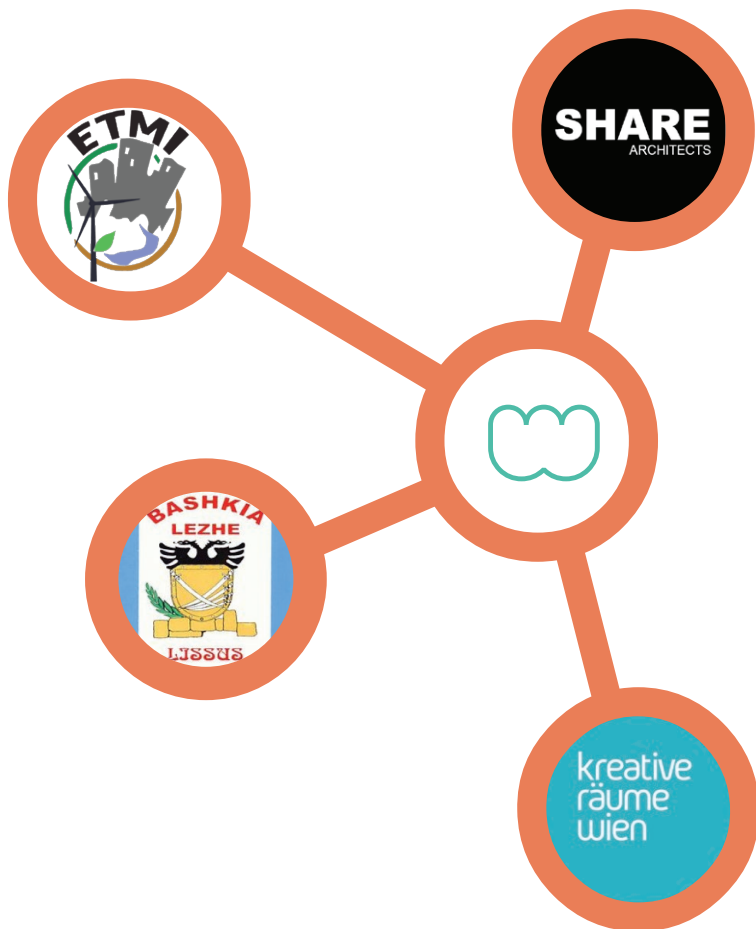


Neighbourhood transition
towards collective use of vacant spaces

ROADMAP FOR LEZHA



wonderland
magazine

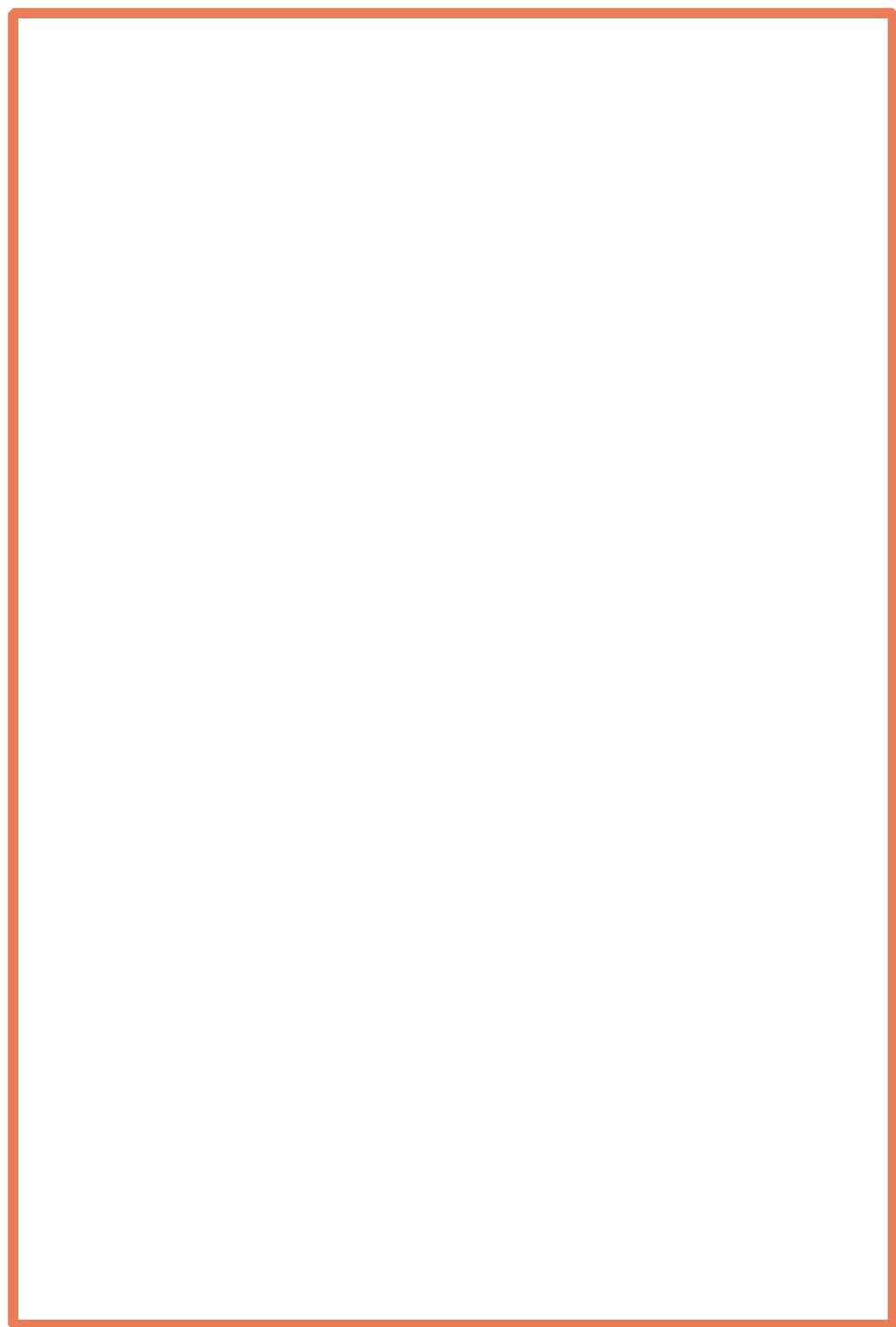


INCLUSIVE CITIES FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Revitalizing the vacant
spaces in Lezha

developed by:

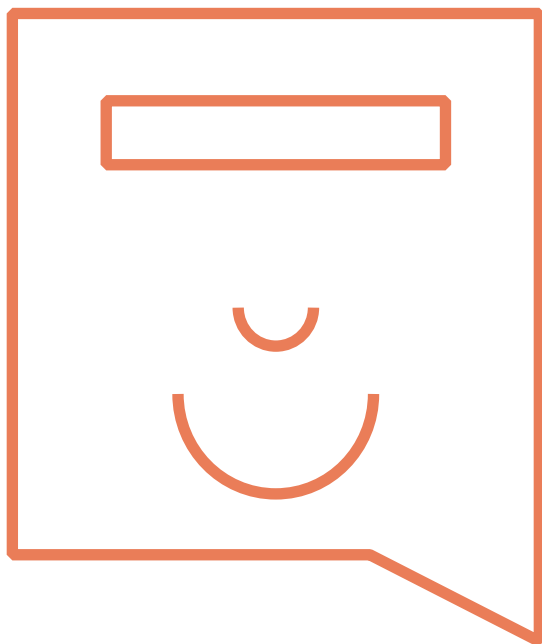
Wonderland, ETMI, Kreative Räume Wien,
SHARE Architects and the Council of Lezha.



INCLUSIVE CITIES FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Revitalizing the vacant
spaces in Lezha

ROAD MAP FOR LEZHA



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CHAPTER 1



INTRODUCTION

Our society and the need for spaces are in a constant process of change. Each development, whether it be technical or economic, opens up new requirements and needs in terms of the availability and usability of spaces and buildings. Urban planning, development and regeneration is therefore, a process that has to reflect on the changes taking place in society. Contemporary urban management needs to find an adequate solution for each phase of the city's transformation. Our cities are never ready, never finished, but the also never old and never outdated. Moreover, with every implementation, they can be the best version of themselves. We believe every spot on earth can become a WONDERLAND for its users. Even the best places need to adapt to upcoming and future challenges and needs. Therefore, this process of constant adaptation needs visions, ideas, best practices and a multiplicity of actors to become what we deserve.

For this Blind Date exchange between Austria and Albania, we choose experts with extensive knowledge and experience. Silvia Forlati is one of the founding members of the wonderland association, founder of architecture office SHARE Architects and researcher at TU Wien. She's managed or worked in transition processes both for small towns and big cities such as Vienna alike. Ulrich Fries has worked on numerous urban transition projects dealing with urban vacancy. He brings his knowledge about and experience with Vienna's vacancy management organisation, kreative Räume, to this unique project. Bahanur Nasya, Head of organisations at wonderland, utilizes her experience with European activation projects in managing the exchange between the experts and guiding the development of the project roadmap.

The re-use of spaces and buildings opens up regeneration scenarios and challenges that need to be managed in an integrated manner by administrators, companies, associations, and citizens. In Europe, we have numerous positive experiences of effective temporary or permanent re-use of places to draw from. We need to contribute to urban regeneration through the occupation of new spaces and the development of new participatory processes while public administrations carry the responsibility of deciding and facilitating re-use and developing policies that ensure such adaptations on an on-going basis.

In Lezha, the concept of re-use cannot yet be considered to be at a developed phase as neither the city administration nor the inhabitants have visions or concepts that embrace vacancies. But the effects of vacant spaces, such as the diminishing of the local population and the recession of the town, a loss of brain power as well as urban vitality and diversity is evident. When paired with the diminishing value of property, it results in all citizens being affected by the vacancy in the city.

With this awareness, we hypothesized that the creation of a process for activation could facilitate urban regeneration and the circular re-use of unused buildings and spaces. Current needs could be addressed through the involvement of citizens and local stakeholders. The transformation of existing buildings and adaptive re-use strategies could assist in making Lezha and other cities and towns more sustainable and resilient, resulting in promoting and favoring citizen well-being and a better quality of life, strengthening local identities, memories, and culture, fostering respect for the environment as well as social inclusion and economic growth.

We're collaborating with Mevis Struga, founder of ETMI for this project. Melvis not only does he have extensive local knowledge, but the capacity to act as a multiplier within the country to promote knowledge of the roadmap and its re-use in other parts of the country. Fatlinda Struga is an experienced architect also teaching at the University of Tirana. Various municipal departments in Lezha were represented in this project to ensure the ongoing implementation of the project ideas. Petrit Marku (Municipality of Lezha, Albania) is the director of Planning and Development Department, Zef Zefi, Klevis Marku and Alban Marku (Municipality of Lezha, Albania) are specialists in charge at Planning and Development Department, (Municipality of Lezha, Albania).

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Aims of the roadmap

This roadmap can be a useful tool to kick-start an overall strategy that looks at a new model of urban re-use management, regardless of whether it's driven by the municipality of the citizens themselves.

In fact, the activation of disused and underutilized spaces and buildings in European towns and cities can create opportunities for new jobs, promote a collaborative economy, spearhead social innovations and support start-ups.



This collaboration project created a mix of actions that are also tackling other SDG requirements, such as:

The aim of this project is to support the cities in reaching the "Sustainable Development Goals" of the UN (the so-called SDG's), which are defined for all nations to ensure no city, town or village is left behind. Since 2017, the wonderland Blind Date series has been supporting various actors through organizing international exchange and ensuring transparent and democratic access to knowledge. We believe this has fostered an opportunity to embrace current challenges and create opportunities for emerging experts. These topics "urban regeneration and re-use of buildings" presented in this roadmap covers SDG 11 ("Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable") and SDG 15 (Life on land) concerning land saving.



Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;



Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;



Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Synergies with other Actions:

The project creates important synergies within the country and supports the achievement of the national goals. The national program for urban renaissance, as well as the program for the urban transformation of cities throughout the country is initiated by the central government of Albania. This project can be utilized as a model to be replicated in other cities, within the frame of those programs.

The objective of the Action:

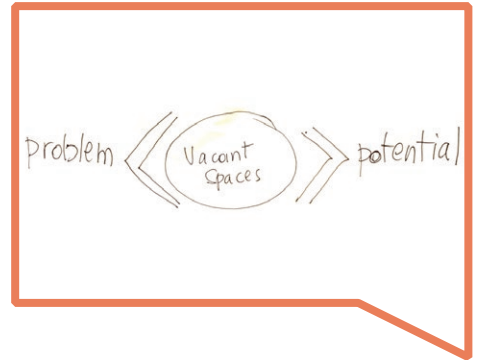
The goal of the project is to usher in a new way of thinking when it comes to the revitalization of unused space in the Lezha Municipality. This will be achieved through the transference of know-how and good practices to public authorities and other relevant stakeholders such as scholars, communities and local businesses.

In the first chapter, a background overview of Lezha is presented. In the second chapter, urban re-use examples are presented. Chapter 3 mainly focuses on the models for Lezha and explains the roadmap, with case studies. This book ends with recommendations and next steps for the presented scenarios.

1.2 Scope of the project

Through this project, Austrian partners plan on creating a new way of revitalizing vacant spaces to Lezha (Albania). This will be achieved through the establishment of new practices and know-how transfer involving public authorities and other relevant stakeholders. The interdisciplinary action aims to remove the inefficiency of unused spaces, thereby changing the perspective and offering more sustainability. The approach is a mix of cultural affairs and economy, finance, city planning and development.

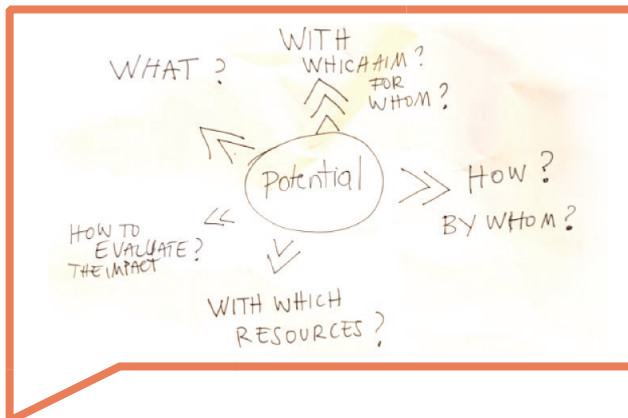
Source: Silvia Forlati, SHARE Architects



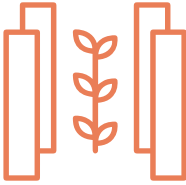
The revitalisation of vacant spaces has a revolutionary impact on the lives of citizens. By using already built spaces, the act ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. It also makes cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, while promoting

sustained and inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work opportunities for all. It also ensures sustainable consumption and production patterns while increasing identification with the space and a promoting a sense of belonging.

Source: Silvia Forlati, SHARE Architects



Focus of the project



ENVIRONMENT

The project is focused on the re-use of the already vacant spaces in Lezha. The aim is to use the exiting potentials in the city, save energy and prevent the construction of new buildings.



SOCIAL INCLUSION

The actions will involve the fusion of different groups, thus constructing the base for long-term cooperation. The project can facilitate the creation of new organisations, jobs and expertise.



KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Knowledge transferred to local authorities of best practices on local urban development.



SUPPORT

Support to create opportunities; see chances in the use of existing buildings and resources.



ECONOMIC SCENARIOS

Increased opportunities for small and medium businesses to initiate their businesses in the area.

1.3 Selected exchange-experts for the project



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**UNIVERSITETI*
METROPOLITAN
TIRANA**

Arch. FATLINDA STRUGA

Fatlinda is an architect and urban planner boasting over 30 years of experience. She has been part of many international and national projects providing expertise in the field of architecture, landscape and territorial planning. She has had significant impact on Albanian cities through her role as an expert in the development of the territorial plans of major cities in Albania, with a significant importance placed on the sustainable development of cities and its communities.



© Bahanur Nasya

DI. BAHANUR NASYA

wonderland
patterns for european architecture

Bahanur is an architect, researcher and film producer specialized in sustainable architecture. Her recent work focuses on heritage development and centrality concepts for peripheral or rural settlements with a special attention to environmental and social impacts. She works also in various EU funded projects: COST action "Underground 4 Value" [EU funded]; the Rural NEET Observatory in increasing opportunities for rural youth while creating contingencies that promote social integration; and the OpenHeritage (H2020) project. She is also the project manager of "PlaceCity" [JPI Urban Europe funded] where an international consortium develops frameworks that revitalize neighbourhoods and creates local central hubs for stakeholders via the employment of placemaking tools and methods.

Silvia Forlati is expert on re-activation with creative industries. She studied architecture at the IUAV in Venice, Italy and the Arkitektuskolen Aarhus, Denmark, worked in the Netherlands and for Zaha Hadid Architects in London and Singapore. In 2003 she established SHARE architects in Vienna with Hannes Bürger and Thomas Lettner. The practice has received numerous awards for a variety of projects. From 2006 to 2008, Silvia was president of wonderland, and has since remained as a board member. In November 2010, she published the Wonderland manual for emerging architects in collaboration with Anne Isopp. She also teaches at the Vienna University of Technology and has been developing research on mixed use that lead to the (interim) revitalisation of Nordbahnhof (Mischung:Possible, 2016 ongoing) with creative industry. In her work Silvia combines practice, research and teaching.

SHARE
ARCHITECTS

© www.share-architects.at

Dr. SILVIA FORLATI



Uli Fries is the managing director of Kreative Räume Wien. Aside from being in charge of the business operations of the small team, he is also responsible for public relations and the counselling of space seekers. His educational background in the field of geography as well as spatial planning underpins his holistic approach to urban development overall, and the task of reactivating vacant spaces in Vienna specifically. Ultimately, he aims to make affordable spaces available to civil society actors, with a particular focus on the arts and culture.

DI Mag. ULI FRIES

kreative
räume
wien

© Uli Fries



1.4 Actions of the project

Experts contributed throughout the project, including distanced dialogue techniques and the use of proven methodology. All participants had a transparent and reflective approach to ensure the maximum impact and benefit of the collaboration. Due to the current pandemic (COVID-19) and restrictive travel regulations, the partners collectively decided to ensure the realization of this project through use of online technology. The Austrian partners couldn't visit Lezha and acquire first hand experience. Consequently, they had to rely on the information provided by the Albanian partners.

Key elements in this collaboration were:

- » Data collection and mapping by the Albanian partners;
- » Finding adequate and inspiring cases and stories from across Europe
- » Four exchange webinars with the participation of different stakeholders;
- » Case analysis and the development of the guideline for the roadmap.
- » One online workshop to draft the roadmap

The chronology of the activities was an essential part of achieving the results.

Action 1:

Data collection and mapping:

Primary and secondary data collection includes

- a. Observations,
- b. Literature studies on the urban-related phenomenon,
- c. Realization of formal and informal interviews with government officers and urbanites are deemed vital to ensure obtaining an enriched variety of information

Action 2:

Four online webinars:

Ensuring the exchange of knowledge between Kreative Räume Wien, wonderland, the Technical University of Vienna, the Municipality of Lezha and the NGO ETMI. The webinars will be published online and made available for further actors.

Action 3 and 4:

case analysis and the creation of guidelines for the roadmap:

“Neighbourhood transition towards use of vacant spaces.”

The roadmap contains relevant information in regards to the Lezha context. It also carries a series of proposals on how the unused spaces can be transformed into better places to work and live in, including useful references to good practices from Austria and beyond. The core proposition of the roadmap can be found in the chapter titled “Using the potential of Lezha: the way to establish an agency for the vacant spaces in Lezha.” This chapter takes into account the local expertise, knowledge and situation (legal, financial, political). The workshops are the starting point to set up an agency dedicated to vacant spaces.

This roadmap in itself is the innovative element of this exchange project. It contains recommendations and suggestions on how to further develop the Lezha case as well as suggestions for further actions such as the setting up of an agency for the management of vacant spaces in Lezha. The unique roadmap will be published online.

INTRODUCTION



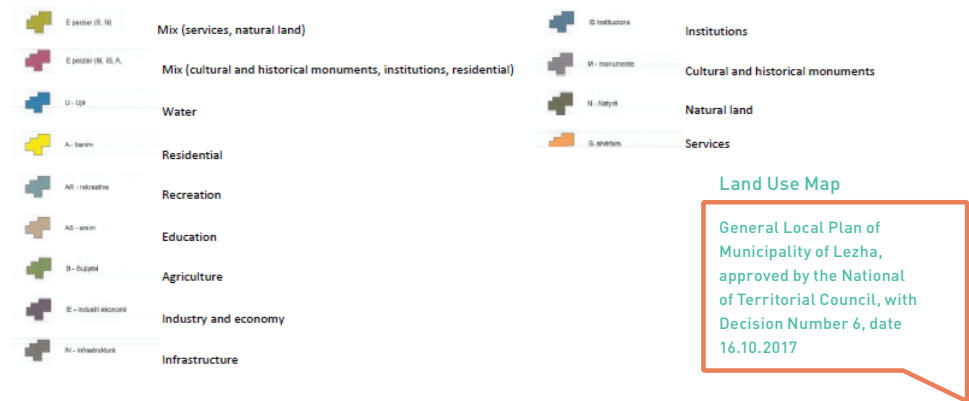
CHAPTER 2



THE LEZHA CONTEXT

The Municipality of Lezha is located in the western plain of the Republic of Albania, in an area comprised of 508.9 km², bordered in the north by the Municipalities of Vau i Dejës and Puka, in the west by the Adriatic Sea and the Municipality of Shkodra, in the east by the Municipality of Mirdita and in the south by the Municipality of Kurbin. The municipality consists of 10 administrative units: Lezha, Shëngjin, Zejmen, Shënkoll, Balldren, Kallmet, Blinisht, Dajç, Ungrej and Kolsh. The territory contains two main urban areas (the city of Lezha and Shëngjin) and 65 villages. The total population of the municipality, according to the Civil Registry (2017) is 106,245 inhabitants, with an average population density of 209 inhabitants / km². This data positions the municipality among the 10 most populated municipalities in the country. Lezha has a very favourable and strategic position, located in short distance to some of the main cities, such as Tirana (55km), Podgorica (98 km), Shkodra (44 km). Also, the municipality is located close to main national infrastructure nodes such as the Port of Durrës (70 km) and the Rinas Airport (40 km), while the Port of Shëngjin is part of the municipality. Additionally, the north-south national transport corridor passes through the territory of Lezha.

2.1 The Lezha urban area and the surroundings



What is the general economic and social situation in Lezha?

Lezha is located on the coastal plain of western Albania. This area has become the most developed region in the country. Prior to the 1990s, the main industries in Lezha were wood and paper mills, building materials (bricks, tiles) and food, particularly fish processing. The number of employees in these industrial enterprises were approximately 2,000 people. However, the industrial zone is now abandoned and the previously undertaken business activity no longer exists. One of the industries, whose development continued after 1990 is the food industry, particularly fish processing. This industry originated in the 1980s when a food preservation plant was built in Lezha. In recent years, fish processing in the region has seen major investments from the national level. In 2006, four fish-processing units were established and 90% of the fish catch that enters the municipality goes to these units for processing. The city now has a diverse economy, though one reliant mainly on trade and services, which are the sectors that employ the most number of people. The construction of the business park in the north of the city will enable a concentration of local, regional and foreign businesses in one place. Planning to exercise activity in the park are mostly

medium and large businesses, including industries such as confectionery, shoe manufacturing, construction, agro-food, aluminium and wood processing, transport, trade and services. It is thought that the new park will provide around 3,000 job opportunities¹.

There are 860 private entities registered in the territory of Lezha Municipality. Of these, 629 (74%) are small businesses, most of which provide commercial services. These businesses account for 30% of the small businesses in the park. The other businesses (2,310) are big businesses, and account for 25% of those in the park.

¹ http://www.lezha.gov.al/web/plani_strategjik_bashkia_lezhe_eng_583.pdf

2.2 Information about Lezha

The Municipality of Lezha is located in the western plain of the Republic of Albania, in an area of 508.9 km², bordered on the north by the Municipalities of Vau i Dejës and Puka, on the west by the Adriatic Sea and the Municipality of Shkodra, on the east by the Municipality of Mirdita and on the south by the Municipality of Kurbin. The municipality consists of 10 administrative units: Lezha, Shëngjin, Zejmen, Shënkoll, Balldren, Kallmet, Blinisht, Dajç, Ungrej and Kolsh. The territory contains two main urban areas (the city of Lezha and Shëngjin) and 65 villages.

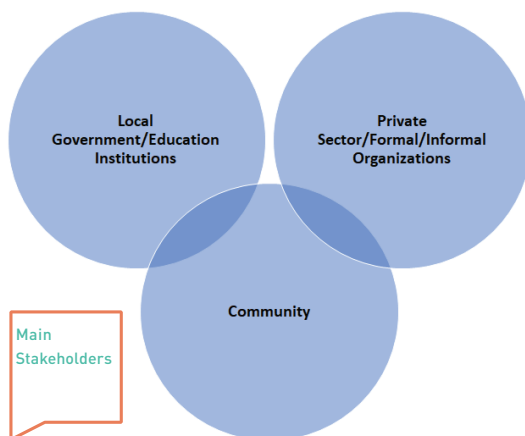
Demographic information

- » Population of the region of Lezha (Municipality of Lezha, Municipality of Kurbin and Municipality of Mirdita) in 2018 -127.910 inhabitants
- » The population of the city of Lezha in 2019 (civil status January 2020) -31.779 inhabitants
- » The number of families in the city of Lezha in 2019: 9.836 families
- » The unemployment rate is 19.2%.
- » The structure of the population of the Lezha region is;
- » 0 –14 years: 22583 people, 25 %
- » 15 –64 years: 48994, 54 %
- » 65 + years: 18421, 21 %

The economic sectors in Lezha

- » Industrial activities: shoe factory, cement factory, brick factory, fish processing factor, marble processing, oil deposits, quarries and inert processing, etc.
- » An important sector of the economy of this municipality is trade and services, with a considerable number of businesses concentrated in the city area.
- » Agricultural activities: the agricultural sector is the largest contributor to the region's economy. About 60% of the population in the municipality of Lezha lives in the village and is mainly engaged in agriculture. Agricultural land is quite fertile with high productivity yields.
- » Cultural and touristic activities: an important activity is tourism, both cultural (historical and religious) and natural tourism. The city of Lezha has a rich history: cultural monuments, cult objects, coins, archaeological finds, written documents, prominent events and figures and a great cultural, folkloric heritage, clothing and ethnography, etc

2.3 Stakeholders in Lezha



Local authorities/public agencies

They are responsible in activating vacant public spaces such as schools, theatres, cinemas etc that need to be re-designed and might change their initial function. They also give the approval for retrofitting the open vacancies for private or community projects. The municipality the Urban Planning Department² is in charge of implementing the spatial planning policies and the instruments for urban development (part of it are open vacant spaces). Also involved in this are departments of education and culture, addressing relevant socio-economic and cultural activities.

Other stakeholders (private, organizations etc):

Private sectors (entrepreneurs) play a significant role in ground floor investments. Nevertheless, the private sector is not quite keen on the revitalisation of vacant spaces. Investments are more directed towards the construction of new buildings rather than repurposing existing ones and utilizing vacant spaces not used for a long time. Other important stakeholders that might contribute are civic organizations (youth, cultural, etc) that can use vacant spaces for different activities i.e. social enterprises, the creation of a youth centre (library, studies centre), shared offices for different ages etc., and thus unlock the potential of vacant spaces.

² http://www.lezha.gov.al/web/organigrama_2019_5232.pdf [organigramme of the municipality_Albanian language]

2.4 Vacant spaces in Lezha

The first activity organized by the local project partners was a site visit to offer an overall view on the situation of vacant spaces in the urban area of Lezha. Their findings show how the changes in life style has had a tremendous impact on vacancy in the city, because vacant spaces are located mainly in the residential area, which has more collective buildings. These spaces are located on the ground and/or the first floors of collective buildings. Such vacancies are located on the main roads, as well as on the secondary roads and inside the residential blocks.

Why are the spaces vacant?

Residents of the city do not prefer to live on the ground floors of buildings, resulting in the use of ground floors for services and not for housing, despite the fact that there is no demand for so many service facilities. Such spaces were allocated for commercial use, such as shops or offices. However, the need for such places is in a decline due to the shift and change in shopping and working attitudes. Therefore, many of these spaces remain unused. What's more, due to recent developments like the economic challenges, but also the COVID-19 pandemic, many commercial activities were closed, increasing the number of vacant spaces

2.5 Examples of vacant spaces in Lezha

In Lezha, vacancies are not solely dedicated to old buildings that struggle to find contemporary uses. The city of Lezha also hosts many new buildings, which are partially vacant. The vacancies are all located in the lower part of the buildings, which show that the urban planning and architecture is neglecting the topic of "ground floors." The changes in society and the preferences for living space has changed dramatically in the last century. For this reason, the paradigms of urban planning and architecture have to respond to these changes.

Main Road
On the Ground Floor



Main Road
On the First Floor



Vacant spaces in
ground floor - inner city



Vacant spaces in
ground floor - inner city



THE LEZHA CONTEXT



CHAPTER 3



INSPIRATIONS FROM VIENNA AND BEYOND

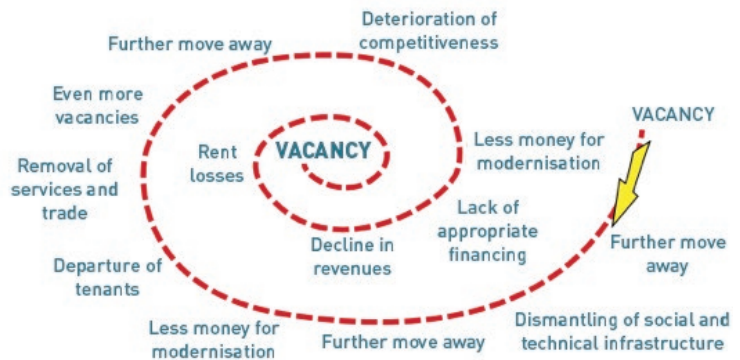
3.1 Vacant spaces: from problem to potential

by Silvia Forlati

Vacant spaces are an undesired element of many urban contexts. In recent years, they have received increasing attention, from urban administrations and experts alike. The focus is on understanding their causes and dynamics and in developing strategies to revitalize them. It is a diffused phenomenon, linked to wider trends of the economy, which strongly affect the qualities of surrounding public spaces and the built environment, investing small and big urban centres at the same time. The concept of the negative development spiral is used to

describe the process of the 'emptying out' of many urban centres. This helps us understand vacant space as a symptom of a more general degenerative process, by which entire urban centres and central spaces increasingly lose significance and function. We are not dealing with an insulated issue that will solve by itself: it is instead a systemic issue that will tend to affect increasing parts of our urban centres, requiring specific actions from the public sector as well.

Vacancy as the beginning and end of the movement of people away from the city centre.



„Negative development spiral” - Vacant space as starting and finishing point of the movement of change in the city in a research in small towns in Austria.

Source: Austrian Association of Cities. White Paper City Center . Opportunities and Challenges of Inner City Regeneration for Small and Medium-Sized Cities, Available online:

https://www.staedtebund.gv.at/fileadmin/USERDATA/Service/Dokumente/_Weissbuch_2409_WEB.pdf

The tendency is to focus on vacant spaces as problems to be solved. Yet, it is also possible to see vacant spaces as potential! Thanks to vacant spaces, new things be created. The question here – relevant for Lezha as well – is how to create awareness for this potential and begin the activation process. It is not a simple endeavour: many stakeholders and different expertise have to be involved in order for it to succeed. Moreover, the activation of empty spaces cannot be mandated from above, the process implies collaborative formats of innovative transdisciplinary actions.

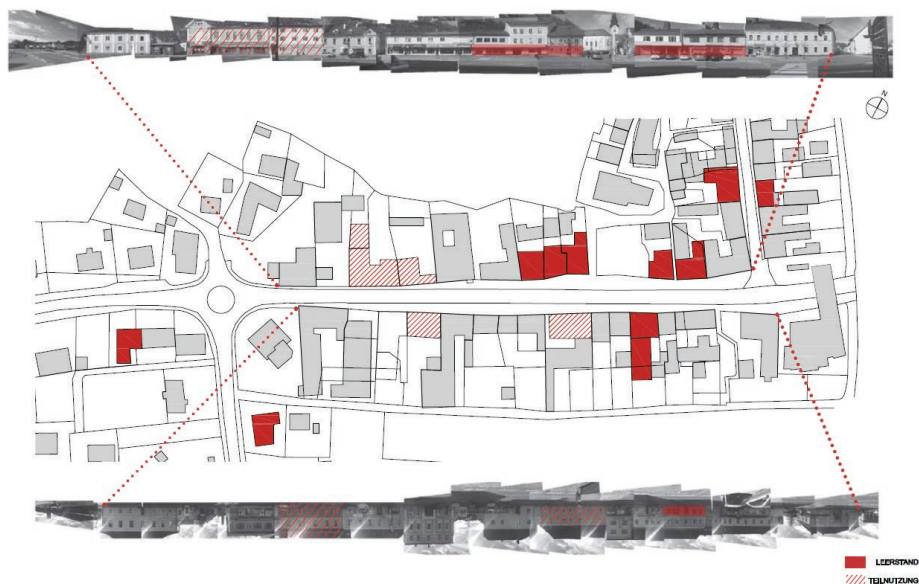
Relevant experiences in the activation at international level include the program set up by the Amsterdam Municipality, starting in 2000. The municipality set up an own office providing support and funding for private initiatives for the temporary use of vacant spaces in the city. The support included providing approved projects the necessary guarantees for bank credits. In order to be accepted, the projects have to submit a business plan and guarantee low- cost working spaces for local creative entrepreneurs and artists.

The project 'Nordbahn-Halle' in Vienna shows the potential of an empty warehouse in giving space to civic activities of all kinds, which otherwise, new urban quarters would miss out on: from co-working to co-making, space for events, learning, neighbourhood meetings and even bees and honey-making. The concept was implemented as part of a research and development project aimed at extending capacities of new built quarters to cater for low threshold non- residential uses such as work spaces for micro and cooperative enterprises.

Projects aimed at activating vacant spaces in small urban centres are also a fertile learning ground. Many of these centres have lost much of their importance in the last decades, as commercial activities have been relocated in the outskirts. The result is a progressive loss of functions and quality, as well communication spaces and civic cohesion, as described by the negative spiral diagram introduced above.

The office SHARE architects has developed a variety of strategies in collaboration with local authorities. The key element here is a focus on participative consultations and the involvement of citizens in order to develop implementable action plans.

LEERSTANDSERHEBUNG



ORTSKERNBELEBUNG GRIFFEN - KONZEPT

30

SHARE architects

SHARE architects: Example of the distribution of vacant spaces in a small rural town in Southern Austria. The plan differentiates between full vacancies and partial vacancies and shows the impact of this phenomenon on the urban structure.

Relevant elements for possible approaches against the negative spiral include:

- » Setting up specific urban (re) developments programs
- » Integrate in this programs different fields of action and sectors
- » Develop specific actions plans in different scales and time lines (short, medium and long term)
- » Last but not least, invest in participation, making sure to include the 'people' in the process.

Among the important criteria that need to be kept in mind, the check list at the following page can be of help.

Toolbox for vacant space activation



Promote temporary, short-term uses, not only long- term uses: Temporary uses are not commercially viable, but can signal the potential of a space to be used again. Supporting temporary uses is an important task for agencies involved in the activation of vacant spaces.



Create awareness and ensuring that space- offers are ,low thresholds'/ easily accessible, affordable: Flexible condition to access the space (short term leases, low deposits, graduating the costs) as well as affordability are essential pre-conditions in encouraging users to take over vacant spaces. Often owners' expectations about rent levels are exaggerated. It is important to create awareness about realistic prices and conditions.



Make space for 'new' uses: Creative industries, new work, as well as cultural and community initiatives serve as the foundation for many activation processes. Traditional, profit oriented uses should not be expected.



Toolbox for vacant space activation



Support cooperation and sharing economies.

Cooperation and sharing models can contribute to space activation by reducing the financial load of singular users and supporting synergies and community building.



In terms of infrastructure, “**low-tech**” solutions should be made possible, even if they require exceptions to regulations.



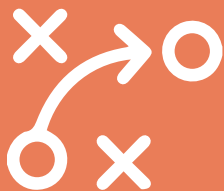
The set-up should prioritize concepts that are open for individual initiatives, and that offer a multifunctional docking- infrastructure (meeting rooms, shopping windows, performance spaces, workshops, storages and so on) for a variety of users.



Toolbox for vacant space activation



The activation is not a one-off solution, **but a process that needs long-term management.** Setting up a position for a “manager of vacant spaces” should be considered whenever the issue of vacant space has become systemic and gone beyond being a one-off situation.



Last but not least, the focus should be on “**bottom-linked**” strategies, in other words strategies that are based and support interactive relations between political authorities and civil society actors, such as active individuals, networks and cultural organizations.



Innovation needs ‘care-takers’, ‘care-takers’ need support. In order to develop a strategy for activating vacant spaces, municipal administrations such as the Lezha municipality need to not only identify the potentials of such spaces but also make space and find ways to interact and support ‘care-takers’ from the civic society for such initiatives.

3.2 Taking Care of Vacant Spaces: Kreative Räume Wien

by Uli Fries

When looking to Vienna as an example to learn from in the field of the reactivation of vacant buildings, it is necessary to bear in mind the vastly different size of the city and different situation compared to Lezha. Overall, Vienna does not have a vacancy problem. Instead, the vacancy is mostly seen as an opportunity to meet the need for affordable spaces in the city. Nevertheless, there are several different kinds of vacancy that exist in Vienna and

that can be activated to meet that goal: former industrial sites or transport infrastructure fallen out of use, small shops in mostly peripheral shopping streets, (partially) empty office-buildings and former administrative or other buildings (e.g. schools) that belong to the city administration but are no longer needed. Unfortunately, the extent of the vacancy in Vienna is not known fully, since no official numbers exist.

© Lukas
Preisinger



In 2015, the city of Vienna issued an open call for an agency to take care of the issue of vacancy, vacancy activation and temporary use. A consortium consisting of three actors was selected and has operated the agency Kreative Räume Wien (KRW) since 2016. Pepelnik & Karl provide expertise in the legal field, KLK architecture in the field of urban development and SOHO in Ottakring serves as a relay to cultural actors and cultural uses in the city. The agency is funded by three City Council Departments: 'Finance and Economy', 'Culture and Science' and 'Urban Development'. Every three months there is a meeting of KRW with representatives of all three council departments to discuss the current state of affairs. Kreative Räume Wien operates entirely with the annual budget it gets from the city administration and provides its services to the target groups for free. The main goal is to facilitate access to affordable spaces for cultural and social projects, the arts and creative industries (start-ups), to enable hybrid areas where potentials for future prosperity can develop.



Benefits of vacant space activation

The target groups consist of space seekers, property owners and space entrepreneurs.

Most of the space seekers are cultural, social and creative entrepreneurs or artists from a wide range of disciplines that need space to work but cannot afford rent at market rates.

Still, their output is seen as beneficial to the city of Vienna. Therefore,

the activation of vacant buildings is seen as a win-win-win situation for the owners, for potential users (incl. space entrepreneurs) and for urban society as a whole.

Even when the new users of a formerly empty building cannot pay regular rent, the owner still profits by at least saving the operational costs of the building.

Further decay (vandalism etc.) of the building, which is a common problem when no longer in use, can be prevented in such a way.

Interesting projects can also have a positive effect on the place identity and image of an area, while helping initiate positive economic and social development at the location. What's more, this results in potential future uses being tested on-site. It is possible that users establish themselves and turn into regular renters over time.

For potential users, there is the obvious benefit of finding a space that is affordable to them. Users mostly consist of actors that are involved in cultural or social projects or are part of the creative industries. While artists and public welfare projects often struggle to finance the space they need long term, for economic actors, it is often the start-up phase that is especially difficult.

For large-scale vacancies of 1.000 m² or more, a space entrepreneur is usually needed to manage the project.

Most owners of vacant spaces, even when part of the city administration, have no interest in dealing with 20, 30 or 50 individual users when making space available to them. Instead,

a space entrepreneur serves as an interface and deals with the owner as well as the individual users and curates the project.

Of course, space entrepreneurs need to charge individual users extra for their service, since this can quickly turn into a full-time job, especially for large vacant spaces. It is therefore important to start out with a very low initial cost per month and square meter ratio. Only then can the goal and purpose of affordability be met.

In Vienna, rents of up to 10 € per m² and month for the actual users is usually considered affordable, although some projects need prices considerably lower than that.

Last but not least society as a whole, the citizens of Vienna profit from these kinds of projects. Not only do such hybrid spaces where the arts, business and social projects meet represent some of the most interesting places in the city where stimulating cultural events take place and people from different backgrounds and fields of expertise meet and intermingle, but this also represents:

a space of opportunity for the economic future of the city, since new ideas can be tested here at a relatively low cost and risk.



The field of action of Kreative Räume Wien consists of counselling, networking, communication and the support of projects. So the set of instruments is rather soft. The agency does not rent spaces in the city and provides them directly to users. It also does not provide funds to vacancy activation projects. Instead,

KRW facilitates projects and strives to help people help themselves.

Counselling includes educating property owners, space entrepreneurs and space seekers on vacancy, vacancy activation and temporary use, on the potentials and challenges of these kinds of projects. The first steps are usually to lay out the underlying conditions of these kinds of projects in Vienna, to take an in-depth look at the concept or project idea presented, to give advice on possible public grants accessible and to help finding vacant spaces in the city that could potentially be activated.

Once a project becomes tangible, it is very important to offer legal advice.

Overall, the idea is to find a solution that makes it possible to offer low costs to the users (especially at the beginning), that provides planning reliability (contract terms), minimizes risks and regulates liabilities.

Common solutions for this task are:

- » “Normal” rental agreements
- » Gradual rental agreements (continuous rent increase from low to a normal level)
- » Precarious occupation agreements (payment of the operational costs, terminable at any time)
- » Occupation agreements with a guaranteed timespan (payment of the operational cost, guaranteed time span)

While it was very common to set up precarious occupation agreements for temporary use projects initially, KRW has moved on to recommending occupation agreements with a guaranteed timespan, if possible.

The guaranteed time span allows the users or space entrepreneurs to invest more time, money and energy into the project, when compared with knowing that the project could end any day.

For start-up businesses that are precarious in the beginning but expect to grow financially in the future, a gradually increasing rent agreement, from a low a level to a common market level price, can be a fitting model. Kreative Räume Wien does not only give advice on the subject, but also makes model contracts that can be customized according to individual needs available, and if asked for, also offers expert evaluations before contracts are signed. This provides property owners with the kind of trust often needed to realize a project.

It is not always necessary though to activate a completely new space/vacancy to realize a project. Instead, it often makes sense for space seekers to dock onto an existing project. Therefore KRW supports space seekers by providing information on current projects in Vienna that might be suitable for them and vice versa, by assisting existing projects by helping them find users (from a database or open calls). KRW can also serve as a mediator when problems arise within a project, with neighbours, property owners or officials. To be up to date about what is going on in the field of vacancy activation and use in Vienna is key of course, and necessitates constant networking. This way, many possibilities of collaboration are identified. Also, the subject is communicated to a broader audience by Kreative Räume Wien. This includes an online presence and press work but also taking part in conferences, talks and alike.

KRW serves as a platform that communicates with and interconnects relevant stakeholders involved in the field in Vienna.

3.3 Best Practice: Creative Cluster Margareten

by Uli Fries

Creative Cluster Margareten is a project enabled by Kreative Räume Wien that has received a lot of attention in the last year. It has been operational since August 2019 and is located in a former school building of approx. 3.500 m² (including the 2nd phase starting in Aug. 2020). The project is run by a so-called 'space entrepreneur' and serves as a hub and workplace for around 120 users. A space entrepreneur is a professional actor that serves as an intermediary between the owner and the users. Besides managing the project overall, legally this role includes negotiating and concluding contracts with both sides - the owner as well as the users. This becomes necessary especially

when dealing with major vacant buildings, since owners usually don't want to deal with large groups of individual users.

The former classrooms have been transformed into studios where artists from different fields as well as creative professionals from a wide range of fields and projects work together. Some of the better-known users are the 'Academy of Visual Arts Vienna' with their Academy Studio-Program 2020/21, the architecture collective 'mostlikely', the DJ school for girls 'turntablita', the magazine 'c/o Vienna', the hip hop label 'heiße luft' or the interdisciplinary dance collective 'Anima Fabrik'.

Artists
Studios



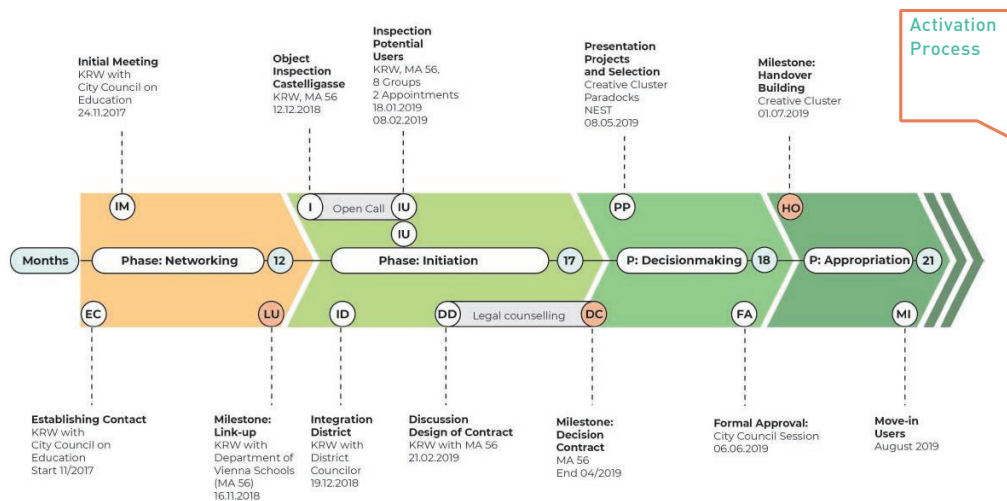
Building
Facade



© Stefan Brenner

Creative Cluster Margareten is a good example that illustrates the amount of time the process of facilitating and realizing projects like this typically need. Initially, Kreative Räume Wien contacted the City Council on Education and proposed the idea of using an empty school building for this kind of project. Once a suitable school building was found, KRW cooperated with the Municipal Department of Schools (MA 56), escorted

the entire process, did legal counselling for all sides involved, initiated the call for a space entrepreneur, supported the call for individual users, and helped with networking and PR. Between the initial contact of KRW and the City Council on Education in November of 2017 and receiving the information that a school building would soon be available, an entire year passed (networking phase).



At the end of 2018, the school building was inspected by KRW together with the Department of Vienna Schools (MA 56) and an open call to find a space entrepreneur to take over the building was issued (initiation phase). Representatives of the district were also integrated into the process. In February of 2019, two viewing appointments were organized during

which, it was possible for potential users to inspect the building and declare their interest. Overall, eight different groups submitted their project ideas. Before moving on to deciding on who would be chosen to realize their idea, a fitting legal framework had to be developed. In order to allow for low prices for users, and to ensure planning reliability and

flexibility for the space entrepreneur while minimizing risks, it was decided to set up a lending agreement (decision-making phase). The space entrepreneur was guaranteed use of the building for three years, paying only the operational cost and no rent. At the same time, the space entrepreneur would be allowed to end the contract early if the project failed. In May of 2019, three groups were invited to present their project ideas in greater detail and finally, Creative Cluster was chosen. Although KRW was counselling throughout the whole process, this decision had to be made by the owner,

the Department of Vienna Schools, itself. Finally, the City Council had to approve the project and the building was handed over to the space entrepreneur in July of 2019 (appropriation phase). The first users moved in, in August of 2019.

So far the project has been very successful and is currently expanding to a second part of the former school building (August 2020). Kreative Räume Wien is still constantly supporting the space entrepreneurs of Creative Cluster Kunstverein.

Interior
Courtyard



© Florian Mair

3.4 NORDBAHN-HALLE Vienna

by Silvia Forlati

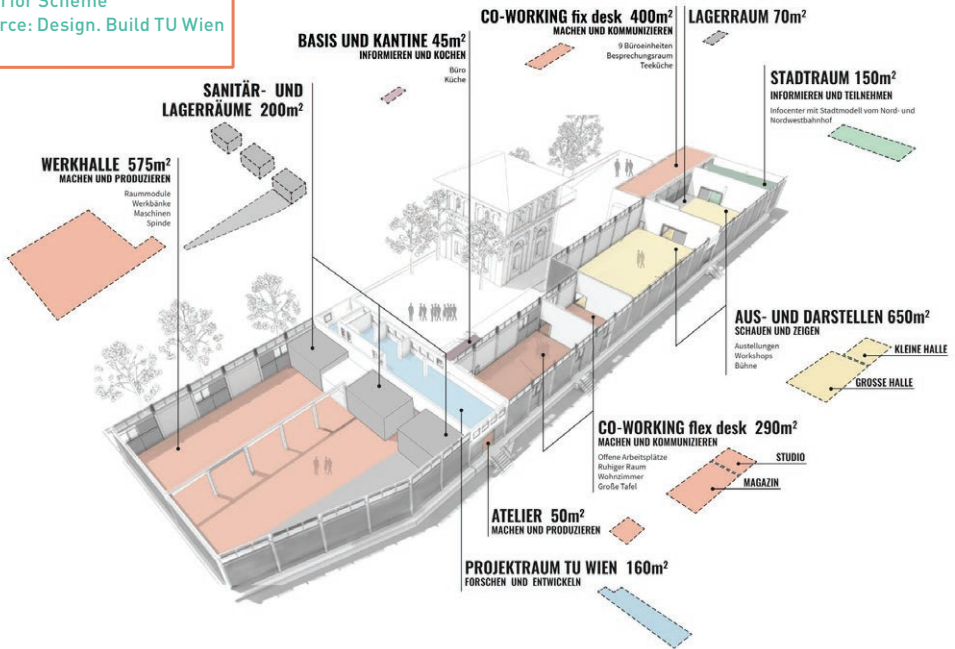
The Nordbahn-Halle has been in operation for over two years as an interim use, as part of the research and development project “Mix: Nordbahnhof,” under the lead of the Vienna University of Technology and financed by the Austrian Climate and Energy Fund. The aim of this interim use was to set impulses for the urban development of the surroundings, to increase the quality of life in the district, and to support participatory urban planning. The findings on the use of the Nordbahn-Halle are to be incorporated into the concept for the further urban development and design of the Freie Mitte, the near-natural recreational area at the centre of the development.

The Nordbahn-Halle was returned to the owner at the beginning of August 2019 and eventually demolished. However, the “Mix: Nordbahnhof” project continues to operate and is active with impulses at other locations, and interested in cooperation opportunities. The outputs from the Nordbahn-Halle experience include the online service ‘Raumteiler’ on the digital platform “imGrätzl.at/Raumteiler”: (<https://www.imgraetzl.at/wien/raumteiler>). The service connects local makers and entrepreneurs interested in sharing their workspaces with other makers looking for affordable space. This service supports the sharing of resources and at the same time raises affordability, intensity and variety of use of non-residential spaces.

View of the site
copyright: Markus Fattinger



Interior Scheme
Source: Design. Build TU Wien



Care + Repair Ausstellung Architekturzentrum Wien
copyright: Lisa Rastl (18.06.2017)



3.5. Urban regeneration with vacancy

by Silvia Forlati

The program for creative incubators “AMSTERDAM BROEDPLAATSEN” focused on the activation of vacant spaces as a motor for urban regeneration and a means to support the creative economy.

49 million euro 2000-2014

1.372 working space units for artists and creative entrepreneurs.

105.583 sqm have been (temporarily) transformed into broedplaatsen.

58.333 sqm of the total amount have been assigned to officially classified artists.

The program provided support to private initiatives as long they could ensure the creation of affordable workspaces for artists and creative entrepreneurs. By doing so, they created the necessary financial and organization infrastructure to ‘bottom- link’ these initiatives.


For more information, visit:

<https://www.amsterdam.nl/kunst-cultuur/ateliers-broedplaatsen/>

and

<https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/organisaties/organisaties/bureau-broedplaatsen/>

<https://www.amsterdam.nl/kunst-cultuur/ateliers-broedplaatsen/>




[My Amsterdam](#) [English site](#)

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Workshops and breeding grounds



Register workshops and incubators (ABA)

In order to qualify to come to the studio (apartment) must you will first register...

Supply of studios and studio houses

You can view the offer and respond after you have logged in

Report a studio or studio home

Report an a new or released studio or studio apartment at for rent...

Bureau Broedplaats

Information about the development of breeding grounds

For artists and creatives

- > Conditions for studios, studio houses and breeding grounds
- > Procedure respond to available offer
- > Breeding grounds procedure
- > Foundations procedure
- > Contract renewal procedure
- > Reconsideration procedure
- > Find an artist's studio or home

For landlords


- > Report a studio or studio home to Ateliers en Broedplaatsen Amsterdam
- > Assign a space in a breeding ground yourself
- > Reassessment of artists and creatives

News

- > Newsletter art and culture about COVID-19

Lake

- > New Amsterdam studio and creative Incubator policy 2019-2022
- > Commission for Studios and (Residential) Work Buildings Amsterdam (CAWA)



3.6. PlaceCity – a school transformation in Oslo:

by **Bahanur Nasya**

In this project taking place in the partner city of Oslo (Norway), PlaceCity focusses on the “Hersleb Upper Secondary School.” The project aims to engage with the students and work with them in revitalizing their school area while establishing contact with stakeholders around the school. Nabolagshager leads the local case study and aims to empower students of the school so they not only make better use of the school facilities for their needs, but also connect with stakeholders to create valuable opportunities. The neighbourhood this school is located in has a rather dense population, and the school drop out rate is very high. Through this PlaceCity project, we are empowering students to develop skills for entrepreneurship while assisting them in transforming the schoolyard and thus, correcting the top-down decisions previously made.

The Hersleb Upper Secondary School is located in the district Grønland. It struggles with a bad reputation, low academic test scores, and a student population consisting mostly of first- or second-generation immigrants. It has one of the the highest drop-out rates among schools in Oslo and the long-term societal challenges related to their students are significant - including a low degree of attractiveness in the labour market, as well as limited life skills and networks to ensure employability as well as other key aspects of societal integration and participation.

In this project, the partners aim to empower the students and facilitate the creation of inclusive meeting places across demographic groups and organize activities in the schoolyard after school hours and on weekends for neighbours and fellow students.

Hersleb Upper
Secondary School



3.7 Open Heritage – reactivation of a vacant market in Bratislava

by Bahanur Nasya

Bratislava's Old Market Hall (Stará tržnica) is owned by the municipality. Despite its historical importance, the hall had remained unused for years, given that the renters could not find an adequate use for the large sized building and that it needed substantial renovations. It was finally leased to an NGO for a symbolic one euro per year, with the condition of investing 10.000 euros per month in the building's renovation. This old market was revitalised by a group of people who added

more functions to the market to make it financially sustainable, and took on the task of renovating the space, instead of paying rent. This renting model is assured by commercial events, while the building also accommodates many social and non-commercial activities.

Download the full case description from Open Heritage website:

https://openheritage.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/9_Open-Heritage_Stará-Trznica-Bratislava_Observatory-Case.pdf

<https://openheritage.eu/2018/11/22/stara-trznica/>

OPEN HERITAGE

Project ▾ Heritage Labs ▾ Practices ▾ News & Events ▾ **Participate ▾**

STARÁ TRŽNICA

Bratislava's Old Market Hall (Stará tržnica), owned by the municipality and unused for years, was leased to an NGO for a symbolic one euro per year, with the obligation of investing 10.000 euros per month in the building's renovation. The model is assured by commercial events, while the building also accommodates many social and non-commercial activities. <http://staratrznica.sk/en/>

To understand the story behind please download: [Stará Trznica, Bratislava Observatory Case](#)

THE STARÁ TRŽNICA

The Old Market Hall, Bratislava

Stará Trznica movie @openheritage.eu

The Old Market Hall Alliance has been running the market as a non-profit project since 2013. The city had decided to to run the market by itself, but the stalls were closing down due to unfavorable rental conditions. With the number of active stalls on the decline, the place became even less attractive for visitors over time, losing more of its character and importance. The municipality was loosing around 30.000 euros a year within this structure. The economic situation also did not permit the renovation of the hundred-year-old building. The Alliance thus, invented a special program for the building, one which combined various uses and the different needs of citizens. The building functions as a market one day of the week. Eleven people from a wide range of disciplines, ranging from music and concert experts to charity specialists and an event organizer, cooperated as a multidisciplinary team and elaborated on a new program for the building; their collaboration serving as a key-element for the diversity of the program created.

The building functions as a market as well as a concert hall, a ballroom for companies, a conference hall, and a workshop space. The renters come as commercial enterprises or non-profit-charities organizing various activities.

What works is the blend of activities, multi-functionality, the combination of functions that do not generate solid revenue with those that can generate revenue, thus allowing the later to subsidize the former.

A key element to the project's success is a mix of economic models as well. On Friday evenings for instance, the location could obtain a high rental fee for offering use to various functions, but the Alliance attaches importance to the market function. The Saturdays market, when people have time, is always full of people. But during the week, the stall owners can do other businesses and do not need to compete with supermarkets.

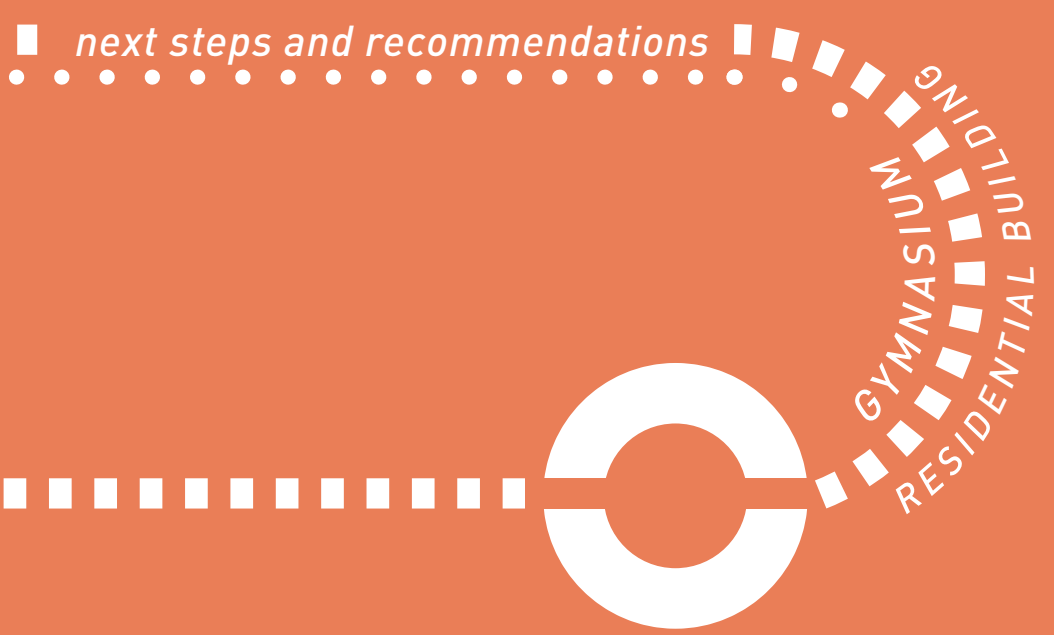
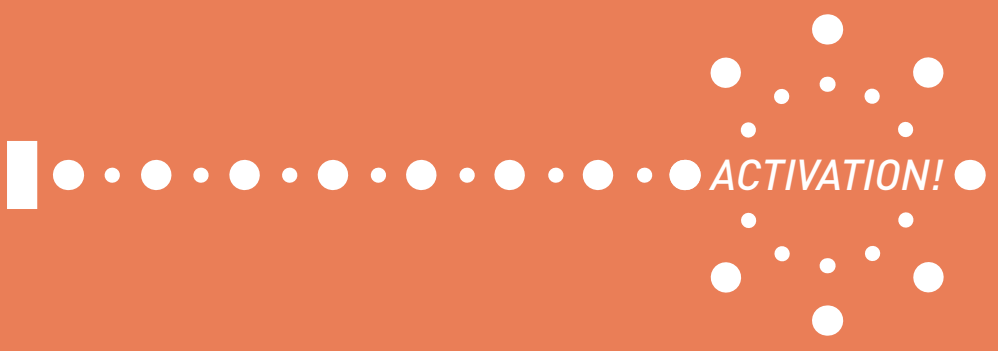
INSPIRATIONS FROM VIENNA AND BEYOND



**ROADMAP
FOR
LEZHA**



■ ■ ■ *defining the field of action* ■ ■



CHAPTER 4



DEFINING THE FIELD OF ACTION

This project was designed to be a collaboration over distance, making the development of the key aspects ensure it advances of utmost importance. The Viennese experts in the project prepared a checklist for Lezha's team in order to stimulate the debate during online meetings, which also served as a guide for the implementation of the project. Here is an elaboration of the main aspects of the roadmap.

4.1 Synergy potentials

Currently there are no projects focusing on vacant spaces in the city, in the Lezha municipality.

Apart from that, there are a series of ongoing and implemented projects in youth empowerment, vocational training programs and innovation in Lezha.¹ The EU is funding a number of projects that aim to boost employability (in particular of young people) and accelerate vocational professional skills. In addition, the United National Development Program in collaboration with the National Employment Service has implemented

a series of projects in the field of youth employability and skills advancement.

In the neighbouring town, a unique project is being implemented by the G02 NGO within the framework of the EU program Entrepreneurial Innovation Ecosystem² in Albania, funded by European Union. The project takes place in the city of Shkodra (30km from Lezha) and aims to boost the employability of young people through innovation and entrepreneurship. The project might be extended to the young people in Lezha city to ensure a wider socio-economic impact.

4.2. Local multipliers

We can divide the stakeholders (actors) in local authority/public agencies, private sector, formal and informal organizations, and the community itself. Each of the actors have a key role to play in the activation of vacant spaces in the Lezha municipality. Local project partners are in contact with local authorities and community members that are willing to invest in or receive ideas on open vacant spaces projects.

Local authorities/public agencies: They are responsible for the activation of public vacant spaces such as schools, theatres, cinema and similar locations that need to be re-designed, and might be able to change their initial function purpose. They are also the institutions that give the approval for retrofitting open vacancies to private or community projects.

Other stakeholders (private, organizations etc): They are responsible for investing with their initiatives in open space revitalization and retrofitting.

4.3 Case studies as starter

Lezha has a very favourable and strategic position, located in a short distance to main cities such as Tirana (55km), Podgorica (98 km), and Shkodra (44 km). The municipality is also located close to various main national infrastructure nodes, such as the Port of Durrës (70 km) and the Rinas Airport (40 km), while the Port of Shëngjin is part of the municipality. Additionally, the north-south national transport corridor passes through the territory of Lezha.

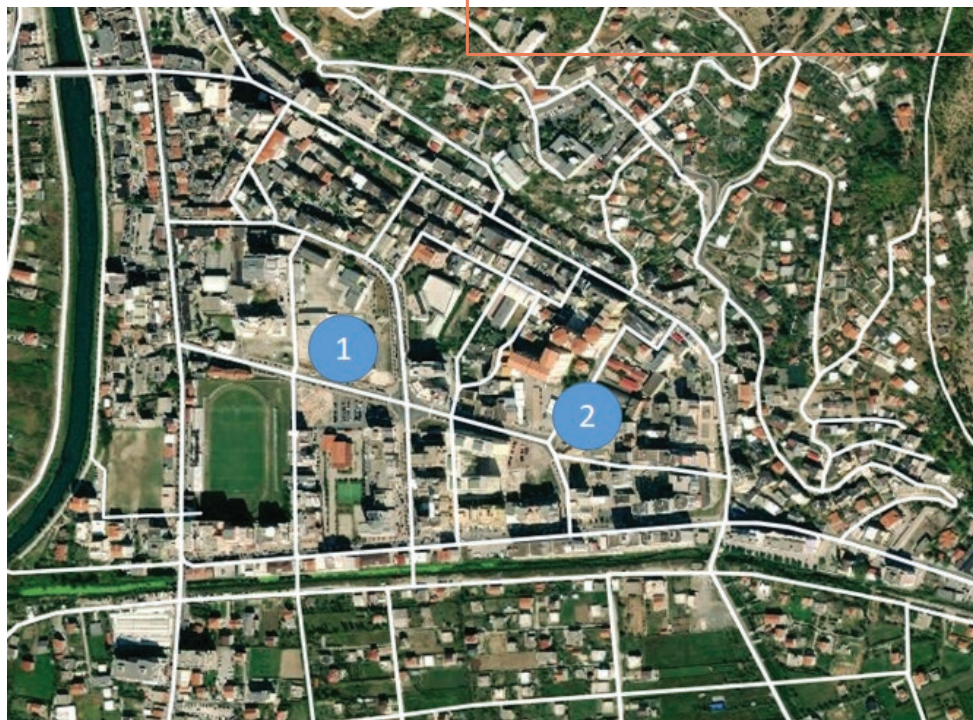
1-Vacant public space,former "IdajetLezha" Gymnasium
2-Vacant private space



The buildings in which the vacant spaces 1 and 2 are located are near the existing road as well as near those proposed by the General Local Plan.

The project partners decided to treat these two case studies as equal starting points to develop scenarios on how the vacant space issue could be tackled and how a force group, as well as the process could be set up.

1-Vacant public space,former "IdajetLezha" Gymnasium
2-Vacant private space



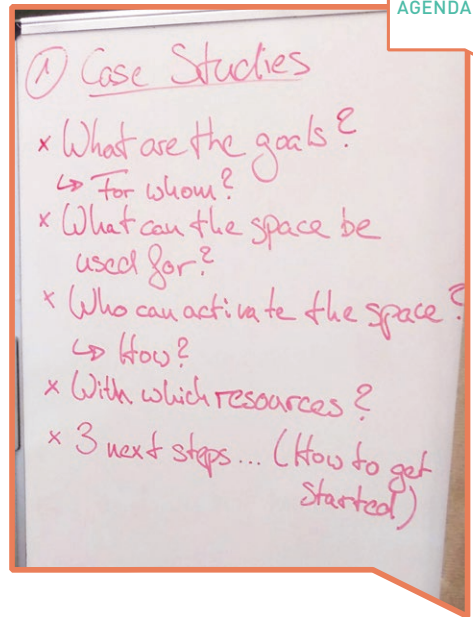
4.4 Distanced working on two cases

The methodology of the online workshop on June 29, 2020

The core part of the online workshop was made up of two working sessions. While the first session was about the two case studies mentioned above, the second part was about the possible set-up of a task force for revitalizing vacant spaces in Lezha. After an introduction to the methodical approach, both - the group of experts in Vienna (Silvia Forlati, Uli Fries) as well as the group in Albania represented by Melvis Struga - worked on the first set of questions separately.

Each group had 45 minutes to work on the key considerations to bear in mind when developing a project for their case study. The team from Albania was first to present their conclusions. This was followed by the presentation of the second case study by the Viennese group. This ensured that the group seeking to gain knowledge was initially give the opportunity to think independently before moving on to take in the more experienced approach of the expert team as well as the feedback to their own work.

Online
Workshop
AGENDA



CHAPTER 5



VACANT SPACE I GYMNASIUM “IDAJET LEZHA”

5.1 Gymnasium “Idajet Lezha”

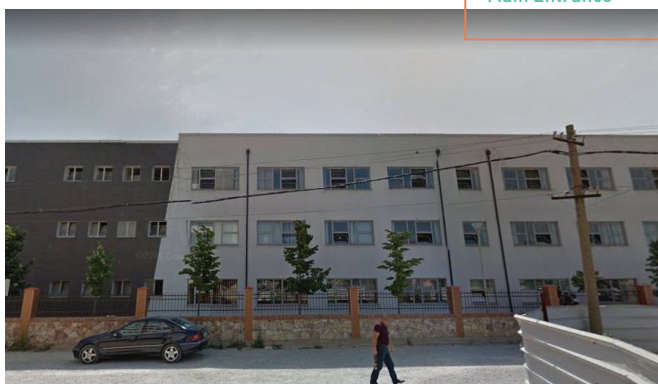
60 inhabitants and 580 users (mainly school pupils) occupy this unit, with 1300 inhabitants and 2700 users in the sites (units) adjacent to it. According to the General Local Plan, this space is located in the unit of LE-UB-105. Currently, this unit has educational use. The GLP for this unit foresees education and residential use with services and institutions being allowed. The increase in intensity is also foreseen.

The existing use of the building is as a school (in renovation). The vacant space is located on the ground floor and the first floor of the school building. The physical condition of the building is good; it has decent access to existing and proposed road axes.

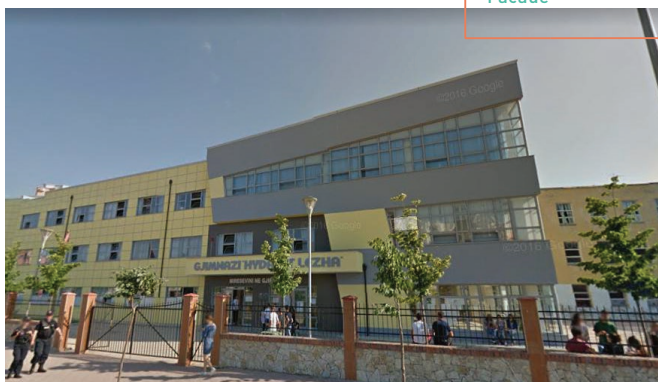
SERVICES NEAR/AROUND VACANT SPACE 1

- Bar
- Restaurant
- Market
- Pharmacy
- Dentist
- Sports fields
- Cult objects
- Barber
- Hairdressing
- Mobile service
- Travel agency
- etc.

Main Entrance



Facade



5.2 ideas and recommendations for case study: school building

1. What is the goal?

- The main goal is to activate/unlock the vacant space potential and reuse it for the needs of the local community
- The primary function of the project is to establish an 'Innovation HUB' on the ground floor by initiating small-scale projects/start-ups in the field of technology, tourism and agribusiness
- The youth will receive mentoring and coaching from experts (from the school itself or NGOS and the industry sector) who will lead and guide from the early stages of the project through capitalization

2. The target group/beneficiaries

- The current students in the school
- The neighbours (mostly young people) that are living in the surroundings
- Young people from North Albania (neighbouring cities/regions)
- SMEs in the field of tourism/agriculture etc

3. Who are the potential caretakers?

- Municipality (Department of Urban planning in collaboration with Education Department/Youth Department)

- Education Agency in Lezha
- Non-profit organizations in collaboration with the municipality
- Youth organizations/Cultural organizations

4. What are the resources needed?

- The initial investments
- Human resources/capacities in the field of innovation, start-ups & technology mentoring
- Fruitful collaboration between the municipality and other stakeholders (NGOs, Industry, Academia, etc)

5. What are the next steps?

- Project design (detailed plan, tasks, actors involved, business plan)
- Fundraising from national and international donors
- Establishment of the innovation HUB
- Establish a working group (NGOs, entrepreneurs, authorities, experts) on the open vacancies/municipality to keep the issue alive

CHAPTER 6



VACANT SPACE II RESIDENTIAL BUILDING

6.1 Residential Building

There are 450 inhabitants and around 580 users (mainly educational and service facilities) in this unit, with 2200 inhabitants and 1600 users in adjacent units. There are also residential, services and administrative buildings on the site. Referring to the GLP, this space is located in unit LE-UB-086. This encompasses units with mostly residential use, where services, recreational facilities, health and institutions are also allowed.

SERVICES NEAR/AROUND VACANT SPACE 2

- Coffee bar
- Restaurant
- Market
- Pharmacy
- Dentist
- Sports fields
- Cult objects
- Mobile service
- Photographer
- Electricity equipment
- etc.

Residential Building



Residential Building



6.2 ideas and recommendations for case study: residential building

1. What are the goals and for whom?

The first question was split up into two parts, distinguishing between the goals for the building itself and the goal of developing a positive social impact with the project by reaching out to the public realm. It has to be considered from the very start if realizing set minimum goals can already be considered a success, or if more can be aimed for.

1.1. What are the (minimum) goals? For whom?

- To activate the space in order to avoid dangers, vandalism etc.
- Strictly private uses are also acceptable (storage etc.)
- Benefits to the private users / the owner
- Improve the basic situation and the safety of the ground floor of the building, which benefits the residents and the owner

1.2. What are the goals that benefit the public realm? For whom?

- Make a space available for a good price to potential users
- Develop a space that adds functions and services to the area for inhabitants of the building and the neighbourhood
- Make the building more attractive
 - improve the place identity / image / atmosphere of the place / and the public space around it for the neighbourhood and its inhabitants

- Prevent a downward spiral of the area

2. What can the space be used for?

- Extension of the private residential space: storage, parking, bicycle garage
- Regular commercial use: retail, office
- Community infrastructure - between social and commercial: café, fitness centre, child care centre, indoor playground
- Events (temporary uses): flea market, exhibition, party (concert)
- Creative use: studios
- Social use: NGOs, neighbourhood service, care work
- Hybrid space: combination of the above

3. Who can activate the space? How?

3.1. Who:

- Scenario 1: owner + residents
- Scenario 2: owner + NGO / community organization
- Scenario 3: owner + social entrepreneur
- Scenario 4: owner + city administration

It's a definite prerequisite to have the owner on your side. Then you need to find a stakeholder that is interested in facilitating and managing a project in the vacant space.

3.2. Feedback:

- How could the possible barrier of a lack of understanding from the owner be tackled? There needs to be an educational process to explain owners and residents what kinds of projects could be possible
- What if the owner and the residents have different ideas on the kind of project they want? This is a job of the task force.
- Is it the job of the municipality to engage in this communication?
- International best practice examples could help to bring across what might be possible. There needs to be some kind of official recognition with an appointed official in charge of this process (task force or an actor from the municipality itself)

3.3. How:

- Support by Taskforce to be started in Lezha
- Grants for pilot projects
- Call for ideas
- Temporary uses
- Graduated rent (reduced rent models – affordability especially in the start)

4. With which resources?

4.1. Money:

- From the EU
- From the City
- From private investment (owners)
- From crowdfunding (e.g. from residents)

Vacant Space



4.2. Time:

- Of the task force
- Of the city administration
- Of volunteers
- Students/university or schools – cooperation (international - TU Wien?)
- Recycling / upcycling / urban mining: for example furniture, façade elements

5. Three next steps... (How to get started)

- Agree with the owners on possible scenarios:
 - Under which conditions is the owner willing to invest?
 - Under which conditions is the owner willing to provide the building free of charge for a while (investment by the users)?
- Contact the residents in order to begin with the cleaning action to hold an event in the space – background aim: find out what the local interests are – who could be the local caretakers?
- Define a business case according to step 2

VACANT SPACES I - II



CHAPTER 7



NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Next steps and recommendations

The exchange and reflection on the two specific case studies indicated that vacant spaces are a relevant issue for Lezha, but there is a lack of awareness and know-how on how to proceed.

The Bacid team suggests thinking and acting simultaneously on different levels:

1. On the institutional level to establish awareness and enable frameworks for positive actions, such as identifying possible responsible persons for the task force (see point two) and calling for expressions of interest by private entities and civic organizations (see point three).
2. At the experts level, possibly in the form of a 'task- force' consisting of members from differing expertise and backgrounds. They could assist in establishing the necessary link between public and private initiatives and ensure the project proceeds into the conception and possibly implementation of a pilot project in the immediate future.
3. At the Civic society level to help look at ways to involve private citizens and civic organizations ('project makers') in the project initiation and implementation, as both should be based on participative processes.

A meaningful first step is the establishment of the above-mentioned task-force that will serve as a link between the institutional level and civic society in general.

Members of this task force should consist of:

- » Up to two representatives of the municipality, in charge of the municipal management of vacant spaces
- » Local experts
- » Experts from the Bacid Team
- » Representative of active organizations and institution in the region, with experience in EU projects.

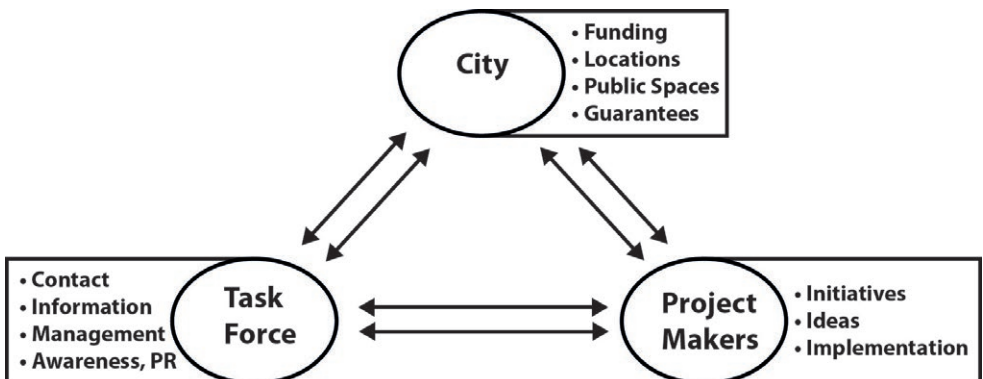
Its initial task will be to raise awareness about the issue and the potential of vacant spaces. The communication should be aimed both at the institutional level as well as private citizens and civic organizations interested in activating a vacant space in the frame of a pilot project.

At the same time the task-force should investigate funding possibilities and link to local stakeholders in order to define up to three pilot projects to be implemented within a period of approximate three years.

Online
Workshop
AGENDA

② Task Force

- x What are the goals?
- x Who can initiate the task force?
- x Who needs to be involved?
↳ How?
- x What can the task force do? (tasks, responsibilities)
- x With which resources?
- x 3 next steps...



Following to do's should be considered:

- » Establishment of a contact points
- » Mapping of vacant spaces, documentation
- » Research of possible locations for pilot projects
- » Research the legal and normative contexts
- » Management, networking among potential initiators and open-minded space-owners
- » Make calls for ideas
- » Organize study trips
- » PR and communication

The test case of the school (see workshop results) promises the site as having good potential as the first pilot project. The task force could use it to quickly move into an active mode. For this, explicit support from the municipality is an essential requirement, in the form of:

- » Explicit acknowledgment of this document
- » Nomination of an official in charge of the issue
- » Nomination/ official designation of the task force
- » Minimal budget for the task force

To conclude, it is important to point out that the potential of such actions is not private profit, but the creation of a public value to the benefit of a wide range of citizens.

One of the mayor recommendations of the roadmap is the establishment of the task-force responsible for the management of vacant spaces in Lezha Municipality. The proposed task force will be composed of members of civil society organizations (ETMI), experts (urban planning experts, etc) and representatives of the Lezha Municipality. The main role of the task force will be to identify, assess and to monitor the vacant spaces at Lezha Municipality by using it the base model of the road map already developed from the project.

The roadmap will be used firstly as a good example that explains the entire process; from the identification of vacancy spaces to the importance of revitalizing the vacant space into a useful one, followed by good examples on integrating these actions/strategies at local level. Apart from the development of the roadmap, the establishment of the task force to monitor the implementation of the proposed actions is also being proposed as part of this project.

NEXT STEPS & RECOMMENDATIONS



CHAPTER 8



CHEKLIST FOR DEVELOPING A ROADMAP

Checklist

Project partners used a catalogue of questions to identify the needs and potentials and to guide the process towards a roadmap. The above-mentioned questions can be used for similar projects as well, or as a basis to advance this roadmap to a fundamental project proposal or development strategy.

1.1.

What is the general economic and social situation in the city or town?

Please give an overview.

1.2.

Are there relevant projects or processes in place that are having a positive impact on the city?

Best practices of some kind?

EU Projects?

Can you give us a short overview?

1.3.

Who are potential stakeholders for the activation of vacant spaces in the city/town?

Who is there to work with, on the side of the municipality?

Who could be potential users for vacant spaces?

Educational institutions and organizations?

Cultural facilities/groups?

Cultural festivals?

Social Projects? SMEs?

Are you in contact with these groups?

1.4.

What can you tell us about the vacancy in the city/town and the extent of vacant buildings – are there any numbers?

What kinds of buildings are vacant? Where in the city are buildings vacant? Why are the buildings vacant?

How has a vacancy developed in recent years?

CHAPTER 9



SUMMARY

Summary

The project “Revitalising Lezha” was initiated as an international collaboration. The aim was to involve partners from Albania and Lezha in a rethinking process that enables them through accurate examples on how to use vacant spaces for the improvement of the city. The project initially had two phases, the first being a preparatory phase consisting of a distanced collaboration as well as a workshop on site in Lezha. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak and travel restrictions, the second phase had to be done online, which restricted the collaboration and challenged the exchange process.

Regardless, the project partners utilised digital tools to create webinars out of the knowledge exchange that occurred, which can be useful for the further implementation of the project and/or for other cities and communities. An essential part of the collaboration is also this publication, which allows the advancement, replication and scale up of the roadmap.

In this project, the local partners chose two cases to be developed for the roadmap.

The first partially vacant building is a school, which has an unused ground floor, where the upper floors are still in good use as a school building. The expectation is that the use of the upper floors are going to be intensified. The building is under public ownership and quite centrally located. The second vacancy case is located on the ground floor of a privately owned residential building. The vacant spaces are in a bad shape and need some investment to be utilised. The neighbourhood is residential.

The roadmap consists of case studies that address successful models on how to shift towards the revitalization of vacant spaces through a holistic approach. It consists of several steps: identification of vacant spaces, selection of stakeholders and means of interventions as financing, human capacities, etc.

Strategically approaching the task of activating vacant spaces in Lezha implies aiming for initiating a bottom-linked process. Official dedication to the cause by the city administration is necessary as well as the creativity and commitment of actors from the local civil society (project makers). At the same time, a body of experts (task-force) is needed to accompany the process. By funding and officially recognizing the project, the city

administration enables the task-force to develop and manage an environment in which civic engagement on the matter can thrive. The duties of the task-force include gathering information on the local situation (searching and mapping vacancies, identifying stakeholders and potential partners), contacting relevant stakeholders (vacancy owners, residents and possible project makers), providing information on similar projects (international and national best practice) and raising awareness via PR.

The task-force ought to consist of representatives of the municipality, local experts, experts from the team of this project as well as representatives of institutions in the region that have experience with EU projects. In order to kick-start the process, it can be sensible to initially follow a more implementation oriented approach and to start out with realizing a showcase project in order to highlight what is possible and to inspire imagination among civic actors. Ultimately it is civic society itself though from which project ideas and the desire to develop formerly vacant spaces in the city of Lezha needs to come from in the long term.

The roadmap consists of two case studies that address successful models on how to shift towards revitalization of vacant spaces through a holistic approach. The municipality of Lezha and local stakeholders will not only use the examples developed and capitalize them into concrete actions, but also share best practices and replicate their formats in other vacant spaces in Lezha Municipality.

ABOUT THE PARTNERS >>





wonderland
platform for european architecture

 www.wonderland.cx

 office@wonderland.cx

ABOUT Wonderland is an independent NGO established in 2004, which provides a communication and exchange platform between European practitioners. The network conducts research, realises co-creation workshops, publishes findings and results, organises public screenings, discussions and other events to involve non-professionals and to stimulate discourse. The association has members in most European countries and supports emerging professionals who are either studying or have recently completed their education. The aim of the organization is to empower and enable young experts in fulfilling their capacities, to have an impact in their built environment and enrich their chances in the future. Association members come from contemporary architecture and urbanism, culture, arts, politics, economy, science and practice backgrounds. During recent years, the organization has concentration more on the valorisation of the cultural heritage and the empowerment of youth and emerging professionals. The network is open to new members from all countries.

blind date



www.wonderland.cx



blinddate@wonderland.cx

ABOUT 'Blind Date' is an exchange format that promotes interdisciplinary exchange on a topic among professionals that have not previously met. The format encourages participants to engage in an active and in-depth dialogue with the presenters. The involvement of the audience and stakeholders is crucial, as they are the local experts and can provide insider information to the participants. Furthermore, these "local experts" can ensure that the "blind date seeds" can grow in the local community. This wonderland format is open to everyone.





 www.share-arch.com

 office@share-arch.com

ABOUT SHARE architects is an international architectural studio led by Silvia Forlati, Hannes Bürger and Thomas Lettner. Considering, of course, client's needs and wishes, the objective is to create excellent and innovative architecture. The team is distinguished by international practice, wide knowhow, and over 25 years of experience.

The team is interested in developing creative, solution-oriented architecture and urban design. Difficult needs or conditions, such as redevelopment or conversion projects or limited budgets, are a welcome challenge. The designers believe in the necessity of an intensive exchange with the client in order to fully explore the potential of the given brief. They see design as a research based, collaborative process in which ideas, wishes and dreams are shared and space is made for them.



 www.kreativeraeumewien.at

 office@kreativeraeumewien.at

ABOUT Kreative Räume Wien supports and guides the reactivation of vacancies for long-term and temporary uses in Vienna. A focus is set on counselling of space seekers and users as well as property owners. Furthermore networking and PR aimed at raising awareness on issues of vacancy activation and prevention, interim use and cooperative concepts play a major role. The agency is funded by the municipality of Vienna.



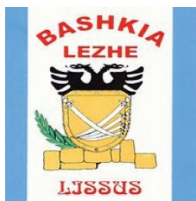


 www.etmi-al.org

 info@etmi-al.org

ABOUT Environmental and Territorial Management Institute (ETMI) is a non-profit organization founded in 2014. ETMI collaborates with experts in the field of environment, territory and other related fields to promote environmental and territorial management at regional, national and international level in accordance with modern sustainable development standards.

The Environmental and Territorial Management Institute stands for sustainable development, environmental justice, territorial management, transparency, and participatory democracy. It promotes clean, healthy and sustainable environment.



 www.lezha.gov.al

 info@lezha.gov.al

ABOUT Lezhë is a town and municipality in northwest Albania, in the county with the same name. The present municipality was formed in 2015 by merging different former municipalities. The merge increased the population of the municipality 4 times. With the change in the legislation, the town has to take further roles for a wider area.

PARTNERS SUMMARY !



Masthead

BLIND DATE SERIES on SAME CHANCES FOR EVERYONE

Coordinator of the series and partnership:

Bahanur NASYA (Wonderland, Austria)

Project assistant:

Francesco REMONATO (Wonderland, Austria)

Working group experts and contributors:

Silvia FORLATI (share architects), Uli FRIES (kreative Räume, Austria)
Mevis STRUGA (ETMI, Albania), Fatlinda STRUGA (ETMI, Albania), Petrit MARKU (Municipality of Lezha, Albania), Zef ZEFI (Municipality of Lezha, Albania), Alban MARKU (Municipality of Lezha, Albania), Klevis MARKU (Municipality of Lezha, Albania),

Layout & design:

Jorge MOSQUERA (Wonderland, Austria)

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contact us

Wonderland Platform for European Architecture

c/o das Packhaus
4th floor. Office 4.03
Marxergasse 24, 1030
Vienna – Austria
www.wonderland.cx

supported by

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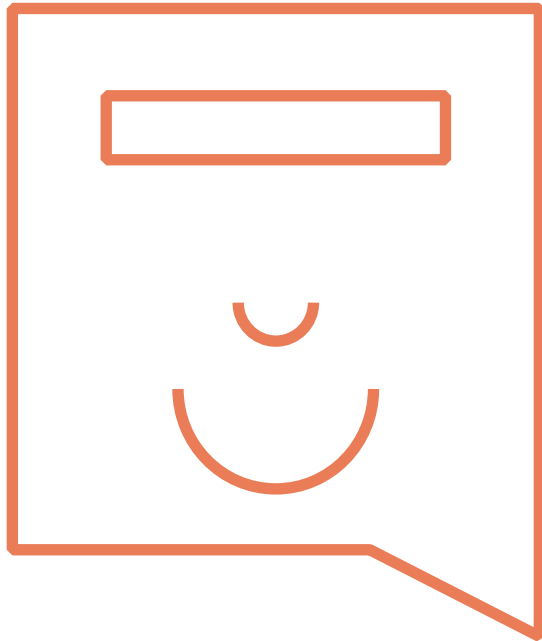
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INCLUSIVE CITIES FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Revitalizing the vacant spaces in Lezha

ROAD MAP FOR LEZHA



This roadmap can be a useful tool to help lay the foundations for an overall strategy that embraces a new model of urban re-use management. The activation of disused and underutilized spaces and buildings can transform into opportunities for new jobs, promote a collaborative economy, social innovation and the establishing of start-ups.

