

## ARKOPOLIS, AN ARK OF ETERNAL YOUTH AND CULTURE



### AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



### CULTURE 21 ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

1. CULTURAL RIGHTS
4. CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
6. CULTURE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCUSION
7. CULTURE, URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC SPACE

**CROSS-SECTORIAL, PUBLIC SPACE, REGENERATION,  
SKILL, INCLUSION, PROMOTION, COOPERATION, ACCESS,  
YOUTH, MULTIACTOR**



## 1. Elefsina and culture

Elefsina is one of the five most important sacred cities of antiquity, the city of the Elefsinian Mysteries and birthplace of Aeschylus, Eleusis. In the 19th century it was transformed into the productive engine of Greece and one of its largest industrial centers with extraordinary traces of antiquity, modern stories of population displacement, labor movements and industrial and cultural development, and texts and songs. Moreover, sensitive issues are witnessed, such as the heavy impact of the industry and climate change on the environment, deindustrialization and unemployment – especially in the younger generations.

The city's ten-year Cultural Strategy (2016–2025) is based on the adoption of the Agenda 21 for Culture. The ARKOPOLIS project was also the Flagship Project of the Eleusis 2023 ECoC programme under the strand "ENVIRONMENT".

## 2. Project goals and implementation

### 2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

The main purpose of the project was to shed light on a previously abandoned area right in the city center, also answering to a long-standing expressed need of local young people for a space to gather, create and practice skate (cultural and recreational space). Arkopolis was envisioned, designed and materialized to function as a free space open to all the communities of the city without exclusion and bias, also being the "legacy" of the ECoC.

The specific goals were to:





**ARKOPOLIS WAS THE FLAGSHIP PROJECT OF THE ELEUSIS 2023 ECOC PROGRAMME, IN THE THEMATIC AXES “ENVIRONMENT”, AND WAS ENVISIONED, DESIGNED AND MATERIALISED TO FUNCTION AS A FREE SPACE OPEN TO ALL, WITHOUT EXCLUSION AND BIAS.**

- » Activate an abandoned area.
- » Create a space of free expression for the youth, open to all the communities of the city without exclusion.
- » Follow NEB principles: raising environmental and aesthetic consciousness.
- » Provide the city with a skate park.
- » Create a green area right next to an emblematic industrial complex.
- » Strengthen cultural rights, giving voice to communities that are not heard.
- » Improve the quality of life of the citizens.
- » Manage of public space in a participatory way through culture.
- » Allocate cultural funding to different communities and actors

## **2.2. Development of the project**

The initiative originally started from an institutional body (2023 Eleusis, Municipality of Elefsina), but then civil society, represented by youth groups, and then by local ethnic communities, which are traditionally excluded from such processes, became involved in a substantial way. Moreover, having a European artist collective in charge of the design (the TimeCircus), a space was created that combines beauty with informal and joyful coexistence, very different from the cultural spaces usually designed in Greece.



In parallel, 2023 Eleusis has implemented strategies of capacity building and networking activities to strengthen independent cultural activities run by local youngsters, involve diverse local communities and create new audiences.

Although the space/land is actually owned by the Municipality of Elefsina, and was intended for sports activities, the final choice of the type of sports activity is extremely different from the usual choices of a public body, responding to a multi-year struggle of a group of young people to create a skate park. The contribution of 2023 Eleusis was fundamental at the level of mediation between public bodies, the Onassis Foundation and civil society, that being possibly the most interesting best practice followed.

The main implementation phases of the project were:

- PHASE A (MAY 2022-FEB 2023): TimeCircus traveled 3,000 kilometers on foot from Antwerp to Elefsina.
- PHASE B (FEB – JUN 2023): Cleaning of the area and construction of the ARK structure.
- PHASE C (JUN – OCT 2023): Cultural programmes organized by TimeCircus and youth group Cultterra, in collaboration with Eleusis 2023 (estimated audience: 2500), such as:
  - » Music events/concerts.
  - » Collective dinners with the Albanian & Pakistani Community.
  - » Spontaneous gatherings.
  - » Dance performances.
  - » Collective gardening/building a community garden.
  - » Exhibitions.
- PHASE D (OCT - DEC 2023): Construction of the skate park in collaboration with the Onassis Foundation and a parallel cultural programme by the youth group Cultterra, in collaboration with Eleusis 2023 (estimated audience: 2000) with activities such as:

- » Skate classes & Skate competitions.
- » Film screenings.
- » Music events/concerts.
- » Collective dinners
- » Exhibitions.
- » Visual arts installations.

The current phase focuses on the ARKOPOLIS becoming a place run by the city's youngsters with different cultural activities.

The project is the result of joint work and local, national, and European collaboration, with a combination of participatory processes and collaborations between public-private sector and civil society. The Municipality of Elefsina led the initiative, jointly with Eleusis 2023 European Capital of Culture and with contributions of TimeCircus, Onassis Foundation, City of Genk, the Belgian Embassy in Athens and Cultterra youth group

**THE PROJECT SHED LIGHT ON A PREVIOUSLY ABANDONED AREA RIGHT IN THE CITY CENTER, ANSWERING THE LONG-STANDING NEED OF LOCAL YOUNG PEOPLE FOR A SPACE TO GATHER, CREATE AND PRACTICE SKATE.**

## 3. Impacts

### 3.1. Direct impacts

ARKOPOLIS has a positive impact as it:

- » Constitutes a new, public, green space in the heart of the city, which has already rendered the city more inclusive and resilient.
- » Strengthens a core team of youngsters who are now ready to take over and run the place as an open-air sports and cultural center.
- » Includes the first skatepark in the Western Attica region and attracts people of the skate community from all over Greece and beyond.
- » Shows an innovative collaboration between public-private sector, cultural field, and civil society, as well a combination of participatory processes in decision making.
- » Forms a public space that is open to all the communities of every age, religion, sexual preference and ethnicity, designing and implementing inclusive activities.
- » Gives way to implement collaborative artistic events, bringing in contact with the cultural sector, the local civil society and empowering the local and national cultural field.
- » Promotes the discussion around environmental issues and sustainable way of life, one of the main challenges of the city due to industrial exploitation and climate change.





### 3.2. Evaluation

Collecting data and monitoring the progress of ARKOPOLIS during 2023 was part of the overall evaluation process of 2023 Elefsina European Capital of Culture, implemented in collaboration with the evaluation team from the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences. Monitoring and evaluation focuses on local citizens' access to and participation in culture, the city's cultural vitality and sustainability, the local economy and tourism. The evaluation is performed through a set of 62 indicators. Quantitative and qualitative methods are being used to produce and collect primary data and to analyze secondary data.

### 3.3. Key factors

The project acts as a catalyst at local, national and international level:

- » Keeping young people in the city with an attractive environment for them.
- » Developing dynamism, creativity and social cohesion of the city, reinforcing the involvement of different local minorities.
- » Changing the stereotypical image of Elefsina as an industrial, polluted city and establishing Elefsina as a dynamic cultural centre in the region.
- » Promoting Elefsina to become an effective interlocutor in the European and International dialogue.
- » Collaborating with different stakeholders of the city.
- » Engaging new and diverse audiences.
- » Increasing cultural activities in public spaces, especially in places abandoned for many years.

### 3.4. Continuity

Various different elements of the project methodology could be replicated or transferred to other places, groups of beneficiaries and context, such as:

- » The methodology of the new-age pilgrimage that was used during the journey of the TimeCircus collective.
- » The unique combination of participatory processes, based on the collaboration between public-private sector and civil society. Strategic decisions following a philosophy similar to that of Bioregionalism, taking seriously in consideration the needs and specificities of the communities concerned (human and non-human) of the natural environment, as well as the political, social and cultural sustainability of the new enclave.
- » The critical contribution of a cultural organization (2023 Eleusis) in the mediation between public bodies, sponsors and civil society.

In terms of continuity we are now in discussion with the Municipality in order to actively include the Arkopolis in the yearly public infrastructure maintenance provision, and we keep supporting activities run by the local youth group Cultterra and empowering the group through networking activities. In fact, Cultterra has won this year's Philippe Grombeer Award in the Duct Tape and Dreams program by Trans Europe Halles, which aims at the capacity building of civil society organizations that operate in abandoned spaces.



**THE INITIATIVE SHOWS AN INNOVATIVE COLLABORATION BETWEEN PUBLIC-PRIVATE SECTOR, CULTURAL FIELD, AND CIVIL SOCIETY, AS WELL A COMBINATION OF PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES IN DECISION MAKING.**

## 4. Further information

Elefsina was a candidate for the sixth UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award (November 2023 – March 2024). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June 2024, and requested that the Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices to be implemented through Agenda 21 for culture.

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