

How creative approach and shared knowledge can help revitalize the non-profit city project in Bratislava

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Abstract: Growing potential and impact of civic initiatives and active participation of non-government organizations in Slovakia is more frequently visible and successful. Such activities guarantee progress, democracy, transparency and higher life quality. Thanks to own original ideas, shared knowledge and received advice several remarkable projects started to be reality. Optimistic vision of the group of enthusiasts – experts from different areas gathered in the Alliance of The City Market Hall (Aliancia Stará Tržnica) has focused on revitalizing of the former significant venue of Bratislava. Their intention is not only to reconstruct the dilapidated building but also to create a pulsing place for cultural, social and educational events with a regular Saturday market supporting local farmers and Design markets presenting creative producers and artists. This study will map the starting point of the process before the tender and after announcing the verdict. The research will present intentions and goals of the management team including possibilities of financing, co-financing and sponsoring as well as supporting of various creative startups. Besides own numerous experiences of the team members, irreplaceable role belongs to participation of other foreign and Slovak experts who did not hesitate to share valuable information and knowledge in order to assist with this revitalizing project.

Key words: revitalization, creative approach, livability, shared knowledge, non-profit.

Introduction

According to the National Audit Office “European cities and regions encounter similar renewal issues placing them in danger being left behind without necessary and appropriate adjustment to new economic conditions including social, physical and environmental infrastructure” (NAO, 2013). Although the decision of people to settle and live in cities is as old as the humankind, we are witnessing continuous growth of city population. Upon media and institution reports we have been facing the period when majority of population lives in cities which determine us to develop pulsing, healthy, safe, and comfortable cities. Recent decades of the world cities have meant massive urban modifications related to residents migration to suburbs, establishing new office, retail, culture and sports venues and unbearable traffic situation. All mentioned factors together with increased land and living prices, growing number of protected buildings, air and noise pollution contribute to the city centers decline (Lu, 2012, pp. 1-2).

In order to avoid losing attractiveness, prosperity, livability and safety, more or less successful initiatives have been presented on different levels. Necessary framework for meaningful urban regeneration projects has to possess requiring new approaches based on appropriate communication, cooperation and support of the entire society in their common effort to create “livable and lovable” community centers (Benfield, 2011).

Keeping in mind R. Florida’s words that “historic buildings provide the authenticity, the credibility, the sense of history and identity in this creative and fast moving, constantly changing world”, we believe that courageous beginning phase of “Projekt Tržnica”, (City Market Hall Project), will challenge the team of brave creative people around to continue transforming their plans to reality (Florida in Allison, E., Peters, L., 2003).

The aim of this paper is to delineate the revitalizing strategy of a former alive city venue – City Market Hall by a group of creative and enthusiastic people having their own valuable experience with managing other unique and remarkable events and concepts. However, they do not hesitate to learn more about other successful projects abroad and in Slovakia by sharing information and knowledge on the national or international platforms.

The first part provides selected crucial facts of the “Projekt Tržnica” submitted to the Mayor of Bratislava City and the City Council, finally chosen for its future implementation. The second part maps the events organized or co-organized in Stará tržnica (City Market Hall) since it was reopened again in September 2013.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the vision for the venue revitalization: to present the main intentions of the project and highlight opportunities related to its creative potential with the relation to 1/ location, 2/ history, 3/ physical inventory, 4/ civic culture and 5/activities (Novy, Colomb, 2013). The research was based on

literature and press reviews related to urban development and current creative effort, intensive attendance of various events and structured personal interviews with the “Aliancia Stará Tržnica” members and visitors.

City center attractiveness

Numerous cities have realized that the role of city centers and their preservation are unique phenomena that determine decisions of citizens to live and/or to get a job there or tourists to visit. “Ability to create not only comfortable, but also inspiring cities connecting history and future matters to more than 3 billion people currently living in cities and estimations present the growth up to 5 billion by 2030” (Allison and Peters, 2011, p. 1). Therefore, they require constant attention and sensitive creative approach how to keep them alive, attractive and pulsing with abundant entertainment and updated services.

Additionally, city centers as “multifunctional places stand for forum of civic life, include housing above stores, provide public and private services” as well as contain cultural and historical symbols as operas, theatres, churches, monuments or fountains (Balsas, 2007, p. 234).

Generally speaking, in the past most of city centers primarily served as market places, institutional, cultural and educational locations. However, new shopping services and entertaining venues situated in peripheries of urban borders have taken over the function of meeting points. Therefore, city centers have to struggle for their previous attractiveness and unique atmosphere while including square, street and pavement redecoration, site furnishing signage and greenery replacement. Moreover, reinforcing multifunctional usage of historical buildings, increased comfort and aesthetic value is definitely a challenge providing guarantee of creating “genius loci” people love to repeatedly visit (Balsas, 2007, p. 236).

Project description

The main concept of the “Projekt Tržnica” was submitted to the Mayor of Bratislava and the City Council as the result of creative initiative of 10 professionals sharing identical motivation and intention to transform original market place to an accessible public place with rich community life. The venue is planned to be modified as a multifunctioning center providing food, craft and design markets as well as place of cultural and social events.

However, the prior focus of the project is to transform and maintain the venue functioning in a long-term horizon with the emphasis on transparency and without financial support of Bratislava City.

The mentioned events presenting objectives planned and provided by the non-profit civic association will involve cooperation with both local and European organizations, addressing various target groups and respecting recent trends with environment friendly solutions (Bindics, 2012.)

Project context

Stará tržnica (City Market Hall) is situated in the southeastern location of originally gothic city, built as steel eclectic construction. When opened on Nov. 1, 1910, it provided “900 sellers with the space of 900m², central heating, electricity, water, elevators and cooling equipment for the period of 50 years”. Later, the building served as a TV studio, and TV storage from 1960 to 1989 (Projekt Tržnica, 2012). The political and social changes after November 1989 caused that the City of Bratislava became the owner of the building. The following two decades have brought several rental agreements, “partial facelifts”, missing conceptual approach involving neighborhood and public participation. However, the building was also utilized for its original purposes (markets, gastro services, shops) and occasionally for special social and cultural events (concerts and dancing shows).

As Jaurová states, the City of Bratislava, as other post-socialist cities has to cope with 1/ inherited poor architectural urban concepts, 2/ uncontrolled development boom, 3/ missing compact social and cultural infrastructure without public space and 5/ traffic problems.

Fortunately, the recent years have brought visible social and cultural regeneration and certain positive signals as initiatives arising from civic involvements represented by creative individuals and groups who are able to form unique activities and projects.

Since several abandoned and dilapidated city buildings have been currently unused, mutual cooperation of local activists and city representatives is more than desired. Within such cooperation numerous civic activities and intentions will assist to meaningful exploitation of venues and thus contribute to increased level of infrastructure services, entertainment and city center attractiveness (Jaurová, 2012, pp. 11-12).

Institutional Actors

The crucial intention of the team supporting reconstruction and revitalization of Stará tržnica (City Market Hall) in a close cooperation with the Bratislava City Council and the BKIS (Bratislava Cultural and Information Center) is namely focused on 1/ a specific effective form of future venue operation and 2/ consideration of existing city strategies and interests in this urban location. Moreover, the proposed “Project” offers a unique platform for a broad partnership of public, private and civic sectors serving citizens and visitors, tending to become a pilot project inspiring other revitalization initiatives (Jaurová, 2012, pp. 12-13).

The creative team prepared the “Project” in summer 2012 which consists of parts elaborated by members of “Aliancia Stará Tržnica” – professionals representing different areas and organizations.

As mentioned before, the proposed Projekt Tržnica is focused on necessary reconstruction and complex exploitation of the entire venue. Moreover, suggested portfolio of activities, events and services provided will help regenerate not only the building itself but also the entire neighborhood and will contribute to creation of alive community zone attracting various social and age groups.

Since the starting stages it has considered support of numerous partners expected to participate in the Project and contribute by different means and forms. Just to mention such as universities, institutions, embassies, event agencies and potential financial corporations or services partners (Chylová, 2012, p.24).

According to M. Jenča, the creative team intends to focus on a 2-layer communication campaign parallelly supporting the image and the proper program. Limited resources will determine cooperation with low-budget creative media able to attract the target audience attention and spread information and positive emotions. Moreover, Tajtáková suggests that „audience development contains two equal goals: 1/ to encourage the consuming frequency of cultural services by already existing consumers and 2/ to attract and convince those who for different reason recently do not attend cultural events, by using interdisciplinary mix of tools (2010, p. 12).

Planning and Implementation Processes, Fundraising

The history and original purpose of the City Market Hall predetermined the entire program planning process established on the three main pillars represented by markets, services provided and city cultural events. The team members shared and consulted experience of skilled local professional individuals and organizations as well as those from Vysegrad countries. Highly effective and contributing was a visit of urban creators from Berlin, Germany, who organized workshops and lectures with discussions, related to successful revitalizing activities and afterwards, the trip to Berlin itself. In the center of “Aliancia Stará Tržnica” attention were such phenomena as “sustainability, public opinion, municipality expectations, context of tourism and preference of ‘green solutions’ in urban development”.

Therefore, the venue reconstruction followed requirements of a multifunction space enabling to organize food, craft and design markets, conferences, workshops, concerts, fashion shows, theater and dancing performances, exhibitions or educative programs (Bindics, 2012, p. 41).

However, the frequency of particular events is expected to gradually increase. Proposed yearly schedule considers approximately 80 markets, more than 200 public events and about two dozens of private events.

Economic sustainability of the Project counts on rental fees of stands used for markets, private event rental fees, public event entry fees, services provided (restaurants, café, stores, etc.) as well as funds support (Molnárová, van Oijen, Zavarská, 2012, pp. 47-53).

In terms of financing the Project, as Faltinová and Lachká claim, the main strategy relies on diversification of resources, which prevents dependence on one main source and will not require any municipality financial input. Therefore, fundraising will combine public and private resources, European resources, self-financing together with the support of the European Fund of Social Entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the tools as tax assignation, volunteering activities, sponsoring, individual donations, public contribution and philanthropy assistance are considered as significant additional tools of fundraising (2012, pp. 17-20). Upon suggested budget and signed agreements, “Aliancia Stará Tržnica” is obliged to invest monthly the amount of 10.000 EUR for reconstruction work and building maintenance, which so far has been successfully managed (Bindics, 2014).

Annual Activity Evaluation Report

September 2013 was the date of opening the Stará Tržnica doors to the first food market symbolically named TRH-PIAC-MARKT held monthly from September to May and recently twice a month from June. As Chylová said, for Inspire Magazine, this event is perceived as the “flagship” among other activities. The selection of local product providers was very carefully carried out with the emphasis on quality and diversity.

The intention of “Nedeľná Paráda”, organized on Sundays, is to create space for community events enabling presentations of “minorities living in Slovakia through their culture and habits”. Visitors can admire traditional arts, products, souvenirs and taste national delicacies (www.staratrznica.sk).

Further attractive project “Zberný bod Paráda”(Collecting Point) is based on donating unnecessary, but still usable clothes, toys, books or other household/office things, which can be exchanged or purchased and received money will contribute to the leaking roof reconstruction (van Oijen, 2014).

Fusion of “creative workshops, music performances and authentic design have attracted the audience of “Vysehrad Markets” – the unique occasion of not only presenting current creative trends, but also comparing customers behavior and sharing knowledge, experience and opinions.

Permanent services as the store “U Paulíka” providing customers with high quality groceries from recommended suppliers or culinary school “Jem iné” (Eating Differently) demonstrating healthy and tasty cooking, have gained attention of both local and foreign visitors of various age categories (Orrosiová, 2014).

Last, but not least, it is necessary to mention 2 following projects, both just very recently opened > 1/ “TUTO” – a multifunction center for parents and their children and 2/ Café “Dobre&Dobré” (Well&Good) providing job opportunities for homeless people (www.staratrznica.sk).

Besides of herein mentioned original projects and activities, since the last year the venue of Tržnica has roofed a number of public social and cultural events as Viva Musica! Festival concerts, Fashion Week Show, GLOBSEC City Talks, WHAT CITY?, PECHAKUCHA NIGHT Bratislava, the European educative program The Night of Researchers as well as corporate celebration and promotion events.

As Chylová concludes, the team of “Aliancia Stará Tržnica” has spent a great deal of time preparing technical paper documents allowing necessary reconstructions, as the building belongs to a protected historical heritage, part of which was successfully accomplished, while some other are about to happened. Moreover, most of the renovation activities were carried out almost simultaneously with managing the events, following comfort, safety and aesthetic demands (2014, p. 64).

Conclusion

Thanks to numerous inspiring cases of successful revitalization projects we can learn and share valuable knowledge and create own ideas related to transformation processes. Either the whole cities (Bilbao, Rotterdam, Vienna, San Francisco) or districts (New Orleans Warehouse/Art District, East London, Pedestrian Mall in Miami, Florida or Greenwich Village in NYC) have managed to improve what was supposed to be destroyed (Appendix C: Successful Revitalization, 2003).

Undergoing revitalizing activities require integrated framework and participation of different sectors in order to manage housing, transportation, employment, services, leisure time activities or healthy and safe environment. Urban regeneration instead of “mono-function and mono-social zones” should result into creating multifunctional venues that preserve or even emphasize historical values and identity while including expected recent requirements (Lunter, 2010, p. 2).

Further condition heading to accomplishing ‘culture-led revitalization’ stands for emphasizing sustainability of the projects by composing well-balanced program structure, diversified fundraising and appropriate audience communication that is able to satisfy different age and social group expectations. At the same time such efforts result in building and strengthening of community atmosphere and creating livable urban zones. As Montgomery claims, “a successful place must combine quality related to physical space, attractive activities, accessibility, comfort, redesigned greenery, replaced street and square furnishing, impressive image and sociability (in Balsas, 2007, p. 235).

An extensive monitoring of academic and popular press reviews related to successful attempts of revitalization of European, North American and Chinese city centers together with intensive observation of the plans implementation, while attending all organized events, so far it is possible to admit that “Aliancia Stará Tržnica” in Bratislava, Slovakia proved high level of achieving desired results. There is no doubt that skilled and enthusiastic professionals gathered around “Aliancia Stará Tržnica” have not convinced only the Mayor of Bratislava and the City Council, but also established an inspiring pilot project deserving admiration and further support. Within the first year of implementing their plans, they attracted the attention of local citizens, city visitors, institutions and organizations, sponsors and small supporters as well as media.

To conclude, we claim that thanks to unique personalities and previous project skills of the team members together with their willingness to gain extended knowledge and experience from local and international platforms, the first year of existence was very fruitful and appreciated by the entire community. However, in order to prove sustainability of the Project, a further research related to monitoring and evaluating the following performance under a full operation is needed.

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