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Renovating past mistakes

Of the more than 150 million people living in central Europe, nearly two-thirds live in cities that saw massive development during the socialist era, when concerns of cost and expediency often outweighed liveability. These cities may have run-down buildings, lack cultural diversions, and experience many other problems. ReNewTown's pilot initiatives seek to address specific needs of such cities.

Post-socialist urban areas can be found all over central Europe. While these cities might have been carefully planned, only a few manage to inspire local pride today. The problems of post-socialist cities and housing estates are not new, but they remain unsolved. To help improve old tools and develop new ones for this issue, ReNewTown conducted research in Chomutov and Ústí nad Labem in the Czech Republic, Cottbus and Karlsruhe in Germany, Warszawa and Kraków in Poland, Hnúšťa and Rimavská Sobota in Slovakia, and Nova Gorica and Velenje in Slovenia.

Pilot initiatives

The researchers gained an understanding of what makes an estate a success story or a problem area. Based on the knowledge gleaned from their studies, project partners developed four pilot investments in different municipalities: Nowa Huta is a former industrial town, built in the 1950s. It struggles with limited opportunities for leisure and social problems. The ArtZONA venue is an initiative to bring a creative buzz to this post-socialist area. ArtZONA is a popular staging ground for cultural and social events, with the

Every new initiative is welcome in Nowa Huta with great joy. ARTzona shows how space can be a link for people, ideas, thoughts, and actions for the local community.

Małgorzata Wirzechowska, journalist, activist for development of the Nowa Huta in Kraków

potential to host various types of activities. It provides entertainment and helps strengthen the sense of local identity. Velenje was intensively urbanised in the 1950s, due to local coal mining. These days its public spaces are neglected and exposed to vandalism. Through rejuvenating a playground between blocks of flats in Velenje, a pilot created an attractive public space that offers something for all generations. The project encouraged local pride and interest by involving the neighbours: Volunteers from the community donated 1,567 hours to do most of the physical work required. Prague 11, a district of Prague, is the home of the Centre for SMEs, which was created to support and develop local entrepreneurship in one of the largest panel-housing developments in central Europe. The area is struggling with unemployment and low commercial activity, and the Centre helps change this, offering a good example for other local governments in Europe.

Hnúšťa was once a prosperous industrial city but is now a shrinking city with high unemployment rates and hardly any attractions. The city's Museum of Socialist Curiosities in Hnúšťa transforms old socialist architecture into a new tourist attraction based on the local specific cultural heritage. The Museum helps to preserve the knowledge and culture of Hnúšťa's socialist period for future generations.

Databases and publications

Along with offering lessons learned from pilot initiatives, the ReNewTown project presents the experience and knowledge of related efforts undertaken during the past 20 years. This experience is available to everyone through online databases, which list good practices, initiatives undertaken and expert contacts. Major findings and solutions are explained in the final project's publications, including a handbook of models, a manual for urban revitalization and a strategy for post-socialist cities.

148

Good practices and initiatives described in the online database

1,567

Hours of voluntary work provided by locals aiding the pilot action in Velenje

200

Artefacts donated to the Museum of Socialist Curiosities in Hnúšťa

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Project: ReNewTown

ERDF funding: €1 271 020

Duration: 2011 – 2014

Website: www.renewtown.eu