



WP4 team report: Identifying social and institutional innovations in industrial towns: Case study town of Velenje, Slovenia

Authors: *Jernej Tiran, David Bole, Primož Gašperič, Jani Kozina, Peter Kumer, Primož Pipan*

Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Anton Melik Geographical Institute

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1. Introduction

The aim of this team report is to present the working process and results within WP4 with an objective to identify social and institutional innovations in industrial towns (Velenje in the case of Slovenia), which can boost the transformation or “reinvention” of those kinds of towns across Europe. WP4 builds on data gathered in WP3, namely the transitions, specificities and narratives of industrial towns – they were included as the input of social sustainability assessment (T4.1), which was the groundwork for searching for practical solutions that would help to solve the most pressing developmental and societal issues in the town.

i. Overview of WP3 findings and relationship to WP4 themes

The WP3 work in Velenje was three-fold: to make a historical overview of the (post)industrial development of case study towns (T3.1), to analyse industrial-town semiotics (T3.2) and to reveal locals’ narratives through the implicit and unwritten side of industrial tradition and/or transition (T3.3). The results were also used as the groundwork for WP4.

Within the historical overview (T3.1), we found that Velenje is a young town with a deeply rooted mining, industrial, and working class tradition, which also determines the culture and values of its inhabitants. They identify with the town very strongly, which is also reflected in the development of a unique and diverse cultural scene and pride over the town’s history and achievements in the socialist period, indicating a high level of social sustainability.

This pride is in a way also reflected in industrial semiotics (T3.2); we uncovered that the industrial and socialist tradition in Velenje are conveyed to visitors and inhabitants through material and immaterial symbols in a very positive sense. Lately, there have been signs that municipality officials are trying to adopt a new narrative, increasingly orientated towards emphasising the innovative and technological aspects of this community and the high quality of the local environment, while industry, despite its dominant position in the town, is being omitted from official documents. Restructuring the economy is in a way logical, as the dependence on two major companies makes the town less resilient to economic shocks.

Within the analysis of locals’ narratives (T3.3), we found that the collective memory is what is preserving socialism in a positive light, especially from the viewpoint of the values that once strengthened social cohesion and built an effective and innovative economy. Equality, multiculturalism, mutual respect and solidarity continue to persist to a large degree today and have been transferred to modern sociocultural practices, such as the institutionalization of certain volunteering activities and the non-governmental sector and municipal support to services and social activities, all of which create a solid ground for developing social innovations. The transition period was characterized by the introduction of the Western capitalist mentality, which had numerous positive effects on the economy and the environment, but it also affected the disintegration of once stronger social ties. One of the hidden narratives includes political ideologization, rooted in an undemocratic past and still present in the entanglement of politics with ideological questions and an overpolitization of social life, as well as a fear or intelligentsia. This could diminish the power of the inhabitants to take control over their town on one hand and “force” young educated people to leave the town on the other hand, which was examined in detail in WP4.

All these findings were used as an input for a social sustainability assessment and also indicated a rich history of local social innovation, the town’s main needs and challenges and potential to develop new social innovations that could help the town to tackle societal issues and overcome an uncertain future.

ii. State of the art: national context and trends in social innovation

The foundation for social innovation has always been present in Slovenia, although there has so far not been any extensive projects documented at the national level. There has also not been any overviews or historical research on social innovation in Slovenia (Novak 2018). According to the Social Innovation Community, social innovations in Slovenia are in their early stages (Social Innovation Community 2019). However, the field of social responsibility and innovation is clearly present in the Slovenian legislative and strategic framework. The Slovenian Development Strategy 2030 (Government... 2017) has “a decent life for all” set as the third developmental goal and envisioned measures to strengthen cooperation, solidarity, and volunteering, also by promoting social innovations. In the sixth developmental goal, “Competitive and socially responsible enterprise and research sector”, the strategy mentions innovation, but the latter relates only to enterprises and research centres. Similarly, the Research and Innovation Strategy of Slovenia 2011–2020 states that non-technological innovations are important (Ministry... 2011a). Slovenia has also adopted the Social Entrepreneurship Act (Ministry... 2011b), which defines the term and goals of social entrepreneurship.

Despite the relatively solid legislative and strategic framework, supporting organizations and mechanisms for developing social innovation in Slovenia are very underdeveloped. In addition to some public funds and foundations that are not specifically oriented toward social innovation, the Social Entrepreneurship Act (Ministry... 2011b) was adopted in 2012, which blazed the way for the first social incubators and related supporting services for social innovation, although a sufficient financial support and investment are still sorely lacking. There are quite a few companies, organizations, and individuals in Slovenia that act in a socially innovative way, without presenting their activities as such. Generally, social innovations have been historically rooted in the civil sector, which has always been tasked with filling the gaps in national and commercial activities in the area of social well-being (Bulajič 2012).

We can now notice an increasing popularity of social innovation in Slovenia. The most visible evidence is the number of responses submitted to different calls and tenders for funding from public sources (national and local). Public authorities are supporting social innovation by often listing it as a key selection criterion in such calls. The social innovation projects solve a range of problems in Slovenia. The most common are: long-term and youth unemployment, poverty and social inequalities, inclusion of marginalised groups such as Roma, need for technological social innovations, ageing population, deterioration of human health and environment, striving for a fair and ethical society (Novak 2018). In 2012, an annual contest on social innovation was launched, organized by various partners as a private financial fund for financing and developing social entrepreneurship and social innovation (Fund 05). In 2015, Slovenia, backed by the European Investment Bank, hosted the Social Innovation Tournament, which is indicative of certain shifts and movement in the field (Babič and Dabič Perica 2018).

2. Methods

i. Details of WP4 process as conducted in case study town

During the work in WP4, we followed the methodological framework prepared by Social Life in August 2018. Within the **social sustainability assessment**, we firstly encompassed the **data collected in previous work packages** on the case study town, such as:

- desk-based research on how the industrial history of the case study town has shaped the local mentality, local culture and/or civil society (T3.1),

- observation of the physical 'landscape', cultural exhibitions, places of tourist and cultural consumption (T3.2),
- 33 short interviews with local people on the streets of Velenje on the general perception of everyday life in the town (T3.3),
- 19 planned semi-structured interviews about the dominant and hidden narratives with the local representatives of the public authorities, enterprises, civil society, and science and culture professionals (T3.3).

Once the data was reviewed, we carried out a **gap analysis** to understand which information were missing. Filling the gaps in knowledge was executed with:

- up-to-date administrative data on population, employment, education, ethnicity, migration, social life, crime and voter behaviour, gathered from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia. The data was mostly available at the municipal level.
- 11 additional, mostly "ad-hoc" interviews with representatives of the public authority, enterprises, civil society and educational institutions.
- a short questionnaire that was forwarded to the heads of 19 town districts, mostly to gain a deeper insight into the theme "Voice & influence" where the highest number of knowledge gaps was identified (4 town districts responded to our inquiry).
- an analysis of local news sources and social media for current issues in the town. Additional documents, strategies and other available literature were also studied.

After the initial social sustainability assessment was done, it was verified by the local stakeholders. A series of 3 workshops was organized, entitled "*Velenje Towards a Brighter Future*" to indicate the relation with the project and to additionally motivate the participants by presenting the workshops as important for the town's future. Based on the stakeholders who had already been engaged by interviews in WP3 and having in mind the main objective of WP4, we identified 25 potential participants from the public authorities, local economy, civil society and academia. As some participants refused or were not able to cooperate in the later stages, we contacted additional ones. We hired the PiNA Association for Culture and Education as an external facilitator to help us run the workshops, as they have a lot of experience in the participatory process and are also familiar with social innovation. The workshops were held on 7th November 2018, 13th February 2019 and 3rd April 2019 at 4:30 PM in a small hall in Rožle Villa, a house in Velenje's main urban park owned by the state and operated by a regional NGO, providing a neutral place and relaxing atmosphere. The first workshop was devoted to the verification of our initial social sustainability assessment, the second one to explore the history of local social innovations and identify the town's main challenges and needs, while the third one identified the possible practical solutions to solve the town's key issues. All the workshops started with an introduction and an ice-breaker exercise and lasted three hours including a short break. The participants were also asked to evaluate the process in the end.

ii. Workshop participants

Workshop 1 was attended by 17 participants, while workshop 2 & workshop 3 were attended by 12 participants. In total, 31 people attended at least one workshop. Only 3 people attended all 3 workshops, 13 people attended 2, and 15 only participated at 1 workshop. Regarding the structure of the participants, civil society strongly prevailed (NGOs, local inhabitants, cultural sector, ethnic minority society ...) over the others (Figure 1). Attracting the participants was very difficult. Many

people who had proven to be experts with creative ideas in workshop 1 were missing at the 2nd and the 3rd and new people had to be invited instead.

Figure 1: The structure of the external participants in the workshops in Velenje.

sector	workshop 1 (social sustainability)	workshop 2 (history of local social innovation)	workshop 3 (practical solutions)
civil society	6	6	4
education	3	0	2
economy	3	2	2
local authorities	1	2	1
culture	1	2	2
academia	3	0	1
total	17	12	12

3. Social sustainability assessment

i. Final assessment

The social sustainability assessment was done in accordance with the framework of social sustainability and the WP4 Method Guidance developed by Social Life, divided into four themes and further divided to key dimensions and questions. The taken methodological steps were 1) **the data review** phase, in which we encompassed the data collected in previous work packages on the case study town (desk-based research, observations, street and planned interviews), 2) **a gap analysis** (secondary data, additional “ad-hoc” interviews, short survey, local news sources), and 3) **participatory workshop** with local stakeholders, at which the results of the assessment were reviewed.

The social sustainability assessment resulted in a matrix with 15 key strengths and 10 key weaknesses across four themes, illustrated in the Figure 2. The overall scores were given based on the ratio between the number of strengths and weaknesses and a comparison to other Slovenian (industrial) cities and towns. The results showed that Velenje can be marked as a socially sustainable town, as it was assigned the highest or the second highest score on a three-level scale in three of four themes. the town features many high-quality amenities and social infrastructure, offers solid opportunities for the residents to participate in civic life and have some control over the town, and extensive and diverse social relationships. The biggest challenge for Velenje in the future seems to be its adaptability and resilience, especially its capacity to react to changing economic circumstances and the quality of local work opportunities. The situation here is somehow polarised: on the one hand, the town has already started to diversify its economic base, while on the other hand, it still has a very vulnerable economy due to the dependency on two major companies.

ii. Discussion of the SS assessment

The social sustainability assessment seemed to be a very useful and appropriate starting point for identifying social innovation in the local/national context and in the context of industrial towns in general. The framework was also well-accepted by the workshop participants. Dividing such a diverse area into four themes seemed reasonable and with the methods used, we were able to assess almost all of the elements.

From our experience, the methodological framework could be improved a bit, removing overlaps of certain elements between themes (Voice & Influence and Adaptability & Resilience), adding certain elements (e.g. possibilities for leisure/cultural scene), and changing the title of the theme “Social and cultural life”, as it is very much focused on social life and community relations, while none of the elements in the matrix asked about cultural life in particular. Finally, we propose that the assessment procedure is made to be more objective, quantitative, and comparable: each element within a respective theme could be assessed on a numeric rating scale, e.g. a 5-point scale. In addition, the elements could be ranked based on their perceived importance (by researchers or by workshop participants). In our opinion, such an approach would provide a more accurate and solid background for further local development and also ease the comparison between the case study towns.

Figure 2: Final matrix of the social sustainability assessment.

	Key strengths	Key weaknesses	Assessment (strong/weak/expected)
Amenities & social infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity and quality of educational institutions up to the university level, including adult education • Ubiquitous support for culture • Quality public space and community facilities • Support for vulnerable groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a fragmented higher education • The transport system is based on the car instead of on walking, cycling and public transportation 	STRONG
Social & cultural life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community cohesion, intercultural cohabitation • Core values: mutual aid, solidarity, social equality, tolerance • Strong local identity and sense of belonging • High quality of urban life (residential quality, low crime rates, sense of safety) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing intolerance toward recent immigrants • Lack of integration among the Albanian community 	STRONG/EXPECTED
Voice & influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of trust and collaboration between the municipality, economy and civil society • Established mechanism for participation and submitting citizen suggestions • Developed forms of participation as the legacy of a collective social conscience and identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Excessive) role of political affiliation in decision-making processes • Decreasing influence of the local community on the town development due to the diminished social responsibility of companies 	STRONG/EXPECTED
Adaptability & resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity and innovativeness of the younger population and their responsiveness to new technologies • Available space for new settlements, economic activities and green areas • Lately, foundation of new, smaller, and diverse companies • Great potential in tourism development for future economic diversification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bipolar and vulnerable economy: dependency on two major companies • Unclear future after the coal mine closure • Out-migration of the educated young population • 'Miners' mentality': closed society, clientelism, fear of intelligentsia 	EXPECTED (POLARISED)

4. History of social innovation

i. Examples of social innovations explored during the workshop, or others researched by the teams

By conducting our own research¹ on the case of Velenje from 1945 to the present day, we recognized 14 practices, services, and organizational forms that can be categorized as social innovations. They were presented to the participants at the 2nd workshops and were amended by a further six (Figure 3). Then, four selected innovations were further examined and their protagonists were interviewed on the aspects of innovation, necessary resources, initiators, and involved stakeholders, which helped us understand their formation, reasons for success, and social advantages. These innovations were 1) urban gardening, 2) environmental movement, 3) well-developed volunteering, 4) revitalizing one of the degraded industrial objects.

We have determined that all the innovations have the common trait of extremely close and fruitful collaboration among everyone involved, especially the civil society-local authorities relationship, which has not changed despite the changes to the political-social system and the threat of neoliberalism. The only element that has adopted a lesser role is the coal mine, which had been working closely with the municipality in the socialist period to invest into local development (gardening area, recreation infrastructure, etc.). Velenje's reputation for good internal collaboration and strong dialogue were also confirmed by the interviewees in the WP3. The local "climate" is therefore positively inclined to creative ideas, finding solutions to common problems, and lastly, creating social innovation, which is certainly a good forecast for reacting to any possible shocks and crisis situations in the future.

Figure 3: List of recognized social innovations in Velenje.

Type	Social innovation	Year of establishment
New practise	Shock work	1945
New practise	Construction of the town	1945
New practise	Good urban gardening practices	1974
New rules/regulations	Ecological movement from the late 1980s	1987
New service	Pippi Longstocking Festival	1989
New practise	eMČe Plac Youth Club	1996
New practise	Holiday work for the youth (My Clean Velenje project)	2002
New organization form	SAŠA incubator	2007
New service	LOKALC public transportation	2008
New service	Municipal support for vulnerable groups	2010
New practise	Revitalizing Stara pekarna, former bakery	2012
New service	Free ice-skating rink	2013
New practise	House of bands	2014
New service	BICY bike sharing system	2014

¹ The research is still ongoing. We speculate there are many more innovations from the socialist period that have not been recognized and discovered yet.

New organizational form	Well-developed volunteering (MC Udarnik)	2015
New service	Innovative educational program of the Velenje University GENERATION PLANET and PATTERN CITY	2017
New practise	Holiday day care for children	2018
New service	KAMERAT transportation for the elderly and physically impaired people	2018
New service /proizvod	COSHAPING VELENJE online portal for citizen initiatives	2018
New practise	Free spaces for societies	unknown

ii. Discussion of themes and findings relating to the history of social innovation

Researching the history of Velenje's social innovation is best examined from World War II onward, when the town was established in its current form. The changing needs of the town and reactions to them that include elements of social innovation can be divided into four historical periods: socialism and construction of the town (1945–1980), environmental crisis (1980–1990), transitional period (1991–2007), and the threat of neoliberalism (2008–).

During the first period, the main social innovation was the shock labour relating to the construction of the new town in the new social-political system of Yugoslavian socialism. Shock labour, which is based on volunteering, involves following the practices of the Russian post-October revolution tradition. The essence of the shock work² in Velenje, in which up to 70% of the inhabitants were included, was not just in saving money, physically constructing the town, caring for the surroundings, etc., but especially in the influence it had on the consciousness of the inhabitants of Velenje of the time. The constructors of the new town were certain that the shock work being done by people from many corners of the area will encourage more authentic relationships, collaboration, unity, and eliminate social differences, as well as enable the acceptance and execution of useful ideas and actions. It also contributed to solidifying the values of solidarity and comradeship and the cult of work, which had been developed earlier, during the volunteers' work in the mine. Even as it began waning elsewhere in Slovenia and Yugoslavia in the 1950s, Velenje continued to nurture it (Hudales 2015). The tradition of shock work is reflected in the highly developed and formalized volunteering system today.

The most extensive shock work action in Velenje was the regulation of the Paka River in the period 1956–1957, which was the basis for the construction of a new Velenje, as a large part of the area had been constantly or intermittently under water (Žgank 1999). In 1957, a new urban plan of the town was created (Poles 1999) and the opening of the new town centre was celebrated on 20 September 1959, which some consider to be the official date of the town's establishment (Kljajič 1999). With the municipal holiday in 1963, Velenje formally became the centre of the Šalek Valey and continued to grow. Velenje was also an architectural phenomenon, as its development reflects all the major architectural trends of the eras. Unlike other mining towns, the residential areas in Velenje consistently followed the principle of the ideal natural light. With its greenery, walking paths, airy spaces, cleanliness, and communal management, the town was regarded as a major urbanism feat in its time (Poles 1999). Along with the construction of residential buildings, most of

² Shock work is a specific kind of communist-era type of work where (younger) workers influenced by heavy propaganda went above and beyond the call of duty. So-called shock brigades were formed where people worked enthusiastically and 'voluntarily', usually in big infrastructural projects (roads, towns ...) and were granted certain benefits.

the social infrastructure was also constructed during that time (educational institutions, children's playgrounds, sports and recreation areas, public spaces, etc.).

The other important area from the aspect of social innovation is the environmental crisis of the 1980s. Coalmining and electricity generation made the Šalek valley one of the most polluted areas of Slovenia by the 1980s, resulting in polluted air, rivers, soil and woodlands. The breaking point that led to the mobilization of the inhabitants was the projected radioactive waste disposal site. The mass gathering on the main, Tito Square, on 8 November 1987, which was reportedly attended by around 15,000 people, marked the start of the ecological movement that later grew into a wider social-political, cultural, and research and education movement. It also spurred the first environmental referendum in Yugoslavia, where over 80% of the voters supported the initiative for the ecological remediation of the Šoštanj Thermal Power Plant. In 1988, the ecological society was founded in Velenje and the municipal section of the Green Party of Slovenia a year later. The movement is also responsible for the environmental remediation and transition to cleaner technologies. The environmental remediation in the Šalek Valley were carried out by companies Esotech and Erico, once part of the Velenje Coal Mine, which are a rare example of a successful economic independence from the former parent company. The local knowledge of environmental remediation was the foundation for the establishment of the Environmental Protection School Velenje. The ecological movement and innovation that stem from solving the environmental crisis in Velenje demonstrate the extremely positive changes that can be achieved if the various stakeholders in the local community collaborate, coordinate their differing interests, and come to a unified solution. Innovation in this area stresses the power of civil initiatives and the successful mobilization of the entire local community, which has led to positive and far-reaching changes.

The period of transition after Slovenia's independence (1991) marks the transition from self-governing socialism and a socialist economy to a market economy and a democratic political system. The transition did not significantly damage Velenje's economy; however, the gradual changes in the social and economic fields (tertiarization, increasing numbers of small and middle-sized companies) did highlight certain needs. One of the first ones was solving the issue of the lack a space for the youth where they could socialize and be creative. The City Municipality of Velenje listened to young people and gifted them the spaces of the present-day eMce plac Club in 1996. The Youth Centre of Velenje was established, the first public institute of its kind in Slovenia, and started developing programs in international mobility and the social field, while also organizing cultural and entertainment events in the same space. A few years later, summer holiday work for high school students was introduced, a practice that is still being successfully carried out today. In the first years after Slovenia entered the European Union, Velenje adopted some good practices in the area of micro entrepreneurship, with the Saša incubator leading the way; it was launched in 2007 after the model of company start-up accelerators. The purpose of the incubator is to retain young talents in the region, encourage new companies, and offer support in their speedy development and growth.

In 2008, the world was hit by an economic crisis. In Slovenia, its effects started showing somewhat later, in 2011 (Verbič et al. 2016), as a consequence of the town's export-oriented economy (Lapuh 2018). Due to its focus on the energy sector and the successful transformation of Gorenje into an innovative and globally competitive company, it did not experience the full effect of the crisis (Bole et al. 2019). Nonetheless, the city has been increasingly involved in the wider social-economic and political currents in recent years, marked by neoliberalism, which has had a decisive influence on the shifting values. There is a danger that the principles of tolerance, multiculturalism, solidarity, and social equality that had been the foundation for the socialist-era town and the later development after the country's independence, are now fading because of the evermore present emphasis on individualism, competitiveness, decentralization of the authorities, along with a shrinking public administration and deregulation, liberalization, and privatization of the economy. With the arrival of

new ownership or management from other parts of Slovenia (TEŠ) or even abroad (sale of Gorenje to Chinese giant Hisense), the role and significance of the social responsibility of companies are diminishing, especially in the fields of environment remediation and environmental protection education (Bole in Kozina 2018).

The town's flexibility in relation to the challenges introduced by these patterns of neoliberal development can be measured with the social innovations that have been developed by institutions and/or inhabitants of Velenje since the start of the crisis. The social innovations relate to new services, practices, and organizational forms in the following areas:

- 1) mobility (LOKALC free public bus transportation, BICY bike sharing system, KAMERAT transportation for the elderly and physically impaired people),
- 2) informing and participation (COSHAPING VELENJE online portal for citizen initiatives),
- 3) training and education (Innovative educational program of the Velenje University GENERATION PLANET and PATTERN CITY encouraging intergenerational collaboration),
- 4) urban regeneration (revitalizing Stara pekarna, former bakery, opening the House of Bands, setting up an ice-skating rink),
- 5) social (municipal support for vulnerable groups, MC Udarnik volunteering group, holiday day care for children).

The common trait of all of these social innovations in this period is that they are mostly offered free of charge for the inhabitants of Velenje and that they encourage a high share of social inclusion and intergenerational and intercultural dialogue. The most suitable ways are used to try and include everyone from children, the youth, the elderly, people with disabilities, the underprivileged, and the general public. From this viewpoint, the social innovations are largely based on the values of the past socialist and industrial times from the town's establishment to Slovenia's independence. The number of social innovations has been growing since the start of the crisis, which can be understood as the town's response to the capitalist development during the transitional period (1991–2008) and the return to its roots (1945–1990). The biggest difference compared to the past is that they were mostly initiated through the "bottom-up" approach and also succeeded due to the open-mindedness of the local authorities.

5. Identifying practical innovations

i. Ideas developed during the workshops, including how these related to the problem definition exercise

In workshop 2, we invited the participants to rank the weaknesses from the social sustainability matrix, which can also be understood as the problems or needs of the town, from the most pressing to the least pressing ones. It is important to prioritize and rank the problems of the local stakeholders to start thinking about possible solutions to them. First, we did that in smaller groups and then repeated the process in the entire group and to try and reach a consensus. The three most important issues were related to "adaptability & resilience":

1. Bipolar and vulnerable economy (dependency on two major companies)
2. Unclear future after the coal mine closure
3. Out-migration of the educated young population

It was evident that people favoured the economic issues over the social ones. At first, we were sceptical as to whether those issues could be solved with social innovation, as they are mostly related to jobs and the economy, but then we narrowed their scope a bit and focused on the social issues within them. In workshop 3, we decided to address those three problems and divided

participants in the beginning to three respective groups according to their interests. Many ideas emerged and three were voted to be further developed and fine-tuned in the second part of the workshop.

Figure 1: Ideas developed during the workshop, related to the main problems in the town.



Problem 1: Bipolar and vulnerable economy (dependency on two major companies)

Velenje is highly dependent on two major companies: Gorenje (household appliances factory) and the coal mine, with the two companies providing more than a half of the jobs in the town. The majority of the workforce in both major companies are blue-collar, low-skilled workers (Tiran et al. 2018). There is a need to diversify the economy and to find quick solutions in case these companies shut down or undergo a major restructuring. It is inevitable that the coal mine will close in the (near) future. The plans in local developmental and tourist strategies for making Šalek Lakes (created as a result of surface subsidence due to mining) into a widely popular tourist attraction are rather unrealistic, overly ambitious and would take a considerable amount of effort and time.

Idea 1: Fish farm

A possible way to diversify the economy and to take care of the low-skilled, potentially unemployed workforce is to establish a fish farm in the Lake Šalek area. The farm would be based on a public-private partnership and could employ up to 80 people. The lakes have already been transforming towards attractive recreational and tourist areas, so any kind of practical idea for regeneration would be positively accepted in the local environment. It could also be a part of the plan of the mine closure, securing funds for a business start-up. If such an idea were to be realized, it would have many benefits for the local community: new jobs (also for the low-skilled population), efficient use of natural resources (also as a compensation for lost arable land), and an incentive for strengthening new economic branches that were being slowed down due to the predominant role of two major companies.

Problem 2: Unclear future after the coal mine closure

The majority of the employees in the coal mine are blue-collar workers. The coal mine closure in the future is a fact and when it happens, the town will face problems, such as poverty, social exclusion, rise in crime, community cohesion decline, etc. The City of Velenje has already developed many innovative and successful mechanisms and social protection programs (Gričar Ločnikar and Remic Novak 2014), but it cannot do everything by itself if a major social crisis erupts.

Idea 2: Strengthening & professionalization of the NGO sector

One possible solution to dealing with social issues in the future is to build up the NGO sector, making it less dependent on voluntary work, with a higher number of professional staff. A stronger NGO

sector would be able to develop innovative programs for the social inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups and employ young people with a background in social sciences & humanities. The programs would also include volunteers (youth, elderly), not as the main pillar, but rather as a support and opportunity for gaining skills, additional income and social inclusion. This would encourage young educated people to stay in their home town and help overcome the potential social issues after the coal mine closes. Financial resources to build up an NGO sector would include municipal budget reallocation, tenders, etc.

Problem 3: Out-migration of the educated young population

The out-migration of the educated young population, especially those with a degree in social sciences, is one of the most pressing issues in the town. The “brain drain” is the result of a lack of high-skilled jobs, low wages, a limited selection of jobs and a gap between the educational institutions and firms (Tiran et al. 2018). Many measures have already been introduced and proven to be successful, but seemed to be insufficient.

Idea 3: Mentoring scheme

A potential solution could be a work orientation program in the form of a mentoring scheme. The idea is that older workers would guide new, younger ones for a few years until they retire. This would give them an additional financial incentive in exchange for not extending their retirement age. Such a mechanism, managed by a business incubator or employment office, would help young, educated people to capitalize on their know-how and stay in their home town, help employers to recognize the potential and ideas of young people, and bridge the gap between the economy and educational institutions.

- ii. Discussion of ideas developed (e.g. common themes or approaches, any relationships identified with local history of social innovation, industrial towns, WP3 narratives, or national context)

At first glance, the achieved results seem interesting, potentially useful, and transferable to other industrial towns across Europe. However, it is questionable if all the ideas have the potential to be further developed or realized, as there could be many obstacles in the way towards their implementation.

The 1st idea (founding a fish farm) sounds promising, as it would provide new jobs to the low-skilled workforce, but it is designed around founding a company, associated very closely with individual entrepreneurship and market solutions, which could contradict the rationale behind the social innovation concept. The 2nd idea (strengthening & professionalizing the NGO sector) is definitely worth considering, as the NGO scene in the town is already very strong and valued, while the financial support for NGOs in Slovenia is lower than in the most developed Western countries and is overly dependent on voluntary work. However, the idea remained on a very general level, without a clear focus and concrete solutions for its implementation. Its problem was also that it was not “fine-tuned” by the other participants; the idea was raised by an experienced local NGO professional, so the others did not feel competent enough and participated in developing the idea to a very low extent. The 3rd idea (mentoring scheme) was created in a more participatory way, and it is interesting from the perspective of industrial culture (e.g. Harfst et al. 2018) through accessing tacit knowledge, building on existing competences, community feeling and solidarity. But it also remained on a very general level with many open questions and doubts about its implementation.

The ideas were developed in a participatory way with local experts and were derived from the most pressing issues in the town, so they are worth discussing and developing further. What is also

positive is that ideas 2 and 3 are grounded on existing social capital (strong support for social inclusion, volunteering tradition, intergenerational cohesion, solidarity) while idea 1 builds on natural resources (mining lakes) with untapped potential, which is also one of the key aspects in the town's Tourist Strategy (2016) and Development Strategy (2008). Founding a fish farm also goes in line with one of the dominant narratives, found in WP3 that the municipality is trying different ways of setting up developmental models to diversify the economic foundations.

6. Conclusion

i. Strengths and challenges of the process, including relevance of process to case study town and any feedback received from participants

From the perspective of the entire participatory process and achieved results, the methodological framework set up in WP4 was appropriate, coherent, and well-accepted by the workshop participants. Using the concept of social sustainability was useful for later stages. One of the biggest weaknesses of the process was the number and the structure of the workshop participants, despite the fact that a lot of effort was put into ensuring the heterogeneity by gender, ethnicity, social position, and the sector of interest. Only 12 people attended the 2nd and 3rd workshop and they were mostly from the civil society, while we were not able to attract more people from the economic sector and the local authorities. We speculate that the final results of the process (developed ideas/practical solutions) would have been completely different in this case. What was a bit problematic was also the fact that the workshops were attended by different people, which made it difficult for us to explain the entire picture about the process' objectives to the newcomers. We speculate that the "workshop turnout" would have been higher if the workshops had been closer together (e.g. all three in 1 month), they had been organized during work hours or if people had been compensated for attending them. What almost every attendant emphasized was the lack of time to develop the ideas in the workshop 3. Some people also questioned the usefulness of the achieved results.

ii. Key findings relating to social innovation in case study town, including relationship to town's qualities as an industrial town/ WP3 findings; any critical reflections on social innovation

We discovered that the town of Velenje possesses a favourable environment for designing social innovations thanks to its developed industrial culture, which includes the ability of its actors to cooperate, its pioneering spirit, high innovation capacity, and a great sense of solidarity. In addition, the town has developed many practices, services, and organisational forms which were proved to be socially innovative, as they successfully solved societal challenges and some of them were even diffused on the national scale. These undisputable qualities of the town also result in a high level of social sustainability with high social cohesion, equitable access to amenities and power and control of the inhabitants to shape the town's future. The weakest points are the town's limited ability to react to major economic changes because of its quite a vulnerable economy, dependence on two major (industrial and mining) companies, and limited capacity to attract the young, educated population to stay in the town.

iii. *Any initial findings relating to policy recommendations (WP5) e.g. challenges or opportunities relevant to policy-makers emerging from WP4 process*

Searching for potential social innovations in the abovementioned fields or further developing and fine-tuning the ideas that were developed in our workshops would benefit the future of the town, as well as other industrial towns in Slovenia and abroad, because a monostructural economy and “brain drain” are challenges they all have in common. Within WP5, the results of WP4 will be presented in a policy seminar with the local decision-makers in later months to bring the innovations and ideas to the table. This is also important so that the local community sees that their participations was not in vain, but was also acted-upon and considered by the local administration. The next purpose is also empowering the local communities and giving them the sense of a positive transformation by active civic engagement. This is especially important for post-socialist communities, where a general apathy can be felt for civic participation due to specific political and cultural reasons (Greenberg 2010; Poljak Istenič and Kozina 2020).

7. References

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