



EURO  
CITIES



## KomKuK - linking up creatives

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# One-stop agency for the creative sector

Dusseldorf has pioneered a new kind of proactive support agency to enable the growth of the creative industries. KomKuK stimulates collaboration, activity, innovation and enterprise, simultaneously raising the city's profile as a creative force and citizens' quality of life.

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By actively inviting our creative industries to bring energy and ideas to the table for us to explore and enable, KomKuK is shifting the mindset of the city administration from controlling to collaborating and supporting in an open-minded way.

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**Lars Terlinder, director, KomKuK**

Dusseldorf's creative sector is worth billions of Euros - yet its financial success has not traditionally been associated with creativity. The city clearly has the potential to further establish itself as a dynamic creative hub. It is home, after all, to over 22,000 creative companies and entrepreneurs, many leading advertising agencies, seven fashion academies and a renowned arts academy. By 2015, realising this potential had become a priority for the city.

Dusseldorf was conscious that creatives found it difficult to navigate their way around council departments and were working in their own 'bubbles', missing opportunities to collaborate and ignite innovation. It was evident that high rents were hampering some creative endeavours too. Looking ahead, the city also saw that elements of the industry could become less dependent on location and infrastructure in the digital age. Creatives needing only a laptop and an internet connection are likely to be increasingly attracted to cities with highly visible and inspiring creative environments.

### Encouraging activity

To become a first choice city for creative enterprise, Dusseldorf created a new body that actively embraces, enables and stimulates creativity. The Competence Centre for Cultural & Creative Industries, KomKuK for short, was established in the Office for Economic Development. This unusual move signalled the intention to encourage and strengthen economic activity instead of simply providing funds for creative activity. KomKuK receives annual funding of €100,000 from the city and has a team of four whose size reflects its role as a facilitator rather than a programme manager.

cities in action

November 2018

where: Dusseldorf, Germany  
what: innovation  
when: 2015 - 2020

The team sees its purpose as doing what creatives and companies don't have the time, patience or budget for. In terms of the city administration this means guiding them through bureaucracy and finding new paths if need be. It means providing contact details for the right person for getting event permits or identifying walls for graffiti artists to paint. It also means spreading the word that this is the go-to team for people who want to find a collaborator or studio, set up a project or access services such as mentoring.



KomKuK is a really cool gateway to information and opportunities where you know everyone is genuinely interested in what you are doing and how they can help. It once helped us find a set up location for a multi-immersive virtual reality experience within just two hours and continually gives us amazing opportunities to present at international events and meet potential clients.

**Jan Thiel, creative director & co-founder,  
A4VR - The Agency for Virtual Reality**

## Building relationships

Strong networks among the city's creative, commercial and educational communities underpin everything KomKuK does. These connections enable it to continually team up with, and build bridges between, artists, event organisers, collectives, schools, venue managers, creative companies, technology start-ups and trade organisations to initiate, support or execute activities, events and platforms. The team's relationships with property managers and developers have also helped unlock vacant real estate and open the door for interim uses.

KomKuK is continuously involved as an enabler or partner in projects initiated by the creative community, ranging from festivals and lectures to concerts and conferences. These include creat|e|conomy a biannual event in cooperation with the chamber of commerce which takes participants behind the scenes of a creative hub for tours and talks to kick-start co-creation. There's also a Start-up-Week packed with 170 events including pitches, coaching and hackathons where KomKuK actively involves creative industries. Other formats include Metamarathon, a technology festival providing 42 hours of non-stop talks, performances, films, concerts, exhibitions and workshops on artificial intelligence.

By advocating free interim use of spaces, KomKuK has enabled small studios to be made available to individuals and large, post-industrial venues to operate temporarily, ahead of renovation or demolition, as galleries, co-working studios and live music venues. One former pub has been remodelled as Café Europa, where citizens can find out about the city's European activities over a cup of coffee. Vacant offices next door have been transformed into a popular location for cultural events for up to 200 guests, including exhibitions by art students and fashion designers and KomKuK's own third anniversary celebrations in September this year.



## Sustaining impact

The boost KomKuK gives the city's creative industry owes much, says the team, to its determination to quickly establish credibility. It invests time motivating sometimes sceptical city colleagues to greet creatives with an open, problem-solving mindset. It also immerses itself in the creative scene and maintains high visibility as the industry's champion. The team cites two other success factors. The diverse industry backgrounds of its four members, which brought pertinent new perspectives into the administration, and the sustainability enabled by the ethos of enabling progress primarily through competence not cash.

Now three years old, KomKuK is well established as the industry's one-stop shop within both the creative community and administrative microcosm. Its support has enabled hundreds of individuals and organisations to actively participate in the city's creative life and put creativity centre stage as an integral part of the city's economic identity. Citizens are always involved in the process or outcome of KomKuK's work. For example, 45,000 people visited the DoKomi Expo, a two-day gaming, cosplay and manga event. Project proposals have more than doubled since its launch and landlords themselves are now inviting assessment of their properties for use. So significant is KomKuK's impact that some say it now feels more like a movement than an administrative agency.

