

METROS

Strengthening Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in Southern European Metro Regions



IMPACT REPORT 2014-2016

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The German Marshall Fund
of the United States

STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Urban and Regional Policy Program (URP) of The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF), with the support of the Compagnia di San Paolo launched a peer-to-peer learning program on regional economic development focused on network development and cooperation for Southern European metropolitan areas. The METROS network included the cities of Bilbao (Spain), Genova (Italy), Torino (Italy), and Thessaloniki (Greece).¹

The METROS cities collectively determined to focus their peer learning efforts on strengthening their local entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystems in an effort to generate new economic activity and provide opportunities for their residents in a context still marked by severe economic and fiscal constraints. Over the course of the two years the participants were convened in six workshops, engaging them in

an individual and collective learning experience with inputs and feedback from their Southern European peers, external experts, and GMF staff.

The city delegations used the network and learning experience to infuse a variety of local initiatives they are working on in their own metropolitan regions with insights, strategies, and tools such as open engagement and co-creation processes, asset mapping, stakeholder analysis, consensus and coalition building, strength-based strategies and multilevel and regional coordination mechanisms. Ultimately, over the course of the project the participants succeeded in creating a constructive cross-sector peer-to-peer learning network, which supported the development, design, and implementation of specific local policies and projects in each of the four cities involved.

¹ For purposes of this report the terms “Torino” and “Genova” will be used in place of the standard English “Turin” and “Genoa”.



ABOUT THE ORGANIZER



The German Marshall Fund of the United States

The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) strengthens transatlantic cooperation on regional, national, and global challenges and opportunities in the spirit of the Marshall Plan. GMF does this by supporting individuals and institutions working in the transatlantic sphere, by convening leaders and members of the policy and business communities, by contributing research and analysis on transatlantic topics, and by providing exchange opportunities to foster renewed commitment to the transatlantic relationship.

In addition to its headquarters in Washington, DC, GMF has offices in Berlin, Paris, Brussels, Belgrade, Ankara, Bucharest, and Warsaw. GMF also has smaller representations in Bratislava, Torino, Bilbao, and Stockholm.

GMF Urban and Regional Policy Program

GMF's Urban and Regional Policy Program (URP) supports leaders, policymakers, and practitioners in the United States and Europe by facilitating the transatlantic exchange of knowledge for building inclusive, sustainable, and globally engaged cities.

URP works in selected cities in the United States and Europe that share a set of common challenges and desire to explore solutions through transatlantic exchange. URP actively stewards transatlantic initiatives that explore key issues through high impact gatherings, peer exchanges, and applied research. URP has an extensive and successful history of working cooperatively with public, private, and NGO leaders to apply these insights to improve local and regional policies and programs. In addition to supporting policy innovation, URP activities also support individual participants in expanding their transatlantic network, growing their policy expertise, and developing their leadership skills.

PARTNERS

METROS was made possible thanks to our partners:



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Introduction and Background

Nearly a decade after the onset of the global recession, the economies of Southern Europe still battle high levels of unemployment, public debt, underfunded public services, and in Greece's case, the looming fear of default on loans.¹ The major Eurozone countries of Southern Europe continue to face important socioeconomic challenges and widespread public discontent. The European Union has thus far also been unable to respond in a way that would support these economies returning to sustainable levels of growth and employment. However, regardless of European and national policies regarding major macroeconomic questions like public debt or further integration in banking and fiscal policies, local and regional governments have had to continue to take action on the ground to alleviate the compounding socioeconomic challenges of their citizens.

The Urban and Regional Policy Program (URP) of The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) with the support of the Compagnia di San Paolo launched a peer-to-peer learning program on regional economic development focused on network development and cooperation for Southern European metropolitan areas. The METROS network included the cities of Bilbao (Spain), Genova (Italy), Torino (Italy), and Thessaloniki (Greece).

These cities were engaged for a period of two years through a series of peer workshops, featuring input and coaching from U.S. and European experts, as well as virtual engagement to check in and support the

city delegations in their projects between workshops. Through this network local level policymakers and stakeholders shared and learned from each other on strategies to bolster their economies at the metropolitan level. All of these cities shared a strong commitment to create and develop robust economic ecosystems regardless of the wider context of national economic stagnation.

The initial convening of the METROS city delegations sought to build trust among the network and engaged participants on the broader approaches and issues related to regional economic development. After an initial exploration of a series of approaches to metropolitan economic development, in a structured discussion among participants, experts, and GMF, the topics of entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems emerged and were designated by the participants as priorities for the METROS program of peer learning.

These represented thematic areas of strategic interest for the cities, as well as areas for which such a network for learning and peer support would have the most added value, especially since these issues had not been deliberately explored by these cities as drivers of economic development until this point. Moreover, these respond directly to one of the paramount concerns of southern European cities — the loss of human capital. While the economic situation in Southern Europe has been greatly weakened over an extended period of time, its institutions have continued to train and educate highly-skilled and

¹ For the purposes of this report, Italy, Spain, Greece, and Portugal will be referred to as southern Europe.

creative workers. This has resulted in a systemic leaking of invaluable human capital to cities such as London, Amsterdam, and Berlin, where it is not only easier to find regular employment, but also from where they are better able to create their own businesses and have access to capital and markets. This can be seen by the inflow of workers from Spain, Italy and Greece into Germany, the Eurozone's largest economy, which increased by an average of 38% in the year 2012 alone.²

The alarmingly high levels of unemployment and especially youth unemployment in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, combined with the loss of human capital — often of the most highly skilled and highly trained youth — greatly undermine long-term economic potential. These factors are even more acute in non-capital cities, with lower levels of public employment and government institutions to buffer the fragile economic situation.

METROS cities clearly understood that in order to retain their human capital, they would have to create opportunities not just for professional employment, but to develop their innovative ideas and entrepreneurial competencies. This strategy would need to be based on the local assets and institutions of the metropolitan area and driven by the needs of the entrepreneurs — not by politics or the policymakers' preconceptions about the needs of entrepreneurs. Creating partnerships, connections, and leveraging synergies at a local level were understood by the METROS delegations as achievable and necessary opportunities to be explored in order to create more resilient and innovative economies connected to and anchored by local assets and institutions.

The METROS program brought together a unique network of Southern European cities working hard to strengthen and grow their economies by exploring previously new approaches and policies in fomenting innovation and entrepreneurship in their metropolitan ecosystems. Policymakers from all over the globe want more and better innovation and entrepreneurship, and there have been efforts in many cities and regions

to create the next “silicon valley.” While this model may be inspiring, public officials, academics, and even entrepreneurs themselves understand the importance of developing local and regional economic ecosystems based on core attributes and competencies, rather than focus on importing models that are successful elsewhere but ultimately prove impossible to duplicate. The fundamental structure and approach of the METROS program and network was designed to avoid such attempts to duplicate best practice models by basing the engagement on peer learning, combined with impulses, coaching, and discussion by a diverse variety of experts. In this way the METROS city delegations were learning from the experiences of others in similar contexts, while receiving stimulating external input to help break barriers to innovative ideas.

² © OECD International Migration database. <http://stats.oecd.org/>.



METROS Objectives and Process

The **approach** adopted for the METROS program was one that was designed from the start to be participant driven, allowing city delegations to steer the network and workshops in the direction that would be most useful for their metropolitan economic development strategies. After jointly distilling the broader challenge and thematic priorities of the participants, GMF proceeded to design a program that would address these areas effectively.

The shared **challenge** that emerged after the first workshop with all city participants was that of policy makers with the intent to strengthen innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems but with few tools to effectively engage entrepreneurs, understand their needs, and co-create solutions that would effectuate their common goals.

In order to address this challenge, the METROS program set itself the **objectives** to:

- create a forum for constructive peer-to-peer learning between cross sector teams from four Southern European metropolitan regions;
- explore specific policies and tools that support metropolitan economic development and revitalization, specifically around innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems;

- introduce city teams to new collaborative and creative approaches to idea generation and problem solving; and
- establish a network that can support peer engagement outside of scheduled workshops.

Over the course of two years, the METROS program pursued its objectives and addressed the challenge articulated by the cities through a combination of purposeful program design and shared learning on new approaches and specific tools. Each city delegation interacted with their peers, external experts, and GMF staff for a total of six workshops that each formed a milestone marking a key step forward, supported by recurring virtual engagement in between convening sessions. The agenda of each workshop, including the tools learned and experts invited, were all purposefully and carefully designed to effectively support the progress of the city delegations in their more specific goals for their respective entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystems. Each of the workshops was supported by our local partners and participants and also featured site visits and interactions with local stakeholders, so that the METROS city delegations could get a first-hand impression of the initiatives and actors in the local ecosystems of their peers.

LOCAL PARTNERS

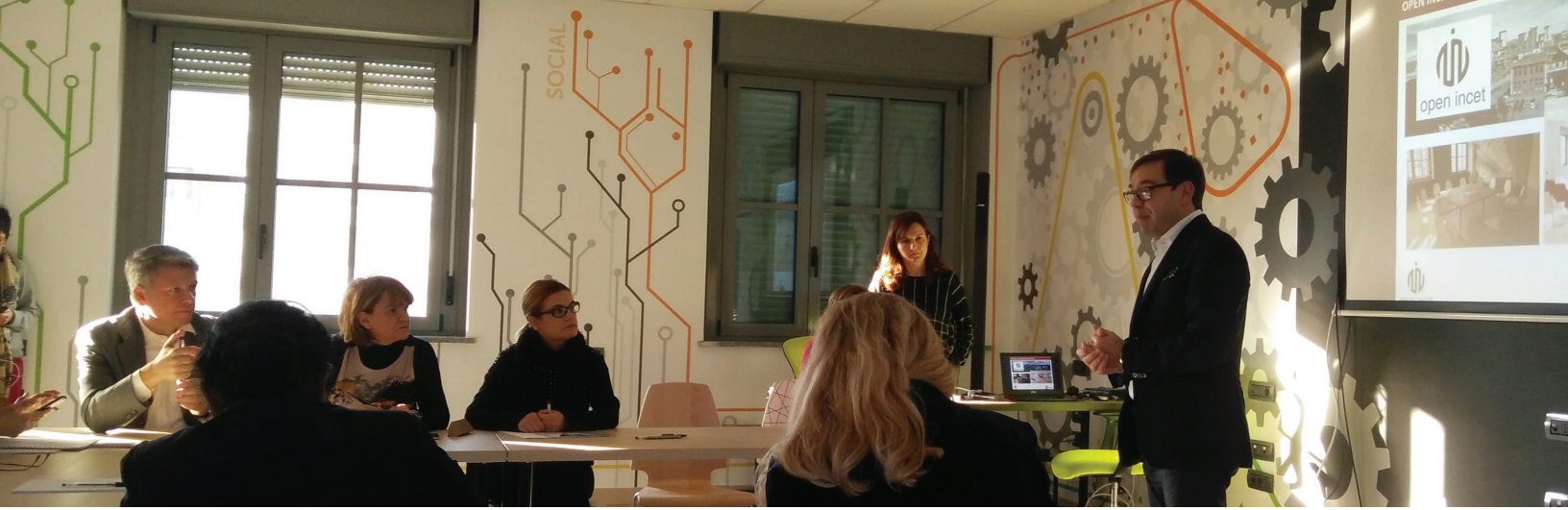


POLITECNICO DI TORINO



TIMELINE OF WORKSHOPS

Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Workshop 3	Workshop 4	Workshop 5	Workshop 6
November 2014 Torino, Italy	February 2015 Genova, Italy	May 2015 Washington, D.C., U.S.	November 2015 Thessaloniki, Greece	April 2016 Bilbao, Spain	November 2016 Torino, Italy
					



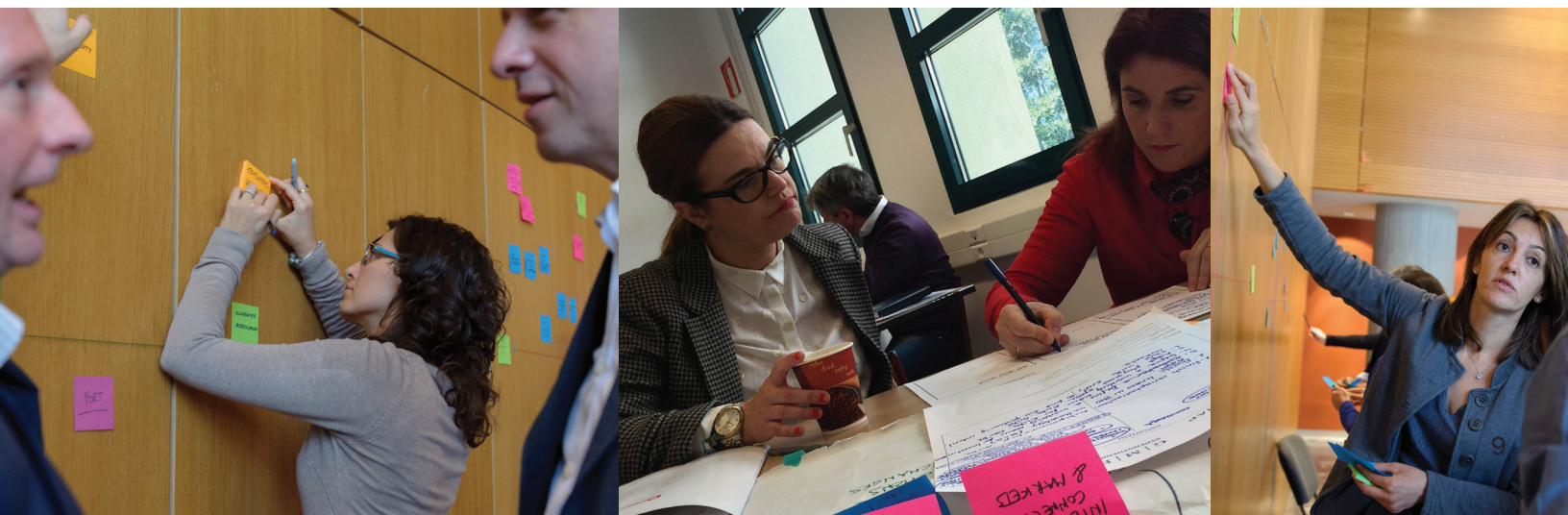
PROCESS

Peer-to-Peer Learning

A core component in the structure and design METROS program is the concept of peer-to-peer learning. While each of the workshops did bring in global experts to work with the cities, the actual design of the overall program and most of the workshop sessions were oriented for the participants to share, discuss, and learn together as well as from each other. This structure leveraged a balance

between the diversity of the participants, their cities, and their specific ecosystem goals, while having just enough similarity — particularly in the socioeconomic and political contexts — for rapidly constructive discussions. The emphasis on peer learning contributed to the workshops becoming a forum that was readily engaged and could embark on an enriching peer learning experience. Even the external

experts that demonstrated some tools and coached participants did so in a way that was interactive and made participants engage with each other in order to complete any exercises or reflections. By exchanging and discussing ideas, successes, and challenges of participants as a cross-sector and cross-city group, each participant gained deeper insight and knowledge useful in advancing their own projects locally.



Multilevel Contexts

The METROS program was designed taking in consideration the growing reality that many of the challenges at a local level are connected to and embedded in wider metropolitan, regional, national, and even global contexts. Therefore addressing these from a cross-sector, metropolitan, regional, and transatlantic perspective would be necessary to support the type of exchange and reflection that would ultimately support the economic transformation projects within their relevant scales for each of the participating cities. The multilevel and cross sector framework of the program was also key to furthering the understanding and engagement of the METROS cities with their own ecosystems. While the political boundaries and competences of the city administrations are always quite clearly defined, entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystems also exist and require multilevel and multi-stakeholder coordination and engagement. Creating a better environment for developing entrepreneurship and innovation on a local or metropolitan level will always be conditioned by the capacity and connections of this ecosystem to regional and global stakeholders and markets.

Design Thinking

From the onset GMF embedded design thinking methods into the design, structure, and content of METROS. Even before the workshop, this approach was considered fundamental to enable the process to be driven by the participants themselves, and moreover to ensure that the ideas and work of the city delegations maintain a human centered perspective and voice at the core. In first instance this allowed for a process that could fundamentally be shaped by the views and preferences of the participants. In part this allowed for a seamless and flexible focus on the elected themes of innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems.

In terms of the workshops it was also a way of leveraging the space for open ideation and creativity so that innovative thoughts and discussions could develop. The approach of design thinking provides many useful tools and exercises to be shared in workshops and for participants to employ in their own local professional contexts, especially given the particular challenge formulated by the city delegations. The challenge statement, designed to be difficult to understand and co-create with ecosystem actors and stakeholders, is one that is perfectly suited to be addressed by a design thinking approach.

Action Planning

At each workshop participants developed and refined problem statements, and 30-60-90 day action plans, outlining their activities aimed at fulfilling the objectives and addressing the problem statements. In the intervening check-in calls as well as the start of the next workshop, city delegations were asked to report on their successes and challenges, based on the commitments and action plans articulated in the previous workshops. The methods and approaches taken allowed for the participants to adapt and refine their commitments over time, encouraging them to set ambitious and feasible objectives for themselves and their teams. Throughout the program participants reiterated that this approach was an effective way of keeping track of progress and developments, while sufficiently pressuring the teams to fulfill their commitments at home in between workshops. Furthermore, this ensured that while the workshop sessions were not only informative and thought-provoking, but could lead to actual change and impact in their respective cities.

METROS Cities and Successes



CITY	METROPOLITAN POPULATION (2014) ³	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
BILBAO	1,013,805	The city of Bilbao has been a global example of successful post-industrial urban transformation. Its continued efforts in this direction currently include strategies to develop their entrepreneurial ecosystem and specific areas of economic specialization and industry clusters.
GENOVA	707,321	Over 20 years Genova transitioned from a city built on traditional industry to one with an important regional port and growing its tech industries. The UNESCO World Heritage designation in 2006 also gave tourism and cultural activities a critical boost in recent years.
THESSALONIKI	975,439	Greece's second largest city, particularly renowned for its universities, culture and important port, unfortunately saw its long-term goals temporarily put on hold given the fiscal conditions and macroeconomic context, which were more acute than any of the other METROS city. Nonetheless, Thessaloniki's ambition to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystems and innovation in strategic sectors was reinvigorated throughout the METROS process.
TORINO	1,774,507	Italy's industrial powerhouse and hub of the national automotive industry for most of the 20th century has a legacy of technological vocations — from advanced mechanical engineering to information technology. In recent times, Torino has been leveraging this legacy to become an emerging startup and innovation hub.

³ © OECD Metropolitan database. <http://stats.oecd.org/>.

Bilbao

DELEGATION, PARTNERS AND LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

The delegation from Bilbao participating in METROS was led by Bilbao International (Bilbao Ekintza), with the participation of Bilbao City Hall, the Orkestra Basque Institute of Competitiveness, the Provincial Government of Bizkaia, Bilbao Berrikuntza Faktoria (BBF), and IDOM.



KEY SECTORS FOR ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES

Urban solutions, advanced services, arts and culture, and local level entrepreneurship

METROPOLITAN ASPIRATIONS

- Position Bilbao as a dynamic and attractive mid-size magnet city on the global stage for talent and investment
- Develop a robust “Invest in Bilbao” strategy through multi-stakeholder engagement

ECOSYSTEM GOALS

- Create a concept for an entrepreneurship center to facilitate investo–entrepreneur relationships through co-creation, trust building, and knowledge sharing
- Developing the local innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem, complementing its high standard for quality of life.

Achievements and Impact

BIG BILBAO ENTREPRENEURSHIP CENTER



Throughout the METROS program the city of Bilbao worked on an entrepreneurship center to support entrepreneurs, startups, and small businesses. The center opened in March 2017 provides a space where entrepreneurs can receive information and guidance for any initiative generating economic activity and

employment. BIG Bilbao seeks to become the hub for entrepreneurship in the region and build on the longstanding efforts of the city to support the creation of new businesses. In METROS the Bilbao delegation explored strategies for stakeholder engagement in the design and planning of the center, thus ensuring that this would correspond with the needs and direction of their ecosystem, as well as for the service definition, communication strategy, and political engagement. The center counts on a broad range of stakeholder support and its partners include the three local universities (University of the Basque Country, Deusto University, and Mondragón-Bilbao Berrikuntza Faktoria) as well as the Chamber of Commerce, Elkargi, Microsoft, and HP.

IN FOCUS PROJECT

A cross-sector and multi-stakeholder working group was established to define the city’s strategic sectors and align these with those of the wider region in the framework of the In Focus network supported by the European Social Fund. This included a forward-looking perspective on the already ongoing cluster-based policies and talent attraction focus, while bolstering the startup, innovation, and entrepreneurial ecosystem.

INNOLAB AUZOFACTORY REKALDE

The InnoLab in Bilbao, located in the Auzo Factory of Rekalde, incentivizes the integration of new technologies in entrepreneurship. The center’s development and activities count on a wide range of cross-sector stakeholders and partners, and has already incubated over a dozen businesses.



AS FABRIK

The objective of the AS Fabrik project is to improve the competitiveness of local businesses and the consolidation of Bilbao’s Zorrotzaure island as an innovative ecosystem and a reference for advanced services for industry 4.0 and the digital economy. The project’s epicenter will be an old industrial building reconverted into public facilities to convene and support stakeholder activities.

Genova

DELEGATION, PARTNERS, AND LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

The delegation from the city of Genova participating in METROS was led members of the municipal administration together with Business Club LiguriaIN, with the participation of Regione Liguria, and the Genova Smart City Association.



KEY SECTORS FOR ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES

Tourism, multi-utilities, technology and internet of things, SMEs, startups and spin-offs, and creative industries

METROPOLITAN VISION

Sustainable development for an intelligent future. To become a genuinely smart city based on strengthening its competitiveness in the pillars of resiliency, energy, mobility, building, and port efficiency.

ECOSYSTEM GOALS

- Engage cross-sector stakeholders in a clear strategy aimed at developing Genova as a smart city.
- Link and leverage the entire economic region, encompassing Torino, Milan and Genova, through a strategy entitled “Growing Together”

Achievements and Impact

REI PLATFORM AND DIGITAL TREE

The city of Genova has led the collaborative establishment of a series of innovative centers and projects that seek to support and deepen its economic and innovation ecosystem. The Research Enterprise Investment (REI) platform was set up to connect technological innovation and research to market outlets, investors, and entrepreneurs, thus leveraging the potent research and development efforts of locally-

based institutions and businesses. The city has taken a similar role in the founding of the public-private project called Digital Tree, the city’s first innovation start-up hub. The hub specializes in supporting and connecting stakeholders seeking to innovate, work, and invest in the fields of cognitive computing, machine learning, the internet of things, and industry 4.0.

NURTURING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

Genova is undergoing a more comprehensive stakeholder mapping process to identify and engage the most important actors and investors in their metropolitan ecosystem related to entrepreneurship and innovation. The city has begun work on an entrepreneurial hub within the city center to help catalyze and support its budding ecosystem. The presence of many large corporations in the city is being leveraged to obtain their increased engagement and interaction with the local ecosystem, and its SMEs and entrepreneurs. Initiatives related to capitalizing their niche and leveraging their positioning are currently underway, with a resilient city certification pending, increased activities of the Genova Smart City Association to include a potential smart city business center, a technological park planned, and European Urban Agenda partnerships being explored.

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POSITIONING

Genova is in the process of developing an economic growth strategy that will link and coordinate amongst the wider region entitled “Growing Together,” which encompasses the Torino, Milan, and Genova metropolitan regions. The strategy will also focus on leveraging the diversity of asset and strengths of each metropolitan ecosystem as well as the broader regional one. On a different level, Genova has increased its networking on a global level, leveraging the METROS network and other platforms and has narrowed its niche and positioning to one focused on its smart city philosophy based on the pillars of resilience, energy, mobility, buildings, and port connections.

Thessaloniki

DELEGATION, PARTNERS, AND LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

The delegation from the city of Thessaloniki participating in METROS was led by the Deputy Mayor for Tourism and International Relations, together with Greenways Social Cooperative Enterprise, and counting on the participation of T.R.P. Architect Engineers.



KEY SECTORS FOR ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES

Tourism, recreational, educational, logistics, and commerce

METROPOLITAN VISION

For Thessaloniki to engage and mobilize stakeholders around a common objective of developing the city's assets through entrepreneurship and SMEs to increase investment and attractiveness, showing that regardless of the national level economic context, the city can push forward.

ECOSYSTEM GOALS

- Attract and retain talent and youth through improvement in urban mobility, public space and infrastructure, and better entrepreneurial development policies
- Attract investment in Thessaloniki's infrastructure and public through private investment attraction and the promotion of metropolitan tourism.

Achievements and Impact:

CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER

The experience of METROS and particularly exchanges with U.S. experts and counterparts inspired the city of Thessaloniki to create a specific office in the city administration for a Chief Digital Officer, which in combination with their IBM Smarter Cities challenge project, was a crucial factor in ongoing development of data-based workshops with stakeholders to refine the tourism and investment partnerships and strategies of the city.

OK!THESS

A fundamental milestone for Thessaloniki's regional ecosystem development during the METROS



framework has been the Ok!Thess pre-incubator project launched in October 2016. It builds on multi-stakeholder engagement with local and international partners and forms part of the broader vision for developing the innovation ecosystem of the metropolitan area based on public-private partnerships and social cooperative enterprises.

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING AND PARAMETERS FOR DEVELOPMENT

In the framework of METROS the participants from Thessaloniki have been able to apply the tools from the workshops in their local projects as well as to guide the strategic direction of their activities. An extensive stakeholder mapping and analysis done in conjunction with METROS was a key part of this. Moreover, the parameters established from the onset of the METROS program regarding metropolitan economic transformation were taken onboard to structure coordinated local efforts.

Torino

DELEGATION, PARTNERS, AND LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

The delegation from the city of Torino participating in METROS was led by Torino Strategica together with SocialFare, counting on the participation and support of the Politecnico di Torino, and the Compagnia di San Paolo.



KEY SECTORS FOR ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES

Education and research, automotive, aerospace, mechanics/mechatronics, cultural and creative industries

METROPOLITAN VISION

Build partnerships that enable Torino's ecosystem to flourish as a technologically innovative, socially inclusive, and popular international city with increasing economic development and improved quality of life.

ECOSYSTEM GOALS

- Bring together local stakeholders since the municipality cannot develop the economic ecosystem to advance entrepreneurship and innovation without the universities, incubators, and SMEs
- Connect with global and regional actors and experts to find solutions from other similar ecosystems and contexts
- Access strategies and methods to support planning and completion of ecosystem assessment and analysis

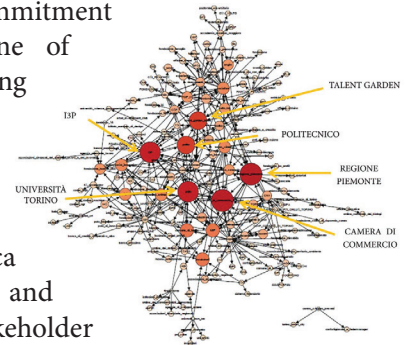
Achievements and Impact

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

A large part of Torino's third strategic plan, which directed the work of the participants in the METROS program, involved stakeholder engagement and startup ecosystem development as fundamental

steps in its commitment to developing one of Europe's leading innovation ecosystems. Together with local partners, Torino Strategica led an extensive and thorough stakeholder map and analysis, after which

they collaborated with U.S. experts for the strategic analysis. Ultimately, the result provided a solid basis for a greatly strengthened capacity to connect with and amongst local stakeholders of all sizes and sectors. This process of identification and analysis created initiated relationships and laid the foundation for taking the ecosystem to a higher level.



TORINO STARTUP

The stakeholder map and analysis described above was a core component of the wider Torino Startup project. Based on the Startup Amsterdam model, but leaner, the Torino Startup project is one that is based on local data and analysis derived from the stakeholder surveying and mapping. The goals defined by the Torino Startup project are clear and actionable. These are ready to be taken forward by a steering committee, which in itself would already drastically improve coordination and support for established local stakeholders, entrepreneurs, and startups.



LEVERAGING OF THE METROS PROGRAM AND NETWORK

Through the METROS program the city of Torino assembled a motivated, cohesive, and diverse cross-sector team. This dynamic and team functioned as an essential node in the efforts to increase connectivity and awareness within and beyond the local ecosystem. This allowed for an extension of the network to include non-traditional stakeholders and both commercial and social entrepreneurs. The framework of the METROS program enabled certain partnerships and activities at the local level that would have not happened otherwise.



Common Challenges and Key Insights

COMMON CHALLENGES

Aside from the specific challenges related to each city's project and unique local context, over the course of two years there were a series of recurring or common challenges emerging across city delegations that also provide insightful lessons for city stakeholders engaged in similar processes.

Changing mindsets and leveraging learning

Many of the METROS delegations often voiced a frustration over the broader mindset of city administrations that often act as an obstacle for new, dynamic, or innovative processes. Similarly, METROS participants recurrently referred to the challenge of leveraging and extending the experiences and lessons learned in METROS to their colleagues and counterparts locally — both within and beyond their own organizations. This challenge was framed and juxtaposed to the success of creating productive team dynamics among the cross-sector city delegations themselves — which nonetheless remain proportionally small in scale relative to the metropolitan ecosystem.

Political constraints

The political context of each of the METROS cities was vastly different, yet there seemed to be a recurrence of interferences or obstacles in the efforts

for metropolitan economic development, particularly as it relates to strengthening the entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem. Such hurdles could be of many different forms from simply passive disengagement to proactive disruption. In any case, the common factor in this type of challenge highlighted the importance of multi-stakeholder consensus and approaches in metropolitan economic strategies. While political engagement and leadership is important, single ownership of such strategies by certain stakeholders or political parties can then leave the broader efforts vulnerable to any political disagreements or changes.

Short-term visions

The situation of Southern European economies during and following the crisis seems to have conditioned and exacerbated a propensity for short-term visions, objectives, and planning. The volatile and declining economic context has made it more difficult, yet more important, for stakeholders to engage in long-term planning and collaboration. Similarly, the trajectories and institutional dynamics of many stakeholders as successful and independent entities often make it more difficult to engage them in a common vision for their city. In other words, large institutions, corporations and businesses in these cities have a tendency to undervalue the importance of the local ecosystem, especially when they are export-oriented, since they operate on a different scale. Successful engagement of these has often been realized through anchor institutions such as universities, which do have more direct connections to these entities, but are also more reliant on the metropolitan context.



Communications and marketing

The multitude of projects and initiatives undertaken by METROS city delegations have been implemented to different extents and with varying success and impact, but regardless of this, many have struggled in the communication and marketing aspects. The initial difficulty of communicating about strategic efforts for strengthening entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystems is exacerbated by the institutional, cross-sector or multi-stakeholder nature of these. Many of projects and initiatives either fail to recognize the importance of communication, or struggle to do so in a way that is captivating and not formal or institutional.

Fiscal resources

In several instances METROS participants expressed frustration over the scarcity of resources in terms of their time and more importantly budgets. This was often cited as a common challenge, particularly when discussing the possible implementation of new ideas or projects. Since there are tight fiscal restrictions, the priorities are already established in a top-down manner and new ideas or approaches are not even worth bringing up. While each situation was distinct, the network often countered these frustrations and challenges with examples of how others had overcome similar constraints by engaging external stakeholders or prototyping the project on a small scale to obtain results and then advocate for resources.

KEY INSIGHTS

The METROS process was a shared learning experience for all of those involved. In this sense, both external experts invited to work regularly with the participants and GMF have been able to gain sufficient experience to provide some key insights for public administrations and local stakeholders seeking to strengthen their innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems in their metropolitan regions.

Open engagement and co-creation processes

Local and metropolitan authorities should carefully consider how successful and sustainable strategies can be when they are determined in an excessively top-down manner. Developing and strengthening an ecosystem successfully will be highly dependent on other actors and stakeholders. Engaging with all relevant stakeholders from an early stage in an active and constructive way is critical to ensuring any initiative or project responds and supports real needs and a shared vision. The extent to which this is applicable evidently varies, but should be considered realistically. In certain instances it might be more effective for city administrations to limit themselves to supporting and enabling other stakeholders to strengthen an ecosystem, especially in the case of entrepreneurial and innovative ecosystems that are governed by different and autonomous dynamics. Co-creation can often be a complex but effective procedure for self-sustaining and successful projects.

Asset mapping and stakeholder analysis

To best ensure the open engagement and co-creation processes mentioned above, it is essential to effectively engage relevant stakeholders, especially non-traditional actors and institutions. This is especially the case when seeking a stronger entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem. METROS city delegations worked together to identify key opportunities and challenges to partnership building within their cities. Delegations mapped out their region's assets and key stakeholders and then contrasted with each city's objectives and activities to both highlight the existing successful partnerships already present amongst mapped assets, as well as the unrealized opportunities and synergies. Discussing this amongst the larger group made participants take a step back and view their own contexts with less clutter and nuance, forcing them to explain and think critically about the current partnerships or lack thereof. Engaging with non-traditional and non-institutionalized stakeholder, such as startup entrepreneurs was a common challenge for city delegations. To address this, METROS delegations were brought together with local and international stakeholders from various startup and innovation ecosystems to explore opportunities and strategies for identifying and engaging actors in these ecosystems.

Consensus and coalition building

Ecosystems by definition rely on a broad variety of actors, institutions, and interactions. In order to sustainably strengthen an economic ecosystem it is important to establish a stable and inclusive foundation and framework for interaction with the relevant actors. This is particularly important for innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems since these should involve non-traditional and non-institutional actors. From the onset it is important for leading stakeholders to build coalitions and establish

consensus on a common vision and path for the ecosystem. This consensus should include and reach out beyond traditional political and social barriers in order to be sustainable and not be undermined when the context changes, thus making it unstable.

Strength-based strategies

In planning and designing strategies and projects aimed at strengthening innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems it is crucial to consider local strengths, assets, and features, and to avoid simply replicating or importing models from other cities. Innovation and entrepreneurship as such as open and flexible to adapt to any type of industry or commercial sector. All metropolitan areas have had a historic trajectory and economic legacy which should not be ignored but rather leveraged in a future-oriented perspective. Moreover, these have developed over time in wider regional and national economic contexts.

Multilevel and regional coordination

Actively engaging and coordinating with other cities in the region, regional administrations, as well as national and supranational organizations can help identify and exploit synergies. Connectivity and cooperation is hugely beneficial in strengthening innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems. Regional and national institutions should improve frameworks to support such multilevel coordination and engagement among metropolitan areas. One of the particular features of the METROS network is that none of the cities are the political or economic capitals in their respective countries. This condition makes it more difficult to become a regional and especially global hub. In order to strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystems and innovation METROS cities would need to be innovative and strategic themselves in how they leverage their unique strengths and situations, and how these connect with other regional and global hubs.

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