

**Culture &
Creativity**

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CREATIVE TOWNS AND REGIONS INITIATIVE: REPORT FOR SISIAN

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction	4
2. Overview of Sisian	4
3. Creative Towns and Regions Initiative in Sisian	6
3.1. <i>Project Schedule</i>	6
3.2. <i>Project Team and Stakeholders</i>	7
3.3. <i>Mapping of Cultural Resources</i>	8
4. Creative Sisian Strategy	13
4.1. <i>First Phase: Nurturing Talent and Raising Awareness</i>	13
4.2. <i>Second Phase: Creating Necessary Preconditions</i>	15
4.3. <i>Third Phase: Creating Supportive Eco-system</i>	17
5. Additional Cases	20

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme launched the Creative Towns and Regions Initiative in 2016 to highlight the importance of culture and creativity in small and medium sized towns and regions. The Initiative introduces a practical approach for towns and regions in the Eastern Partnership countries to use the local cultural and creative potential for social and economic development.

The aim of the initiative is to raise awareness of all key stakeholders of the potential of cultural and creative sectors, to collect data on local cultural and creative resources and to propose concrete action plans for developing the cultural and creative industries potential, including development of local cultural landscape, building clusters with local businesses, increasing the quality of offer of the tourism sector and build stronger networks with similar towns and regions in other countries.

As a result of the initiative, the Programme published a document “Making the Most of Cultural and Creative Resources: The Mapping and Strategy Building Handbook for Creative Towns and Regions”¹, which is available for free download and could provide practical tools and recommendations for towns and regions to develop their local resources.



2. OVERVIEW OF SISIAN

Sisian is a town in the southern Syunik Province of Armenia. It is located on Vorotan River, 6 km south of the Yerevan-Meghri highway, at a distance of 217 km from Yerevan and 115 km from Kapan. Sisian was known as Sisakan, Sisian and Sisavan during the ancient times and later in the Middle Ages. However, the name Karakilisa, which was used for the town by the Turkic rulers of Armenia, was kept until 1935. In 1935, one of the old names, Sisavan, was restored. Finally, in 1940, the town was renamed Sisian. As of the 2011 census, the population of the town is 14,894 inhabitants. After administrative reforms planned in October 2017, the town will be united with surrounding villages and the population will increase up to 30,000 residents.

¹ <https://www.culturepartnership.eu/en/article/mapping-and-strategy-building-handbook>



Sisian is in a green mountainous region in south Armenia, with a diverse topography of semi-deserts, dry steppes, forests, alpine and subalpine meadows and snowy zones. Sisian is rich in biodiversity, with rare forest flora and fauna attracting international attention from conservationists. The area is rich in minerals, including copper, molybdenum, zinc, gold, silver, and also stone used in construction, like limestone and granite. Farmers grow a range of vegetables and fruits. Produce is sold at markets, helping to increase household incomes. However, much of its agricultural land has been abandoned or is underdeveloped due to a lack of irrigation.

Sisian and its 35 neighbouring villages contain a rich culture and history unique to this region and, sadly, largely unknown to most tourists entering the country. National treasures, such as the Ukhtasar Petroglyphs and Zorats Karer, exist alongside striking mountain views and breath-taking valleys. For many in northern Syunik Marz, the Sisian area serves as a hub of culture and creativity. In addition to countless monasteries, including the 11th century Vorohtnavank and 8th century Tanahat Monastery, the region claims beautiful nature and hiking trails, that lead to unexpected treasures, such as Tolors Monastery, a monastery hidden beneath Tolors Lake, or caves in local Aghitu, that were occupied over 40,000 years ago.

The region is also rich in cultural offer: throughout the region there are many cultural houses, music schools, dance schools, and museums. Within Sisian, children from throughout the region attend the local art school, visit exhibitions at the Sisian branch of the National Art Gallery, and practice chess with Samvel Mkrtchyan at the local chess school. Over 929 students attend a variety of cultural schools in Sisian, with students taking part in national dance competitions, singing for large crowds in Yerevan, or creating art and designs at the City Cultural House.

Town institutions are sustained by a dynamic civic society and private sector, that invest in the arts and creative practices, including an Adult Education Centre, that is supported by the German Embassy. These sectors are complemented by a community of active artists that celebrate art in all its forms, from Zara Gasparyan's beautiful handmade batikas to Ashot Avagyan's unique performance art, that celebrates Sisian's landmarks and culture.

The natural beauty of the Sisian region combined with the enthusiastic community allows for a variety of creative activities in the area. The region frequently hosts singers, performers, and theatre groups from around Armenia and Russia. On any given day, a visitor to the area can be treated to a movie in the town centre, a play at the Cultural House, and a new exhibition at the gallery. This is not to mention events put on by the municipality and civil society actors, including Youth Day, the Bread Festival, and the Raspberry Festival. Each of these events attract participants not only from the Sisian region, but Armenia as a whole, and serves as a testament to the enthusiasm the Sisian people regularly demonstrate for their region's culture and heritage.

All stakeholders, whether artists, civilians, business owners, or the municipality, are ready and willing to work with different cultural initiatives and projects that could help to further develop creativity, business, civil society, education in Sisian.

3. CREATIVE TOWNS AND REGIONS INITIATIVE IN SISIAN

Sisian local administration applied for becoming a pilot town within the Creative Towns and Regions Initiative for the following reasons:

- > This initiative would allow the region to further develop its unique creative and cultural resources and reach its full potential.
- > The mapping and roadmap exercises would allow local residents to identify the most valuable resources and positively impact the region's social and economic development.
- > The process would raise awareness of all local stakeholders and facilitate capacity-building through workshops, trainings and mapping exercises.

3.1. Project Schedule

January 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 14 Armenian towns applied for the call
February 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sisian and 5 more towns and regions from EaP countries have been selected as pilots
March 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Desk study of the strategies, documents and online resources
March 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparation visit in region - meeting with local partners
April 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Second visit - screening of the local stakeholders
May 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Networking of 6 partner towns at Creative Regions forum in Moldova• Third visit - the key stakeholders group meetings (creative industries, tourism, culture)
June 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation of draft results of research• Brainstorming with local stakeholders. Meeting with NGOs and youth
July 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analysis of the collected material, development of recommendations• Public presentation of the recommendations, public discussions in Sisian
August 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalising the report, drafting final recommendations
September 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Publishing of the report

3.2. Project Team and Stakeholders

Project's Core Team

- > **Lia Ghilardi** (UK), Non-Key Senior Expert for Creative Towns and Regions Initiative
- > **Olena Pravylo** (Ukraine), Non-Key Junior Expert in Armenia for Creative Towns and Regions Initiative
- > **Ragnar Siil** (Estonia), Key Expert of the EU-EaP Culture and Creativity Programme
- > **Norayr Yerzyknyan** (Armenia), Country Coordinator for the EU-EaP Culture and Creativity Programme
- > **Hasmik Asatrian** (Armenia), Project Coordinator in Sisian, General Manager of Basen Hotel in Sisian
- > **Haykuhi Blblulyan** (Armenia), Head of the Sisian Organizational Department of the City Council

Participants of the Research (total over 70 people):

- > Sisian City Council (Mayor, secretary, deputies)
- > Sisian Junior Music School named after Emma Asyan, Sisian School of Fine Arts named after Z. A. Khachatryan, and Sisian Community's Junior School of Art
- > Sisian community's School of Chess and Sisian School of Football
- > Centre of Creativity for Children named after Aghvan Minasyan
- > Sisian Centre of Culture named after Hamo Sahyan
- > Sisian City Library
- > Sisian Ensemble of Folk Instruments
- > Theatre group Dhol
- > "Grand" Dance Company
- > Sisian History Museum named after N. Adonts
- > Sisian Gallery
- > Sisian Ceramics
- > Sisian batik business "Astre"
- > Sisian woodcarving master and stonemason
- > Sisian Sport School
- > The branch of the Armenian National Agrarian University
- > Kickboxing group
- > "Vorotan" monthly newspaper
- > Victoria Raspberry Producer Group
- > Engineering labs of Sisian and nearby villages: Engineering lab of Sisian High School, Engineering lab of Sisian No 2 Primary School, Engineering lab of Tsghuk Secondary School, Engineering lab of Shaghat Secondary School, "Sisteam" programmers' group
- > Technological University branch
- > Hotels and B&B of Sisian and nearby villages: Hotel "Basen", Hotel "Lalaner", Hotel "Dina" B&B, "Zorac qarar", Hotel and Spa centre "MJA Resort"
- > Sisian Primary School
- > Sisian Educational Centre for Adults
- > Qarahunge (Zorats Karer) megalithic historical complex in Sisian
- > Ashot Avagyan sculptural park
- > World Vision UK, office in Sisian
- > Urban Lab (Yerevan), Sarhat Petrosyan
- > Peace Corp Volunteers in Sisian (USA)

3.3. Mapping of Cultural Resources

The mapping of cultural resources based on combined approach that includes field visits, interviews with stakeholders, focus groups and group sessions with different cultural actors, youth, business representatives, local authorities and civil society. Different methods were used for data collection and analysis, including SWOT-analysis matrix, the problem tree and objective tree analysis, interviews, and brainstorming sessions. As a result, the research identified following key resources:

3.3.1. Network of cultural institutions

The network of cultural institutions works particularly well with children and teenagers to develop their creative potential.

Challenges:

- > *Lack of cultural development and engagement of local citizens after they graduate local art and music schools.*
- > *Income generating for local cultural institutions is prohibited by law, only cultural centre is allowed sell tickets or rent its hall. The system does not motivate institutions, because if they earn money, they lose proportionally from city's subsidies, they receive less than 10% of the earned amount.*
- > *Due to lack of resources, the local students cannot go outside the town to showcase their achievements or participate in competitions. Only private money is used for it, which is not sustainable and brings institutions under dependency of private sponsors.*
- > *The state of infrastructure for art and dancing schools, library, and museum. The thermoregulation system in the library is out of date and it destroys books, in dancing classes the floor is hazardous for children, heating in dance school is very poor, etc. Only the cultural centre has recently repaired building and rooms with necessary equipment.*
- > *There is no department of culture within the structure of the City Council.*

Opportunities:

- > *Development of series of workshops for adults and tourists, which could also be generating additional income for the institutions.*
- > *Creating a foundation to support the development of local cultural institutions, run by the local community, not government representatives. That foundation could receive donations from sponsors, income from workshop participants and other activities. The money could be used for institutions' development needs, e.g. traveling for children, repairs, bringing outside experts, buying of new costumes, books, etc.*
- > *Promotion of cultural institutions through diaspora, developing campaign about helping the institution to develop good conditions for children. "World Vision"*



organization could be advisor and operator of such campaign. In collaboration with different NGOs, the projects should not only include renovations, but also initiatives in the field of education, culture and creativity projects, business and civil society capacity building.

- > Development of attractive and inclusive museum programs with local citizens, businesses and outside experts.*
- > Library could develop more friendly space for children and adult audience, and organise meetings and readings with authors. The library needs special programs for personnel training – in particular regarding activation and involvement of the population.*
- > There should be more awareness about the local talents living in Sisian or originating from the town. The awareness raising could involve stories in the local newspapers or social media, video clips or school research assignments.*

3.3.2. Tourism

In addition to existing institutions, there are several new initiatives throughout the region, most notably a tourism association led by local entrepreneur Hasmik Azoyan. This association allows all hotels and local restaurants to collaborate on how to best promote tourism in the area, and the tourism promotion works congruently with cultural and creative arts. Sisian hosts several hotels and restaurants, such as the Basen, Lalaner, and Dina Hotels, that cater to tourists that come to Sisian specifically for its unique cultural and creative sites.

Challenges:

- > Lack of workforce in service industry and the level of service quality in hospitality industry is rather low. The workers lack necessary knowledge of English and other languages, in order to attract foreign tourists (other than those from Russia).*
- > Employment in the hotel or restaurant business is neither attractive nor prestigious for the youth.*
- > Information about the town is poor and spontaneous, the tourism infrastructure is often out-dated, navigation system in the town is not working, there are no dedicated maps nor tourism applications.*
- > The local tourism sector is rather fragmented, there is mostly competition instead of collaboration between different stakeholders.*

Opportunities:

- > Creation of tourism information point or centre, which would share information about the town and help to build cluster of tourism service providers. There is a need to develop a local tourism strategy, which would include both local authorities, business community as well as cultural and creative resources.*
- > Local festivals and public events could work as tourism activator and bring new people and ideas in the town. Tourists and talents want to stay in Sisian for longer, there are number of foreigners in Sisian who had chosen the town as the place for permanent living.*

- > *Capacity building for local specialists involved in the tourism sector, both within the tourism sector as well as in other related fields.*
- > *Developing materials and tools for tourism development, including touristic routes, cultural and creative maps, applications, etc.*
- > *The municipality is working to improve infrastructure between Sisian proper and surrounding villages. This would allow even closer collaboration between different actors and further promote regional integration of services and events.*
- > *The town is situated close to the popular tourist routes. To attract tourists' attention passing the road near Sisian on their way to Tatev or Yerevan, the special navigation system should be developed and road signs set up to invite tourists to visit Sisian.*
- > *The town has a strong network of women – hotel directors, craftswomen, civil activists – who actively cooperate to develop Sisian. Recently, a non-government organization was registered, which has a potential to become the first instrument to attract citizens into the common dialogue. Supporting civil sector could become a basis for long-lasting changes in the town.*

3.3.3. Crafts

The Sisian region is home to several unique artistic businesses, including “Sisian Ceramics”, a new batik (scarves with silk painting) business “Astre”, a carpenter and a stone master are all working in the town as professional craft makers. Plenty of locals also do their traditional waving, embroidering, and carpets as a hobby. Sisian Ceramics is a private business that works to preserve regional ceramic practices. Basen Hotel organises tours to major cultural sites in the area.

Challenges:

- > *Low level of business skills of local crafts makers.*
- > *The local market is very limited and access to other markets is very difficult. The awareness of local population and tourists about the local artists and crafts is very limited, visitors don't find the local masters.*

Opportunities:

- > *Developing marketing skills and business strategies for crafts makers could open up new opportunities. One way would be to encourage collaboration between different masters to make co-productions and joint marketing.*
- > *Local hotels and restaurants are good places to sell crafts, there is a need for a good representation.*
- > *Sisian is planning to development the Craft Centre, which could work not only as workshop venue, but also collaborate with museum, art school and help to profile unique heritage in the region.*
- > *Crafts makers need to invest into raising quality of the products, collaboration with designers could make products more modern and interesting for international markets.*

3.3.4. Chess school, classes and engineering labs

The main goal of engineering labs in Armenia is to meet the demand of the engineering industry in quality specialists and graduates educated on up-to-date technological base, to confront the employee shortage and to increase value-added and innovativeness of Armenian high-tech businesses, thus increasing their international competitiveness. There are four labs in Sisian and surrounding villages. They work with children and teens. Till the 4th school grade, all pupils are obliged to learn chess and after they could choose engineering classes to develop tech skills.

Challenges:

- > *Lack of local teachers. Students move out from Sisian after graduation to study and work in Yerevan.*
- > *Small resources for development of tech projects*
- > *Lack of equipment and common working spaces.*

Opportunities:

- > *Collaboration with artists and local business could bring more creative projects and experts in the city. Sisian should attract large IT-companies to initiate joint projects.*
- > *Development of creative spaces is already developing, encouraged by active tech community. Involvement of local NGOs could support local tech businesses and start-ups in creating better working conditions.*

3.2.5. Artistic community

Sisian has existing art community, that collaborates with the art school. As a result, more than 10% of art school pupils become artists, architects and other creative professionals. Local Sisian artists, such as Ashot Avagyan and Zara Gasparyan, express their creativity in vastly different ways, but share a common goal of developing the creative field in Sisian. Mr. Avagyan, head of local historical centre Zorac Qarer, bought the nearby hill and he is developing a sculptural park. Zara Gasparyan is oriented on the market and she produces batik (scarves with silk painting) and jewellery in collaboration with a pottery master.

Challenges:

- > *Migration of talented youth from Sisian.*
- > *Competitive environment between artists with low level of collaboration.*
- > *Art market in the town is weak – few artists work with art projects and do their own performances, exhibitions, but there are no sales for art, only showings.*

Opportunities:

- > *Art residency programs should be supported by local administration, businesses (hotel, restaurants) and NGOs, that could bring new opportunities to develop artistic programs in the town. NGOs representatives could help to develop more*

projects with artists: exchanges, classes, materials, art exhibitions, etc.

- > *Art could work as a magnet for cultural tourism in Sisian, artists need support and should be invited to various projects.*

3.3.6. Cultural activities

Sisian has several festivals: Bread Festival, Raspberry Festival, and celebration of Youth Day. Up to 500 people are visiting each of the local festivals. Local events organized by culture house are oriented mostly on youth and families. The local community interacts through self-organised national dance classes, female movement and festivals.

Challenges:

- > *The variety of festivals is small and quality needs significant development. There is a clear need for more cultural events in the town, especially in the new and contemporary cultural fields.*
- > *The cultural events need to take into account the tourism development needs. Currently, the events in Sisian are lacking uniqueness and they are not sufficiently oriented to tourists.*

Opportunities:

- > *Inviting talented cultural managers from outside of Sisian to carry out projects together with locals – it could bring new ideas into cultural events in the town. Development of ideas and realisation of events together with local citizens, events that work on neighbourhoods' development.*
- > *There are opportunities to organise cultural events combined with serious topics and with partners as universities or international institutions.*

3.3.7. Natural and cultural heritage

Unique natural and cultural heritage in Sisian and in surrounding areas make it ideal location for visitors. The region includes Zorats Qarer, a prehistoric archaeological site, the Shaki waterfall, the Ughtasar petroglyphs, the Surb Hovhannes, the Votornovang and the Tatev monasteries, and many old cemeteries with traditional Armenian Hvachkars (stone crosses).

Challenges:

- > *Many of historical places are not well preserved. The situation of the sites can be in some cases hazardous for visitors (wild animals, lack of security measures, etc.). Some of the places lack even basic tourist infrastructure.*
- > *There is lack of awareness about the rich heritage, both within Armenia and also outside. There are only few touristic guides and touristic routes are practically not developed.*

Opportunities:

- > *Eco-tourism – herbs gathering, environmental conferences, special routes,*

producing of local herbal cosmetics.

- > Archaeological tourism, organising conferences and research projects in collaboration with international institutes.*
- > Creating an artistic residency in Sisian, e.g. for video makers, writers, bloggers, etc., to attract talented people from outside, who could share the stories about unique nature and places with wider audiences.*
- > Initiating a process to list the area in the UNESCO (tentative) list.*

3.3.8. Cooperation with surrounding areas

The surrounding areas of Sisian offer potential for cooperation. In one of the nearby villages, there is a production of mineral water "Darbaz", in another they focus on raspberry production. In Lor village there is a museum, and in Vaghatin there is an ongoing development of traditional wedding service business.

Challenges:

- > The infrastructure in those villages is out-dated and in a need of investment.*
- > Some villages are far away from Sisian, the distance and availability of transport connections hinder the cooperation between villages and centre of Sisian.*

Opportunities:

- > Many villages have their own embroidery makers and local artists, that can market their products in. Unfortunately, the awareness about local cultural richness is low, therefore there should be small-scale projects to support that kind of development, e.g. creating cultural maps, rethinking art interventions, archaeological research with video and photo documentation, etc.*
- > New initiatives by locals - the wedding agency in the village that provides special events in traditional style could inspire other locals to initiate rural projects.*
- > The interest for green tourism and local cuisine are in the rise globally and therefore it could create additional opportunities for tourism development.*

4. CREATIVE SISIAN STRATEGY

4.1. First Phase: Nurturing Talent and Raising Awareness

1. Identifying the narrative for Sisian.

Every city has its own unique DNA – geographic, demographic, economic, and institutional characteristics that make it different from other places. These differences play a key role in creating opportunities for social and economic development. Not



*every city is equally well-suited for every kind of industry or economic opportunity.*² Figuring out what Sisian is good - and not so good – at doing is a key to success. To do this, it is important to discovering problems, opportunities, resources, visions, stakeholders, and goals, to find the place for Sisian on global level, and to identify the role of the town.

It could be a story about ecological, spiritual place with deep roots: petroglyphs, the ancient observatory and churches could show real history, long connections, bring new level of attention to the town. On this stage, the main task is to raise awareness about existing resources that could work for culture and creativity, to highlight opportunities and find creative solutions that could solve the existing problems. Identification should be done through several lenses, which would inspire following activities³:

- > *Beautiful or intriguing scenes in nature, including geology and wildlife.*
- > *Fun things to do outdoors.*
- > *Places to get to know local history and culture.*
- > *Chances to see and interact with local art and artists.*
- > *Festivals and events that celebrate local history, culture, harvest time, foods, music, or celebrities.*
- > *Built attractions, such as monuments, amusement parks, or theme parks.*
- > *Local businesses and retail stores where visitors can shop or be pampered.*

The common image in Armenia about the town is that “Sisian is the town of the constant cold”. Such a clear positioning could be played out in promo materials. Sisian is the perfect place for summer weekends – the waterfall, a lake in the volcano’s mouth, the sup with friends in a cool shadow of the local restaurants. Work with existing myths and ideas about Sisian, opens up opportunities for finding unique positioning of Sisian, which will interest not only tourists, but also other people who would like to spend time to explore Sisian more deeply.

2. Openness, accessibility and participation.

Development of new ideas and realisation of new projects needs to be transparent, accessible and inclusive for all participants. Local citizens, cultural actors and other stakeholders are easily engaged, but doesn’t yet have necessary experience and they often lack self-confidence. The most suitable strategy for Sisian is to start with small-scale projects, pilots and experiments, not focusing on huge projects. Prototyping creative ideas, creative businesses and cultural initiatives could bring new people, ideas and opportunities to the town. This will help to build capacity for the local community, so that they would be ready to develop bigger projects. For example, to focus firstly on tourism development, the city could open a tourism information centre, create tourist programs, routes, establish town brand, work with the promotion of the town with tourism agencies and manage tourist flows within the region. The initiatives could also include creating a local advisory map made by locals with must-visit location, places to buy local products, such as honey, herbs, hand-made goods by the craftsmen. This could attract more visitors, reinforce occupancy rate of local hotels, restaurants and bigger sales of local production goods.

² <http://cityobservatory.org/>

³ <https://www.extension.umn.edu/community/news/tourism-assets.html>



Branding and positioning of Sisian needs to include both external and internal components. The bilingual town navigation system (e.g. shop signs, pointers, etc.), unique and typical for Sisian, should be developed as a part of so called town design code, which would help Sisian to become easily identifiable. The town should also launch a promotion campaign to attract tourists and talents. To achieve this, the permanent schedule of events and activities, such as festivals, exhibitions, seminars, etc. needs to be elaborated. The promotional materials, in particular videos, brochures, web-sites, etc., should include Armenian, English, Russian and Farsi languages.

3. Attracting talents and building capacities.

Developing of creative industries requires skilled local activists, professionals, and cultural and creative leaders. Capacity building could include different approaches, e.g. training programs and mobility projects as residencies, conferences, etc. The most sustainable way to develop Creative Sisian is to invest in its people and create opportunities for their self-realisation. To avoid losing traditional methods, it is of high importance to launch research projects based on the crafts centre in collaboration with the museum, and gather a data base of practices and knowledge about the local authentic traditions. This research may be further developed by the artists and scientists. The capacity building should not only include the crafts skills, but also business skills. Additionally, there is a need for a joint marketing programme to introduce Sisian and its cultural and creative resources at international markets.

It is recommended to launch short-time residency programs for artists, cultural and media specialist, and scientists. For instance, the conference for archaeologists in collaboration with international universities could be held as well as residency for bloggers (cooking, traditions, urban studies, archaeology, etc.), journalists, sculptors, and artists.

Indicators for the first phase: publication of local strategy paper and policies, publications, transparent reports from government and NGOs, new educational programs in town, mobility projects.

4.2. Second Phase: Creating Necessary Preconditions

1. Developing political and public framework.

Forming of sustainable creative agenda, policies, regulations, and participatory budgeting of local projects is a necessary step to create preconditions for creative industries development. The town should engage stakeholders in preparing a creative town development strategy, which would set goals and shares responsibilities. It might be necessary to create a local group of stakeholders' representatives, who will meet regularly and will actively work on the strategy. The group works on recommendations and ideas for local community. Group task is to develop a strategy and propose local programs and projects. It should hold meetings on regularly basis - minimum once a month, and support each other in development of ideas, to provide transparent process of strategy planning, engaging stakeholders, managing the process and results. Planning process itself is often more important than the final document. Considering that fact, that the City Council doesn't have any strategy for the town, such document could be start point for the future official documents development.



Sisian needs a social support system for the creative entrepreneurship development, including support from regulations, education and finances. As a result of the process, Creative Sisian support fund could be created to finance creative projects and initiatives. The authorities should develop alternative finance instruments for the cultural and creative sectors.

Town budgeting practices could include participatory budgeting. *Participatory budgeting is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget.*⁴ It also helps to develop the most important infrastructural objects in the town. Practices of transparency and participation could be actively used also by civil society sector. For example, creating a community fund to develop social initiatives. These special programs could support of educational and practical exchanges for youth, business representatives, cultural actors and creative professionals. The town needs to tackle seriously the youth unemployment issue to decrease the migration patterns to Yerevan. Sisian mobility program could support local talented youth to travel and for talents from outside of Sisian to come to the town.

2. Supporting strategic leadership and agility.

Long term planning, monitoring results and adapting necessary strategies is the cornerstone of effective management. This role could be well done by city institution or NGO supervising strategies, priorities, projects and programs. It is also important to involve local stakeholders in a dialogue at this stage. Few existing activists in Sisian are well educated and motivated, official town leaders should demonstrate positive change by their own behaviour. Transforming economic and political systems into inclusive, transparent and engaging systems is not a quick exercise, but it would bring more trust and create a win-win situation in a long run. Sisian needs real partnership between different stakeholders, and it is also important to note that transparency and inclusion is attractive to investors and donors. The local specialists are in a need for educational programs and setting quality standards. Sisian should avoid the risk of attractive lots of investment without capacity building program and transparency practices. Town's projects should include representatives of civil society and business sector. All the projects, including town administration projects, must be based on the principals of transparency and local community engagement, including publishing related project documentation online.

3. Developing physical infrastructure.

Public spaces in the town, except a central square, belong to private businesses. Meanwhile, the young people in Sisian insist that they don't have enough green zones in the town and they spend their free time mainly having walks down the streets. Community demands renovating parks within the town – owned by private business. Sisian should rethink public spaces, empty spaces (not used), to find new potential locations, to create new places for setting up institutions as the creative town development centre, the culture and innovation centre, or the tourism information centre. Empty places are potential spots for festivals, cultural and tech events, business gatherings, physical platforms for different communities, such as co-working spaces, creative hubs and creative business incubators, etc. The empty buildings and public places could be developed together with invited and local architects, urbanists, cultural managers, musicians, artists, tech specialists and

⁴ <https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/>



others. The group responsible for town development (the city institution) should carry out an analysis and mapping of the empty zones. To do this, local authorities, businesses, especially owners of the parks, civil sector and young people should be involved in the dialogue. Thus, the town needs to create an urban action plan, reconsider zoning of the town and provide opportunities for different groups to spend their time.

4. Using smart, mobile, virtual and digital technologies.

Expansion of local tech community provides opportunities to engage them into creative town development. The key is to combine different disciplines – tech, business, arts and creativity. Engineering teams and artists could work together to create new projects, businesses, initiatives for the town, as well as local tourism businesses and local crafts makers could develop new tourism products and services. Generated applications or mobile adapted web-sites could be used by tourists on their phones. Craft products could be promoted online through platforms and applications for successful e-commerce. With use of geolocation technology, augmented reality and bots, Sisian could become a location for quests and games that will discover hidden layers of Sisian or tell the stories. The hackathon – special event for developing tech applications – could be organized involving different specialists in PR, marketing, ecology, technology, humanities, etc. to develop new e-services for the city. It is important to analyse data of user experience and visitor journeys from other places in Armenia and from other countries, and use e-service platforms popular with visitors to promote Sisian. Articles or recommendations for Sisian could attract many active tourists from other countries, for example from Iran. The unique proposition from the town does not depend on its size, only on smart usage of potential of the place and people.

Indicators for the second phase: The Strategy for Sisian, programs and mechanisms for creative industries support, transparent financial mechanisms, empty spaces mapping and activation program, infrastructural improvements, multidisciplinary projects, educational and mobility programs, public reports of local government.

4.3. Third Phase: Creating Supportive Eco-system

1. Developing creative economy.

The aim is to enhance Sisian as the place where people could live and act with imagination. To achieve this, Sisian should focus on developing its creative economy potential. This can be done through encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation, and develop new (creative) clusters. This cluster (or sub-clusters) could include crafts makers, tech specialists, artists, tourist operators, agricultural operators, cultural representatives from rural areas, and many others. Developing creative economy should go hand in hand with increasing population density, creating new jobs, better use of public spaces, developing transport system, including new bicycle roads and pedestrian areas, and investing into social innovation and human capital. The task is to make creative entrepreneurs one of the key players in economic system of Sisian.

The new generation of tech educated youth could be the foundation for new economic development. The schools should implement programs about start-ups and creativity. Sisian could be viewed as an incubator for developing educational environment, with supporting educational and financial programs for local



businesses, local business clubs and other instruments. Those will help to create and strengthen clusters. It could be also a good moment to create a local business school that will help youth not only from Sisian, but from the entire region. The business school could be supported by businesses, donors, local or national governments. The school could be a branch of technical university.

Local hotels and tourist sites should be equipped with stands displaying the products by the local craftsmen. Goods should have high-quality packaging and wear official town branding. Branded products could be distributed at festivals and other cultural events. Improving the level of tourist service requires creating conditions for youth to be trained in this sector. Therefore, it is recommended to launch exchange programs for volunteers and young specialists from other countries to take part in teams of hotels' and restaurants' projects in Sisian. This will provide local youth with the opportunity for self-development in business sphere and will inspire them to get a different understanding of business.

2. Strengthening communication and connections.

Sisian is connected with villages and towns around it, which is why there should be a regular communication between the stakeholders in the entire region, creation of common projects and programs. Sisian and areas around it should understand, that cooperation model is more efficient than competing with each other. Collaboration with other towns could bring new ideas, tourists, talents to the region and to Sisian. The common projects would help to scale up the opportunities and resources, as it would provide critical amount of people. The cooperation between towns should result in creation of the regional cultural maps, new touristic routes, advocacy campaigns to include region in the UNESCO list, launching of support programs for creative businesses in region, protecting local historic sites, etc. Also, it could help international collaboration with towns from other countries. Connection fosters community's social networks, offers social support, enhances social trust, supports members living harmoniously together, fosters civic engagement, empowers members to participate in community and democracy.

3. Creating good living environment.

The main aim of Creative Sisian needs to be creation of stimulating living environment, not creation of status objects. There is a need for human oriented space in the town: green zones reanimation and development, transition-oriented planning for the town, increasing pedestrian and bicycle roads, encouraging diversity and providing high-quality spaces, development of physical and virtual spaces for communication. Travelers do not consider political boundaries when they explore any region, and nearby attractions and services can be leveraged to improve visitors' experiences. They can visit local farms and places in mountains, they can drive down highways and by-ways on self-guided tours of local crafts makers and artists.

4. Supporting distinctiveness and place-making.

The uniqueness of Sisian and the stories around it should be translate into real projects and objects in the city fibre, it could be in terms of new sculptures, special navigation or new places and buildings. But most importantly, it means redefining public spaces.



As Project for public space defines: *“Place-making inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, place-making refers to a collaborative process by which they can shape public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, place-making facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution. With community-based participation at its centre, an effective place-making process capitalizes on a local community’s assets, inspiration, and potential, and it results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people’s health, happiness, and well-being.”* Place-making process in Sisian could follow the Principles for Creating Great Community Places⁵. Empty spaces could become places for meetings of citizens who are interested in Sisian development as well as lectures or planning for the joint urban projects. This could be a place to invite lecturers – foreign practitioners and scientists, successful representatives of diaspora and speakers from other Armenian cities.

Another possibility is to establish a centre for Sisian crafts, based on existing potteries. The space allows conducting workshops, which is a good start for further developing these workshops into regional crafts development hubs. They should include programs for students with local art school, local tourism businesses could follow full learning-production-distribution cycle. Taking into account, that in the near future many neighbouring villages become under Sisian governance, such a centre may become a unique place of knowledge and experience concentration of the region in traditional crafts. Inclusion of tech community in the process of craft centre could transfer idea even into creation of maker-space or fab-lab in Sisian. Engineering community with tourism managers could realise first Sisian Maker Faire with inviting foreign guests, participants and speakers to develop more connections with the global makers movement.

5. Increasing well-being of citizens.

According to public health researchers Wiseman and Brasher, *“Community wellbeing is the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential”*. The quality of life is strongly connected with ecological potential of the town. As locals say: *“This place is the place to raise children”*. Sharing ecological traditions, walking tours, herb gathering, is part of local life and it should be stressed out in communications. The well-being is also a question of security, safety and freedom of expression. Some girls have told the researcher that they could not go to café in the evening, because they could be abused or harassed. Without better security for locals and visitors, Sisian cannot boast its creative and touristic image, based on tolerance and uniqueness, which attracts talents from near and far.

Indicators for third phase: realised local initiatives, establishment of creative cluster, local initiatives and projects, income from developing creative economy.

⁵ <https://www.pps.org/reference/11steps/>

5. ADDITIONAL CASES

First Phase

- > Worpswede⁶, Germany – the oldest European art colony. The town places art and culture in the heart of its identity.
- > Consorcio de la Ciudad Monumental: Involving local actors in the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage⁷
- > Archeological Foundation for region Friuli-Venezia Giulia⁸
- > Annual town report from Grafton⁹, Massachusetts (USA).
- > USE-IT maps¹⁰ with local stories and routes from different cities
- > University of Minnesota Extension Tourism Center¹¹, example of natural relaxation and farm visiting tourism.
- > City design code examples: Lviv¹², Ivano-Frankivsk¹³ and Uzhgorod¹⁴
- > Well-developed project by Art.Lebedev design code of Moscow¹⁵
- > Artists in Residencies: Kosice Artists in Residency¹⁶, Muzychi Artists in Residency program¹⁷, artistic residencies for local development in rural areas¹⁸, La Fragua artist residency in rural areas in Spain¹⁹
- > Example of article in Guardian about Iran with destination promotion, this is a good example of kind of results that could be produced by journalists who could stay in Sisian on residency program²⁰

Second Phase

- > Participatory budgeting in Georgian agricultural region²¹
- > Example of finance support mechanism: Regional Cultural Fund NSW²²
- > Creative Essen Local Action Plan, could help to understand the logic of regional collaboration²³
- > Example of collaborative city institute: The International Gardens Cities Institute²⁴
- > Example of private donations into education: The Metropolitan Sheptytsky Centre²⁵ in Lviv received 5.7 million USD from 15,000 donors.

⁶ http://www.worpswede.de/index_eng.html

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/MeridaConsorcioDeLaCiudadMonumental>

⁸ <https://www.fondazioneaquileia.it/>

⁹ <https://www.grafton-ma.gov/town-administrator/pages/annual-town-reports>

¹⁰ <https://www.use-it.travel/>

¹¹ <https://www.tourism.umn.edu/>

¹² http://www.urban-project.lviv.ua/php_uploads/data/articles/ArticleFiles_UA_215.pdf

¹³ https://dma.if.ua/files/dodatok_do_porjadku_wywisky.pdf and

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2Sw13muyW3qLXVXQ3dfY0VIQmM/view>

¹⁴ http://rada-uzhgorod.gov.ua/web/uploads/old_docs/rada/pravula_vstanov_vuvisok.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.artlebedev.ru/moscow/design-code/>

¹⁶ <http://www.kair.sk/>

¹⁷ https://www.facebook.com/pg/The-Muzychi-Expanded-History-Project-Private-residency-program-453124678154022/photos/?tab=album&album_id=813518285447991

¹⁸ <http://www.kulttuurikauppila.fi/>

¹⁹ <http://lafragua.eu/>

²⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2017/jan/29/motorcycling-through-iran-travel-lois-pryce-women-adventure>

²¹ <http://www.onecaucasus.org/mameuli-participatory-budget>

²² <http://regionalartsnsw.com.au/grants/regional-cultural-fund/>

²³ http://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/local_action_plan_essen_2015_0.pdf

²⁴ <http://www.gardencitiesinstitute.com/>

²⁵ <https://ucu.edu.ua/en/news/obitsyaj-malo-roby-bagato-tsentr-mytopolyta-sheptytskogo-urochysto-vidkryto/>

- > Examples of the public space events activation: Alley Fair²⁶ is a community event that works to activate and transform the alleyways of downtown Fargo by bringing together the area's best food, music, and art. The event's mission is to "design an environment that encourages guests to rethink urban landscapes."
- > Project "Artist Alley"²⁷ has recently been deployed in downtown Bismarck to engage local artists in the creation of an outdoor art gallery along a previously desolate alley in the city's urban core.
- > Infrastructure activation examples: The High Line²⁸ is one of the most surreal spaces in New York City. It's a former elevated freight rail line serving the West side of Manhattan that was converted into a linear park in 2009, with a second section opening in 2011, and a third in 2014. The interesting point about that case – it was initiated and advocated only by two local citizens. This showcases that changes are depend on smart ideas and brave people.
- > The Sound Places Program incorporates musicians, artists, students, and civic leaders over a week-long event of community engagement, interactive performances, and other collaborative efforts in Louisiana's Cultural Districts. This project was aimed at helping communities re-imagine public spaces and corridors.²⁹
- > Cesis Municipal web-site – the small town of 17 000 inhabitants³⁰ and Cesis tourism³¹
- > Mapping of abounded places made by activists in Kyiv³²
- > Artificial intelligence bots for tourism common information³³ and 22 travel bots list³⁴
- > Popular applications: Maps.me³⁵ – Sisian is in the catalogue but no information about town, Izi.travel: Audio Travel Guide³⁶
- > AlpineQuest GPS Hiking³⁷
- > Good example of the gamification of the town Escape Game – Italian Hill Town³⁸
- > NPS National Mall – Location-based tech also makes a great resource for tourists. The app comes with a detailed map that tracks landmarks and other points of interest, complete with a "Locate Me" button, and users can also explore a "Park Lens" augmented reality view that tags surrounding buildings.³⁹

Third Phase

- > Next generation urban farms⁴⁰
- > Art project made by Tomas Libertiny – bees as sculptors⁴¹
- > Promoting and renewing of traditional craft with contemporary creations in Limousine-Aubuson⁴²

²⁶ <http://www.alleyfair.com/>

²⁷ http://bismarcktribune.com/gallery/downtown-bismarck-alley-art/collection_60073735-c24b-572f-b8dc-bde8bf958a58.html#1

²⁸ <http://www.thehighline.org/about>

²⁹ <https://www.pps.org/blog/sound-places-chamber-musicians-take-streets/>

³⁰ <http://www.cesis.lv/en/cesis-municipality>

³¹ <http://turisms.cesis.lv/en/>

³² <http://texty.org.ua/d/buildings-kyiv/#16.91354/50.46502/30.52249>

³³ <https://www.botflux.com/tourism/>

³⁴ <https://www.30secondstofly.com/ai-software/ultimate-travel-bot-list/>

³⁵ <https://maps.me/>

³⁶ <https://izi.travel/ru/app>

³⁷ <https://www.alpinequest.net/>

³⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7D6dWv9Zwk>

³⁹ <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=gov.nps.nama>

⁴⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/jul/02/next-gen-urban-farms-10-innovative-projects-from-around-the-world>

⁴¹ <http://timagazine.com/libertiny-bees/>

⁴² <http://www.tourismelimousin.com/>

- > Pecs Regional Creative Cluster: Sustaining a creative ecosystem⁴³
- > Tartu Centre for CCl : Growing local CCl through an export-driven incubation programme⁴⁴
- > Creative Brno – creative centre made from ex-prison⁴⁵
- > Clusters documentation example⁴⁶
- > Collaboration project of cities and towns – Metropolis Ruhr, Germany⁴⁷
- > Craft centres⁴⁸, FabLab community⁴⁹, Fablab Berlin⁵⁰, Kyiv Mini Maker Faire⁵¹, more information about makers movement⁵²
- > Example of community well-being Albert Lia⁵³
- > Many cases with cultural analysis, recommendations and strategies for towns and cities in one catalogue from Culture for Cities and Regions⁵⁴

⁴³ <https://www.parcaudiovisual.cat/en/>

⁴⁴ <http://www.loovtartu.ee/en>

⁴⁵ <http://www.creativebrno.cz/>

⁴⁶ [https://www.behance.net/gallery/35068745/Craft-cluster-initiative-\(Pattachitra\)-Documentation](https://www.behance.net/gallery/35068745/Craft-cluster-initiative-(Pattachitra)-Documentation)

⁴⁷ <http://archiv.ruhr2010.de/en/>

⁴⁸ <https://crafts.arts.ncsu.edu/> and <http://www.umass.edu/craftctr/>

⁴⁹ <http://www.fablabni.com/what-fablab.html>

⁵⁰ <https://fablab.berlin/en/>

⁵¹ <https://kyiv.makerfaire.com/>

⁵² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brit-morin/what-is-the-maker-movemen_b_3201977.html

⁵³ <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/enhance-your-wellbeing/community/what-community-wellbeing>

⁵⁴ <http://www.cultureforcitiesandregions.eu/culture/resources/Case-studies-catalogue-2-0-complete-version-WSWE-AFJFF5>

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