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## Leveraging the Creative Knowledge of a Community\*

Giuseppe BIAGINI\*\*

### Abstract

*The Creative Knowledge Foundation (CKF) is dedicated to reinforcing the role of Creative Knowledge and the work of “Creative People” in developing sustainable and resilient models of collaboration between members of one of the seven creative clusters recognized by UNESCO as well as across them (inter-cluster projects).*

*By presenting case studies that use the CKF framework—“The Future... is under your feet”—within the UNESCO Creative City Network, this paper shows how the CKF can organize and manage projects that can be understood by any community, regardless of age, religion, gender, ethnicity, social status, and target social cohesion objectives. Examples of current projects address universal concepts that are familiar to any community across any creative cluster, while the flexibility of the platform used allows for the creation of local and international variations of the projects to better suit the priorities and needs of the target community.*

*The “Hands at Work” (2017–ongoing), “Artisanal Cheese” (2019–ongoing), “Breads of the Creative Cities” projects (2018–ongoing) and their current variations will be used to give practical examples of the concepts expressed. Finally, we will highlight the initial phases of “Connecting Threads—Connecting Cultures,” a collaborative proposal for a new cluster project.*

**Keywords:** Creative Knowledge (CK), Creative Knowledge Platform, “The Future... is under your feet,” inter-cluster projects, collaboration, social cohesion.

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## 1. The Creative Knowledge Foundation<sup>1</sup>

The Creative Knowledge Foundation is a US 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that strives to reinforce the role of “Creative People”—the living keepers of the Traditional Knowledge of the world—in leveraging the collective intelligence of a community refined over centuries, if not millennia, by behaviors and location-specific methodologies. With the term Creative Knowledge (CK) we refer to the “... contemporary evolution of traditional knowledge-based practices that have adjusted to the rules of nature and have learned how to work with it and not against it...”

In the light of the changes that contemporary societies are experiencing with climate change and increases in urban density, CK Systems can provide innovative and sustainable solutions to the contemporary world.

The Creative Knowledge Foundation is therefore committed to protect CK Systems and help Creative People (e.g. farmers, cooks and chefs, artisans, artists, etc.) to thrive in their original communities and at the same time provide positive examples of sustainable communities.

This paper will initially present the model and the software tools that we use to create UCCN projects and then will present examples to highlight specific advantages and objectives that can be reached with the model and the tools.

## 2. The Model “The Future... is under your feet” and the Creative Knowledge Platform

To achieve and implement its mission, the Creative Knowledge Foundation has defined a software platform—the Creative Knowledge Platform (CKP)—as well

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1. As of September 16, 2022, the International Traditional Knowledge Institute Foundation (ITKIF) has changed its name to Creative Knowledge Foundation to reinforce the role of Creative Knowledge within its mission statement. See <https://creativeknowledge.foundation/> for more details.

as the project format “The Future... is under your feet” (THEFUTURE)<sup>2</sup>.

### 2.1. The Model “The Future ... is under your feet”

THEFUTURE studies territorial development strategies and proposes concrete actions aimed at promoting the social and the economic development of territories and local communities. The framework is inspired by the concepts expressed by the “Faro Convention” (2005),<sup>3</sup> by the “Ventotene Digital Manifesto” (2017–2021)<sup>4</sup> and by the UN2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>5</sup>

Goals of the framework are to:

- Promote “digital culture” by using software tools to preserve, document and transmit local cultural heritage to future generations.
- Identify sustainable and inclusive best practices to make communities resilient.
- Promote the participation of all levels of government, civil society, academia, creative people in the co-production of sustainable and resilient development models.

The framework is divided into four main milestones:

- STEP 1—Mapping the territory to document the traditional and creative assets of a territory by mapping the custodians of the local knowledge and

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2. The CKF and the Benefit Company KOOR, Milan, Italy have jointly developed the Creative Knowledge Platform (CKP) and the framework “The Future... is under your feet.” More details about this latter framework can be found at <https://ilfuturosottoituoipiedi.org/en/who-we-are/>.

3. For the full text of the “Faro Convention” (2005): [//www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention](http://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention).

4. For the full text of the “Ventotene Digital Manifesto” (2017–2021): <https://www.diculther.it/blog/2021/09/15/manifesto-ventotene-digitale-loccasione-digitale-per-la-cultura-e-leuropa/>.

5. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

the locations where their work is performed, and to raise awareness of the need to protect local heritage.

- **STEP 2—Heri-telling (local heritage + storytelling)** to promote the territory and the unique local heritage by developing a web-based project—with local, national, and international scope—that collects stories directly from the creative people (who) and describes their activities (what) and the context in which the creative assets have been developing and evolving (where).
- **STEP 3—Education and training on local Creative Knowledge.** This step involves educational entities and the custodians of the local creativity to engage new generations of aspiring creatives into an intergenerational dialogue. Typically, the objective of this step is to activate interactive learning methodologies combined with the use of digital communication languages (learning-by-doing, hackathons, role playing, etc.).
- **STEP 4—Co-creation of resilient and sustainable models for local development.** This specific step solicits proposals from creative people, civil society, academia and local government to be undertaken in the territory. The proposed actions must satisfy the expectations of the territory (bottom-up approach), respond to the priorities uncovered during the initial 3 steps of the model, and be in line with the SDGs.

STEP 2 and STEP 3 of the framework require the use of the Creative Knowledge Platform to be fully executed.

## 2.2. The Creative Knowledge Platform

The Creative Knowledge Platform (CKP) is a web app that guides users on how to analyze a territory, how to highlight its unique creative assets, how to build a database of multimedia content (text, video, images, audio recordings) in one “digital library hub,” how to engage the practitioners of a local Creative Knowledge in telling their stories and how to lay the foundations for more sustainable economies that meet the needs of a community in a more equitable manner and keep them thriving in its

original territory.

The CKP activates and manages projects by preparing a collaborative web space where users can upload information about a specific subject matter remotely. The data collected is reviewed and published online by the owner of the project (project leader) using the platform’s publishing workflow, as described in Fig. 1.

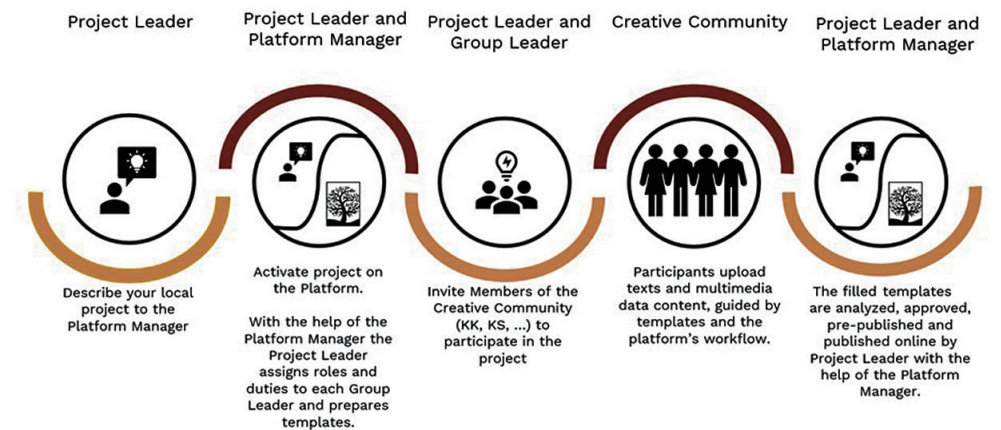


Figure 1. CKP's workflow and project management

CKP provides users the following outputs and tools:

- A Digital Library to house the multimedia content (stories, images, video, etc.).
- QR Codes to link a participant profile in the CKP to dedicated websites and social media accounts.
- Tools to produce interactive e-booklets and books.
- Geo-tagged and web-based interactive maps that link the geospatial data collected to territories and people.
- Knowledge Keepers' location and local points of interest (Around me).
- Tools to create and monitor hackathons built to make users and professionals discuss specific topics of interest for the territory.

### 3. Applying the THEFUTURE and the CKP

In what follows we will analyze three active projects where we have applied THEFUTURE and used the CKP tools to benefit cities and territories that are part of the UNESCO Creative City Network (UCCN).

The examples have been selected to show key takeaways that are in line with the objectives of the UNESCO Creative Cities (UCCs):

- 1) Contribute to the development of hubs of creativities and innovation, broaden opportunities for creatives and professionals in the target cultural sectors, and facilitate a community to discover and to appreciate its unique cultural assets (project “Hands at Work,” developed by CKF in partnership with Carrara UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art).
- 2) Integrate culture and creativity into local development strategies and plans (project “Artisanal Cheese,” developed by CKF in partnership with Bergamo UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy).
- 3) Provide practical ideas on how to participate in the life of a community and leverage its collective intelligence (project “Breads of the Creative Cities,” developed by CKF in partnership with Tucson UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy).

#### 3.1. “Hands at Work” and the “Carrara Declaration”

The collaboration with the Municipality of Carrara began in 2017, when the CKF prepared the dossier for Carrara to become a UNESCO Creative City of the Crafts and Folk Art and the first step of THEFUTURE framework (“Mapping the territory”) was completed with a presentation of a successful dossier to UNESCO and the printing of the first bilingual edition of the book *Hands at Work: Carrara Marble*.<sup>6</sup>

In 2020, Carrara UCC, in collaboration with the CKF and with the

6. ISBN 978-88-8341-679-8 (2017). A preview of the book is available at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/p0tia1ckdvytst1/Carra-Marble-Preview.pdf?dl=0>.



support of various local cultural entities, has decided to activate Step 2 of THEFUTURE framework (“Heri-Telling”) by announcing the prequel phase of the project “Hands at Work” and the preparation of nine videos and a documentary that describes the work of local artists and artisans and an itinerary to visit them.<sup>7</sup> The other two phases (local and international) of the project have the objective to map all the artists and artisans who presently live in Carrara and work using Carrara marble.<sup>8</sup>

Using the website built with the Creative Knowledge Platform and dedicated to “Hands at Work,” Carrara UCC and local non-profit organizations, active citizens and educational entities are helping local artists and artisans to tell their stories, describe their work, discuss the challenges they face every day, and share the opportunities offered by the unique cultural assets available in Carrara.<sup>9</sup>

The project “Hands at Work” has stimulated further investigation within the creative community and in 2021 the city has decided to activate Step 4 of

7. At the link <https://fb.watch/8OjqGy6sV9/> there is a preview of the full documentary prepared by the Carrara nonprofit association APS Oltre – Studi Aperti.

8. <https://ckp.creativeknowledge.foundation/view-projects/18:20/en>.

9. <https://ckp.creativeknowledge.foundation/view-projects/18:20/en?section=members>.

THEFUTURE (“Co-creation of resilient and sustainable models”) by engaging a local working group composed of artists and artisans (both experts and beginners), educational institutions (Accademia di Belle Arti, Istituto Gentileschi), civil society and local unions (Confartigianato, Confederazione Nazionale dell’Artigianato, Camera di Commercio, Club UNESCO Carrara, Istituto Valorizzazione Castelli, Gli Stati Generali del Patrimonio, APS Oltre), local foundations (Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Carrara, Fondazione Marmo), active citizens and entrepreneurs to focus on an in-depth analysis of the role of artists and artisans in the sustainable development of the city of Carrara.

From this collective discussion, conducted using a bottom-up methodology, the outcome was the “Carrara Declaration” that was presented during the “Creativity Forum” of Carrara (September 2021) and adopted by the participating Italian UCCs of Crafts and Folk Art.<sup>10</sup>

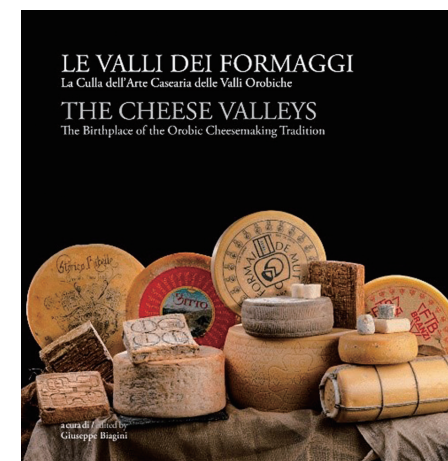
The next step is to share the content of the declaration to the other members of the UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art.

The application of the CKF’s framework and platform prompted Carrara’s government, civil society, academia, non-profits, and active citizens to:

- Be aware of the role of artists and artisans in the sustainable development of the city;
- Integrate creativity into local development strategies and policies (formal adoption of the “Carrara Charter on Art and Crafts” as a driver of urban sustainable development and the “Carrara Declaration” on the role of artists and artisans);
- Co-design further actions with local stakeholders to carry out the adopted policies and strategies. One example is the project “Carrara si-cura”<sup>11</sup> that encourages artists and artisans to live and work in the historical city center, both adding new creative spaces (showrooms, laboratories, etc.) and

10. <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/events/carrara-reunites-italian-creative-cities-creativity-forum> and [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid086fQP6AtakSozG7EDV15qzgitKmBVTkjmKxtmQkQuaWBGMYV9fi45ZahyH3TMz3U1&id=100603965306246](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid086fQP6AtakSozG7EDV15qzgitKmBVTkjmKxtmQkQuaWBGMYV9fi45ZahyH3TMz3U1&id=100603965306246).

11. [https://web.comune.carrara.ms.it/archivio10\\_notizie-e-comunicati\\_0\\_4136.html](https://web.comune.carrara.ms.it/archivio10_notizie-e-comunicati_0_4136.html).



increasing the safety of the area with added community participation in the life of the historical city center (events).

### 3.2. “Artisanal Cheese”

As it happened with Carrara, the collaboration between the Municipality of Bergamo and the CKF began in 2018 when the city decided to apply to the UCCN (Gastronomy cluster).

Considering the size of the area involved in the application, which included the Orobic Valleys, a mountain range spread over three provinces (Bergamo, Lecco and Sondrio), the CKF immediately set up a strategy and an operational committee to “Map the Territory,” prepare the dossier and use the CKP to collect the information to publish the book *The Cheese Valleys—The Birthplace of the Orobic Cheesemaking Tradition*.<sup>12</sup>

Local experts prepared the chapters dedicated to the historical context and the unique characteristics of the Orobic Valleys’ landscape, while

12. SBN 978-1-7346136-1-2 (2019). A preview of the book is available at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/coiurd2gsi2a1c/Preview%20Book%20%2B%20Ferdy%20Digitale.pdf?dl=0>.

knowledge keepers were interviewed and their considerations were recorded on why “... cheese is not a mere mixture of ingredients... or a set of tastes and flavors. Cheese making is instead an anthropological and cultural heritage, made of people, expertise and traditional practices that includes the continuous activity of men and animals, which have marked the time and the lives of the peoples of the Orobic Valleys years after years.”

In October 2019, Bergamo was nominated UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, and the Municipality of Bergamo, the Associazione San Matteo and the CKF initiated work on the projects proposed by the cheese community in the application, which included: 1) storytelling of the members of the local cheese value-chain (Step 2—“Heri-Telling”), 2) specialized education courses (Step 3—“Education and training on local Creative Knowledge”), and 3) the preparation of an application to define an agricultural district to support the unique local agricultural practices (Step 4—“Co-creation of resilient and sustainable models”).

The project “Artisanal Cheese”<sup>13</sup> was activated and one sample of each of the unique artisanal cheeses of the area was described.

Particular attention has been dedicated to preparing specialized education courses to make sure that the traditional gastronomical knowledge of the region is documented and transmitted to the next generation. For this reason, in collaboration with a local vocational school (the Azienda Bergamasca Formazione, ABF), CKF, and the Benefit Company KOOR a new specialized course—“Technician for the enhancement of products in the dairy supply chain”—has been developed. The course aims to educate technicians about the unique local knowledge related to the dairy production processes, and to support enterprises in:

- Developing new and traditional high-quality dairy products.
- Branding and leveraging the history and uniqueness of the local dairy products.
- Defining promotional strategies in line with the local tourist offerings.
- Using innovative (social media-based) promotion tools.

13. <https://www.artisanalcheese.org/>.

Another Step 3 project was developed by activating hackathons with local schools. The first event involved thirty-five students who were challenged to propose resilient ideas in support of two areas of the Orobic Valleys (Valle Seriana e Laghi Bergamaschi) in the post-covid recovery phase. The participants, grouped in multidisciplinary teams, discussed ideas, developed SWOT analyses of the territory and prepared business plans for new start-ups to make the area more resilient.<sup>14</sup>

The most challenging objective of the dossier is to establish a formal “Agricultural District of Bergamo and the Orobic Valleys” to protect the territorial identity and support the development of agricultural and food businesses. The district will be characterized by artisanal products that are consistent with the uniqueness of the Orobic Valleys and are of significant cultural and social value. The district project is a natural extension of the “Artisanal Cheese” project and the full application of the model (Step 1 to Step 4 are needed to substantiate the request to the central government).

### 3.3. “Breads of the Creative Cities”

“Breads of the Creative Cities” (BoCC) addresses the most challenging of the objectives of THEFUTURE and the CKP. BoCC is an attempt to fully leverage the Creative Knowledge not just of a homogeneous community (the one belonging to a single UCC), but of the ones belonging to the whole UCCN, with people characterized by different UNESCO-recognized creative clusters (Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, Music) and regardless of age, religion, gender, ethnicity and social status. Unlike the other examples, BoCC sets the goal of establishing an inter-cluster dialogue as its first objective. The second target, developed after several years of interaction with the participating UCCs, is the definition of “social cohesion” best practices, as we will see in what follows.

14. See a video of the event at <https://youtu.be/0xvYdnk9cWQ>.

Since 2018<sup>15</sup> the Creative Knowledge Foundation and Tucson, UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, have organized and supported the first (and only) UCCN all-inclusive inter-cluster project, now in its fourth edition.<sup>16</sup>

Probably the reason for its success derives from the fact that BoCC is inclusive by definition and simple to understand by any participating UCC, and the word that we use to describe the project probably makes it evident: “... bread is a symbol of fecundity and miracle, generosity and sharing... bread fulfills a specific function in social and culinary culture by providing nourishment and sustenance, and its methods of preparation and associated traditions are as diverse as the world itself.” After the first edition of the project, the organizers decided to extend the definition of “bread” to include “any local staple food that uses a local flour and plays a culturally significant role in the heritage of a community,” thus making participation in the project as universal as possible.<sup>17</sup>

Another important keyword that identifies the project is flexibility: the project format is adaptable to represent UCCs’ unique community characteristics, the ingredients used, and the techniques applied to making the “bread.”

BoCC has been evolving over the years from a simple project that required the description of the UCC participating, a description of the cultural significance of the local “bread,” the story of at least one baker, and the presentation of one bread recipe, to a more complex project. Since the 2022 edition we have taken under consideration the whole bread value chain: the farmer who selects the appropriate seeds for maintaining the traditional ingredient, the miller who grinds the grain into the required flour and the

15. The project originates from the “Days of Bread” event held in Krakow, Poland, during the UCCN XII Annual Meeting (2018).

16. “Bread of the Creative Cities” is inspired by the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity which states that “Respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of mutual trust and understanding are among the best guarantees of international peace and security.”

17. Many UCCs see “bread” as a product not typical of their culture, so the need to extend the definition and include all the uses of the basic ingredient of bread, that is flour, and accept any kind of flour (fruit-based, fish-based, grain-based, etc.) and any kind of preparation technique.



baker who interprets the tradition and makes it relevant to contemporary tastes and local tradition. The first major evolution of the project took place in 2019 during the XIII UCCN Annual Meeting in Fabriano, Italy, when the organizers were able to discuss with several UCCN members at a dedicated roundtable the significance of the BoCC project and what possible evolution we could give it. At the roundtable we received suggestions on how to be more inclusive and how to address relevant issues for the participants, including: addressing challenges that local bakers must resolve to stay in business; bringing bakers, millers and farmers into direct conversation with the BoCC organizers to receive full recognition for their work; and addressing social issues that are a priority to the participating UCC.

The result was the establishment of the “Bread Meeting” concept which requires that a member of the BoCC organization pays a visit to the bread-making community and acknowledges the work of the baker, the miller and the farmer with a certificate jointly issued by the CKF and the hosting UCC. The visit offers the opportunity for a direct interview of the baker, miller and farmer, and, when possible, to discuss issues on how to maintain active the local bread traditions. In 2019, several UCCs were visited in Italy (Alba, Bologna, Carrara, Fabriano), Mexico (Puebla, San Cristobal de las Casas),

Poland (Krakow), Turkey (Gaziantep), United States (Paducah, Tucson) using this approach.

The third recommendation from the XIII UCCN roundtable—to address social issues that are a priority of the participating UCCs—was more evident in the third edition of BoCC presented in Santos, Brazil, during the XIV UCCN (2022). Three social issues were presented and three different best practices to address them were suggested:

- 1) The city of Santos prepared a set of video interviews presenting students of “Fundo de Solidariedade,” a local non-profit dedicated to help unemployed women learn how to provide basic food for themselves and how to open their own bakery with the knowledge acquired at the school.<sup>18</sup>
- 2) The city of Gaziantep, Turkey, presented the case of how BoCC helped the local project of reintroducing the ancient “havrani wheat” into the local production cycle by giving international visibility to the farmer that the city had selected to cultivate the grain.<sup>19</sup>
- 3) The city of Denia, Spain, indicated that BoCC has offered the stimulus to create new local initiatives to restore ancient traditions that “play a culturally significant role in the heritage of a community.”

CKF and Tucson UCC are now preparing for the fourth edition of the project, which will be presented in Istanbul during the XV UCCN (2023). New highlights of the BoCC edition include:

- 1) The city of Istanbul, Turkey, wants to prepare a collaborative project with the seven Turkish UCCs and map the different techniques and significance of each local bread. One baker, one miller and one farmer from each of the participating cities will be invited to Istanbul to prepare their bread and offer it for sharing during the BoCC Roundtable. During the roundtable a topic of discussion will be “how breaking bread together can become a way

18. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54WTKUHZBuc&feature=youtu.be> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5S3Xr032I8>.

19. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKV1XoaF5rA>.

of building social cohesion.”

- 2) The city of Puebla, Mexico, wants to produce a manual on how to revive the ancient practice of stamping bread baked in communal ovens, and transform the concept into an opportunity to create a certification program to recognize bakers of each UCC that keep traditional breads alive.
- 3) The city of Jinju, Republic of Korea, wants to study its bread value chain characterized by a unique heritage grain, recently reactivated, and describe how the local community has been able to support farmers and millers in the process.

With the presentation of the BoCC editions we have indirectly highlighted how the project can be used to completely adopt the 4 Steps of THE FUTURE. Namely, BoCC uses the first concept of the framework by suggesting the participating UCC to study what is the significant cultural food made with a local flour (“Mapping the territory”), then we ask to interview members of the local bread value chain (“Heri-telling”), paying special attention to describing the local educational institutions dedicated to preserving the bread tradition (“Education and training on local Creative Knowledge”). Applying Step 4 of THE FUTURE has not been suggested until the current 2023 edition of the project, when we are asking new and previously registered BoCC members to describe the local resilient and sustainable model used to keep the bread tradition alive (“Co-creation of resilient and sustainable models”). During the XV UCCN the most successful models will be discussed and presented.

### 3.4. “Connecting Threads—Connecting Cultures”<sup>20</sup>

Building on the experience of “Breads of the Creative Cities,” the CKF wants to activate a new Crafts and Folk Art (CaFA) cluster project, tentatively called “Connecting Threads—Connecting Cultures” (CTCC), with a group of CaFA

20. To fulfill the objective of defining a participatory project, the final title will be decided by the UCCs that take the lead on the sub-topics of the project.



UCCs that have demonstrated immediate interest in discussing how threads, fibers and textiles are an integral part of their creative community and history. Initial supporters are Como (Italy), Nassau (The Bahamas), Paducah (USA) and Santa Fe (USA).

CTCC follows the same basic idea of BoCC, since it addresses a universal need of humankind, that is, covering one's body to protect it and obtain a sense of comfort. Threads, fibers, and textiles are combined into clothing that are a powerful representation of a culture or of a status of the wearer. Just as "bread" in BoCC is a representation of the culture of a community, so are "threads, fibers, and textiles." Like "bread," the use, transformation and preparation of "threads, fibers, and textiles" are "as diverse as the world itself."

Each participating UCC should address a specific aspect of the general subject matter. So far, we have received the manifestation of interest from:

- Como UCC to discuss how fashion can be considered a cultural heritage that is defined by tradition and creativity, craft dexterity, and practical use.
- Nassau UCC to discuss how straw has engaged and connected people (local and international) regardless of race, gender or age and has contributed to the social and economic development of many communities around the world.

To complete the initial working group, we would like to obtain the participation of UCCs that address the issues of "natural dyes for coloring threads, fibers and textiles" and of how to approach the "re-use of threads, fibers and textiles."

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this paper we have presented several examples of how THEFUTURE and the CKP can be considered a successful template for defining and managing projects that contribute to the interaction between cities and peoples, the discovery and appreciation of often-marginalized cultural assets

of a community, and the broadening of opportunities for creatives and professionals in a target cultural sector. We have tried to demonstrate how THEFUTURE offers opportunities to integrate culture and creativity into local development strategies and plans while at the same time preserving local traditions, increasingly endangered by homogenization on a global level.

The examples cover a variety of communities, regardless of age, religion, gender, ethnicity and social status, thus adopting in full the objectives and mission of the UNESCO Creative City Network programme.