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Cultural Hidden Identities ReAppear through Networks of Water: leveraging cultural heritage for blue-green urban regeneration

Region	Europe and Central Asia
Award Scheme	Shanghai Manual
Themes	Climate Change Rehabilitation Others
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Summary

The Cultural Hidden Identities ReAppear through Networks of Water (H.ID.RA.N.T.) initiative, launched in July 2020, revitalizes Chalandri, a municipality in the North Athens Regional Unit, by leveraging its cultural heritage, particularly the Hadrian Aqueduct.

Background and Objective

Chalandri, with over 74,000 inhabitants, is rich in cultural and historical significance, most notably due to the ancient Hadrian Aqueduct. This 20 km-long structure supplied water to Athens for nearly 1,800 years but became forgotten and neglected, with sections decaying beneath the urban landscape. The municipality's focus shifted to economic recovery post-2009, often at the expense of cultural heritage and local community involvement. Despite the existence of a valuable ecological corridor, urban development has led to limited green space, with only 2.8 m² of parks per resident, compared to 4.8 m² in Athens. The project aimed to address these issues through heritage-led regeneration by restoring the Hadrian Aqueduct and creating green spaces for the community, while promoting sustainability and climate resilience.

Actions and Implementation

The initiative was executed as a partnership between eight organizations under the European Union's Urban Innovative Actions programme. This cross-sectoral approach allowed for collective decision-making, with a cooperative governance system and weekly coordination meetings. Citizens were actively involved through local groups and co-design processes, ensuring that the project aligned with the community's needs and aspirations. Key elements included youth engagement, with students, young professionals, and local school communities participating in planning, clean-up events, and tree planting. The initiative also included the creation of a digital archive of local history, which served as an educational



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tool and fostered engagement around the Hadrian Aqueduct's cultural significance. The Hidrant Festival, launched in 2021, promoted awareness of water and urban resource management, further integrating cultural activities with local regeneration.

Outcomes and Impacts

development and community engagement. By focusing on blue-green infrastructure, it has created over 8,500 m² of new public space, with long-term goals of an additional 24,000 m². The restoration of the Hadrian Aqueduct and the development of new water infrastructure, such as underground reservoirs and irrigation systems, have contributed to water conservation, saving 25,000 m³ of water annually. These efforts have helped address climate-induced water scarcity, while also providing tangible benefits to the local community. The initiative has enhanced public awareness of the value of cultural heritage and the sustainable use of natural resources. Furthermore, Chalandri has seen a 300% increase in the use of green spaces, with the municipality now receiving around 5,000 visitors per weekend.

Sustainability and Scalability

The project stands as a model of sustainable urban regeneration, blending the preservation of cultural heritage with the practical needs of climate adaptation. The initiative's success in creating green spaces and implementing water conservation techniques is scalable to other urban areas facing similar challenges. The focus on citizen participation and co-governance ensures the project's long-term sustainability, with the community actively engaged in maintaining the new spaces and water infrastructure and by promoting the shared responsibility of water as a commons, the project fosters a culture of sustainability that could be replicated in other municipalities, particularly those in Mediterranean climates facing water stress.

Gender and Social Inclusivity

Gender and social inclusivity were central to the H.ID.RA.N.T. initiative. The project encouraged the participation of all community members, particularly marginalized groups such as youth, through educational workshops and participatory governance. The involvement of 13 school communities, with an emphasis on youth leadership, fostered a sense of ownership among younger generations. Furthermore, the integration of people with special needs in the oral history project ensured that a wide range of voices and experiences were included in the regeneration process. This approach helped ensure that the project was not only environmentally sustainable but also socially inclusive.

Innovative Initiative



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The initiative is innovative in its combination of cultural heritage conservation, sustainable urban development, and participatory governance. It leverages the Hadrian Aqueduct as both a cultural asset and a practical resource for blue-green urban regeneration, and by treating water as a commons, integrates intangible cultural heritage with modern infrastructure solutions, creating a model for climate resilience in urban areas. In addition, the digital archive and the Hidrant Festival also serve as innovative methods of engaging the public in heritage preservation and sustainability education.

Resources devoted to delivery

The initiative was supported by significant resources from the European Regional Development Fund's Urban Innovative Actions programme, along with the collective efforts of eight partner organizations. The cooperative governance structure ensured that resources were distributed effectively, with each partner responsible for specific aspects of the project. Local stakeholders, including schools and community groups, also contributed time and effort through participatory activities. These resources were effectively leveraged to deliver both tangible infrastructure improvements and intangible cultural benefits, with the community playing an integral role in the project's success.

Conclusion

urban landscape. By restoring the Hadrian Aqueduct and integrating sustainable water infrastructure, the project has enhanced the community's resilience to climate change, increased green space accessibility, and fostered a renewed sense of local identity. The participatory, cross-sectoral approach has empowered citizens and reinforced the value of cultural heritage as a driver of sustainable urban regeneration. The initiative serves as a model for other cities facing similar challenges, showcasing the potential of heritage-led regeneration to create more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient urban environments.