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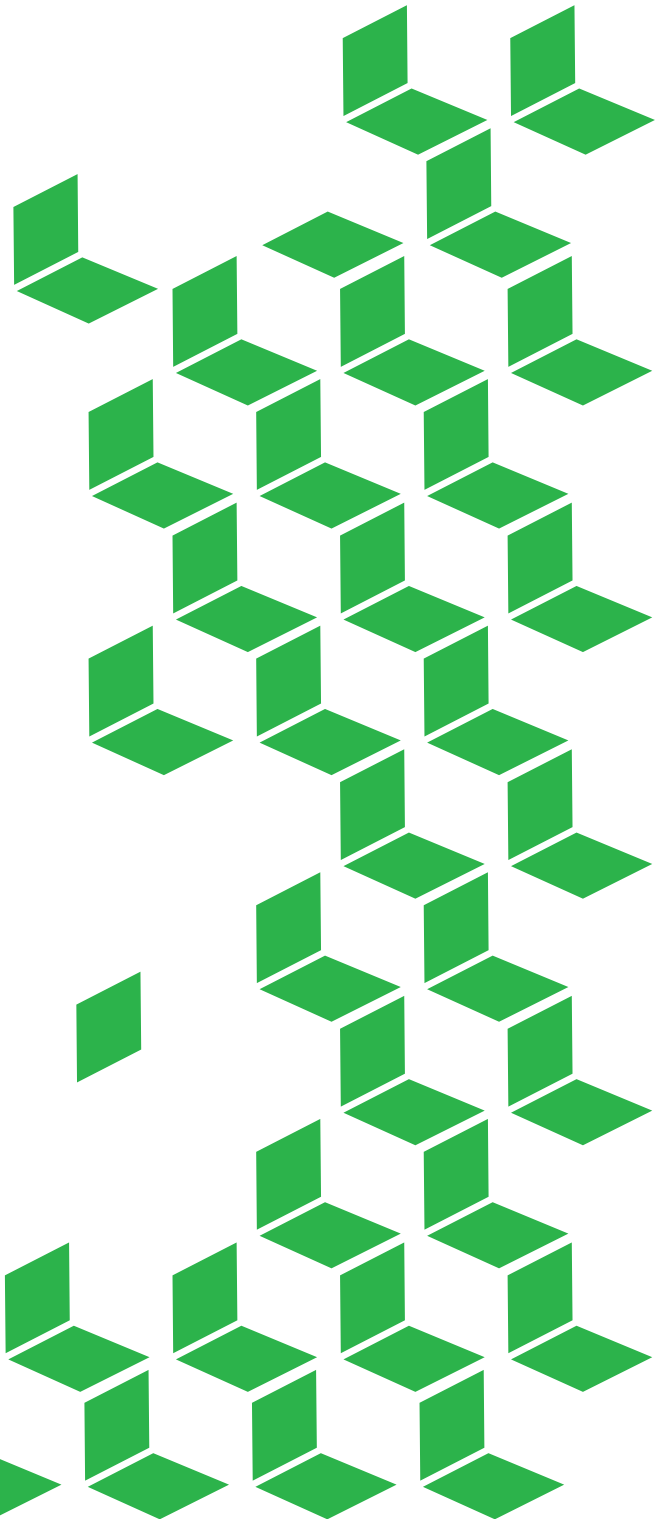**Innovation**
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Hubs & everyday challenges

The role of creative hubs in small and medium-sized cities

What are the specific challenges and opportunities for creative hubs in small and medium-sized cities?

Facilitators:

Sarah Daly, Creative Spark &
Ronnie Garattoni, Warehouse

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When we are thinking of a creative hub we always have in mind a space in a big city. But what about the creative hubs in small and medium-sized cities? Ronnie Garattoni, one of the founders and CEO of Warehouse, a co-working space in Marotta, a small city of Italy, along with Sarah Daly, executive director from Creative Spark located in Dundalk of Ireland, are both raising the question of what is the role of the creative hubs in small and medium-sized cities.

During this session, the instructors presented their respective hubs and their philosophy (both in small towns) and questioned if it is possible to build a creative ecosystem or if it is something that only happens in a metropolis. Mr. Garattoni believes that there are some challenges, some opportunities and some difficulties, of course, that differ from what bigger cities are facing.

He also presented some data of the creative economy in the EU concluding that an important percentage of the people living in small-medium-sized cities are involved in the creative economy, which makes it crucial to create strategic places, especially for youth, community-based, with a strong social dimension, which can represent fertile contexts- capable to attract social, professional, economic, cultural resources – where talents can develop in their personal and professional growth (also through training, mentoring and job orientation). This should be the role of creative hub is small and medium sized cities, allowing young people to develop their ideas and careers in the context where they live, within local and international networks, without being forced to leave their home towns, unless they want to.

On this also local policy makers and other stakeholders should engage too, supporting creative hub leaders and working together in such an extent.

Sarah Daly outlined the ways in which the Creative Spark hub has become very involved with the local community in order to become more relevant to its needs and ultimately to be sustainable. It offers

more than simply workspace, being involved in education and training in enterprise and creative skills, and outreach through creative community programmes.

After discussing and exchanging experiences with the participants the following question arose:

- should creative spaces be agents of change, to be the future?

- should creative spaces emphasize the value of the local culture and community traditions?

- should creative spaces engender collaboration and community engagement?

- should creative spaces encourage creative entrepreneurship and support the rural economy

- should creative spaces develop creative approaches to educating young people?

- how can someone define what a community is? Who is the community?

- is physical space important?

This session set the basis for an ongoing dialogue about the importance of creative spaces in small to medium-sized cities and how they always have to redefine themselves and their goals depending on the given circumstances, but also to find ways to be sustainable. Moreover, hubs in small cities need to be supported and represented in the European Creative Hubs Network.

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