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The Urban Lab of Europe !

The Curing the Limbo Project Journal N° 3

Project led by the City of Athens



**INTEGRATION OF
MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES**



The Curing the Limbo Project

The **Curing the Limbo** project targets newly arrived refugees and vulnerable locals that are unemployed and without a role in society as well as tackling the issues surrounding the large number of buildings that have become vacant since the economic crisis. Therefore, the project will empower refugees to interact with local citizens while addressing various city and social needs in exchange of access to affordable housing. These actions are especially important for those under-skilled refugees. The project will capitalise on the strong civil society in Athens to help them overcome the state of inertia they find themselves. The city will pilot different and tailored pathways to access affordable housing in exchange for limited hours of community service, providing them in addition with language learning, psychological support as well as knowledge on their rights and duties.

Partnership

- Municipality of Athens
- Athens Development and Destination Management Agency S.A
- National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
- Catholic Relief Services - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Greek Branch
- International Rescue Committee (IRC Hellas)

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Curing the Limbo is the Athens Municipality's initiative to provide a complex answer to the challenge of integrating refugees into the Athens society – by connecting education, employment, housing and active citizenship. Funded by the EU's Urban Innovative Actions programme, the programme brings together a diversity of actors in a joint effort to accompany recognised refugees in personalised trajectories that help them build new skills, engage with civil society activities and access housing. Curing the Limbo represents a model of inclusion and personal development that can be applied in a variety of contexts to a variety of vulnerable groups; and it **brings new energies in the city** by strengthening local communities and enhancing social cohesion.

The past period of Curing the Limbo was characterised by **a full-speed implementation** of all activities envisioned during the preparations. In April 2019, the Limbo Exit Lab was officially inaugurated, with most of its personnel hired, all classes launched and the first community events realised. By the beginning of August 2019, 174 refugees registered to the programme and in the following months an active, focused, capable core group was formed.

The unfolding of all project's activities and the progress of the first refugees through the programme's trajectories also gave **confidence to the project consortium**. Strengthening joint work through a series of capacity building activities and more streamlined procedures and communication, many new joint activities were born from the cooperation of different partners. In their process of realisation, all the project activities have become more tangible, enabling

consortium partners to better perceive the shortcomings of the original project design and adapt it to the actual needs.

On the other hand, **political changes** at the local and national level have pushed the programme to reposition itself and overcome new challenges. At the national level, the new government delegated refugee affairs into the Ministry of Citizen Protection, defining it as a security issue as opposed to an integration issue. At the local level, following the elections and the victory of a new mayor, many administrative processes were suspended during Summer until the arrival of the new administration. The new mayor embraced Curing the Limbo, understanding the programme's social innovation element and its potential to develop a set of new policies.

Another challenge came from the **exclusion of recognised refugees from the ESTIA programme** that resulted in hundreds of refugee families suddenly losing their accommodation and looking for emergency solutions. In addition, the eviction of several squats accommodating refugee families has added to the pressure on the remaining accommodation programmes. This situation affected all parts of Curing the Limbo, from the housing provision element to the educational and psycho-social support elements, requiring more flexibility in the implementation of the education and housing components of the programme.

While Curing the Limbo has been promoted internationally through a series of conferences, it has also **experienced increasing attention in Greek media**. During the Summer, two big

articles from major newspapers presented the programme, focusing on its social aspect and its way of re-energising neighbourhoods. A photo exhibition presented at the city centre and later installed at the Kipseli Market further increased the project's local visibility.

This Journal accompanies Curing the Limbo in its past half year of progress. By giving an account

of the main activities and achievements of each project component, the third issue explores the challenges of strengthening synergies between the project elements, accompanying the refugees in a well-planned learning trajectory and adjusting the programme's design based on feedback from partners and stakeholders.



2. PROGRESS

“We see that there is a real need for people to be supported towards integration.” Antigone Kotanidis

2.1 Organisation and partnerships

“This is an open project, the city is full of surprises, that is how it should be approached. The big paradox is that the project and the methodology are open – but the bureaucracy is closed.” Thalia Dragona

Curing the Limbo was officially inaugurated in April, with two vice mayors and the directors of all participating organisations and with over 200 participants. With the various teams and the first cycles of classes filling the spaces, the “Limbo Exit Lab” in Serafio building has become the veritable centre of Curing the Limbo’s activities and a living room for the programme’s beneficiaries. A calendar of social events installed in the corridor of the Lab also attracts people to regularly visit the venue also when they have no classes: it has become an important place for socialisation and building relationships.

The **hiring process** was practically closed in April, due to the electoral period, with 2 ICT teachers and 1 ICT coordinator, and 3 cultural mediators missing from the planned staff. Delays in payment from the municipality created significant tensions. As some of the consortium members are not employees of the municipality, they are not on a payroll: they need to report their activities every month to the municipality and they get paid as external contractors, after confirmation by municipal officers. With no obligation for the municipality to pay some of the consortium members ever month, there are often longer periods with no payment to some employees.

“The different components need a continuous effort otherwise to be connected with each other, otherwise people do their own thing and lose track of what is happening in the broader project. This is something that needs to be worked through all the time: it is time consuming and needs a lot of energy.” Thalia Dragona

There has been important process with the **group dynamics** of the consortium: for partners that come from different backgrounds and have different organisational cultures, working together has been an important learning process. In some aspects, the Curing the Limbo partnership still functions as small teams in a big team, but there has been a shared effort to better synchronise activities and communication between the different teams. The open methodology of the project helps such adjustments by connecting activities by different partners and accommodating new, unplanned elements in the programme. Born from necessity, important connections were made between language classes and community activities in order to help beneficiaries’ orientation in the city; between the psycho-social support team and teachers in order to better understand the personal challenges of the participants; and further cooperation is planned between language teachers and the IRC team, in order to prepare participants for job counselling.

By mid-2019, the partnership has established its **cooperation procedures**, with coordination meeting with all the consortium partners, and

meetings twice a month with all the departments. The case management team also meets every two weeks to discuss more problematic individual cases. However, communication and cooperation between partners has remained a challenge and it was addressed in capacity building sessions in September and October.

“We need to figure out how by connecting the different elements we can do a holistic approach.” Antigone Kotanidis

In 2019, Curing the Limbo has witnessed significant **political change** both in the national government and in the municipality, strongly affecting the project. The new government merged the Ministry of Migration Policy with the

Ministry of Citizen Protection, labelling immigration as principally a security issue. As another unfriendly gesture towards refugees, the Ministry of Social Affairs announced that it would stop giving security numbers to foreigners, thus eliminating their access to healthcare. In addition, evicting squats in Exarchia in late August put many refugee families on the street, adding more pressure on the housing market.

“When it comes to the municipal structure change, it will affect a lot how Curing the Limbo works primarily because the eco-system was known to a lot of people who work for the project. A lot of things might not be a priority for the new municipal council.” Anastasia Sikiaridi

2.2 Trajectories

“Many people arrive to us from other programmes who were supported in everything and didn’t have to do anything alone. They are dependent on public support and find themselves in a difficult situation now.” Anthy Koutsoupi

By Summer 2019, 174 people coming from 14 countries enrolled in Curing the Limbo; a majority of them (about 50%) are from Afghanistan and only a small proportion of them (around 28%) are women. The 174 people enrolled include a core group of refugees who have developed strong skills, speak a bit of Greek and have good chances to find a house and a job. About 50-60 people are very focused, seriously working on their language skills. The rest of the people are more precarious, with no continuous involvement: they often disappear for a period. By Summer 2019, 26 people dropped out because of moving to another city or finding a job themselves. As of late August, around 90 people were on waiting lists for new language tests and classes.

The refugee **trajectories that connect the different activities** in the programme, have been established, following the original design. When refugees get in touch with Curing the Limbo, they have an info session about the basic features of programme. If they are interested in joining the programme, they are called to make a Greek and English test to understand their language skills. They are also encouraged to attend the portfolio that Curing the Limbo offers: right to housing facilitations, employability service and support. While everyone has to enrol for the educational activities, the housing and employment trajectories are not necessarily connected: people who attend housing facilitation workshops are eligible for housing, but they are not required to have a job or to attend career counselling. Job readiness is one factor within the criteria of accessing an apartment but not a primary factor (especially as not all people applying for housing had seen a career counsellor and had a job readiness assessment).

“Many refugees had to go through very difficult experiences. We know this but this is not useful information for everyone. It will harm you to let you know because you won’t know what to do with this information if you’re not a psychologist or a social worker.” **Anthy Koutsoupi**

There is a continuous **feedback loop** built in the beneficiaries’ trajectories. After contacting Curing the Limbo, refugees receive an appointment with the psycho-social support team to register the “social history” of the participants. Some information like the educational level or the household size are shared with all the partnership through the common database, but more sensible information is kept within the psycho-social support group. For refugees who joined the programme, meetings with the psycho-social support team are organised every 6 months in order to see if there are major changes in the beneficiaries’ life, how they evolve in the program. The psycho-social support group also organises follow-up focus groups with the participation of several beneficiaries, in order to build connections between participants, to find out what activities they needed and to hear their opinions of the programme. Findings of these groups are fed

back into the programme’s various activities. In order to understand how refugees benefit from the programme, beneficiaries have a regular task to fill a questionnaire prepared by the Limbo Exit Lab director, focusing on daily life, work, housing, languages, jobs and activities in the city aimed at gathering information about the program’s impact. The questionnaire, to be filled with the support of the psycho-social support service, asks about the refugees’ ability to move around in Athens, search for information, go alone to the social services, buy groceries, pay the bills, find a job, negotiate a salary raise, find a house, join volunteer groups, get to know their neighbours: the building blocks of integration.

As the pace of arrival of refugees into the programme was uneven, and language classes began with too few students. Therefore, the procedure of accessing the classes has been changed, and students were allowed to join the classes anytime during a cycle. For example, the second teaching cycle began in May but new students kept on joining until early July.

“It is not a stable population. They have a shifty life, anxieties, you have to start with the principle that you will have a huge drop out.”
Thalia Dragona



2.3 Education

“The improvement in the language of refugees is easy to notice: they start communicating differently towards each other, they form new relationships. This also gives them a higher self-esteem. It is a really nice thing to see.” Orinda Liza

The first cycle of classes was completed in May 2019 and the second cycle began immediately afterwards, making it easy to move on from the first one to the second. After a slow start, the classes have been full, with a manageable number of students (20-28 per class). In the first two cycles, 600 hours of Greek and 500 hours of English were taught. After the first cycle, 62 certifications were given in Greek and 36 in English. Understanding that the newcomers had low level of Greek language knowledge, new beginner classes were added to the programme: the first cycle had 9 classes, the second cycle had 11. The third cycle, started in September, includes classes that prepare students for certificates, A2 in Greek and B1 in English.

In line with the initial design, **the curriculum is adjustable and flexible**, adapted to the needs of adults: the instructors are also learning new skills. Based on the curriculum, teachers have created their own syllabus, different for each class, based on the needs of the students. Similarly, the themes of the classes were also born inside the classrooms, emerging from the students' needs. Each theme lasts 5 weeks and after the 5 weeks there is a related project to be produced by students: it can be a video, a poster or an image. This teaching methodology, applicable for a variety of target groups and situations, is planned to be disseminated as a series of manuals to broader audiences.

“We already had close collaboration with synAthina, we are starting now with IRC, in the future we will work closer with CRS. There have been many steps, and more steps needed for a more holistic collaboration.” Panayota Malkogianni

The refugees' **learning process** was originally designed as activity-centred and task-based, helping orientation and daily life. This design also posed challenges to the refugees who were more accustomed to book-based learning and had to accept an alternative educational form. An important evolution of the teaching curriculum was to give a more important to community activities: during the first teaching cycles, beyond the classes, 15 external activities were organised (like visits to a museum or a hospital), 7 in cooperation with assistance by the synAthina team (like a visit to food market, for instance). External activities focus on the themes taught in the classes (like culture, food, shopping or neighbourhoods and the city). Based on a workshop with the language class coordinators, synAthina created an initial list of activities, from which teachers chose their external actions suitable for their groups. From the third cycle on, language teachers also cooperate with IRC in a Greek and an English class, to prepare participants for job counselling. More cooperation between language and audio-visual teachers as well as with CRS is also envisioned.

“Instructors are very enthusiastic. These projects are giving refugees a new perspective of what is going on, provides them with good cultural opportunities. It is not about taking them to a show but how it relates to the classroom.” Thalia Dragona

2.4 Employment

“Until now, 20% of our beneficiaries have been able to find jobs within the given timeframe. We are doing quite well. It’s going to change a lot because we will be adding people who do not speak the language.” Anastasia Sikiaridi

In the past months, the employment dimension of Curing the Limbo also began to work at full speed. Municipal job counsellors were hired and the IRC delivered a **job counselling training** for them in March-April 2019. The training, incorporating lessons learnt from IRC’s Livelihoods programme in Greece from the last two years, included career counselling methodology for refugees, techniques of job development, financial coaching, monitoring and evaluation as well as ways to contact the private sector, to design job readiness trainings, to set up engagements and collaborations with potential employers.

The **municipal job counselling team**, led by the IRC Livelihoods officer, operates with the help of weekly coordination meetings, monitoring and evaluation, gathering data, keeping track of statistics and sharing it with the municipality or with Curing the Limbo. Career counsellors always begin with creating a self-sufficiency plan and a skills assessment, identifying the skills, education and past experience of the beneficiary, setting short- and long-term goals. Follow-up sessions can include assistance with job search, CV. Once the career counsellor reaches ten

people they have seen, they do a group job readiness training series that involves cover letter writing, communication skills, soft skills, work place culture, financial literacy, labour rights. The programme has also organised job clubs where job seekers use computers at job search sessions facilitated by the job counsellor.

Career counsellors have seen 30 people from Curing the Limbo, **9 of whom have found a job**, mostly in tourism and hospitality, in restaurants, facility management, support, logistics, customer service, as well as household support service like childcare and housekeeping. The high success rate is attributed to the fact that the training had been originally restricted to people with language skills, before IRC was encouraged by consortium partners to extend its training to a broader circle of people by adding Farsi, Arabic and French interpretation to the service. Another change in the programme to offer a pilot entrepreneurship programme with a micro-enterprise counsellor to help people interested in setting up a business. Adding this unforeseen service is made available by another IRC programme whose resources and costs can be shared with Curing the Limbo.

“We saw that a number of beneficiaries that come to the career counselling service have expressed an interest in opening up a business.”
Anastasia Sikiaridi



2.5 Housing

“The fact that we come in gives a sense of security.” Stefania Gyftopoulou

As in earlier phases of the programme, **identifying available housing and engaging property owners** has been a non-linear process with many new challenges emerging on the way. The ejection of people who acquired refugee status from the ESTIA programme and the consequent exit of many families from subsidised accommodation structures has put additional pressure on the housing market, especially on its segments more suitable for refugees.

Curing the Limbo had changing fortunes with **institutional landowners**. The largest public housing organisations in the center of Athens are still under a lawsuit, preventing Curing the Limbo from cooperating with them. Negotiations with

the University, owner of a great quantity of empty apartments did not go as well as expected. Because of its internal regulations, the University has to open a tender where refugees can only apply with a guarantor. As the Curing the Limbo consortium members cannot apply for the apartments on behalf of the refugees, this procedure practically excludes refugees. The programme’s legal advisor works on finding solutions to have these apartments assigned to the programme in the lack of other bidders. Unexpectedly, however, a potential cooperation emerged with the Institute of Blind People, another owner of a variety of apartments, usually in need of renovation. In addition, the municipality also helped bringing in the programme a variety of other property owners. Some apartments came into Curing the Limbo as rejected by the ESTIA programme.

The programme had more luck with **individual property owners**. While a grassroots campaign with flyers to find available apartments in neighbourhoods did not bring results, other outreach methods based on specialist newspapers, websites, the union of property owners and real estate agents helped the programme connect with potential landowners. By the end of Summer 2019, out of the 25-30 landlords who joined the programme, there were proceedings with 16 and **signed lease contracts with 9 owners** – with 28 beneficiaries eligible for housing at the moment. Most apartments coming into the programme have specific features that make them relatively unattractive on the housing market: in bad conditions or in areas where Greeks are not interested in renting. Some landlords, in neighbourhoods with a high proportion of immigrants, are willing to lease their properties to refugees, especially with the mediation of Curing the Limbo.

“Some landlords wanted to rent for 6 months but we didn’t want to engage with these cases: we don’t go below one year with contracts. The refugees are here to stay, they want to build their lives, find a house, have a home.”
Stefania Gyftopoulou

In order to accelerate beneficiaries’ access to privately owned apartments, a series of focus group discussions were organised with private property owners to discuss potential incentives to engage them in the refugee accommodation programme. **The financial incentive** towards the owners is the equivalent of 6-month upfront payment, giving owners a sense of security. If the rent is 300 euros, Curing the Limbo pays upfront 6 months (1800 euros) that is the equivalent of half-price rent for 12 months, making the apartment more affordable to the refugees. The owner and the beneficiary sign a 12-month lease

contract to cover the other half of the rental price (150 euros / month). Curing the Limbo provides additional housing cost subsidies to refugees for 9 months: 100% of the housing costs are covered in the first 6 months, 70% in the 7th, 8th and 9th months, and 50% in the last 3 months. Refugees with signed lease contracts receive the same total subsidy, with more housing cost contribution replacing the financial incentive. The housing cost contribution is a fixed amount depending on the apartment size and communal expenses, based on subsidies in the ESTIA programme. Each household manages their budget on their own. In order to receive the second and third portions of the subsidy, beneficiaries need to bring CRS a receipt that they paid the rent before: the CRS team therefore meets them monthly.

Besides engagement work on the property owners’ side, Curing the Limbo has done significant work on the future tenants’ side. CRS organised the first rounds of **housing workshops** with about 30 home-seekers each time. The workshops focus on the housing component of the project, including ways to find an apartment, apartment costs, learning about neighbourhood resources, cleaning and maintenance, rules regarding communal spaces, contracts and legal obligations. The workshops form the basis of a guide to be published before the end of 2019. CRS also works on informing beneficiaries about rental prices: a map of the price ranges in different neighbourhoods will be published and regularly updated, seen the exponential increase in prices year-by-year.

“Because the subsidies for housing came so late, people didn’t just wait until we were ready, they made steps on their own and it was then that we decided it would be good to support this group as well. Otherwise we would punish them for making steps and exiting the Limbo.” **Ourania Dimitriou**

The original idea of the **housing package** has changed: corresponding to the different housing situations of the refugees, Curing the Limbo now provides two different packages to beneficiaries: one to people with already signed lease agreement, one to people without. Led by CRS, the Curing the Limbo consortium has worked hard on developing the **housing access criteria**. The established criteria include vulnerability (housing need), engagement (with courses and civil society activities) and job readiness (steps taken towards a job and language skills). To address the emergency situation created by the closure of refugee accommodation programmes,

people who are involved in an exit scheme from other programmes were prioritised as extremely vulnerable. The access criteria accepted by all partners represents a compromise between traditional, vulnerability-based approaches and Curing the Limbo's approach to promote active citizenship and reduce refugees' dependence on humanitarian aid.

“The biggest challenge is how to make people understand that they are not in the protection sector, but now they have to make it on their own: go through the integration path and then move on.” Antigone Kotanidis



2.6 Community and active citizenship

“The innovative aspect of the project is working very well. At the beginning it was unclear how it is going to come together, the city initiatives and the classes. Now it is really working.”

Thalia Dragona

In the past months, based on the work of the synAthina team, **community activities** have “infiltrated” all areas of Curing the Limbo. Since the arrival of refugees into the programme, synAthina has been working on connecting them with community initiatives through various layers of activities. First, language classes were taken to a variety of cultural activities, museums, farmers markets, cooking activities, urban gardens. Second, refugees were encouraged to connect with activities by themselves as well. Third, independent workshops were organised in the form of a photography seminar or a guided photography tour.

Joining community activities does not only help integration but also helps people enhance their skills or find jobs. To encourage refugees joining such activities, a **public calendar of events** was created in the Limbo Exit Lab with a variety of cooking activities, language exercises, sport activities, football games, music, arts, knitting, fashion, ceramic, sailing, tattoo, etc. Thanks to the activities of larger institutions like the Museum of Islamic Arts or small organisations like the Victoria Square Project, the calendar has events to recommend every day across Athens. The calendar was also added as an inner platform within the synAthina website, where all activities and public events are uploaded.

“It was difficult to make it clear what we mean by activities. That we don’t organise a theatre performance but we mean connecting with the civil society no matter what the activity is. People are not familiar with the idea of a community that works together to approach and challenge something in the neighbourhood.”

Haris Biskos

When the first refugees began to attend language courses, the synAthina team conducted a focus group research with them to learn about their perspective of the city, their difficulties, favourite neighbourhoods, friendships, interests and ambitions within Athens. The research revealed that almost none of them had spent time walking around the city, exploring neighbourhoods that are not strictly functional in their everyday life: participation at civic activities has significantly changed this. Connecting the community activities promoted by synAthina with the classes was a successful strategy: refugees visited citizen initiatives as part of their language classes and learned about neighbourhood challenges and responses to them in an organic way. By Summer 2019, over 100 refugees were connected with community groups in Athens, including those 70 or 80 refugees who are the most active in attending the classes and contributing to the events and the exhibition.

After the first neighbourhood events, a fourth public event with the title “Athens my new neighbourhood” was organised on 22 June, focusing on the **refugees’ perception of the city** and showcasing Curing the Limbo’s work with photos by refugees attending the audio-visual seminars. The results of this workshop were assembled in an exhibition displayed at the Kipseli Market.

“We used polaroid photos, selfies, with their favourite street art... we like the idea of photography as they have a microscopic view of the city. We ask them how they understand the city; how do they experience it, what do they like, how do they approach it? From this microscopic view they can move on to initiate something.” Haris Biskos

One of the big challenges of Curing the Limbo is how to turn refugees from passive beneficiaries of various aid packages into active citizens, how to encourage refugees to give back to the city. In November, a call will be launched in order to build connections around some projects developed by refugees and community groups together:

8-10 projects will be selected to be awarded with funding of 5-20.000 euros, as well as project development support, mentoring and communication from the programme and external organisations. In October, two workshops were organised to match these initiatives and regular meetings will be held with the selected groups and start developing a business plan with them.

“We feel that refugees are more ready now to give back to the city than when they entered the programme in March. We think about their contribution no longer as “exchange” but as “reciprocity,” giving back in an equal way with the communities of Athens, like a true citizen.” Haris Biskos



3. CHALLENGES

TABLE 1: MAPPING CURING THE LIMBO AGAINST THE ESTABLISHED UIA CHALLENGES

Challenge	Level	Observations
1. Leadership for implementation	Low	While national elections have impacted Curing the Limbo indirectly, the local elections have an important stake for the programme. Anticipating the change, the Curing the Limbo partnership has worked intensively on positioning itself as a social innovation programme developing public policies that can be adjusted to and implemented in different policy areas. The European Innovation Capital title has definitely been a strong asset in this operation. According to the first meetings with the new leadership, the new municipal administration seems to have embraced Curing the Limbo and this gives good perspectives to Curing the Limbo.
2. Public procurement	Low	While the hiring process has ended, its timing and long duration has created serious problems for the partnership. Some of the positions remain unfilled: 2 ICT teachers/ 1 ICT coordinator and 3 cultural mediator trainers are missing from the envisioned staff, forcing changes in the programme and risking to disappoint some beneficiaries. The long procedures and the discontinuity in payments has created tensions within the partnership and left a bad feeling with many of the staff. After the local elections, due to the suspension of many processes in City Council, many decisions have to be postponed and it further slowed down the work of the consortium. In general, procurement proved to be the most difficult challenge to overcome, although it should play a minor role from Autumn 2019 on.
3. Integrated cross-departmental working	Medium	Local elections brought about a new situation: while the new leadership seems to support Curing the Limbo, the consortium will need to build new relationships and partnerships with many new actors within the administration. It is a long-term process that begins now and its result can have a strong impact on the implementation of Curing the Limbo.
4. Adopting a participative approach	Low	The participatory design of Curing the Limbo where each programme element interacts with the other elements and all of them are participated by beneficiaries and local stakeholders, makes the participatory approach inevitable. A series of capacity-building workshops as well as rethought coordination procedures have helped strengthen the cooperation and communication between the different partners and their interaction with beneficiaries. Once the right mechanisms of coordination and participation are in place, it does not represent any further significant challenge.

Challenge	Level	Observations
5. Monitoring and evaluation	Medium	Since the creation of a monitoring and evaluation methodology, there are regular opportunities for feedback within all elements of the programme. Each team works with clear indicators and evaluation tools and the regular coordination meetings and capacity building trainings also give space for feedback for all team members. Beneficiaries are followed by the psycho-social support team and they have the possibility of participating regularly in focus groups or questionnaires to help consortium members understand the programme's impact. These established mechanisms will potentially accompany the project until its end and help the creation of a critical overview of the programme as well as make various adjustments possible.
6. Financial Sustainability	Medium	A big part of Curing the Limbo's financial sustainability depends on the current state of the housing market and the willingness of various property owners to join the programme with their apartments. In the past period, the first lease contracts were signed and this success shows the feasibility of the planned procedure. In other programme elements, partners managed to use resources from outside the project budget to bring new educational and training opportunities into the programme. All these experiences open new perspectives for the programme's financial sustainability beyond the project period.
7. Communicating with target beneficiaries	Low	In the first project period, the consortium had to experiment with different methods to reach beneficiaries. After a slow start, registration numbers began to increase rapidly and classes were soon filled with participants. With a continuous presence at the Limbo Exit Lab, as well with a series of outreach programmes and public events, the consortium learned how to best communicate both with beneficiaries and other local stakeholders. In the past months, with growing interest from the side of various media outlets, the public opinion has also made acquaintance with the programme and it has become a well-known initiative.
8. Upscaling	Low	Curing the Limbo relies on a methodology of combining elements of education, employment, housing and community activities that can be applied in different fields or contexts. This combination can already inform public policies and integration strategies, to be implemented in Athens and elsewhere. In the meanwhile, particular methods of language teaching, for instance, as well as housing education, are planned to be collected in manuals to be disseminated and shared widely. All these actions and reflection improve the chances of upscaling Curing the Limbo and making it transferable to other situations.

4. TAKE AWAY POINTS

In this period, Curing the Limbo has encountered a variety of new challenges. All these challenges could only be addressed with the help of flexibility in the project's design and implementation, regularly adjusted to changing needs and circumstances. Such flexibility has also been enabled by a methodology able to accommodate change as well as better cooperation between project partners, achieved through new forms of one-to-one cooperation.

- a) **Consortium cohesion:** give a particular emphasis to group dynamics, through regularly updated cooperation mechanisms that enhance the sharing of information and awareness of each other's activities
- b) **One-to-one cooperation:** besides capacity building trainings and updated consortium mechanisms, it is important to build one-to-one cooperation projects, so that each partner has the chance to inspire other partners and get inspired by them
- c) **Beneficiary trajectories:** build flexible trajectories that are able to accommodate newcomers and give space for beneficiaries to develop their skills according to their needs and the city's possibilities
- d) **Feedback loops:** introduce a variety of feedback opportunities for partners and beneficiaries as well, in the form of questionnaires, focus groups or individual sessions
- e) **Adjust the programme based on the feedback:** use the feedback loop to adjust the programme, build on comments and critics to help the programme elements adapt to changing needs

- f) **Accommodate change in the context:** use the flexible project methodology to adapt to changing circumstances, whether a new political reality or a housing market in transformation
- g) **Explore new housing resources:** keep the programme open to accommodate resources from unexpected directions, whether unsolicited housing owners offering their properties or human resources made available in related programmes
- h) **Highlight innovative aspect to secure political support:** explore the values of the project that are compatible with the new leadership and secure continuous support through highlighting innovative aspects that make the project attractive across the political spectrum
- i) **Use creativity to connect with the city:** make beneficiaries' connection with the city playful, experienced through creative activities like photography, instead of defining it as an obligatory task
- j) **Sharing methods:** work on identifying, extracting and sharing new training and involvement methods from the beginning, allowing the broader community to follow and learn from it

5. CONCLUSION

The Curing the Limbo programme has gone through a period of transition. Political changes at the national and local levels have changed the official discourse related to refugee integration. At another level, refugee accommodation programmes have been discontinued, and this brought many families at the edge of homelessness, putting additional pressure on a specific segment of the housing market and on Curing the Limbo. Facing these changes, the consortium has responded with remarkable flexibility in adapting to changing circumstances, a move enabled by the project's action-research methodology, based on continuous learning, feedback and adjustments. Curing the Limbo has repositioned itself to be better accepted in the new political reality, underlining the social innovation aspect of the programme. In the housing field, not relying on one unique housing pool and understanding the needs of property owners through focus groups and surveys allowed CRS to accommodate new opportunities and keep the programme open for new housing resources.

In the same period, all mechanisms of the programme began to work in full speed. Seeing beneficiaries move through the planned trajectory and step-by-step acquiring the competences needed for obtaining housing, a job and better cultural integration gave confidence to the entire consortium. Cooperation mechanisms

among consortium members have been tested, sometimes failed and then were adjusted to the needs of the partners and the programme.

Innovation in linking refugees to community initiatives has been “contaminating” the areas of language education and job training as well, themes of the city and neighbourhoods have “infiltrated” the syllabi of language classes and housing trainings, helping refugees build a more complex experience of Athens and acquire better navigation skills through its society. Better thematic connection between the different project streams also allowed partner-to-partner cooperation to develop many new methods in education, employment and housing training, and community activities as well.

Once the project mechanisms are proven and the passage from language courses, trainings and community activities towards housing, jobs and involvement in the city are completed by an increasing number of beneficiaries, the focus on the programme will move to questions of scale and long-term sustainability. This will require stabilising the programme's structures and developing mechanisms to enable the project to continue once its budget is spent as well as exploring further untapped resources for housing, human capacities as well as community initiatives.

Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Based on article 8 of ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

UIA projects will produce a wealth of knowledge stemming from the implementation of the innovative solutions for sustainable urban development that are of interest for city practitioners and stakeholders across the EU. This journal is a paper written by a UIA Expert that captures and disseminates the lessons learnt from the project implementation and the good practices identified. The journals will be structured around the main challenges of implementation identified and faced at local level by UIA projects. They will be published on a regular basis on the UIA website.



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