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The Urban Lab of Europe !

# The Curing the Limbo project Journal N° 2

*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, the Athens Municipality's initiative to connect education, employment, housing and active citizenship offers a complex answer to the complex challenge of **integrating refugees** in the Athens society. The initiative funded by the EU's Urban Innovative Actions programme bring 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.

The past period of Curing the Limbo has been characterised by the **establishment of the project's teams, spaces and working routines**. While the months before October 2018 represented a "period in limbo," with only a fragment of the project staff hired, no services offered and refugees involved, the past 6 months brought major changes in the life of the project. By March 2019, the Curing the Limbo headquarters are in full operation, with its offices buzzing from activities and schoolrooms packed with refugees eager to improve their skills.

Despite being elected the European Capital of Innovation in 2018, innovation in Athens cannot be taken for granted. It is the result of an ecosystem of innovation in which a diversity of actors can cooperate, share knowledge and resources. Curing the Limbo has been at the core of this ecosystem, and its consortium had to overcome a variety of problems, from administrative challenges through institutional changes to structural difficulties originating from fast urban transformation. In this context, the use of an **action-research methodology** that gives the consortium flexibility to assess its results,

revisit decisions and replan activities helped the project in dealing with changing circumstances.

The issues raised by the rapidly changing housing market, past and future reorganisations in the municipality, and the fact that many recognised refugees will soon have to leave their accommodation offered by the ESTIA programme can only be addressed with this flexibility and continuous self-correction. In the past months, partners of Curing the Limbo joined forces to build a **common ground and shared understanding** of the roles and tasks, as well as to build a governance model based on a system of meetings and a flow of information between the partners.

Helped by this common framework and shared decision-making, each component of the project has begun with **hiring staff and gathering knowledge** about the needs of refugees and local communities and the resources available for the programme. The project's headquarters, the Limbo Exit Lab located in the Serafeio building has become a point of reference for the consortium partners as well as for beneficiaries, offering a secure institutional space for all participants of the programme. The first courses of Greek and English language and audiovisual skills have been launched with special curricula developed for this occasion and with students from a great diversity of backgrounds and education levels. Employment counsellors have been hired and started their trainings, specialised to identify skills and strengths in refugees and connect them with employment opportunities in the Athens labour market. Property owners of various kinds, ranging from individual landlords

to the Ministry of Education and the Athens University have been engaged in discussions about their potential role in offering refugees affordable housing. A series of public events helped mapping the problems and opportunities of various Athens neighbourhoods as well as the stakeholders that Curing the Limbo could rely on and cooperate with.

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 second issue explores the challenges of building a coherent project consortium by developing a common working routine, as well as the dynamics of launching activities and engaging with shifting circumstances in the constantly changing environment of Athens.

## 2 Progress

*„The project is getting on the Athenian scene, people are getting to know us, we have media attention, the mayor is talking about us.” Alexandros Makrygiannis*

### 2.1 Limbo Exit Lab

*„Being a point of reference for the refugees, we want them to be able to create some kind of space of their own. We want them to feel that this is a point of reference for them, this building.” Thalia Dragona*

Six months ago, the Athens Municipality’s Serafeio Building’s second floor was a sterile space with few activities other than finalising the arrangement of the offices and meeting rooms. In the past months, the Limbo Exit Lab began to be fully operational with Curing the Limbo staff and partners inhabiting their offices and participants appropriating their learning spaces.

The Limbo Exit Lab is conceived as a centre of activities, a reference point where all activities began before radiating out to other locations in the city. The institutional settings of the Serafeio building help the project in forming its own identity and offer refugees a stable sense of belonging before inviting them to build

relationships with and in other neighbourhoods. Until the classes move out to other spaces across the city, the Limbo Exit Lab serves both as a working space and a training venue.

The Lab now operates at full capacity: by March 2019, almost all administrative and educational activities have begun at the Serafeio Complex and some classes had to move to other floors of the building. This situation will be alleviated when some classes will move out of the building to other Athens neighbourhoods. In the meanwhile, the Limbo Exit Lab has become a place for gathering and socialisation, an institutional but also informal safe space for refugees in search for a new life.

*„I see refugees happier and better clothed every day. They’re getting more comfortable here. They come earlier, which is very important. To drink their coffee or see their classmates so they feel secure.” Anthoula Koutsoupi*

### 2.2 Partnership

*„All organisations in the partnership are very experienced in their field but they also tend to do what they know how to do best. Here they really need to get out of what they have always done and do things differently.” Antigone Kotanidis*

Unlike most UIA projects, Curing the Limbo heavily relies on its personnel and on the coordination of interdependent tasks performed by various consortium partners. By March 2019,

most employees of the consortium partners have been hired, and therefore most of the workstreams have begun. As anticipated in the challenge assessment, public procurement has become one of the major obstacles of the proceedings. New hiring and even changing job descriptions need a vote in the city council: these complicated procurement rules caused significant delays in the consortium’s work. Procurement rules impacted not only the process of hiring





*The Serafeio building. Picture by Levente Polyak*

personnel but also the purchasing of equipment for the trainings, specifically for the ICT classes. The project has spent months and a disproportional amount of energy on unlocking bureaucracy both in the municipal administration and the university. As a result of procurement difficulties as well as administrative reorganisation issues, a part of salaries were not paid for several months – a situation that heavily affected not only the work atmosphere but also the coordination activities.

*„We have generated a framework where we can explore, experiment, and work back and forth, step by step, where assessing, rethinking and replanning are very important.” Harris Biskos*

Curing the Limbo consists of organisations with different working cultures. The challenges of this diversity, of the coordination between different

workstreams as well as of changing schedules have been addressed by the project’s **action-research methodology**. In October 2018, a **capacity-building workshop** was organised with the participation of all teams in order to get to know each other and exchange their ideas and visions of the project. As an important part of the project staff had not been yet hired, the capacity-building training could not run on full capacity and could only include a fragment of the future project consortium. Therefore, a later occasion for further capacity and team building activities is planned.

*„A meeting is a working space to formulate new patterns of collaboration. Our management meetings are like workshops to find out ways of communicating and collaborating in a more effective way.” Kostas Papachristopoulos*

Despite the success of the capacity-building workshop, however, many partners felt the need for more activities to strengthen the coherence of the actions of the various partners in order to better connect the educational, employment, housing and neighbourhood aspects of the project. This need gave birth to several tools to help the collaborative process.

This investment includes a, **weekly management meeting** that serves as a common space between consortium partners to share their progress and challenges. In addition, consortium partners expressed their need to follow the trajectory of refugees at a more personal level: this led to the establishment of a **case management team** that includes one person from each participating organisation and assesses the participation of each beneficiary in the programme and establish their personalised exchange plan to access housing. All this information will be organised in a **database** managed by the recently allowed data officer.

## 2.3 Education

*“Our role is to motivate refugees, to help them re-gain power over the life, to reactivate the powers they lost.” Nestoria Fragoulia*

Education is at the core of the integration process. Curing the Limbo relies on a **wide selection of courses**, ranging from Greek and English lessons to audiovisual courses, designed by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. By the first months of 2019, almost all instructors and coordinators have been hired and most courses began in February and March, with the exception of the ICT classes and the cultural mediator trainings. The education component of Curing the Limbo is based on the close cooperation of teachers, coordinators and their supervisors from the university who developed **specific curricula**

In recent months, a highly detailed trajectory was designed to lead refugees through a series of steps. The cycle begins with the psychosocial support team that first meets refugees, and explores their needs and interests. Based on this encounter and a placement test, refugees are assigned to different courses and introduced to a variety of citizen initiatives. Based on their skills and interests, the career councillors advise the refugees about job opportunities and connects them with prospective employers, while the housing facilitation unit organises a specialised training to selected candidates that enables them to find and rent an apartment.

*„The idea is the full programme, accommodation, training, psychosocial support, involvement in the city, you get the people out of their waiting, you empower them, job training and back to accommodation. You want the full cycle.”*

**Thalia Dragona**

designated to work with people who speak no English or Greek at all or are illiterate. For instance, instead of an in-depth education of grammar, the language courses focus on practical issues and daily challenges, situations of family life, living in apartments or job seeking. The audiovisual courses, in turn, are designed to help beneficiaries in developing more self-awareness and building relationships with local communities and city life.

*„The teachers were worried that classes would run empty – but by word of mouth people heard about the programme and by now most classes are full. It all happened in a month.”*

**Antigone Kotanidis**



In order to **recruit refugees** for the courses, Curing the Limbo organised a series of info sessions. Recognising that the first classes had very few people from Eleonas, the city's refugee camp, the psychosocial support team visited the camp several times to discuss with inhabitants of the camp the opportunities offered by the programme. While engaging refugees initially seemed a challenge, communication towards refugees has gradually become more efficient and streamlined and by March 2019 almost all courses have been filled.

*„We want to work with people who want to invest in their lives here.“* Antigone Kotanidis

Apart from recruiting, **selecting participants** for the programme proved to be another challenge. After long discussions, the Curing the Limbo steering committee decided to stick to the original criteria and focus on refugees recognised in Greece and not asylum seekers who may end up leaving Greece or immigrants that have been in Greece for long years or sometimes decades. This choice is meant to assure that resources are well spent on people who are willing to invest in their lives in Athens and targeted to the people that have recently arrived in the city (after 2015).

## 2.4 Employment

*„Group trainings are important and needed but they should always be combined with a personalised and one-to-one approach to beneficiaries.“* Anastasia Sikiaridi

Curing the Limbo's employment support component is provided by the International Rescue Committee. Due to delays in the hiring process, the two municipal **employment counsellors** have only been hired recently and were about to start working in the beginning of

Besides teachers, course coordinators and supervisors, the educational component of Curing the Limbo is backed by the **psychosocial support team** composed by a psychologist and a social worker. The first personal contact is created at info sessions where candidates have the opportunity to book one-to-one meetings with the support team. At a second appointment, the team reviews the social history of candidates including their family status, educational background and skills. The process allows the team to gradually develop personal links with refugees, monitor their progress within the programme and share their needs with the employment, housing and active citizenship teams during coordination meetings. The psychosocial support team also helps teachers with training about how to face situations they are not prepared for, for instance, how to deal with students in emotional distress. In the same time, this contact also offers refugees the opportunity to give feedback and share their personal issues related to the programme, and receive help in solving their problems.

*“We have to put them in a situation where they think how to solve their problem, and to provide them with support in these procedures instead of solving problems for them.”* Nestoria Fragoulia

April 2019. In April, the counsellors receive technical advice and guidance from IRC on market assessment, labour market trends, financial literacy, job readiness training and company outreach, as well as monitoring and evaluation. Following these preparations, the counsellors will deliver a series of job readiness trainings to beneficiaries. While the original concept was based on group trainings, experience with refugees shows the importance of **one-to-one**

**sessions counselling sessions** for beneficiaries to develop a self-sufficiency plan that is co-owned by them and co-design of short- and long-term goals in terms of professional development. Therefore, in the months before beginning the trainings, the IRC revised the structure of the employment counselling service to include one-to-one sessions. The one-to-one sessions offered by the counsellors will be complemented by open seminars on topics such as labour rights and communication skills.

*“The service is to assist people in looking for jobs but not to finding jobs for them.”*  
**Anastasia Sikiaridi**

Counsellors will also have an important role in **collaborating with teachers** on their training material, cross-delivering what is important for job readiness across language courses and trainings. The municipal employment counsellors trained by IRC will develop their own tools in

order to assist people to look for jobs but not to find jobs for them and to bring out their strength through various scenarios and role games. They will not be able to serve all the people attending courses but will be accessible through appointments booked by beneficiaries through the psychosocial service. The employment specialists will also work on a series of events, career days or job fairs, building on a network developed by IRC, mapping and engaging stakeholders from the private sector, people and companies who can potentially support Curing the Limbo. Unlike shorter employment support programmes, the duration of Curing the Limbo makes long-term strategic cooperation possible.

*“Different cultures have different ways of communicating. Unlike in Anglo-Saxon cultures, people we work with have a difficult time expressing how good they are at things.”*  
**Anastasia Sikiaridi**



*The Capacity-Building Lab. Picture by Levente Polyak*

## 2.5 Housing

*„We want to cover all the process from the beginning of understanding the housing market, prices, neighbourhood characteristics in order to select where you want to live – and the specificities of living in an Athenian apartment building which comes with communal rules and responsibilities.” Stefania Gyftopoulou*

The housing component of Curing the Limbo, managed by the Catholic Relief Services, is one of the most challenging elements of the programme, due to the ever-changing circumstances of the housing market. In the past months, a **series of studies** were produced to help designing mechanisms to connect housing with citizen activities. A desk review created by the University College of London offers a detailed international overview of housing models that include an exchange component. Another review has produced a list of vacant spaces in Athens, together with potential incentives to engage the owners of these properties to collaborate with Curing the Limbo.

Based on these reviews, a series of **meetings were organised with different property owners** in Athens. In the process of making housing units available for Curing the Limbo, important progress was made through discussions with the Athens university, an institution with over 700 apartments and buildings in its ownership across Athens. Besides securing tenants for its unused properties, the University is also interested in participating at the development of an affordable housing model that can in the future also serve students and other vulnerable groups. In order to stabilise this cooperation with the University of Athens, a Memorandum of Understanding was prepared and is in the process of signing. Other negotiations have been organised with the

Ministry of Labour, one of the largest property owners of the country. Furthermore, a series of discussions were conducted with a large, Asylo Aniaton with interest from both sides.

*“It’s more secure if the exchange is with an institution or an organisation rather than an individual exchange with a private landlord.” Stefania Gyftopoulou*

Another series of negotiations and focus group discussions have been conducted with individual property owners represented by the National Landowner Association. While signalling its interest in supporting Curing the Limbo (70% of private landlords were found to be interested in working with the programme), the Association indicated that they **need a more attractive package** from the side of the programme. In exchange for lowering their prices and offer an affordable rent, private owners claimed that the 2200 euros renovation budget offered by the programme might not be sufficient for some of the owners. Similarly, the six-month subsidy period is considered by many as not enough to allow refugees to find jobs and become self-sufficient.

*“This idea of getting a house in exchange for work has many risks. It might take time from the beneficiary as they work but they don’t earn money. They might be trapped in a circle where they don’t have time to find a job in order to be autonomous. We are developing a model for a more indirect kind of exchange.” Stefania Gyftopoulou*

In order to accompany refugees personally in their quest for housing, a **housing facilitation unit** was established with all members hired by March 2019. The unit is composed by a team leader, two shelter officers, a neighbourhood

liaison officer, a cash officer and cultural mediators. Their role is to assist beneficiaries through the process of identifying an apartment, meeting with landlords, sign rental contracts, change utility contracts, maintain a stable monthly budget and create a personalised housing exchange plan that involves community activities. The housing facilitation unit will also

organise workshops and publish a guide to help refugees access housing.

*“We want the refugees to drive the process. We will be there to support each family and individual in what they need our support but if a person feels comfortable we don’t need to attend all the meetings. They can do them on their own.” Stefania Gyftopoulou*

## 2.6 Community and active citizenship

*„What makes our programme special is the very central position of the city in the programme’s activities.” Thalia Dragona*

In the context of various refugee integration programmes, Curing the Limbo is unique in its approach to connect with Athens neighbourhoods and community activities. The active citizenship component, organised by the

Municipality’s synAthina team, has been designed to create this **link between refugees and local communities**. This strong neighbourhood aspect appears at every level of the project: all courses will connect to the city, in their subjects and soon their decentralised locations; a grassroots campaign will work on engaging local property owners to join the



*The Victoria Square project, a key stakeholder for Curing the Limbo. Picture by Levente Polyak*



housing programme and cultural mediators will emerge from the events organised in various neighbourhoods.

In order to ensure these **connections between workstreams**, synAthina has been working on creating a stronger sense among consortium partners of its work and the planned participatory activities and city connections. For instance, a series of workshops have been organised for each of the courses provided in the training programmes, encouraging teachers to go out in the city with their classes and connect with initiatives in different Athens neighbourhoods. A grassroots campaign to find apartments in the neighbourhoods will also start in the following weeks.

*“Classes can become the medium of introducing refugees to the city of Athens.” Harris Biskos*

In order to map community initiatives ready to engage with refugees, three **neighbourhood events** were organised in the last months of 2018. The events were supported by a variety of communication activities, synAthina was present in neighbourhoods with leaflets, and municipal radio programme as well as through social media that builds on synAthina’s existing audience and daily newspaper articles. These events helped synAthina in mapping problems, opportunities and resources, as well as proposals coming from local communities. The events were followed by a 1,5-month assessment period overviewing the proposals and feedback from participants. A pool of city needs and a pool of proposals were created as well as a map of over 250 stakeholders who participated at the events, 40 of which are close to Curing the Limbo’s mission and therefore considered as potential long-term collaborators in the programme.

*„All the activities and services that Curing the Limbo offers to participants come through the lens and the filter of Athens to make the programme more connected, more integrated, more rooted in the city. We are creating links to infiltrate the city.” Harris Biskos*

As a result of the neighbourhood events, a series of **new activities** have been conceived, focusing on sports both for men and women. A calendar of events was installed at the Limbo Exit Lab outside the classrooms, giving an overview of regular activities that refugees can engage with across the city. The assessment also prompted changes in synAthina’s neighbourhood engagement strategy. While all the events assured a high level of participation by citizen initiatives and locals, refugees – beneficiaries of Curing the Limbo – were largely absent from these events. This finding encouraged synAthina to keep the **fourth neighbourhood event to be organised together with refugees** and focusing on their needs and perceptions. Based on the learnings from the first public events, two full day thematic workshops will be organised with refugees and local stakeholders to co-create the framework of the open call for collaborative events. According to the plan, as a result of the call, 4-5 collaborative activities will be organised by partnerships consisting of refugees and local community initiatives. These activities will be part of the housing exchange model and will be helped by synAthina with seed funding, as well as mentoring.

*“The exchange model was rethought from a direct exchange of activities for housing towards encouraging refugees to co-design activities and participate in them. The city will benefit from these in a more complex way.” Harris Biskos*

### 3 Challenges

*„We are always very keen on developing links with other programmes and this can lead to synergies that will be sustainable after the end of funding.” Antigone Kotanidis*

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

Challenge	Level	Observations
1. Leadership for implementation	Low	The Curing the Limbo team is actively preparing for the municipal elections coming up in May. There is a consensus among the partners that Curing the Limbo needs to be well-established to make all related municipal officers and politicians familiar with the programme and support it. Therefore, the consortium will need to emphasize that the project does not only cater for refugees but also creates benefits for the city: Curing the Limbo needs a narrative that highlights concrete results and creates a common space bridging the previous administration with the new one. The objective of the partnership is to put Curing the Limbo as high in the agenda of the new administration as in the previous one, engaging the mayor as well as elected council members and public officers across the administration.
2. Public procurement	Low	Public procurement has proven to be a major challenge in the implementation of Curing the Limbo. Hiring and purchasing procedures turned out to be much longer than expected: new hiring and even changing job descriptions need a vote in the city council and this created significant delays in the project launch and also made coordination and team building activities difficult. Although some of the staff (ICT coordinators and teachers) have still not been hired, most of the procurement process is over and activities could begin by Spring 2019 – this means that procurement will no longer be a significant burden on the progress of Curing the Limbo.



Challenge	Level	Observations
<b>3. Integrated cross-departmental working</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<p>In the past months, administrative transformation within the municipality has created difficulties for the Curing the Limbo programme. The innovation department, previously an autonomous department directly under the Mayor, has been incorporated into a broader department for strategic planning, innovation and resilience. This process caused significant delays in the appointment of personnel as well as in salary payments. Besides this occasional transformation, the hierarchies of the municipality’s administrative structure do not facilitate communication and problem-solving between various branches: staff in different departments cannot easily cooperate with each other without the direct involvement of the department heads. As Curing the Limbo requires cooperation with municipal departments and companies in many fields like real estate, communication and integration, the successful implementation of future steps in Curing the Limbo will therefore continue to depend on further investment in communication and collaboration with other departments and public officers.</p>
<b>4. Adopting a participative approach</b>	<b>Low</b>	<p>Curing the Limbo is based on a participatory approach both in the internal dealings between project partners and in the external relations with beneficiaries and other stakeholders. Within the project consortium, the action-research methodology designed by the university and the structure of meetings elaborated by the partnership have been encouraging participatory decision-making among partners. The participatory dimension of the cooperation with external stakeholders is enhanced by the collaborative events designed together with beneficiaries and local communities.</p>
<b>5. Monitoring and evaluation</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<p>Unlike many other projects, Curing the Limbo does not have a separate work package focusing on evaluation. Therefore, the consortium felt the need of investing energies in a sounder evaluation methodology. The evaluation handbook prepared by the appointed Limbo Exit Lab director was designed to address this need: by harmonising the expectations and definitions of impact of different partners of the consortium, the handbook manages to bring the different visions to a common ground. A designated evaluation team will update the evaluation methodology and develop ways to collect the appropriate data.</p>

Challenge	Level	Observations
<b>6. Financial Sustainability</b>	Medium	Financial sustainability is one of the core challenges of Curing the Limbo. It is not very likely that the exchange and affordable housing mechanisms developed in the project will be self-sufficient on the market. However, they can potentially be maintained in the long term in synergy with other relevant initiatives, like teaching and job counselling programmes. The most expensive components of the programme are the teaching facilities, housing and project staff. In theory, offices and apartments can be provided by large donors who are willing to create impact in the city and staff costs can be covered by partner organisations. At another level, a hypothetical introduction of stricter regulations of short-term accommodation could change the context and increase housing availability for similar programmes.
<b>7. Communicating with target beneficiaries</b>	Low	Communication with target beneficiaries and other stakeholders has become much more streamlined. With the help of info sessions, visits to camps, as well as by word of mouth, many refugees have been informed by the programme. Special interview sessions with refugee families and individuals helped the understanding of their needs and desires. Combining institutional communication with non-typical networks (including social media and public events) have all contributed to a better outreach by the project. Communication therefore does not seem to be a significant challenge in the process.
<b>8. Upscaling</b>	Low	The specificity of Curing the Limbo, that is, the combination of education, employment, housing and community activities can be upscaled in Athens or elsewhere, depending on the available resources. Besides offering a model for affordable housing to refugees, the proposed agreement with the Athens University also projects the possibility of using some of the mechanisms developed in the project for affordable student housing. In any case, Curing the Limbo has to be understood as an integration programme where education, employment, housing and active citizenship are all integral elements of successful integration.

## 4 Take away points

The Curing the Limbo consortium had to face a variety of structural challenges in the past months, ranging from complicated procurement processes to rigid municipal structures and hierarchies. The burdensome regulations tying the hands of public officers make it important that innovative public actors develop a certain kind of flexibility and resilience that allow them to adapt to changing conditions and circumstances. In order to proceed with its plans despite the challenges of bureaucracy and urban transformation, Curing the Limbo had to develop a variety of tools that help in shaping the internal working mechanisms and cooperation with external partners.

**a) A methodology that allows adaptation:** a methodology that offers flexibility and encourages partners to regularly assess their results and replan activities allows the project to adapt itself to the changing circumstances

**b) A gradual start for the project:** a step-by-step opening for activities allows different working streams to be developed without depending on a fully operational system

**c) Storytelling for non-partisan support:** a strong narrative that bridges different political worlds and enables new decision-makers to embrace the project is an important step for the long-term acceptance and sustainability of the project

**d) An infrastructure of cooperation:** designing a system of regular meetings and a seamless flow of information between partners can enhance project coherence and collaboration between different teams

**e) A venue that gives identity:** in a project with the complexity of Curing the Limbo, it is important to start from a venue that accumulates action and offers a secure institutional space before spreading activities in the city

**f) A diversity of means to reach communities:** using new channels of communication from social media through radio programmes and public events might extend the scope of institutional communication and help reaching communities beyond the “usual suspects”

**g) Co-creating processes:** co-creation and co-design are important methods of involvement and empowerment that also help in understanding needs and capacities of communities

**h) Personalised trajectories:** integration depends on many factors and personalised attention to beneficiaries can detect specific motivations and challenges in each individual

**i) Unexplored resources:** in order to recognize resources in unexpected places, it is important to consider a wide range of resources and potential partners

**j) Project complexity:** Curing the Limbo’s complexity is given by the combination of education, employment, housing and active citizenship towards integration; any element missing from this ensemble will hurt the entire project

## 5 Conclusion

Curing the Limbo is in a phase when all its activities are taking shape and the whole programme is becoming more tangible for its personnel, beneficiaries and the participating communities. After months of delays caused by complicated procurement processes that put the project itself in a kind of limbo, the Limbo Exit Lab and the project teams are operating at an almost full capacity. With a series of capacity building activities and a lot of efforts invested in refining the modalities of cooperation between partners, the consortium by now has reached an organised flow of information and sense of coherence that encompasses each activity.

In this operational phase the consortium is facing the most important barriers of implementing the models envisioned for education, employment, housing and citizenship activities. These barriers, gradually unfolding as the project arrives to new milestones, help the partners rethink and refine the models by adapting them to changing circumstances of the housing and the employment market, as well as the needs of refugees and neighbourhood initiatives.

In the past months, Curing the Limbo has accumulated a variety of knowledge about available resources, potential mechanisms for

housing exchange, beneficiaries and the local communities. In the coming period, all this knowledge will serve as a basis for new activities. The coming 6 months of Curing the Limbo will be decisive in many ways. The new administration will embrace or brush aside Curing the Limbo, improving or limiting its capacities to cooperate with other municipal departments. Through the work of teachers, coordinators, employment counsellors and the psychosocial support team, the consortium will know much more about the programme's beneficiaries and their real possibilities in the Athens labour market. The housing team will come to terms with the size and features of the available housing stock and the exchange mechanisms that can open these properties for refugees. The next neighbourhood event will be a test case for co-creation between refugees and local communities and for the scale of potential interventions in the city. These results will help the consortium translate its theory of change into tangible facts and assess the real impact that can be expected during the implementation of the project. The next edition of this Journal will explore these results and will accompany the major decisions to be taken by consortium partners to adapt Curing the Limbo to the changing circumstances.

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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