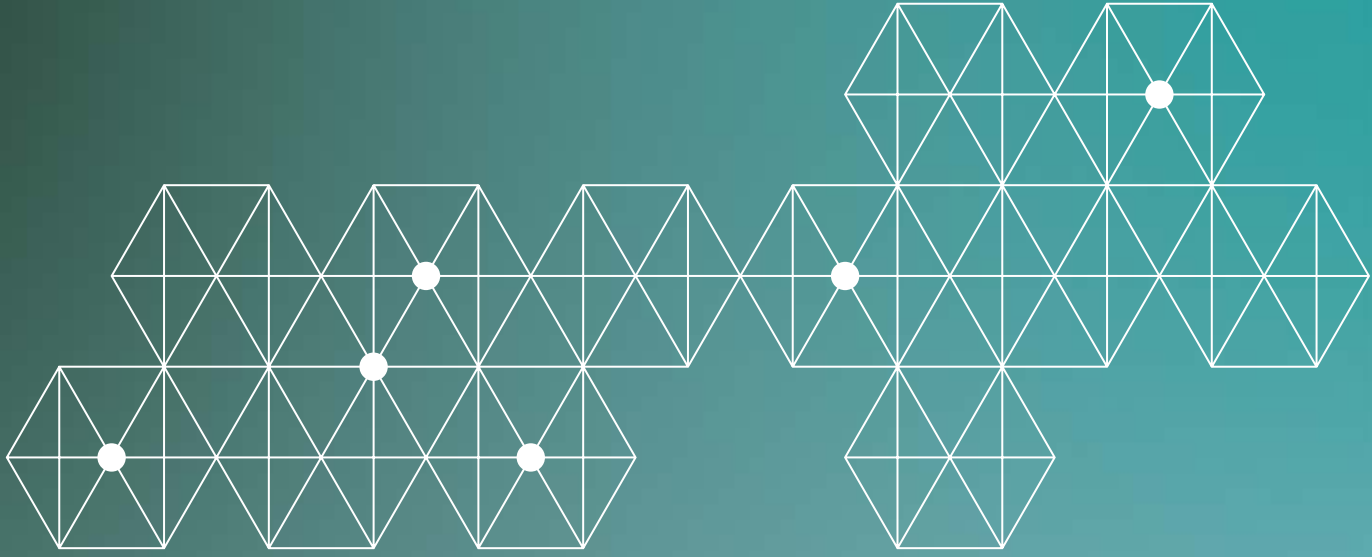


GCDN
Global Cultural
Districts Network
An Initiative of AEA Consulting



STAVROS
NIARCHOS
FOUNDATION
CULTURAL
CENTER

ΚΕΝΤΡΟ
ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΟΥ
ΙΔΡΥΜΑ
ΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ
ΝΙΑΡΧΟΣ



GCDN ANNUAL CONVENING ATHENS 2024

20–23 MAY 2024
SUMMARY REPORT





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FOREWORD



Athens was the location of the 10th annual Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN) convening, which united perspectives of people deeply invested in culture, creativity, and community. Being in Athens was significant: the city's vibrancy, history, and philosophy cascaded from ancient surroundings and its energy propelled itself into the centre of this future-facing convening.

Looking to the past to reflect on our present is a clever way to reframe thinking. Just like the ancient agora — the public square common in ancient Greek cities — the convening brought attendees together and fuelled healthy debate at a time when we, as a global society, seem progressively afraid to speak out, to embrace difference or to advocate for change. The convening embodied the theme of the agora by facilitating a space where people felt comfortable in expressing views, in being challenged and having differences of opinion. Some deeply sensitive concepts were explored, but this was necessary considering the context that cultural organisations currently find themselves navigating. Facilitating a space where people were able to genuinely address their challenges and speak about them in a supportive environment is deeply significant in paving the way to a more inclusive future.

What's more, the theme of inclusivity was embedded into the design of this convening. By bringing in non-conventional ways of sharing knowledge that challenged power dynamics, learning became more accessible and exciting. Be it in a 'walkshop', a mud-making experience or a fishbowl conversation, a considered curation facilitated authentic bonding for people with an array of backgrounds and experiences. This hints at the possibilities of innovation when we question the status quo. There is benefit in taking risks in programming, to challenge tradition and to welcome flexibility.

Above all, this convening showed that being humans, together, in real life, is still essential. Even as technology advances, there is still nothing more profound than a deep, unexpected chat in an in-between moment. These corridor conversations ignite ideas, sparking collaborations that cross borders. The agora brings into realisation that it is this randomness that is powerful and necessary for democracy. Fostering these spaces should be a responsibility for cultural organisations moving forward, as experiences that bring together diverse perspectives, opinions and experiences become ever more important. Being open and authentically learning from each other within this complex, increasingly hostile world is the way we will be able to collectively navigate through it.

And yet, in acknowledging the importance of face-to-face connection, we must also be conscious of our own impact as the climate emergency worsens. It is within our capacity as a network, and our responsibility as cultural anchors to develop travel experiences that are healthier, and ultimately richer as a result. Reframing travel from a rushed trip to a more meaningful place-based experience brings fruitful results for both personal wellbeing and professional development. Taking a bit of extra time to deepen our connection to a place makes us more aware of the world and our potential as cultural organisations and place-makers. It firms up our ethos, our mission and our knowledge of current affairs to enable us to take informed stances.

Having facilitators of culture across the world come together in one space makes us all aware of how much potential there is as a collective. Many of us felt this strong sense of connection, and this has the potential to permeate across cultures to grow into exciting collaborations. Having the awareness to move away from silos is key, and drawing on the network is a great way to collectively overcome the challenges we all face individually.

Gregorio Lucena Scarpella
Director, GCDN

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who have made the 2024 GCDN Convening a success.

It was our honour to receive the support from our esteemed sponsors: the Ministry of Culture of the Hellenic Republic, Greek National Tourism Organization, Smartify and the Greek Wine Federation. Thank you for your support.

Our wonderful hosts, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre (SNFCC), and their dedicated team and volunteers worked long and hard to ensure every part of our convening was seamless. Our utmost thanks to the following SNFCC staff members, without whom our event would not have been possible:

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Visitors Experience & Special Events Director
(and the whole Visitor Experience team)

Lastly but certainly not least, we thank all our members, speakers, guests, and partners who wholeheartedly participated in the event and contributed generously to engaging discussions and meaningful exchanges.

THANK YOU!

REFLECTIONS



ACTIVE LISTENER REFLECTIONS

By Charles Landry, Co-founder, Creative Bureaucracy Festival

Listening can be a deep experience; it triggers a **360-degree** perspective with at times unexpected results. You are there alone with your mind, yet it is not still, thoughts seep in, but most importantly there are the sounds of other people talking. I, quiet to the outside world, but inside there was a scramble of scattered thoughts attempting to cohere.

But then **irony of ironies** — just as the collective message from our convening was emerging: *Listen to the unheard voices: really hear and viscerally feel that unheard person when you are listening* — I, the old European guy actively listening, lost my voice. Was this an emblematic message from the spirits? Yes, say I, it is now time for others to be heard, because everything has a meaning.

The **listening** we are talking about is not of the trivial kind. It includes the dead, who are now only soil. At times simply scattered carelessly, or at other times in sacred places in Asia, to Africa to the Americas – slaughtered, enslaved and forgotten. Once you know their stories, tears can well, the memories hurt and for those closely connected, it can feel like a stab in the heart. Yet, those telling us these horrific stories of their ancestors at our convening were gentle, spoke poetically and were generous of spirit.

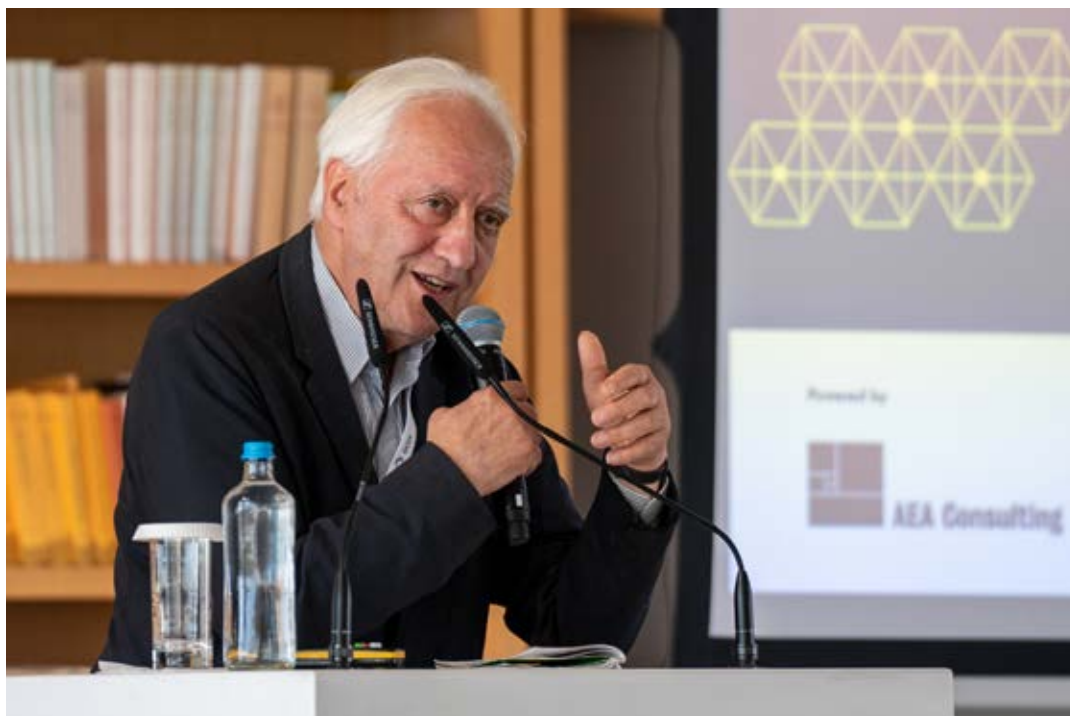
Such **big issues** gave another layer of significance to our convening and what a cultural district is and can be. You can think of the districts as typologies or as settings and gathering places for intent, purpose, activity and conversation. Whatever the origin of the district – just being there because of history, or developed by adaptive reuse, being a cluster of existing cultural institutions or helicoptered in from the sky – it is the philosophy that is key.

Here we see how much the GCDN **convenings** over the last decade have become **richer**, more engaged, more concerned to do the right thing and to address the questions that really matter, such as: Where is my voice and where are the diversities? Where do I belong in a nomadic world? Am I a shaper and co-creator of my evolving environment? Can we create a just society? Am I a friend to nature?

Perhaps the strongest encapsulating theme was to foster the **dialogue of difference** and where better to hold that conversation than in Athens where the GCDN theme was centred around the **agora**.

Agora – the gathering place – and in the room convening together there was an equivalent of 2,500 years of experience in thinking about the big questions and especially about what makes a space a place. And what is the difference? A space becomes a place when it is imbued with significance and meaning. That happens when the varied activities and discussions have these qualities – coincidentally ones that reflect the aims of cultural policy at its best. They all start with the **letter E**. They encourage and emphasise in essence, helping us to become enlightened, enabling expression, providing experience, but also entertainment as well as fostering employability and giving employment opportunities – and thus generating extensive effects.

Those places then are **places of** anchorage and distinctiveness, communication and conversation, ambition and opportunity, nurturing and nourishment, aspiration and inspiration. Easy to say, difficult to create.





In this way a 2,500-year idea – the **agora** – can come to life in contemporary times. In a time of endless forgetting, this old idea is fresh so it can work its magic. It is relevant, indeed urgent, through the ages as well as cross culturally whatever name you give it across the globe.

Today the agora is **tangible** and **intangible**. The physical probably has more impact, but that agora exists too in virtual space as part of the public sphere of discussion including the various media. And here to be a good agora we need rules of engagement, such as having respect from which trust can grow. Then the agora truly becomes a place to gather, to converse, to explore, to trade ideas, to see through the eyes of the other and to have this dialogue of difference.

The difference between **conviviality** and **convivencia** is key. The former is the quality of being gathered together and being friendly, whereas the latter – the Portuguese version – denotes more co-existence like in a family where you need to get along but don't need to like or love each other. And this is what cities are like. It reflects good urbanity: the art of living together in our differences. Here the physical is the canvas onto which the familiar and unfamiliar coalesce and where in the endless small encounters that make up community and the occasional chance encounter can occur.

As isolated islands, cultural districts **prefigure** what great city-making can be. They are a model at their best and so they present a message to the future. And districts driven by heritage are equally important as the past and the future are great partners.

But there is so much to do in responding to the great **yearning** felt in this convening to connect and to explore more of what we share than what divides us, so as to address those intractable problems we face, but crucially to implement solutions.

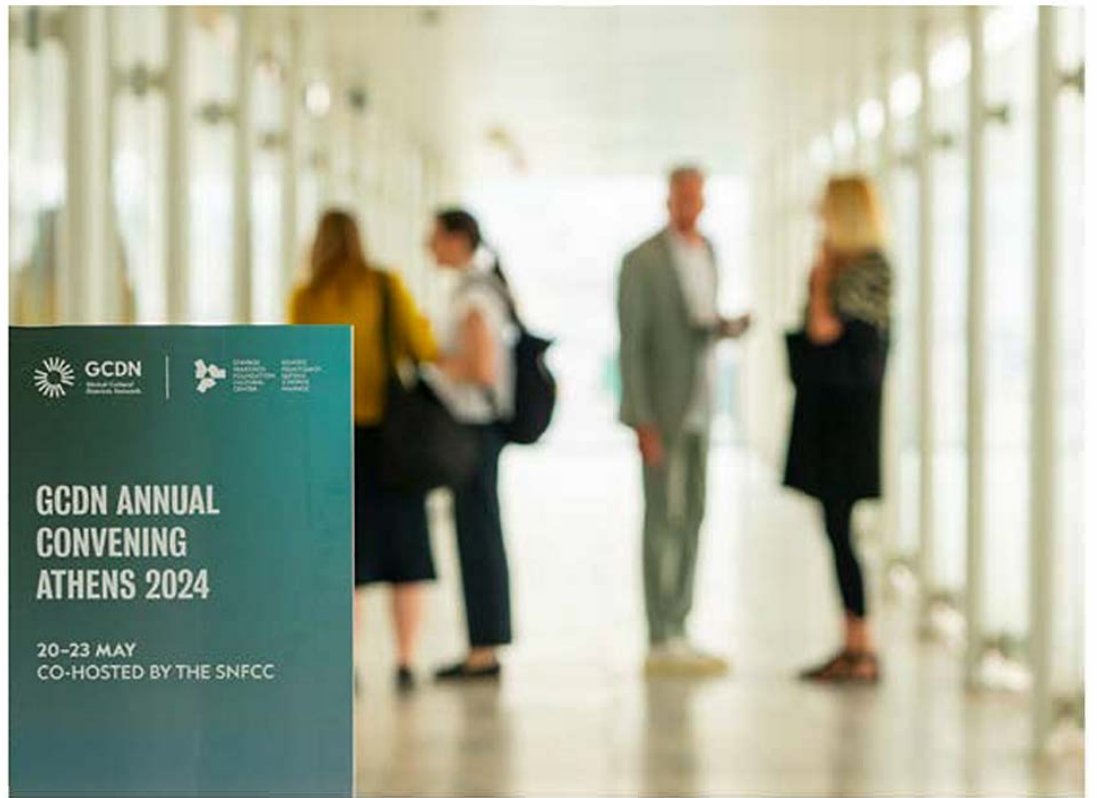
So where next?

Step one: The great **unlearning** – once we have understood that a business-as-usual approach will not get us to where we need to ‘unlearn and reimagine’.

Step two: Assess what **blocks** change, such as challenging vested and entrenched interests, bad ideas (such as “the market is always right”), lack of trust or systemic rigidity. What triggers change? A crisis handled well as well as an ethos, a set of principles, a mission plus personal qualities like courage or tenacity. Yet, most importantly it is the real, implemented and lived project that embeds good principles that makes a difference and creates learning and the confidence to repeat and scale up. Orchestration is the key that draws together all the catalytic levers, otherwise the prescription is just a list.

Step three: Generate new levels of **imagination**, such as rethinking innovative finance mechanisms that foster the common good such as addressing housing affordability or more inclusive procurement schemes that bring in a wider range of players to deliver services.

Finally, the message from the convening was: **Stay human, be open and go for it.**



DAY 1

WELCOME REMARKS



The 10th GCDN annual convening kicked off with a warm welcome to guests. The convening celebrated a diverse group of people coming together from across the world, to forge new connections and develop insights and perspectives. With leaders of cultural organisations emerging from localised contexts coming together to collectively develop authentic ways to navigate challenges faced as a global society, the convening was designed to be an open, inclusive space for people to be able to share, learn and debate together.

Our hosts at the SNFCC then gave an overview of their organisation and the significance of their spaces. Symbolic of a public-private partnership model, the SNFCC has a mission to activate public space and enrich the lives of visitors. The SNFCC campus is the first in Europe to attain LEED Platinum accreditation for environmental sustainability. This has been achieved through the integration of innovative practice that takes into account the potential of the campus surroundings and includes maintaining SNFCC's vast Mediterranean gardens with desalinated sea water. Our hosts also highlighted the symbiotic relationship between tourism and culture in Greece, demonstrating how cultural districts are an attraction for people who seek a travel destination that can provide a more authentic cultural experience.

Speakers:

Elly Andriopoulou
Managing Director,
SNFCC

Adrian Ellis
Chair, GCDN &
Director, AEA
Consulting

Olga Kefalogianni
Minister of Tourism,
Government of the
Hellenic Republic

Drawing on inclusivity as a central theme, the 'agora' aptly became the focus of this year's convening. This public space for communal gathering is rooted in ancient Greek tradition, where people from all backgrounds can connect, engage, and participate in everyday life. These seemingly simple spaces are catalysts for social interaction, enhancing quality of life and generating a sense of belonging. But this doesn't have to be tied to history; cultural districts can implement the concept of the agora in practice. Indeed, the more we understand of the concept of the agora, the more it can become an important way of thinking that can be applied to many of the issues we face today.

Key Takeaways:

- As centres of cultural activity, cultural districts should utilise public space to create and uphold agoras that are inclusive, accessible and vibrant.
- Agoras have the power to create space for social cohesion that caters to the needs of residents, businesses and visitors alike.



DAY 1: OPENING SESSION

CULTURAL DISTRICT AS AGORA: THE ATHENS PERSPECTIVE



Speakers:

Christos Dimas

Deputy Minister of Culture, Government of the Hellenic Republic

Elly Andriopoulou

Managing Director, SNFCC

Moderator:

Adrian Ellis

Chair, GCDN & Director, AEA Consulting

This session further explored what the ancient agora could mean in today's landscape of increased polarisation. Inclusion is now a priority for many cultural districts and yet the need to create and sustain a sense of belonging within space can be difficult to achieve when the barriers are complex. The European Union's urban agenda aims to explore this idea by examining the link between sustainable urbanisation and improved quality of life.

The agora is a centre for co-existence, a communal public space of exchange and meeting that has no barriers. It holds deep value in its porosity and seeming randomness, where people are able to encounter and engage with different perspectives. The significance is greater than ever today as our interactions are often limited to people who share similar views, and our tolerance of difference is arguably diminishing. The agora therefore highlights the significance of public space, as it represents democracy in action.

Within Athens, the government is creating new public space and is embarking on ways to protect existing spaces. The vast archaeological park in the historical centre of Athens has created room for public space and increased pedestrianisation, whilst also standing out as a key attraction for visitors. The city's archaeological riches have also presented a unique challenge for the municipality during the construction of the new metro systems, due to the antiquities discovered underground. City leaders turned this problem into an opportunity by transforming the train stations into public spaces which also serve as small museums. This is considered one of the best urban planning solutions Greece has adopted in recent years.



Key Takeaways:

- Programming public space is important, but making people feel welcomed and safe within it is paramount.
- Fostering inclusive safety means understanding what it means from different perspectives, balancing the need for people to feel ownership over space without feeling monitored.
- Understanding how people interact with spaces, and showing how quality of life can be enriched within the space, enables it to act as a catalyst for social change.



DAY 1: BREAKOUT SESSION

FEMINIST CITY-MAKING

This session explored leading initiatives in feminist city-making around the world. It emphasised the need to consider how gender affects experiences of urban space, and to recognise the ways in which cities are failing women. From addressing inadequate access to essential services to tackling urban pollution, the discussion illuminated how cultural districts that embrace feminist city-making can heal societal fractures and foster vibrant, equitable communities.

By examining the social inequities and patriarchal constructs found within the built environment, the session highlighted the fact that feminist urban practice is not just beneficial for women: it is essential for the health of democracies and the wellbeing of everyone, particularly marginalised communities. Emphasising the need to rethink how design and governance can embody values of joy, trust, collectivity and sustainability, the session embodied feminist concepts by following a fishbowl structure that shifted power dynamics and encouraged participants to share lived experience for deeper understanding.

A feminist approach to city-making is rooted in principles of collaboration, generosity, distributed power adaptability, flexibility, and care. It dismantles the idea that public space is neutral as cities are often designed by and for able-bodied men, ultimately neglecting the needs of others. As a result, women navigate the city differently to men, for example with regard to safety at night. In Bogotá, there is strong public leadership in this realm with the local government working to understand the needs of women and create solutions that improve quality of life. Their innovative approaches included mapping the way women navigate the city alongside an examination of existing infrastructure to identify buildings that could be transformed into care blocks, which have become deeply important to communities.

Speakers:

Nourhan Bassam PhD
Founding Director, The Gendered City

Ana Buritica
Advisor, Secretary of Women Affairs of Bogotá

Eva Grigoriadou
Founding Director, Urbana

Moderator:

Robyn Bennett
International Programme & Partnerships Lead, Creative Bureaucracy Festival



By examining cities through a gendered lens, we can begin to understand the dynamics of place, with layers of other marginalisation and intersectionality also dictating how a city is navigated and experienced. There are still significant actions needed to facilitate a sense belonging for diverse urban communities, including the need to consider the everyday needs of women and vulnerable groups that are not active participants in city-making and city planning groups. From a design perspective, there needs to be a shift in ambition among architects from 'standing out' to instead focusing on the little experiences that could improve overall quality of life. Incorporating co-design with communities who have a diverse spectrum of needs is one way to create radical inclusivity.



Key Takeaways:

- Changing a city is challenging, particularly when gender equality is not considered a priority by those in power — the way to overcome this is by building a movement.
- *The Gendered City*, written by Nourhan Bassam, is sparking communities of practice within the FEM.DESign Network, a collective of placemaking leaders across the world who are working to reclaim space and identity in cities. The network represents the value of advocacy and collective action, leveraging shared knowledge and support.
- They highlight the need for feminist (?) thinking to be embedded into planning and placemaking in order to become systemic, with an intersectional lens being vital for the development of authentic solutions.
- Education, awareness building and holding space for conversations that include men are also important within this movement.

DAY 1: BREAKOUT SESSION

PROCESSES OF MIGRATION, INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL COHESION: THE ATHENS PERSPECTIVE

This discussion explored how performing arts and sporting programs in Athens can work as powerful means of increasing social cohesion at a time of crisis. While the environment for arriving refugees, especially children, can often be hostile, the initiatives highlighted in this session demonstrated the ways in which they were able to help build a sense of community amongst newly arrived refugees and help them integrate into their new communities.

The Walk, produced by Polyplanity Productions, is a public art project that has received global acclaim. It features Little Amal, a 12-foot puppet that brings to life the story of a Syrian child refugee in search of her mother. Her journey started in Turkey, with Greece being the second country she arrived in. This was a unique and experimental project for Greece, where public art projects of this scale are not common, and the arrival of refugees remains a contested and complicated topic. To make *The Walk* a reality, producers established over 300 partnerships around Greece, including public schools and local authorities. Polyplanity Productions produced a workbook for educators, inviting them to use it ahead of Little Amal's visits to their cities. Public schools proved to be an important partner to secure the project's overall positive reception.

El Sistema Greece is a community music project that provides free music education to children and young people in Greece, particularly those from migrant and refugee communities. El Sistema is a safe space for youth empowerment, where young musicians are encouraged to become active citizens, and are provided the tools to help them develop a firm sense of tolerance, solidarity, and self-esteem. The El Sistema youth orchestra encourages non-linear learning for children and engages their families and support systems. El Sistema works as a healing organisation, responding to the trauma experienced by its participants. Through its activity, it changes hostile perceptions of refugees, with audiences becoming allies. This builds a wider community around the musicians whilst working to change embedded local perspectives.

In response to the lack of inclusive and positive recreational activities for young people in Athens, **Free Movement Skateboarding** runs a mobile skatepark that travels to the same areas every week to develop a consistent presence, sparking participation and a sense of community. Beyond skateboarding itself, the organisation developed an "edu-skate" curriculum which leads themed discussions for young people around identity, belonging, and tolerance. Since 2017, Free Movement Skateboarding has led 1,200 sessions, engaging 3,500 people of 63 nationalities, with 35% of participants being girls. The mobile skatepark and its method of inclusive engagement, transforms a negative urban space through positive placemaking.

Speakers:

Will Ascott

Co-Founder,
Free Movement
Skateboarding

Anis Barnat

Co-Founder, El Sistema
Greece

Yolanda Markopoulou

Polyplanity Productions

Moderator:

Sofia ouvelaki

CEO, The Home Project



Key Takeaways:

- Activating public space through the arts can encourage integration for and with migrant communities.
- International collaboration can help advocate top-down support for bottom-up initiatives.
- Involving local communities and institutions in the process enables wider awareness and develops a consistent presence.
- There is a need to utilise the power of artists even more to encourage greater cohesion.

DAY 1: BREAKOUT SESSION

THE CULTURE OF LEISURE



Speakers:

Marjan Faraidooni

Chief of Education and Culture and Chief of HR, Expo City Dubai

Marilynn Gardner

President & CEO, Navy Pier, Inc.

Elena Mavromichali

Strategist- Cultural Advisor, Prime Minister's Office of the Hellenic Republic

Moderator:

Ramon Marrades

Director, Placemaking Europe

As cultural institutions endeavour to foster meaningful engagement beyond enclosed structures, can public spaces become catalysts for experimentation? This session critically examined ways to develop engagement and inclusion through cultural programming in public spaces.

The speakers opened the session by recalling a personal moment of joy they experienced when visiting a cultural district. They emphasised the importance of making cultural spaces accessible to everyone by developing programs that appeal to diverse audiences. A key focus was the need to balance the creation of touristic value with local community engagement. This is a balance they actively work on, observing who interacts with their spaces and by reviewing which programmes to ticket or offer for free. If cultural institutions build strong relationships with their communities, tourists will follow, but tourism fatigue can threaten these relationships.

Panellists discussed programming including performing arts, engagement with local visual artists, incubation support for small creative enterprises, artist residencies, and other activities that celebrate local cultural heritage. These initiatives preserve the uniqueness and traditions of the places in which they are located and provide a platform for development of the local creative sector.

Panellists highlighted the importance of early-stage engagement with audiences to nurture a sense of belonging within cultural venues, and to show children that careers in the arts are achievable. They also expressed the struggle to find data-driven impact measurements that motivate funders, which are vital sources of income.



Key Takeaways:

- Cultural programming significantly influences the design and management of public spaces; balancing the needs of tourists and local communities is critical.
- It is equally important to preserve the spirit and identity of place.
- Impact is difficult to prove through financial metrics, when many goals are qualitative and long-term.



DAY 2: OPENING SESSION

CULTURAL DISTRICT AS AGORA: THE MACRO PERSPECTIVE



Speakers:

Ore Disu

Director, Museum of West African Art (MoWAA) Institute

Aastha Johri

Creative Director, Dhun, Jaipur

Chereda Grannum

Manager, Reclaiming Our Atlantic Destiny Programme, Government of Barbados

Moderator:

Sharon Ament

Director, The Museum of London

In a period of growing polarisation, the role of cultural districts as places that uphold inclusivity and openness has never been higher on our agendas. Expanding the focus beyond the Greek context and building upon the conversations from the previous day, this plenary session reflected on diverse strategies and models for cultural districts to become centres of social and cultural activity at the heart of public life.

This session took a new approach to understanding context: each speaker opened the session by choosing a song of significance that reflected their project and sense of place. Despite being different endeavours, the projects shared commonalities in having sustainability models that embed circular approaches to nourishing communities and environments. These initiatives explore the owning, reclaiming and reconsidering of heritage and histories.

Dhun, based in Jaipur, India, is a privately driven project aiming to create an environmentally positive impact. It challenges design norms by creating a sustainable design model that incorporates living environments. Through considering an area's ecological ceiling, it questions how to limit environmental impact whilst not limiting ambition; looking at ways to increase, rather than deplete resources. This is achieved by understanding the land and incorporating traditional local practices of craft and environmental knowledge found within Jaipur's history. By learning from indigenous communities and studying the ecology, they have been able to transform an area that was perceived as a wasteland and bring it back to life. Humans and nature live collectively and harmoniously on site to embed continuous learning and wellbeing. This philosophy is embedded into practice to ensure it remains grounded throughout the design process.

The **Museum of West African Art** responds to the wider context of Benin and its violent history of colonisation which continues to impact people and the environment to this day. It focuses on creating a centre that speaks to people's identities whilst taking ownership, embedding archaeology as an African practice and as a system through which to hold conversations and process complex histories. On the site, there will be an archaeological centre, exhibition and workshop space in addition to a reforestation project that brings in the communities and reflects on the natural habitat that would have been on that site.

Barbados Heritage District is situated on one of the oldest working plantation spaces on the island, the Newton Enslaved Burial Ground. The **Reclaiming Our Atlantic Destiny Programme** works to reconcile with the traumatic past and highlight lessons for humanity as the effects of colonialism continue to impact Barbados. They aim to approach reconciliation through questioning, holding space for people to explore trauma and the African consciousness. A memorial will be the anchor of the heritage district, which will become a site of global memory, learning and reflection, where people from all backgrounds can build a shared vision for the future. In addition, there will be the Barbados Archives, a new national performing arts centre, a research institute and museum which examine the impact of transatlantic slavery and forced migration.

These initiatives are finding balance between the past and the future, whilst finding ways to maximise impact with communities as much as possible. They are addressing histories whilst also enabling conscious co-creation with multiple demographics. This has created genuine ownership and engagement.

Key Takeaways:

- As the traumatic legacies of colonialism continue to manifest, addressing systemic oppression is a global problem that shouldn't be the burden on those most affected. Instead of avoiding this, countries need to join in a global reconciliation that acknowledges the past.
- Displaced objects and physical artefacts need to be returned to ensure the restitution of memory, along with reconciliation with the land and species within it.
- Instead of outsourcing, the focus is now on upskilling local people who are learning conservation and digitisation whilst connecting to their own heritage. This not only brings in new skills but also new revenue streams as capacity is unlocked.

DAY 2: BREAKOUT SESSION

EXPERIMENTS IN GOVERNANCE AND OWNERSHIP



This panel followed a fishbowl format, with each panellist representing an organisation that examined governance of their work in a new light, demonstrating possibilities for evolution and new processes.

It highlighted the need to establish 'ethics of care' to support the work of cultural organisations, and that care requires trust both in sharing power with others and working toward systems change. Opportunities to move in new directions involve both learning about new ideas and unlearning of old ones. This process, like most change, takes time and an interest in shared accountability.

This work has emerged from the realisation that current systems frequently neglect to reflect the reality of people's needs, especially those from marginalised backgrounds. This was described as a crisis which emerges from a lack of trust. Yet crises were also described as an opportunity, recognising a need to listen and work together to build trust. To begin to remedy this lack of trust, care needs to be part of core values, with groups set up to decide together, organise together, and bridge gaps that have emerged.

The group discussed the value of accountability in both management and decision-making, highlighting the reality that new methods are needed.

Speakers:

Vivian Doumpa
Co-founder, STIPO
Greece

Natassa Dourida
Founder, Communitism

Konstantinos Karalaitis
SNFCC Youth Council
Member, SNFCC

Dina Ntziora
Founding Director, We
are Community

Moderator:

Annie Bares
Research Analyst, AEA
Consulting

Emily Harney
Senior Associate, AEA
Consulting



Key Takeaways:

- The panel highlighted a focus on evolution over revolution. Deploying agility and flexibility within contexts that may be more rigid, is careful work. Experiments, if too radical, may actually become roadblocks. As a result, there is a need to let the process shape us as we shape it and look for unexpected synergies that may emerge.
- Different cultures have different governance norms and governance can be both structural and personal. For example, Greek professional life was described as more vertical/hierarchical, whereas many experiments in governance are more horizontal (or begin that way). New governance structures aren't always blocked by existing legal structures, sometimes it is just tradition that stands in the way. New ideas will therefore need to adapt to what fits a culture. This includes taking time to listen to people in different ways when working across cultures, as they may not have the same set of starting expectations.
- Participation in these experiments can be improved by offering consistent opportunities for discussion and by building personal relationships. This can be done by creating informal activities with team members out in the community, observing, and listening actively.
- Leadership and exercising power require training and guidance to be deployed effectively. As a result, local authorities should be included in new processes so that new leaders can learn from those who have experienced power, and those in power might learn from new efforts too.

DAY 2: BREAKOUT SESSION

GLOBAL LGBTQ+ STORYTELLING



Speakers:

Thalia Kioussi

Head of Inclusion Programs, Me Alla Matia (and formerly Head of Communications, Athens Pride)

Eric Solis

Queer Currents

Gijs Stork

Co-founder, DTLA Proud & Principal, Fever

Moderator:

Robin Abad Ocuillo

Program Manager at the City of Oakland, Producer & Curator of SF Urban Film Fest

This panel explored the role of cultural institutions in amplifying LGBTQ+ stories and supporting queer communities through intentional programming and partnerships. From Los Angeles to Athens and Amsterdam, the panellists discussed the different ways queer communities have developed engagement in arts and activism, and amplified, in their own unique expressions, queer voices.

In LA, **DTLA Proud** was founded in 2016 as a grassroots response to mainstream LA Pride, focusing on community-driven programming. The festival invited different local organisations who represented diverse community groups to program and plan the festival, promoting a sense of inclusivity, belonging and ownership. The festival, located in LA's central business district (Downtown LA or DTLA), features film screenings, community booths, music, art installations and performances. It celebrates the culture, history and diversity of the growing LGBTQ+ community.

Similarly to DTLA Proud, **Queer Currents** is an events platform that was established in 2018 to bring more diverse and inclusive content to Pride Amsterdam week. Now, 70 days of lectures, films, exhibitions, dance and music on queer topics are dedicated to diverse audience groups, which opens the floor for a more inclusive community.

Athens Pride represents a mainstream event that has faced challenges in balancing grassroots movements with commercial sponsorships. To address these issues that are recurrent worldwide, the team decided to further engage queer communities by issuing open calls for queer artists to contribute to the annual theme and slogans, and by supporting grassroots marches as part of their events.



Key Takeaways:

- We all need to use new tools and strategies to increase accessibility and create a sense of safety and belonging for LGBTQ+ groups.
- Several thoughts emerged following these presentations, which questioned how queer platforms can become more inclusive for disabled, trans, and migrant communities, and what cultural institutions can do to support and give visibility to queer communities in meaningful ways.
- Finding partners, including queer people in the creation and decision-making process, and maintaining engagement with queer communities are important tools to provide visibility, amplify voices, and provide safety for queerness in public spaces.

DAY 2: BREAKOUT SESSION

THE ROLE OF ANCHORS: THE APAC PERSPECTIVE



Speakers:

Michael O'Leary
Deputy CEO & Project
Director, Melbourne
Arts Precinct
Corporation

Yvonne Tham
CEO, Esplanade -
Theatres on The Bay

Austin Wang
Former CEO, Taipei
Performing Arts Centre

Moderator:

Alex Budd
Director, Canberra
Theatre Centre

This session was developed in a collaboration between the GCDN and the Association of Asia Pacific Performing Arts Centres (AAPPAC).

Larger cultural institutions have a defining role within cultural districts. How can these institutions position themselves to fulfil their responsibilities as anchors of community life and stewards of culture?

The Asia-Pacific perspective brought together leaders of cultural anchors from the region, to explore how institutions can authentically embrace their community role, forge a collective civic identity, and truly become shared spaces for all.

Cases in Canberra, Melbourne, Taipei and Singapore showed how cultural anchors can cultivate a regional identity and drive cultural growth for artistic communities.

Specific to the APAC perspective, being in areas where there is a diverse population with new migrants, there is also an economic and social responsibility to create inclusive programming that involves different communities. In addition, changing the rhetoric from having an imported arts scene, to fostering local artistic production with pathways for local artists to develop is a priority.

Taking art out of formal spaces and creating festivals centred around community points of life enables cultural anchors to connect with a place-based identity that already exists. Acknowledging the culture and communities that existed in the space before is also important. Finally, with regards to impact measuring, KPIs need to move beyond silos of individual organisations to establish common goals with shared targets that recognise the value of in-between space.



Key Takeaways:

- Large cultural institutions can use their central position, influence, and resources to promote inclusivity, facilitate community engagement, education, and the exchange of ideas.
- Instead of cultural organisations competing to become anchors of a city, there needs to be a cultural glue of collaboration that makes them work effectively together.
- Moving away from siloed working into connected and collaborative thinking creates an even more powerful, holistic anchor.
- Public space is the glue that can connect organisations in a vicinity together, to form a coherent cultural district that can collectively achieve greater goals. Utilising this space to forge connections through joint programming amplifies the stories of all organisations, making it a destination in its own right for tourists and locals alike.
- To stay relevant there is a need for cultural organisations to continuously observe and respond to how people use the space.

DAY 2: BREAKOUT SESSION

DIGITAL PLACEMAKING FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES



Digital placemaking combines technology and storytelling to convey the identity of place. In this workshop, social enterprise Smartify invited attendees to consider ways in which a place could encourage human interaction and anticipate needs.

By providing a more seamless visitor experience, organisations can foster community and shared experiences, whilst building ongoing relationships with visitors that could eventually translate into memberships or return visitation.

As technology evolves, there are a variety of technological tools for organisations to employ, such as:

- AI for user-centric experiences which empower visitors to tell you what they're interested in;
- augmented reality which can bring to life historic scenes and stories; and
- digital wayfinding and navigation, which enables a more carefree and accessible experience through easy and intuitive tools.

In terms of audience engagement, digital placemaking enables technology to be tailored to specific visitors, and these tools can help gather audience insights.

Speakers:

Thanos Kokkiniotis
CEO, Smartify

Jessica Sharpe
Head of Experience,
Michigan Central



An example of this is the National Gallery of Scotland's focus on widening their younger audience demographic by using audience data and machine learning to create personalised tours.

Another way to engage audiences is co-designing digital stories with the community to accompany an in-person experience of a place. The Royal Museums of Greenwich achieved this through co-created accessible tours led by drag queens and queer performers. They also created an app that provided soundscapes and music as you walked through different sites. Across these examples, visitors responded positively to the diversity in performances.

When attendees were asked to think about the challenges they face in embedding digital placemaking into their districts, most mentioned a lack of understanding of their visitors, an issue familiar to many cultural organisations today. Many districts don't know the audience journey through their space, predominantly due to a lack of resources. In addition, because cultural districts are often designing for a variety of visitors, it becomes a challenge to tailor stories and experiences. There is also a need to strike the balance between attracting new visitors whilst continuing to engage existing ones.

Key Takeaways:

- With a range of technological tools available, districts now have the opportunity to leverage digital placemaking to reinforce identity of place and connect with visitors on a deeper level.
- Successful digital placemaking therefore combines storytelling and technology to put the user at the centre of the experience.
- Enabling a way for visitors to relate to what they're seeing served as an entry point for many people.
- Effective digital tools can take the user on a journey, not only bringing stories of the past to life, but also highlighting ways in which these stories are still relevant today.

DAY 2: KEYNOTE

PROFESSOR STATHIS KALYVAS



The keynote delved into the relationship between politics and its impact on cultural institutions from an academic perspective. At a time of increased crisis and polarisation, there is a desire for cultural organisations to broaden their missions to respond to events in wider contexts. This raises a dilemma of free speech: is it right to remain neutral to facilitate free speech, or is it the duty of cultural organisations who have a prominent role in shaping public discourse, to push for social change?

Whilst it may seem that moral issues are at the forefront of political debate now more than ever, calling out and holding people to account in the arena of public opinion parallels with the gladiators of ancient Rome. This is a difficult path to navigate, particularly when attempting to establish a position on behalf of multiple stakeholders who may have different views. Moral accountability therefore causes tension within the functioning of institutions, raising questions as culture intersects with economics, and institutions face a reputational cost. To overcome this, there is a need for organisations to rethink their strategies in order to understand their identity and stance by setting up a framework for interaction, mapping neutrality, activism and positioning.

Speaker:

Professor Stathis Kalyvas

Chairman of The Board of Directors, SNFCC

Moderator:

Adrian Ellis

Chair, GCDN & Director, AEA Consulting

DAY 2: CLOSING SESSION

NURTURING DIALOGUE AND PROTECTING EXPRESSION



Speakers:

Adrian Ellis
Chair, GCDN &
Director, AEA
Consulting

Professor Stathis Kalyvas
Chairman of The Board
of Directors, SNFCC

Lily Cabatu Weiss
Executive Director,
Dallas Arts District

Moderator:

Patrick McIntyre
Chief Executive Officer,
National Film and
Sound Archives of
Australia

Following the theme of the keynote, panellists in this session discussed the ethical implications of the positions of power cultural leaders find themselves in, at a time of increased public scrutiny. In this era of polycrises, cultural organisations are not isolated from issues in their wider environment. Making a statement, or not responding at all can lead to scandal for institutions. The pressure to deliver a rapid response – as enforced by social media – makes the situation even more difficult to navigate. Whilst understanding positioning and developing consistency over time is difficult, staying silent or being reactive can be deeply problematic.

On free speech and expression in a crisis: panellists questioned whether the ancient Athenian agora could (and should) be upheld in our context, where free speech is facilitated by cultural districts who may be compelled to remain neutral. Opinions were divided, but some panellists believed there is great importance for established institutions to stand resolute in their neutrality. Staying neutral enables diverse voices to feel safe in sharing and reflecting, which cultivates a culture in which people have the capacity to express themselves freely and develop new perspectives. This could be important at a time when people have become seemingly less tolerant of opposing opinions. There may also be a lack of expertise in dealing with current affairs and crisis communications within cultural organisations, which could make a strong view waver under public scrutiny.

However, as the world faces serious, interconnected issues on a global scale, it becomes increasingly inappropriate for leaders to stay silent, which some may view to be the antithesis of leadership. Communities often look to large cultural organisations in times of crisis and so it is their responsibility to lead by forging consensus, representing communities and providing a voice to the voiceless.



Arguably, it is also a cultural institution's responsibility to be aware of crises that affect their communities or their own values. Therefore, instead of being reactionary or staying silent, what a cultural organisation stands for should flow into how they lead as an anchor in a community. Many organisations already have their values and ethos built into their mission statements, so it is a matter of enacting this in practice. As the arts have always served to question and voice opinion, they have the power to form powerful and influential responses.

Key Takeaways:

- The power of cultural organisations and the role they play in society should not be underestimated. There are no genuine silos in spaces that hold culture: they are influencing and are influenced by wider society.
- Neutrality is questionable when staying neutral is a position in itself, and staying silent is not neutral.
- Understanding who their stakeholders are can help institutions develop a response. One approach could be to let the art and artists speak for themselves, through programming that reflects an institution's communities.
- Moving forward, there is a significant need to create spaces for free speech, safety and inclusivity on an individual level, whilst also having the ability to speak up against atrocities as a collective.
- The agora created by cultural districts can be this place: a catalyst for tolerance, where people can sit with complexity, and tune into different perspectives that in turn has the power to create genuine dialogue and empathy.

FOCUS TRACKS & WORKSHOPS

Panel-led focus track sessions as well as hands-on, practical, and interactive workshops ran in parallel over Days 1 & 2 of the convening. They were repeated to enable members to participate in different sessions

DAY 1 & DAY 2: FOCUS TRACKS

BUILDING MODERN AGORAS: THE BOTTOM-UP WAY

The power is in the storytelling, and these stories come from people. This was the headline from the session on building agoras from the bottom up.

We heard from representatives of local, community-driven action in Brooklyn, Copenhagen, Mumbai and Vancouver – each diverse in their population and ambition, each successful in building a consensus and community movement that empowered marginalised voices and led to positive change. These organisations were locally initiated and responsive to their specific cultural contexts, allowing them to be flexible and have direct impact on the communities involved. In comparison to the top-down discussion, which focussed more on buildings and spaces, this session emphasised programming through activating public space as a key strategy for bottom-up models.

Speakers:

Jesper Koefoed-Melson
Director,
Kulturdistriktet

Esther Rausenberg
Artistic and Executive
Director, Eastside Arts
Society

Natasha Sharma
Lead, Arts & Design
and Co-curator of
Govandi Arts Festival,
Community Design
Agency

Shelley Worrell
Founder, Little
Caribbean

Moderator:

Emma Wilcox
Consultant: Purposeful
Placemaking, Wilcox
Associates



In Copenhagen, **Kulturdistriktet** uses culture to mobilise the community by uniting organisations, artists and cultural producers. This approach enabled them to strengthen bonds and face challenges collectively. As a result, they have delivered partnerships across events, networks and locations that have developed a sense of pride and belonging.

Similarly, in Vancouver, collaborating with arts and cultural producers across the region enabled **Eastside Arts Society** to have a wider impact. Through stakeholder consultation, cultural mapping, consultations with indigenous communities, and identifying key assets at risk, they have developed a robust business plan and secured funding for further work that will change cultural policy within the city.

In India, **The Govandi Arts Festival** demonstrates the power of the arts to create positive change in communities that have been largely forgotten and sidelined. Through structured mentoring schemes, cross-sector partnerships, workshops and performances, they have highlighted the importance of culture, and reclaimed a community space to nurture future generations.

I am Carribeing also focuses on culture, community and commerce. Uniting the Caribbean diaspora across the boroughs of New York, it celebrates heritage and expression, fostering partnerships and commercial opportunities to cultivate collective belonging.

Having a limited budget and capacity necessitates agility, and doing so pushes for partnerships and collaboration. This makes projects become part of a larger creative ecosystem where top-down models and the leadership, scale and investment they bring are valuable. Bottom-up models should also consider production, commercial enterprise and entrepreneurship opportunities based on their core creative output. These models are iterative and emergent and there were calls for the need of stronger networks and collaborative problem solving.

In addition, smaller scale projects, which are often equated with a bottom-up approach, require longer time frames for measurement of impact. Moving beyond numbers to storytelling, utilising qualitative data as a way to demonstrate impact enables funders to be invested early and builds their understanding as a project grows.

Key Takeaways:

- Remaining flexible and authentic when scaling up, with an ability to pivot and redefine activities where necessary, is critical to success.
- Storytelling is also key: showing impact rather than telling is important, looking at transformation of the individual, the community and the environment.
- Soft power and the intangible value of art and creativity can act as the driver of change within a community.
- Co-creation and centring the voices of participants, residents and artists is crucial for authenticity. This honours the time that people contribute which is not often compensated. By delivering activities that are relevant to an individual community, organisations can foster pride and legacy for the projects and the people involved in them.

DAY 1 & DAY 2: FOCUS TRACKS

BUILDING MODERN AGORAS: THE TOP-DOWN WAY



Top-down models have the capacity to transform urban spaces, significantly changing the way people use them. But creating new districts can be challenging: first, how can we unite institutions of varying scales, disciplines, revenue and missions under one umbrella organisation and ensure that they all feel involved and understood? Second, how do we define cultural identity? This session explored building modern agoras by examining top-down approaches of districts located in Melbourne, Nantes, Casablanca, Riyadh and London.

East Bank draws on the legacy of East London, uniting the borough's diverse communities which are rich with a multitude of languages and nationalities. It also draws on the area's history of hardship to build upon the narratives of past, present and future. East Bank engages and partners with local experts and local organisations, with a focus on developing free public programming in efforts to create consensus and support.

Qiddiya, a megaproject focused on entertainment and tourism located in Riyadh aims to reconnect audiences with the power of play. Heavily influenced by bottom-up research and behaviour analysis, Qiddiya's approach to cultural programming stratifies each offering as a "layer": an asset (such as a museum or racetrack); an exhibition or featured programme; an activation (such as a festival or event). Each layer aims to offer varying opportunities for audiences, recognising that co-creation and audience participation are vital to ensure the city's evolution and continued success.

Casa Anfa in Casablanca is focused on reviving the district's heritage and uniting live/work/culture spaces in one revitalised area of the city. The arts district of Casa Anfa will coexist within the surrounding community framework, offering the opportunity for engagement and interaction across social divides.

Speakers:

Tamsin Ace
Director, East Bank

Tim Reeve
Deputy Director,
Victoria & Albert
Museum; Chair, East
Bank Board

Charalampos Chaitas
Executive Director
for Culture and Arts,
Qiddiya Investment
Company (Public
Investment Fund)

Youssef Hayat
Communication
Director, Agence
d'Urbanisation et de
Développement d'Anfa
(AUDA)

Michael O'Leary
Deputy CEO & Project
Director, Melbourne
Arts Precinct
Corporation (MAP Co)

Lucie Renou
International Project
Manager, Samoa

Moderator:

Antoni Durski
Senior Consultant, AEA
Consulting



The **Melbourne Arts Precinct Corporation (MAP Co)** is conscious of creating a unifying environment that offers access to locals as a priority. One of the major features of the precinct is an urban garden that celebrates biodiversity in Australia and creates an ever changing and evolving environment that responds to the country's diverse climates. MAP Co is working with horticultural experts to create a distinct offering that unites the needs and desires of both locals and visitors.

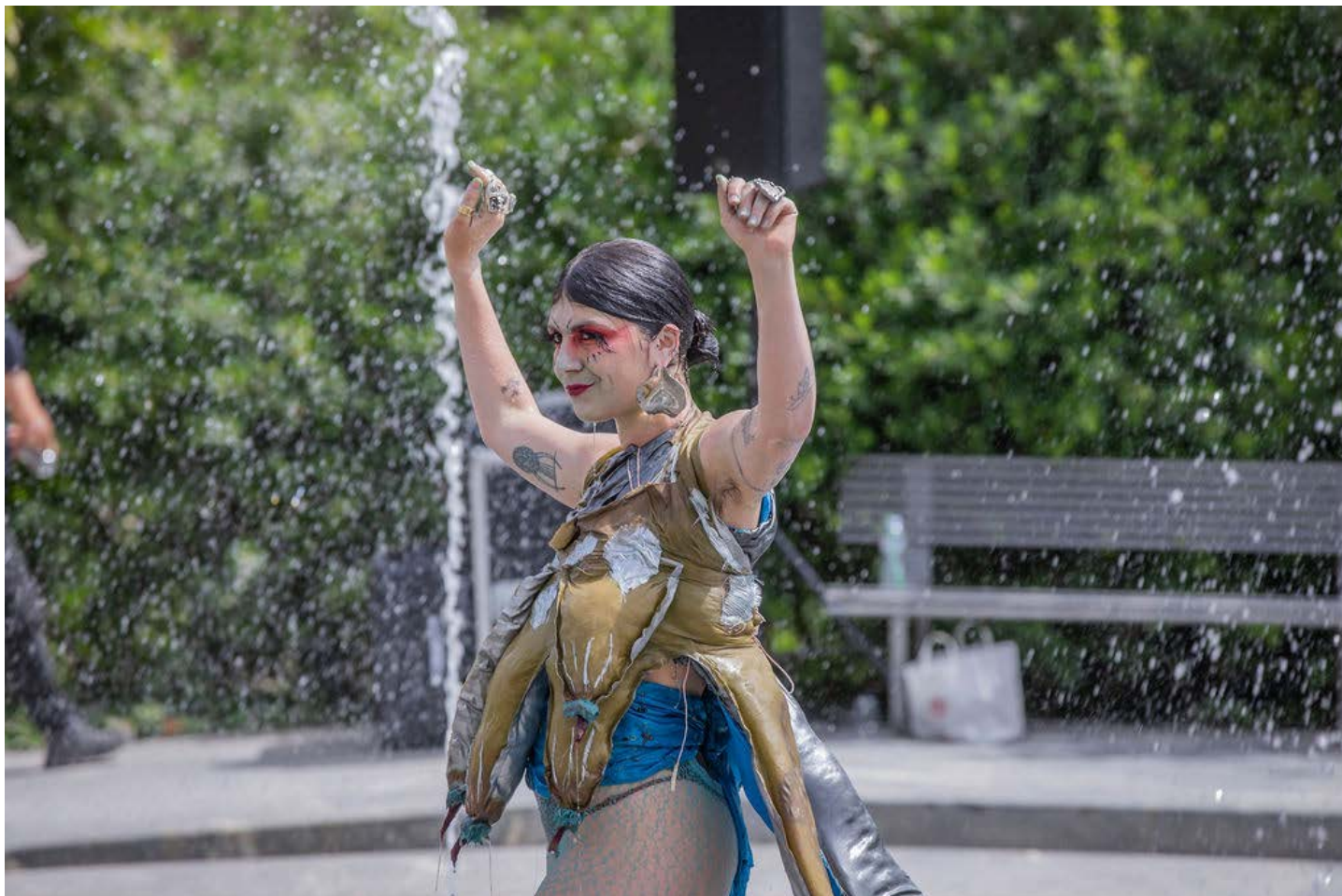
IÎle de Nantes looks to culture as a vehicle of economic development. On the island you will find a diverse group of organisations: from higher education and visual arts institutions to cultural businesses and music venues. Involving local stakeholders continues to be a priority, and this has led to an evolving urban masterplan that shifts and changes with consensus priorities. This is a more iterative approach to other top-down projects, with a dialogic master plan that evolves over time and a method of empowering artists to sustain themselves.

Key Takeaways:

- These large-scale projects are privileged in their position to think and work across sectors, whilst contributing to the development of housing, education spaces, and greenspace. With strong leadership, projects can move at speed and scale, with the ability to experiment whilst seeing the full value chain for a creative industry: education, participation, production, presentation.
- When stakeholder interests are complex and sometimes contradictory, building support requires demonstrating positive impact along the way.
- Organisations need to avoid working in silos, competing for resources. Instead, collaboration is key to utilise opportunities for economies of scale. In addition, there is a need to be respectful of the wider communities that already exist in the space to avoid displacement.
- The session emphasised that these large urban projects are looking beyond their return of infrastructure investment, to focus on the cultural impact. In order to be successful in the long term, involving the community is vital at every stage of development.

DAY 1 & DAY 2: OUTDOOR WORKSHOP

PERFORMANCE AND PLACEMAKING



This “walkshop”, a walking workshop, took place in the Stavros Niarchos Park, where three artists — Konstantinos Papanikolaou, Chara Stergiou, and Iria Vrettou — were commissioned to create site-specific performances. Participants walked from one performance to the next, pairing up after each to discuss how it had changed their perception of the space. The performances ranged from storytelling to sound art and performance art, each acting as a means of disrupting the space to make people stop and think differently about place. They each emphasised the organic nature of performing in public space, with the need to embrace the unpredictable.

At the end of the walkshop, the group gathered for Q&A with the artists, to discuss how the performing arts can be developed as part of public art programmes. The discussion covered how institutions can facilitate these programmes by providing sufficient lead- time for artists to engage with the spaces and communities. Participants also addressed challenges such as obtaining permits for outdoor events, particularly for institutions without outdoor spaces, in addition to managing insurance and health and safety measures.

Artists:

Iria Vrettou
Chara Stergiou
Konstantinos Papanikolaou

Moderators:

Alyssa Cartwright
Coordinator, GCDN

Bella Stenvall
Research Analyst, AEA Consulting

DAY 1 & DAY 2: OUTDOOR WORKSHOP

MENDING: MATTERS OF MUD-MAKING WITH IO MAKANDAL FOR A FERAL COMMONS

In this immersive workshop, participants were encouraged to reconnect with nature as they delved into discovering the project, A Feral Commons, the global co-commission helmed by Alserkal Advisory in partnership with the GCDN. This initiative commissioned site-specific public art that responds to local environmental imperatives, whilst documenting principles of responsible commissioning in an era of escalating climate crisis.

Led by South African artist, Io Makandal, the workshops centred around engaging with tactile soil materials as earth medicine to foster soil remediation in Stavros Niarchos Park. In acts of caring for soil, Makandal facilitated a process of “re-membering” and mending a connection to Earth — relationship building as a form of artistic activism. The workshop was an opportunity to tacitly engage in the ethos and methodology of A Feral Commons, presenting a framework for social and sustainable public art, fit for purpose in 2024 and beyond.

Moderators:

Roxani Kamperou
Project Manager, A Feral Commons & Programmes Advisor, Alserkal Advisory & GCDN

Io Makandal
Artist



Photo by Maria Maraki/Courtesy GCDN

DAY 1 & DAY 2: INDOOR WORKSHOP

ASSESSMENT AND DECISION-MAKING FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURAL DISTRICTS: A CONEXIONES CREATIVAS WORKSHOP

Cultural districts are ecosystems, some small and some large, but they encompass a variety of stakeholders from creatives to businesses. There is a natural entanglement that happens within them, and if leveraged properly, a district can help break silos and bring innovation and creativity to our cities. Showcasing their work across cultural districts in Latin America and Europe, Conexiones Creativas walked attendees through their assessment and decision-making framework, which aims to help emerging cultural districts lay the groundwork for strategic, sustainable growth. Emerging cultural districts face challenges from economic sustainability to implementation, with funds needed for both operations and infrastructure.

The decision-making framework tool acts as a guide for cultural districts, encouraging them to identify the steps they'll need to take across different areas. It covers ten components of a cultural district's operations, each mapped across a five-stage life cycle of a cultural district. The tool also invites organisations to look

Speakers:

Paula Trujillo

Director of Strategy,
Conexiones Creativas

Conrado Uribe Pereira

Contents Director,
Conexiones Creativas



ahead within the near-term period, which helps to identify immediate next steps for each operating area.

Through this tool, Conexiones Creativas has identified key components that make a cultural district successful, from the original vocation of the district to its international positioning. The flexibility of the tool, which accounts for different contexts, can be a helpful guide for any district to start or continue a path of strategic, intentional growth into the future.

[Click here](#) to download the Assessment and Decision Making Framework tool.

Key Takeaways:

- Governance can be complex for organisations and districts, especially when there are a lot of moving parts. Good governance means that everyone benefits, which means that spaces need to be created for decision-making with the right stakeholders if they don't already exist.
- In the case of Latin America, Conexiones Creativas explained that governance in districts typically starts top-down, but that in some communities, it starts with community leaders themselves. In all cases, governance models should be evaluated periodically.
- Routine assessment and evaluation is key for both emerging and established districts. Not only does it help you make sustainable and consistent progress across key areas, but it also helps you keep track of the ways in which you have grown, which is appealing to funders.



DAY 1 & DAY 2: INDOOR WORKSHOP

NIMBLE STRUCTURES, GLOBAL IMPACT: HARBOURFRONT CENTRE'S THE DISTRICT PROJECT



Moderators:

Hilary Knight

Senior Consultant, AEA Consulting

Tim Robertson

Chief Digital Officer, Harbourfront Centre

This workshop examined potential paths for Harbourfront Centre's The District, a new digital initiative that seeks to explore what a cultural district without borders might incorporate. This includes aspects of an institutional incubator, artist accelerator, and community builder, all within a digitally-led context. The workshop discussed potential forms of governance that would reflect the collaborative nature of the initiative. It emphasised the fact that there are ways to leverage digital tools in such a way as to benefit both cultural creatives and the institutions that showcase them.

Tim Robertson from Toronto's Harbourfront Centre and moderator Hilary Knight then framed a series of questions for the group. Discussion emerged around four themes:

- **Developing a shared vision and understanding is critical to support collaboration**, especially where funding is at stake. Leadership needs to define success both from a mission and a commercial perspective. There is a need to create metrics or similar measurable outcomes that will demonstrate when this success occurs. When a vision changes (or needs to change), leaders then need to think about who or what provides continuity for participants. Pathways to stronger links among partners and participants should be explored. In-person events can be particularly helpful in allowing people to connect and understand each other.

- **Appropriate structures to manage innovation can vary.** Innovation works within single organisations and across partnerships of sometimes loosely affiliated entities. In some ways, The District functioned as a start-up, with the need for agility and speed; in other ways, it existed within a highly institutional context, with the need for stability and structure. As a result, parts have been managed with flat structures and flexible roles while others had more layered decision-making. The importance of clarifying the plan and runway to execution was emphasised to enable team members to focus on delivery. Accountability is critical: to project teams, partners, users and other beneficiaries.
- **There may be opportunities (or a need) to evolve the legal structure of an entity.** This can allow for support for innovation within a dedicated team while embedding each product/opportunity in its own legal structure so that it can be easily scaled up or shut down. Discussion also highlighted the value of dedicated commercial entities for not-for-profit organisations, and the entrepreneurial focus this might enable.
- **Ongoing learning is part of the benefit delivered.** The journey is important for cultural organisations too, not just the product. Looking at what other organisations have learned is valuable when developing new initiatives or products.



SOCIAL EVENTS & TOURS

There were a variety of events and tours for members and guests to develop their understanding of Athens and deepen the connection to place through cultural experience. From learning about Greece's rich heritage of wine production through a wine tasting experience, to kayaking the canal, or taking a tour of the SNFCC, attendees were able to take the time to connect to their new networks in alternative contexts. There were also optional tours of The Ellinikon, The National Museum of Contemporary Art and The National Gallery of Greece. The grand finale was an exclusive showcase by The Greek National Opera Ballet, held under a dome in Stavros Niarchos Park, followed by a closing cocktail. This performance was breathtaking, uniting the convening members together in an unforgettable moment.





CLOSING & 2025 CONVENING

Adrian Ellis, Chair, GCDN and Director, AEA Consulting, and Gregorio Lucena Scarpella, Director, GCDN conveyed their thanks on behalf of the AEA and GCDN team to everyone who participated, and to our hosts at the SNFCC.

The 10th GCDN convening ended with the exciting announcement that the next convening will be held at the Los Angeles Music Center in 2025 (May 18-21).



ABOUT



ABOUT GCDN

The Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN) is committed to improving the quality of urban life through the contribution of the arts, culture, and creative industries.

Initiated in 2013 by AEA Consulting, GCDN brings together policymakers, planners, and executives from widely diverse international contexts, all working at the intersection of culture and sustainable urban development through convenings, research and collaboration.

By fostering knowledge-sharing among those responsible for planning and managing creative and cultural districts, quarters, precincts, and clusters, GCDN stimulates the promotion of urban development with culture at its core across four fundamental areas: operational realities, the environment, society, and the economy.

www.gcdn.net

ABOUT AEA CONSULTING



AEA Consulting is a global firm setting the standard in strategy and planning for the cultural and creative industries. Since 1991, AEA has successfully delivered more than 1,200 assignments in 42 countries, helping clients around the world plan and realize vital and sustainable cultural projects.

With offices in New York and London, AEA offers a talented, multidisciplinary team of professionals with proven practical experience who deliver personalized solutions to organizations in the arts, cultural, creative and public sectors.

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