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FINAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary - learning from YOUMOBIL
revitalization projects

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With the contribution of other YOUMOBIL partners





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1. Introduction

Abandoned (or disused) railway stations and other former railway infrastructure were constructed to serve for railway transport but have fallen into disuse. There are various circumstances when this may occur - a railway company may fall bankrupt, or the station may be closed due to the failure of economic activity such as insufficient passenger numbers, operational reasons such as the diversion or replacement of the line. In some instances, the railway line may continue in operation while the station is closed, or partially closed. Additionally, stations may sometimes be relocated along the route of the line to new premises - examples of this include opening a replacement station nearer to the center of population or building a larger station on a less restricted site to cope with high passenger numbers. Many rural stations and lines began to close in the past with the introduction of new bus services and of course the increased popularity of the car and the improvements in road conditions. Other lines and stations never lived up to the expectations of their operators. Many rural stations were also badly sited, away from the towns and villages that they were designed to serve and this too led to a rapid decline in passenger numbers when more convenient forms of transport became available.

Many former railway lines, railway buildings, or rail carriages were converted and now they have new functions. Especially architecturally and historically notable station buildings may present a problem if they are protected under building preservation laws but fall into disuse. Such buildings are often abandoned, simply demolished, or preserved as part of a heritage railway. Many abandoned stations are located in rural areas.

Participatory community development projects have become increasingly popular in the last few years. Such projects promise to improve efficiency, sustainability, and democratization. Nonetheless, they can be complicated to implement because they involve a wide variety of actors who must collaborate and coordinate efforts effectively for a successful outcome.

The purpose of this document is to show good practice in the planning of reinvention/revitalization of the unused railway infrastructure, especially railway stations with the help of local youth, and provide guidance and recommendations on how to manage the whole process. It summarises the learning from YOUMOBIL project. During YOUMOBIL (2019-2022), five partners prepared feasibility studies and investment plans to reinvent unused railway infrastructure in rural or suburban areas. One small-scale revitalization intervention was implemented in Brezno. The core idea of these pilot actions was finding local and tailored solutions, encouraging the local population to use more public transport, and devoting their knowledge and talent to local reinvention projects.

Experiences made by YOUMOBIL partners are documented in this report in the form of a step-by-step guideline allowing replication. It was developed as a reference work to provide practical information for local authorities, public policymakers, and railway managers and guidance for their efforts to revitalize the infrastructure for which they have responsibility. At the end of the chapters, they can find tips on how to proceed effectively in different steps of reinvention/revitalization projects.

2. YOUMOBIL in a glance

Limited mobility options are frequently mentioned as a reason why young people choose to leave their native rural area and migrate to larger cities or even beyond. This intensifies demographic change, which troubles many rural areas in central Europe. A number of tools such as shared mobility and demand-oriented flexible collective transport services have emerged across Europe but only a few have been introduced in the rural areas of central Europe.

The YOUMOBIL project supported by Interreg Central Europe aimed to enhance the passenger transport system for young people who live in rural areas and improve their access to the European and national transport networks. The YOUMOBIL partners networked with local youth in rural areas to pilot demand-



driven novel service features, to exploit potentials of transport management through interfaces for mobile devices, and to explore how youth initiatives can revitalize disused rail infrastructure to enhance the attractiveness and image of public transport. Five technology-driven pilots demonstrated the use of modern ICT solutions for smart youth-oriented transport in rural areas, while five pilots and one investment, in addition, showed the role young people can play to revitalize rail infrastructure. This report focuses on revitalization part of YOUMOBIL.

YOUMOBIL project started in 2019 with a selection of suitable pilot sites. Five railway buildings (mostly former railway stations) and one electromotor train were chosen for revitalization in Slovakia, Germany, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Italy, and Poland (Fig. 1). Partners select sites where potentials for revitalization following young people's ideas were analyzed in autumn 2019 during a series of workshops with youth groups, where visions were elaborated and selected and a strategy, and an action plan prepared. The focus was on local youth's needs and interests.



Fig 1 – YOUMOBIL pilot sites (From the top left side: Brezno, Hevlín, train in Zagreb, Modena, Weißenfels, Grodzisk Mazowiecki)



Project activities also built on consensus among the relevant local stakeholders sharing the same aim of making rural town's stations as access points to the PT network more attractive through different actions driven by local youth. YOUMOBIL partners acted rather as facilitators and guides, and local youth acted as driving forces. Following good practices collected and documented in form of the report on how local communities revitalized disused rail infrastructure for the well-being of the local society, YOUMOBIL partners facilitated concerted action of local stakeholders, foremost young people, to bring new life to selected railway infrastructure.

The common summer school provided space for discussion, presentation of best practices, and mutual learning. Students from several countries were invited to propose designs for reinvention projects for five partners' sites. Later for each site, the feasibility studies and investment plans were prepared giving details about the necessary actions and financing for future implementation. Local youth in Brezno was involved in the real revitalization of the small railway station near the rural town center.

YOUMOBIL activities enabled the testing of new participatory revitalization planning approaches in a specific environment and context. Thereby providing an excellent opportunity for learning and accumulation of first-hand experience for the wider professional and the general public.

3. How to start?

It is not always an easy process to find the right railway facility and start the whole process. People from local communities and activists often work and think in different ways to the understandably process-driven rail industry. The challenge is enabling a meeting of minds so that the creativity and vision of community groups can be harmonized with the rules and interests of the facility operator, or local authority. Ideally, the revitalization project should be mutually beneficial for them.

It is necessary to choose such a facility and location that makes sense to revitalize. Suitable conditions and support not only from the local people but also from the owner or operator of the building are necessary. For this reason, the first step should be a meeting with the owner of the building and other authorities and actors, who are responsible for the planning, development, operation, and maintenance of the site. The revitalization project should fit into the local context and policy settings, and there should be no major obstacles to its implementation. It is advisable to obtain prior approval from all necessary bodies before the start of the whole process. It is also good to start with a smaller project or partial revitalization.

YOUMOBIL partners start this process at pilot sites in 2019. They identified suitable facilities and negotiated with the building owners to find out if there were any plans on how to use the neglected railway infrastructure in the future. They presented the basic concept of the revitalization projects and explained the role that the local communities of young people will play in it while prioritizing local people's needs. Different facilities were selected including two railway stations still in operation in small towns (Brezno (SVK), Weißenfels (DE)), one former railway station in a rural area (Hevlív (CZ)), one unused railway technical object in a suburban area (Modena (IT)), the abandoned object located next to the station (Grodzisk Mazowiecki (PL)), and the EMV 6111 - electromotor train (Zagreb (HR)). The owners or operators of all these facilities have confirmed that they are suitable for revitalization and have approved the start of cooperation in the project.

Tips on how to start:

- **Work through the benefits, opportunities, risks, and disadvantages of different options when selecting the object of reinvention.**
- **Consider different approaches, when the train operators or building owners and community are approached.**



- Explore what the community needs and wants. This includes also assessing the situation and related facilities already in the area, and whether and how the community might benefit from reinvention.
- Make sure that your revitalization idea is in line with the long-term planning documents that provide a conceptual layout to guide future growth and development of the site. Check the connection between the selected facility, surrounding social settings, and environments (site population, economy, housing, transportation, community facilities, and land use).

4. Creation of vision and strategy

Train stations are a part of public space and a piece of infrastructure in a community. They are vital to many people to enable them to engage in work and social commitments. For young people and those without cars, they can be essential to maintain community links. Unfortunately for many people, they are also places mixed with feelings of fear and frustration because they are often abandoned. There are many possibilities for railway stations becoming places that are inclusive, safe, facilitate social inclusion and cohesion and contribute to the development of local communities.

Working to develop a common vision for reinvention is a prerequisite for the success of the project. A carefully planned staged approach is needed, in consultation and discussion with the local community and relevant actors. The different elements need to work together, so it is necessary to consider how to facilitate interaction and collaboration and lay the foundations for strong relationships, by engaging key partners early on.

A powerful, achievable vision reflecting needs and goals should be delivered at the start of the communication process. For this reason, YOUMOBIL partners organized a series of workshops. The main objective was to bring relevant people and groups together and provide a structure to make a good start on planning for the revitalization of selected sites in partners' regions. In total three workshops were organized. For each pilot site, a first visioning workshop with local stakeholders, including youth groups, was staged. During this workshop, partners presented some examples of best practices worldwide which were collected earlier in the Good-practice-collection report.

Many train stations across Europe or the world were transformed and rejuvenated into very special places, benefitting not only passengers but also the wider communities around them. The impressive innovations and successes of these projects have been often driven by the communities themselves, with support from the rail industry, with a vision of getting more from their railways and making a difference to local people, or visitors.



Fig 2 – Examples of best practices (From the top left side: Museum of transport (Sweden), Stacja Kultura, Biblioteka Rumia (Poland), Rural community hub in Temora (Australia))

Their efforts returned many abandoned stations to the heart of the community, creating hubs for arts, education, enterprise, volunteering, healthy living, or social interaction. Some examples are shown in Fig 2. There is an exhibition of old rolling stock and workshops, given added interest by the fact that narrow-gauge steam trains still run between Mariefred and Läggesta in Sweden. The museum is run by the non-profit association ÖSJ (Eastern Södermanland's Railway). In Rumia the old building of the railway station was rebuilt into a city library and cultural center. This project initiated a new trend of reinvention of stations for cultural purposes in Poland. The community hub in Temora was completed in 2016 situated in the old railway station. The State Heritage-listed Temora Railway Station has been restored and returned to active use so it can once again play a central role in Temora's social and economic fabric. The facility is housing a youth center, railway museum, and exhibition space. It is a part of a wider precinct renewal and tourism scheme to house events and provide free camping.

For more cases visit the YOUMOBIL web page, where is the YOUMOBIL Good-practice-collection report providing an overview of inspirational work by station groups, community rail partnerships, and their commercial, public and third sector partners, to return station buildings and other rail structures to the different public, private or commercial use.¹

The second local workshop was dedicated to agreeing together on one vision and elaborating a strategy for its achievement, including identifying necessary actors and resources. Building on the strategy chosen an action plan was agreed upon, tasks assigned to different actors, and funding potentials analyzed at the third workshop.

Involving the local community is necessary to create awareness, generate ideas, receive feedback, and itemize work. Successful projects recognize the unique contribution individuals, organizations and agencies make to a project and offer opportunities for input throughout the whole process. When developing a common vision different actors can be involved depending on the local situation, and different tools and methods used. As an example, we provide the case of Weißenfels and Modena.

¹ <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/D.T2.4.1-Good-practice-collection-unused-railway-infrastruct.pdf>

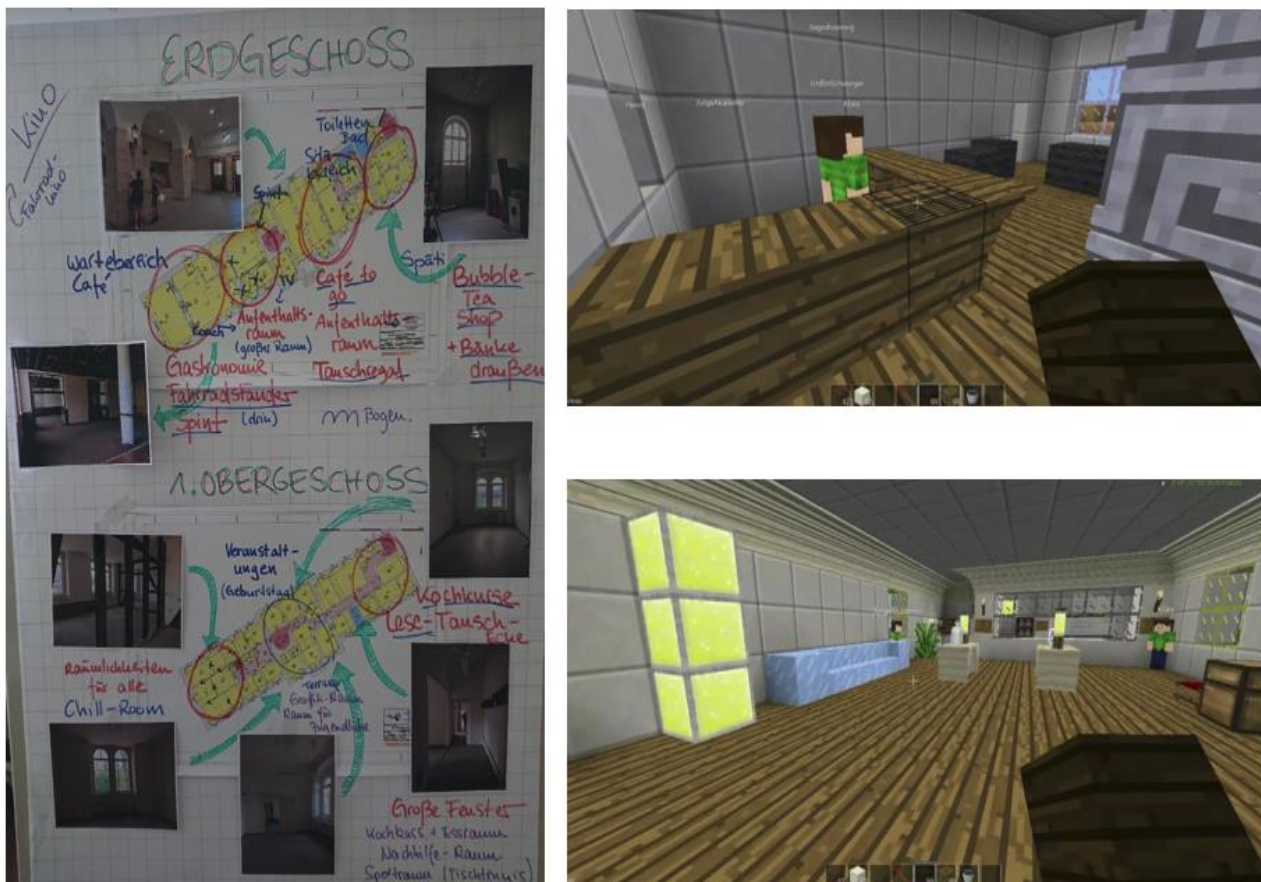


Fig 3 - Floor plans and impressions of the train station building for visualization purposes in Minetest

In Weißenfels, among other stakeholders, students and teachers from the Protestant Academy of Saxony-Anhalt e. V. were invited to co-create the vision on how some parts of the railway building can be used for benefit of local youth. Minecraft/Minetest PC game is used at the academy as a method in youth education. The aim is to use modern media to increase young people's interest in social issues or the shaping of their environment. Several young people were equipped with a laptop and connected via a server and worked together on a project, to graphically illustrate the use of space in the station building. For this purpose, the existing floor plans and impressions from the building (Fig 3) were used to recreate and design the individual rooms. In this way, the young people assigned their ideas developed during the workshops for use in individual areas in the station building.

In Modena school for surveyors Istituto di Istruzione Superiore G. Guarini" was involved in the reinvention project from the start. The school for surveyors trains youngsters who in the future will work in the construction and environmental fields, both in the public and private sector. During YOUMOBIL students

could work “in the field” analyzing all the phases of a revitalization activity, together with preparation of design, feasibility study, and investment plan.



Fig 4 – Fieldwork in the building Stazione Piccola in Modena

The survey work in the field had also an impact on the definition of vision, as there is a close correlation between the intended use of the abandoned building and its structural characteristics (Fig 4-5). Students addressed this issue as a school task with a competition of ideas between several classes.

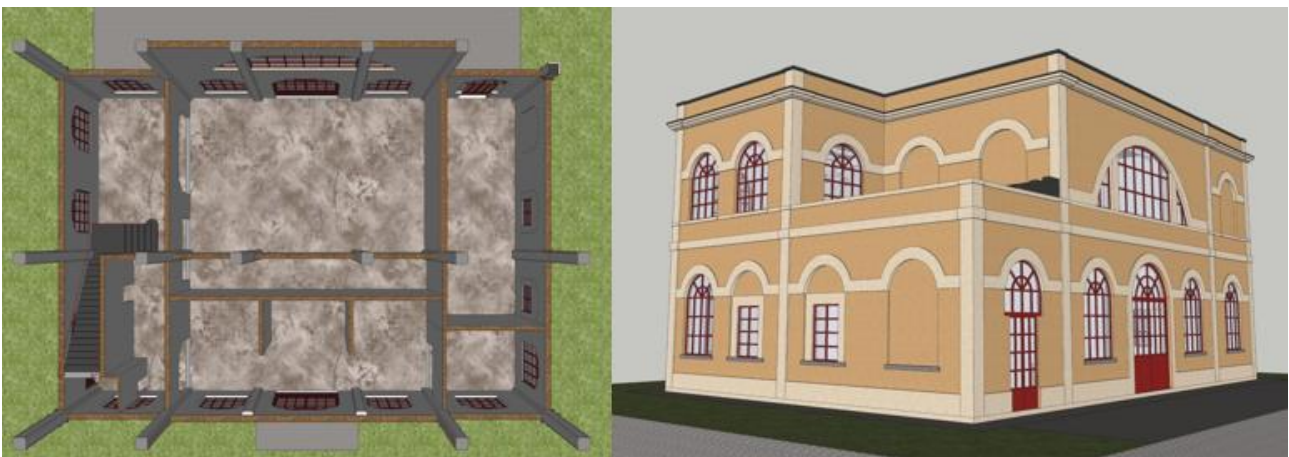


Fig 5 – Structural characteristic of Stazione Piccola in Modena

To share the visions created at the local level, and for mutual learning, partners also organized YOUMOBIL online course for practitioners, facility owners, and youth - students of civil engineering, architecture, and design. The course was divided into three phases. The first one was dedicated to all participants. It was organized in two days - April 26-27, 2021 as afternoon online sessions. This phase focused on the theoretical base, introduction to project activities related to the revitalization of the unused railway infrastructure, presentation of best practices, and discussion. On April 29 registered students were introduced to individual



work and supporting tools and documentation. Students from several countries were invited to propose reinvention projects for five partners' sites. They focus both on the design and new functions of buildings. The main aim was to prepare ideas for reinvention projects and posters for project partners to share with infrastructure owners or operators for future development. The ideas for reinvention followed the results of local workshops with youth. Some posters are shown in Fig 6-8.



Fig 6 – Example of posters for the reinvention of Stazione Piccola in Modena

The course was based on the creative processes of ‘thinking and making’ to enhance understanding of architectural and functional design. It was a great opportunity for students to work on real-life projects and to develop their visions and contribution to an architectural topic relevant for the revitalization of the railway infrastructure, by working intensively in international teams. Supported by tutors and under the guidance of YOUMOBIL partners they developed their design in discussion with all participants. The course was a great time to prepare students for the intellectual challenges they’ll face in future studies or at the



workplace. On the other hand, partners received new creative ideas for reinvention projects and material that can be used in the future for the real development of partners' sites.

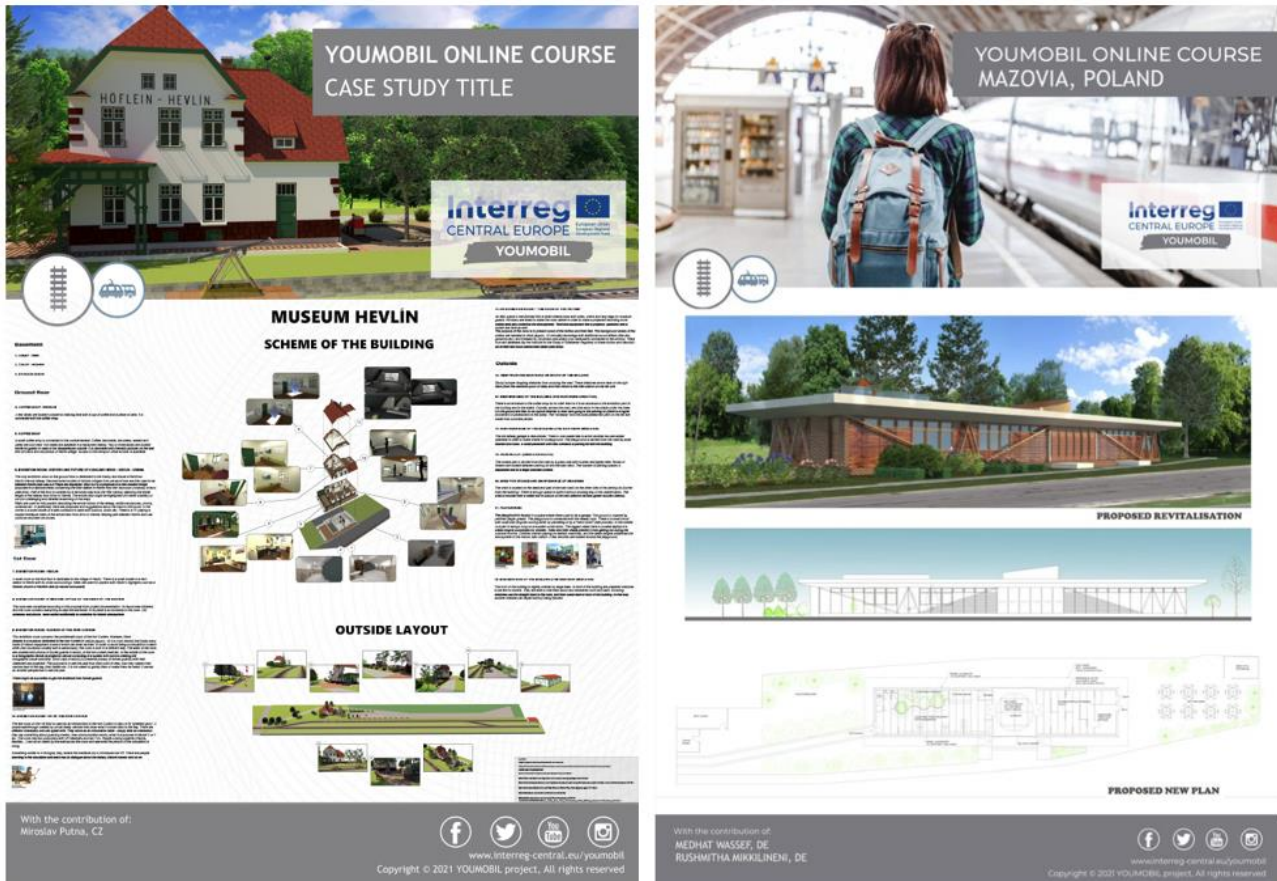


Fig 7 – Example of posters for the reinvention of the station in Hevlín, and railway object in Mazovia

Tips on how to prepare a common vision:

Reach out to all who will be affected by the project's vision, gather their input, and assure they feel involved in the coming decisions.

Bear in mind the benefits that a project can bring, and convey these to the community and partners.

Take on board creative people from the community, or organize special events or competitions to collect ideas for reinvention.

Developing a vision for multiple functions of the building is likely to be more challenging, but the benefits are more considerable.



5. Active involvement of local youth

The 2003 Council of Europe’s “Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life”, states that “participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election. Participation and active citizenship are about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and wherever necessary the support to participate and influence decisions and engaging in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.”² Active participation of young people in decisions and actions at all levels is essential in order to build more democratic, more inclusive, and more prosperous rural societies too.

Youth participation represents the opportunity for young people to understand their responsibility to contribute to the sustainable development of areas where they live. In this context, young people have a particularly important role to play. First, from a rights perspective, young people have a right to participate in decision-making that impacts their future, particularly in the climate change context, where they more than any other generation will bear the greatest costs of its impacts. Within this framework, one of the main goals of the European Union Youth Strategy³ is to enable young people to be the architects of their own lives. Moreover, the first dimension of the Strategy - to “engage” with youth - aims towards meaningful civic and political participation of young people.

The benefits of youth participation in all aspects of a policy are substantial. Young people have opinions and ideas about the development of their communities, but they need to be listened to and to be trusted, and to be given the opportunity to make a change, be empowered, with the means and tools to implement their own ideas and develop ownership over their projects. It is therefore very important to make youth participation a priority, make it regular and continuous, and embed it in institutional structures.

Youth participation comes in different forms, at different levels and depths, and with different methods. The following levels and depths of youth participation were identified in Good Practices of Youth Participation (Report of the project ‘Youth for a Just Transition’ realized for DG REGIO within the Junior Professionals Programme)⁴:

1. Engagement, enabling youth to get involved, raise awareness about a specific policy, to be consulted or involved in preparing recommendations for a policy.
2. Co-creation, whereby young people come up with their own ideas, recommendations, and/or projects to address specific issues and provide solutions to challenges.
3. Implementation, whereby youth is given the space, trust, and means to carry out their own projects.
4. Monitoring and evaluation, whereby youth is given the tools to make public authorities accountable, monitoring policy implementation and assessing its results.

This document also provides the collection of 30 best practices of youth participation in ambitious policy actions. During YOUMOBIL project we involved local youth in the first three mentioned levels of participation when implementing project activities. The approaches to how we engaged them are described in all parts of this document. The more general and structured guidelines on how to involve local youth are provided below:

² https://theewc.org/content/uploads/2020/02/Have_your_say_en.pdf

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A42018Y1218%2801%29>

⁴

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/eu_regional_and_urban_development/topics/documents/youth_for_a_just_transition_mid-term_deliverable_report_final.pdf



5.1. Engagement and raising awareness

Effective youth engagement should lead to positive outcomes for young people at three levels:

1. The individual level: e.g. increased personal skills, healthy or sustainable choices, or sense of identity.
2. The social level: e.g. stronger connections with community, adults, and a larger support network.
3. The system-level: e.g. greater civic engagement, policies, and programs responsive to the needs of young people.

The engagement activities should be meaningful and topics relevant to young people. This can be also assured if young people are asked to contribute to the development of the engagement activity. Youth are more engaged when they feel connected and contribute to something larger than themselves. They have a desire to be part of something, to belong.

Youth engagement experiences are complex and vary significantly depending on the context. Anyhow you should create youth-friendly materials to explain the initiative and what is expected of participants. Different channels can be used as direct face-to-face, telephone, email, or social network to contact youth, or their organizations. You should also offer hands-on experience and provide opportunities to develop youth skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving.

Awareness-raising campaigns on sustainable mobility should promote behavioral change in favor of active mobility, public transport, and other clean, or intelligent transport solutions. When organizing such a campaign the following steps should be considered during planning:

- What is the message that is required to be communicated?
- What budget is available?
- To which group should you communicate it?
- How should you communicate it?
- How many times the message should be communicated?
- How long should it go on for effective communication?
- Which media has the most effectiveness?
- What time should the message be communicated?
- Would you like to test it on a representative sample before it is implemented, etc.?

Some case studies on how to organize campaigns are available on the web page of ELTIS (The Urban Mobility Observatory), which facilitates the exchange of information, knowledge, and experience in the field of sustainable urban mobility in Europe⁵.

5.2. Co-creation

Co-creation is the act of bringing different parties working together in order to produce an outcome that is jointly valued. By working together in this way there is a greater opportunity to create something that can have a real impact on everyone involved including young people. Everyone that participates in the co-creation needs to understand the shared vision and end goal of the project or measure. Ensure that the goal is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time Sensitive). It is also critical to find the right facilitator to lead the group. Bringing together a diverse group of people with a range of experiences and

⁵ <https://www.eltis.org/>



backgrounds is the best way to find new ideas. All participants should feel that their opinion and beliefs are valued, and need to understand how to work together. The facilitator should also think about a potential conflict of ideas, perspectives, and values and keep every participant engaged.

Leapfrog association prepared a toolbox - Working with Young People, a collection of flexible tools that can help anyone to engage young people in creative, inspiring, and effective ways. They give young people inspiring, creative ways to articulate their ideas, but more importantly, the tools offer ways of working that fit with the way young people think and develop ideas.⁶

5.3. Implementation

Young people can be involved in many project activities. They can have a lead role in promoting and presenting information about the project. They can share information with other youth in general, conduct creative workshops, or use innovative technologies such as web-based social networking to disseminate information. They can collect or evaluate data, administer surveys, conduct interviews, or participate in focus groups. It is also very important if youth are presenting information to locals who can serve as potential partners and also help make a difference in the community. They can also contribute with manual work in the creation of the place in which they live. In this way, they can learn about civic responsibility and be active in their community. First online community involvement can motivate especially teenagers to get involved in face-to-face community activities. By getting involved with community activities, they can come into contact with like-minded peers. Interacting and cooperating with them encourages young people to see the world in different ways. It also helps them see how to put values into action for the good of others, gives them a sense of belonging in their local community, and also an opportunity to make new friendships and connections. They also learn to deal with challenges, communicate with different people, and build up their life skills.

5.4. Feedback and monitoring results

If you have asked the youth to give input on a policy or project, it is important to report back to them on how their ideas were used. Have clear feedback mechanisms in place to ensure that participants understand the next stages, the follow-up, and the results of their input. This creates trust and opportunities for reflection. Always evaluate the whole process with participants to understand how to develop it in the future. Ensure that participants have been recognized for their input.

Tips on how to work with youth:

Young people should be involved early in the process of planning an activity or initiative, including generating objectives, because they can bring valuable ideas and perspectives to the table.

Partnering with an existing youth organization is an efficient and effective way to facilitate young people's engagement.

Maintain frequent contact, and use tools and methods that are convenient for young people.

Use language and working styles that are accessible to youth.

Seeing and hearing about the impact of their contribution motivates young people to stay engaged and get involved in future opportunities.

6. Feasibility study and investment plan

The feasibility study helps to determine the viability of an idea of how to reinvent unused railway infrastructure, such as ensuring the project is legally and technically feasible as well as economically

⁶ <http://leapfrog.tools/toolbox/working-with-young-people/>



justifiable. Generally, it precedes technical development and project implementation. It evaluates the project's potential for success; therefore, perceived objectivity is an essential factor in the credibility of the study for potential investors.

This assessment focuses on the technical resources available to the organization. It helps organizations determine whether the technical resources meet capacity and whether the technical team is capable of converting the ideas into working systems. A **technical feasibility** part of the study assesses only the basic details of how organizations responsible for project implementation should intend to bring project ideas into reality. It should validate an idea, strategy, and approach. The analyst must find out whether it is possible to develop the project given the current technical resources.

Once the technical feasibility is established, it is important to consider the monetary factors also. Since it might happen that developing a particular project may be technically possible but it may require huge investments and benefits may be less. For evaluating this, the economic feasibility of the proposed project is carried out. This assessment typically involves a cost/benefits analysis of the project, helping organizations determine the viability, **cost, and benefits** associated with a project before financial resources are allocated. It also serves as an independent project assessment and enhances project credibility—helping decision-makers determine the positive economic (or other) benefits to the organization and community that the proposed project will provide.

Legal assessment investigates whether any aspect of the proposed project conflicts with legal requirements like e.g. zoning laws. A feasibility study might reveal the reinvention project location isn't zoned for that type of business.

Operational feasibility is mainly concerned with issues like whether the project will be used and how it will be operated if it is developed and implemented. The essential questions that help in testing the operational feasibility of a project could be the following. Are the users not happy with the current state? Will, then they welcome the change and the new project? Have the users been involved in the planning and development of the project? Will the system considerably affect the users? Operational feasibility also examines how a project plan satisfies the requirements identified in the requirements analysis phase of project development.

Scheduling assessment is very important for project success; after all, a project will fail if not completed on time. In scheduling feasibility, an organization estimates how much time the project will take to complete.

When these areas have all been examined, the feasibility analysis helps identify any constraints the proposed project may face, including internal and external project constraints.

Data for the feasibility study can be gathered through different channels and by different methods of data collection, e.g. personal interviews, surveys, discussions, etc. The kind of interview required is directly related to the problem or opportunity being suggested. The author of the feasibility study typically interviews those requesting project results and those directly concerned with the decision-making process, typically management.

The revitalization of unused or abandoned railway infrastructure creates opportunities to include various activities leading to spatial and functional changes in specific areas, which will contribute to economic, social, and cultural development, to spatial order, aesthetics, and functionality of these areas. The refurbishment or reconstruction of an existing building constitutes a construction project. It takes time and costs to complete, so it can be described as an investment and construction process, consisting of phases that include many stages and tasks. The preparatory phase of a construction project consists of activities preceding the execution of construction works, including preliminary studies with an examination of risks to the investment, planning and design processes, and administrative proceedings. The issue of preparing a reinvention project requires a comprehensive approach and, above all, a multifaceted analysis of the conditions during the programming and planning of the investment. Despite the difficulties that can occur



throughout the entire investment cycle, the implementation of the project should bring benefits for both the investor and the local community.

The partnership can help with the implementation of the project because it capitalizes on the strength of many contributors and makes possible projects that would otherwise be more difficult. Partnerships can occur between organizations, private companies, community groups, local agencies, or different levels of government. Partnerships can help a project financially, through cost-sharing with local, provincial, and federal grants, gift, and foundation programs. Project capital costs can be reduced through donations by community groups of the time, machinery, or labor. Maintenance costs can be reduced with private sector assistance, innovative technologies, or maintenance by third parties.

Tips on how to prepare a feasibility study:

Before hiring an experienced independent consultant, perform preliminary analysis and define the scope of reinvention. The project scope identifies internal stakeholders as well as external clients and customers.

The study should include complex market research giving insight into the current competitive landscape and helping identify different factors of the area.

If the cost-benefit analysis is performed participatory with communities, you will better identify positive outcomes for the community.

7. Reinvention in Brezno

The purpose of this investment was a reinvention of an abandoned railway station “Malá stanica” (“Small Station”) in Brezno (Fig 8). Brezno, a town in central Slovakia, is a main access point to the rural Horehronie region. It is located on the rail line between Banská Bystrica and Červená Skala. Further rail lines link to Tisovec and Hriňová. Brezno has two working train stations. The bigger – main railway station is combined with the bus station but is located far from town. The Small Station in Brezno is located near the town center.

The station building and surrounding space are owned by the Slovak Republic. It is no longer used for the services of Slovak Railways. The building and adjacent space were in urgent need of refurbishment. The waiting area of the station has been inaccessible for years. First-floor office spaces were rented. Outside the station, there is one platform. The whole space was deteriorated and inappropriate for public transport.

YOUMOBIL project has aimed at improving rural people’s access to the European and national transport networks. The Small Station was a well-chosen pilot site because it is a secondary transport node and a great spot for starting a trip to three different destinations - Banská Bystrica, Tisovec, and Červená Skala.

The main goal of this pilot project was to make the waiting time in the station more pleasant for regular travelers especially youth, as well as for locals, and tourists visiting this region motivating them to take off the train and visit also the town center which is within walking distance from the station.

The municipality of Brezno, a partner of the YOUMOBIL project, decided in cooperation with the owner Slovak Railways to give this place a new life and function. Suggestions on how to reinvent this place were discussed with relevant actors, including young people. The vision was created during the workshops. The owner of the building approved the project of revitalization of this place and leased the premises to the local government. However, this process was quite lengthy and bureaucratic on his part. Combined with the problems posed by the Covid 19 pandemic, this has caused significant delays in reconstruction work. It was not possible to finalize some of the work on the exterior. However, much of the project has been already implemented during YOUMOBIL project lifetime.



Fig 8 – Brezno Small Station and surrounding area before the project

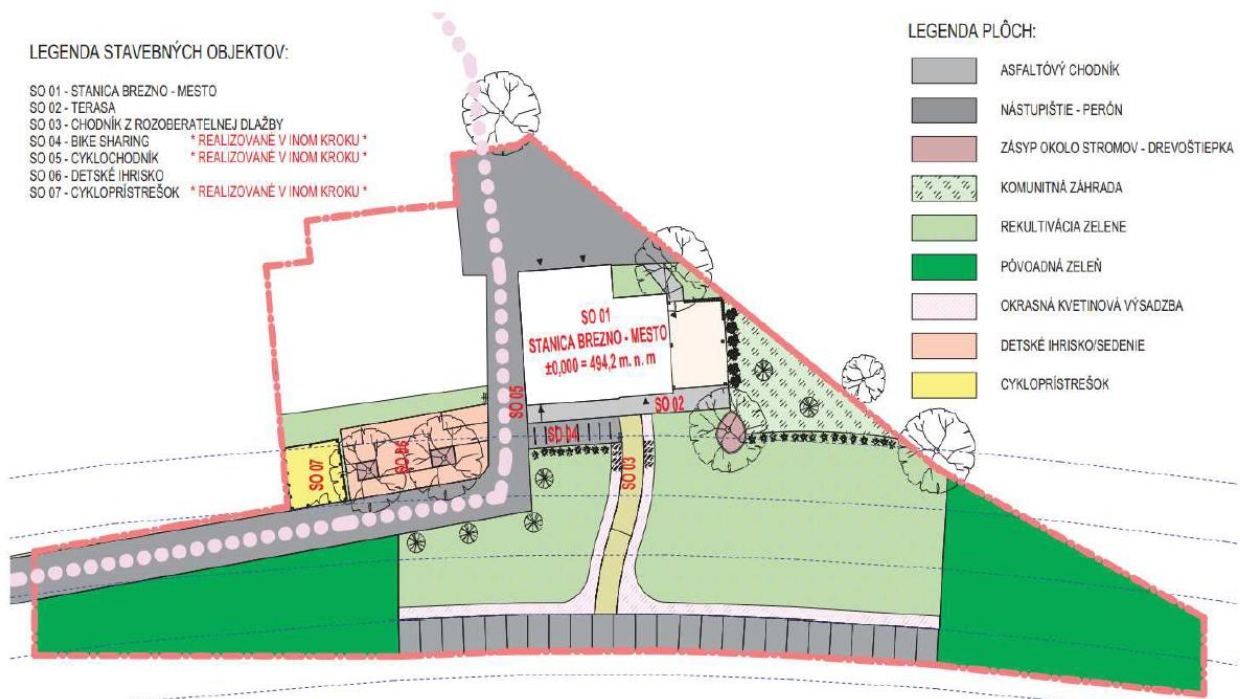
The central motive of the whole proposal was to create an environment that would respect significant natural values and dominants of the area and at the same time create conditions for a quality environment in terms of public space for people with different opportunities. The basic principle of the solution was the creation of a central area with a direct view of the platform and the surrounding countryside. This corresponded to holding the original lines between the platform and the building. The creation of new objects in line with the building respects the distances required by Slovak railways. With this urban solution, each object gets in touch with the central space and at the same time retains its connection to the surroundings. Urbanism's ambitions were as follow:

- Create a clearly legible and spatially unambiguous location that respects the given conditions, and limits of the territory, it is not closed to itself, it integrates the environment and develops it,
- keep a reference to the original architecture and history of the area,
- create effective interconnection of individual functions in the territory,
- resolve communication links.

The architectural concept aimed to create valuable architecture and a pleasant environment for the inhabitants of the town, visitors, tourists, and especially for young people. The design highlighted and used the advantages of the site as much as possible and provide an adequate environment, which would support the resumption of rail transport, the self-realization of young people and tourism throughout the year and attract a wide range of clients, from individuals, families with children to organized group visits. It was, therefore, necessary to design and create attractive spaces for leisure activities, both



indoors and outdoors, and thus ensure the possibility of year-round use of the building. The first idea of how to reinvent the whole space is shown in Fig 9.



1 - SITUÁCIA - 1

1 - SITE - 1

Fig 9 – Situation plan for the reinvention of Small Station in Brezno

As part of other projects, the town of Brezno will build new cycle routes in the future. The cycling route will be led also by the railway station and connect the suburban parts with the town centre. The resulting conditions had to be respected in the design. As part of the interior renovation design, a new purpose was being considered with the creation of a space for young people for meetings, a historical museum with a waiting room and new sanitary facilities. As part of the exterior design, the creation of roads between the surroundings of the building and the platform, greenery, waiting area, rest area, community garden and bike sharing were considered (Fig 10).

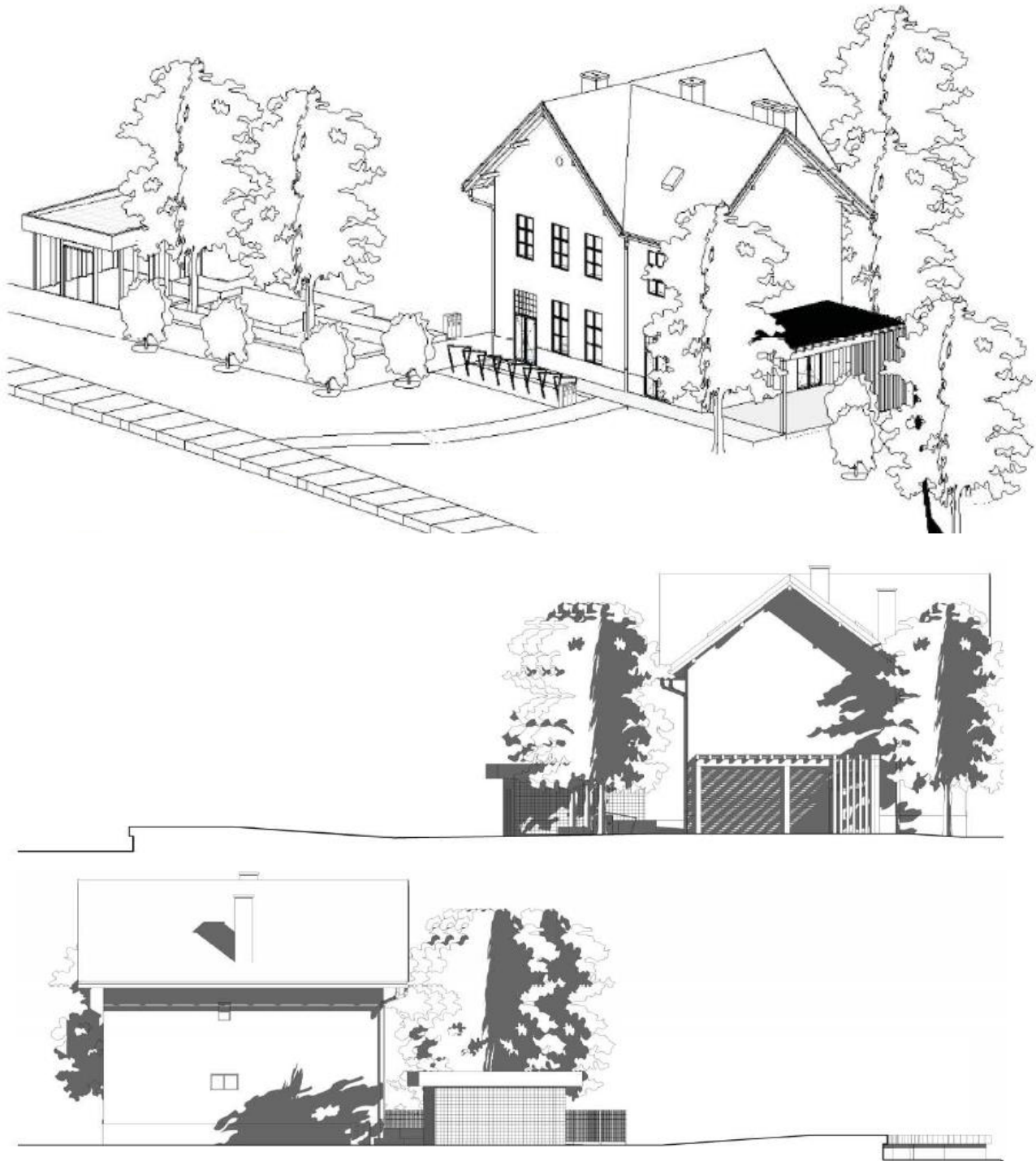


Fig 10 – New architectural concept



Figures as follows show the condition of the building before and after renovation.



Fig 11 – Building before and after renovation works

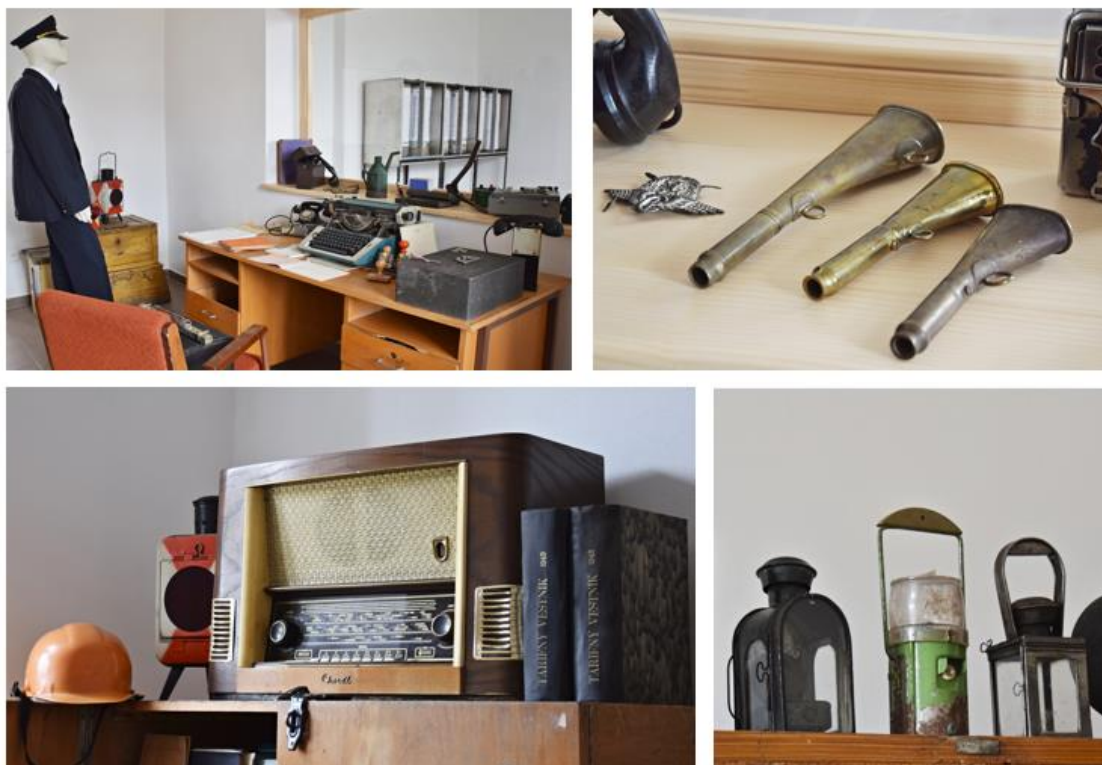


Fig 12 – Part of the small railway history exhibition



Fig 13 – Young people from Brezno when furnishing the interior

For the project implementation schedule, a Gantt chart was used (Fig 14). It should be noted that before the start of the YOUMOBIL project, no one had any idea what the situation would be in 2020 and what coming time would bring. Therefore two timetables were developed, one of which is related to the original setting of the project proposal and the second related to the real setting of the project affected by the Covid 19 pandemic.



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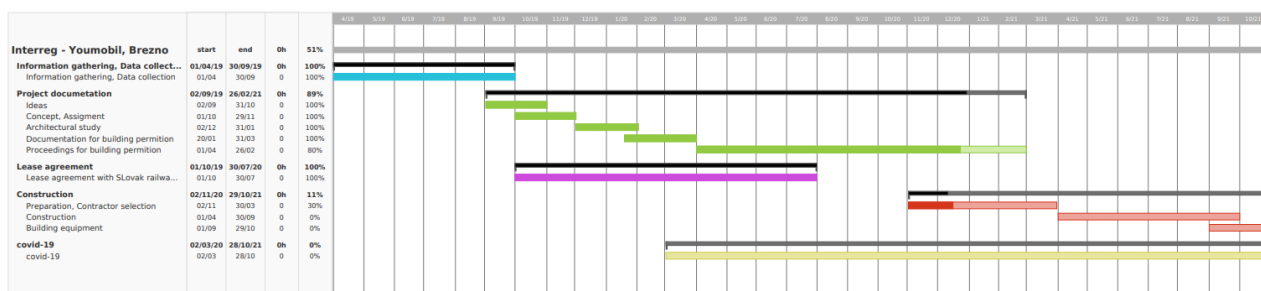


Fig 14 – Implementation schedule

Construction cost budget		
Building	Price in EUR (without VAT)	Price in EUR (with VAT)
Maintenance work	13 224,97	15 869,96
Interior - construction work	56 762,05	68 114,46
Interior - electrical installation	9 937,97	10 050,00
Interior - equipment of the building	8 375,00	11 925,56
Together		105 959,99

Fig 15 – Costs for reconstruction works

In the feasibility study also cost-benefit analysis was prepared. It was emphasized that the project is not implemented for profit. It is expected that the operational phase of the project will be loss-making, which means that there will be a negative economic result between costs and revenues. The newly created museum will have opening hours from 8:00 to 16:00 during the whole year for free. The municipality of Brezno cannot make a profit on building, because Slovak railways are providing rent of their building for non-profit activities.



In order to make it clear that the project will show a slight loss, it is necessary to define the revenue that the project will generate.

There is no doubt that if the municipality of Brezno seizes the opportunity to introduce modern ecological rail transport into its region, it will have a unique opportunity to transform Brezno into a modern town, a center of tourism with a name beyond the borders of Central Europe.

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Impact

This locality is the starting point for the entrance to the center of Brezno. The town of Brezno is developing the field of tourism, which has recently been one of the most important economic sectors in the Horehronie region and has the potential to create new job opportunities and increase the number of visitors to the town in the future.

By implementing the project, several impacts will be achieved that will positively affect not only the internal environment of the city of Brezno but will also have positive effects on the external environment. The activities that are planned to be implemented will have an impact on the local population of the town of Brezno, but also on the inhabitants living in the entire Horehronie region, who come to the town on a daily basis. The planned activities will also positively affect a group of the population who come to the region and the town sporadically, e.g. for rest, relaxation but also an active holiday in the Low Tatras region.

Specific impacts on society are as follows:

- Positive impact on the inhabitants of the town of Brezno, who travel for work or to schools in the nearest regional town or other cities in Slovakia. The quality and comfort of traveling by public train will increase. The implemented activities will also enhance the environment of a small train station.
- Raising awareness and interest in train history, which is very diverse in the region thanks to the train's uniqueness in the region not only for train enthusiasts but also for residents and especially the young generation of pupils and students.
- Thanks to the planned activities, increasing the attractiveness of traveling by train with the possibility of connecting to cycling in the region.
- The influx of a larger number of tourists, which will result in an increase in the inflow of economic resources, especially within the tourism industry - an increase in the number of overnight stays in the city and its urban areas. Increase in revenues in follow-up services – catering, additional services, sports or wellness services, and others.
- Improving relations with young people in the newly created spaces, which will offer them a place to implement their ideas - youth parliament, exhibitions and openings on various topics, social and charitable small events, and others.
- Attracting new groups of tourists. Mainly older people, who use mainly more advantageous train transport, but also young people and students who do not have their own means of transport.



- Attracting new tourists – those interested in train history with a connection to existing train products in the region, such as Čiernohronská železnica n.o., ride the historic train during the main tourist season "Horehronská express"

8. Conclusion

There are plenty of examples of best practices of adaptive reuse of old railway infrastructure. Adaptive reuse refers to the process of reusing an existing building for a purpose other than which it was originally built or designed for. It is also known as recycling and conversion. It is an effective strategy for optimizing the operational and commercial performance of built assets. Adaptive reuse of buildings can be an attractive alternative to new construction in terms of sustainability and a circular economy. It has prevented thousands of buildings' demolition and has allowed them to become critical components of urban or rural regeneration.⁷

The reinvention of railway infrastructure can act as the catalyst to stimulate revitalization of the whole area and also community life. Municipalities, building owners, architects, developers, builders, and entrepreneurs who wish to become involved in rejuvenating and reconstructing a building must first make sure that the finished product will serve the needs of the market, that it will be completely useful for its new purpose, and that it will be competitively priced. YOUMOBIL partners who prepared reinvention projects in pilot sites prepared feasibility studies to justify the "market" for the recycled project and its viability for the future. YOUMOBIL took a youth-centered approach - enabling young people from rural areas to first identify the key issues limiting their potential there, then to develop vision and action plans and collaborate with others in the community to make a positive difference. The best practice can be followed in many similar localities in rural, or suburban areas.

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adaptive_reuse