

# CULTURE [SHIFT]

An Independent Evaluation



“ I gained so much from Culture Shift...  
It was a once in a lifetime experience. ”

Anna Michael, Culture Shift (Nicosia 2015) participant

# Introduction



In recent years, the UK has led the pack when it comes to applying digital hacking practice and business start-up strategy to the cultural domain. The British Council has been running its own Culture Shift hack programme since 2012, with the aim of exploring and celebrating the role technology can play in boosting growth and development in the creative sector and how collaboration between the cultural, technology and business sectors can help tackle social challenges.

In 2015 the British Council, in partnership with Google and Future Library, delivered its first Culture Shift hack in Athens. Participants created prototypes that responded to challenges and opportunities relevant to the Greek cultural sector, with the winners going on to a residency at the YouTube Space in London where they could test and further develop their ideas. In 2016, we expanded the programme, running hacks in Greece, Cyprus and Spain. Again, our winning teams spent two days at the YouTube Space enhancing their digital and communication skills and exploring new forms of collaboration.

Two years in, we've worked with over two hundred professionals from the culture and tech sectors in Greece, Cyprus and Spain – from artistic directors, curators and artists to developers, coders and entrepreneurs from across the creative industries. We wanted to properly evaluate the impact Culture Shift has had, so we asked the hub to help us do that, and also explore how we might take things forward in the future. We've found the work they've done really useful and inspiring, and we hope that if you're interested in the intersection between culture and technology, you will too.

Maria Papaioannou  
Arts Manager, British Council Greece



“Culture Shift is the British Council's global innovation programme. In Greece, we succeeded in connecting people from different creative disciplines and places to test ideas, learn new skills and tackle cultural challenges together. It was exciting to see how many innovative ideas came up and we will be doing our best to encourage many more in the Greek entrepreneurial and cultural sector.”

Tony Buckby, Director,  
British Council Greece



As an organisation that's inherently curious about the world, we've been facilitating collaborations between the creative and tech sectors for a number of years now. The act of bringing together people with different starting points, knowledge and experiences, results in what we refer to as 'atomic collisions'. During a hack, ideas and relationships are formed that simply wouldn't ever come to life if people stayed in their sector 'silos', and hopefully everyone goes away with their world view and ambitions a little bit altered by their experience. As a means of fostering innovation and understanding it's hard to beat, particularly if it's coupled with follow up activity that helps sustain those relationships and ideas beyond the hack itself.

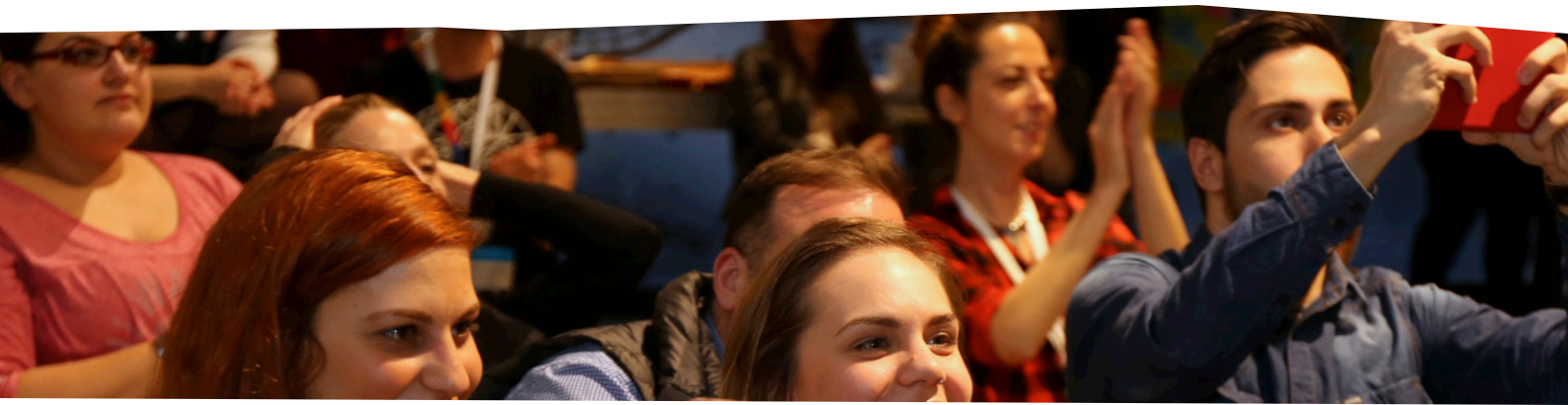
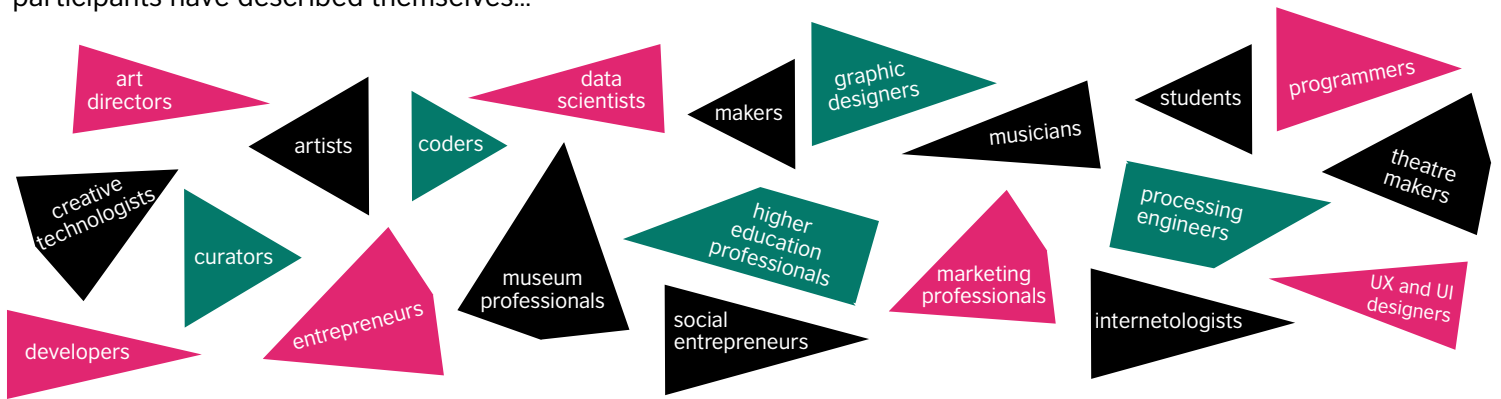
That's why we were really thrilled when the British Council asked us to evaluate Culture Shift and think about how it might evolve in the future. What you'll see unfold in these pages is a summary of what participants and partners told us and the thinking that we've done in response. We hope that if you're considering taking part in a hack – or even running one – you'll find it a good read.

Happy hacking!

Julia Payne  
Director, the hub

# Who culture shift is for

Culture Shift is for anyone with an interest in exploring how collaborations between those in the culture and tech sectors can bring about social change and economic growth. Here are just some of the ways that previous participants have described themselves...



## What attracted people to culture shift

To work on an idea they already had.

The focus on culture, tech and entrepreneurship.

The involvement of high calibre partners, such as the British Council and Google.

To explore and develop new ideas with new people - get some practical experience.

To learn from other people, who were different from them.

To gain experience of a new way of working, and get out of their 'comfort zones'.

To develop a better understanding of other sectors, how things work.

To meet people from their own and other sectors, and expand their networks.

## A few words from Google...



Working with the British Council on 'Culture Shift: Technology Meets Art' has been a productive and inspiring experience. The initiative brought together technologists, artists, cultural professionals and entrepreneurs to develop new solutions, through the use of technology, to some of the challenges faced within the cultural and creative sector. The first year the programme ran in Greece and a year later we expanded to also include Spain and Cyprus.

At Google, we aim to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful; and culture is a very important part of the world's information. We hope that 'Culture Shift: Technology Meets Art' will continue to have a real legacy.

Dionisis Kolokotsas  
Public Policy Manager, Google

# Broadening networks, thinking and creating new possibilities

"You feel that you may know things but there aren't many around you who you could work with. Culture Shift opened my eyes to the talent we have here, and how we can collaborate with each other."

Dimitris Chloupis, Culture Shift (Athens 2016) participant

Bringing together people from culture and technology has been critical to the impact that Culture Shift has had.

The act of bringing together people from different sectors, with different starting points, knowledge and experiences, results in what we refer to at the hub as 'atomic collisions'. In these circumstances, things happen that couldn't happen if people stayed in their comfort zones, and everyone goes away with their world view and ambitions a little bit altered by their experience.

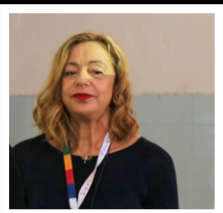
"It changed the way I think about people who are involved in the culture and tech sector and what they are doing. The biggest problems are when you stay only on the inside... I work in tech and [through Culture Shift] I thought about new areas, like theatre, that I wouldn't have thought about otherwise... It's broadened my thinking."

Vassilis Kourtis, Culture Shift (Athens 2015) participant

Without a doubt, one of the most important impacts that Culture Shift has had is to broaden participants' networks and thinking, and engender in them a sense of new possibilities.

Many participants have stayed in touch with their team mates, opening up the potential for future collaborations not just with each other but with members of each other's wider networks. Participant feedback suggests that the impact that Culture Shift has had in this respect will continue to be felt over coming years.

## Case study



Agnes Mariakaki  
Business Psychologist  
Culture Shift Athens 2016

I got involved in Culture Shift because I'm interested in making a difference through culture, and because I think it's important to continually 'reset' my mind, stay creative.

Culture Shift had a deep impact on me, was so empowering. It made me realise I can step out of my comfort zone, touch on an idea and make something out of it. The sense of intellectual and creative risk taking was what I really grasped in the hack, and got encouraged by.

I decided I could take this risk taking further, so I recommended to a client that they work with a theatre company on a new strategy. We sat down with actors and improvised around how we could persuade technophobes to use online banking. You could see as the employees did the improv exercises how rewarding it was, so I've continued taking these kinds of creative risks.

# Developing skills, knowledge and understanding

"I got introduced to how to develop more entrepreneurial, more creative thinking, through developing a series of ideas... Since then I've felt like I'm hungry to know more. I come from theatre and I work also in education... Even now, after Culture Shift, I'm learning more, and getting more into creative leadership."

Maria Dimitriou, Culture Shift (Athens 2015) participant

'Silo thinking' can often shut down innovation. Culture Shift tackled this issue head on, with considerable success. Participants consistently told us just how effective Culture Shift was at increasing their understanding of how to work successfully with people from other sectors, and, more importantly, how to develop ideas together from scratch.

Across the board, participants reported that the most challenging and rewarding aspect of the Culture Shift hacks was learning to work more effectively in diverse teams. Their feedback clearly points to how valuable an experience the hacks were, in terms of improving participants' ability to collaborate, understand and navigate team dynamics, and balance listening and leadership.

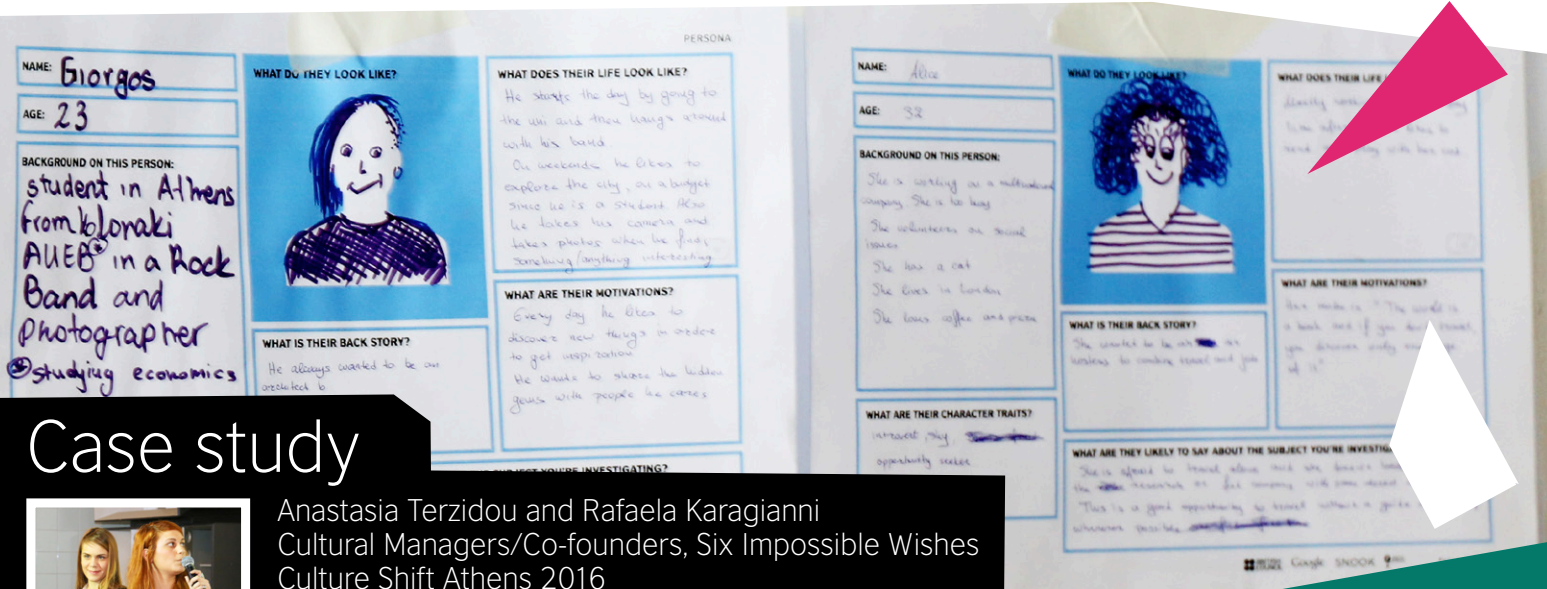
"It was tougher than I expected. It tested my limits...It was hard work, they really pushed us to develop a concrete plan, think it out, create a real business out of it. I learned never to fall in love with an idea...to insist on it when you shouldn't, and not be open to other ideas... That was hard."

Andreas Louca, Culture Shift (Nicosia 2016) participant

Many participants also talked about how Culture Shift has helped them to hone their ability to conceive and develop new ideas and work under pressure, and improved their strategic thinking, business planning, presentation and pitching skills. In short it's helped them develop a more entrepreneurial approach.

In an increasingly complex and fast moving world the ability to cross fertilise thinking, to develop, test and communicate new ideas, and identify new business models is becoming ever more important, so it's great that Culture Shift has equipped participants with the tools to do just that.

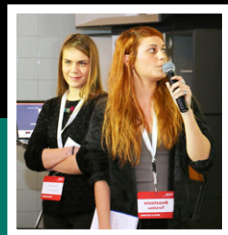
## Case study



**Giorgos**  
AGE: 23  
BACKGROUND ON THIS PERSON:  
student in Athens from Kifissos AUEB in a Rock Band and Photographer @studying economics

**Alice**  
AGE: 32  
BACKGROUND ON THIS PERSON:  
She is working in a multinational company. She is a big fan of the volunteers on social media. She has a cat. She lives in London. She loves coffee and pizza.

**Anastasia Terzidou and Rafaela Karagianni**  
Cultural Managers/Co-founders, Six Impossible Wishes  
Culture Shift Athens 2016



Anastasia Terzidou and Rafaela Karagianni  
Cultural Managers/Co-founders, Six Impossible Wishes  
Culture Shift Athens 2016

We met on a masters course in cultural management, and Culture Shift coincided with us working on a joint diploma project. As students, there aren't many chances like this; we don't learn how to do the practical things. Culture Shift was so hands on, which was really motivating.

We were so excited to win at the hack! As part of our prize we got extra mentoring and a residency in a co-working space. That's made a real difference. Since then we've taken things more professionally; we founded a non-profit organisation. For us the impact has been great. We're now a team...and we've turned our hobby into a profession, and are organising our next exhibition. We say that everything started to happen after Culture Shift.

# Confidence and validation at a difficult economic time

"Culture Shift had a deep impact on me. I would definitely call it empowering. It really led me to believe that I could step out of my comfort zone, I could touch on an idea and make something out of it."

Agnes Mariakaki, Culture Shift (Athens 2016) participant

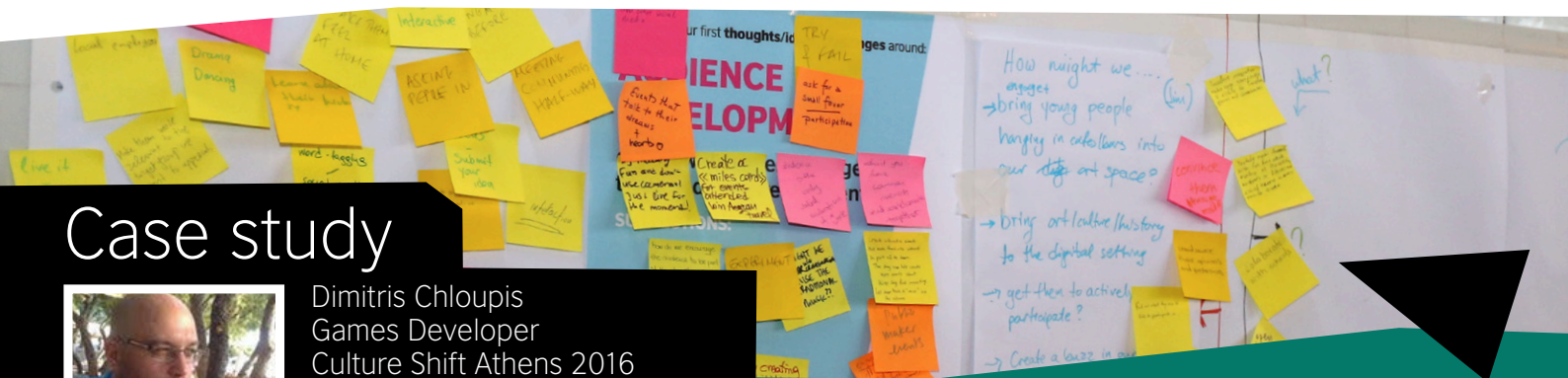
Social entrepreneurs have to be incredibly self-confident and self-reliant, not just to start something new in the first place, but also if they are to stay the course. For many participants, being part of Culture Shift means they feel more confident about their ability to innovate; taking the kernel of an idea, developing a value proposition around it, and pitching it to an expert panel was really empowering. With realisations such as this comes a confidence, a belief in their ability to do things differently, do different things and make a difference.



Entrepreneurs often lack the support or validation network that other professionals have, and in many instances, being involved in Culture Shift has validated ambitions and ideas that participants might otherwise have never entertained or explored. In this respect, Culture Shift has been incredibly valuable, and a real catalyst for sustained change that is already having a personal impact and may in the future yield wider social and economic change.

"I met a lot of likeminded people...Usually it's not easy to find people who want to combine art and tech. I came out another person. It was a very important step. I am definitely more confident. The main point is the validation I got for the direction I have chosen, the way I've been thinking about my work. This is really important."

Angela Kashina, Culture Shift (Nicosia 2016) participant



## Case study



Dimitris Chloupis  
Games Developer  
Culture Shift Athens 2016

I've been coding since I was nine, but until recently I was a lawyer. A few years ago I decided to get back to my tech roots, and now I am a programmer. Culture Shift was my first hack with people not from the tech sector, and I went to meet people, and because I'm curious about how you can use tech to promote and improve culture.

It was a great way to connect with people, find out who's out there and how they think. Our team got really passionate about our idea, our business model and our imaginary clients! Culture Shift opened my eyes to the talent we have here, and how we can collaborate with each other. I met people from other countries too, with different points of view and stories. It all builds understanding, and I feel very privileged to have done it.

# Shifting socio-economic perceptions in a time of austerity

**"The speaker at the hack was amazing. I was really surprised, I didn't know we had those kind of people in Cyprus."**  
Phivos Stavrou, Culture Shift (Nicosia 2016) participant

In addition to shifting how they perceive themselves, for a number of participants Culture Shift appears to have instilled a more general or widespread confidence, and perhaps done something to confound cultural stereotypes. For these Culture Shift participants and people in their wider networks, Culture Shift has challenged the views they hold about their own society and its cultural identity.

**"I posted photos from Google and everyone got excited, and seemed surprised. I told them Google had a lot of Greek people working there... All this builds wider confidence. That for me is important. It breaks down stereotypes, tells people 'You are not less than other countries; you are not less organised; you can work well with other Greek people'."**

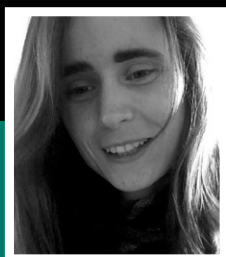
Dimitris Chloupis, Culture Shift (Athens 2016) participant

A number of Culture Shift participants from Greece fed back just how much of an energy booster Culture Shift had been, at a time of ongoing economic hardship in the country. One entrepreneur told us that Culture Shift has been incredibly important in terms of catalysing much needed change and in developing a more business-focused approach in young social entrepreneurs.

**"The opportunity to...co-create an idea, was, for us in Greece where we are in recession and nothing moves, so great."**

Agnes Mariakaki, Culture Shift (Athens 2016) participant

## Case study



Angela Kashina  
Founder, Roads and Keys  
Culture Shift Nicosia 2016

Culture Shift was my very first hackathon. After the event, I began participating more actively in other hackathons, which were excellent learning experiences. However, I realised that I was looking for another Culture Shift. The other hackathons were more focused on the tech side (ie. the development of tech solutions rather than on the combination of culture and technology). So I would say that the concept of Culture Shift "Technology meets Arts" was the perfect fit for me.

Previously, I'd been experimenting with mini projects, but I would still say that Culture Shift was a turning point for me. I have always wanted to create something on my own and after the event, I began working more intensively towards this direction.

Right now I'm working on a platform for travelling pianists. The idea of mapping pianos in public spaces came a few months after the event. Initially I began mapping pianos just for me, but then I decided to expand on the idea, to experiment with it on a larger scale and to see how far it can go.

# Lasting impact on professional and organisational development

"I really got encouraged by the whole thing, and I decided that I could take this risk taking further, so...I decided to recommend to a client that they work with a theatre company on a new strategy. So we sat down with the actors and improvised around how we could take technophobes into using online banking technology. You could see as the employees did the improv exercises how rewarding it was."

Agnes Mariakaki, Culture Shift (Athens 2016) participant

To judge Culture Shift's success solely on whether the winning ideas have gone forward is to miss the point; hacks exist to unlock new thinking, confidence and action in individuals, and the prototyping process is a means to do this rather than an end in itself. In this context, it's great to see that, for many participants, taking part in Culture Shift has unlocked real personal, and in some cases organisational, change. Some have stepped up to lead new initiatives in their organisations, some have been inspired to get new side projects off the ground, while others have taken the bold step to start working full time on a new start-up.



"I proved to myself and others that my ideas are sound. It gave me an immediate target; the next step was to make those ideas...By that time I was working as a freelancer, so winning this was an open door to what's next in my life. ...I quit my job just before the Google trip."

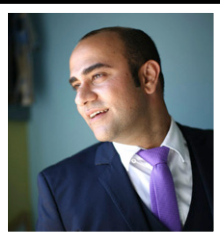
Phivos Stavrou, Culture Shift (Nicosia 2016) participant

The winning team from Culture Shift Athens 2016 have used the follow up mentoring and co-working space they received to create a company and develop a business plan, both things they are absolutely clear wouldn't have happened without Culture Shift.

"Culture Shift has made a real difference. Since then we decided to take things a bit more professionally; we founded a non-profit organisation. For us the impact has been great. We're now a team, have a place to work and have had some mentoring. We've turned our idea from a hobby to a profession. We say that everything started to happen after Culture Shift. We now think there is a possibility to develop our idea and do this thing professionally."

Anastasia Terzidou and Rafaela Karagianni, Culture Shift (Athens 2016) participants

## Case study



Andreas Louca  
Co-Founder, StudentLife  
Culture Shift Nicosia 2016

Culture Shift was my first hack and I went for the networking. But it was such a great all round experience. It definitely exceeded my expectations, but it was tougher than I expected. It tested my limits. I'm in my thirties and run a couple of companies, but it was hard work, developing a concrete plan as a team, thinking it out, creating a business out of it.

I learned a lot as a leader. I really feel like it was a tipping point for the way I think. I'm confident, I have employees, I'm always the one leading. This was a situation where I couldn't just say something and have it happen. It showed me my weaknesses, and I learnt a lot that I've brought back to the companies I run.

# The key components of culture shift

## The hack process and what was key here

As we've mentioned, the focus on culture and tech was the main reason why people signed up for Culture Shift in the first place. Here's what participants told us made Culture Shift so valuable once they were on the journey.

**"I hadn't heard about prototyping before, and what that means... Just being involved in that systematic process over a longer time was really useful... The playing, sharing ideas, elaborating on them, then realising 'no, we need to try in another way' was so useful."**

**Maria Dimitriou, Culture Shift (Athens 2016) participant**

- The structure provided a chance to experiment and trial new approaches to ideas development.
- The composition of the team was important in terms of the quality of the experience.
- Participants were encouraged and supported to be playful and use a breadth of approaches, and the support materials they were provided with were useful at the hack, and have been since.
- Most participants felt that the facilitators got the balance between stepping in and encouraging teams to think for themselves just right, and liked that they were really generous with their knowledge and experience.
- The facilitators did a lot to help unlock team thinking when people got stuck, and helped resolve team tensions.
- When mentors honed in on areas that teams were struggling with, they helped unlocked some participants' thinking.

**"London was great. It was a life changing experience... seeing other people from the same countries with the same passion and ambition, with ideas they want to develop, their enthusiasm, hearing from them what went wrong or right. Mingling with people from Google and YouTube, you see how big corporations work. It seemed a bit unreal, seeing the opportunities that tech offers in the arts. In the arts field at home it's very limited."**

**Maria Kozari, Culture Shift (Athens 2016) participant**

## The 'wrap around' support for winning teams

- The chance to go to Google Campus, and meet employees and the other Culture Shift winners was really inspiring and valuable; a number described it as "life changing".
- For the Athens 2016 winning team, the co-working space and other support has been invaluable.



## Case study



Carlos Naranjo  
Tech Consultant  
Culture Shift Madrid 2016

I don't normally have anything to do with culture; I work in tech and have an engineering background. I'd never been to this kind of hack before, but I love culture and I'd love to work in that sector, and I thought Culture Shift would be a great way to get to know people.

It was an amazing experience. Our team included a designer, blogger, opera producer and me. We'd never met before, but our idea won. We got to go to Google in London, and did a lot of workshops there, heard about loads of great projects. We're all still in touch, we tell each other our ideas and feedback to each other. Because of Culture Shift I know the culture sector much better, and know so many more people in it.

# Recommendations for the future

## A call for British Council leadership around social entrepreneurship and cross-sector collaboration

**"The British Council should make Culture Shift even more business-orientated...They need to build a case, and foster an ecosystem where culture will be, and be seen as, a key driver for growth."**

**Dionisis Kolokotsas, Google**

There is much enthusiasm for the British Council to build on the work started via Culture Shift, and real appetite for the organisation to provide some leadership in two key areas: nurturing social entrepreneurs and fostering collaboration between the cultural and tech sectors. This is what we heard.

From participants in all three countries there was a simple call for more Culture Shift hacks.

As not all teams continued after the hacks, it was suggested individual winners could be supported.

Both partners and participants suggested a more bespoke/interactive approach to residencies.

Many want the British Council to create an accelerator programme for winners and runners up, and possibly a wider cohort of social entrepreneurs.

Participants would like to connect with people who've been part of Culture Shift before or in other countries, and winners would like to learn from and network more with other winners.

Some want the British Council to team up with universities to enhance the latter's theoretical approach.

There was a widespread call – again across participants and partners alike – for winners to receive additional financial support to help them further develop their ideas.



**"Hacks provide ignition...They are amazingly important in creating new things, but most of the teams tend to discontinue what they started because there's no proper support in place. Having a specially designed acceleration programme for culture would increase the legacy."**

**Dimitris Kalavros-Gousiou, Found.ation, Athens**

## What that leadership role might look like in the future

There are a number of shapes that this leadership role could potentially take. It may simply be about enhancing the hack opportunity, but might also be an offer for a wider group of cultural entrepreneurs and creative technologists. Here are a few observations about what it might include if the goal was to help catalyse new thinking and increase the potential for some ideas to get to market.

The simplest enhancement to the existing offer would be follow up mentoring for all winners.

A broader incubator programme, that includes development grants and a period of 'incubation' for truly ground breaking ideas that have the potential to get to market.

Annual hack opportunities.

Continuing to build effective partnerships that add real value to the programme.

'Show, tell and tackle' sessions where culture and tech professionals can work on their ideas with new people – perhaps at a crucial juncture in its development.

A regular 'Culture Shift' club night, where people from across culture and tech come to network and hear from leaders in these fields.

Creating, curating and distributing online content from participants and partners involved in the broader creative economy programme across the globe.

# Thank you!

the hub would like to thank the following participants, mentors, partners and attenders who took part in our research:

## Participants

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Andreas Louca  
Agnes Mariakaki  
Anna Michael  
Carlos Naranjo  
Jorge Rubio Quintana  
Phivos Stavrou  
Anastasia Terzidou

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## Photographer

Kyriakos Makaronidis

## Principal Partner



## Project Partners



## About the British Council

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The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and build trust between them worldwide.

We work in more than 100 countries and our 7,000 staff – including 2,000 teachers – work with thousands of professionals and policymakers and millions of young people every year by teaching English, sharing the arts and delivering education and society programmes.

Arts is a cornerstone of the British Council's mission to create a friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and the wider world. We find new ways of connecting with and understanding each other through the arts, to develop stronger creative sectors around the world that are better connected with the UK.

We believe arts and culture are vital to prosperous, secure societies, and that offering international cultural connections and experiences strengthens their resilience. We are uniquely able to make a difference thanks to our extensive and diverse networks in the UK and internationally, enabling us to respond to the individual context of each place within which we work.

Through our UK and worldwide network of experts, we support business to business connections, working in partnership to create programmes that responds to the needs of local markets. We foster collaboration; share arts work with the world; build resilience and creative responses to crisis; shape policy; and develop skills and livelihoods. Our programme of seasons and focus countries allows us to rapidly develop relationships between the UK, major trading partners and important emerging economies. These seasons build a modern, dynamic and creative image of the UK and develop new audiences for British culture around the world.

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