Challenge
There is a vibrant civil society in Athens, with a huge amount of activity going on at a community level. This activity is often restricted, either by government regulation or because there is not the infrastructure and support to enable these activities to flourish.

Idea
synAthina is an online platform to engage members of the community in problems solving and reform. Citizens and groups can submit activities they are undertaking and ideas on how to improve their city, and will be connected to the relevant government representatives, resulting in creative grassroots solutions and a mechanism to influence and update municipality services and procedures.

Intended impact
• Increased momentum and energy, supporting enhanced activity amongst community groups.
• More supportive and collaborative ways of working between the municipality and the community.
• Reduced regulation, creating space for a greater contribution in city life from community groups.
• Increased understanding from the municipality of the contribution that community groups can make to improving the city.

About our innovation
synAthina - supporting community activity to flourish and influence municipality thinking

Who is involved?
Amalia Zepou (Project Director), Stelios Voulgaris (Project Manager), Vassilis Chatzopoulos (Communications Lead) Harislissos (Programme Co-ordinator)

From the bottom up: How to build a collaborative, grassroots vision for change within a municipality

Building authentic and personal relationships through face to face engagement
There is a history of mistrust between grassroots activists and the municipality. Our approach has been to attract interest and engagement by investing in face to face relationships. We have used our strong background in community activism to identify with and understand these groups.

Demonstrating new ways of interacting
We are modelling new ways of working between the municipality and community groups, and have undertaken a number of events which bring these groups together, gradually building the sense of ambition for change amongst municipality officials.

Focusing on high impact activity
We have collected hundreds of community activities, and now need to focus our energy on supporting groups undertaking the most high impact activities to influence municipal decisions, and realise the potential impact of these activities for citizens.

Connecting with the community in an authentic way is key to building trust and their desire to be involved in a project.
Connecting people to tangible change helps them to see new ways of working in practice.

Energy is not an endless resource: prioritising is important for maximising impact.

Holding onto a living vision
Through trust and communication, we have developed a culture of reflection and debate within the team. We all feel supported to surface questions or uncertainty which helps us to agree the direction of the project.

“We are discovering new things through action” Stelios Voulgaris

Next steps
Developing the platform
We are updating our platform so that it automates more of the data collection. It will also respond to the evolving intent of the project, for example enabling us to identify themes across community activities and analyse what citizens are most interested in.

Codifying new approaches
Informed by synAthina, the Mayor is committed to supporting longer term change in the municipality. We are working with him to think about a declaration or set of principles which codify how the municipality should work with citizens.

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