

Multi-cultural Cities:

Identifying State-holders, policies and
modus operandi

G R E E C E N E T W O R K

Inspiring **Knowledge** Driving **Action** Uniting **Cultures**

Executive Summary



In the framework of the fellowship at the Thomas Mann House in Los Angeles we focused on „Community Organizing“, on meaningful interactions between public administration and civil society and how to include also silent groups of society. We were interested in finding out what civil society needs as support from public administration in order to contribute to improving political representation and strengthening trust in political institutions, thus fostering social cohesion.

We met a variety of activists, social workers, and community organizers to talk about their practices and experiences in the City of Los Angeles. From infrastructural challenges to problems with racism, housing, gang criminality and poverty: How can local civic engagement strengthen trust, help individuals and repair urban infrastructures? Together with our guests, we explored how collaborative approaches on the local level can effect communities.

We were especially interested in one topic that is a challenge for many organisations and institutions working in the cultural and non-formal education sector:

How to avoid preaching only to the choir, how to avoid discussing the socially only topics with those who are already convinced? How to include different audiences, how to reach the so called „hard to reach“?

Community organizers are specialised in getting in touch with people, listening to their needs and either try to help on an individual level or advocating for their communities at the city council for example.

Introduction

Based on the results of our interviews:

– Approaches for organisations and institutions who want to develop their audience in a way that they reach out of their bubbles:

To reach out to those who usually don't feel invited, the so-called hard to reach: **Personal Encounters** seem to be key. **Knocking on doors and having one-on-one discussions**

Particularly in diverse communities, storytelling and listening to each other's stories is often underestimated.

Proximity and reliability

One of the key learnings is that credibility is crucial for every successful Activity. As you need to be "on the spot", you need to be reliable and you need to be there for long time.

Trust as a two way street:

The overall aim is to build sustainable trustful relationships – in both directions. Trustful funding mechanisms: one community center trusted their partner organization in a way that they provided them with a certain budget and then leaving it to the organization to create something that fits their needs. They even left their key to them so that they could prepare the cultural space in the way they needed.

It's also about **ownership**, being involved in activities from the very beginning,

in the entire circle of co-creating processes. Not being invited only as an audience, but as active creators makes a huge difference.

Needs-oriented approach

Listen to your target group to clearly define their needs. Involve your target group from the very beginning. Small, local, civil society actors on the grassroots level can directly refer the fears, worries and expectations of the local population.

Peers as mediators, diverse teams

Peers of the target group can as members of the team also serve as intermediaries and bridge builders, particularly when it comes to communication, the choice of media to reach out and choice of which language to address your target group in.

Go to where your audience is

Lower the barriers by planning activities in places that are familiar to the participants you want to reach, since space and mobility play an important role. This might mean organising exhibitions in public places or debates in cafés, developing theatre plays with prisoners, or planning entire programmes in rural areas.

Active audience participation:

involve your target group as active protagonists, not as silent audience. It is important for the initiators of participatory programmes to reflect on their roles, especially concerning the degree of the content's openness and accessibility, the approaches adopted, and the hierarchy of any decisionmaking processes. If the project's initiators see their role merely as facilitators, their task can be to provide space and bring people together and support. This definition of roles enables the target group to operate as active participants and protagonists of the project.

See also: Swenja Zaremba: How to Avoid Preaching Exclusively to the Choir: Extending the Scope of Civil Society Involvement in Cultural Relations

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Aida Ridanovic

From Coexistence to Co-Ownership

Good afternoon, and thank you.

It's a privilege to speak here in Tirana, a city layered with stories of coexistence and resilience, on a topic that feels both timely and urgent.

As someone who grew up in Sarajevo, spent two decades working across the US, the Middle East, and the EU, and now leads Solidarna Foundation in Croatia, I want to speak from both personal experience and our work on the ground about what it takes to build cities where diversity is not just present, but protected, engaged, and made meaningful.

Cities reflect us, at our best, and at our most fractured.

Our cities today are spaces of possibility, but also of fragmentation. Diversity is no longer an exception; it is the default. Yet many cities are still governed and imagined through outdated assumptions: that homogeneity is stability, that cultural expression is decoration, or that inclusion happens through goodwill alone.

In Croatia, we often talk about cities as heritage sites, but we rarely discuss who is shaping that heritage today, or who is left out of the public square.

At Solidarna, we work with people who are systematically excluded, Roma communities, women escaping violence, youth without access to decision-making, and yet, they are the ones holding up the city's social infrastructure. If we want to talk about the intercultural city, we have to start by asking: whose city is it?

Stakeholders who don't share the same language, literally and figuratively

One of the central challenges in building inclusive cities is the mismatch of tempos, priorities, and cultures among stakeholders:

- Civil society is often brought in too late, asked to validate what's already been decided.
- Academia produces vital insight but often speaks in closed circles.
- Local authorities work under real constraints but rarely build participatory mechanisms.
- And the private sector, increasingly interested in "social impact", still struggles to engage beyond sponsorships or visibility.

In our experience, the gaps between these actors are not just institutional, they are emotional. There is mistrust. There is fatigue. There is a lack of shared vocabulary.

Crisis as catalyst, lessons from the Banovina earthquake

Let me offer an example that illustrates both the risks and the potential.

When the 2020 Banovina earthquake devastated parts of central Croatia, the official response was delayed, fragmented, and, for many, alienating. In that vacuum, civil society became the connective tissue.

At Solidarna, we mobilized a nationwide relief effort, funded by citizens and the diaspora, within days. We partnered with local activists, social workers, and architects to assess needs and deliver support directly: shelter, aid, psychosocial help.

But this isn't just a story of speed or efficiency. It's a story of legitimacy.

People trusted us because we listened first. We didn't arrive with a program. We arrived with presence.

And what we learned is that crisis reveals what already exists beneath the surface: whether stakeholders know how to work together, whether they trust each other, and whether the social fabric of the city is strong enough to stretch, not snap, under pressure.

From token inclusion to shared ownership

Often, what gets labeled as "multicultural" in city planning ends up being symbolic, food festivals, flag days, slogans. Inclusion becomes performance.

But if we are serious about intercultural cities, we need to move toward co-ownership.

This means:

- Residents, especially those most affected, have a real say in shaping policies and public spaces.
- Civil society is not a subcontractor, but a co-designer.
- Power is shared, not delegated.

At Solidarna, we aim to center the lived experience of survivors, particularly women escaping violence, by responding directly to their needs through flexible and dignified support. It's not just about delivering services, but about challenging who holds power in defining support.

What can be done, practically and politically

From our work and watching cities across the region I want to offer five modest, concrete ideas:

Create structured co-creation platforms grounded in real projects

Why it matters:

Dialogue is important, but without shared action, it often ends in good intentions. Co-creation platforms are collaborative spaces where CSOs, municipalities, youth, and businesses work together on tangible challenges, from urban planning to social services or climate initiatives.

What it looks like:

Jointly designed and implemented projects with clear responsibilities, shared resources, and a commitment to learning together, not just consulting one another. Example: During the Banovina earthquake, Solidarna didn't just coordinate aid, we co-created solutions with local actors across sectors.

Institutionalize city-level solidarity pacts, with inclusion benchmarks and regular reporting

Why it matters:

Commitments to inclusion often remain vague or voluntary. A solidarity pact formalizes those commitments, setting clear goals, timelines, and indicators for inclusive policies and practices.

What it looks like:

An agreement co-signed by local stakeholders (e.g. government, civil society, business) that includes measurable targets, such as increasing representation of minority communities in decision-making bodies, or ensuring access to housing and cultural services. Progress is tracked and made public.

Invest in boundary-crossers, people and organizations that bridge institutions and communities

Why it matters:

Most sectors still operate in silos. Boundary-crossers are the translators and connectors, they build trust, align priorities, and hold the knowledge of how systems can work together.

What it looks like:

Hiring or supporting individuals who can move between city administration and grassroots communities, or between academia and activism. These people often come from hybrid careers and are vital for ensuring collaboration is not just top-down.

Make cultural infrastructure inclusive, not just museums and theaters, but community spaces for expression, learning, and dialogue

Why it matters:

Culture isn't only what hangs on museum walls, it's how people live, gather, and express themselves. But many marginalized groups lack access to the spaces where this happens.

What it looks like:

Investing in neighborhood cultural centers, libraries, and public spaces that reflect local identity, are accessible to all, and invite co-programming from communities, especially youth, migrants, and underrepresented voices.

Support youth advisory councils with real influence, not as optics, but as pathways to policy co-ownership

Why it matters:

Young people are often engaged symbolically, not structurally. Real participation means they shape the agenda, not just comment on it.

What it looks like:

Youth councils that are linked to municipal budgets or strategy processes, have clear mandates, and are supported to develop their own priorities. They must be non-partisan, transparent, and treated as equal contributors to policy

Final reflection, from network to action

Forums like this are invaluable but our cities need more than exchanges of good practice. They need alliances that outlast events. They need us, as stakeholders, to commit to a longer process of shared risk and shared reward.

And they need civil society not as a participant, but as a co-architect, especially in times of fracture, when legitimacy is not given, but earned.

Manal Benani

1. Redefine "Public Space" as a Negotiation Zone:

"Barcelona's Superblocks aren't just traffic projects – they force diverse communities (like El Raval's residents) to renegotiate shared ground daily. How do we design public spaces not just for 'coexistence,' but for active, sometimes uncomfortable, intercultural negotiation – ensuring no single group dominates?"
Mandate Intercultural Impact Assessments for all major urban developments.

2. Treat Intercultural Mediation as Critical Urban Infrastructure:

"Marseille's 'urban mediators' (often from migrant backgrounds) bridge gaps between marginalized communities and institutions like schools or police. This isn't soft social work – it's essential civic plumbing for trust and equity. How can Mediterranean cities formally fund and integrate these roles into core services?"
Embed & fund trained Intercultural Mediators in public services (health, schools, housing).

3. Leverage Conflict for Innovation, Not Just Harmony:

"Avoiding tension breeds superficial peace. Look at Naples' 'Scugnizzo Liberato' – a squatted school turned community hub where migrants and locals clash and co-create solutions via mutual aid. Can we design safe conflict transformation mechanisms (e.g., citizen juries on mosque placements in Athens) to turn friction into progress?"
Establish city-funded Dialogue Labs with trained facilitators for contentious issues.

4. Challenge "Fortress Europe" vs. Port City Identity:

"Cities like Genoa and Marseille built their DNA as Mediterranean gateways. Yet today, they enforce exclusionary EU border policies. Can a city genuinely be 'cosmopolitan' while frontline walls go up? What concrete agency do mayors have to uphold port identities against national migration regimes?"
Advocate for city-level asylum processing & integration support networks.

5. Secure Spaces for Cultural Survival Against Gentrification:

"When Palermo's historic markets or Tunis' medinas face tourist-driven gentrification, 'culture' becomes a commodity displacing communities. Community Land Trusts can give residents collective ownership, ensuring affordability and authentic cultural continuity. Who gets to define – and profit from – a city's 'multicultural' brand?"
Establish publicly-backed Community Land Trusts for culturally vital neighborhoods.

6. Demand More Than "Tolerance" – Build Solidarity Systems:

"Mediterranean history (Convivencia, Ottoman Millet) shows 'cohesion' is a myth. 'Tolerance' is passive – Naples' solidarity kitchens or Beirut's grassroots reconstruction demand active co-creation. How do we shift from managing diversity to harnessing difference as urban fuel? What policies reward solidarity, not just service delivery?"
Fund hyper-local solidarity networks (e.g., skill-shares, communal kitchens) with micro-grants.

The "city" as the ultimate, autonomous and coherent unit, has been the key notion and concern of this activity. It is an entity and a space occupied by a multi facet society, one with its own unique features and culture, yet also a dynamic entity which is constantly evolving and therefore in need to adopt to the changing reality, and which is increasingly multi-cultural in nature. Meanwhile, "Intercultural cities" is perceived as the character that most cities will tend to evolve to, if they want to successfully deal with the challenges that their societies are facing.

Such paradigm, on the other hand, to function effectively, requires a somehow different approach and perception about the relevant stakeholders' role and performance, i.e. a collective approach, based on intercultural dialogue, where the key stake holders include civil society, academia, the entrepreneurial community, and of course the local authorities. This collective approach, irrespective of the contribution, the weight and inevitably the role of each of those stakeholders, does not only reflect the prerequisite of efficiency and effectiveness, but also sits on the democratic values of inclusion and that of shared responsibility of the society at large. Furthermore, such a partnership, secures the legitimacy and ownership of policies applied, provide a richness of approaches and innovative and good practices, and offers a coherent and comprehensive advocacy strength towards the central state authorities vis-a-vis their own agenda.

The managing team also formulated the topics of the interventions with a prime focus on

- The multi-cultural reality locally, the management by local authorities and the role of CSOs.
- The role of intercultural dialogue and cultural/historical heritage
- The state of the cooperation between CSOs & local authorities, between academia & CSOs, and between local authorities & academia (in relation to the forum's topics)
- Specific issues identified as priority (inclusion, SDGs, public spaces, entrepreneurship)
- Voluntarism & CSOs: the operational framework in Greece
- Youth: roles, challenges & policies

Recommendations & Future Actions

Recommendations & future actions The key findings and relevant inputs that were outlined in the forum (from the interventions, the workshops and the participants inputs) included:

- The importance of intercultural education in the function for intercultural dialogue, for a sustainable future and development, and therefore for relevant capacity, yet also to work towards advocating to be included in the formal education curriculum. • Accordingly, there is a need for capacity building in terms of the CSOs and other organisations' skills in advocacy.
- Encourage and support, after mapping existing good practices, the creation of Local Youth Councils (ideally to be affiliated to the relevant municipalities), as a hub of future active citizens, trained in a democratic and inclusive ethos. Yet, it is essential to safeguard its non-partisan character and monitor its functionality. • It is imperative to develop and cultivate the self-awareness of the citizens, in relation to their responsibilities and duties as such, hence their active participation in the public life of their locality. • The positive role of culture and of tourism (as cultural tourism) and its contribution to highlight and promote a cosmopolitan and extroverted city profile, hence, a need to 'understand' the notion of culture in a wider spirit to incorporate this strategy.
- The importance of developing a collective paradigm of cooperation of the key stakeholders, but also of synergies among citizens and civic organisations, where the international and European networks and links are vital added value. • The importance of leadership, especially that of local authorities, which inevitably holds a leading role in the cities' governance.
- The lack of confidence and trust between the stakeholders and therefore the need for extensive, structured dialogue and paradigm shift, to realise the potential and role of each and establish a functional modus operandi. • The initiative can (or should) come from CSOs that have the potentials to lead such a dialogue, a consortium of such CSOs, one that collectively has the credentials, the skills and the experience of working with the other stakeholders to develop a sustainable and effective dialogue. Accordingly, there is a need to collect, study and present similar examples. 3 • The state of CSOs nationally is pretty diverse (underdevelopment). In that respect, very often, in many regions, there is a lack of such 'organised collective activism and action', and in many cases, when there are certain associations (primarily) which are in operation (frequently of cultural heritage, women's local organisations etc.), they don't identify themselves as such, indicating either the lack of knowledge of the phenomenon or (rather rare) an ideological disposition to it - there is, in Greece, also a historical predominance of the political parties even in the social life (but also of the church) that competes with the role and space of CS and other forms of collectivities. In that respect, there is a need to campaign about the nature, the rational, and function of civil society, targeting those areas where there is a deficit of representation and understanding of this notion.

- There is no precedence in terms cooperation and collective actions that brings together all of the four identified stakeholders, in contrast to the presence of pairs, although the CS and entrepreneurial cooperation also needs researching into its potentials and development of relevant paradigms. In that respect, there is a need to scan and identify case studies that fit in the particularities of each country (Greece here).
- Make use of the twining practice among municipalities to create international links and synergies in order to expand the capacity and knowledge.
- Enlarging the outreach of the network to academic institutions.
- The outputs of this forum are a starting point to reach out to the relevant stakeholders.
- Although the city focus identified four stakeholders, any relevant policy and strategy needs to take into account the 'state' (the central authorities) as a fifth pillar. The state is the one formulated the legal and administrative framework and therefore a similar link to its institutions is essential.
- The forum identified two important problems: mistrust and lack of confidence between (some of) the stakeholders, and, a different 'language' and 'culture' among some of the stakeholders. In that respect, dialogue is essential, yet to achieve that, there is also the need for certain skills to be developed (like debating ones).
- The guidelines for cooperation between the four (plus one) stakeholders, to move on have been established - and therefore a road map can soon lead our work in this 4 direction. To move one, there is a need for a group of CSOs who are willing to take part, hence formulating a thematic group, become focal points of communication with local authorities, especially as one of the mayors who participated heads the collective body of local authorities in Greece (the Central Union of Municipalities in Greece).
- For the cooperation among the stakeholders, a project-based approach is a starting point, as it will allow for them to work together on a concrete idea and framework, therefore, gradually understanding each other better and hopefully building trust.
- The UN 17 Sustainable goals will dominate the discourse and policies nationally and globally, and in that respect, they can be the foundation for the cooperation between the stakeholders (in pairs and collectively), starting from the relevant to the cities' themes and moving on to the other ones.
- In between, there is a need for the members to create links with their respective local authorities and communicate the results of this forum, and advocate for a functional relationship.
- One of the key points would be to work on the key narrative that should guide the collective work of this partnership, a bottom-to-top ideally formulated. In terms of the Network and its function and actions
- The hybrid is here to stay as a tool, yet we need to further improve our knowledge of how to make the best of it. In that respect
 - o virtual meetings prior to physical events can add value and save time, by getting to know each other.
 - o The venues of the relevant activities should have the capacity for virtual participation, which will enlarge the number of participants and of the speakers
 - o Introduce certain virtual relevant applications that would allow for maximising the benefits, like for networking during coffee breaks etc.
 - o However, this cannot replace physical meetings, as there is a limit to their usefulness, while personal face-to-face contacts are essential.
- There is a certain discrepancy between the academic, CSOs and local authorities' 'language' and culture (time discipline, substance and focus of interventions, etc.) used in such activities and therefore there is a need for more extensive guidance and guidelines to maximize inputs and effectiveness, especially with time limitation of such activities which in the hybrid formats are exacerbated.

- Hosting the meetings in different places and regions is an added value and allows for enlarging the outreach of the network, and it is an additional stimulus for participation in the actions.
- Take advantage of the newcomers in the network by giving them active roles
- Regular activities, well spread within the year create a momentum to the network's coherence and the members' participation and renewed interest
- The forum identified the need for investing in capacity building in cultural management, in digital skills.
- Thematic (varied) focus, also creates space for discourse, proved an asset and desirable by the members while also allows for an active interest of academia and other stakeholders, and this is an element, in addition to geographic outreach to different places, that should feed into the organisation of the annual meetings.
- The cultural element and getting deep into locality are desirable and essential, and in should be part of the curriculum of any activity, planned creatively in order to remain within the time framework allocated for the activities and serving the aim and target of those activities.

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The FORUM's Inputs In the opening remarks, the President of the Hellenic Foundation for Culture, Nikos Koukis, after welcoming the participants, stressed the role of culture as a bridge, and the role of cultural institutions as a vital tool and space for such an intercultural dialogue to flourish. The cities, are dynamic entities that are permanently going through a process of change and adaptation, where migration is a major challenge, an element of this change to deal with, yet also an opportunity to explore. And in that respect, he offered an ideational parameter by stressing the importance of values as a torch for applying policies, making a reference to the "Western Rule", yet, one that encompasses the universal values of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and tolerance. The coordinators of the Greek National Network, (Vallianatos & Paraschou) made a brief presentation of the Anna Lindh Foundation and its Greek Network, emphasizing the fundamental role of CSOs and intercultural dialogue in its function and operation, stressing the importance of youth, women and immigrants as the key groups, but also the vital partnership with local authorities, media and academia, the focus of networking and synergies, and the function for the Foundation as space for creative dialogue, of knowledge sharing, capacity building offers. With regard to the cities, they emphasized their function as a space for multi-cultural co-existence and intercultural dialogue, yet also as a hub for creative and innovative policies and activities. The Interventions The Local Authorities Perspective Georgos Lolis, stressed the importance of highlighting the socio-political dimensions and the cultural richness of the locality, the energy and environmental challenges that the cities are facing, the need for maximizing and utilizing the existing financial tools and the role of the cities' diplomacy in building bonds. Spyros Pengas, stressed the importance of continuity in the applied policies and of exchanges and relations

between cities globally (cities diplomacy), hence, an active presence in the globe. Based on the experience of Thessaloniki, he illustrated how investing in the multi-cultural heritage of the city had a very positive effect on the cities' development but also in positively affecting and shaping the dominant perception and mind set of the people during the refugee influx, by having created an inclusive and progressive narrative shared by the majority of the stakeholders (who also viewed it as positive to their prosperity).

This policy was the result of an inspired leadership with a vision who gave space and opportunities to youngsters and new ideas, of planning, of persistence and patience, of synergies and cooperation with CSOs. Michalis Tremopoulos, stressed the dire consequences that Greece had to face from facing simultaneously the combine effects of a climate, economic, health and now energy crisis and the need to revisit and revise the paradigm followed, with a renewed emphasis on culture and creativity. Konstandinos Tzoumis, stressed their priority (as a municipality) to digitalise their operation, and to improve their environmental footprint, how the pandemic contributed to further developing their social outlook by upgrading relevant social services and structures, including creative hubs, virtual health services (telemedicine), their participation in programs related to refugees, but also their synergies with the University of the Peloponnese, also a participant of the Clever Cities program. Dimitris Papastergiou, highlighted the importance, and therefore his priority, to regain the trust of the citizens, a rationale that guided his priorities which included the improvement of the people local well-being, encouraging the citizens' participation in public life, mentioning that the quality of the people / citizens and their active role, is not a threat for the local authorities' administration, on the contrary, it improves the quality of governance, also praising vital the role of social networks as providers of important social services and of self-realisation. Finally, he also stressed the need to deal with the energy challenges by creating relevant communities. The entrepreneurial Perspective Sergios Aivatzis', intervention focused on the contribution of cultural institutions and venues to financial and sustainable development in touristic regions, like museums, festivals, historical sights and monuments, galleries and cultural laboratories, etc. 2 Especially with regards to museums, he highlighted their intercultural functionality where diverse groups meet, their educational activities and in general a modern perspective about their role and approach, with technological breakthroughs contributing immensely to their potentials. Furthermore, those institutions are shaped but also promote the local perceptions and culture, to a diverse audience, hence, the importance to existing cultural capital. Furthermore, cultural tourism, as a practice by entrepreneurs and individuals, also makes them agents of their culture, hence, adding an element of pride. Accordingly, there is a growing role for the gastronomic element, as a pillar of cultural heritage and tourism. The Civil Society Perspective Nikolaos Chadzitriton, stressed the importance yet also the dire reality of including civil society in the decision-making process, as an institution that represents all sectors of society enjoying a large and deep outreach. He offered an outline of the existing institutions at a local governance level, including the operation of some informal ones, and the citizens' initiatives. Some of the key essential notions mentioned were sustainable development (economic and cultural), decentralization of funds & political power (as an example of good city management), dominant culture and minority ones, cultural heritage and culture as a social glow and a way of thinking,

and the importance of intercultural dialogue as a result of the multi-cultural (in different respects) fabric of contemporary cities. Aspasia Protoogerou, having worked on the issue, outlined the functionality and importance of intercultural education of citizens, offering a hand-on experience of applying the relevant Anna Lindh tool (the intercultural citizenship education handbook), and how it can be used and applied in diverse environment and audience – in that respect, the ‘other’ can be identified in different terms (linguistic, cultural, ethnic, financial). In that respect, this tool can be useful in civic education and in intercultural education needs, both in formal and informal education approaches. Ioakim Delimitrou, offered an intriguing insight into the operation of the Youth Council he is a member of (linked to a smaller municipality), which is based on the model of sociocracy, a non-partisan society, which he described as a ‘laboratory of democracy’, as it is based on extensive consultation and collective decision making, on equal roles and opportunities for all members, and respect for the minority opinion and its right to be on the table. His final remark was that the future is the youth and therefore the need for such institutions to be introduced all over the local authorities’ map. Argiro Skitsa, as the coordinator of the informal network of CSOs of Thessaoniki, outlined the operation merits yet also difficulties of such a cooperative entity, stressing the importance of continuous education and training, and the importance to avoid postponing to deal with pressing matters and challenges. Lefteris Papagianakis, brought into the discussion some of the contemporary challenges that the cities tend to face, stressing that the urban format is growing as the dominant one, i.e. demographical one, the results of extensive tourism, urbanization, housing problem, cultural disintegration and others, also mentioning that centralised state as a format of governance is dis-functional. Accordingly, he offered the paradigm of clever cities (eg from the UK, Spain and Italy), as good examples and of dealing with such challenges. Georgos Tsitiridis, gave his personal journey into activism, outlining the presence of different paths and stimuli to becoming an active citizen, yet also the opportunity for a professional occupation via this. Then, he moved on outline the difficulties and perspectives of dealing with a marginalized group (in this case the Roma), and the importance to understand both size of any equation, see things from both perspectives, if the aim is to reach viable and function solution to the problems. The Academia Perspective Dr. Ronald Meinardus, focused on the merits and function of the twining of cities, calling it as the ‘biggest peace movement in the world’, as a bridge offering understanding between peoples and cultures, as long as it is practiced properly, where the citizens and CSOs have a vital role to play – yet also, inevitable a foreign policy tool in the hands of authorities. For such initiatives to perform properly, there is a need for a bottom-to-top approach, of a democratic culture to prevail, and for private, or non state, initiatives to take the lead. In a nutshell, it is the citizens and peoples’ societies who are in the heart of those initiatives. Dr. Sotiris Petropoulos, highlighted that the pandemic, but also the financial crisis that preceded, illustrated how local authorities and CSOs can and should work together and have a very positive impact in dealing with urgent challenges and needs. Such a process was not self-evident, as each side functioned under a different ‘culture’, whereas the achievement of cooperation between two stakeholder, inevitably, leads to an enlargement of the ‘partnership’, to include a third one, and so forth. Yet, he did recognise that the academic community tends to be more isolated, whereas there is a need for structures and process for a sincere dialogue and cooperation – in which case, he claimed that the local authorities have

the greatest responsibility for such initiatives. In terms of problems and obstacles, he identified the differing legal structures of each, the lack of coordination between the different levels of governance (state vs municipalities) and in between the local authorities, and the lack of trust.

Finally, he did add that such a desired partnership is not that wide, yet, there are case studies to explore, adding the added value of culture and mind-set of social entrepreneurship. Elena Sioni, an architect by profession, with a point of reference to the Ioannina city's lake, outlined the human factor as an important parameter, along the environmental ones, in shaping and utilizing the potential of such an asset in a sustainable way, connecting it to the urban space of the city.

In that respect, she presented a relevant model, one that was developed by experts yet, with the contribution of other stake holders (citizens and relevant groups and associations), hence, describing an inclusive and cooperative model and its benefits.



PO. Box 732 El Mansheya, 21111,
Alexandria, Egypt

<https://alf.website/en/>

info@alfsecretariat.org



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