

PRESS RELEASE # 3 | Prague, March 29, 2018

## Tech-driven innovation will help our cities, the conclusion of Prague salon by reSITE & Airbnb

*“The technology is pointless if it doesn’t serve people”.* This was the common ground of the salon discussion powered by reSITE and Airbnb that brought to Prague tech innovators and startup founders from diverse industry sectors coming from different parts of Europe. The second event of My City / Your City multi-city series attracted 150 visitors reaching beyond full capacity of the SmetanaQ Gallery.

### #reSITEsalon

*“Technology allows locals to connect globally and the world to connect with locals.”* Sofia Gkiousou, Airbnb

On March 27, 2018, reSITE brought together guests from five countries to discuss the future of technology in cities seeking to improve the quality of life in cities. **Rui Coelho**, Head of Invest Lisboa agency, joined us from Portugal, to speak from the perspective of a city policy attracting tech innovations. **Szilvia Walter**, Co-founder of EVA – Extended Visual Assistant, one of Europe’s Top 50 startups – came from Budapest. **Sofia Gkiousou**, Airbnb’s Public Policy Manager EMEA joined us from London. **Martin Pejša**, Founder of Creative Dock, represents the local startup scene that has overgrown the borders of the Czech Republic. The event was curated by **Martin Barry**, reSITE’s Founder, originally from New York and a relentless ambassador of creating lovable cities for the next generation.

### Major takeaways of the salon

Starting from the personal benefits of using new technologies in our everyday life and work, the discussion explored the positive power of technologies along with their economic potential. The people – the users of technologies, inhabitants of our cities and clients of smart services – were at the heart of the discussion. They are the ones who define the needs and desires, they are the ones who provide feedback, they are the ones who will benefit from their impacts. The technologies from tech

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startups respond to their desire of flexibility, simplicity, easy access, lower costs and sustainability.

Airbnb's policy manager **Sofia Gkiousou** pointed out that the company aims to bring together engaged communities in everyday life. **Martin Pejša** and **Szilvia Walter** stressed the potential of technologies to create healthier and more inclusive environments, by focusing on sustainable mobility, or by offering AI tools to those with disabilities that will give them independence and freedom. **Rui Coelho** added that supporting entrepreneurship and startups creates a tremendous amount of jobs. **Martin Barry**, the host of the evening, added that besides the social impact, we are interested in the spatial impact those innovations will implicate for the design of our public spaces.

#### **Innovation happens at intersections**

*"reSITE is not interested in just urbanism or architecture or policy or sharing economy. We are interested in all of it. Innovation, ideas and creativity really happen at intersections. They happen at the crisis points,"* Martin Barry opened the evening stressing the multidisciplinary approach that is crucial for finding sustainable and successful solutions for our urban environment.

#### **Sofia Gkiousou: Empowering locals and utilize our resources better**

Airbnb utilizes sharing as a tool for connection and creation of community and encourages people to be engaged daily. *"If there is one insight gained from company: the more people travel, the more they become understanding, tolerant, and curious about other people and cultures."* Airbnb believes that healthy tourism depends on providing diverse options providing benefits to the locals, which is one of the main reasons why Airbnb is growing. Sofia who is the Regional Public Policy Manager for EMEA of Airbnb pointed out that hosting helps many people to keep their homes in attractive cities like London or Prague.

#### **Creative Dock: Predict, test, decentralize and provide autonomy**

*"What is going to happen in the future, we cannot tell, but to find out, we test different options,"* introduced Martin Pejša, Founder and CEO of Creative Dock, the philosophy of his company based in seven cities that brought to life over 35 startups and converted ideas into business models with social impact. From being able to sell your own data to investing in home-installed solar energy panels and creating charging stations on your property, their portfolio includes a variety of projects currently in production that have one in common: materialize ideas that aim to bring autonomy to the people through tech.

By leveraging technology in the sharing economy and peer to peer platforms, economic power can be returned to the people. He stressed that tech can often cause a centralization of wealth, thus seeking creative ways to counter that by creating more personal autonomy through sharing is essential to creating a safe city. He predicts that B2C and C2C sharing

models will and need to coexist, giving an example from the shared mobility: *“B2C is more common for short rides while C2C tends to serve longer trips. Shared mobility will become more widespread when those two will become closer. This is very important to create healthier cities,”* he said.

#### **Unlocking new possibilities to upgrade the quality of life for millions**

Szilvia Walter, whose startup EVA develops a breakthrough tech solution for the blind and visually impaired as a wearable navigation tool, has a big ambition: *“We aim to erase the distinction between blind members of our society and people with vision.”* By enabling smart and safe urban mobility, she wants to offer accessibility to new places and the freedom of independence to those who are defined by fear to mobility.

Although the technology doesn't substitute the emotional value of a guide dog, it costs 60,000 euros to train a seeing-eye dog. AI it is much more accessible than the animal. Szilvia believes that the first wearable glasses developed by EVA could hit the market by the end of 2018.

#### **Speaking technology. And jobs**

Rui Coelho, Executive Director of Invest Lisboa, agency that is behind the prosperity of the Portuguese capital in the last decade, thinks that the massive growth in the sharing economy demonstrates a growing need for flexibility, simplicity, easy access, lower costs and sustainability. The innovative companies and startups – the business community – were fast in taking advantage of technology to the development of new business models in response to those new consumer desires. *“I consider myself very lucky: our intention is to create jobs. Support more and more entrepreneurship,”* he said adding another angle to the discussion. He also strongly believes in the need of collaboration and considers himself a huge fan of the EU. *“I know it's not sexy to say this but no urban challenge can be solved alone. Suddenly we are able to unite countries and negotiate things and there is no other way to move forward than this one.”*

#### **When it comes to innovation, all roads lead to cities**

**Martin Barry**, reSITE's Founder and the host of the evening, added that besides the social impact, reSITE is interested in the spatial changes those innovations will implicate for our public spaces and the way we design our cities. He predicts that the physical urban environment will change considerably when sharing and autonomous mobility will dominate.

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**Martin Barry**

Founder and Chairman, reSITE, Prague, CZ/US

Martin is a landscape architect and the Founder and Chairman of reSITE, a nonprofit organization exchanging ideas for more lovable and livable cities. A visiting lecturer at the Paris Sorbonne-University Abu Dhabi, Martin is also a co-founder of City Crew, a global design, branding and ideas company. As a landscape architect, he has led multi-disciplinary teams on urban projects in North America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. His projects at W Architecture in NYC have received dozens of awards. He is a Fulbright Scholar, a Fellow with the Design Trust for Public Space, and he was recently granted the President's Award for Community Service.

**Rui Coelho**

Executive Director of Invest Lisboa, Lisbon, PT

Rui Coelho is the Executive Director of Invest Lisboa, since its founding in 2009. He is responsible for the international economic promotion of Lisbon and support services for investors, companies and entrepreneurs. He kick-started the projects Startup Lisboa Business Incubator (Member of the Board) and the Reuse of Desterro's Hospital, amongst others.

**Sofia Gkiousou**

Regional Public Policy Manager EMEA, Airbnb, London, UK

Sofia Gkiousou works as Airbnb Regional Public Policy Manager. Based in London, she concentrates on Central Europe, the Middle East and Africa, working with cities to open the door for new forms of tourism and educate policymakers about the huge potential of the "sharing economy" for sustainable economic and cultural growth. Sofia joined Airbnb after several years in the energy industry where she was working as a Policy & External Relations Manager concentrating on domestic energy efficiency programs, renewable energy and smart data. Sofia's experience includes working with startups, helping them express their story to media and customers, and she continues doing independent and academic work on innovation and digital communities.

**Martin Pejša**

Fouder, CEO, Creative Dock, Prague, CZ

Before founding this international corporate innovation hub, Martin worked in large corporations – the last one was Vodafone where he acted as the business director leading more than 1000 people. Then he sold his apartment, took all his savings and founded Creative Dock with two associates. After 5 years on the market of building innovative digital services for corporations, Creative Dock has brought over 35 startups to the market. There are over 250 people working in Creative Dock in 8 countries.

**Szilvia Walter**

Co-founder of EVA – Extended Visual Assistant, Budapest, HU

EVA is an EU Top 50 Startup winner currently prototyping AI glasses for the visually impaired. Szilvia's startup represents a great example of social impact entrepreneurship by improving the quality of life of visually impaired clients. The AI glasses will be a solution for the 20 million visually impaired people in Europe. Szilvia's role is to support the

company in all financial aspects and fundraising, as well as business development. She brings more than a decade of experience in project financing on multiple levels, from SMEs to multi-billion HUF municipal projects. She holds a BA from Oxford Brookes University International Business School Budapest.

The discussion was moderated by **Linda Bartošová**, Czech Television reporter and anchor.

The event took place in the SmetanaQ Gallery space and the interior equipment was provided with the kind support of Vitra. reSITE Salons are a multi-city series open to social and tech innovators, policy makers, researchers, architects and designers, journalists, students, artists, cultural and municipal leaders, and everybody else who is concerned about a better future for our cities. Follow reSITE.org for announcement of the next volume.

WHAT: My City / Your City | Urban Tech Pioneers  
VENUE: SmetanaQ Gallery, Smetanovo nabr. 4, Prague 1  
WHEN: March 27, 2018, 6 pm – 10 pm  
INFO: [Click here](#) | FACEBOOK: [Follow the event](#)  
POWERED BY: reSITE,  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH: Airbnb

## About reSITE

reSITE is a non-profit platform supporting the understanding and synergies of architecture, urbanism, politics, culture and economics. It presents the ideas and projects of internationally renowned experts to professionals and to the wider public, through events, media and consultancy. For the past six years, reSITE became a leading voice in Europe in the field of rethinking urban planning, architecture and urban development, attracting political leaders of inspirational cities to its Prague's flagship event. Being a bottom-up start-up, reSITE connects leaders across disciplines and brings a multitude of side events, debates, film screenings, exhibitions and bike rides for the general public. reSITE was founded in 2011 by Martin Barry, landscape architect, originally from New York.

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High-resolution photographs are available upon request.

## About Airbnb



Founded in 2008, Airbnb is a global travel community that offers magical end-to-end trips, including where you stay, what you do and the people

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you meet. Airbnb uniquely leverages technology to economically empower millions of people around the world to unlock and monetize their spaces, passions and talents to become hospitality entrepreneurs. Airbnb's accommodation marketplace offers access to millions of places to stay in more than 191 countries, from apartments and villas to castles, treehouses and B&Bs. With Experiences, people can see a different side to a destination through unique, handcrafted activities run by locals, while a partnership with Resy provides access to the best local restaurants in selected countries. All of this is brought together in one easy-to-use and beautifully designed website and app.

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