



## Creative Cities: Experience of Türkiye in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network

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**Abstract:** The creative economy has become instrumental for the development of cities. In this respect, the ‘European Capital of Culture’ in the EU, as well as the global ‘Creative Cities Network’ of UNESCO, are initiatives that promote the creative economy. Nowadays, as a consequence of international calls and practices, the agenda in urban areas comprises the development of the creative economy, the site selection of industries, and the attraction of the creative workforce by means of various urban design practices, as well as innovative planning approaches and policies. To discuss the contribution of the creative economy in urban development, this study focuses on the outcomes of the workshop titled ‘UNESCO Creative Cities and Experience of Türkiye’, which was held on 8 December 2022 in the ‘Urban Development Workshops’ action group as part of the Taskisla Design LAB project sponsored by the Istanbul Development Agency (ISTKA). The specific experiences of Turkish cities in UNESCO’s Creative Cities Network (UCCN) help to confirm the various achievements ensured by creative-economy-based practices.

**Keywords:** Creative cities, UNESCO Creative Cities Network, Türkiye

### 1. Introduction

The creative economy generates intensive enthusiasm towards economic development, thus ensuring that national and local policies are formulated and concrete steps are taken. Many countries draft policies and programs to reinforce the position of the creative economy in the national/local economy. The ‘creative city’ concept emerged in the 1980s and has since been a hot topic of debate in relation to the creative class and the creative economy. The concept takes a creative stance in addressing urban areas that focus on and enable the resolution of the issues in cities and the revelation of the strengths in cities (Landry, 2012). In this respect, creativity is critical when formulating urban policies that ensure economic development (Hamdouch et al., 2017; Kerimoglu, 2017), and development based on both innovation and creativity is in the agenda not only for big cities but also for small- and medium-sized cities (UN, 2019).

Since the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 2004 (UNCTAD, 2004), creative industries have gained importance as an item on the global agenda. The importance of creative industries was further highlighted with the emergence of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) the same

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year. The primary purpose of the network is to reinforce creative industries at the local and global scale by ensuring cooperation between cities and nations, and the exchange of knowledge and experiences. For Türkiye, this may prove to be an opportunity to ensure the active participation of cities in international networks and to enable the contribution of local assets to the globalization of Türkiye. For the Turkish economy, with its dynamic nature, it is of critical importance to keep pace with any new developments and the competition. The cities in Türkiye, which have different characteristics in terms of production and culture, may be utilized as a mechanism for development. Given the fact that, in today's developed world, the contemporary transformation of conventional industries is achieved by means of innovation and creativity, the favorable contribution of creative industries in the economic, social, and spatial transformation of cities and the importance of the issue for Türkiye becomes apparent (Kerimoglu, 2017).

Local authorities can help their cities to participate in the UCCN. For a city to join the UCCN, the Turkish National Commission for UNESCO should submit the introduction and commitment materials, which are prepared by local authorities, to UNESCO, and UNESCO should assess and approve the application. The application process is carried out by the local authorities. The UCCN covers 7 thematic fields: Literature, Music, Film, Design, Media Arts, Gastronomy, and Crafts and Folk Arts. Between 2015 and 2023, a total of 21 cities in Türkiye applied to join the network. The distribution of these applications by fields is as follows: 10 in gastronomy, 2 in design, 2 in crafts and folk arts, 4 in music, 2 in literature, and 1 in film (Turkish National Commission for UNESCO). The Turkish cities that are included in the UCCN are as follows: Gaziantep – Gastronomy (2015), Hatay – Gastronomy (2017), Istanbul – Design (2017), Kütahya – Crafts and Folk Art (2017), Afyonkarahisar – Gastronomy (2019), Kırşehir – Music (2019), Bursa - Crafts and Folk Art (2021) and Şanlıurfa – Music (2023). This study discusses the valuable outcomes of the workshop titled 'UNESCO Creative Cities and Experience of Türkiye', which was held on 8 December 2022 in the 'Urban Development Workshops' action group as part of the Taskisla Design LAB (TDL) project sponsored by the Istanbul Development Agency (ISTKA), with a particular focus on the presence of the creative economy in Türkiye.

The TDL project (2022) aims to bring the university together with the general public, various industries, and the public sector, propose various collaboration models, improve the organizational capacity, and raise organizational awareness. For these purposes, during the course of the TDL project, a total of 741 actors were contacted, and 37 activities and 5 pilot projects were conducted. The overall outcomes of the project revealed the level of awareness among the actors in terms of the creative economy, institutionalization, collaborations, innovative and flexible management, the versatility of funding sources and tools, and their responsibilities and roles. The purpose of this study is to thoroughly discuss the experiences and

achievements of the cities that acknowledged the creative economy in an effort to raise awareness about the creative economy, which is yet to find an area of execution, to be included in policy documents, and to be duly recognized in Türkiye. It is evident that the positive implications of the creative economy on urban development at various scales, as well as on social and spatial transformation, are not understood. Current experiences also reveal the present situation. The following sections briefly touch upon the relation between creativity, cities, and networks, and then discuss the policies and experiences in Turkish cities.

## **2. The Creative City and the Formulation of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)**

Creativity and economic development have become the essentials for urban policies, and creative industries and creativity-based business models hold great potential for building the new economic climate (Rivas, 2011). When the brand-new opportunities in terms of accessibility, social life and culture are taken into account, creativity may be considered to redefine economic and social development in cities of different sizes (URBACT, 2010). With the social and economic connections between them, the networks found in creative industries inherently promote such restructuring. Creative industries, which are based on a diversity of economic activities, also depend on social relationships and informal interactions that simplify both learning and the generation of economic value (Daskalaki, 2010; Karlsson, 2011; Neff, 2005; Potts et al., 2008). Creative communities, which are created by networks, provide a social milieu that facilitates direct interpersonal interactions, fostering idea exchange and innovation in the creative sectors. Such interactions and connections are essential for advancing the industry and cultivating fresh ideas and approaches (Tepeli Turel, 2023).

Creative cities emerged as an influential development paradigm adopted by local authorities (d'Ovidio & Cossu, 2017). The Creative City theory is an interdisciplinary framework for urban development that emphasizes the role of creativity, culture, and innovation in shaping sustainable, inclusive, and dynamic urban environments. It combines ideas from urban planning, cultural studies, economics, and governance (Florida, 2002; Landry, 2000, 2008, 2012). The main idea is that creativity and cultural industries are not just amenities but strategic drivers for sustainable urban development.

### **2.1 The Creative City and Policies**

Creative cities are strategic and critical for stimulating local economic and sustainable urban development. Landry (2012), who defined the dynamics in creative cities based on his analyses and research on European cities, argues that urban growth in Asian countries has been accelerating, while the growth based on industry and manufacturing in European countries is being replaced with economic

activities that utilize intellectual capital from production to distribution. These new economic activities encapsulate creative industries, and creative cities prove to be the spaces where such activities actually take place or are intended to take place. In other words, creative individuals attract creative industries, and creative industries attract creative spaces that are appealing to and encouraging for creative individuals. These processes prove to be in a continuous motion (Eg̃l̃ite, 2022). Creative cities Hahn (2010) are rather a kind of strategic planning. They define an urban construct that is relevant to creative industries that drive development and growth.

Creative cities stimulate open-mindedness, tolerance, freethinking, and creativity, thus contributing to the social and economic development in a city. Cities that are open to innovation are appealing on account of the fact that they offer a favourable atmosphere to do business and to embark on initiatives. The diversity (gender, ethnicity, culture, occupation, etc.) incorporated in these cities leads to the emergence of a creative atmosphere, and cities with such an atmosphere attract creative and information industries, get integrated into the global networks, and lead to the emergence of new initiatives (Hahn, 2010; Florea, 2015). Creative cities offer a holistic development (cultural, social, and economic) rather than a unidimensional development. The importance of encouraging innovation and creativity has gained increasing importance as the driving forces to ensure sustainable and inclusive urban development.

It is not a new thing that creativity is popular as an urban policy; however, there have been different approaches shaped by the specific needs and the nature of different periods. Recently, the focus of urban policies has been particularly on fostering the cultural and innovative potential in cities, making culture easily accessible for everyone, and adopting clustering approaches that support creative industries aimed at ensuring the shift to de-industrialization or the revitalization of industrial areas where growth has been stagnant (Alpan, 2021). The current development models in cities, which are formulated as urban development policies, also involve strategies that encourage creativity. The creative economy generates intensive enthusiasm towards economic development, thus ensuring that national and local policies are formulated and concrete steps are taken. Various policies and programs are formulated to reinforce the position of the creative economy in the national/local economy (Rivas, 2011; Niblett, 2020). Culture is a component of local identity and the quality of life, and together with tourism and creative industries, it helps growth by boosting the competitiveness in a city, thus serving as a critical policy tool for cities of any size (Montalto et al., 2019).

## 2.2 Urban Networks and the UNESCO Creative Cities Network

Creative cities also increase the appeal of local characteristics and help to achieve development at the local scale. Networks formed at different scales play an active role in the development of creative industries, thus fostering development at the local scale. When formulating local policies that are suitable for a creative atmosphere, the sharing of knowledge and experiences proves to be inspirational; therefore, creating networks should be encouraged (Chapain & Comunian, 2010). When it comes to creative industries, networks are widely utilized to achieve collaboration between all relevant actors and to build the innovative and creative capacity of cities in an effort to reach a common and shared goal (Namyślak, 2014; Laitinen et al., 2016; Ling & Martins 2015). Social capital plays an important role in creating local interactions and connections; however, creating and managing even further global information networks require network capital (Gertler & Levitte, 2005) and also depends on interactions (Daskalaki, 2010; Karlsson, 2011; Neff, 2005; Potts et al., 2008). Creative urban networks are typically formed by cities with a similar creative profile (Namyślak, 2014). In recent years, creative/cultural clusters and networks has led to an increased interest in creative cities. Cities encounter creative urban development by means of the platforms created to sustain an endogenous growth. In other words, cross-regional and regional governance levels as well as municipalities and inter-municipal groups are considered as a basis to create local business and social networks, to attract and encourage qualified human capital and investments and to enable urban renewal in cities (Rodrigues & Franco, 2020). In creative industries, the fundamental purpose of network creation is to ensure the sharing of experience and information between participatory cities as they formulate their local policies (Namyślak, 2014). The network approach is a method to encourage collaboration at various scales to improve local creative industries and to ensure sustainable urban development. However, it has also gained popularity among cities and has made it into the literature as urban networks.

International recognition is key to drawing attention to local initiatives. In 2004, UNESCO created the UCCN as an interactive platform to increase the visibility of cities and their residents and to encourage multi-party cooperation. The primary purpose of the network is to pave the way for development partnerships that are aligned with UNESCO's global priorities (namely, "culture and development" and "sustainable development"), thus encouraging intercity and international collaborations. Joining the network helps cities to connect with and conduct projects in cooperation with other cities around the globe (Stocker, 2013). The purpose here is to go beyond mere financial motivations to achieve multi-dimensional outcomes and to bring various communities, resources, and experiences together while fostering economic growth (Grodach, 2013). Certain aspects of a city are highlighted by making use of

promotional and marketing activities, including logos, slogans, publicity campaigns, and public relations. Physical interventions and communication tactics uncover the authenticity of the local ‘identity,’ ‘history,’ and ‘culture,’ and they help to establish the connection between distinctive characteristics and the intended audience (Colomb, 2013). This helps to create partnerships between various organizations and to discover funding sources to sponsor activities in support of development in creative cities.

### **2.3 Impact of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network**

UCCN commitments concrete local actions, strategies, and policies aimed at maximizing the multidimensional impact of culture and supporting creative economies and industries. According to city interviews (UNESCO, 2024), “Singapore, a city of design, has significantly opened doors for local designers and provided opportunities within the design industry, specifically ‘international exposure, opportunities to hone our skills, and access to new markets.’ Macao SAR, a gastronomy city, has benefited the local food industry. Similarly, the City of Bologna issues calls to support musicians performing abroad, particularly in other cities within the Music sub-network.” UNESCO (2024) features similar evaluations, highlighting the impact of numerous projects and events from various cities.

During interviews (UNESCO, 2024), member cities affirmed that the UCCN plays a pivotal role in localizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, contributing to the global achievement of the SDGs. Best practices implemented by UCCN member cities exemplify the effective localization of the SDGs.

According to UNESCO (2024), “Cities play an equally crucial role in harnessing the potential of inter-city collaboration, especially in identifying appropriate resources and infrastructure. Dubai is actively working towards strengthening its logistical and organizational facilities to facilitate hosting network-related international conferences, creating opportunities for strategic collaborations. The city of Mumbai engages the film industry to support the local creative sector in partnership with the municipality.” For international collaboration, Singaporean designers participate in universal discussions and showcase their work in other design cities, such as Detroit, Graz, Puebla, and Seoul. Singapore has also gained knowledge from other cities, such as Helsinki, regarding design education policies and programs (Prayudi et al., 2022).

According to Pearson and Pearson (2016), UNESCO gastronomy cities have the potential to generate benefits from an enhanced brand image, with associated economic and social rewards. Many gastronomy cities raise their profile. Similar evaluations are indeed for Gaziantep and Hatay.

### 3. Turkish Cities in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network

As an essential component of local identity and the quality of life, the importance of culture is ever-increasing, and together with tourism and creative industries, it contributes to urban growth by boosting the competitiveness of a city. Therefore, it proves to be a critical policy tool for cities of any size (Montalto et al., 2019). Drawing on the findings of Niblett (2020), various achievements of creativity-based actions in cities may be summarized as follows:

- Reveals local residents' creative abilities and initiatives in creative industries,
- Increases the number of visitors, revives tourism,
- Contributes to local businesses, ensures sectoral/economic revival,
- Builds the feeling of trust/ownership towards the city, changes the image of the city, and
- Improves social life, fosters the relations between the local community.

#### 3.1 Methodology

This study discusses the extent to which 8 cities of Türkiye, which are included in the UCCN have gained from the network and the awareness of them. In Section 2.2, the benefits of urban networks and the UCCN were briefly mentioned. Thus, to understand the benefits that the cities included in such an international network have gained from this network for information and experience sharing, the change in their perspectives on urban policy development and implementation, the updates for sustainability and local development approaches, and the co-operation behavior. A workshop entitled 'UNESCO Creative Cities and Experience of Türkiye' was held in December 2022 within the scope of the TDL project, which was detailed in Chapter 1, with the participation of the responsible officer of the local government units of 8 cities in the inclusion and implementation processes of the network. During the TDL project, Şanlıurfa was not yet listed in the network; therefore, it was not included in the workshop. The workshop had two objectives: to share the experiences of the cities in integrating into an international network on a national scale and to evaluate the cities within the scope of the purpose of the network and what it brings. The workshop continued with the sharing and discussion of the participant cities under the headings of the efforts of the participation process, the practices they have carried out after their inclusion, their success stories, future goals, and problems experienced. The sharing and the discussions were recorded. The workshop outputs were edited in parallel with the cities' presentations and joint arguments, focusing on the cities' practices, achievements, and the problems encountered. Like similar studies in the literature,



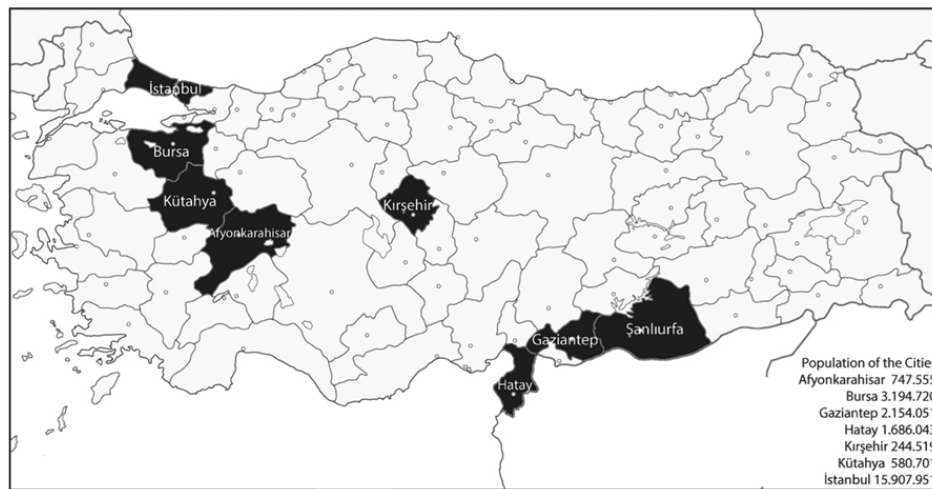
this research employed a qualitative research method. Narrative analysis, which is used to understand how individuals construct meaning through stories or narratives, was explored as one of the core qualitative analysis methods. This approach is meaningful when participants recount specific experiences or journeys related to the workshop (Czarniawska, 2011; Riessman, 1993).

### 3.2 The Characteristics of the Cities and the Policies

Taking a closer look at the general characteristics of the Turkish cities of different sizes that are included in the UCCN will help to make the connection between urban awareness and the creative economy. The variables and statistics below are compiled from the latest data available. Given the fact that the data relevant to creative industries is not broken down in detail, data and analyses that were produced by researchers at the city level (NUTS 3) were used. The statistics pertaining to creativity are available at the NUTS 2 level; therefore, the majority of the policy documents are provided at the regional level. This part aims to present information about the cities by making use of the available statistics and documents, and these are quite explanatory. Information on the population and the location of the cities is provided in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Population and the Location of the Cities*



*Note.* Adapted from TUIK (2022).

According to the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Industry and Technology's Socio-Economic Development Ranking Studies (SEGE, 2017), which includes 52 variables and 81 provinces in Türkiye, the index scores and rankings for NUTS 2 regions and provinces were identified, and the provinces were categorized under 6 development levels based on the natural breakdown of the scores. Istanbul and Bursa are in the 1st category, while Kütahya and Gaziantep are in the 3rd category, and Kırşehir, Afyonkarahisar,



and Hatay are in the 4th category. With 52 percent of the country's exports performed in Istanbul, the city holds the reign as the most developed city in Türkiye. 36 percent of the manufacturing businesses are located in Istanbul. Istanbul keeps the lead as the heart of industrial production and manufacturing in Türkiye. Istanbul also stands out as the financial center of Türkiye. 46.8 percent of the total tax income in Türkiye is collected in Istanbul. Bursa has high scores in competitiveness, and it holds a critical position in terms of export capacity in the country. 5.9 percent of the total exports in Türkiye depart from Bursa. When it comes to exports by capita, Bursa - with \$3,339 per capita - is ranked 4th in Türkiye. Gaziantep, which is the most developed province in Southeast Türkiye, is high in the rankings in terms of the variables pertaining to competitiveness and innovation capacity. For instance, Gaziantep is in the 1st place in terms of the number of registered businesses in the manufacturing industry, and it is ranked 2nd in terms of the number of trademark applications per capita. However, when it comes to the variables pertaining to education and health, Gaziantep is below the average values in Türkiye (SEGE, 2017).

Gaziantep features high scores in the variables pertaining to economic development, whereas it ranks below average in terms of social variables. Kütahya is found at the bottom of the 3rd development level. With an unemployment rate of 6 percent and other health variables, Kütahya is below the average in Türkiye, and the education variables for Kütahya are mediocre. The unemployment rate in Afyonkarahisar is 5.6%, and it is lower than the average in Türkiye. When it comes to the number of registered businesses in the manufacturing industry, Afyonkarahisar presents a much better outlook. The share of Hatay in the number of businesses in small-scale industry is high, and the employment rate in Hatay is 12.2%. The capacity to compete and innovate can be observed in the accessibility variables. Kırşehir stands out with its figures in education; however, the city stands lower than the average in Türkiye in terms of the variables relevant to competitive and innovative capacity (such as the number of patent applications, the amount of investments with an incentive certificate, and the number of tourist beds) (SEGE, 2017).

According to National Strategy on Regional Development of Türkiye (2014-2023), which analyses regions by human capital and employment, income, economic profile, entrepreneurial ability and innovativeness, social and physical infrastructure, accessibility, digital life and communication, natural characteristics, environment and climate change, energy, institutional capacity and social capital, urban pattern and development trends, and level of development and income, the provinces located within the impact area of metropolitans differ from each other in terms of the distribution of national income. Particularly after the 1980s, provinces near Istanbul (such as Bursa) have increased their share in the national income due to industrial decentralization. However, cities in the vicinity of Ankara (such as Kırşehir) have a lower share of the population and income. In rather low-income regions where the use of

modern agricultural production methods is limited, and thus, agricultural productivity is low, the rate of employment in agriculture. Accordingly, in the region where Afyonkarahisar is located, employment in agriculture is above the average in Türkiye, while employment in services and manufacturing is lower than the national average. In general, in the regions where Istanbul, Bursa, and Gaziantep are located, the share of manufacturing in employment is higher than the average in Türkiye. In Istanbul, however, employment in both services and manufacturing is above the national average. In the regions where Afyonkarahisar, Kütahya, and Bursa are located, the share of employment in hospitality and food services, as well as tourism, is high. Istanbul, Bursa, and Afyonkarahisar are among the provinces that have the highest number of tourist beds. In terms of the tourism strategies, Bursa is addressed as a winter tourism centre and an olive corridor; Afyonkarahisar, Kütahya, Kırşehir, Bursa and Gaziantep are addressed as cultural tourism destinations and development areas, Hatay is addressed as a tourism destination; Afyonkarahisar is addressed as an eco-tourism region; Istanbul and Bursa are addressed as congress tourism destinations; Istanbul and Gaziantep are addressed as trade show destinations; Afyonkarahisar, Kütahya and Kırşehir are addressed as health and thermal tourism destinations, and Istanbul is addressed as a marine tourism destination (National Strategy on Regional Development). In 2017, the creative economy generated about 28 billion dollars of revenue, 25 billion dollars of production volume, 7 billion dollars of added value, and provided employment to 344 thousand individuals. These industries make up 3 percent of the total production, 2 percent of the total revenue, and 1 percent of the employment in Türkiye (IZKA, 2021). The creative economy is the most specialized in Istanbul, Ankara, Antalya, Isparta and Burdur (IZKA, 2021).

The regional development agencies that pertain to the cities that are included in the UCCN prepared regional plans for 2024-2028. However, only the plan for Istanbul is available, given that all of the other plans are yet to be approved. In the regional plans for 2014-2023 for the aforementioned cities (except for Istanbul), there is no mention of the creative city, the creative economy, or creative industries in the analysis of the current situation, potentials, and plan decisions (Ministry of Industry and Technology, Regional Plans for NUTS2 Regions).

In the case of Istanbul, the regional plan for 2014-2023, highlights the importance of creative industries, while in the plan that covers 2024-2028, technological transformation, green transformation, entrepreneurship, and creative industries are identified as the driving forces of development in Istanbul. In the plan, 24 goals, 100 precautions, and 34 projects and programs are formulated pertaining to these driving forces (strategic priorities) (ISTKA, 2023).

### 3.3 The Experiences and the Achievements of the Cities

The outcomes of the presentations and the discussions that were performed during the open workshop activity that was organized in December 2022 with the officers and the executives of the cities that are included in the UCCN are presented in this section.

#### **Gaziantep – Gastronomy (2015)**

Gaziantep's registration as a Creative City of Gastronomy did not happen until 2015; however, the application process began much earlier. Previous applications made by Gaziantep were rejected. Previous applications submitted by the city were rejected because all institutions, including the private sector, academicians, and the public sector, did not give full support. In 2014, partnerships were improved, and the application process was commenced again, and some steps were taken to ensure that the entire city embraces the application process. For the success of a city throughout the application process, the efforts of the municipality or the chamber of commerce are not sufficient alone, and it is necessary for the entire city to welcome the process. In 2015, a Turkish night was organized at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, and the cuisine was promoted. Simultaneously, lobbying activities were carried out. With its history that dates back 6,000 years, thanks to the geography it is located in, Gaziantep was listed as a city of gastronomy in 2015. The main goal was to publicize the uniqueness of Gaziantep to the international audience; therefore, being included in the UCCN was preferred. The cuisine in Gaziantep has gained popularity over the last more than 50 years, and the number of same-day visitors who enjoy culinary tourism has been increasing.

In 2013, before Gaziantep was added to UNESCO's network, the first culinary arts education centre - 'Culinary Arts Education Centre' - was founded by the municipality. After the city was included in the network in 2015, two international-level 'Culinary Arts Centres' were opened. The aim of these centres is to present the dishes that are about to fade into oblivion, as well as one-pot dishes that are common in regular households. In addition, there is a restaurant that serves local drinks.

Since Gaziantep was declared a city of gastronomy in 2015, the number of tourists visiting for culinary purposes, as well as occupancy rates and the number of businesses, has increased (Gaziantep Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism). Gaziantep is the first Turkish city that was added to the UCCN; therefore, it has a strong team that builds and sustains the necessary infrastructure and performs promotion activities. It is important that such a team is created within the municipality. The efforts towards publicizing Gaziantep on all platforms still continue, and Gaziantep's sixth rank in export capacity of Türkiye, as well as its rich food culture, geography, and heritage, all contribute to the promotion of the city. At this

point, it is worth re-emphasizing that the success of Gaziantep is particularly rooted in the diversity of the actors that embraced the process. The budget and the reach of the municipality is limited; therefore, the involvement of the private sector significantly helped Gaziantep gain recognition among a much wider audience. However, the recent influx of Syrians had adverse implications for the city's prestige in the international arena.

Currently, in addition to the commitments made to UNESCO, 50 more projects are carried out. Activities towards the rating and evaluation of the businesses that operate in gastronomy in Gaziantep have been carried out. For the moment, only logos are given to the businesses. However, studies continue to create a system where businesses are also evaluated, audited, penalized, and rewarded. While it is planned to introduce annual inspections into the system, it is an important deficiency that the provincial directorate of national education has not been contacted in advance for the training of service staff. The aim is to provide professional waiter training at a high school level. In addition, the 'Culinary Arts Education Academy' to provide professional education as well as an 'Agricultural School' that includes a women's cooperative were established. In the women's cooperative, the free-dry technology is used for the first time in the public sector. This method has been quite an appeal to investors. Products processed with the free-dry technology are offered for sale in large supermarket chains and e-commerce platforms. Moreover, the 'International Spice Museum' was opened, and the local seeds specific to the gastronomy cities in the UCCN will be brought together to create a seed bank.

### **Hatay – Gastronomy (2017)**

With its cultural, historical, and political characteristics, Hatay vastly differs from other gastronomy cities. Within the same time period, Hatay has become not only a city of gastronomy but also a learning city, and it hosted the EXPO, which the third largest organization in the world. It is possible to state that Hatay is a city of gastronomy by its existence. Each and every individual who serves or receives service, either at a shabby snack shack or at a high-end restaurant in Hatay, is a gourmet because the culture in Hatay revolves around food and not around merely eating to survive. Furthermore, the city hosts a heritage that dates back thousands of years and carries the traces of numerous civilizations. Therefore, when talking about Hatay, it is inevitable to frequently use the expressions "the first" and "the most." Until now, Hatay has been home to 13 different civilizations, and the most significant characteristic of the city is the fact that these civilizations were all passed on to the next generations. In this respect, Hatay has an extremely sensitive and cognizant social structure with an incredible sense of ownership. As the gateway of the Silk Road to the Mediterranean, Hatay is located on the fertile lands of Mesopotamia, enjoys all four seasons as well as an abundant biological diversity.

Before launching the application process to the UCCN, the benefits of being in the network were duly considered, and the areas to emphasize and to develop were carefully assessed. Although Hatay's proximity to Gaziantep was considered a disadvantage, it was aimed to highlight different cultural characteristics and lifestyles, and unique characteristics were emphasized. An approach that literally ignored the aforementioned disadvantage was embraced, and the application process was carried out by a team within the municipality without performing any lobbying and/or promotional activity. Gastronomy was considered a scientific discipline, and it was addressed holistically with all relevant industries, including manufacturing, packaging, marketing, and advertising. The process was carried out with the resources of the municipality without any connection with the government or any other public institution, and the projects were conducted simultaneously. The application was structured around 4 pillars: EXPO, history, culture, art, and gastronomy. In addition, all of the projects were compiled together, and they were designed and conducted with a focus on both rural and urban development. Similar to the efforts of the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, projects during the EXPO were aimed at improving agriculture, supporting farmers, ensuring a higher yield of organic crops, achieving the distribution of the produce all around the city, and ensuring that all of the restaurants use this produce.

Projects to promote the 'Green City' concept, as well as rehabilitation projects, were carried out, and most of these projects were performed with a specific focus on gastronomy. With its unique assets and rich heritage, Hatay greatly contributes to the UCCN. A project that aims to compile the books with the recipes of the unique dishes prepared with vegetables and herbs that are produced in Hatay into an encyclopaedia, as well as projects in alignment with the 2030 sustainable development plan, are currently in the pipeline. The vocational trainings in Hatay provide training on gastronomy, agriculture, and other relevant fields. The 'Gastronomy Academy' and the 'Gastronomy House' were both established to educate the necessary personnel and to teach the dishes that are unique to Hatay. With the inclusion of Hatay in the UCCN, the number of visitors and businesses increased, and even more exclusive and high-priced goods were produced. The demand for the products increases day by day. In addition, the number of chefs in the city has also been increasing.

During the process, restoration and renovation projects in the historical core of Antakya were carried out, and projects that will turn the area into a centre of attraction were performed. Elements related to gastronomy such as the 'Gastronomy House' were particularly placed in this area to provide a business that can serve as a role model in terms of streamlining. Despite the turmoil in Syria and the global COVID pandemic, the number of businesses and the relevant figures in Hatay did not drop, and the city sustained its growth regardless.

## **Istanbul – Design (2017)**

In the earlier phases of its application to the UCCN, it was apparent that Istanbul could stand out with a wide range of characteristics; however, it was eventually decided that the city should be addressed as a design hub that incorporates crafts and design. The members of the team who submitted the application then and who are now leading the current studies are different; therefore, the current team prefers to address ‘design’ as ‘the design of public spaces.’ One of the priorities for Istanbul was to carry the historical and cultural assets of the city into the future. For this reason, the efforts were primarily shaped around the restoration of historical sites, and the provision of these sites to public use, as well as the provision of cultural sites by means of design. Creating a unique identity for the city was also listed among the priorities. Given that UNESCO welcomes city branding efforts, the Istanbul brand was created, and Istanbul became a brand that is ‘followed’ and ‘respected’ by Istanbulites.

Under the Heritage Department of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, a ‘Design Centre’ that will serve Istanbulites as well as designers was created. The efforts to complete the ‘Design Complex’ by 2025 also continue. The first ‘Design Museum’ in Istanbul will be available within the complex. The primary purpose of these efforts is to cast some light upon the urban memory and to encourage designers.

## **Kütahya – Crafts and Folk Art (2017)**

Having completed its fifth year in the network, Kütahya has accomplished a lot. Yet, it is possible to suggest that the majority of the accomplishments are in favour of the municipality. Kütahya is neither a port city nor an industrial city, and the Regional Plan that was drafted by the Zafer Development Agency envisions that the development in the city will be based on creative cultural industries. Crafts, folk art, and particularly çini, ceramics, and porcelain stand out as the creative cultural industries. With the inclusion of Kütahya in the UCCN, many project-based activities were carried out in the city, and the city received numerous grants. However, the ‘symbolic meaning’ of being in the network was the most important. This is what increased the international visibility and recognition of Kütahya. After Kütahya joined the UCCN in 2017, the ‘United Cities and Local Governments’ (UCLG) was held in Kütahya, and the participation of the city in the ‘Middle East and West Asia Council’ was approved. These may be considered significant achievements for Kütahya. In particular, achievements such as being involved in international projects and receiving a higher number of partnership requests to perform cultural activities are highlighted. Identifying the most appropriate projects out of the requests received and carrying these projects out proved to provide invaluable experiences for the actors in the city. Yet, learning and meeting the requirements of standing in an international platform should be considered as the most significant achievement. The partnerships



established between stakeholders other than the municipality helped to improve the capacity, and many projects were performed for these purposes. Kütahya considered even the smallest details, such as offering English courses to local artists in an effort to duly meet the requirements of being on an international platform. Yet, it is a reality that establishing the necessary infrastructure for such activities requires some time. In order to benefit from the process, the officials in Kütahya also acknowledge that various requirements should be duly met. On the other hand, the activities and efforts throughout the process accelerated the city's overall status. The achievements relevant to the UCCN should also be measured by the happiness levels of the investors, private-sector organizations, business people, and artists in the city. For instance, Kütahya is the 5th happiest city (73%) in Türkiye, and art was instrumental in achieving such a success.

### **Afyonkarahisar – Gastronomy (2019)**

In 2019, the 'Department of Gastronomy' was established under the Directorate of Cultural and Social Affairs in Afyonkarahisar. This department oversees the promotions pertaining to gastronomy and geographical indications. Three local and three international applications are submitted, and 90% of these six applications are complete. In the scope of the 'Histories That Go Beyond Borders' project, the dishes and the food culture specific to the migrants in Afyonkarahisar are explained, relevant courses were offered, and those who completed these courses were provided with employment opportunities. A historical mansion is designated for the 'Museum of Gastronomy' project, where the cuisine in the city is demonstrated. In the scope of the 'Green Energy and Stop Food Waste' project, the food waste in Afyonkarahisar was mapped, awareness about the issue was raised, and relevant events and webinars were organized with the relevant municipalities. Afyonkarahisar was selected as a city of gastronomy during the global COVID pandemic; therefore, some of the projects were completed online. A book that is the outcome of the 'Incorporating the Traditional Cuisine with the Digital World' project will be published to promote the local dishes and the cuisine in Afyonkarahisar. The 'Gastronomy Festival' was organized as part of the 'International Gastronomy Congress' project, and many activities were organized simultaneously. During the same festival, the 'International Mevlevi Gastronomy Competition' was also organized.

After its addition to the UCCN as a city of gastronomy, Afyonkarahisar was also featured in the 'MasterChef Türkiye' TV show, and a commemorative coin was issued. District municipalities helped to identify local treats that are about to fade into oblivion. A 120-year-old mansion was put into service as a restaurant that only serves local dishes. Packages that contain local treats were sent to the members of the parliament and the ambassadors. City officials participated in festivals and trade shows in Bosnia

and Herzegovina and Macedonia. The number of geographical indications was increased from 6 to 35. Afyonkarahisar is ranked fourth in the list according to the number of geographical indications. The products are inspected once a year, and the businesses that pass the inspections are presented with a certificate of achievement. In order to ensure that businesses contribute to the promotion of gastronomy and that they make production in accordance with the standards, businesses that applied to the municipality were awarded a ‘Certificate of UNESCO Gastronomy Standards.’ The ‘1st International Afyonkarahisar Gastronomy Workshop’ was organized, and the Turkish National Commission for UNESCO were hosted along with the committee from Moldova. The ‘Gastronomy Train’ made its first run between Afyonkarahisar and Denizli. During the trip, only local treats were offered, and historical and cultural heritage areas were introduced. Similar to Hatay, Afyonkarahisar is also a member of both the ‘Learning Cities Network’ and the ‘Creative Cities Network’.

To measure the impact of being a UNESCO city of gastronomy on the city and the economy, a survey was performed. As an effort to capitalize on the thermal tourism, congress tourism, religious tourism, and cultural tourism potential in Afyonkarahisar, studies to incorporate these other kinds of tourism with gastronomy are in progress. Afyonkarahisar’s inclusion in the UCCN as a city of gastronomy greatly contributed to the city. Transit passengers began to stop and visit the city centre, and the number of local businesses increased.

Afyonkarahisar Municipality plans to accelerate its future efforts to organize international events and promotion activities. The main purpose is to provide international added value for the city. Future projects include the ‘Accessible Gastronomy and Therapy Centre’ project that will offer both training and therapy to the disadvantaged groups in Afyonkarahisar, and the ‘Gastronomy Street Project’ that will be located in an area where historical streets are concentrated.

### **Kırşehir – Music (2019)**

During the UCCN application process, a wide range of stakeholders relevant to music were contacted. Given the advantage of being a small city, collaborations were made with the Provincial Directorate of Commerce, the Office of the Governor, the Fine Arts High School, the Provincial Directorate of Youth and Sports, the Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, and the Provincial Directorate of National Education. Both during the UCCN application process and after the inclusion to the UCCN, it was realized that the city had an even more comprehensive musical capability. It was later experienced that the local music performers, educators, and local music lovers expected such an informative experience. In Kırşehir, a saz can be found in almost every household. In this city, playing the saz is as natural as drinking water.

The Abdal culture is passed on from father to son. When Kırşehir is mentioned, everyone thinks of Neset Ertas. In an effort to continue the Abdal culture, which heavily relies on performing live music, the Kırşehir Municipality took action, particularly during the global COVID pandemic, and provided financial support. Kırşehir suffers from a disadvantaged location between two large cities (namely, Kayseri and Ankara), thus struggling to develop. The disadvantages of Kırşehir in terms of social and economic development also adversely impact local musicians in Kırşehir. To tackle such difficulties, the *bozlak* music (a form of Turkish folk song from Central Anatolia) emerged in a similar fashion to how jazz music made it to the scene. The ‘UNESCO Kırşehir Music-Based Development Initiative’ music initiative project, which is led by Kırşehir’s office of the governor and supported by the municipality by providing the necessary space, continues. The most significant activities in the scope of this project are the YouTube recording room provided for the local Abdal musicians and the training sessions that aim to improve local musicians’ access to technology. The main reason behind why Kırşehir applied to be included in the UCCN is to introduce the deep-rooted music heritage to the entire world. The activities, concerts, workshops, and conferences were all based on a scientific and artistic background in relation to each other, and they increased the global visibility of the instruments and rhythms that are specific to Kırşehir. During national and international activities, interaction between a wide variety of actors was ensured, and the stakeholders in Kırşehir got together with similar UNESCO cities at the international conferences and festivals.

Throughout the process, many competitions were organized to ensure the sustainability of creativity. A total of 5 commitments (2 local and 3 international) were found in Kırşehir’s application to the UCCN. ‘Music Corners’ were created, the ‘Buy A Souvenir’ project was carried out, and a national workshop and musical activities for children were organized. Opportunities for the Abdals to train children were created. A national festival, which marked the passing of Neset Ertas, was organized. In addition, a competition was held to select the UNESCO city logo. In an effort to introduce new works of art into the Turkish folkloric music, song contests were organized, and spots where buskers can perform were identified. Orchestras of other cities around the globe were invited to perform in concerts, and concerts of the ‘Women’s Council Chorus’ were included in the UNESCO-oriented events. There are ongoing efforts to instill the joy of music in children and support children in selecting a career as a musician. In order to formulate a concept that establishes a connection between music and the other six themes of the UCCN, the production of music-themed souvenirs was supported by organizing a competition and by setting up booths in international festivals. Conceptions to ensure the mass production of the products, as well as 15 new goals for the future, are formulated in alignment with UNESCO’s 2030 sustainable development goals and UNESCO’s mission statement, field of activities, and purposes.

The officials of the city aim to organize meetings with various occupational groups, along with music performers and musicians, to identify new goals for Kırşehir's development and to formulate goals that will enhance Kırşehir's musical, cultural, and social development. Signs that emphasize Kırşehir's status as a city of music will be placed at the entrances of the city; photo-shooting spots will be placed at certain points along the roads that connect Kırşehir with other cities; the UNESCO logo will be used in local public transport vehicles to increase awareness; an annual concert will be organized to mark the anniversary of Kırşehir's inclusion in the UCCN; a 'UNESCO Music Forest' will be created; a 'Music Street' will be designed, and a platform for buskers to perform will be placed along this street. The 'Abdals Community' is established under the roof of the Kırşehir Municipality, and Abdals are encouraged to participate in various activities and to record a licensed album in an effort to enable them have a regular income.

### **Bursa – Crafts and Folk Art (2021)**

The officials in Bursa planned to apply to the UCCN as a city of gastronomy in the first place, and a comprehensive 'Gastronomy Festival' was organized. Under the title of 'Silky Flavours,' the aim was to highlight the Ottoman heritage and the Ottoman cuisine in Bursa as well as Bursa's culture that was blended with the migrations from the Balkans and the Caucasus. A consultation meeting was organized where the metropolitan mayor of Bursa, the governor of Bursa, the members of the parliament who represent Bursa, and the officials of other relevant institutions were present to offer their opinions, and eventually, it was decided that it will be for the benefit of Bursa to submit an application as a city of crafts and folk art. Bursa's bazaars and inns area was the final destination of the Silk Road in Asia, which extended from Eastern Asia. Asian merchants turned over their goods to European merchants in Bursa. As Sultan Bayezid II continued his reign in Istanbul, he ordered the construction of an inn in Bursa to meet the needs of his complex in Istanbul. These were all indicators that Bursa was the heart of trade back then. When political issues arouse with Iran, the Ottoman Empire decided to produce its own silk, the plans of Bursa proved to be the most appropriate location. Bursa was not only the heart of silk production but also the location where the first turquoise glazed tiles were produced. Therefore, silk and çini were highlighted during the consultations with artists. Eventually, Bursa's application file was centred around the fact that it was a crafts city, and Bursa was added to the UCCN.

Silk production has been a deep-rooted culture in Bursa, and for hundreds of years, the residents of the city have made their living from silk production. The first factories in the city were focused on silk production. The first factory in Bursa was established by the imperial council, and it was later transformed into a university, but over time, silk production lost its popularity as an occupation. With the efforts of

the Bursa Metropolitan Municipality, the 200-year-old silk factory was renovated, and the ‘Umurbey Silk Production Design Centre’ was opened. In The mountain villages in Bursa were targeted in the first place to revive the production of silk. Currently, silk is produced in 16 villages. The cocoons are collected and processed at the ‘Silk Production Centre,’ and they are transformed into new products by artists. The authentic silk of Bursa is now produced at its original quality. The priority is to increase employment in the selected locations. However, other villages such as Golyazi, which are famous for olives and figs, are also former silk production centres. In the future, the aim is to encourage silk production in such settlements that are located in the Bursa plain.

With the lead of Bursa Metropolitan Municipality and the support of the Vocational School in Iznik and the Iznik Municipality, the ‘Çini Excellence Centre’ was opened in Iznik. The aim of this centre is to provide training to çini producers and raise awareness to sustain a certain quality and standard in çini. With a centre that will be established in Bursa, it is planned to bring çini and silk together. This centre will be a sales point, and it will also serve as an area made up of workshops. It will help to bring crafts and folk art together in the heart of Bursa. The development agency provided funding for silk spinning. In addition, exclusive and awareness-raising projects such as the manufacturing of silk sutures are prioritized. Efforts continue to encourage manufacturing activities that aim at the health sector, along with the textiles sector, to come up with similar examples, and to apply for new funding resources.

### 3.4 Evaluation

The main goal of the UCCN is to ensure that these experiences are shared globally, to improve the collaborations between cities, and to promote creative industries globally and locally by sharing experiences. Although the experiences of the Turkish cities in the UCCN differ from each other, it is possible to state that the UCCN helped these cities to develop the relevant industries, to raise urban awareness, to achieve institutionalization at the urban level, and to learn how to exist in an international atmosphere.

Gaziantep is the first Turkish city that was included in the UCCN, and both the cultural assets and the food culture in Gaziantep are strong and competitive not only nationally but also internationally. The city authority was well aware of this fact, and they managed to involve the city’s important actors in the process, thus balancing the power of local assets with institutional ownership. Gaziantep’s strong and competitive economy, along with the awareness of the actors contributing to the economy towards national and international developments, led to a rather more institutionalized awareness and sense of ownership and facilitated the formation of partnerships aimed at becoming a creative city. Gaziantep

Metropolitan Municipality created a professional team to ensure that the process continues in a systematic, cognizant and planned manner created a professional team. Promotional activities receive the necessary attention, and the benefits of being an internationally renowned city of gastronomy lead to favorable implications on the development and promotion of the other sectors in the city. Gaziantep's cuisine has become a tourism asset, and its positive influence can be observed in the figures pertaining to tourism. The gastronomy-oriented use of the technologies that attract investors, as well as professional training, demonstrates the institutional power of Gaziantep. It is also possible to state that the city is quite cognizant and rather advanced in terms of establishing partnerships and securing and using funding resources.

Hatay, which was included in the UCCN as a city of gastronomy soon after Gaziantep, shows resemblances to some of the practices implemented in Gaziantep. Despite the similarities between how these two neighbouring cities managed their process as a city of gastronomy, their experiences also differed from each other due to the robustness of Hatay's social construct that stems from its diversity and the rather rich cultural heritage in Hatay, which is a natural outcome of the diverse civilizations that existed in Hatay. In a similar fashion to Gaziantep, the local authority in Hatay was also well aware of the local power it holds and managed to coordinate its power. With its unique cultural heritage and social diversity, Hatay adopted an appropriate administrative approach by organizing its relations with other industries in a holistic manner throughout the UCCN application process. Hatay Metropolitan Municipality governed the process with its own resources and not only hosted the international-scale EXPO and other events but also conducted numerous projects pertaining to the UCCN's city of gastronomy concept. At this point, it is critical to mention that as much as the UCCN added value to Hatay, the heritage in Hatay added value to the UCCN. Being included in the UCCN increased the quality and the price of the culturally unique products in Hatay, thus indicating that the UCCN will help to achieve economic institutionalization in the city.

One of the major achievements in Afyonkarahisar, another Turkish city of gastronomy listed in the UCCN, has been the improvement of the infrastructure in the city. Similar to the other two cities of gastronomy, Afyonkarahisar showed great effort to promote gastronomy along with other relevant industries. It is also possible to suggest that the projects conducted in Afyonkarahisar were more socially oriented and more inclusive. Although the inclusion of Afyonkarahisar in the UCCN showed how eager the city is to achieve institutionalization, the city has a long way to go. Yet, it is worth noting that such a willingness is quite important. After Afyonkarahisar was added to the UCCN, the city became more visible, and the number of businesses increased. Afyonkarahisar's application to join the UCCN was approved during the global COVID pandemic; even so, favourable economic outcomes were observed



immediately.

The process in Istanbul is quite different from the previous cities. The scale of Istanbul may raise questions about how appropriate it is to join the UCCN. It is impossible to state that Istanbul, which by itself accounts for more than half of the creative economy of Türkiye, is successful in managing the UCCN process. The main issue in Istanbul is sustainability. The frequent administrative changes in the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality not only jeopardize the ability to track and sustain the process but also lead to a radical change in the initial city of design concept that was formulated for the city. In contrast to the other cities, the actors or inhabitants in Istanbul do not embrace the process or the UCCN. It is even possible to suggest that they are not aware of the UCCN. The process was carried out in a chaotic and impractical manner, and the activities that were performed so far were not communicated systematically. The top priority for Istanbul should be to create a city brand and identity that is based on the tangible cultural heritage in Istanbul, and it is evident that the city of design concept that was initially formulated for Istanbul is no longer relevant. With a robust human capital, Istanbul is far from achieve institutionalization as a city of design. At this point, the centuries-long brand value and the current urban identity of Istanbul should not be overlooked.

Kütahya, which is one of the two Turkish cities of crafts and folk art in the UCCN, was included in the network before Bursa was added. Kütahya differs from other cities on account of the fact that the achievements gained by being included in the UCCN had influence only on the municipality and did not have any significant influence on other stakeholders. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the city is still in a learning process. During this process, the actors in the city have been learning how to be part of international projects, how to establish partnerships, how important such experiences are, and what kind of international funding opportunities are available. Raising awareness about the institutional achievements, understanding the importance of these achievements, and increasing the institutional capacity distinguishes Kütahya from other cities. Throughout the process, the actors in Kütahya became aware of the factors that hinder development, and such an awareness is very critical for a city at the scale of Kütahya. It is especially worth highlighting that this awareness, achieved by means of the UNESCO experience, will lead to a positive atmosphere. During the process, Kütahya also enjoyed increased visibility.

Bursa is home to a very rich cultural heritage and a robust and unique traditional production. It is also the most developed industrial city in Türkiye. With the size of its population as well as its production and economic capacity, Bursa is one of the top cities in Türkiye. During its UCCN process, the city preferred to highlight crafts and folk arts instead of gastronomy, which is another key strength of Bursa.

Such a preference demonstrates the broad vision, extensive experience, and far-sightedness of the local administrators. It would not be inaccurate to suggest that economic development has had a positive influence on this decision. In the case of Bursa, the UCCN experience has been utilized as a well-suited tool to revive traditional production. During the process, not only the relations between industries but also holistic economic development were taken into account. Governing the process by utilizing various funding resources is prioritized. When its institutional and social capital are considered, Bursa has the capacity to reach a wide range of national and international funding resources. Although the city was added to the UCCN very recently, it has made very quick progress in reviving traditional production.

Kırşehir, which is included in the UCCN as a city of music, is very unique and special in comparison to the other cities. It is impressive that the entire society and all of the stakeholders in the city are so united in music, thus having a unique identity and an incredible sense of belonging. It is rare - if not impossible - to witness such a unity in other cities in Türkiye. Therefore, Kırşehir proceeds with the power of this unity and implements exciting activities. The rich musical heritage in the city, along with the relevant institutional and organizational capacity, facilitates the process and makes it extremely practical. It is expected that the stakeholders in the city will have a strong sense of belonging, and the fact that they sustain their daily lives within an international network such as the UCCN sets Kırşehir apart both at the national and international levels. Hence, it was sufficient for the local authority in Kırşehir to support daily life and production, and the process was institutionalized at the international platform. Kırşehir does not have a prosperous economic atmosphere; therefore, it is rather important that the city finds a place for itself in the international arena with its cultural heritage. The support and efforts of the municipality to ensure the sustainability of the process is invaluable. The process was successfully formulated with an inclusive, cognizant, and planned manner to introduce local assets to the international audience without jeopardizing the traits of local assets. Kırşehir is a real ‘city of music,’ and it proves to be a role model with its urban characteristics and scale.

The cities’ cooperation and communication within the international sphere are weak compared to other world cities in the network. Notably, while some cities have developed capacity at the municipal level and their activities are primarily conducted through local projects, it can be argued that although these cities, which have gained international recognition through their unique local values, have achieved sector-specific growth in terms of local development by joining the UCCN, they have not developed holistic and integrated whole city development policies. The most significant issue hindering alignment with the UCCN’s objectives is the exclusion of cities’ cultural values, crucial for local development, from urban development plans. Cities aspiring to join the network must first recognize the importance of their unique

local values and integrate them as essential components of their urban development policies. Sharing knowledge and experience on a national or international scale should involve understanding problems and alternative solutions rather than simply replicating strategies, projects, and practices. First, this principle needs to be understood at both the national and city levels in Türkiye. Furthermore, political changes should not impede these processes; opportunities should be leveraged sustainably, and all activities must be sustainable. Otherwise, strengthening the institutional capacities and sound urban development cannot be achieved.

One of the main objectives of the UCCN is to localize the SDGs through tools, experiences, and solutions. Encouraging the collaborative realization of solutions at the local level, it aims to acquire advanced knowledge and develop collective skills for the cities of tomorrow. To examine the cities of Türkiye included in the network from this perspective, it should be said that

- local communication and cooperation are not institutionalized sustainably,
- international relations and cooperation are not structured on a sustainable foundation,
- and best practices, interdisciplinary approaches, and international projects are not developed to the necessary extent,

In addition to

- the lack of institutional capacity and human capital,
- the traditional planning approaches, the absence of participatory contemporary planning approaches,
- and the failure to transform inter-actor relations and cooperation into a behavioural pattern have a significant impact.

Yet, this is one of the weaknesses of urban development in Türkiye. Although the cities in the network derive economic gains from the unique cultural values they strive to promote and maintain through various activities, it is evident that these gains are not reflected in the city as a whole and urban development plans. The UCCN does not contribute to the SDGs as effectively as intended.

## 4. Conclusion

In order to regulate urban, regional, or national economic activities, creative industries should be formulated simultaneously along with the relevant workforce and policies. In Türkiye, awareness about these industries is lacking, and the economic system and regulations are achieved by means of conventional economic approaches and traditional industries. When it comes to development policies in Türkiye, there

are no innovative policies that delve into the economy at the urban scale. The reflections of recent economic dynamics and innovative models on the physical geography cannot be put into practice, and institutions fail to keep pace with these dynamics. Therefore, it is critical to use tools that raise awareness. In this respect, the processes of the cities that gain experience reveal how cities that start off from practice can improve, and these are worth to take a closer look. How the Turkish cities in the UCCN intervened in urban policies and their achievements should be well understood. These cities prove to be role models for modern-day urban development. Their inclusion in the UCCN and the specific ways they governed the process demonstrate the institutional success of these local authorities. In other words, they prove that institutions can swiftly adapt to innovative models and translate these into the urban space. In this respect, it is evident that the cities have gained many achievements.

In recent years, an increased number of studies focused on small- and medium-sized cities emphasize that urban development based on the creative economy proves to be an alternative for such cities and that these cities may be instrumental in improving the creative economy at the national level. This should be taken into account and encouraged in Türkiye, where regional inequalities are still a significant issue. With its geographical, historical, and cultural diversity, Türkiye holds such great potential to adopt urban policies and practices to incorporate this diversity with economic development. However, traditional institutions and political systems, an idle institutional structure, a lack of awareness, and outdated visions are great obstacles to realizing this potential. In order to achieve urban development, the current capacities of the institutions of all sizes, regardless of their duties and responsibilities, should be improved and transformed. Creating and using funding resources, which prove to be one of the most suitable tools, is only possible with increased awareness and innovative institutional structures. To formulate innovative urban policies, the policy tools should be diversified, and city administrators and politicians should update their perspectives. Given the abundant geography in Türkiye that offers an incredible diversity, 10 out of the 21 applications submitted to the UCCN by Turkish cities between 2015-2023 were concentrated in gastronomy instead of being diversified among the 7 UCCN themes. This fact by itself is a testament to the importance of ‘updated perspectives.’ However, the effort to join an international network and the awareness of its importance for the city should be considered a visionary approach of the aforementioned cities. Although the participation topics and practices are partially traditional, the effort itself, the understanding and highlighting of the importance of local cultural values, and the international promotion gained through the network should be accepted as achievements.

Some studies indicate that creative/cultural clusters and networks lead to increased interest in creative cities. This also holds true for Turkish cities. In particular, tools that are aimed at establishing international

relations are quite popular. However, this totally depends on capacities. Another drawback for Türkiye is the generation and sharing of data. Many research studies cannot delve into the specifics of a topic due to the lack of data. The availability of an increased number of studies on this topic is critical in terms of ensuring improvement and raising awareness. Under these circumstances, developing national and particularly urban policies and implementing these policies in a scientific manner becomes irrational and almost impossible.

In the policies that are formulated, it is not possible to find any analyses, forecasts, or proposals pertaining to creativity. For instance, none of the national, regional, or local plans that cover the period between 2014 and 2023 highlight the characteristics of the Turkish cities in the UCCN and include proposals and models that address how the potential of these cities can be translated into urban policies. Yet, the Turkish cities in the UCCN were added to the network between 2015 and 2021, which fall within the scope of these plans (2014-2023). This points to another issue: A lack of communication between institutions. Lack of communication leads to even further complexity. It is possible to state that urban policies are usually put forward by a single institution with the efforts of a few individuals without the involvement of the actors in the city, and they lack establishing a connection with the city in its entirety. These predicaments lead to adverse consequences in terms of sustainability.

The original findings of this study present the outcomes of this workshop. This study evaluates the developments in urban policy development and implementation, with the aim that the various findings of this workshop will serve as a guide for future similar studies and city managers. Despite the overall outcomes of the TDL project demonstrating an unfavorable outlook in terms of creative industries, creative cities, institutionalization, and awareness, the workshop results, which expose the experiences of the Turkish cities in the UCCN, confirm the achievements listed above (Niblett, 2020), thus presenting favorable conditions for developing creative urban development. As detailed in the evaluation section, cities exhibit different behaviors due to their varying success in establishing collaborations, raising awareness, and creating financing opportunities. According to the workshop outcomes, corroborated by the literature review, the number of visitors has increased significantly in some cities, such as Gaziantep and Hatay. In cities, local businesses have modernized through public support and collaborations, becoming institutionalized, which has led to increased economic dynamism. Furthermore, the international image of cities like Kütahya and Kırşehir, in particular, has been strengthened. However, the impact in large-scale cities like Istanbul and Bursa is less pronounced. While Bursa possesses a developed institutional and collaborative structure that allows it to execute the process comprehensively, Istanbul has not experienced the same success. Here, a lack of awareness overtakes institutionalization.

UNESCO (2024) emphasizes that the UCCN serves not only as a hub for innovative ideas and best practices but also as a driving force for developing creative solutions to contemporary urban challenges. In this regard, Turkish cities are still lagging behind contemporary approaches due to their traditional planning methodologies, top-down central and local government structures, practices and legal instruments, available funding sources, and associated levels of awareness. Therefore, cities that have joined or are attempting to participate in the UCCN are significant. Their strategies and projects should be shared widely and considered good practices. For cities preparing and applying to join the network, it is beneficial to re-examine their most authentic values. Turkish cities possess exceptionally diverse and unique values in terms of cultural heritage and historical production processes.

Cities are expected to develop and implement concrete policies, strategies, and plans that foster the growth of their creative sectors, promote cultural participation, and integrate culture into broader urban planning. Policies should aim to generate employment within the creative industries and contribute to the diversification of the local economy. Policies encourage strong partnerships involving public authorities, the private sector, civil society organizations, and local creative communities in the design and implementation of initiatives (UNESCO, 2025).



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Hatay, which was included in the network for gastronomy in 2017, is one of the cities that was hit the hardest by the Kahramanmaraş earthquake on the 6th of February 2023. The current state of the city, which is home to a unique architectural and cultural heritage, led to indescribable grief not only in Türkiye but also in other countries. The Hatay section in this manuscript is based on the interviews/presentations prior to the earthquake on the 6th of February.

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