

## Ljubljana, Slovenia

### Culture comes to town

The INTERREG IV B MED project SOSTENUTO was implemented between 2009 and 2012. It focused on bottom-up urban revitalisation of the inner-city district of Tabor in connection with innovative cultural events, greening and gardening activities. Local stakeholders and residents have joined forces through cooperation and networking to improve social cohesion, quality of life and future perspectives of their neighbourhood. The project is a good example of strong local efforts to make a difference in current urban development practices in Ljubljana.

### Culture comes to town

#### **Sostenuto: Economic and social innovations in the field of culture and creation activities, for bottom-up revitalisation of the inner-city Tabor district in Ljubljana (Slovenia)**

The Sostenuto project has used transnational cooperation and networking as the principal method to support various partners, local stakeholders and inhabitants from the Mediterranean area to take part in innovative cultural and creative activities in their cities and regions. At the same time local project partners have encouraged different institutions, social groups and individuals to get involved in enhancing economic and social cohesion, sustainability and the quality of life for local residents. The project was implemented between 2009 and 2012 (36 months) by seven partners from EU countries in the Mediterranean area (Spain, France, Italy and Slovenia) and one IPA Adriatic country (Montenegro) with the support of the ERDF (€1.2 million), IPA Adriatic and matching local funds. It was supported under the INTERREG IV B MED programme which runs from 2007-2013.

The Slovenian partner was the Bunker Institute, a Ljubljana-based non-profit organisation which organises cultural events. The project, which took place in the inner-city district of Tabor in Ljubljana, is an example of a local non-monetary system enabling the exchange of know-how, services and local competences in urban revitalisation activities. In the *Garden by the Way* project, innovative cultural activities – workshops, a festival, art performances and sport competitions – were organised, which focused on urban gardening and greening of streets, parks, abandoned sites and other public spaces. These activities resulted in the establishment of the *Tabor Cultural Quarter* in March 2011. This non-profit association is based on a long-term partnership with cultural institutions (museums, galleries, cinemas, theatres, etc.) and other non-profit organisations in the neighbourhood, and will organise a range of cultural events and activities in the future.

In Ljubljana all these activities have contributed to the bottom-up urban revitalisation of the local neighbourhood. The project has been a good example of multi-level cooperation and networking and provides a role model for social inclusion, local empowerment and participation in improving the quality of urban life.

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### *Culture comes to town*

The Sostenuto project, part of INTERREG IV B MED 2007-2013, has used transnational cooperation and networking as the principal method to enable different partners, local stakeholders and inhabitants from the Mediterranean area to take part in innovative cultural and creative activities in their cities and regions. At the same time local project partners have managed to increase the active participation of different institutions, social groups and individuals in order to enhance economic and social cohesion, sustainability and the quality of life for the local population. The project represents a collection of good practices involving diverse local experiments in interconnecting culture, economy, social issues and democracy. It is a role model of the integrated approach involving social inclusion, local empowerment and participation in improving the quality of urban life.

Sostenuto aimed to strengthen the competitiveness and capacity for economic and social innovation of the cultural and creative sector by helping it to meet new economic and social models. This encouraged policy-makers and funding bodies to take the cultural sector's economic and social potential and its capacity for innovation into account, enabling it to be transferred and disseminated within the MED area and beyond.

The project was implemented by seven partners from four EU countries in the Mediterranean area (Spain, France, Italy and Slovenia) and one IPA Adriatic country (Montenegro). Benefiting from the experience of their own networks, Aide aux Musiques Innovatrices (AMI) from Marseille (the lead partner) and Relais Culture Europe from Paris mobilised partners from the MED area that were best suited to meeting Sostenuto's objectives: CITEMA from Tuscany and Zunino from Liguria (Italy), the University of Valencia (Spain), Bunker from Ljubljana (Slovenia) and Expeditio from Kotor (Montenegro). They launched a series of experiments designed to stimulate cultural and creative activities which would improve local economies and community cohesion. The project focused on innovative methods of managing cultural and creative activities, and has tested them in four experimental laboratories (labs):

- incubator (AMI, France)
- cluster (CITEMA, Italy)
- local exchange trading system (Bunker, Slovenia)
- territorial governance (Expeditio, Montenegro and Zunino & Partners, Italy)

The University of Valencia (Spain) has capitalised these experiences, and modelled and evaluated their transferability. The dissemination work will enable the diffusion of results and transferability and the valorisation of new appropriate practices, through on-line capitalisation, two transnational conferences (in Ljubljana and Valencia) and a Green Paper. This is all managed by Relais Culture Europe together with AMI and other partners locally.

The Sostenuto project was implemented between 4 May 2009 and 30 April 2012 (36 months) with the support of ERDF, IPA Adriatic and matching local funds. The project budget was €1 536 411 (of which the ERDF component was €1 179 210). The EU support is certainly an important added-value element which enabled project implementation in different local contexts and countries.

### *Why culture?*

Culture is a major economic development sector, and forms part of the knowledge economy and innovative society envisaged by the Europe 2020 strategy. A European Commission study emphasises that the cultural and creative sectors contribute directly to growth and employment. This impact depends on the strong presence of creative enterprises and jobs, and on the development of new innovative services and products (notably related to ICT) and human capital. The cultural sector relates directly to a society based on innovation

embedded in societal values where every form of innovation is promoted. Nevertheless, much more could be made of cultural and creative activities in Europe: there are structural weaknesses, most notably a myriad of SMEs that have a strong local base but cannot benefit from the internal market due to a lack of appropriate tools and accompanying measures. The cultural sector in Europe has a huge potential for development, but strategies, policies and modes of territorial governance are not integrated. The Sostenuto project proposed to make the cultural and creative activities in the MED area more competitive by applying innovative methods of management and organisation to this sector, notably to SMEs.

The possibilities for innovation and dynamism that the cultural sector possesses remain for the most part unrecognised by public bodies. Practice remains relatively unaffected by a whole set of economic and organisational experiences of urban and regional development. In the MED area, the cultural sector has real potential, but suffers from diffused activities and a lack of organised strategies from public agencies. The Sostenuto project was born from a synthesis of 'top-down' policy recommendations, partners' assessments of the sector's problems (both national and international), as well as new 'bottom-up' demands from local residents, SMEs and other stakeholders for a strategy to promote innovative cultural and creative activities in the cities and regions of the MED area.

Implementing these ideas in Ljubljana was the Bunker Institute,<sup>1</sup> a non-profit organisation which organises cultural events. Bunker produces contemporary theatre and dance performances, organises workshops and other cultural and educational programmes, carries out research in the field of culture and co-ordinates a prominent international festival, the *Mladi Levi* ('Young Lions') Festival. Bunker has developed Sostenuto's original ideas, bringing in the international experience it has gained from managing alternative creative activities, and adapted them to meet the needs of the inner-city district of Tabor. Bunker managed the Sostenuto Lab no. 3 – *Local non-monetary exchange trading system (LETS)* – in partnership with local people, and in collaboration with other labs in the project. It also organised the mid-term international conference in Ljubljana in December 2010.

The total Bunker budget from the Sostenuto project was €271 020 – €230 667 from the ERDF plus 15% match funding from Slovenia's Ministry of Culture. There was a serious delay in receiving funding from the ERDF. The first ERDF funds were received approximately 12 months after the official start of the project, so Bunker had to finance its work through a low-interest international bank loan via the Sostenuto lead partner in France. This is a serious problem in Slovenia especially for a small non-profit cultural organisation. No special foundation or low-interest bank guarantees exist at the national level to cover the pre-funding costs in these EU projects in Slovenia.

### ***The inner-city district of Tabor***

In Ljubljana Sostenuto was implemented in the inner-city district of Tabor, located between the Town Hall, the main railway and bus station and the National Clinical Hospital. Tabor is a small mixed-use inner-city district, formerly an industrial and working class neighbourhood, like many others in Mediterranean and European cities. It is facing problems common to many rapidly-changing urban spaces, with a lack of social cohesion, exclusion of local residents from the urban development processes, degradation of public spaces (i.e. lack of green areas and non-commercial public spaces) and a growing perception of insecurity. Bunker is located in Slomškova Street as well as in Stara Elektrarna (Old Power Station), which they manage as a theatre and performance hall for various events, including the *Mladi Levi* (Young Lions) Festival.

This location is appropriate for Sostenuto, in that it comprises residential and other mixed-used buildings (factory, railway station, barracks), which testify to its past and now host a range of activities (i.e. a home for the elderly, a students' hall of residence, a church, schools, offices, shops, museums, cinemas, housing). It was under pressure from property

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bunker.si>

developers until 2009. The neighbourhood experienced a loss of residential and social life, and the project's activities demonstrate the effectiveness of a model that connects the physical regeneration of urban green areas and innovative cultural and creative activities with the provision of non-monetary services for local residents and visitors.

Sostenuto's plans are well anchored in policy, as they are in line with all five priorities of Slovenia's National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) 2007-2013, especially as regards the promotion of entrepreneurship, innovation and technological development. The project corresponds to all the OPs in Slovenia: Strengthening Regional Development Potentials, Human Resources Development, Environmental and Transport Infrastructure Development, Cross-border, Interregional and Transnational. The project was also relevant to the implementation of the National Programme for Culture 2008-2011. One of the principle development goals of the Regional Development Programme of Ljubljana Urban Region (LUR) 2007-2013 is 'Creative people and successful companies', which it aims to achieve through specific instruments and projects involving:

- culture as a competitive advantage
- a supportive entrepreneurial environment
- heritage preservation

Urban development programmes in the City Municipality of Ljubljana, especially culture, tourism, sport, education, health and social security, environmental protection and urban planning for 2008-2011, have also supported the urban revitalisation of Ljubljana through physical and land use regeneration together with different social and cultural activities in specific city districts. The implementation of the Sostenuto project in Ljubljana corresponds with the cultural strategy and programme of the City Municipality of Ljubljana 2008-2011 (developed by Bunker in 2007) and the urban revitalisation strategy of the new Spatial Development Plan of the City Municipality of Ljubljana (adopted in 2010).

### *Physical and cultural projects*

Bunker developed and implemented activities in Ljubljana from the summer of 2009 until the end of 2011 in cooperation with people from Tabor and other interested actors in Ljubljana, providing an example of local non-monetary systems enabling the exchange of know-how, services and local competences for bottom-up urban revitalisation, with the primary aim of social inclusion and environmental improvement.

A research survey conducted in Tabor by Bunker in cooperation with sociologists and anthropologists from the University of Ljubljana in summer/autumn 2009 found that there was a lack of green spaces, local identity and qualitative social life. It was in response to this that the partners set up an ambitious and innovative plan specifically to use the Sostenuto project to revitalise this neighbourhood. The planned activities had two aspects. The first focused on land use regeneration – including urban greening, gardening, reuse of the local park, the open space between the new museum quarter (a former barracks), traffic calming and the temporary establishment of pedestrian zones. The second concerned cultural, social, sport and other activities organised in these various public spaces by Bunker in cooperation with other cultural institutions (museums, cinemas, theatre, galleries etc.) and local non-profit associations in Tabor, citizens' groups and residents. The partners organised innovative activities – workshops, a festival, and art performances – on these sites as part of the comprehensive Garden by the Way project, a long-term project which highlighted how culture influences social and economic innovation within a given space. The activities included the following:

- **My Street:** art installations and street exchange market in Slomškova Street with the temporary transformation of a number of parking lots into open spaces during the *Mladi Levi* festival for activities and interaction between local residents, visitors and other partners such as cultural institutions, non-profit associations, sport clubs, eco-farmers, and a bicycle repair service;

- **Trail 10 Book:** participation in the event *Ljubljana – World Book Capital 2010* together with other partners (e.g. Europlakat), sponsored by the Municipality of Ljubljana, libraries, bookshops and individuals;
- **Workshops:** T-shirt printing with an art fashion designer, DJ techniques, culinary events with residents from the home for the elderly, workshop with Professor Franco Bianchini from the University of Leeds (UK), and artist and thinker Simona Levi (Barcelona, Spain).

The concept of a 'garden' in Tabor has served as a window to a debate on the meaning of space, especially the need for green and social areas, and has touched on the subjects of ecology, innovative thinking, solidarity, and the limits of self-sufficiency. The vanishing of natural spaces calls for an innovative attitude and originality of ideas in establishing green spaces, with the idea that they can and should be set up practically anywhere; not forgetting the value of upgrading existing parks, green areas and courtyards, and greening roofs, balconies and windows with plants and flowers, with the help of local architects and landscape architects, applied art school students, gardening shops and firms. The *Garden by the Way* project is a unique expression of the living nature of the Tabor neighbourhood.

Another important project activity, which was developed and implemented with local residents, is the *Beyond a Construction Site* urban gardening project. Bunker established a partnership with *Kud Obrat*,<sup>2</sup> a non-profit association focusing on the relationship between art projects and the public urban space, to regenerate and upgrade the long-deserted building site between the mixed-use residential blocks near the main railway and bus station. The project is supported by the Municipality of Ljubljana, which gave permission for the temporary use of this brownfield site for urban gardening, while commercial firms donated soil, seeds and plants. Local residents actively participated in the design of the project as well as its implementation, volunteering to clean the site, prepare the plots for gardens, exchange knowledge and gardening skills, and help newcomers. All partners also take part in various cultural and social activities organised on the site, such as culinary activities, music, eco-farming and gardening lectures. Approximately 50 plots have now been established. The purpose of this urban gardening project was to transform the degraded construction site surrounded by residential and mixed-use buildings into a dynamic and shared creative area. The *Beyond a Construction Site* project is expected to live on as a leisure activity of residents and citizens in cooperation with Kud Obrat.



**Photo 1: *Beyond the Construction* site: start of the new urban gardening project (photo Bunker)**

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.obrat.org/>

BUNKER also made a partnership with ProstoRož (*Flower Space*) for the physical upgrading of the Tabor urban park<sup>3</sup> and other greening activities and cultural, sport, and art performances. Everyone was invited to participate in activities such as the installation of public lighting, care of the greenery and the birds, restoration of the playgrounds, and improvement of traffic arrangements around the park. The first actions started in autumn 2009 with the aim of restoring the park benches and creating a boules court, a basketball court and a children's sandpit. In the spring and summer of 2010 and 2011 various sport, cultural, social events were held in the park, organised on a voluntary basis and attended not only by local residents, families, children, students and elderly people, but also by other citizens of Ljubljana, visitors and tourists.

All these activities resulted in the establishment in March 2011 of the *Tabor Cultural Quarter*, a non-profit association bringing together cultural institutions (museums, galleries, cinemas, theatres, etc.) and other non-profit organisations located or active in the neighbourhood to organise diverse cultural events and activities.<sup>4</sup> This has become a role model for social and cultural cooperation and the participation of local stakeholders in improving social cohesion and the quality of life in Ljubljana.



**Photo 2: *Beyond the Construction Site*: start of the new urban gardening project with community events (photo Bunker)**



**Photo 3: *Beyond the Construction Site*: new urban gardens after upgrading (photo Suzana Kajba)**

*'I like it here a lot, this is my new love.'* – local resident Ružica on the establishment of the community garden<sup>5</sup>

*'This area used to be quite dead in the past, now, it seems that there is this great energy present.'* – local resident Andrej on Bunker's efforts in Tabor<sup>6</sup>



**Photo 4: Tabor Park: new activities at the**



**Photo 5: Tabor Park: new community**

<sup>3</sup> <http://prostoroz.org/slo/index.php?tabor/o-projektu/>

<sup>4</sup> [www.kct.si](http://www.kct.si)

<sup>5</sup> <http://onkrajgradbisca.wordpress.com>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bunker.si/slo/sostenuto>

park Tabor and sport centre Tabor (photo  
Bunker)

activities at the upgraded park Tabor (photo  
Bunker)

*'I've been living in this neighbourhood for more than 25 years and I have to say it's really becoming revived. When I tell my friends about all the things going on and that we now have community gardens, they just can't believe me.'* – local resident Vida on the change of the Tabor district.

In December 2010 Bunker organised a mid-term international conference in Ljubljana<sup>7</sup> in cooperation with other principal Sostenuto partners, their own (inter)national networks, and local cultural institutions. More than 200 participants gathered from around 20 countries in Europe and beyond. They discussed new ways of operating in the cultural sector, how cultural agents are coping with social transformations, public policies, new cultural and artistic practices, collaboration and using communication technologies. The participants also prepared a manifesto, as part of the capitalisation of the Sostenuto project results and the forthcoming Green Paper.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Exceeding expectations***

The project's results in Ljubljana have far exceeded the expectations of the original proposal: they have been developed step-by-step during the project's implementation in close cooperation with residents and other stakeholders. The innovative aspects of the local partnership are apparent in the successful cooperation between different stakeholders, local residents and end-users in organising innovative cultural events and activities on a voluntary and non-monetary basis. The cooperation involved researchers, non-profit associations, public institutions (museums, cinemas, schools, a student hall of residence, a home for the elderly), voluntary groups, residents and businesses in Tabor, citizens of Ljubljana, as well as visitors from Slovenia and abroad taking part in these events and activities. The beneficiaries are thus widely distributed on various levels and scales, going well beyond Bunker, the project partner, and including many local stakeholders and participants, and most of all the local residents.

The Municipality of Ljubljana supported the project but did not co-fund it owing to budget constraints that are a consequence of the economic crisis in Slovenia. The Department of Culture of the Municipality of Ljubljana provided some funds for Bunker's activities over a three-year period but they are only indirectly connected with Sostenuto. The Department of Urban Planning gave Bunker temporary planning permission to use brownfield land for urban gardening as part of the *Beyond the Construction Site* project, as well as providing temporary permission for traffic calming in the streets in Tabor during cultural and sport events. The Mayor of Ljubljana, Zoran Jankovič, Chief Architect Prof. Janez Koželj and other decision- and policy-makers supported the project and participated in Sostenuto's activities in Tabor.

*'We have organisations like Bunker to thank for producing these kinds of events (that build community cohesion) for the residents of Ljubljana.'* – Mr Zoran Jankovič, Mayor of Ljubljana, opening an art installation in Tabor<sup>9</sup>

Sostenuto is a role model for possible transfer to other city districts in Ljubljana for the improvement of social cohesion, sustainability and the overall quality of urban life. More needs to be done to include such practices in official city policies and development programming activities.

<sup>7</sup> The conference was entitled 'Ready to Change? – Experimental Forum on Culture and Social Innovation in Europe and the Med Area': <http://www.bunker.si/eng/ready-to-change-an-experimental-forum-on-culture-and-social-innovation-in-europe-and-in-the-med-area>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bunker.si/slo/ready-to-change-eksperimentalni-forum-o-kulturi-in-socialnih-inovacijah-v-evropi-in-obmocju-med>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.bunker.si/slo/sostenuto>

## ***Culture and sustainable development: the way forward***

The project has improved social cohesion and the quality of life in Tabor by creating a new cultural focus that integrates three factors: physical regeneration (urban greening and gardening); cultural, social and sport activities; and the active participation of local residents and other stakeholders. The project has added to the stock of flexible connecting spaces (i.e. a new urban garden with 50 small plots), the revitalisation and use of Tabor Park for social activities and street events, and the establishment of the Tabor Cultural Quarter with partners including the Old Power Station (a theatre and performance hall managed by Bunker), Kinodvor and the Slovenian Cinematheque (cinemas), museums (the National Museum of Ljubljana, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, the Modern Gallery), the elementary school, a student hall of residence, a home for the elderly, a drama school, non-profit associations and businesses.

The implementation of the Sostenuto project in Ljubljana has involved experimentation with new methods of cooperation and networking between economic, social and cultural agents and new methods of territorial governance. This will lead to new long-term partnerships and activities based on shared responsibilities and a shared vision of development for Tabor and other neighbourhoods in Ljubljana. The project develops the participative capacity of citizens, public and private organisations in the cultural and creative sector, which drives economic and social innovation in the MED area.



**Photo 6: Tabor Park: upgraded playground and community activities (photo Bunker)**

Some project ideas and activities implemented in Ljubljana draw on traditional ways of spending leisure time in Slovenia – urban gardening, open-air sports and cultural events, voluntary activities in the neighbourhood – that had waned during the previous 15 years. The same approach could easily be transferred to other towns in Central and South-Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean area. An undoubted success factor in Ljubljana has been the solid base of consistent ERDF funding. The integrative approach to promoting the multi-functional use of the inner-city district of Tabor has been most successful in its anticipated social and environmental sustainability. The Sostenuto project has been a good example of multi-level cooperation and networking and provides a role model for social inclusion, local empowerment and participation for improving the quality of urban life in Ljubljana.

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