

Waterford's Africa Day as a Solution Story: Integrating Communities, Cultures, and Creativity

In June 2018, Waterford — a member of the CREATIVE SPIRITS network — organised Africa Day as part of its strategy to boost its cultural and creative industries through the development of a cultural quarter. It serves as an example of how to implement a strategy in an integrated manner and of how the involvement of hard-to-reach stakeholders such as migrants can be maintained in that implementation process. This is of great interest to city leaders across Europe as they wrestle with the challenge of capitalising on opportunities for social and economic development in an increasingly diverse continent.



What is CREATIVE SPIRITS?

Launched in October 2016, CREATIVE SPIRITS is a network of nine European Cities working together to improve their implementation of strategies and action plans that aim to boost cultural and creative industries (CCI). These industries are loosely defined as those that create economic value through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.

Local governments all over the world are increasingly becoming aware of the benefits of having a strong CCI sector due to its ability to generate jobs, wealth, and cultural development. Because cities possess diverse industries, skilled workforces, and a high level of cultural diversity, they naturally possess many of the necessary ingredients for a thriving CCI sector. However, this opportunity is not always fully exploited. CREATIVE SPIRITS aims to help change this by improving the capacities of the cities involved to implement their CCI-boosting strategies. It does this by facilitating knowledge exchange and by bringing in external expertise.

To help focus this work, the network is concentrating its efforts on finding solutions to five implementation challenges. These are:

1. Ensuring the integrated approach in the delivery of the strategies and their related actions/projects
2. Maintaining the involvement of local stakeholders and organising decision-making for delivery
3. Setting up efficient indicators and monitoring systems to measure performance
4. Moving from strategy to operational action plan
5. Enhancing the funding of urban development policies through financial innovation

This article will examine how one of the CREATIVE SPIRITS cities, Ireland's Waterford, has found solutions to the first two of these challenges. It will illustrate this through the example of a festival called Africa Day.

What is Waterford trying to do?

First, let's dive into the specifics of the local situation. In CREATIVE SPIRITS, Waterford is working to implement its cultural quarter development plan, 'A Cultural Quarter for Waterford: Outline, Rationale, Priorities and Building Blocks'.

The plan describes the current reality of the target area, O'Connell Street. It is a richly historic thoroughfare of the city, with a tapestry of heritage buildings and deep memories of being a place of trade, worship, and social practice. Despite the fact that in recent years it has lost much of its prosperity and energy, evidence of new beginnings and a fresh distinctiveness are coming to the surface. There are the diverse communities who now call it home, the range of cultural assets located on the street, the emerging scene of bars and cafés, and the cultural hub offered by Garter Lane Arts Centre.

The rationale of the plan is that by nurturing this scene and by providing the enabling conditions for CCI to flourish, the O'Connell Street area can be re-imagined and then re-born as the Waterford Cultural Quarter (WCQ), and thus form a vital part of Waterford's future. The achievement of this objective has been broken down into six specific objectives:

1. Improve the public realm in the O'Connell Street area
2. Create a more vibrant atmosphere in the WCQ
3. Develop an environment to allow creative practice to flourish
4. Develop a supporting environment for CCI actors
5. Support enterprise creation
6. Engage communities in the development of the WCQ

The subject of this story, Africa Day, was an action developed with the second and sixth specific objectives in mind.

What is Africa Day?

On the June 15th, the WCQ hosted the city's Africa Day celebrations, an annual event that celebrates the links between the African nations and Ireland. It involved film screenings, a street market, henna painting, fashion and crafts, a children's zone (with crafts, etc.), and two stages with a mix of African and Western music. This [video](#) does a good job of capturing the atmosphere.



How is Africa Day an example of how to tackle the implementation challenges?

The organisation and implementation of this action demonstrates how Waterford has found solutions to two implementation challenges.

The first of these is implementation challenge number one, 'Ensuring the integrated approach in the delivery of the strategies and their related actions/projects'. A strategy is implemented in an integrated manner when the actions combine factors from different policy fields (e.g. social, economic, environmental) with the intention of addressing multiple fields at once. A key factor in achieving this is organising structures within the administration that can coordinate the execution of integrated actions. The Waterford Cultural Quarter has a dedicated multi-disciplinary development team for precisely this purpose. This meant that, in the organising of Africa Day, it could consider both economic factors (how can it use Africa Day to help small CCI enterprises increase their exposure?) and social factors (how can it use Africa Day to engage hard-to-reach communities in the development of the WCQ?). Additionally, within this team there is an individual with the responsibility for ensuring the implementation process is integrated. This meant that there were very few capacity issues when it came to involving other city council departments in the organisation of the event.

The second solution Africa Day illustrates is a solution to the second implementation challenge, 'Maintaining the involvement of local stakeholders and organising decision-making for delivery'. In the WCQ, this challenge is made more complicated by the fact that a high proportion of its community comes from a migrant background. Currently, these individuals have very low levels of engagement with the city's civic life. Waterford's solution was to work with relevant stakeholders to develop and execute an action, Africa Day, that was targeted at these migrant communities. The data hasn't been collected yet, but council workers report an improved relationship and an increased level of trust between the council and the families, community leaders, and women from migrant communities. There are also signs of an increased level of engagement with the WCQ. This is evidenced by a speech made by the Chair of the Irish Multicultural Group, Dauda Abdul Ganiyu, who stated:

"the Cultural Quarter is a good concept, and a huge opportunity towards the empowerment, development, and growth of micro-entrepreneurs from different cultural backgrounds. I call on all Africans and other cultures in this community to make the best use of the opportunities appropriately. This will not only strengthen the integration process that we are seeking, but will also harness the strength in the diversity of our different cultures. Cultural Quarter is our own; let us avail of these rare opportunities."

Additionally, the development team has established a very close relationship with two institutional stakeholders who were previously involved in WCQ to a minimal degree, the council's Community Department and its Integration and Support Unit.

To conclude

What can other cities learn from Waterford's Africa Day? Two things. First, establishing dedicated development teams pays off when it comes to ensuring the integrated implementation of actions. Second, It's worth investing in outreach activities targeted at specific communities if maintaining their involvement in the implementation process is a challenge.