

GEN-Y CITY

Developing, attracting & retaining Gen-Y 'creative-tech' talent in European cities



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Thematic Report:

Fostering a creative-tech culture in a city through the development of a creative-tech talent ecosystem (Part 2: A practical approach)

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Introduction

In Part 1 of this report on fostering a creative-tech culture in a city through the development of a creative-tech talent ecosystem, we explored what theoretical frameworks exist to examine how best to inspire individuals, local communities, sub-cultures, cultures and whole cities about the potential role of science and technology in their lives and inspire young people into creative-tech careers.

The main goal of the GEN-Y City project is to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth through the definition of stronger forms of cooperation between science, local institutions, businesses and citizens to enhance growth, attractiveness and Conservation of talents in European cities.

In this second part of the report, we consider how to practically deliver such initiatives.

In this second report, we examine some of the potential practical strategies and approaches cities might adopt and use, to develop a stronger creative-tech talent development, retention and attraction eco-system.

Who is the architect and facilitator of the eco-system?

The first thing that a city needs to ask itself if it is interested in trying to develop a suitable creative-tech talent development, retention and attraction eco-system is who is best placed to perform the role of architect and facilitator of the system?

This could be an organisation, a partnership, an individual visionary or a combination of all of these entities. Because eco-system development often requires the buy in to organisational change across a range of organisations, and senior leadership commitment, it's not uncommon to see the role of architect and facilitator given to a multi-agency partnership, comprising of representatives of the Education, Public, Private and Academic Communities.

This can involve a variety of structures – depending on local circumstance – but invariably will comprise a strategic forum, an operational forum and an executive. In addition, it's often quite important for the executive to be from an organisation with a community/economic development (or strategic 'whole-place') outlook – rather than a strong corporate service delivery culture – as the processes behind creating a creative-tech ecosystem is quite heavily reliant on traditional bottom-up, partnership based community 'capacity building' techniques, rather than top-down service delivery.

Developing a strong partnership culture within the executive

As we have set out above, it's vital for the architect and facilitator of a creative-tech eco-system to have quite a strong partnership culture, because they are going to need to work with a range of other agencies and understand what motivates them in creating this eco-system. They will need to draw them into supporting the municipality achieve its goals and encourage them to invest time, and potentially other resources, in the creation of the system. If such a function doesn't already exist in the body responsible for leading the process, the

organisation might consider establishing a dedicated partnership function to lead the process, or drawing in individuals from across the partnership to take the process forward.

During the early 'forming' stages of the process of creating ecosystem partnerships, it's important for partners to spend time working together to building trust, trust and more trust; create a clear shared vision, create a clear benefit statement and start to enhance the ability of the different organisations to work together.

Developing the skills needed by the team

“Despite their ‘blind faith’ that partnerships are a good thing in principle, many respondents believe that partners have hidden agendas¹”

“Because of our collective failure to recognise the connected nature of the organisational world, we have largely failed to educate managers and leaders sufficiently in the art of making collaborative work effective²”

Whilst much of the process of establishing eco-systems partnerships and ensuring they operate effectively is fairly common sense, it's remarkable how many times this entire process goes wrong. In many cases, this is because the process doesn't take sufficient account of the amount of time needed to;

- Build & sustain strong trust across leader relationships in complex multi-partner collaborations;
- Develop a shared vision between partners on the purpose of the partnership;
- Develop consensus between partners on the procedures and structure required to deliver the new mission;
- Develop consensus between partners on the accountabilities and powers in the new service;
- Build strong trust between key stakeholders during the design stage;
- Draft clear communication pieces to communicate with stakeholders; and
- Forecast the return on investment scenarios, who the beneficiaries are and what benefits will accrue;

Prior to initiating a programme or project to try to build, strengthen or create a creative-tech eco-system, its vital that the people responsible for delivering it are equipped with the skills needed to deliver it effectively.

Mapping the starting point of your eco-system

If a city has decided it wants to establish a stronger creative-tech talent development, retention and attraction eco-system, the first thing a city needs to ask itself is what assets has it got to work with / what agencies exist that would help support the delivery of such an ecosystem?

¹ SOLACE (2007) p2

² Collaborative Advantage, Elisabeth Lank (2006) p2

Eco-systems generally operate better – or are easier and quicker to establish - in cities which have a multitude of creative-tech, science and technology interested organisations that are willing to work together to promote creative-tech careers to young people.

In earlier reports, we have discussed Smart Specialisation, the importance of understanding the Knowledge Base of a city and the organisational/institutional thinness/thickness of a city (which serves to describe how rich a creative-tech eco-system is in a particular city).

Cities that have fairly thin creative-tech eco-systems will likely need to spend a significant amount of time building the capacity of the community – facilitating specialist organisations, networks and partners that deliver a range of different support services (business support agencies, science agencies, youth work, educational associations etc). These cities are going to have to invest a significant amount of time, money and effort in facilitating the range of organisations needed to support the development and delivery of an eco-systems approach.

Cities that already have a strong creative-tech provider base are likely to find the process of establishing a creative-tech eco-system easier, as the process is likely to merely be about creating greater alignment in the partnership and encouraging partners to work together more coherently.

In simple terms, the process of partnership alignment is likely to involve a process which comprises

1. Identifying and engaging the stakeholders.
2. Establishing personal relationships, and beginning to build trust.
3. Establishing governance, procedures, ground rules, and decision-making structure.
4. Clarifying the goals and objectives each partner wants to accomplish
5. Choosing and implementing a partnership that is mutually beneficial.
6. Measuring and evaluating the impact of the partnership programme, to inform future delivery

In this report, we shall look at how a city can practically deliver some of these activities

Mapping your current creative-tech ecosystem

As far as mapping the current eco-system is concerned, the scope of work should include some information about the level of analysis that is needed to provide actionable recommendations to the relevant stakeholders.

Invariably, this analysis will need to cover;

- **Asset Identification:** Reviewing existing research and data sources, and obtaining input from local leaders about the key public, private, academic and non-profit entities that might make up parts of the eco-system;
- **Basic Evaluation:** Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the ecosystem, and identifying gaps, with comparisons to relevant benchmarks or comparable regions;
- **Comprehensive Assessment:** Undertaking a complete examination of the underlying business culture in the region, including understanding the linkages between the various domains and key actors within each domain. While all of an ecosystem are inherently interconnected, there may be some elements that are of more

interest than others, based on the kinds of interventions that are planned and/or possible (i.e. targeting school pupils, versus graduate retention etc.)

- **Identifying and Rating Indicators:** Despite the wide range of indicators available for assessing the effectiveness of a creative-tech ecosystem (school results, graduates retained, business start-up rates etc.), it is essential to identify the most relevant and accurate indicators available.
- **Data Collection and Analysis:** A comprehensive assessment typically involves a combination of primary and secondary data collection. While it is likely that many of the indicators will be available through local statistical and administrative agencies, some of the proposed indicators will likely require additional surveys. Once the appropriate indicators have been identified, evaluators can identify the gaps in the ecosystem, and develop potential interventions.

Establishing a shared vision for the eco-system

“Many change programmes start to go wrong, right at the very beginning when the purpose and expected outcomes are not clearly articulated or properly shared³.”

The most important feature of a successful partnership is to have a common purpose. Before setting up a partnership that can develop/strengthen a successful creative-tech eco-system, clarity is needed about what the partnership wants to achieve and how the partnership will add value to the work of the individual partners. Could working in partnership:

- Bring extra resources?
- Provide access to different expertise?
- Allow learners to gain additional experiences?
- Allow teachers to gain additional experiences?
- Deal with educational shortfalls more effectively?
- Bring in external funding for shared priorities?
- Share good practice and communication between organisations?

In agreeing to spend time committing time and resources to developing and/or enhancing a cities creative-tech eco-system, it's important to understand what the vision is for the future and secure potential buy in to it. This cannot operate as a too mechanistic process. It needs to be based on dialogue and discussion, listening to what partners want to achieve and their reasons for being committed to the process. It should be a highly participative process.

[Shared Service Architects](#) have developed a simple, but effective, five-stage 'route-map' for developing a shared vision across complex partnerships, as illustrated in the diagram overleaf. The five stages of the process they

³ The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives' 2009 shared service paper, p4, Sammons, R. & Crouch, R.

describe includes understanding the context; understanding each other; understanding the opportunity; creating a shared vision; and enabling consensus/buy in.

It's important to fully complete each particular stage of the process before formally agreeing to progress to the next stage, otherwise partners will still be 'stuck' in an earlier part of the process.

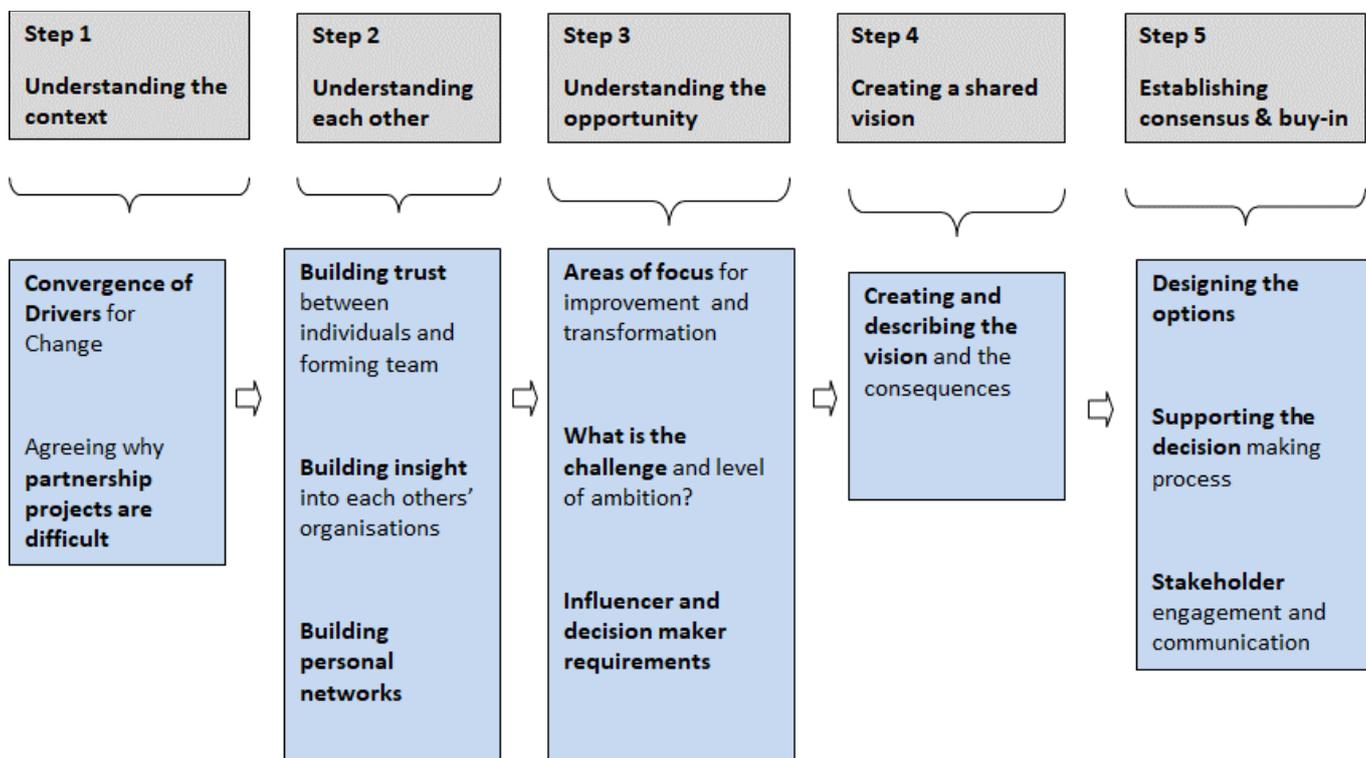


Fig. 1: The five-stage process for developing a shared vision

STEP 1: Understanding the context

The first step in the above five-stage process involves partners coming together to understand the context, by identifying the drivers for change and agreeing why partnership projects are difficult.

Identifying the drivers for change

The first step in the process is for partners to come together is to agree the drivers of change. As far as developing creative-tech ecosystems are concerned, the major drivers of change are provided largely by the socio-economic context, as set out in numerous previous reports of the GEN-Y CITY Network (i.e. shifting populations, fewer skilled technical people, the rise of technology, the changing nature of jobs etc.).

A potential tool for analysing the drivers for change is a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities or Threats), or undertaking an environmental scan, using a tool like the PESTLE (Political, Environmental, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Economic) Framework.

Once partners have agreed with the main drivers for change, it's worthwhile exploring why partnership projects are difficult.

Agreeing why partnership projects are difficult

During the course of developing an eco-system partnership, it's important to recognise what some of the potential barriers to the creation of a shared vision might be and try and address them as you advance through the process. Some examples of barriers to effective partnership working in the development of creative-tech eco-systems might include:

- Different organisational cultures;
- Different expectations of partners;
- Lack of commitment at a senior level;
- Lack of communication between the partners;
- Lack of trust between the partners;
- Objectives not set out clearly at the start;
- Insufficient time allocated by the partners;
- Staff changes affecting the partnership;
- Previous failed attempts at partnership;

Some of the ways of handling these barriers are dealt with in the next section of this report.

STEP 2: Understanding each other

Having understood the main drivers for change and the barriers that prevent partnership projects being difficult, it's worthwhile just spending some time getting to know each other's organisations.

Building trust and agreement between partners

Building trust and agreement between partners takes time. Invariably, because of the personal nature of trust establishment, it's something that is rather difficult to do remotely (and therefore may take a range of meetings to establish). Sometimes, it's also something that can only happen over time, as organisations and individuals get to know each other and the partnership 'beds down'. That said, there are ways to accelerate the process, by;

- Creating clear roles and responsibilities;
- Establishing strong governance structures & shared reporting lines;
- Make clear space for people to operate in; and
- Communicating, communicating and communicating;

During this part of the process it may be necessary to find ways to go around, under over and through processes which act as barriers; source alternative data (to reinforce an external issue you want partners to agree about); and/or challenge norms (if resistance to change becomes an issue).

Building insight into each other's organisations

In this element of the process of understanding each other, it's important for project executive to try and develop a solid understanding of what the priorities are of the various organisations involved in the partnership, who the key players are, what barriers might get in the way of them supporting the establishment of an eco-system approach etc.

Developing this understanding will help the executive understand the different organisations motives, decision making processes, potential challenges etc. This will help overcome any barriers that arise as part of the process.

Building personal networks

In addition to the executive officers building insight into each other's organisations, its vital for the executive to develop really effective relationships with the key personnel – both leaders and officers. This will help tackle any issues of personal conflict and build further trust amongst partners.

STEP 3: Understanding the opportunity

Once the partnership has been formed and started to understand/get to know each other, it's worth trying to move the process on, to try and help the partners to develop a clear understanding of the opportunity by agreeing the challenge, the focus of the potential collaboration and the requirements of senior leaders.

For this reason, during the early part of the partnership formation process, it may be worthwhile working with partners to;

- Highlight 'best in class' eco-systems from other parts of Europe;
- Highlight the upside benefits and the downside risks of not building an effective creative-tech eco-system;
- Challenge the norms, particularly during the idea generation phase; and
- Highlight the upside benefits and the downside risks of failure;

Allowing partners opportunities to explore what the opportunity is, what the area of focus is and what the needs of senior leaders are should result in a convergence between partners, enabling the partnership to come together to agree some common ground rules.

STEP 4: Creating a shared vision and describing the consequences

In this stage of the formation of a partnership based approach to creating a strong creative-tech eco-system in the city, the partners need to come together to agree a high-level vision about what the future might look like, what might be different and what the consequences of the proposed change programme might be.

Developing a menu of the perceived partnership 'end benefits' that building strong trust and shared vision will deliver should also help bind an eco-system partnership together.

This benefit statement could include:

- Agreement and appreciation between partners of the (internal and external) common drivers for change;
- Greater empathy and trust between individuals;
- A willingness to focus on the service-users' needs;
- A shared understanding of the challenges facing the partners;
- A feel for the sense of ambition for the project;
- Statements around the key influencers, customers and stakeholder needs; and
- A coordinated and synchronised decision-making process.

Once the partnership has committed to supporting the shared vision and the benefit statement is agreed, the agreement between partners needs to be formalised, to ensure there is a formal agreement between the partners of their commitment to the shared goals of the partnership and its modus operandi.

STEP 6: Establishing consensus and buy in

Following the establishment of a shared, high-level, agreement between partners and the consequences of collaboration, the process of realising the agreement really starts. Many projects fail during this stage of the process, as partners lack the commitment to delivery or fail to devote sufficient resources to keep the project moving. During this stage of the process, it's worthwhile designing the options and supporting the decision-making process.

Designing the options

In this stage of the process, once the high-level vision for the establishment of a creative-tech eco-system has been agreed, participatory action planning tools (like the ones advocated through the [Urbact Local Support Group Toolkit](#)) can be very useful in moving partners from a high level 'strategy agreement' into a more detailed design phase, built around a concrete action plan to develop a strong creative-tech eco-system. The tools contained in this toolkit include;

- Stakeholder engagement checklists
- Stakeholder analysis tools
- Stakeholders Importance/ Influence matrices
- Self-assessment tool for Local Support
- Problem Tree Analysis
- Action table

- Self-assessment tool for Local Action Planning

Similarly, a range of other [service design tools](#) can also help partners to design the options, reimagine the utilisation of resources and/or develop a stronger partnership approach.

Supporting the decision-making process

Once the action plan has been developed and agreed by all parties, there may be some value in developing a Partnership Agreement to formally agree the key elements of a negotiated partnership.

Studies of partnership working suggest that relationships between organisations are less likely to encounter irreconcilable difficulties if the parties concerned establish a comprehensive agreement about how they intend to co-operate.

A Partnership Agreement would normally comprise some or all of the following elements;

1. Definitions of terms - A glossary of the terms used in the agreement. Clarification of terms may avoid future problems due to differing interpretations;
2. Statement of intent - What the vision for the joint work is;
3. Parties involved - Who are the parties involved in the partnership?
4. Objectives of the partnership - What is the partnership supposed to achieve.
5. Values and principles - What the partnership's values and principles are.
6. Mutual trust and respect - Establish the principle of mutual trust and respect.
7. Description of partnership - What type of partnership is being proposed
8. Transactions - What is being transacted in each direction between the organisations.
9. Timescale – The time period over which the initial partnership agreement will run.
10. Obligations/responsibilities of each party - this should include issues of ownership, funds and any conditions attached to them
11. Roles - What roles and responsibilities each party has in the partnership.
12. Sharing information - How and by who should information be made available by each of the parties
13. Confidentiality - What the agreed expectations are about the sharing of information
14. Decision-making - How and by who will decisions be made between and within each organisation
15. Sign-off procedure - Identifying the named persons in each organisation with approval authority
16. Financial issues – setting out the terms, conditions for any financial transactions
17. Access - This may be to information, to premises etc.
18. Naming rights - concerning intellectual property, branding and mutual use of names and logos
19. Reporting - frameworks used for reporting
20. Monitoring progress - How the development of the partnership will be monitored
21. Evaluation - What are the indicators for success?
22. Exit strategy - Under what conditions might the agreement be terminated?

23. Opportunities to develop- Who will decide about developing the partnership?

24. Conflict resolution - What mechanisms will be used to resolve conflicts

In addition to formalising the agreement about how partners will move forward, regular dialogue and communication is vital to support the implementation process.

A note about target setting and evaluation

Whilst not necessarily covered in the Shared Service Architects five stage process for developing a Shared Vision for a collaborative service or project, a periodic process of evaluation and review (with a feedback loop running from stage 5 to stage 1) is useful to enable the partnership to regularly assess its performance and redefine its goals.

Implicit in this statement is that the partnership will establish SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) goals as part of the action planning process and will have benchmarked its starting point, using a variety of indicators (to be able to assess distance travelled/progress achieved).

A period evaluation of the effectiveness of the creative-tech eco-system partnership in achieving its stated goals may consider;

- **Process evaluation:** an assessment of what aspects of the project contributed to delivery of project outputs;
- **Theory based evaluation:** asks how the intervention succeeded by testing the effectiveness of the mechanisms that were expected to be the key drivers of impact;
- **Outcomes evaluation:** asks whether outcomes moved in the desired direction and often includes contextual information to test non-project influences;
- **Impact evaluation:** asks whether the intervention had any impact on observed outcomes, providing a key component of assessments of both cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit;

A note about some of the softer elements of delivering change

In addition to the five-stage process proposed by Shared Service Architects, John P Kotter (the professor of leadership at Harvard Business School) proposed an eight-stage process for delivering organisational change.

Whilst this contains a number of the same principles of the five-stage model, it also places some importance on a number of 'softer' / more qualitative elements of change, including;

- The need to create a sense of urgency in the change process;
- The need for regular communication;



Fig. 2: Kotter's Eight Steps of Change - Kotter, J.P. (1996) *Leading change*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

- The need to empower key personnel to act on the vision; and
- The need to build and institutionalise the change;

Conclusions

A process for developing a successful place based partnership that is capable of establishing a creative-tech ecosystem in a city needs to take account of the existing 'depth' or 'thickness' of the local ecosystem.

As we highlighted in [the second Transnational Exchange report for the visit to Wolverhampton](#), more peripheral or smaller cities which are suffering from post-industrialization will obviously have much more work to do build the capacity of their local 'creative-tech' eco-system before they can form a strong place based partnership for promoting creative-tech careers.

This may necessitate cities developing a medium-long term plan for supporting the creation and establishment of a range of different organisations and institutions in their city, which are responsible for providing different 'creative-tech' support services in the city (i.e. youth enterprise, creative development, business start-up, incubators, access to finance etc.)

Those cities which already have a fairly well developed 'creative-tech' support environment (with a proliferation of agencies delivering support to local residents) may have a somewhat simpler job to do, insofar their task may be more strongly orientated to getting partners to play together more coherently.

Regardless of the approach needed, the process underpinning both development activities is likely to require bringing partners, individuals or different organisations to agree a shared vision and to develop an action plan to improve the alignment/delivery of a set of agreed goals.

This process will require the development of an integrated action plan for the city, using a participatory approach – something that sits at the heart of the Urbact process. This report is intended to highlight some of the practical considerations cities need to consider when undertaking this task and should be read together with the more theoretical report (Part 1) setting out a range of theoretical frameworks for developing a creative-tech eco-system (or eco-system of eco-systems) in a city.