



DEVELOPING  
INCLUSIVE  
AND SUSTAINABLE  
CREATIVE ECONOMIES

# REGIONAL CASE STUDY REPORT: L'AQUILA, ITALY

A Horizon 2020 project by:



UNIVERSITY  
OF TURKU



culture & media agency europe, AISBL

CUMEDIAE



Co-funded by the Horizon 2020 programme  
of the European Union

<b>Project Number:</b>	822314
<b>Project Name:</b>	Developing Inclusive and Sustainable Creative Economies
<b>Project Acronym:</b>	DISCE
<b>Deliverable Number:</b>	MS8 & MS9
<b>Deliverable Name:</b>	Regional case study report: L'Aquila, Italy
<b>Work Package:</b>	WP2, WP3, WP4, WP5
<b>Responsible Partners:</b>	KCL, GSSI, UTU, SSE Riga
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<b>Type:</b>	Report
<b>Due date:</b>	March 2022
<b>Dissemination level:</b>	Public



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# 1. Introduction

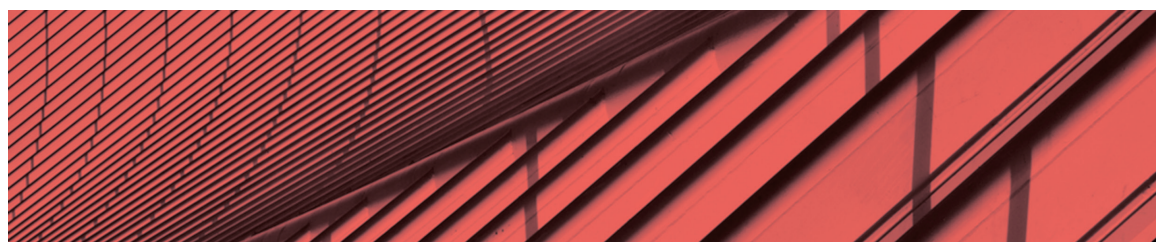
DISCE is a research project funded by the European Commission, via Horizon 2020. The overall research question that DISCE is seeking to answer is: What are inclusive and sustainable creative economies, and how can they be developed?

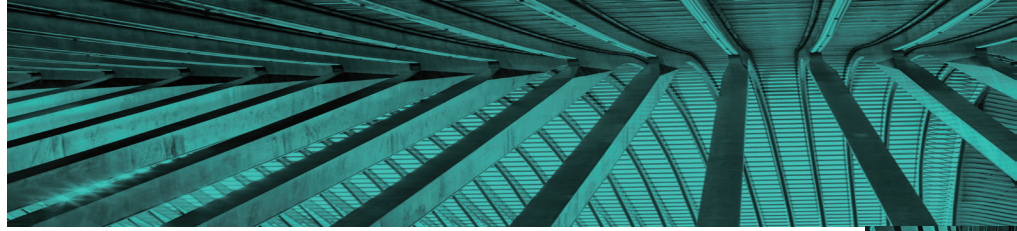
To answer this question, we conducted ten regional case studies across Europe. To select the case study locations, we established the following criteria as the primary basis: the locations had not been extensively studied and they were of comparable size, with population of approximately 150,000. Additionally, we sought locations that are diverse in terms of their creative economy profile and planning, ranging from cities with an established reputation for creative economy, to those for whom this is not the case.

In this document, we present a brief overview of one of our ten case study locations, the city of L'Aquila, Italy. We present key facts about the city, with a particular attention to how the 'creative economy' has previously been understood, based on a review of existing academic literature, publicly available data, and policy documents. In future publications we will present the findings of our own empirical work within L'Aquila, comparing and contrasting our findings with pre-existing accounts of creative economy in the city.

A key feature of the DISCE research project is that we are using 'creative economies' with a deliberately inclusive meaning, involving creative activity outside of paid employment, as well as within paid employment. This is reflected in the range of academic texts, publicly available data, and policy documents we are concerned with in this report: not only focusing narrowly on the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), but more broadly on areas such as cultural participation, and aspects of community development.

To read more about the distinctive DISCE approach to understanding and developing inclusive and sustainable creative economies, please see the publications on the project website: <https://disce.eu/>.





## 2. Facts and Figures

### 2.1 Overview of the City

L'Aquila locates in the south of Italy, and is the main city of the province, in the Abruzzo region. The resident population in 2019 was 69 925, of which 34 353 males and 35 572 females. In 2019, the resident population in the province of L'Aquila represents less than 0.5 per cent of the overall Italian population. At the region level, resident population was 1 300 645. (Eurostat, 2021.)

Built in 1254, in the 15th century L'Aquila became the most flourishing town in southern Italy after Naples, thanks to its industries and printing works. At the beginning of the 16th century its fortunes declined, partly due to the dismemberment of the countryside by Charles V and the city's alternating parties between Spain and France. It recovered briefly under the Bourbons of Spain (Charles III), only to decline again. It suffered a lot from brigandage.

Within the 14<sup>th</sup> century city walls were created, although the city still retains its ancient early medieval layout. The main monument in L'Aquila is the Romanesque church of S. Maria di Collemaggio, a prototype for churches in the entire region. Overall, there are 2 000 buildings of national cultural interest in the city. The ancient centre has a settled sizeable tourist attractiveness, partly because of its proximity to the Gran Sasso Mountain and the related outdoor tourism. The Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga National Park is a national park established in 1991; it is the third largest protected nature reserve in Italy in terms of territorial extension. Both the city and its province had a considerable development of tourist facilities, especially for winter sports.

Further, L'Aquila is an attractive destination also for religious tourism, being the only location in the world granting total forgiveness to Catholics if, after confession and holy communion, they visit the Basilica of Saint Mary of Collemaggio on 28 August. L'Aquila religious festivity – La Perdonanza Celestiniana – is part of the UNESCO immaterial heritage. Tourism positively affected the city's economy, which moved towards tertiary activities that have replaced the traditional agricultural and forestry activities.

Aside tourism, metal, textile, wood, and leather industries characterize the city economy. The city's specializations allowed for a demographic recovery after the depopulation of the 1970s. Now, educational, administrative, and commercial functions prevail, alongside an industrial core made of electromechanical, food, clothing, and building materials.



The city's surroundings are such that more than 60 per cent of the territory of L'Aquila province is made of "inner areas", peripheral rural areas characterised by their distance from the main service centers (education, health, and mobility).

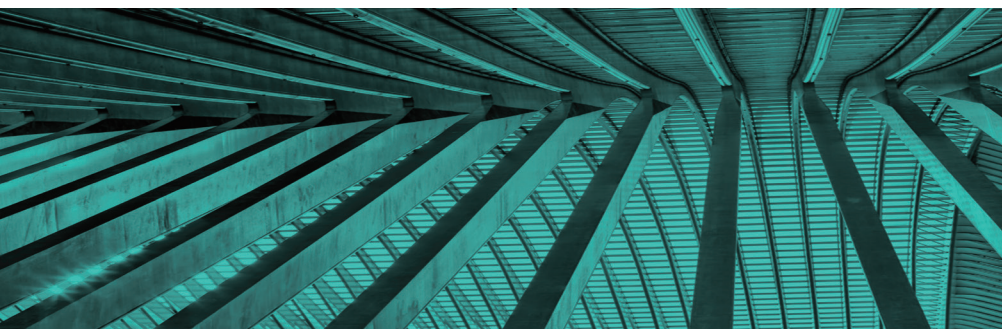
L'Aquila hosts several relevant research and education institutions. University of L'Aquila is the oldest in Abruzzo region. It was founded in 1596, and then re-established in the 1960s. In the 60s also a bachelor music conservatory and an academy of fine arts were established, all having strong networks with analogous institutions in Rome. The University of L'Aquila represents a key comparative advantage for the city. With nearly 30 000 students, it represents a relevant source of innovation and human capital creation, also having a big impact on rental income and demand for local goods and services. Big shares of the student population come from outside the city and reside in L'Aquila for the studying period. The fine arts academy is among the 20 in Italy, the other being mainly based in important national university cities such as Bologna, Florence, and Turin. L'Aquila also hosts a film and cinema school with a focus on report production. In the 80s, the National institute of Nuclear Physics started the Gran Sasso National Laboratories, which are the largest and most important underground research centre in the world in terms of size and wealth of scientific instruments.

In 2012, the Gran Sasso Science Institute was established in L'Aquila as research and advanced doctoral training institute. The institute has four departments: physics, mathematics, computer science and social sciences.

In 2021, MAXXI – the national museum of 21st-century arts based in Rome – opened a branch in L'Aquila.

On 6th of April 2009, the city was hit by an earthquake measuring 5.8 on the Richter scale, which caused the city devastation, with extensive damage to the monumental heritage in the historic center, as well as inflicting damage in 56 municipalities in the area. The earthquake caused a total of 308 victims, 1 500 injured, and over 68 000 homeless. It has been the second earthquake from 1900

hitting a densely populated provincial capital with one of the largest historic centers in Italy, rich in monuments and history, but also the hub of the institutional, economic, social, and cultural life of the entire surrounding area.



933 monumental sites (churches, palaces, walls, towers, fountains, etc.) were rendered unusable. L'Aquila economy was harshly affected. Figures from the National Trade Study Centre shows that the city centre of L'Aquila recorded a strong decline both in retail trade (-44.5%), in bars and restaurants (- 21,5%), and in hotels (-46.9%) in the period 2008-16.



The reconstruction strategy provided for the removal of displaced persons from the city, which remained uninhabited, inaccessible, and militarily guarded for months. Such logistics was suggested by the characteristic distribution of damage, which was concentrated in areas with a high population density and ended up compromising a large part houses and institutional buildings, such as the Prefecture, the Town Hall, schools, university, libraries, local offices of Italian Government, and churches. 19 “new towns” were built to accommodate 13 000 displaced persons in

non-transitory buildings built ad hoc within the post-earthquake strategy. The new towns were built from scratch in areas outside the built-up area of L’Aquila (between few kilometres and tens of kilometres away). By removing people and activities from the city for a long period of time, the “new towns” did not help restoring and preserving the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the city, which had remained in place for centuries despite the various catastrophic seismic events that occurred previously. However, the damages exerted by this earthquake implied a complex work on monumental buildings, which constitute most buildings in the city centre. Hence, post-disaster processes were time-consuming, and a fast reconstruction was not feasible.

In 2012, a special office (Ufficio Speciale per la Ricostruzione dell’Aquila -USRA) has been set by the Italian Government together with the Abruzzo Regional Government, L’Aquila Province and L’Aquila City Council to coordinate, supervise, and monitor the reconstruction process. Transparency and accountability of the reconstruction process are pursued through a web platform “Opendata Ricostruzione” managed by the Gran Sasso Science Institute, which assures availability of all the numbers and information relating to post-earthquake reconstruction in 2009. Currently, 87% of private reconstruction and 55% of public reconstruction are completed. Total funding required for the reconstruction amounts to more than 11 billion euros, of which more than 7 billion have been spent. Tax breaks and exemptions were also provided for the population and businesses

With the ongoing private reconstruction, people left the “new towns” to relocate in permanent accommodations. This has implied that now the municipality of L’Aquila has a wide portfolio of houses in its assets which need a local housing strategy.

The relevance of the 2009 earthquake prompted the mobilization of many high-impact cultural actors, located both in Italy and abroad, to support the city and its community towards the reconstruction. Out of this mobilization, L’Aquila has hosted several national-level cultural events, including a Jazz Festival and, until 2019, the Festival della Partecipazione aimed at discussing new forms of activism and citizenship. The city also participate to the European Researchers’ Night is a Europe-wide public event, which displays the diversity of science and its impact on citizens’ daily lives in fun and inspiring ways.

Culture-wise L'Aquila scores 67/110 compared with the other Italian territories. The city is well endowed in terms of libraires and music. New cultural institutions are opening, as the L'Aquila branch of the MAXXI Museum.

In 2012 and 2014, the City developed the reconstruction and revitalization strategy for the historical center, identifying and improving the city's attractiveness for creative sector among the key pillars, together with fostering the Higher Education system.

In 2019, the city launched a manifesto for local development of medium-size Italian cities surrounded by peripheral rural areas which are remarkably distant from the main service centers (Carta dell'Aquila). This manifesto acknowledges the strategic role of cities surrounded by peripheral rural areas, being that cities become hub/providers of services, innovation, and opportunities for the periphery. On this, it defines a strategic policy to foster the local development based on culture, tourism, innovation, and training. The manifesto has been endorsed and signed by other cities: Ascoli Piceno, Avellino, and Carpi.

In 2021, the city applied to become the 2021 Italian Cultural Capital. Through this application, the city updated its cultural strategy, which articulates in the following aims:

- 1) Repopulate the city and the territory and reknit its social fabric.
- 2) Promote a new model of culturally based development and well-being.
- 3) Become a leading center at European level on post-disaster culturally based resilience.
- 4) Formulate a development strategy scalable to other similar realities of the Italian inner areas.

This strategy has been developed by the City Council and numerous private and public institutions, including neighboring towns, the regional government, the Chamber of Commerce, schools, Higher Education institutions, and cultural institutions.

In 2021, the City Council has launched a new strategy for tourism, through a participatory approach involving neighboring towns, the National Park, the local Chamber of Commerce, the local LEADER representatives, the voluntary sectors, and the private sector.

The members of the L'Aquila City Council are elected every five years. The mayor is a member of the City Council, whereas the aldermen / executive board are not.





## 2.2 Socio-Economic Profile

Several economic indicators have been analyzed to delimit the socio-economic profile of L'Aquila and its province. At province level, the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018 was about 7541.76 million euros, which represents almost 23 per cent of the GDP produced in Abruzzo, and 0.4 per cent of the national product. Unfortunately, due to the earthquake, the province is almost steady, with an increase in the GDP in 2018 of only 0.5 per cent with respect to 5 years before, and of 0.8 per cent with respect to year 2017. The GDP per capita in purchasing power standard units was €25100 (in 2018), which is below the Italian average of €29300 and the EU average of €44920 (Eurostat, 2021; World Bank, 2021).

The rate of employment in the city of L'Aquila for persons between 20 and 64 years old was about 87 per cent in 2018, of which 47 per cent are males and 39 per cent females. The unemployment rate in L'Aquila was 9 per cent in 2018, which was lower than the Italian average of 10.5 per cent, but in line with the EU average of 9.1 per cent (Eurostat, 2021). At regional NUTS2 level there were 483 100 employed and 61 400 unemployed people in the region of Abruzzo (EUROSTAT: 2019).

For what concerns social aspects, the Province of Treviso registers a median age about 49.5 years old with an age dependency ratio about 67.5 per cent.

For what concerns population structure, the female population in the province is represented by the presence of 102.2 women per 100 men, which is quite below the Italian average of 105.3 in 2019.

The geographical compositions of people living in the city of L'Aquila is mainly nationals (93 per cent), while foreign people are both European and non-European citizens (2156 EU foreigners with respect to 3073 non-EU foreigners in 2019).

Finally, at the regional level, the proportion of population aged 25-64 qualified at level 5 to 8 ISCED in 2011 was about 30 per cent, far above the rest of the country which shows a rate of 15.8 per cent of people having a diploma.

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## 2.3. Cultural and Creative Profile

Unfortunately, there are no data available at city, province, or regional level for what concerns employments on cultural industries. We can rely only on the number of cultural spots belonging to the province of L'Aquila. Of these in 2014, there were 7 arts institutes (with 80 378 visitors in 2018), 99 public and private libraries, 32 non-statal museums and galleries, and 5 monuments and heritages sites.

The total number of tickets for theatres and musicals in the Abruzzo region in 2018 was 51 0230, which represents only the 1.5 per cent of the Italian total. The number of tickets per cinema seats were 2 029 174, which is almost the 2 per cent of the national data.

All the detailed data are reported in Table 1.

Table 1 Available Data for the Abruzzo Region and Italy (ASTI – ISTAT 2018)

	Abruzzo	Italy	% of the national value
Arts institutes	17	435	3.91
Libraries (public and private)	259	14188	1.82
Non-statal museums and galleries	89	4174	2.13
Monuments and heritage sites	12	235	5.10
Number of tickets for theatres and musicals	510230	36504660	1.40
Number of tickets for cinema seats	2029174	90552291	2.24
Number of cinemas	124	5174	2.40
Number of musical and theatre's performances	2381	165422	1.43

## 2.4. Inclusivity and Sustainability

Unfortunately, no official statistics or data were available applicable to the domain of the cultural and creative sectors. The only reliable statics were related to presence of women in the labour force or the presence of foreign people in the territory of L'Aquila and surroundings.



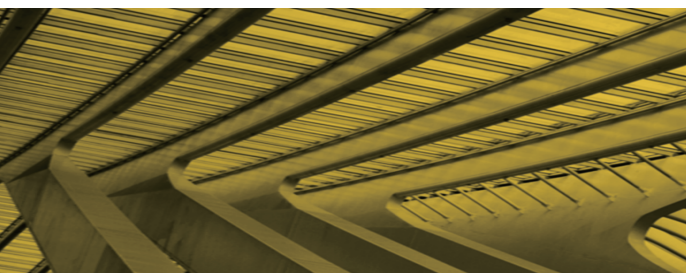
# 3. Creative Economies: Research and Public Policy

## 3.1. Overview of Academic Studies

Academic publications were gathered in the following way:

- Local key informants, including employees of the local authority, provided publicly accessible documents.
- DISCE researchers conducted a web-based search, including webpages of the city of L'Aquila, the Italian Government, the OECD and of the Abruzzo Region.

None of the academic papers speaks directly to DISCE's approach, at the same time they all use the DISCE's keywords and related terms. 'Creative and cultural economy' is used in 4 papers (Lazzeroni, 2010; OECD, 2013; OECD-University of Groningen, 2012; Pasquinelli, 2016). Two papers use 'CCIs' (OECD, 2013; Pasquinelli, 2016). Three papers deal with cultural capital in L'Aquila and four papers with the city touristic strategy. Seven papers pivots around the role of Higher Education in L'Aquila local development.



Four papers relate L'Aquila to Cultural and Creative economy (Lazzeroni, 2010; OECD, 2013; OECD-University of Groningen, 2012; Pasquinelli, 2016). The OECD paper (2013) assesses L'Aquila endowment of territorial capital to conclude that the city should pursue a development strategy to become a "knowledge-driven city" and "university city".

Exploiting the territorial capital made by reputable higher education institutions, natural amenities, and the accessibility to the large basin of the Rome metropolitan area, L'Aquila could become a knowledge-driven, smart, creative, open, and inclusive city. Similarly, Pasquinelli (2016) analyses the touristic strategy for L'Aquila after the 2009 earthquake, relating it to cultural and creative economy. The author outlines that the city should implement services to attract educated and creative people, also internationally, by fostering accommodation and hospitality, internationalizing educational and cultural activities, adopting a Smart-city strategy, and strengthening transport and smart mobility with Rome.

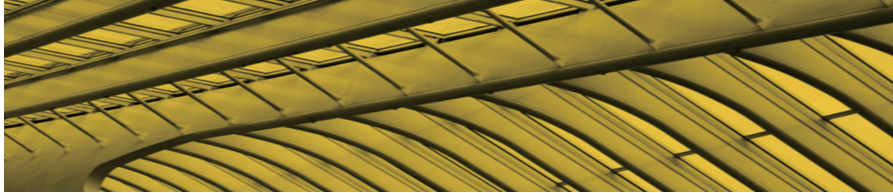
The OECD-University of Groningen (2012) paper identifies in the consolidation of the cultural networks a major tool for growth for the city. It also outlines several strategies to achieve this goal. First, the development of a Smart-City strategy to promote innovation, citizens' engagement, and positive externalities in designing an up-to-date touristic strategy. Second, untapping the potential of the local cultural capital by designing a strategy to become European Capital of Culture. Third, using the reconstruction of historical buildings and the urban planning after a natural disaster to attract architects and planners both nationally and internationally in a living laboratory. Lazzeroni (2010) maps L'Aquila inside the Italian technological districts, highlighting its relevant cultural endowment as a driver for innovation.

Three papers cover the role of cultural capital and events in L'Aquila local development (Koukoufikis et al., 2018; Mariotti 2011; OECD, 2013). Mariotti (2011) focuses on the Perdonanza festivity as a bridge between the local identity and external attractiveness. OECD (2013) develops policy recommendations addressing the potential of L'Aquila cultural heritage in generating employment and income. It also suggests fostering activities in the religious tourism sector. Koukoufikis et al. (2018) measure the role of cultural events in realizing the cultural tourism development strategy for the city to find high rates of local consensus and participation, although limited attractiveness with respect to non-locals.

Five papers relate tourism with local development of L'Aquila (Di Nuccio, 2015; Di Pietro & Mora, 2015; OECD, 2013; OECD-University of Groningen, 2012; Pasquinelli, 2016). Di Nuccio (2015) analyzes the touristic attractiveness of L'Aquila, highlighting the positive effect of the structured and persistent network strategy linking L'Aquila to Rome. Towards the end of the 19th century, L'Aquila began to organize to welcome the Roman upper middle class in search of mountain amenities. This strategy was successful and was further pursued in the XX century, also exploiting faster and cheaper communication. The paper acknowledges the onboarding on local actors and national institutions among the key factors for the success of the strategy. Pasquinelli (2016) highlights how tourism was assigned a central role in local economic development in the post-earthquake strategy and that the discontinuity due to the earthquake prompted strategic thinking about the tourism/urban competitiveness nexus. Di Pietro and Mora (2015) outline the strategic role of an effective strategy promoting nature and culture tourism in the local economy of L'Aquila. OECD-University of Groningen (2012) propose an integration between the tourism strategy and the smart city strategy to create attractiveness actions capable of reaching a wide audience.

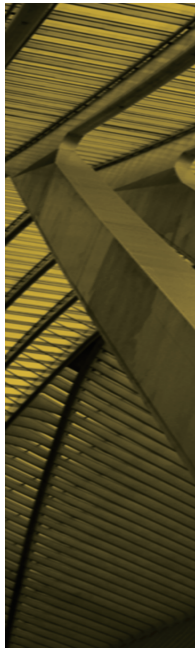
The 2013 OECD paper assesses the state-of-the-art touristic sector in L'Aquila, suggesting a territorially integrated approach to overcome the existing fragmentation and small size of cultural and touristic resources. It further suggests developing new goods and services to improve the quality of the tourism supply and increase the economic return. Finally, it advises to develop actions for untapping the potential of non-local and foreign students and visiting researchers in strengthening L'Aquila brand as a tourism destination.





Eight papers show the key role of the Higher Education fabric in the local development of L'Aquila (Calafati, 2012; Di Giovanni & Raimondi, 2018; Di Pietro & Mora, 2015; ESPON, 2018; Fontana, 2018; Lazzeroni, 2011; OECD, 2013; Pasquinelli, 2016). Lazzeroni (2011) discusses L'Aquila as technological district compared to the other Italian area to conclude that the local university has played a key role in making L'Aquila an advanced technological district with strong specialization in high-tech sectors and high system innovativeness. The ESPON (2018) paper provides an assessment of the post-earthquake development strategy in its attractiveness for talented and high-skilled people to find a positive impact played by Higher Education Institutions. The paper shows two relevant facts. First, the rooted high-quality education institutions have made early leaving rate from education and training lower than the Italian average, and the percentage of people with higher tertiary education. Second, thanks to the post-earthquake policy to build “a knowledge-driven city” and “university city”, L'Aquila had 8.3 per cent of foreign students in 2015-2016 enrolled in a post-lauream course, compared to less than 2 per cent 10 years before. Similar figures are found in undergraduate courses across the Abruzzo Region.

Pasquinelli (2016) develops a case study for a tourism strategy for L'Aquila pivoting on the reputation and the attractiveness of the existing Higher Education institutions. Di Pietro and Mora (2015) identify in the economic turnover generated by university students one of the elements compensating declining manufacturing sectors in terms of local economic growth. Calafati (2012) assesses the city potential to become an “university-city” by leveraging the quality of the local Higher Education institutions and the proximity to Rome. The paper also suggests developing services capable of retaining students after graduation, to assure the modernization of L'Aquila's society as well as investment in new local enterprises. The latter issue is investigated also by Di Giovanni & Raimondi (2018), who assess the implementation of L'Aquila as a “a knowledge-driven city” and “university city”. Their work outlines the need for structured services for students, including housing, to go beyond the “university city”, and becoming “a knowledge-driven city” capable of retaining students after graduation. Fontana (2018) outlines that the leading actors in the reconstruction of L'Aquila are equally distributed between private and public sectors. Moreover, the main implementing public actors being the Municipality of L'Aquila and the University.




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### 3.2. Overview of Public Policy Documentation

Policy documents were gathered in the following way:

- Local key informants, including employees of the local authority, provided publicly accessible documents.
- DISCE researchers conducted a web-based search, including webpages of the city of L'Aquila, the Italian Government, the OECD and of the Abruzzo Region.



The selected policy documents tend to use DISCE key terms “creative economy” but never “sustainable and inclusive creative economy”. However, many terms closely related to “creative economy”.

Selected documents are listed in table 2. All the documents are in Italian, but the titles have been translated for the table.

Table 2 Selected ‘creative economy’ Policy Documentation

Document	What this document is about?	To what extent creative economies are discussed in the document? <sup>1</sup>
City of L’Aquila (2021). CASASI-CURA. ICT and Smart City strategy	Multi-stakeholder strategy to implement the Smart City strategy	Focus on innovation and knowledge city
City of L’Aquila (2021). RESTART – Creativity Incubator	Policy to support the start-up of creative industries in the city	Focus on creative economies
City of L’Aquila (2020). Application for Italian Cultural Capital. 2022call	Collections of documents supporting the cultural capital endowment of the city	Creative economies mentioned
City of L’Aquila (2019). Carta de L’Aquila	Manifesto with actions to support the role and the development of mid-size cities surrounded by peripheral areas	Culture and innovation mentioned
City of L’Aquila (2018). DigitalAQ, the digital transformation strategy for l’Aquila	Strategic plan to pursue an inclusive and sustainable local development through digital technologies.	Creative economies and sustainability mentioned
City of L’Aquila (2014). Update of the Urban development plan	Strategic urban plan for the reconstruction of the city and its subsequent development	Creative economies and culture mentioned
City of L’Aquila (2012). Strategic plan for the reconstruction of the historical center	Strategic urban plan for the revitalization of the historical center	Creative economies, sustainability and culture mentioned
OECD (2013) Policy Making after Disasters. Helping Regions Become Resilient – The Case of Post-Earthquake Abruzzo	evidence-based recommendations on how to move recovery efforts forward after the 2009 earthquake	Focus on creative economies, culture, sustainability, inclusion, innovation

<sup>1</sup> The classification includes four categories:

- Focus on creative economies
- Creative economies mentioned (e.g. culture, cultural or creative sectors or industries, creative businesses/companies, creative workers/people/class, cultural hotspots/hubs)
- Creative economies not mentioned but addresses closely related topics (e.g. innovation, innovative industries/companies, knowledge cities, knowledge-intensive sectors)
- Overall economy of the city or region (creative economies not mentioned specifically)

OECD (2009). Spreading the Eagle's wings so it may fly: Re-Launching the economy of L'Aquila region after the earthquake	9 strategic projects to design the local development of the city after the 2009 earthquake	Focus on sustainability, inclusiveness, innovation
Ufficio Speciale per la Ricostruzione dell'Aquila -USRA (2021) RESTART project	National funding for new and existing SMEs/start-ups willing to invest in L'Aquila	Creative economies core of the GAP analysis
Italian Ministry for Economic Development (2018). RESTART Program	Funding for enterprises and start-ups in the touristic sector in L'Aquila	Culture mentioned
OECD (2013) Policy Making after Disasters Helping Regions Become Resilient – The Case of Post-Earthquake Abruzzo	Cross-sector strategies and evidence-base recommendations on L'Aquila and Abruzzo local development and reconstruction strategies after the 2009 earthquake.	Focus on Creative economies, culture, sustainability
OECD Home Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (2009) Regional Development L'Aquila Earthquake	After-earthquake local development strategy identifying Higher Education as the main focus for the success of the city economy	Culture mentioned
Abruzzo Region (2017). Fare Centro. Support for the relocation or start-up of new productive activities for the repopulation of historic centres	Funding for revitalizing historical city centers after the earthquake	Culture mentioned

### 3.3 Terminology and Stakeholders of Public Policy

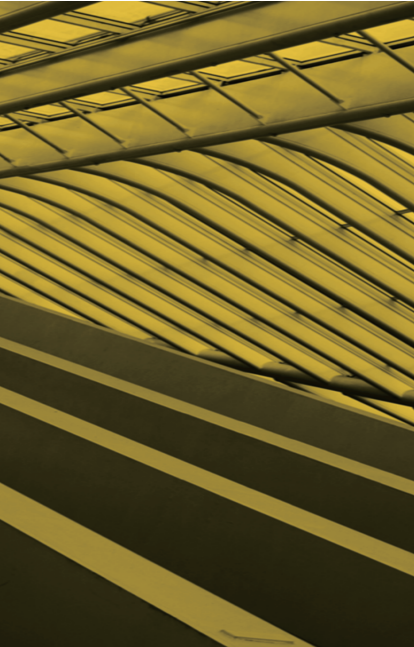
Who is responsible for 'creative economy policy' in L'Aquila?

How – and how much – 'creative economy' policy has been developed?

The documents indicate that policy related to the range of activities DISCE refers to as "creative economy" has been addressed by authorities on different levels – municipality / city of L'Aquila, province of L'Aquila, Abruzzo Region, the State of Italy.

It is important to stress policy making regarding L'Aquila has strong idiosyncratic features compared to the rest of Italian cities and many European cities. This peculiarity is due to the 2009 earthquake and its consequences, which go far beyond the affected area and require responses from regional and national resources (OECD, 2013).





The national level is highly involved in L'Aquila policy making, including the creative/cultural economy dimension. The 2012 City of L'Aquila strategic plans for the reconstruction of the historical center, the 2014 update of the urban development plan and the 2021 policy to support the start-up of creative industries in the city involve the national level in terms of funding and coordination to achieve the reconstruction goals.

At the same time, also local stakeholders are involved, especially the Higher Education institutions. University of L'Aquila and GSSI are active members of policy design and implementation as showed in the strategic policy documents: the 2012

City of L'Aquila strategic plans for the reconstruction of the historical centre, the 2014 update of the urban development plan, and the 2020 application for Italian Cultural Capital.

Further, L'Aquila citizens were involved through surveys and meeting in envisaging the future of the city after the earthquake. Notably, they greatly recognized the “knowledge-driven city” as more suitable strategy to pursue.

This multi-level/multi-stakeholder governance of local development in L'Aquila follows from the post-earthquake policy recommendations from the OECD and the Italian Government, as outlined in the 2009 and 2013 OECD paper.

Importantly, culture and creativity has been identified as key drivers for the reconstruction of the city immediately after the 2009 earthquake, as highlighted by the 2009 OECD paper and the 2012 City of L'Aquila strategic plans for the reconstruction of the historical centre. The reason for this being the pre-existing remarkable local endowment of cultural heritage, cultural institutions, and Higher Education institutions, all with untapped potential to leverage.

Through the multi-stakeholder approach, several initiatives concerning the creative economy have been developed.

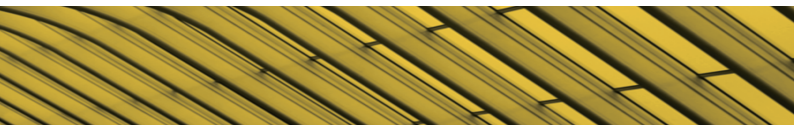
In 2012, the City Council Strategic plan for the reconstruction and the revitalization of the historical center identified several actions to promote the creative economy as a driver for urban development. First, reconstruction should pursue increased livability of the historical center by removing traffic in favor of higher availability of public spaces for pedestrians. Second, bringing back to the historical center all the pre-earthquake cultural activities and facilities, with a prominent role of university activities. Third, exploiting reconstruction to improve the aesthetic quality of the building and of the overall urban fabric. Forth, building ICT infrastructure to cover the pre-existing digital divide. Fifth, assuring visibility to the cultural heritage.

In 2018 the Italian Minister for Economic Development launched RESTART, a program supporting private investments aimed at enhancing the attractiveness and tourist offer of the L'Aquila earthquake crater area.

Within this program, in 2021 the City Council has launched a Creativity Incubator to support the local creative sector.

In 2020 L'Aquila developed a cultural strategy to support its bid to become the 2022 Italian Capital of Culture. The strategy was to design onboarding several local subjects active in the cultural sectors: the municipality, the voluntary sector, cultural institutions, and Higher Education institutions. Currently, this strategy has been adopted as cultural strategy for the city.

Through the multi-level/multi-stakeholder policy approach, from 2021 the City of L'Aquila hosts a local branch of MAXXI – the national museum of 21st-century arts based in Rome. The museum also hosts workshops and training activities in the cultural and creative fields, such as the Digital Think-in lab, an intensive course dedicated to digital skills in the cultural and marketing field.



In 2021, L'Aquila has been awarded the funding for establishing an innovation and technology transfer hub for smart technologies and ICT to support local enterprises towards digitalization, cybersecurity, AI-based services. The project, CASASICURA -ICT and Smart City strategy had a national recognition and it is developed and implemented by a partnership between the City of L'Aquila, GSSI, University of L'Aquila, National Council of Research, and other partners.

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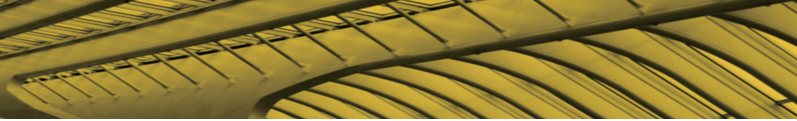
### 3.4. Thematic Review of Public Policy Documentation

#### 3.4.1. Creative Economy Policy & Cultural Opportunity

What are the aims of creative economy policy in L'Aquila? What does success look like?

The key aim of the creative policy in L'Aquila is to contribute to shaping local development trajectories towards the “creative city”, the “knowledge-driven city”, and the “university city”.

Differently from many territorial contexts not hit by natural disasters, in the case of L'Aquila the development trajectories strictly align with a reconstruction trajectory. After the earthquake, OECD was involved in the reconstruction, being asked to analyze L'Aquila to identify policy recommendations on how to move recovery efforts forward. OECD efforts provided evidence-based recommendations identifying L'Aquila as endowed with territorial capital suitable for a “knowledge-driven city”, a “creative city”, a “open and inclusive city” and a “university city”.



These recommendations are grounded in L'Aquila being endowed by sizeable cultural heritage, cultural institutions, and Higher Education institutions also before the earthquake.

The historical city center has a central role in achieving the policy goals, as described in the 2012 City Council Strategic plan for the reconstruction and the revitalization of the historical center. The historical city center is large, endowed with cultural amenities and the fulcrum of the city life before the earthquake. By providing housing, goods, and services to the high share of non-local students, it represents a strong component of L'Aquila's economy. Hence, a fundamental element for the success of the "knowledge-driven city", the "creative city", the "open and inclusive city", and the "university city" is revitalizing the historical city center. This aspect is acknowledged in all the policy papers.

Currently, people, shops, services, and institutions are going back to the historical city center. Nearly 250 shops are now located in the historical city center (<https://laquilaincentro.it>), some of them also benefitting from funds from the regional policy – Fare Centro – supporting the relocation or the start-up of new productive activities in historical centers. A new student housing service opened in the city center, as well as cultural facilities such as the local branch of MAXXI – the national museum of 21st-century arts based in Rome, a public Auditorium designed by Renzo Piano.

What challenges and opportunities for creative economy in this location are identified?

The 2013 OECD policy paper clearly identifies both opportunities and challenges for the creative economy in L'Aquila. Subsequent policy design has referred to these opportunities and challenges.

Among the opportunities:

- young and creative entrepreneurs can become an active part of the city rebuilding's strategy, and becoming acknowledged actors of L'Aquila's development agenda
- having the attraction of creative workers among the strategic reconstruction and development goals, L'Aquila can plan reconstruction so to offer easily accessible urban and natural amenity goods that can compensate for possible lower wages than those offered in larger cities
- the presence of Higher Education Institutions with a strong reputation can attract and create opportunities for creative workers.

Among the most relevant challenges:

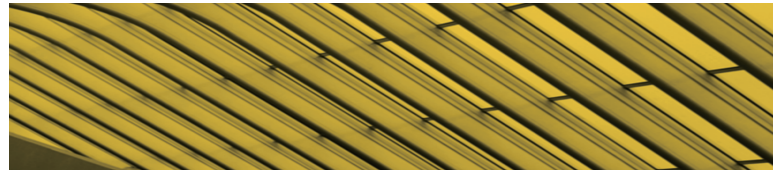
- small-size city
- non-competitive wage and market access
- accessibility to Rome metropolitan area



What opportunities for ‘aesthetic capability’ – opportunities to ‘participate’, to have cultural ‘experiences’, etc. – are identified within the documents and data?

Cultural experiences are acknowledged as a key driver for the local development of L’Aquila. In the 2013 OECD policy recommendations, it is stressed the strong local demand for cultural experience as an enabling factor for making the city a “cultural city”. Further, the provision of cultural experiences is acknowledged as a pivotal element to strengthen L’Aquila as “university city”, as cultural experiences represent an attractive element for non-local students. Finally, by matching easily accessible urban and natural amenity goods with affordable houses and welfare, L’Aquila can become attractive to creative workers.

Despite possible lower wages than those offered in larger cities The 2012 City of L’Aquila strategic plans for the reconstruction of the historical center states that the cultural landscape represents an enduring attractor for tourists and non-local students which needs to be supported throughout the reconstruction process.



How is community engagement with creativity described, imagined, and referenced?

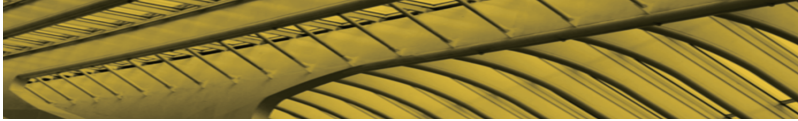
Community engagement was pursued already in the design of the reconstruction and development policy. The OECD- University of Groningen realized several surveys and public workshops to discuss L’Aquila outlook before the earthquake, the consequences of the earthquake and the possible recovery scenarios. Further, by hosting several editions of the Festival della Partecipazione, a national event dedicated to community engagement. The city further nurtured community engagement.

Notably, most policy interventions targeting creativity and innovation are multi-stakeholder by design, following the 2013 OECD recommendations.

In the most relevant policy interventions on creativity, Higher Education Institutions, cultural institutions, and the voluntary sector have been actively engaged.

Who is involved in the creative economy? (What kinds of activities / projects, organizations, and people are understood as being involved in the creative economy?)

The Higher Education Institutions, the cultural institutions, the voluntary sector, the municipality are the main actors involved in the creative economy discourse. The 2012 City of L’Aquila strategic plans for the reconstruction of the historical centre, the 2014 update of the urban development plan assign a relevant role to Higher Education Institutions. The Smart City strategy is designed and implemented by local institutions, Higher Education institutions, SMEs representatives, and the civil society. Through the application to the 2022 Italian Capital of Culture,



also high-impact personalities having linkages with L'Aquila have been onboarded in the development of the culture/creative sector in the city.

The national level has a monitoring and funding role when national public resources are involved.

Who is involved in creative economy policymaking? And what processes are in place for developing creative economy policy and data?

The creative economy policy making involves mainly the Municipality and Higher Education Institutions.

A major recent process for the development of creative economy policy is the bid for Italian Capital of Culture. L'Aquila prepared a dossier supporting its application which contains a strategic policy approach supporting culture and creativity updating and assessing the 2013 OECD policy recommendations. This work has involved all the relevant local stakeholders, as well as nation-wide personalities with linkages with L'Aquila.

Also, both the Creativity Incubator launched in 2021 and the local branch of the MAXXI museum are organizing training courses supporting the start-up of creative activities.

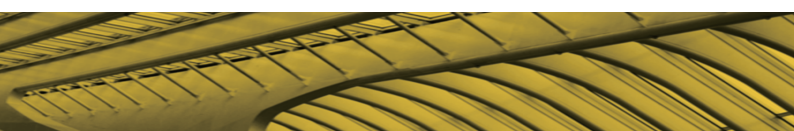
Data-wise, there are several tools monitoring the reconstruction in L'Aquila which map figures that are relevant data for analyzing the creative economy. First, the web platform "Opendata Ricostruzione" managed by the Gran Sasso Science Institute, which lists the numbers and information relating to post-earthquake reconstruction. Second, another web platform "L'Aquila in Centro", mapping all the private activities opening or returning to the historical city centre by type of activity. And third, the Restart project, when fully operational, will show how many new and existing SME/start-ups will receive public funds to invest in L'Aquila, again by type activity.

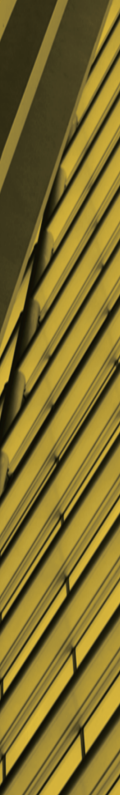
Do these policy documents draw on a wide range of community voices in the process of policy planning? For example, through a formal process of consultation?

The 2012 City of L'Aquila strategic plans for the reconstruction of the historical centre was characterized by a series of meetings and debates organized by the Municipality open to the direct and active participation of citizens and the city's various social, cultural, political, and business organizations.

The OECD policy papers were developed with workshops and surveys targeting citizens, voluntary organizations, cultural, political, and business organizations.

The dossier supporting the bid for Italian Capital of Culture was drafted also thanks to the contributions of the civil society engaged through workshops.





Is there any indication of how local / municipal / regional creative economy policy in this location relates to national policy?

As stressed before, the creative economy policy for L'Aquila intertwines with the reconstruction policy, which has a strong national interest and policy involvement. Therefore, the local creative economy policy strongly refers to the reconstruction aims and strategies defined with the national Government.

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### 3.4.2. Creative Business Development & Entrepreneurship

Is there any strategy for creative businesses / entrepreneurship /self-employment for the city?

The city of L'Aquila is supporting creative businesses through funds from the regional policy -Fare Centro-, which supports the relocation or the start-up of new productive activities in historical centers.

Further, in 2021, the City Council has launched a Creativity Incubator to support the local creative sector.

These policy interventions add to other various policy plans, such as events plan, labor market plan, marketing plan as well as culture plan, and creative businesses/entrepreneurship are addressed within these documents and receive direct and indirect supports on specific actions.

Are businesses / entrepreneurship included in policy discussions of the creative economy? If so, how?

The participatory process supporting the bid for Italian Capital of Culture unfolded through dozens of meetings which also included businesses and business representatives.

Similarly, the participatory process associated to the 2012 City of L'Aquila strategic plans for the reconstruction of the historical centre included meetings with business organizations. Also, the 2013 OECD policy recommendations were developed benefitting from surveys and workshops also involving businesses and business representatives.

Are there any discussions or recommendations for attracting creative businesses / entrepreneurship to the area?

Attracting creative business in among the actions to pursue the development strategy for the city after the 2009 earthquake. The 2013 OECD paper contains specific recommendations addressing this issue.



These recommendations include:

- the provision of appropriate and affordable high-quality workspaces and facilities for young people's creative activities.
- the establishment of a "creative quarter" or several "creative neighborhoods" in the reconstruction of the historical center
- a Smart-City strategy to assure digital and innovative services
- fostering the link between Higher Education Institutions and the productive sector to increase economic opportunities for educated people at the local level
- supporting the existing art institutions (music institutions, Academy of Art) in creating creative activities and workers

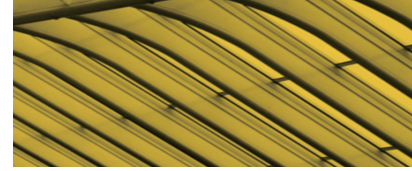
Are there any challenges / opportunities in relation to creative businesses / entrepreneurship in general?

The main challenges in relation to creative businesses are outlined in the 2013 OECD paper and in the 2012-2014 reconstruction and urban development plans by the Municipality. The speed of the reconstruction process has represented the main challenge being, that available spaces, services, and ad-hoc financial support depend on the restructuring and re-building of the damaged and destroyed urban fabric. Another important challenge has been the deterioration of the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the city which happened when people and activities were removed from the city for a long time due to the catastrophic damage of the earthquake. Then, also the small scale of the city represents a challenge to become attractive for creative businesses.

Among opportunities, one of the most relevant one is the reputation and the attractiveness of the existing Higher Education institutions, which assure high numbers of students and visiting researchers, increasingly coming from other regions and from abroad. Further, the reconstruction process has been designed and implemented also with the aim of making L'Aquila a global laboratory of innovation also in terms of cultural heritage valorization. Then, the same reconstruction process has developed plans and policy to make L'Aquila a "creative city" and a "knowledge-driven city".

How are creative businesses / entrepreneurship described, imagined, or referenced in these documents?

All policy documents refer to businesses or entrepreneurs as creative or cultural.



### 3.4.3. Higher Education & Creative Workers

Is there a creative Higher Education strategy for L'Aquila? Or is there a Higher Education strategy that includes any specific reference to creative Higher Education within it?

The envisioned strategy by the OECD after the 2009 earthquake pivoted around Higher Education. In the OECD 2009 Regional Development strategy after the earthquake, it is highlighted that the reconstruction process needed to focus on the University, which should be strengthened to exploit as much as possible its capacity to act as a regional engine of growth. To promote development and foster the city's attractiveness. The role of the University is intertwined with extensive IT infrastructure, affordable and safe housing, cultural events, and entertainment.

As already stressed the prominent role of the higher Education Institutions comes from the already relevant role they played before the earthquake, being one of the most relevant factors of the city development.

The city of L'Aquila has benefitted from a large university population also in terms of demand for houses, and local goods and services, including creative services. Before the earthquake, most students coming from outside the city (more than

10 000) lived in the historical city center. To this regard, several strategies have identified and pursued to bring back the student population in the historical city center, for instance through the recent opening of a post-graduate student house.

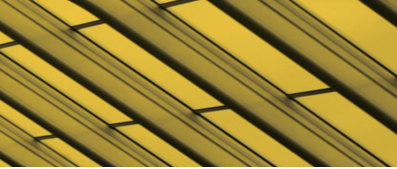
Also, the public funding supporting shops, restaurants, bars, and services willing to open in the historical center foster the attractiveness of the area for students.

Ad-hoc strategy supporting creative Higher education pertains support for the L'Aquila Academy of Art, music conservatory and cinema school, to allow them to operate after the earthquake, to settle back in the historical city centre after reconstruction and to organize activities and events involving their students

Are HEIs included in policy discussions of the creative economy? If so, how?

The local HEIs are included as main partners in the design and implementation of policy interventions on the creative economy.

HEIs have been involved in the design of the cultural strategy supporting the application for the 2022 Italian Capital of Culture. They have also been involved in development of the strategy for L'Aquila as a "creative city" and a "knowledge-driven city". Similarly, they are among the key players of the local Smart Strategy.



Are there specific discussions or recommendations for attracting students to the area to study creative subjects?

Among the 2013 OECD policy recommendations, it was suggested for Higher Education Institutions to partner with other local organizations and institutions to showcase local creative activities and to foster educational programs in creative and artistic subjects to attract potential creative practitioners.

Are there any imagined or predicted challenges / opportunities in relation to students in general?

The main challenge in relation to students was retaining them and the attractiveness of the local HEIs after the earthquake. Enrollment numbers show that the after-disaster measures targeting students have been effective in keeping a high attractiveness of L'Aquila HEIs.

Further, following the 2013 OECD policy recommendations, a new HEI opened: the Gran Sasso Science Institute. The new institution was designed to be attractive for high-skilled capital from abroad, also contributing to reinforce L'Aquila attractiveness within Italy.

How are creative / cultural workers described, imagined, or referenced in these documents?

Reference to the creative and or cultural workforce across the L'Aquila policy documents is mainly done referring to creativity, arts, and culture. At the same time, there are also multiple references to workers within the knowledge economy, the digital economy, and the smart economy.

Do these policy documents include input from the creative/cultural workforce? If so, whose voices are included?

The participatory process supporting the bid for Italian Capital of Culture has involved the local creative and cultural workforce through several meetings, aimed at sharing goals and designing activities. Cultural institutions, voluntary organizations engaged in cultural activities and Higher Education Institutions took active part in the development of the dossier supporting the bid.

Further, the process has also onboarded dozens of outstanding profiles, with national and international standing, who, over time, have established a relationship with L'Aquila.



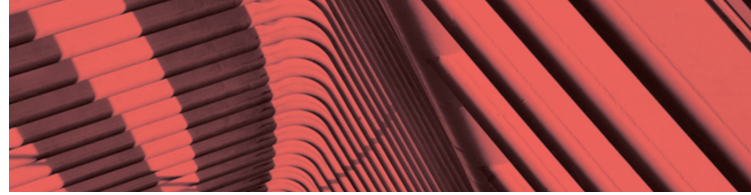
# 4. Conclusions

## 4.1. Headline Findings from the Preceding Analysis

The preceding review of existing studies, policy documentation, and data provides an important analysis of how creative economy is currently imagined, managed and governed within L'Aquila. This provides a set of key insights that DISCE's research speaks to, as we offer new understandings and possibilities for creative economy in L'Aquila – with our detailed empirical findings, conceptual innovations, and policy recommendations to be published at the end of the project, in 2022.

Our analysis of the existing academic and policy documents related to 'creative economy' in L'Aquila leads to the following conclusions:

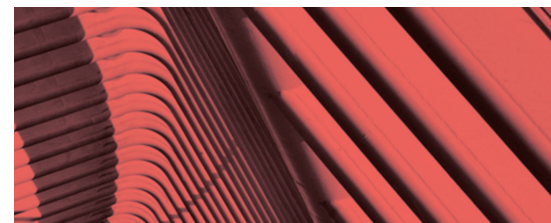
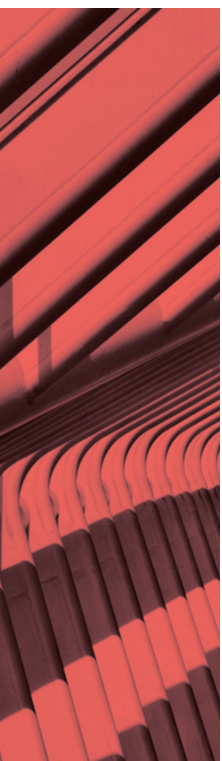
1. L'Aquila represents an interesting case study since it combines a reconstruction strategy with development strategies having creativity and knowledge among the pillars. This has implied that creative economy, cultural economy, and knowledge economy are extremely significant in the municipal policy.
  2. Creative economy, cultural economy, and knowledge economy are also acknowledged in the local community as strategic goals to pursue. This also translates in active engagement in policy implementation by the voluntary sectors and the business sector.
  3. There is terminological consistency in the existing documentation regarding creative economy and creative economy policy in the city and at the regional level.
  4. It appears that L'Aquila has an integrated policy approach addressing the cultural and creative economy, enacted through an active involvement of multi-level institutions (National, Regional, and Local level) and local stakeholders (Higher Education Institutions, voluntary sectors, and cultural institutions).
  5. It appears that there are interesting sources of data that might be relevant in measuring the creative economy.
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## 4.2. DISCE's Approach & Next Steps

Our distinctive methodological approach challenges and expands prevailing accounts of creative economy, offering new insights into how creative economies can be supported to develop inclusively and sustainably. Our approach to the creative economy is deliberately very inclusive: involving not only people who work in the 'creative industries' and those who do creative jobs outside of the creative industries. We also include people involved in creative activities outside of paid employment. This is integral to our 'ecological' framework, in which we emphasize the interconnections and interdependencies between cultural and creative activities of many kinds, including 'everyday', amateur and community creativity.

To keep up to date with these publications, please sign up to the [DISCE](#) project email list via our project website. Here you can also read reports providing more detail on the distinctiveness of DISCE ecological approach to studying and developing creative economies: for example, in our case study framework (2019) and our initial policy briefing (2020). These and other DISCE publications can be accessed here: <https://disce.eu/publications/>.





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