

Laidlaw

Leadership in Action Report

Cultural and Environmental Sustainability in
Corfu, Greece

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in collaboration with
CulturePolis

Who is CulturePolis and How Did I Fit In?

Who is CulturePolis?

CulturePolis is a Civil Society Organisation founded in 2006 in Corfu, Greece, offering tailor-made services for civil society and its stakeholders. Its services address organisations' needs for awareness-raising and capacity building, focusing on actions, training platforms and digital transformation, and citizen-centred research activities.

With more than 20 years of activity, CulturePolis have implemented more than 50 projects and initiatives at the national, EU, and international level, with funds emanating mainly from EU competitive programmes but also international and national programmes in partnership with more than 300 organisations. CulturePolis' active involvement in the implementation of those projects and initiatives has given them unique expertise and knowledge and has allowed them to build a performant network able to exchange the best know-how and multiply their impact.

How did I Fit In?

During my time at CulturePolis (NGO/CSO), I have been actively involved in the Genestia initiative, which aims to revitalise rural communities through culture, sustainability, innovation and education by establishing a network of contemporary hubs across the Mediterranean. My main area of focus has been the coordination of EU project proposals with potential partners, contributing to the development of project consortia and, more broadly, to CulturePolis' efforts to establish new European collaborations and funding opportunities. Alongside my EU projects work, I have contributed to the day-to-day operations of the organisation by participating in staff meetings, conducting website reviews and updates, and overall effectively utilising and optimising CulturePolis' digital tools and platforms.

Feedback from Zeta, one of my colleagues at CulturePolis:

“Through Imogen's contributions, she has significantly supported the improvement of the organisation's day-to-day communication and operations. Imogen has been an exceptionally positive addition to the CulturePolis team, adapting remarkably quickly to the organisation's rhythms. She has consistently demonstrated competence and reliability, combined with an impressive ability to take initiative and deliver tangible results. At the same time, her friendly, approachable and collaborative manner made her a strong cultural fit within the team. We have greatly valued both her professional contribution and her presence within the organisation, and would be very happy to work with her again in the future.”

UN SDG Goals

SDG Goal 1

Primary SDG - SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities

GENESTIA, the new initiative of CulturePolis, aligned directly with SDG 11. The work of CulturePolis particularly targets SDG 11.4, which involves strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage. My LiA supported positive economic, social and environmental links by prioritising sustainable regional development.

GENESTIA aims to revitalise rural communities by combining cultural heritage preservation, environmental sustainability and innovation. This will create opportunities for longer-term community resilience, vitality and regeneration, revitalising local communities and their hubs.

My LiA contributed to SDG 11 by supporting initiatives that strengthen the social, cultural, and environmental sustainability of rural communities in Corfu. GENESTIA promotes heritage preservation, regenerative agriculture, climate resilience, education and innovation. GENESTIA specifically addresses the challenge of maintaining vibrant and resilient rural communities in the face of different pressures. There continue to be challenges with regard to environmental changes, evolving economic conditions and demographic shifts. Activities such as heritage cultivation, sustainable farming demonstrations, educational programmes, and community events contribute to preserving local identity, while creating new opportunities for residents. The beneficiaries include local communities, farmers, cultural practitioners, students, visitors, and future generations who will benefit from strengthened cultural assets, improved environmental practices and more sustainable development methods.

Globally, SDG 11 recognises the importance of creating inclusive, resilient and sustainable communities. In Corfu, this challenge manifests itself in distinct ways. Many rural villages are facing pressures from seasonal tourism, changing agricultural practices and climate-related water scarcity. There are further issues due to the gradual erosion of cultural traditions and local knowledge. GENESTIA will respond to these changes by developing a network of community spaces that reconnect communities with their landscapes and heritage whilst also promoting sustainable economic activity.

Secondary SDG Goals

Although SDG 11 is the primary goal, the project also contributed to several other Sustainable Development Goals. It aligned with SDG 13 (Climate Action) through initiatives focused on climate adaptation, sustainable water management and regenerative agriculture. It also contributes to SDG 4 (Quality Education) through workshops, training programmes, internships and digital skills development. The project also supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by encouraging sustainable tourism, supporting local producers and fostering innovation in rural economies. There are important interconnections and potential trade-offs. For example, increasing visitor engagement can provide economic benefits, but may also place pressure on local ecosystems if not managed sustainably. Climate resilience, economic development and cultural preservation are therefore closely interconnected, requiring balanced and community-led approaches. Issues of environmental sustainability are also linked to broader economic systems, particularly the dependence of island communities on tourism and seasonal employment, making diversification and resilience increasingly important.

SMART Goals

Goal	Produce high-quality research and strategic recommendations that support the ongoing development of the GENESTIA initiative.	Contribute to community engagement and partnership-building activities that strengthen relationships between CulturePolis and local stakeholders.	Develop my leadership, communication and cross-cultural collaboration skills by working proactively within an international, interdisciplinary environment.	Reflect critically on the relationship between culture, sustainability and community-led development to inform my future academic and professional practice.
Specific What exactly will you do? Who is involved? What will be produced, delivered, implemented, or changed?	Conduct daily research and prepare three written outputs or recommendations that contribute to the development of GENESTIA projects and initiatives.	Assist with community engagement, stakeholder communication and partnership activities alongside CulturePolis staff.	Take ownership of assigned tasks, contribute ideas during meetings and collaborate effectively with colleagues from different backgrounds.	Maintain reflective records throughout the placement and evaluate how the experience has developed my understanding of ethical leadership and sustainable development.
Measurable How will you know this goal has been achieved? What evidence, metrics, or indicators will you use?	Completion of research reports, briefing documents or other agreed outputs that are accepted by my supervisor.	Participation in daily meetings, engagement activities or events, together with feedback from supervisors regarding my contribution.	Evidence through weekly reflections, supervisor feedback and successful completion of responsibilities with increasing independence.	Completion of reflective journal entries and final Laidlaw reflective outputs demonstrating personal and professional development.
Achievable Is this realistic within six weeks? What constraints (time, capacity, funding, approvals) must be considered?	Yes. The work can be completed within six weeks with appropriate guidance and prioritisation.	Yes. Activities will depend on organisational priorities and scheduled events but are realistic within the placement period.	Yes. Leadership development is an ongoing process that can be demonstrated through consistent engagement throughout the placement.	Yes. Reflection is integrated into the placement and supported through regular review of my experiences.
Relevant How does this goal align with your partner's priorities? Why does this goal matter in this context?	Supports CulturePolis' objective of developing GENESTIA as a long-term model for sustainable rural regeneration.	Strengthens the organisation's emphasis on community-led development and stakeholder collaboration.	Aligns with the aims of the Laidlaw Leadership in Action programme and enables me to contribute more effectively to the organisation.	Ensures that my learning informs both the placement and my future legal career, particularly my interest in planning and environmental law.
Time-bound By when will this goal be completed? Are there milestones along the way?	Final research outputs completed by the end of Week 6, with interim drafts produced throughout the placement.	Ongoing throughout the placement, with participation whenever opportunities arise.	Developed progressively across all six weeks through increasing responsibility and initiative.	Weekly reflections completed throughout the placement, culminating in the final Laidlaw reflective submissions.
Completed?	Completed - and exceeded! I completed several tangible written outputs, although these tended to be drafts of EU Project Proposals rather than research reports.	Completed (mostly) - I engaged in daily meetings with the CulturePolis team, as well as project partners from Germany, the Netherlands,	Completed - I initially found it quite challenging to take initiative in my work, but by the end of my LiA, I had engaged proactively, often without being asked.	Ongoing - I struggled to keep up with my weekly reflections as I was often tired after a busy week at work! This is an ongoing task to keep me engaged with my leadership development.

Leadership Reflection - 3C's Model

Capacities

Throughout my LiA with CulturePolis, I developed my leadership capacities by applying my pre-existing strengths in research to a more practical project which stretches across different disciplines. I am proud that I showed particular strengths in project management and prioritisation as I worked across organising Erasmus+ project calls, reviewing and improving web materials, and liaising with international project partners. My communication and collaborative skills have been particularly developed by working with my colleagues at CulturePolis and partners from different professional and cultural backgrounds. I found some aspects of the partner research challenging and repetitive, which tested my motivation and determination. However, this strengthened my creative problem-solving and strategic thinking by working beyond assigned tasks. Overall, my LiA showed me that effective leadership requires not only strong individual skills but also being adaptable and showing initiative, communicating with others, and translating thinking into action.

Change Maker Values

My LiA allowed me to put the Change Maker Values into practice. This was particularly evident through being ambitious, curious and determined; I was proactive in an unfamiliar professional environment. I was ambitious by seeking to produce work that had a lasting impact for CulturePolis, while curiosity encouraged me to learn more about GENESTIA as a new initiative, its beneficiaries, and the broader cultural, environmental and funding context of the island. My determination was tested when aspects of the work became repetitive or when funding research took longer than expected. Rather than disengaging, I adapted my approach and took on greater initiative to find new donors and partners. Most importantly, I developed the courage to contribute ideas and take responsibility for work beyond what was merely asked of me.

Character

My LiA developed my character by requiring me to take greater ownership of my work while remaining open to the expertise and perspectives of others. Accountability and drive were especially important as I managed my own tasks without supervision, working towards deadlines, and remaining determined even when I lost motivation or tangible outcomes seemed far away. Collaboration, humility and humanity were also important, as I was working with an organisation whose knowledge of Corfu was much more established than my own, reminding me that effective leadership means listening and supporting others. Judgment and integrity were tested when I took initiative, but also knowing when to seek guidance to ensure that my research and recommendations were realistic. I have become more willing to act independently, but also recognise the importance of reflection and cultural sensitivity to learn from others.

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