

BRIGHT FUTURE

WP 5. Recommendations for alternative urban development of industrial towns

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General presentation

The guide for stakeholders is focused on the objectives, established through the analysis of the previous results, aimed at identifying social and institutional innovations in the selected case study towns. The main objective of the practical guide for stakeholders in small and medium-sized industrial towns is to contribute to the awareness of local issues and to create policies adapted to the problems and challenges that they are facing in the post-industrial era. An important tool is represented through actions and projects that support the local economy, finally determining the increase of the living standard.

The aim of this guide was to synthesise and highlight major challenges of the five towns case studies and to define possible ways to solve or reduce their negative impact on local development. In this respect, each team has made connections between local issues, proposed solutions and their viability based on concrete analyses, as well as interviews with relevant stakeholders. This allowed the cross-validation of the initial hypotheses and the exploration of future solutions for related implementation of projects that would solve the imminent communities' issues. It is worth noting the pressing problems within the communities, the development objectives (with special regard to the conditions conducive to the implementation of new social and institutional innovations), as well as the creation of adapted policies. The guide contains brief information documents for the stakeholders in each town, outlines the main issues they are facing, and suggests policy recommendations or policy implications.

The specific objectives of this guide were to: a) define relevant policies for alternative development strategies; b) propose institutional structures that promote the industrial redevelopment of the specialized towns; c) involve research and innovation activities in the redevelopment strategies of industrial towns; d) highlight the role of social economy and cultural industries in new urban development strategies; e) improve the public-private partnership for the implementation of new urban development policies; f) search for the most suitable ways to attract different financing sources for the implementation of the investment programs designed by the urban communities.

This brief synthesis of future policy recommendations for the studied towns, focused on the main issues faced by these urban places and possible implementation solutions, does not find its usefulness only at the level of the five analysed towns, but it can be a guide for towns that have similar characteristics and contexts of evolution.

Because of these analyses, it was found that urban resilience is interpreted differently from case to case, due to the diverse history and contexts that give rise to different problems over time. Although, at a first glance, it seems that most of the challenges are common to all five towns, there are differences concerning the evolution stage and how to eliminate or reduce them.

In the town of Corby (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), with an industrial past in the steel industry, jobs are present in a relatively sufficient number (compared to Fieni, Romania, for example), but many are low paid, low skilled and insecure. As a result, jobs that require a higher qualification and creative industries are needed attract young people to stay in the town. The town, with a growing population, unlike the other towns that are steadily losing their number of inhabitants, is facing some housing issues for those with low incomes. However, there growing attention at the national level to the prospects of this type of town. Towns in this category will be more prosperous from an economic point of view through the stimulation of the production activities, the well-being of residents, but also by the increase of social sustainability (through the involvement of all citizen groups and through investment in social infrastructure).

The town of Kajaani (Finland) already feels the effects of the social exclusion process and of the reduced involvement of the community members in taking initiatives and carrying out local projects. Discrimination and exclusion from the labour market and education, respectively the social barriers between immigrants and indigenous population, with repercussions over time on shaping the feeling of belonging, are issues that ask for solutions in the next period. In addition, the image of the town should be a priority throughout its visibility at regional and national level. Simultaneously with the still active Nordic welfare-structures, so called „do it yourself“

(DIY) attitude seems quite vivid and strong in Kajaani. This makes it difficult to recognize when the social exclusion is desired by the individual him/herself, and when it is a communal mechanism. Better reconciliation of individualism and collectivism meaning that while society takes care of most of its members, certain individuals have been left behind – unintentionally and allegedly by their own choice.

Velenje (Slovenia) supports a „greener economy“, based not only on the local industrial tradition, but also on the green energy and the image of a „garden town“. The care for the environment increased in the recent years in Velenje, as being a town with tradition in the coal industry and production of appliances. Also, another important objective for the local authorities is the (neo)endogenous, inclusive development, through the cooperation of all representatives of the local community, including the vulnerable groups.

Heerlen (The Netherlands), a former mining town, has developed a new brand to market itself as an experimental, creative and innovative urban centre of the region through activities aimed at attracting young people (musical festivals and events), a new project surrounding the station featuring housing and working spaces, and a mural itinerary for attracting visitors.

Fieni (Romania), nationally recognized for the cement industry, and formerly for the light bulbs industry, faces a series of economic challenges, which need to be currently analysed as future development opportunities. Many proposals focus on tourism and agriculture, in connection or not with the industrial heritage of the town. Some of the future projects to be implemented include the extension of photovoltaic panels, producing non-polluting electricity, and of smart street lighting.

The analysed European towns have in common certain values stemming from their industrial traditions, like the sense of belonging and solidarity, expressed through different means. For example, Corby proposed new solutions for the adaptation to changes in time, including efforts to consider the youth voice on their expectations in relation with the town in which they would like to live further (a Youth Council was proposed in this sense). Social solidarity plays a key role within this process: Corby recommends supporting community assets, while in Kajaani was decided the improvement of spaces dedicated to people interaction, social inclusion and public participation to actions for building a better future for the town.

The collective mentality of the local population frequently includes the presence of the glorious experience of the past (Kajaani, Fieni and Velenje). Also, the mentality of small towns with a weak cultural offer and reduced possibilities for spending free time (Fieni), together with the absence of tertiary education within these towns (Velenje), contribute to the intensification of youth outmigration.

In the post-industrial era, it is important to offer benefits to entrepreneurs in order to be attracted to invest in these towns: locational advantages – Fieni and Kajaani; additional support to SMEs and business incubators – Velenje; industrial heritage as basis for new local socioeconomic activities (Velenje and Fieni): spaces for companies, cultural activities, tourism and commerce.

There are also towns with problems regarding the insufficient use of the existing housing (Fieni and Heerlen). In Heerlen, citizens are involved in the public efforts to diminish the negative effects of this issue. The inhabitants play the key role, and not the municipality, as they are responsible of the innovations from their neighbourhood and they participate to the transformation of empty or abandoned spaces into projects, which respond to the needs of a certain street or of the neighbourhood.

For the implementation of different projects, the involvement of all territorial actors is highly important. The consolidation of the non-governmental sector is essential, as it plays a major role in social innovation. There are several models for institutionalizing social innovation, all of them generally involving the establishment of a public institute in order to connect NGOs with public institutions or with other external sources (especially European Union sources) for their financing.

A model of governance based on a participatory network of bottom-up initiatives could support many actions and urban projects. The Netherlands already offers a suitable environment for such an innovation, as more and more local administrations are reorganizing their internal structures in order to increase the visibility of citizen initiatives through adapting the government to citizens' expectations.

Kajaani: challenges and recommendations

Bright Future WP5 III

Juha Seppä & Simo Häyrynen

Recap of earlier research

- Interviews with 19 local representatives from various fields, e.g. administration, business, education, culture
- Analysis of the editorials of the biggest local newspaper, Kainuun Sanomat
- Analysis of the town strategy survey 2018 material (over 700 responses)
- Semiotic analysis of the townscape
- Series of three workshops held in Kajaani in 2018 (33 individual participants)

Recent work (Bright Future Project Work Package 5)

In Jan 31st, 2020 Bright Future UEF-team attended Big Friday, an entrepreneurship-themed event in Kajaani. Research work at the event included

- Panel discussion (5 participants) with local council members, ngo volunteer and city administrative
- Notecards were given out to event visitors who were asked to write their suggestion/idea for 'brighter future' in few words, 44 suggestions were returned
- Web questionnaire, 8 responses
- Informal discussion with people in the event (No official count but approx. several dozen)

Exhibitors in the event consisted local small and medium sized companies and actors from the fields of employment and education. In all, the event gathered around 1000 attenders. Alongside with research work, UEF team represented some of the preliminary findings and some recommended policies. Additionally, as a way of attracting discussion and publicizing projects' findings, a column series called "tehtaan jälkeen" (After the Factory) is published in a local newspaper, Koti-Kajaani, dealing with the themes similar to the issues studied in the Bright Future project. Abovementioned activity formed an interesting methodological setting for the final field research period; Especially in smaller communities' multiple sources of information and continuous publishing of results across different channels have generated fertile and manifold dialogue between the project and local people, and between different local groups.

Challenges

1. Participation and socio-public sphere: Civic passivity, exclusion and lack of diversity

The findings of the Bright Future study suggest that indifferent and passive stance towards the politics and decision-making is a focal problem in the local community. Kajaani had the lowest turnout (49,3 %) in the Finnish 2017 municipality elections, which also strongly implicates similar development. Besides voting, also other forms of political participation and civic activity opportunities are commonly perceived as distant and vague for ordinary citizen. Civic activity is mostly in the hands of few active individuals, that can also make involving off-putting to 'outsiders.' Furthermore, minorities and marginalized people are generally underrepresented in the public sphere and politics.

Social exclusion can be more severe than just neglecting formal political participation. Although descending unemployment rate (at present 10,6 %), there are many who live without any meaningful interaction with other people or the society. In this group challenges can be manifold: exclusion from labor market and education, mental health issues, substance abuse and crime.

In terms of diversity and discrimination, there are signs of increase of racist speech and intolerance and, according to recent study, hate crime rate of Kajaani is relatively high. This is a development that should be met with serious intention, not just for the sake of equality but for preventing the broader negative effects of intolerance to the town and the community.

2. Brain drain and depopulation: The young, women and educated out-migrate

With about 5 percent decrease since 2000, depopulation has been a long-standing issue for Kajaani. The question is not only about depopulation, but also who the ones are leaving. Young women moving away from small towns to bigger cities is nationwide development. It is not strange issue to Kajaani either, where there are currently 820 young women per 1000 young male residents. Especially for many students, Kajaani is merely a stop-by town with only temporary social ties. Social barrier between migrants and native residents can make attaching and rooting to the town difficult for newcomers. Overall, the young, women and educated people moving away is a recipe for unbalanced demographics with long-reaching effects on the town development.

3. Urban environment and townscape: Gloomy streets, scattered aesthetics and unused potential

The urban environment is generally found unappealing. Built environment is perceived bleak and walking and cycling conditions are poor. Shared view by many suggest that while there are visually pleasing elements in the town center area (riverbanks, architecture, historical layers), the entirety is disconnected, and good qualities lose out. There are also premises left empty in the town center that also effect the overall liveliness of the town center. The question of aesthetics of townscape is not just an issue of itself; it is interconnected to larger issue of the towns (self)image that can have repercussions to themes such as depopulation and labor market.

4. Expecting the giants: Unbalanced industrial-economic development, lack of skilled labor

Possibly as a heritage of the town's long history with forest industry and dependence on state support, there is a persistent narrative of greatness and big actors glimmering in the town's mental atmosphere that is eminent in the industrial-economic sector. In that context, the narrative can be simplified as oversized expectations of the "next paper factory", emergence of a global growth company that will feed the families and bring back the steadiness of the old times. Along traditional industries heavily dependent on natural resources (particularly mining), these expectations, that occasionally evolve to an overoptimistic hype, are generally directed towards high tech companies and ITC-based creative fields like game development. This unbalanced support might be disregarding to small and medium sized companies and less trendy fields of industry. It can, for one part, re-enforce unbalanced development in industrial and economic sector, for example skew the supply of skilled labor and generate male dominated outlook of the industrial sector and labor market.

Recommendations

1. Improving inclusion: Better(ing) spaces and places for participation, inclusion and social interaction

For common citizen of Kajaani, there are many official procedures and practices to express one's view and take part on public decision making. However, when developing social sustainable participation processes, assessment of the reach and significance of these policies is crucial. Therefore, in order to increase inclusiveness, the accessibility of said policies should take under critical evaluation.

However, while improving the existing procedures, developing new experiments and innovations to encourage democratic engagement is also recommended. New modes of participation and civic activity could include establishing concrete space for low threshold social interaction open for everyone. Meeting place could also generate collaborations and networks between NGO's and other actors.

Also, the concept of political participation should be reassessed and broadened, considering not only conventional forms of participation but looking towards alternative discursive spaces and neglected forums of public opinion expression. This can mean observing informal spaces and places of interaction and discussion, such as newspaper's text message columns (for example "Kuuloluuri" message column at local newspaper).

In big picture, more sensitive cultural analysis and intersectional approach that helps identifying structurally disadvantaged groups, has central role on the theme of overall inclusivity of the public sphere. In practice, overall visibility of the excluded and marginalized can be advanced, for example, by creating inclusive spaces for safe interaction, training officials and engaging professionals specialized in equality issues. Kajaani has long tradition on collaborative work on multiculturalism and immigration and it is also a pioneer in cooperation with the Roma community. This offers a foundation for furthering the work with other minorities and fighting discrimination.

2. The soft attractiveness: Easy everyday life, clean nature and distinctive urban culture

The suggested approach on tackling depopulation is reducing out-migration and focusing on keeping the already existing residents and attracting the people who already have a connection to the town (vs. attracting large amount of totally new residents). One of the key points for a town like Kajaani is highlighting the 'soft factors', such as easy-going everyday life and atmosphere, safe and clean environment, good basic services for families, offering of culture events and sports activities. Developing ways of social relations and ties to the town is crucial for re-enforcing belonging and attachment. Local field of culture and arts offers a rich resource for developing distinct and original urban culture that can have essential part on improving the town's attractiveness. Kajaani's peripheral location with Nordic seasons and the image of clean nature and environment can become unexpectedly strong asset in future's climate crisis strained world.

3. Urban environment and townscape: Experimental participation and creative cultural activity

The proximity of nature and water element hold unused potential in developing the town center more attractive. The use of empty premises can be solved with temporary and pop-up activities with collaboration with NGO's and collectives. Methods of citizen engagement can offer new views and ideas in developing the environment: This can include participatory methods, such as idea workshops and planning competitions, that can be supported with some type of small, informal reward for the participants. Essential resource on this theme is also local know-how on culture and arts in creating ways of developing more pleasing, lively and attracting urban environment.

4. Dismantling greatness: Perceiving industrial and economic policy as a complex and nuanced area of manifold of actors and narratives, providing agile solutions on education

Concrete means on shortage of workforce can include experimenting new, agile models of training targeted to industries and companies in trouble finding skilled workers and supporting small and medium sized businesses, for example easing the cost of business premises with targeted financial instruments. In big picture, it is important to evenly support of the attractiveness of industries across the field, not only currently trendy ones. In terms of education, diversifying the supply of particularly higher education, possibly re-launching of university level training. Overall, utilizing networks and collaborations between educational institutions, authorities and companies is encouraged.

In a larger scope, gender sensitive analysis of the male-dominated discourse of the industrial-economic sector could reveal valuable knowledge and increase overall resilience and adaptability of the whole community.

Dismantling the wider, underlying and unconscious narratives and mentalities and, in that way, making space for alternative standpoints is a complex issue with manifold of possible approaches. In the end, it comes down to analysis of context-specific situations and cases that can be carried out with multi-faceted collaboration with local actors and external professionals and institutes such as UEF.

Policy Brief developed from Roundtable Discussion

Corby Today

Distinct from the majority of other industrial towns in Europe which have experienced declining or stagnating populations, Corby has been proactive and successful in developing strategies for economic development and population growth, helping to reanimate and instill pride in the area. The growth of small and medium sized businesses in the town has helped improve its economic resilience and the implementation of a new housing-led growth strategy has seen the rapid expansion of the town through the creation of a series of urban extensions, contributing to the rich voluntary sector projects that have proliferated in recent years, responding to ongoing social challenges and driving cultural renewal. Partnership working has been critical for this sustained and large-scale regeneration.

Despite these successes, Corby continues to face economic, political and social challenges. While there is now a thriving jobs market in the town, low paid and insecure work has characterised many of the opportunities which have come to Corby since the closure of the steelworks, and the growth sectors of the local economy are vulnerable to automation. Poor quality work presents challenges for many residents, and lowers young people's aspirations and confidence. Corby also has a larger percentage of homes that are suffering higher levels of deprivation than the national average, with about 21.3% of children in Corby living in poverty.¹ New housing is also felt to be inaccessible and unaffordable to many long-term Corby residents on low incomes and there are also disparities in services, for example some secondary schools are thriving while others struggle.

On the other hand, Corby residents report strong sense of belonging and there is a vibrant tradition of social solidarity, linked with the trade union and welfare organisations associated with the town's industrial past. However, there remain concerns among residents and agencies that increasing numbers of residents from different social backgrounds could generate new levels of inequality and tensions between groups. Corby is home to many migrants, from Scotland and from beyond the UK and there are tensions around ethnicity and these could be exacerbated by increasing socio-economic divides.

The political landscape of Corby is changing as the town transitions into a new unitary authority, amalgamating its administration with neighbouring towns that have traditionally been socially and politically distinct. This puts at risk the institutional knowledge which the council has accumulated over the years and its close relationship with local organisations and residents, as well as tempering the voice and influence of Corby's residents over their local authority.

Corby will once again need to find ways of adapting to both the new needs and aspirations of its growing population and changes to the economic and political landscape.

In 2019, the UK Government announced the Stronger Towns Fund which may present an opportunity for change in the area. The Government's intention for this is to build more economically prosperous towns to '*create new jobs, help train local people and boost economic activity – with communities having a say on how the money is spent*'. There is also great potential for Corby to leverage this funding to create the conditions and enabling infrastructure for wider change which improves residents' wellbeing and enhances the town's social sustainability – such as ensuring resident and local groups are involved in decision-making, or supporting the town's social infrastructure.

To explore potential solutions to challenges facing Corby, a roundtable event was held in January 2020, bringing together participants from third sector organisations, council officers and members, and Northampton University. The discussion focused on three primary questions:

1. How can social sustainability be promoted alongside economic sustainability?
2. How to enhance the voice of local groups and citizens?
3. How can existing assets and initiatives be preserved and enhanced?

Five key themes were raised as a result of the discussion, which suggest new policy approaches to addressing these questions:

¹ Freeman, Emma. 2017. Equality Information 2017-2021. Available at: <https://www.corby.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Equality%20Information%202017.pdf>

1. Enhancing the voice of local residents and groups

There are proposals for a new Corby Town Council, sitting underneath the new unitary authority. The effectiveness of this could be boosted by a new community forum, bringing together different groups - business, community groups, and residents' groups which are representative of different sections of the local population, including migrant communities. There would be a question about how much power sits at each level and how their roles could be complementary, with the town council holding decision making power and administrative responsibility, and the community forum bringing together local voices and setting priorities.

2. Engaging young people

There is a consensus that effort needs to be made to hear from young people about what they want from the town. Ensuring voices of a wide range of young people are heard will involve several approaches. Among these, the creation of a Youth Town Council, a group of young people from the area who work with different services, organisations and the council itself, would make sure that young people have a voice in shaping and influencing decisions that affect their lives. Associated with this, a Young MP or Youth Mayor, could serve as an ambassador for the town and an inspirational role model for young people. Outreach among other youth groups through schools and organisations could also help bring in a greater diversity of voices.

3. Preserving community assets

As in many other places, Corby's community centres have been under threat as a result of public sector austerity. These spaces are central to community life, providing services, programmes, safe spaces and a means of engagement with and for the surrounding residents. Maintaining and strengthening what exists is important in preserving the town's strong social assets, the sense of belonging and social solidarity. One way of protecting what still exists is to designate community centres in particular as "assets of community value". The council could actively support asset transfer proposals and build community organisation's capacity and ability to take this forward.

4. Diversify the economy

Distribution and warehousing are important in Corby's economy, capitalising on the position of the town in the centre of England. However, many jobs in these sectors are low skilled, low paid and precarious, and are vulnerable to automation. There is a wish to strengthen the local economy by bringing in industries and employers from higher skill, more sustainable sectors. The creative and digital sectors have been identified as being a strong option for this. Improving the quality of work would give young people more options to stay in the town, building community capacity. Partnerships with nearby universities could be important for this, as well as using apprenticeships and training programmes to keep young people in the area and to increase the skills of adults already in the labour market

5. Creating a shared vision

Social and spatial divisions in the town are strong, and there are threats to its sense of unity and cohesiveness. As Corby's identity is often linked to the past, there should be a vision that people can unite around today, which helps create a new narrative around the town and provides a driving force for future change, taking account of recent and future change in demographics and the new unitary structure.

Policy brief // Heerlen



Creative spirit and bottom-up initiatives the key to improving the socio-economic position of post-industrial Heerlen

Following the closure of the mines and a period of swift deindustrialization, the socio-economic fabric of Heerlen dramatically declined, characterized by a period of widespread unemployment, high crime levels and rampant drug use in the 1990's. Today, Heerlen continues to struggle with challenges hereditary of this period. The retrieval of the mining industry generated a lack of a prospective strategy for new industries (mismatch between available skills and labour market, lack of jobs (primarily for highly-skilled persons). This further contributed to an ageing population and high percentage of welfare benefit users, as well as a number of empty buildings, few public meeting places and activities for young people. These challenges have cumulated into a lingering negative opinion about the town, internalized by residents who defensively articulate any display of local pride ("Heerlen isn't that bad of a place", "it really is getting better") and by outsiders who reproduce this narrative.

Thanks to policy interventions such as *Operatie Hartsлаг*, the drug problem in Heerlen has since been eradicated. Efforts to improve economic development occur on both a regional and local level. The city branding campaign *Urban Heerlen* aims directly to increase the livelihood in the city center and more indirectly, alleviate the negative reputation by inventing a new theme for which Heerlen can be known for. Activities geared towards young people, such as festivals and music events, as well as physical projects such as the new Maankwartier development and the mural route all aim to attract visitors and present Heerlen as the urban center of the region, full of experimentation, creativity and innovation. With the ambition to show concrete results beginning in 2020, the local government can learn from examples of social innovation already happening in and around the city. Most importantly, policy makers should be reactive, providing space for bottom-up ideas to take root.

Key challenges

- 1 Increase livelihood in the city center
- 2 Improve reputation as internalized by residents and reproduced by outsiders
- 3 Discover new opportunities for economic development

Policy recommendations for addressing key challenges

❶ In order to transform Heerlen into a more lively area, one possible solution could be the forcing of real estate developers and private property owners by the local government to actively find tenants for their housing stock, rather than letting it sit empty. This could occur by automatically changing zoning after a period of two years of vacancy. If necessary, the local government could employ coercive measures. The new and available properties should then be used for resident initiatives and start-ups. Heerlen boasts enough shops and restaurants. For this reason, space should be made for initiatives that are not primarily oriented towards consumption but rather with a focus on interaction and increased liveliness in the city center. Successful examples such as the ‘Gebroekerbos’ method, which consists of low-threshold support for transformations of (empty) public spaces into initiatives, should be modeled after.

❷ Interestingly, there is no mention of the industrial past in the Urban Heerlen bid book. Instead, ‘urban heritage’ focuses on the currently under-promoted Roman ruins found in the center of the town. While this is certainly an attraction in Heerlen that should be highlighted for tourists, the entire story of Heerlen, including the mining period and the years following, should not be forgotten but rather embraced. The act of ‘copying and pasting’ the urban theme is a risky choice. In doing so, potential creativity and bottom-up energy that are believed to constitute Heerlen’s urban identity and forces existing local traditions into a city branding framework. Rather than using the aesthetic and material opportunities offered by industrial heritage, the policy seeks to create this aesthetic without explicitly invoking the industrial past or its direct aftermath. Such branding campaigns might benefit from explicit recognition of and engagement with residents’ lived experiences, regardless of how negative a city’s past may be.

❸ A growing number of new

innovative organizations, such as the City Lab (currently being set up at the time of writing) and the smart services campus represent a steady increase in prospective new industries. Another quite radical innovation, which was proposed during a workshop with local residents, concerned the legalization of cannabis cultivation. Through legalization, a number of benefits could be achieved including increased tax incomes for local government, less spending on police

“achieving increased socio-economic opportunities is not only possible, but many of the elements needed for social innovation are already present in Heerlen”

force, and a safer and higher quality product. Linkages can be made with strong regional economic sectors: chemical industry, medical industry, and agriculture. Arguably, the skills needed to carry out the cultivation of marijuana are already present in the population and could be made profitable.

Enabling further social innovations

Past examples of social innovations in Heerlen were considered successful when they featured some type of connecting factor: contributing to a sense of community and bringing residents, the local government and other parties into contact. These innovations were also considered successful in the way they present Heerlen to the outside world, as a place worth visiting for tourists. Such innovations contributed to a growing self-confidence, self-consciousness, courage and entrepreneurial spirit for the residents of Heerlen, eliciting a “do-it-yourself” culture. Ideas for initiatives and activities generally sprout from residents themselves. These innovations are long-term processes; especially those that have already proven their added value should be able to rely on

multi-year structural financing. Key figures with persuasiveness power and broad networks are crucial to the success of social innovations.

If one thing is clear, there is no shortage of creativity in Heerlen. Many of the aforementioned challenges are already being worked on in some way or another, be it from the position of the local government or active residents. For this reason, it can be assumed that achieving increased socio-economic opportunities is not only possible, but many of the elements needed for social innovation are already present in Heerlen. One possibility is a new governance model based upon a participatory network of bottom-up initiatives could work as a solution to the larger problem of achieving increased socio-economic opportunities. The Netherlands already offers a suitable environment for such an innovation, as more and more local governments are reorganising their internal structures to make resident initiatives and participation more possible. It is no longer the citizens who are allowed to participate in government plans, but the government is asked to adapt to the wishes and initiatives of citizens. Heerlen could profit from the success of this new model, becoming a new type of post-industrial town that is highly advanced in terms of social innovations and serves as an example for comparable locales.



ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN VELENJE

Executive summary

Velenje is an important city in terms of economic strength, but it is vulnerable due to the global situation. Most research focuses on the problems of such cities, but in this research we wanted to highlight the benefits of towns with rich industrial and coalmining traditions. The main result of participatory research shows that industry is inextricably linked to socialism. Values originating from the mining work (reciprocity, mutual assistance) and later from the construction period of the city (shock work, volunteering) are positively expressed. The survey revealed the local knowledge of Velenje residents and their expectations about the challenges that future city strategies should address. Based on their local knowledge, we recognized three (social) innovations at the workshops: a fish farm, professionalization of the non-governmental sector and a mentoring scheme. Based on the research, we propose to the decision makers the following guidelines when designing future development strategies: 1) to take into account local knowledge and participatory process; 2) that the development is based on the existing industrial tradition; 3) to institutionalize the process of social innovations, which has a long history in Velenje.

1. INTRODUCTION

Velenje is a mid-sized town whose fate largely depends on two major employers (Gorenje business system and the coal mine), making it very vulnerable, as any changes on the global markets and the international owners can be quickly reflected in the city's shrinkage.

Most developmental studies of industrial towns focus on the problems, the shrinkage and the "limiting" factors. The BRIGHT FUTURE project, however, emphasized the innovative and pioneering character of a town that has a long tradition of social and technical innovation as a result of its coal mining heritage. This heritage can be an internal source and stimulus for solving the town's current and future problems.

The purpose of these recommendations is to familiarize decision-makers with the most pressing developmental issues and their possible solutions, as they have been recognized by Velenje residents in the framework of the participatory research in the BRIGHT FUTURE project. The residents are well aware that they cannot affect global economic flows, so the focus was to pinpoint the town's strong points that could help improve its flexibility and resilience to any future crises.

This kind of community-led research is extremely important, as studies have proven that

developmental plans are more successful if the local community is actively involved in the planning process and if the results correspond to their expectations and needs (Mahjabeen et al. 2009).

2. METHODOLOGY

The research in Velenje ran in 2018 and 2019 in two sections:

In the first section, we tried to grasp the way Velenje residents perceive the town's development and its key milestones. We conducted 33 street interviews with passers-by and 23 interviews with representatives of from the economic and the non-governmental sectors, the municipality, science and culture. These were used to (re)create the prevailing and alternative viewpoints regarding the town's past, present and future development and to determine the main sources and obstacles to this development.

The second section encompassed three participatory workshops that were attended by a total of 31 residents. The aim of the first workshop was to use the past results to determine social sustainability and the town's main developmental advantages and disadvantages. The second workshop was organized in order to pinpoint social innovation in the town and try to determine the

residents' need for them. A proposal of three social innovations that could alleviate the town's main problems was formed at the third workshop.



Figure 1: Snapshot of one of the three workshops.

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

VIEWS OF THE TOWN'S DEVELOPMENT

The interviewees highlighted three key periods that had positive and negative consequences on the town's development.

Construction of the new town (1945–1991): the positive values that stem from this period are shock work, comradeship, multiculturalism, a sense

of equality and solidarity. These values are now reflected in the numerous social practices, from the many (free) social services to the way the municipality operates. However, negative values still remain, such as a small-town mentality, which repudiates people's alternative views and is reflected in the elitism of established social and political groups.

Social-economic and environmental transition (1991–present day): a period in which the environmental movements caused the town to become "greener", even in the sense of education and innovation. The interviewees emphasize this period as achieving a better quality of life (air, lakes ...) as well as opening up the economy and the town outward while managing to preserve its fundamental social justice. One of the negative features of this period is growing ethnic intolerance (Albanian minority) and friction between immigrants and locals.

Vulnerable (post)industrial future: the interviewees emphasize the modernization of the

economy and the introduction of smaller companies as representing developmental potential. They see opportunities in the development of "green energy" combined with a tertiary research sector and further improvements to the quality of life ("garden city"). They are critical because they believe there is a lack of a universally accepted vision of the town and that the potential of higher education is underutilized. All of this leads to apathy and emigration, especially of the younger population.

The results of the first section indicate that the residents see the industrial heritage and the town's present situation in a positive light. The industry is inextricably linked to socialism, leading many to express nostalgic feelings towards that period. Positively expressed values are those that stem from coal mining (mutual help) and later from the period of the town's construction (shock work, volunteering).

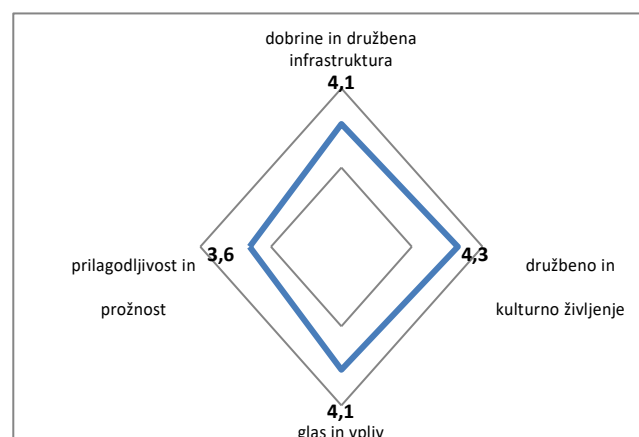


Figure 2: One of the workshop results evaluating social sustainability in Velenje (Tiran et al., 2019).

THE TOWN'S NEEDS AND THEIR SOLUTIONS (PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH)

We pinpointed three main future challenges at the workshops. The first is **Velenje's vulnerable bipolar economy** relating to the upcoming closing of the coal mine and the uncertain future of the industrial manufacturing (Gorenje). **The emigration of young, educated people** was recognized as the second direct challenge: jobs are in short supply for them and many choose not to return to the town due to its "small town" mentality and lack of an interesting cultural offer. The third challenge relates to the unclear future due to **the coal mine closing**, as this could cause many social problems.

At the last workshop, we discussed the best way to utilize the town's positive values to create so-called social innovations – innovations that could at least partially address the current and future challenges in Velenje, especially areas that can be impacted by the community (social, education ...). The participants formed 3 ideas or innovations.

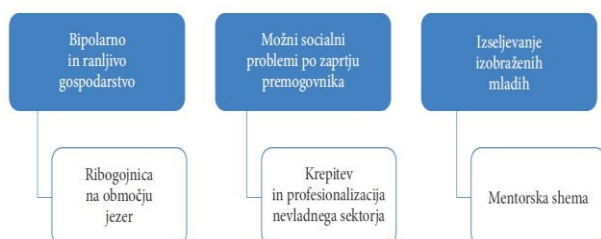


Figure 3: Workshop's suggestions for social innovations addressing Velenje's key challenges (Tiran, 2020).

Fish farm in one of the Šalek lakes is an interesting project, as it utilizes the endogenous resource (lake) and could potentially employ at least 80 workers, including less qualified ones. **Strengthening and professionalizing the non-governmental sector** builds on the town's volunteering tradition and solidarity, while also enabling the employment of young people with social science educational backgrounds and solves pressing demographical and ethical questions. The third idea is the establishment of a **mentorship scheme** as a financial-staffing mechanism in which older workers could mentor and educate younger ones who would then be more employable and competitive in the employment market.

The participatory research uncovered the local knowledge of Velenje residents and their expectations about the challenges that future strategies should address. The research is a good indicator that local values and the endogenous capital should be considered and incorporated into the design of a town's future development.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS

The future local developmental strategies and their concrete solutions (goals, measures) should be based on:

1. Local knowledge of the residents, which must be uncovered and integrated into the town's

contemporary social, economic, cultural and political programs.

Decision-makers at each level (municipal and state) should avoid uncritically "importing" developmental strategies and foreign concepts that are not adjusted to industrial towns like Velenje. The town's developmental strategies can model good practices on comparable successful industrial towns across Europe, but the strategies should consider local knowledge. This concept of (neo)endogenous development is inclusive and involves the cooperation of representatives of the local community (including vulnerable groups). We recommend the participatory approach for future developmental strategies, which should run from the "bottom up", in which representatives of the decision-makers are merely participants and the local knowledge (recognizing the challenges, problems and possible solutions) should be left up to the representatives of the local community. Special attention should be paid to activating the groups that possess the local knowledge, but are usually excluded from such activities (workers and retirees, representatives of ethnic groups, the youth, innovative companies and individuals ...).

2. Tradition; when developing the economy, it is sensible to base it on industries that have a strong heritage in the town (industry, coal mining, energy), diversify it and make it "greener". This should be based on the existing values of industrial labour and a collective conscious and should utilize the potentials of industrial heritage.

The decision-makers at the local level cannot impact the global economic situation, but they can indirectly affect the perception of traditional industrial/coal mining activities. This can take the form of further support to innovative SMEs (business incubator), social companies (strengthening the values of solidarity), as well as formal collaboration with higher learning institutions, universities and research institutions in both natural science (green energy and manufacturing, environmental engineering ...) as well as social science/humanities (sociological, spatial and other studies of industrial towns). The industrial heritage should be the basis for new socially beneficial activities (spaces for societies, cultural activities, tourism ...) and for

commercial activities (shopping malls, space rentals for conferences, business incubators ...).

3. **Social innovation** that effectively solves the town's current and future challenges; various institutions and civil society should encourage innovation and enable its development and expansion with financial mechanisms and adjustments to the legal framework.

The local authorities have the most actual influence on solving social challenges in the local community, which is why a system of social innovation should be encouraged or institutionalized. It is especially important to strengthen the non-governmental

sector, because it plays the greatest role in social innovation – it has access to global knowledge while also being familiar with the local circumstances. There are several models for institutionalizing social innovation abroad, all of which generally involve the establishment of a public institute that links non-governmental organizations and either publishes tenders for social innovations or pursues external resources (especially EU) for their financing. The role of local and national decision-makers is not only to establish a system, but also to actively include and consider social innovation when implementing it. The realization of such social innovations largely depends on the first two items in these recommendations.

5. REFERENCES AND USEFUL RESOURCES

More on this research you can find at the following BRIGHT FUTURE web-site:

<https://giam.zrc-sazu.si/sl/bright-future#v>

or at the official JPI Urban Europe web site: <https://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/project/bright-future/>

We used the following references in this document:

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ARRS

JAVNA AGENCIJA ZA RAZISKOVALNO DEJAVNOST
REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE



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WHAT FIENI CAN DO TO BE MORE RESILIENT?

FIENI – A HISTORY OF 50 YEARS OF URBANISATION

Fieni is a small post-industrial town, with a population of less than 8,000 inhabitants, situated in the south part of Romania, in Dâmbovița County. Until the development of industry in the XXth century, the town functioned based on commercial and agricultural activities. The industrial economic development started in the third decade of the XXth century, with the cement and light bulbs industries which lead to continuous changing of the economic structure and occupations of the inhabitants. In 1968, this small community becomes an urban area. The two industries were emblematic for the development of the settlement until 1990, the cement factory offering jobs for the male workforce, and the light bulbs factory for the female one. In 1992, 81.17% of active population is registered in industry. The deindustrialisation started in 1990 in Romania affected the town of Fieni, too. Nowadays, the light bulbs industry is no longer active. The local industry is represented by the cement and lime industries, but the town is facing the negative effects of population migration (ageing, shrinking etc.).

RESEARCH METHODS

- *Qualitative methods (2018-2020):* street interviews (population); planned interviews (3 focus groups - local authorities, local entrepreneurs and NGOs); workshops.
- *Quantitative methods (2017-2019):* statistical data and analysis.
- *Research questions:*
 1. What are the alternative views on the (post) industrial development?
 2. What is the population perception about Fieni and how do they see the perspectives of its future development?
 3. What are the socio-economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks for Fieni?
 4. How is the collective heartbeat?

General ideas and interpretations for Fieni:

MAIN PROBLEMS faced by the town and which may limit its development are linked to: lack of jobs; poor valorisation of the products obtained in animal husbandry (milk, wool); small number of areas for leisure and sociocultural activities; air pollution.

KEY CHALLENGES

- ✚ Solid cooperation between territorial actors for social cohesion;
- ✚ More developed public spaces and strong infrastructure & services (educational, medical and cultural ones) to boost local economy;
- ✚ Development of bio-agriculture, as an economic alternative activity;
- ✚ Creating of new friendly environment for future developments of industrial sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

1 Solid cooperation between territorial actors for social cohesion

HOW TO DO: *The communication barriers between different territorial actors should be eliminated by guarantying social cohesion, improving the cooperation and building a social solidarity through the cooperation of all economic actors. But how?*

- ❖ Establishing more collaborative activities between local authorities and entrepreneurs for joint projects;
- ❖ Increasing the visibility of NGOs as actor of development and vector for volunteering;
- ❖ Promoting innovative forms of cooperation in different fields (e.g. tourism, agriculture etc.) as strong point of new local strategies;

- ❖ Establishing a real dialogue between generations for community' cohesion;
- ❖ Encouraging young community participation in local actions;
- ❖ Promoting social economy as a cohesion tool;
- ❖ Involving young people, adults and the elderly population in a synergetic way;
- ❖ Exceeding the limits imposed by mentalities;
- ❖ Encouraging of young's initiatives for pushing a new urban development.

2 More developed public spaces and strong infrastructure & services (educational, medical and cultural ones) to boost local economy

HOW TO DO: *Providing functional services and public spaces suitable for all population is mandatory for the conservation of the local identity. The intervention ways could rely on:*

- ❖ Increasing the number of public spaces, through a uniform territorial distribution;
- ❖ Providing suitable equipment for all types and ages of users;
- ❖ Creating a new local authority's mentality on public spaces as ideas' generator;
- ❖ Adapting public spaces, as catalyst of local initiatives;
- ❖ Promoting public spaces as a tool for a better quality of life;
- ❖ Creating a diversified and accessible cultural infrastructure;
- ❖ Providing cultural endowments suitable for all age groups;
- ❖ Adapting on a permanent basis cultural policies and programmes;
- ❖ Having an innovative approach in supporting cultural initiatives;
- ❖ Valorising the knowledge and skills of local traditional practices;
- ❖ Reconsidering cultural heritage as an economic value;
- ❖ Improving the medical and educational infrastructure;
- ❖ Providing sufficient medical and education staff;
- ❖ Creating health care facilities for the elderly;
- ❖ Supporting children coming from low-income families;
- ❖ Promoting vocational courses and new teaching methods.

3 Development of bio-agriculture, as an economic alternative activity

HOW TO DO: *The tradition in agriculture may be an advantage in the development of Fieni. Future actions and projects may be considered in:*

- ❖ Preserving traditions in plant culture and animal breeding;
- ❖ Encouraging the association of agricultural individual producers and farmers;
- ❖ Developing a virtual market platform for farmers;
- ❖ Collaborating with other digital county platforms promoting local agriculture;
- ❖ Creating an informative blog for farmers;
- ❖ Exchanging experience with other agricultural producers in the country and abroad.

4 Creating of new friendly environment for future developments of industrial sector

HOW TO DO: *In the post-industrial times, the attention must be directed to the development of new industries, alongside the traditional ones, environmentally friendly and based on technology, via:*

- ❖ Re-evaluating resources;
- ❖ Defining and applying a new industrial strategy;
- ❖ Improving local legislation and financial support;
- ❖ Increasing industrial diversification, including smart specialisations from industry 4.0;
- ❖ Developing craft industrial activities;
- ❖ Improving environmental monitoring of the cement and lime enterprises.

HOW CAN HELP SOCIAL INNOVATIONS?

The social innovations developed during the time in Fieni relied on the experience gained mainly in agriculture.

Proposals for future social innovations:

1 Agriculture and entrepreneurship:

- A digital platform for the local agricultural producers could provide a relatively low-cost way for local producers to promote their products, support animal husbandry and provide employment options for local residents;

- ▶ Development of the Islaz Costești area: tourism, riding, recreation, amusement park with zip line, shooting with bow, sleigh track, etc.;
- ▶ Collecting organic products from locals and selling online to potential buyers from large cities;
- ▶ Investments in agrotourism, organic products, with hiking in the area and other forms of fun and recreation;
- ▶ Rent of commons pastures to animal breeders organized in microfarms, with extension on agrotourism and bio products;
- ▶ Establishment of plantations of walnuts, acacia, lindens and marketing of products in parallel with beekeeping development.

- 2 Museum of the town: a museum about local history and traditional crafts could generate new jobs;
- 3 Re-organisation of the owners' associations in the residential areas; following the emigration of many residents the existing owners' associations for apartment blocks in Fieni were dissolved due to a lack of resources and participation. These associations played an important role in community activities and maintenance. It was suggested that these associations should be restarted with an appropriate structure for the town's smaller population.

Other ideas for social innovations:

- ▶ Smart street lighting;
- ▶ Tourism organized on predetermined routes in the area of interest: Târgoviște, Bucharest, Prahova Valley, Brașov;
- ▶ Rent of spaces owned by the City Hall for economic activities;
- ▶ Collaboration with locals that leave today abroad to attract tourists from Spain, Italy, Germany, Israel etc.;
- ▶ Implementation of some projects with photovoltaic panels producing clean energy.

Attention to obstacles in achieving future social innovations: absence of a tradition in social innovation; weak community cohesion; institutional, legislative, financial or technical obstacles.

Strengths for social innovations:

- local resources and values;
- tradition in agriculture and industry.

TO KEEP IN MIND FOR THE FUTURE! There is a real need for public debates on different issues of the community.

More information on this research can be found at the following BRIGHT FUTURE web-sites:

<https://bright-future.unibuc.ro/>

<https://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/project/bright-future/>

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