



# European Creative Hubs Network Project evaluation SUMMARY REPORT

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# ECHN IMPACT FIGURES

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**1st**

network of creative hubs in the EU



**215**

network members

**1613**

creative hub managers and staff

**38**

European countries



**3**

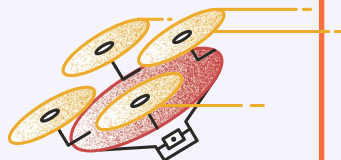
fora

**425**

participants

**78%**

satisfaction rating of very good or excellent



**3**

workshops

**85**

participants

**88%**

satisfaction rating of very good or excellent



**41**

peer-to-peer exchanges in 2016 and 2017

**100%**

satisfaction rating that P2P met objectives

**100%**

commitment to maintaining collaboration



**29,867**

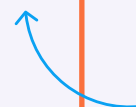
web visits (in 12 months to March 2018)

**812**

newsletter subscribers

**3,032**

Facebook subscribers (March 2018)





# INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly recognised that creative industries contribute significantly to the economy, as well as nourishing social and cultural development. Creative hubs have proliferated in recent times, and are acknowledged to support new ways of working that appeal to small and micro creative businesses and freelancers.

These creative hubs have been defined as “*platforms or workplaces for artists, musicians, designers, filmmakers, app developers or start-up entrepreneurs. They are uniquely diverse in structure, sector and services, and range from collective and co-operative, to labs and incubators; and can be static, mobile or online.*”<sup>1</sup>

Despite the diversity of the organisations they host, creative hubs are distinguished from other contemporary workplaces by their focus on community building, which supports the connectivity of the peer group within and beyond individual disciplines and the creative sector as a whole.

The first initiative to connect creative hubs across Europe, the European Creative Hubs Network (ECHN) was formally launched as a self-standing organisation in January 2018. It is the culmination of a two-year pilot project facilitating connections, collaborations and exchanges of experience and knowledge.

The ECHN evolved from humble beginnings at a 2014 workshop in northern Portugal with 50 hub leaders, followed the next year by a three-day Lisbon forum which attracted more than 250 participants. These events brought to light the collective desire for a hub-focused network, which could help address issues such as isolation, sustainability or lack of leadership, and open up opportunities to learn from peers.

The pilot project was led by the British Council. Partners were six hub leaders considered important influencers in their fields and communities: BIOS (Greece), Betahaus (Germany), Creative Edinburgh (UK), Factoria Cultural (Spain), Nova Iskra (Serbia), Roco (UK) and the European Business and Innovation Network (EBN). A grant of €1 million (co-funding) was obtained through a cross-sectoral strand of the **European Union’s Creative Europe** programme.

<sup>1</sup> Creativehubs.eu / Creative Hubkit, 2015





# EVALUATION METHODS

Project evaluation was designed to assess the outputs of ECHN activities across five work packages, each with specific objectives and deliverables. Key achievements were drawn on to inform decision-making, recommendations and the planning of future activities, supported by close dialogue with the British Council.

This summary report analyses the insights from 199 responses to seven post-event surveys, 21 one-to-one interviews with participants, and observation and informal discussions at six events. It also references a range of supporting documentation for the project.



# OUTPUTS AND FINDINGS

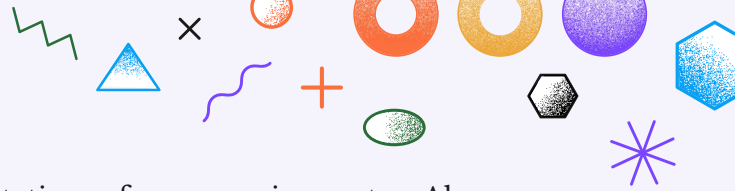
To nurture the creative hub ecosystem, the ECHN delivered events and activities aligned to three ambitious objectives, presented in detail below:

- To support the subsistence and growth of creative hubs in Europe
- To create a community of experienced creative hub leaders across Europe
- To promote hubs as innovative models for supporting the creative economy in Europe

## Supporting the subsistence and growth of creative hubs in Europe

Establishing the **first European network** to connect the disparate community of creative hubs across national boundaries has been an important achievement of the ECHN project.

The proposed Network gained **sustained support** across the various activities of the pilot project and culminated in the registration of **215 members from 38 countries**, 13 of which were not EU Member States. These 215 registrants represent 72% of the target 300. On assessment, 300 members was an ambitious goal for a pioneering initiative



connecting geographically widespread representatives of an emerging sector. Also, taking into account the short 16-month recruiting timespan, member numbers are substantial.

The Network has been highly valued as an umbrella organisation that can give **critical mass and a coherent voice to the sector**. Its role in raising the profile of creative hubs, advocating for policy support at all levels, and gaining the understanding and support of key influencers is considered vital. In the words of a participant at the Sheffield Forum: *“We need to reach a certain critical mass to have a voice in regional, national and European policies. Structures like ECHN are necessary for representing a sector which is largely atomised”*.

The ECHN has also enhanced the credibility of some hubs in their dealings with local decision makers. *“Being a part of the network... [lends] status, which helps us in our advocacy activities to promote creative industries in Ukraine.”*<sup>2</sup>

There was **genuine enthusiasm and willingness to contribute** to the future activities of the Network. Survey respondents from Athens and Sheffield (95% and 100%, respectively) proposed a variety of ways they could do so: from sharing their story and hosting an event to providing consultancy on brand building, mapping, facilitation, marketing and mentoring.

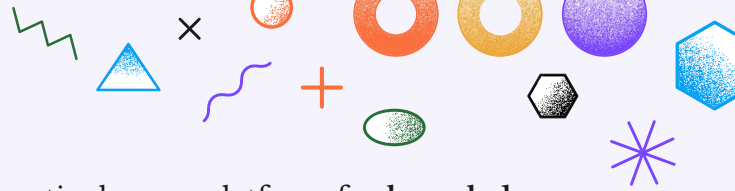
Officially registered in January 2018, the ECHN is being progressed by two members of the pilot-project consortium: BIOS and Nova Iskra (formerly known as Kulturni Kod). To ensure the continuation of the Network, a three-year sustainability plan has been drafted in the form of three papers outlining its values, vision and mission as well as approaches to governance and strategic priorities. Since the conclusion of the planned project activities, ECHN has commissioned the drafting of a Business Plan for the new Network to guide activities over the next five years. Additionally, an Interim Steering Committee of 5 members has volunteered to help consolidate the Network until its first General Assembly, planned for early 2019.

## Creating a community of experienced hub leaders

The ECHN project sought to connect creative hub professionals and enable peer learning, skills enhancement and transnational collaborations, with the benefit of enhancing the community’s resilience. Activities included three fora, three workshops and a two-stage peer-to-peer (P2P) exchange programme. These were supplemented by online communications and resources.

Hosted in Belgrade, Athens and Sheffield, the fora attracted a total of 425 participants, exceeding expected numbers by 70%. Overall, they were rated by 78% of participants

<sup>2</sup> Sheffield Forum Participant



as very good or excellent. They were praised in particular as a platform for **knowledge exchange and peer learning**, and for **building a sense of community by expanding networks**. *“There are lots of opportunities to learn best practice and see innovative ways of developing opportunities and spaces. I really see the value in considering our work in this wider, European, context.”*<sup>3</sup>

Fora publications accompanied each event and contained a series of critical essays and papers.

Workshops designed for smaller groups were held in Madrid, Berlin and Edinburgh and reached 85 participants, exceeding the target by 42%. These sought to achieve a deeper impact: **enhancing the capacity of hub managers** to excel in their role through new skills, techniques and practices.

Overall, 87% of participants rated the workshops as very good or excellent. Hub leaders enhanced their knowledge of set-up, strategy, operations, leadership approaches, business models and community building, among other areas of expertise. Seventy-five per cent of participants agreed in part or fully that they had gained new knowledge or insights which would improve performance. *“The workshop was helpful in defining my strengths and weaknesses. One of my goals after the Berlin workshop was delegating more tasks to my team mates, and I’ve been implementing it for the past few weeks more effectively.”*<sup>4</sup>

Support materials, including toolkits and an online hubs trade magazine, were designed to support hub leaders to share their learning with their own hub colleagues. Indeed, 95% of participants from the Berlin and Edinburgh workshops felt ‘confident and committed’ to cascade their new knowledge to their peers.

Forty-one P2P exchanges provided in-situ experiences for hub leaders at their host’s venue. Exchanges received an outstanding 100% satisfaction rating for meeting participant objectives: *“Being able to visit another working example has helped us ask the right questions in order to come up with a management structure that we are confident will work for the community our creative hub will serve”*<sup>5</sup>. They were highly valued as **opportunities for collaboration through strengthened relationships**. *“Some ideas only come up face to face. This ‘live’ experience makes cooperation more tangible as we are closer, and we know each other’s purposes”*<sup>6</sup>.

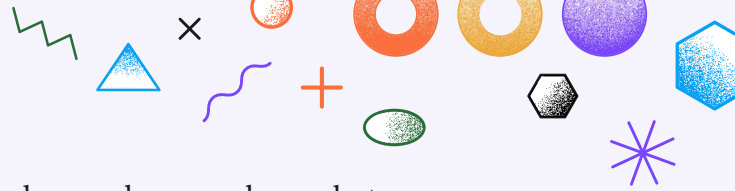
The P2P programme was particularly effective in creating opportunities for knowledge exchange and **new relationships and collaborations** - which 85% of participants intend to develop further. Collaborations already under way include artists’ exchanges between hubs in Portugal, Latvia, Spain and the UK; Erasmus schemes to support

<sup>3</sup> Athens Forum Participant

<sup>4</sup> Berlin Workshop Participant

<sup>5</sup> P2P Exchange Participant

<sup>6</sup> P2P Exchange Participant



young entrepreneurs in several countries; a member exchange scheme between hubs in Portugal and Turkey; and the set-up of local networks to strengthen national connections in Portugal and Spain.

For many participants, ECHN activities in general reduced the sense of isolation common to hub leaders and **nurtured a spirit of friendship and unity**: *“It was a really great experience. Thank you for doing such a great job! You have definitely managed to create a sense of cohesion between creative hubs throughout Europe<sup>7</sup>.”* *“Being part of the European Creative Hubs Network has opened new doors for us in terms of collaborations and networks that will help our creative hub grow<sup>8</sup>.”*

Activities helped participants identify new ways of working and accessing mentors, which enabled them to **support the growth, development and sustainability** of their hubs. *“We are able to materialise our creative co-working space, having an open dialogue with experienced community managers of similar spaces. This is priceless, that we can write an email, or pick up the phone and discuss one doubt or issue we are facing, with peers that we know share the same dreams and face similar challenges<sup>9</sup>.”* Having the chance to meet on more than one occasion was considered an important step in building trust and allowing meaningful connections to evolve.

Hub leaders also **reported greater confidence and clarity in the actions they should take**, contributing to the resilience of their hubs: *“I now realise I know much more about running a hub and that I’ve actually done a god job!<sup>10</sup>”* Learning from peers can be empowering. *“This opportunity to meet other people who are going through the exact things that you are is very refreshing and precious. Sometimes one person has solved a problem that the other is facing and it saves time to solve it faster. I can definitely tell that [my hub] will develop further and grow braver because of the experience ECHN is giving me<sup>11</sup>.”*

The ECHN website and multiple social media platforms enabled continuous, remote contact with members and a wider stakeholder community. The website recorded 29,867 visits over a 12-month period to March 2018, and the sector newsletter had 812 subscribers. These were supplemented by activity shared to followers via Facebook (3,032), Twitter (1,626) and Instagram (161). **Resources for hubs and leaders** - sector statistics, publications and events information - were made freely available and promoted through multiple social media channels. However, it was noted that the Network should be more than an online community, and not replace the opportunity to meet in person, which was considered highly beneficial. *“No matter how many emails you exchange presenting your project, organisation, know-how, nothing can overcome the face-to-face contact, the sharing in person of one’s passion<sup>12</sup>.”*

<sup>7</sup> P2P Exchange Participant

<sup>8</sup> Athens Forum Participant

<sup>9</sup> P2P Exchange Participant

<sup>10</sup> Athens Forum Participant

<sup>11</sup> P2P Exchange Participant

<sup>12</sup> P2P Exchange Participant





## Promoting hubs as innovative models supporting the creative economy

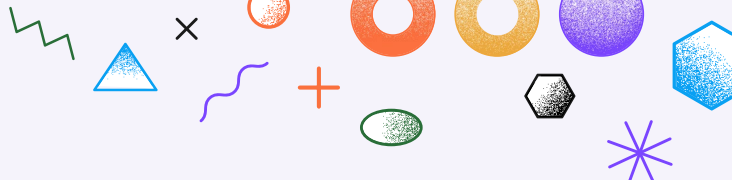
The ECHN brought creative hubs to the attention of a range of influential stakeholders and policymakers. **Valorisation activities and resources** helped seed advocacy among those who can affect the infrastructure of support for the sector.

The ECHN launch and closing events actively targeted policymakers, government representatives and local authorities among others, with a view to strengthening connections and nurturing understanding of the importance of creative hubs to the creative and wider economy. Of closing event attendees at the Creative Campus in Brussels, 20% held government or policy roles. Walter Zampieri, the Head of the Cultural Policy Unit within the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC), delivered speeches at both events<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, the European Commissioner for Education and Culture, Tibor Navracsics, delivered the keynote speech at the ECHN closing event, highlighting the impact of the project and of creative hubs in Europe. Other high-level public and policy figures who engaged in the dialogue at these events included Christian Ehler MEP (Rapporteur on the Coherent EU Policy for Cultural and Creative Industries Report), Michel Magnier (Director of the Culture and Creativity Directorate of DG EAC), and Françoise Schepmans (Bourgmestre of Molenbeek, and Federal Belgian MP).

As ECHN lead partner, the British Council actively engaged a wider cultural community, as well as national and regional policymakers, to enhance the profile of the sector. A wider understanding developed of the **role creative hubs can play as catalysts in their communities**, with hubs and the ECHN being referenced in policy documents relating to cultural diplomacy, innovation in cities, creative value chains, youth and education, among others. Presentations featuring the ECHN were delivered to key influencers at more than 16 cross-sectoral events between March 2017 and March 2018. These events included the December 2017 EU Commission Culture Forum in Milan, where the session on creative hubs attracted more than 300 participants, and a joint ECHN–Joint Research Centre workshop on youth employment.

Further activity included creation of the Creative Hubs Barometer, the first census of the sector, and three policy papers to build confidence in policy development and inform dialogue about creative hubs at a local, regional and EU level. Barometer data confirmed that hubs are relatively recent entities, with 60% founded in the last five years and 96% in existence since 2000. Though they vary in size, they tend to be relatively small, with an average of 7.5 staff (combining full-time and part-time) and 60% seeing turnover of less than €150,000. Their reach is disproportionately extensive, each hub supporting an average of 109 organisations and around 400 individuals.

<sup>13</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/node/463522\\_hu](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/node/463522_hu)



In 2016, the Barometer sample of 78 creative hubs reached almost 9,000 organisations and more than 31,000 individuals<sup>14</sup>.

Uniquely, the ECHN enabled European Commission staff from across Directorates-General to **connect directly with practitioners** and gain first-hand insights, avoiding intermediaries (as would usually be the case). Several relationships resulted in **co-created opportunities** between the ECHN, hub leaders and the Commission: for example, collaboration between ECHN members in the audio-visual/music sectors and the organisers of Tallinn Music Week; and presentations by invited hub leaders at high-profile events such as the Commission's Open Method of Coordination meetings. Cross-sectoral partnerships like these constitute a new way of collaborative working, and demonstrate the wide-reaching potential of creative hubs as catalysts for economic and social change<sup>15</sup>.



## FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

While the ambitious targets set for the ECHN project have generally been met or exceeded, its insights and learnings have been distilled into three levels of recommendations which it is hoped will be helpful to the new leadership team in developing the Network.

### Engagement level:

- Extend membership through in-country promotions to deepen the reach of ECHN
- Engage with Network members to consolidate and build on the momentum and goodwill already created

### Strategic level:

- Develop an advocacy plan to engage with key influencers and enhance the profile of creative hubs
- Gather meaningful data on the sector and identify its needs, informing a strategic approach to sustaining support for its growth and development

### Developmental level:

- Identify sector learning needs to ensure that future activities build the capabilities of hub leaders and staff

<sup>13</sup> The Barometer (January 2018) suggests that creative hubs have an average of 7.5 staff

<sup>14</sup> Creative Hubs Report





- Use feedback from the Sheffield Forum to shape future P2P models and opportunities
- Draw on participant feedback to tailor the format and content of activities: increasing interaction, varying activities to suit learning styles, and delving deeper into topics including challenges and business models.

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The evaluation team at Journey Associates would like to thank the creative hubs leaders, European Commission staff, and consortium members who gave their time and provided thoughtful opinions and suggestions that informed this evaluation report.

Journey Associates is a dynamic design-led innovation consultancy delivering practical solutions for positive change. Founded in 2004, we work internationally and have designed, delivered and evaluated a wide range of leading-edge initiatives for business, public and government sectors.

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# EUROPEAN CREATIVE HUBS NETWORK

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