



Thessaloniki  
**Future Thinking  
Dialogues**

# A hub of talent innovation and technology in the making

**June 1-2, 2021**



Organizer



AMERICAN-HELLENIC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Conference titled: “Thessaloniki Future Thinking Dialogues; A hub of talent, innovation and technology in the making” was organized by the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce between June 1-2, 2021. The Chamber has undertaken this initiative in recognition of the role that technology and talent play in shaping tomorrow’s businesses. As one of the Chamber’s institutional Conferences, further events are planned to take place in other appropriately selected Greek cities.

The Conference highlighted the crucial role of technology and talent in a changing environment and how it can fit with the vision for developing Thessaloniki into an internationally recognized knowledge and innovation hub.

Discussions centered upon:

- The advent of innovation districts and how urban, open places with vision and purpose prosper and transform into a crucial factor for sustainable economic development,
- The manner in which exponential technologies, particularly amidst the pandemic, change the way we live, work and communicate, thereby opening up the borders of talent and innovation,
- The transformation of education, the scarcity of talent and the crucial role of focusing on the development of collaboration and specialized skills,
- The importance of offering a fascinating quality of life as well as inspiring working conditions that encourage diversity and career development.

As Thessaloniki has recently witnessed a surge in interest primarily from U.S. multinationals who have invested in the development of talent, technology and innovation, there are significant opportunities for the region.

The local community stands to gain by developing into a world class knowledge and innovation hub, offering opportunities for personal and professional advancement, an open environment with high standards of quality of life, where top-class talent is developed and attracted in a harmonic symbiosis of large companies, startups and academic and research institutions.



For the full  
conference material  
click [here](#)

## DEFINITION OF INNOVATION DISTRICTS

A geographic area where anchor institutions and companies cluster and connect with small firms, start-ups, business incubators etc.

Physically compact, transit accessible, and technically wired, they offer mixed use housing, office and retail.

Bruce Katz, Julie Wagner “The Rise of Innovation Districts”

## **INNOVATION DISTRICTS - A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

Whether located in different parts of a city or concentrated in regenerated city center vibrant areas, innovation districts are emerging in every global region harnessing its distinctive strengths. All innovation districts are powerhouses of R&D funding and activity placing them in a strong competitive position. But it is when they become accessible to institutions as well as companies, start-ups and others, that they become sticky, triggering a co-location effect. Hence innovation districts are increasingly integrated places for a diversity of people, continuously evolve with many being essentially a “work in progress” project.

To understand the potential of an innovation district one should analyze its economic, physical and networking assets as well as its unique specializations, its critical mass and its ability to facilitate convergence, create quality places, form a buzzing, connected community, and develop a strong organizational structure.

The main set of strategies that fundamentally play a role are place-based, people-based and actor-led. Vision is very important and to be successful the factors to be orchestrated can be summed up as: people, governance structure, development deals, policies, land transformation, value capture, programming, finance and inclusion.

## **THE FUTURE OF WORK**

Technology has always played a role in job creation and destruction but this time we are entering a decade of continued accelerated exponential growth because of the innovation technology enables us to create. Eventually every mental or physical task that is repetitive, predictable, with documented inputs and outputs that can be defined and explained, will be performed by machines. Automation and technologies like AI mean that just about every job is going to experience change. So people need to change along or risk be hollowed out.

On the other hand, tasks that involve ambiguity, general problem-solving, policy making and human interaction are much harder to automate hence the increasing demand for jobs requiring college or university education, and the need to create accessible, life-long learning programmes.

As exponential technologies erode geographical, physical, learning, entry and commercialization barriers, they drive democratization, dematerialization and demonetization. STEM education, soft skills and “learning how to learn” become crucial in today’s exponential world, which will be organized around digital power, tap into external knowledge flows and focus on scalable learning.

## **THE ROLE OF THE STATE**

It is clear that innovation may also serve as a means of achieving long-term objectives and address social, economic, financial and environmental challenges. This is where the State has an important role to play and incentives become important.

The Greek Government has implemented significant measures on non-domicile tax residence, R&D capitalization and repatriating Greeks. It will benefit much by funds from the EU budget, the Resilience and Recovery Fund and the Comprehensive Framework for Education and Skills. It also stands to gain from the reinvigoration of the Transatlantic relationship as expressed through initiatives like the Science and Technology Agreement signed with the U.S. Government. The latter is expected to open up cooperation between the mutual private and public sectors including universities, government agencies, businesses and people.

Moreover the upcoming Bills on spin offs and the Technology Transfer Offices are promising yet further interventions were suggested for angel investors, patent registration, R&D capitalization and vocational training programmes.

Besides financial incentives it was demonstrated that the State could also provide its network and work with businesses to develop certain skills, find niche markets, understand clients better, address branding issues and find contacts abroad.

## **THE BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE**

Technology and innovation affect businesses at the heart of their enterprise, whether through already existing services, new solutions or transformative products. As the distinction between corporate and technology strategies becomes blurred, technology is now a matter of the Board. Technology also intersects with data, security and ethics and integrates with people. Innovation on the other hand, is a human centered process allowing people to go from idea, to early-stage, to scale, successfully.

For all the above businesses need a talent pool with cutting-edge skills in areas such as process automation, robotics, machine learning, AI, software development, data science and project management. Besides talent and unique specializations, businesses look for critical mass in key actors like universities, institutions, laws, geography and the 'buzz' that will make them co-locate. Usually they have a sense of urgency, seek to plug-in fast and often require a single point of contact.

Businesses are attracted by innovation districts connected and visible to their cities, that invest in local talent, cooperate with knowledge and education institutions, embody a clear long-term vision with a balance of large companies and startups. These are ecosystems easy to get into but hard to leave.

## **THE CASE FOR THESSALONIKI**

Greek businesses are finally choosing to invest in R&D, using the abundant specialized human capital and an increasingly deep fund market to create innovation ecosystems that already have Greece back on the investment map.

As an innovation ecosystem already develops organically in Thessaloniki the timing is favorable for opportunities to arise. The city has a large talent pool to grow and as U.S. companies are looking to leverage their local presence to reach out to the Western Balkans, it has the potential to attract diverse talent from the wider region. It can also tap on the considerable diaspora that seeks to expand locally.

But it still has to invent its own story; a narrative to enable it to showcase itself and become widely known. In order to do so intentionality is crucial and the next step is to establish that key actors are willing to collaborate in order to compete so that the local ecosystem becomes organized and not just organic.

Fortunately, the central and local governments share a common understanding for the importance of innovation technology and digital transformation as the third economic pillar for the region, along with food production and tourism. The completion of significant infrastructure projects are set to greatly improve the quality of life and add to the city's appeal.



## DAY ONE | TUESDAY, JUNE 1, 2021

15:30

### Opening Remarks

**Elias Spirtounias**

Executive Director, American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

**Vassilis Kafatos**

Vice President, American Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

**Elizabeth K. Lee**

Consul General, US Consulate General Thessaloniki

16:00

### ZOOMING OUT TO THE FUTURE

**Nishita Henry**

Principal, US Consulting Chief Innovation Officer, Deloitte

**Wassili Bertoen**

Managing Partner, Deloitte Center for the Edge

Moderated by:

**Vassilis Kafatos**

Vice President, American Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

16:50

### INNOVATION DISTRICTS OVERVIEW

**Julie Wagner**

President, The Global Institute on Innovation Districts

Q & A moderated by:

**Vassilis Kafatos**

Vice President, American Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

17:10

### INNOVATION DISTRICTS BEST PRACTICES SHOWCASE

**Stas Gayshan**

Managing Director, Cambridge Innovation Center (Boston)

**Matt Bergheiser**

President, University City District (Philadelphia)

**Cees Admiraal**

Business Development Director, High Tech Campus (Eindhoven)

**Sjors Berns**

Senior Manager, Financial Advisory, Deloitte (Rotterdam)

Moderated by:

**Alexandros Costopoulos**

Secretary General, American Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

### ➤ Components to Transform a District into a Technology and Innovation Hub

18:10

### NEW LEARNING LANDSCAPE THROUGH TALENT DEVELOPMENT

**Jamie Merisotis**

President and CEO, Lumina Foundation

In conversation with:

**Peter Chresanthakes**

Vice-President for Institutional Advancement, Anatolia College



## › Networking and Collaboration Assets to Transform a District

18:30

### THE NETHERLANDS GOOD PRACTICE IN INCUBATION DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

**Stella Ronner-Grubacic**

Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Hellenic Republic, Embassy of the Netherlands in Greece

In conversation with:

**Nikolaos Bakatselos**

President, American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

18:50

### SUPPORTING INNOVATION

**Marina Hatsopoulos**

President, Hellenic Innovation Network

**Sophia Kambanis**

President and Executive Director, Massachusetts Innovation Network

Moderated by:

**Litsa Panayotopoulos**

Treasurer and Chair, EIE Committee, American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

19:10

### THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN ADVANCING INNOVATION

**Christos Dimas**

Deputy Minister of Research and Innovation, Ministry of Development and Investments

In conversation with:

**Elias Spirtounias**

Executive Director, American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

## › Innovation Communities: More than just a Physical Gathering of Buildings

19:40

### CORTEX DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES & PROGRAMMING ASPECTS

**Tim Gaidis**

Principal and Senior Project Designer, HOK (Pre-recorded presentation)

**Beth Letscher**

Vice President, Communication and Strategic Planning, Cortex Innovation Community

Moderated by:

**Elias Spirtounias**

Executive Director, American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

## › U.S. Official Closing Keynote on Technology and Innovation-Challenges and Opportunities

20:10

**Merin Rajadurai**

Adviser to the Secretary, Office of Science and Technology, US Department of State

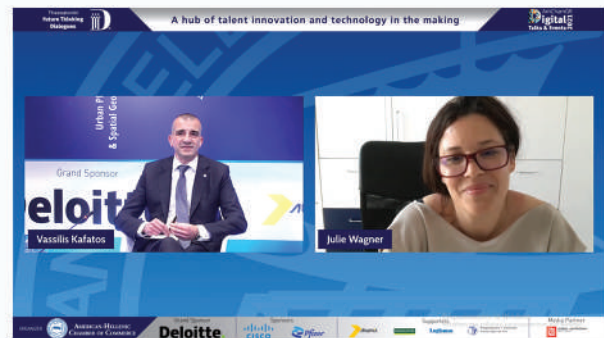
In conversation with:

**Elias Spirtounias**

Executive Director, American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce

20:10

### End of Day One





## DAY TWO | WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2, 2021

- 15:50 **Opening Remarks**  
**Nikolaos Bakatselos**  
President, American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce
- 16:00 **THE EU AGENDA ON EDUCATION, RESKILLING AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS**  
**Margaritis Schinas**  
Vice-President, European Commission
- **Education and Talent Development Discussions**
- 16:15 **Part A**  
**Steven Strauss**  
Lecturer and John L. Weinberg/Goldman Sachs & Co. Visiting Professor, Princeton University School of Public and International Affairs  
*In conversation with*  
**Michael Bletsas**  
Director of Computing, MIT Media Lab
- 16:35 **Part B**  
**Maria Michalopoulou**  
Vice-Rector of Research & Life-long Learning, Democritus University of Thrace  
**Nikolaos Papaioannou**  
Rector, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki  
**Dimitrios Tzovaras**  
President, Centre for Research and Technology Hellas  
**Panos Vlachos**  
President, Anatolia College  
*In conversation with:*  
**Michael Bletsas**  
Director of Computing, MIT Media Lab
- 17:15 **Part C**  
**Evangelos Syrigos**  
Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs  
*In conversation with*  
**Michael Bletsas**  
Director of Computing, MIT Media Lab
- 17:30 **THE ROLE OF LOCAL CORPORATIONS IN DEVELOPING AND UTILIZING AN INNOVATION DISTRICT**  
**Constantinos Constantinidis**  
CEO, Pelopac  
**Andreas Loutzidis**  
Co-Founder, iCry2Talk  
**Athanasios Savvakis**  
President, Federation of Industries of Greece  
**Alexandros Siskos**  
Vice President of Strategic Growth Initiatives, Everseen  
*Moderated by:*  
**Costas Malamas**  
Co-Founder and Managing Partner, Veltio Greece



- 18:20 **THE ROLE OF PRIVATE INVESTING**  
**Panagiotis Karampinis**  
Managing Director, Endeavor Greece  
**Konstantinos Lafkas**  
Co-Founder and Partner, Uni.Fund  
**Marco Veremis**  
Partner, BigPi Venture Capital  
Moderated by:  
**Anastasios Tzikas**  
President, TIF-HELEXPO and Technopolis ICT Business Park
- 18:50 **GLOBAL BUSINESS AND INNOVATION DISTRICTS**  
**Wayne Cuervo**  
Director of Innovation and General Manager, Cisco Toronto Innovation Centre  
**Philipp Deutscher**  
Managing Director, TeamViewer Greece  
**Jeff Hamilton**  
Senior Vice President, Pfizer Digital  
Moderated by:  
**Kyriakos Loufakis**  
President, Thessaloniki Innovation Zone
- 19:50 **THE US CONTRIBUTION IN DEVELOPING THE LOCAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM**  
**Geoffrey R. Pyatt**  
US Ambassador to the Hellenic Republic, US Embassy  
In conversation with:  
**Nikolaos Bakatselos**  
President, American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce
- 20:05 **THE ROLE OF REGIONAL LEADERSHIP IN TRANSFORMING THESSALONIKI INTO A GLOBAL INNOVATIVE DISTRICT**  
**Stavros Kalafatis**  
Deputy Minister, Ministry of Interior (Sector of Macedonia-Thrace)  
**Apostolos Tzitzikostas**  
Governor, Region of Central Macedonia  
**Konstantinos Zervas**  
Mayor, Municipality of Thessaloniki  
Moderated by:  
**Athanasios Kouimtzis**  
BoD Member and Chair, Agrotechnology Committee, American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce
- 20:45 **Closing Remarks**  
**Vassilis Kafatos**  
Vice President, American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce





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# AMERICAN-HELLENIC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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