

**Good Practice Story Title:**

Healing the heart – Transforming Veszprém’s Abandoned Center into a Community Hub

Destination: The City of Veszprém

Country: Hungary

Submitting Organization: VMJV Mayor’s Office

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description:

Nestled upon seven hills, Veszprém's captivating history spans well over a millennium, serving as a crossroads between cultures and bridging the divide between East and West. Legends speak of its castle that stood tall even before the arrival of the nomadic Hungarian tribes, and then witnessed them settle and adapt to the European, christian life. For centuries, it held the right of coronation of Hungary's queens, rightfully earning the city its moniker as “the City of Queens.”

Throughout its vibrant past, Veszprém experienced the ebb and flow of power, including Austrian and Ottoman occupation in the 17th century. Each corner of the city holds untold secrets, and every step unveils a tapestry of history merging with the present. Music and contemporary art pulsate through the city's cultural fabric, nurturing a sense of community and creativity.

Walking the streets of Veszprém, ancient and modern, unveils an ever-unfolding narrative, where each detail and fragment adds another layer to the city's rich heritage. Veszprém is a living history book, beckoning to be explored time and time again. Recognizing its dynamic music scene, Veszprém proudly earned the UNESCO City of Music designation in 2019. As the European Capital of Culture in 2023, the city's present and future converge, uniting its illustrious past with the promise of a global stage. Collaborating with the enchanting Balaton region, Veszprém embraces its role as a cultural hub, ready to welcome the world and reclaim its position as a crossroads of culture and creativity.





Summary of Good Practice Story:

In the heart of Veszprém, a neglected 2.3-hectare industrial area once stood as a stark reminder of the past. For decades, this former site of the Balaton Furniture Factory lay dormant, an eyesore in the vibrant city center. However, through an ambitious revitalization project linked to Veszprém's designation as the European Capital of Culture, this area has been transformed into a bustling cultural hub known as Gyárkert KultúrPark, which stands for 'Factory Garden Culture Park'. Initially planned as a temporary project, its immense success has extended its lease for an additional three years by the city, this time, without external funds, only supported by the city and a business plan. This transformation story showcases how innovative, sustainable approaches can turn abandoned urban areas into thriving community centers, providing a better place for both residents and tourists, and a replicable model for other cities.

Issues faced:

The industrial area in Veszprém faced numerous challenges before its transformation:

Economic Decline: The site, once home to the Balaton Bútorgyár, stood as a stark reminder of economic stagnation in the heart of the city. Its long period of disuse contributed to the city's underutilized potential, casting a shadow over Veszprém's economic landscape.

Social Disconnection: This abandoned area symbolized social fragmentation, offering no space for community engagement or cultural activities. It was a physical and metaphorical barrier that separated the community, preventing the development of a cohesive social fabric.

Environmental Degradation: Years of neglect led to severe environmental decay. Overgrown vegetation and crumbling infrastructure plagued the site, making it an unsightly "scar" in the vibrant city center of Veszprém. The derelict state of the area not only marred the city's aesthetic but also posed potential safety hazards.

Seasonality: The Balaton region is home for Lake Balaton, which is a heavily summer focused destination. Veszprém's challenge is to ease the seasonality and this vision had to be incorporated to this new facility too.

When Veszprém was awarded the title of European Capital of Culture (ECOC), the decision was made to address these neglected sites and buildings. The focus shifted to revitalizing underutilized or abandoned spaces within the city. The former Balaton Bútorgyár site, lying dormant for decades, became a prime





candidate for this ambitious project. In January 2021, the city council purchased the 2.3-hectare area, setting the stage for a significant transformation.

However, the challenges were immense. The site had been abandoned for over 20 years, with no existing infrastructure such as roads or utilities. There was skepticism about whether two years would be sufficient for the necessary infrastructure development. The engineering and content development teams faced the daunting task of transforming this dilapidated area into a functional and vibrant space, but the question remained: what kind of space could this be?!

Solution:

Despite these hurdles, the vision got clear: to address the economic, social, and environmental challenges posed by the abandoned industrial area in Veszprém, a comprehensive revitalization project was initiated to create an area that could accommodate outdoor events, particularly concerts, and offer essential services like restrooms, accessible facilities, and food and beverage outlets. The project aimed to open up the space, integrating it into the urban fabric, with the plan to operate it during the ECOC year which is eventually now transforming into a public park for the community to enjoy year-round.

The Gyárkert KultúrPark was born out of this vision, designed to be a multifunctional event space capable of hosting outdoor concerts and festivals, with a capacity of 4,500 people. The project was not just about creating a venue but about fostering a sense of community and inclusivity.

Economic Revival: The repurposing of the industrial site into Gyárkert KultúrPark aimed to attract new businesses and tourism, providing a significant economic boost to the city. By creating a multifunctional event space capable of hosting concerts and festivals, the project sought to stimulate local commerce and generate new revenue streams.

Social Integration: The project prioritized inclusivity and community engagement. It aimed to create a space where residents could gather, participate in cultural activities, and build social bonds. Special provisions ensured that locals had priority access to events, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging within the community.

Environmental Renewal: Sustainable building practices were employed to transform the area into an environmentally friendly zone. Green spaces were integrated into the design, improving the site's aesthetic appeal and ecological health. The use of eco-friendly materials and the incorporation of green infrastructure were central to the project's environmental goals, especially, that a main goal of the ECOC program was to make events more sustainable, for which a guide was also created, available to all stakeholders for free.





Seasonality Balance: The site was set up, so it can be transformed according to the seasons. During the cold Hungarian winter, there is an ice-skating rink set up.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

The Implementation

Stakeholder Engagement: The project began with extensive collaboration with local businesses, residents, and cultural organizations to ensure the space met the community's needs and desires.

Sustainable Design: Emphasizing eco-friendly materials, the renovation avoided extensive concrete use, opting instead for containers and reusable materials. Green spaces were integrated to enhance environmental health.

Cultural Programming: A diverse array of events was curated to appeal to all age groups, with a special focus on family-friendly and children-oriented programs, making the venue a cultural hotspot.

Noise Management: To balance vibrancy with residential peace, events concluded by 10 pm. Alternative late-night options were supported through the "Streetview program," involving 25 local hospitality businesses.

As the continuation of the project from 2024:

Socio-Economic Incentives: Financial support from the city and capped ticket prices ensure affordability, making cultural events accessible to everyone.

Community Engagement:

- **Priority Access:** Ensures locals have first access to event tickets, fostering community involvement.
- **Long-Term Commitment:** The company managing the site for three years is obliged to prioritize community benefits, ensuring sustained positive impacts for locals.

Achievements and Results:

By employing these methods, steps, and tools, Veszprém successfully transformed a neglected industrial site into a thriving cultural and community hub. This comprehensive approach not only addressed the immediate challenges but also set the foundation for long-term sustainability and community enrichment. The results of the Gyárkert KultúrPark project are a testament to the power of thoughtful urban renewal:





Economic Impact: The area has become a bustling hub, attracting visitors and boosting local businesses. The extended three-year lease reflects its sustained economic viability.

Social Cohesion: The space has become a focal point for community gatherings, fostering social bonds and inclusivity. Locals appreciate the priority access and affordable pricing.

Environmental Improvement: The once-derelict site is now a green, vibrant area that enhances the city's environmental quality and aesthetic appeal.

Cultural Enrichment: Veszprém's cultural scene has flourished, offering a diverse range of activities that enrich the community's cultural life and attract tourists.

Seasonal Balance: The venue helps to balance the heavy seasonality of the Balaton region by providing year-round cultural and social activities.

Community Engagement: The company managing the site for three years is obligated to prioritize community benefits, ensuring long-term positive impacts for locals.

Sustainable Model: The project's success serves as a replicable model for other cities looking to rejuvenate abandoned spaces sustainably.

The Gyárkert KultúrPark stands as a beacon of Veszprém's innovative and sustainable approach to urban redevelopment. It highlights the potential for economic, social, and environmental renewal through thoughtful, community-focused projects. This story of transformation not only showcases the success of Veszprém but also offers valuable lessons for other cities aiming to revitalize neglected urban spaces. By addressing economic, social, and environmental challenges in an integrated manner, Veszprém has created a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable community hub.

It is proving to be successful, giving the city a beating heart, as of now, the year has been so successful already, that the city will have to contribute less to the operations as it was originally allocated.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

We have confirmed that our mission on making Veszprém a better livelihood for the residents as our number one priority works, as happy residents make happy tourists.

We were not afraid to establish requirements for the business running the park, so we can ensure long term social sustainability.



Recognitions and Additional References

Veszprém's new community event space, the Gyárkert, was completed as part of the Veszprém-Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture (ECOC) programme. Here an installation called the Garden of Communities has been set up, where each municipality participating in the ECOC has been provided with a box containing a planted tree. The creation has already won a prestigious award:

- **Big See Wood Design Award 2023 and it was nominated for**
- **the ArchDaily 2024 Building of the Year Award.**



