



NEW POST-SOCIALIST CITY:  
COMPETITIVE AND ATTRACTIVE

ReNewTown



EUROPEAN UNION  
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University of Ljubljana  
Faculty of Economics



MESTNA OBČINA VELENJE

# ReNewTown Project

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NEW POST-SOCIALIST CITY:  
**COMPETITIVE AND ATTRACTIVE**

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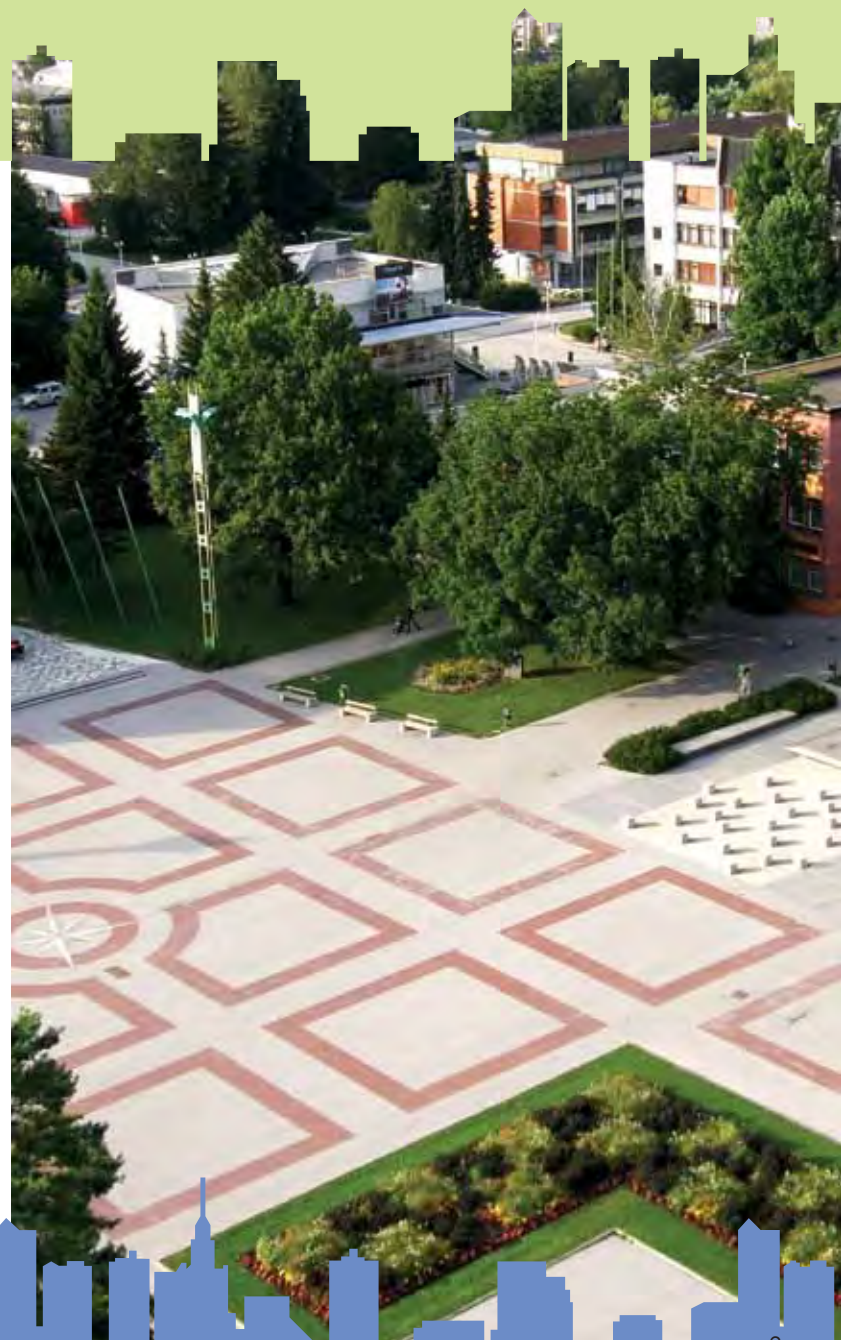
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## Short presentation of the project content

More than 300 million people from the Central Europe live in cities or parts of cities built during the Socialist period (1945 – 1989). These people face problems connected with a low quality of life (poorly maintained residential buildings and public spaces in residential areas), weak sense of connectedness with the local environment, lack of business initiatives, a low rate of preserved architecture and other untouchable cultural heritage from the Socialist period, as well as poverty.

The purpose of the ReNewTown project is to create conditions for a balanced development of cities or those parts of the cities which developed during the Socialist period. We will prepare a transnational strategy for the development of the city until 2024 based on the studies conducted. The strategy will contain a number of measures and solutions for the improvement of conditions for the investment into reconstruction and revitalization of goal objects and public surfaces; models for the development of cultural and social offer; entrepreneurship development models; models for improvement of the identification of the residents with the environment they live in etc.

The project officially started on 1 April 2011 and it will be concluded in March 2014. The Stanisław Leszczycki Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization, which operates as part of the Polish Academy of Sciences, leads a consortium of partners, in which from the Slovenian institutions Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana and the City Municipality of Velenje also part take.

The Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana, cooperates as a strategic partner in the planning and carrying out the research studies related to the state and fluctuation and relevant structures of population, employment, the contentment of the residents of urban centres with their quality of life, their expectations regarding further development of urban centres in which they live etc.

These studies are the basis for the preparation of a transnational strategy for the development of cities until 2024. In Slovenia we have, in addition to the City Municipality of Velenje, also included the City Municipality of Nova Gorica in the analysis of states and trends, and we will use an all-Slovenian representative sample of citizens as the basis for the comparison, therefore the results of the analysis will also be relevant for those who will shape the development policies in other Slovenian cities which are marked by the Socialist urban legacy.

The City Municipality of Velenje will, as part of the ReNewTown project, with the help of the investment estimated at EUR 46,500, in July 2012 revive the immaterial cultural legacy which highly marked the development of the city of Velenje – official community work. We will renew the selected public space in one of the residential areas, which developed during the above mentioned era, with the volunteer work of young and older volunteers. The public space will be given a new outlook and a new function with simple interventions, such as the reconstruction of existing and setting up of new benches, setting up footpaths, planting new trees and grass and installing outdoor machines. In Velenje and its surrounding areas the Youth centre and the representatives of the authorities have already carried out a number of similar projects (such as cleaning and the revival of the open air cinema, which was completely overgrown, but now serves its purpose in the summer and is made into an ice rink during winter) and discovered that such projects immensely strengthen the intergenerational dialogue and socially responsible behaviour of the participants (for example it discourages young people from vandalism). We would like to present these positive effects to the broader Slovenian public as an example of good practice which should also be carried out elsewhere.

Prof. Irena Ograjenšek, Ph.D. ([irena.ograjensek@ef.uni-lj.si](mailto:irena.ograjensek@ef.uni-lj.si)) and Marko Govek ([marko.govek@velenje.si](mailto:marko.govek@velenje.si)) will be happy to provide you any additional information about the project.

## Good practice report – Slovenia

When selecting the good practice examples from Slovenia we tried to account for all project-relevant key areas:

- Improving the provision of local cultural and social events.
- Improving public spaces between blocks and flats.
- Providing support for the development of small business operators in the area of blocks of flats.
- Improving the attractiveness of the architecture of the socialist-period building.
- Promoting the involvement of the local community in events organized in its quarter.
- New functions for structures from the area of socialism (in case of Slovenia that is the period 1945-1991).

We were trying to look beyond the borders of the City Municipality of Velenje and identify examples which, if possible, resonate across borders, like the example of the Hostel Celica or Metelkova Autonomous Cultural Centre, which are internationally renowned.

We ended up with the following list of examples in pre-identified key areas:

Key area	Examples
Improving the provision of local cultural and social events	House of Culture Velenje Renovation of the Open Air Cinema New City Library – Center Nova Metelkova Autonomous Cultural Centre
Improving public spaces between blocks and flats	NA
Providing support for the development of small business operators in the area of blocks of flats	Business Zone “Rudarski dom”

Improving the attractiveness of the architecture of the socialist-period building

Hotel Paka Renovation  
Faculty of Economics  
National Assembly

Promoting the involvement of the local community in events organized in its quarter

Renovation of the Open Air Cinema  
Maximarket Department Store  
Metelkova Autonomous Cultural Centre

New functions for structures from the area of socialism (in case of Slovenia that is the period 1945-1991)

Hostel Celica

The only area with no good practice example is ‘Improving public spaces between blocks and flats’. It should therefore come as no surprise that this is the area of pilot action within the ReNewTown project in Slovenia.

Following is the summary of our analysis based on 6 project-relevant questions:

### 1. What forms of cooperation were used as new approaches in the field of rehabilitation and conversion of urban functional areas?

The approach that deserves most attention are the efforts of the City Municipality of Velenje and its dependent / partner organisations to integrate the youth into revitalisation efforts by means of voluntary work. Not only does this create a pride in achievement, it also deepens the bonds between the youth and their place of living; not to mention the feeling of responsibility towards newly created spaces (those who worked countless hours – and the video documentary shows that many of them wore the insignia of heavy metal fans – will certainly not engage into vandalism activities).

Another example that needs to be brought forward is Hostel Celica, an example of complete functional redefinition. For the local population a symbol of oppression it is now an important gateway towards increased international understanding and communication; this twist is in itself unique but only possible because no real atrocities were committed on the premises (ie. people were not tortured and did not die there).

## **2. Were the buildings in question (or the space between buildings) identified as a valuable socialist heritage?**

Some of the buildings from Velenje are: House of Culture and Hotel Paka. So is the Maximarket building in Ljubljana. They were not only perceived as symbols of economic growth and population well-being in the socialist times; they are also important landmarks of the European modern architecture à la Le Corbusier.

## **3. What criteria were applied to making this judgment?**

Primarily architectural. The buildings in Velenje were designed and constructed as part of a broader plan to create a unique sunny garden city for coal miners and their families following the principles of modern European architecture (the already mentioned Le Corbusier). Infrastructure, communal buildings and housing were all built with an extensive amount of voluntary work. While this voluntary work could be described as ideologically motivated, it has to be recognized that it served the purpose of enormously improving quality of life of the Velenje population.

International expert community was at first skeptical about the whole project. However, once they recognized high professional standards in urban design and execution, based on contemporary European trends in urbanism and architecture, this attitude changed to enthusiasm. Velenje received visitors not just from the socialist countries but also from Western economies whose representatives were on a lookout for ways to improve housing for industry workers. One of the reasons for this is the fact that all

buildings are in perfect (very harmonious, very consistent) scale relation to their surroundings.

What is also interesting is that public reaction to buildings was positive and remains to be so to this day. Along with the public library and the school of music the House of Culture is the centre of cultural activities in Velenje, hosting theatre productions, music and dance performances, festive academies, etc.

## **4. Were the buildings (or space between buildings) important to local communities and how were they involved in decision-making about its rehabilitation or conversion?**

In the majority of cases the owners (municipalities, corporations, an academic institution) carried out the necessary revitalisation efforts without involving the local community into consultations.

## **5. Were attempts made to improve territorial cohesion within the city/town/district? And, if so, how was success on this front gauged?**

This issue is not relevant in the Slovenian context.

Velenje was originally planned as a completely new town so achievement of territorial cohesion was one of the planning goals.

As far as Ljubljana is concerned, none of described revitalisation efforts aimed at territorial cohesion improvement.

## **6. Were there attempts to reduce disparities between districts within cities/towns reduced? And, if so, how was success on this front gauged?**

This issue is not relevant in the Slovenian context as the largest Slovenian city – Ljubljana, the capital city of Slovenia – only has approximately 280.000 inhabitants, which, compared globally, is small, and inter-district disparities consequently practically non-existent.

## Pilot action (City municipality of Velenje) Slovenia

Public spaces in cities have a special function. Public spaces are, or should be, places of interaction, dialogue and well-being. Modern public spaces have a number of functionalities for sports and children's play. So the public spaces also become a place for spending quality time. In the ReNewTown project target cities or parts of cities, public spaces often do not meet these standards and functions. Public spaces are often poorly maintained, exposed to vandalism, which causes the residents to identify less with the place where they live.

The City Municipality of Velenje cooperates on the ReNewTown project with an innovative pilot action: we will renovate the public space between the blocks of flats at Koželjskega ulici in the Gorica local community with a small financial investment. We will, at the same time, stimulate the immaterial cultural heritage which severely marked the development of the city of Velenje – community work. We will give the public space a new, modern outlook and modern functions with the help of our young and older volunteers. The space is currently a playground and a lawn, but after the intervention we wish to have a modern public space which will offer the possibilities of intergenerational socializing and leisure activities for all generations of residents. The project will also represent a model of joint management of public spaces, which will be mainly based on integration of the residents from this area. This measure will ensure a greater degree of identification of the residents with the place where they live and it will also reduce vandalism.

We informed the residents, living in the blocks of flats surrounding the playground, of the project in September 2011. We also conducted a survey among them, which showed that the majority of residents want a public space which would resemble a central playground, as much as 70% of the respondents expressed willingness to cooperate in the campaign as volunteers!

The community work will take place in the beginning of July 2012. In addition to the residents, members of the Velenje Brigadiers' Society and volunteers of the Velenje Youth Centre and Šaleški Student Club will also take part in the community work. Therefore we will provide a quality and generally beneficial intergenerational dialogue already during the pilot action.

BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION



AFTER IMPLEMENTATION



## Market research report – Slovenia

### Introduction

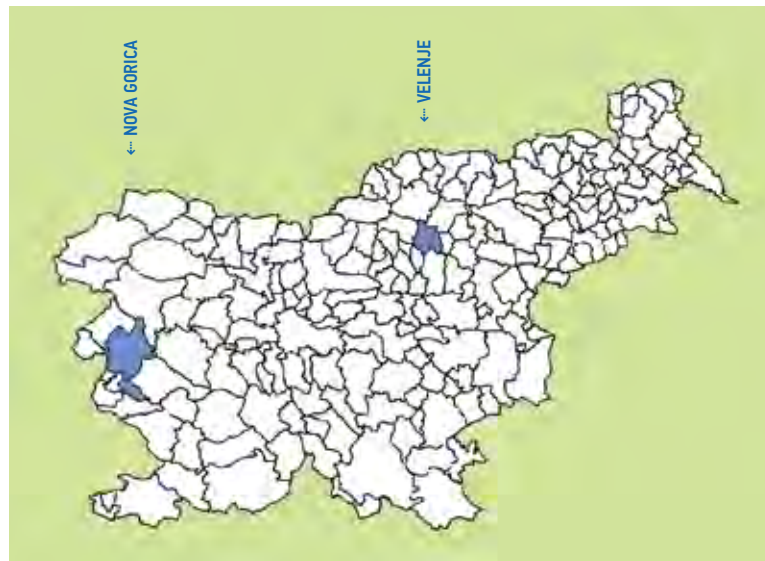
The market research report for Slovenia was carried out in the framework of the ReNewTown project's activities in Work Package 3 – "Identifying the potential of districts with socialist burden" in the period December 2011 – March 2012.

Given that Slovenia, with its approximately 2 million inhabitants, is one of the smallest European countries, its cities and consequently districts are also very small. That is why we decided not to focus on districts in our research but on two cities (in the context of our research city municipalities) marked with socialist urban heritage instead: Velenje and Nova Gorica.

Both cities as we know them today were planned and built after the World War II, but for entirely different reasons:

1. Velenje in Northern Slovenia, which today is one of the most important industrial centres of Slovenia (with a coalmine, an electrical power plant as well as an important European household appliances producer to employ the wives of the coalmine workers), was a designated city of light and gardens for miners who spend half of their day in the darkness of the pit;
2. Nova Gorica in Western Slovenia, which today is one of the most important service centres of Slovenia (with highly developed tourism industry, built around numerous casinos) was created to outshine the 'old' Gorica (Gorizia) which became part of Italy after the World War 2.

It is not despite but because of these historical differences as well as differences in the chosen (or better put predestined) path of economic development that the comparison between the two cities is so interesting.



## City Municipality of Velenje

The city municipality of Velenje (MOV) is located in the eastern part of the Šaleška dolina valley. The central part of the municipality is situated on the plain along the Paka river. The entire V-plain of the Šaleška dolina valley has been urbanised, as over the last 50 years the city – fifth largest in Slovenia in terms of population – has grown and spread to include former settlements and hamlets of Škale, Stara vas, Staro Velenje, Šalek and Šmartno.

The northern part of the municipality reaches into the hills, which stretch from Razborje to Graška Gora and across the Paka gorge at Huda luknja to Paški Kozjak. The eastern boundary of the municipality runs along Dobrnsko podolje across the Pirešica creek and towards the south to the Ponikevska planota tableau and Ložniško gričevje hills, which separate Šaleška dolina from Spodnja Savinjska dolina i.e. the lower Savinja valley. The western boundary splits Šaleška dolina in half along





City of Velenje

the north-south line in the area of former village Preloge, where presently under the basin bedrock the most intensive lignite mining is taking place by the Premogovnik Velenje coalmining company. The border continues along the lower Velunja creek to the foothills of Graška Gora.

The heart of the municipality is the city of Velenje, a predominantly industrial centre (home of Gorenje – manufacturer of household appliances; Premogovnik Velenje running a lignite coal mining operation; Elektrarna Šoštanj – one of the most important Slovenian electricity power plants, etc.), which is fast becoming the hub of the Savinjsko-Šaleška regija region with highly developed trade, administrative, educational and other business sectors.

Remains found in the Šaleška valley testify that the valley was already inhabited in the prehistoric times. **Remains of a settlement of prehistoric man** have been found in the Mornova zijalka cave by Šoštanj and in the Špehovka cave by Huda Luknja, and prehistoric artefacts in Bevče and at Plešivec. The remains from the Roman era, however, in-

dicating the presence of a Roman settlement in the area presently known as Šaleška dolina.

The area of present Velenje was **first mentioned in 1250**; documents mention the Velenje market square for the first time in 1264 while the earliest reference to the castle rising above the old market square is found in the historic records of 1270.

In the **16<sup>th</sup> century**, the Šaleška dolina valley became a hub of protestant life in the Štajerska region. The biggest accomplishment of that time was the school which the protestants established in Velenje. In medieval times the Šaleška dolina valley, on account of the large number of castles (over 20), became known as the ‘Valley of Castles’ and the name has stuck to the present day.

**In 1801** there was a big fire in Velenje, which reduced to ashes the entire market square including the church of Sv. Marija. At the time, a small market square was all there was to Velenje, which was second to Šoštanj in terms of size. In 1889 Velenje only counted 364 inhabitants.

Velenje began to mildly prosper at the **end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**, when a **coalmine was opened** in its vicinity. Coalmining had only an indirect impact on the development of the market square as in those times Velenje was not yet a mining settlement. At the end of the 19th century, the main developed sectors in Velenje included trade and commerce, sawmills and wood processing plants, and agriculture as a vital, continually present industry.

In 1931, more than half of the resident population in the Šaleška dolina valley still lived off the land. Velenje lignite and the Šoštanj tannery were two of the reasons, which contributed to the railway being built in the area in 1891 effectively connecting Velenje to Celje; in 1899, the railway link was extended to Dravograd, Carinthia.

It was mainly **after 1950** that, reflecting increased demand for coal, the need for a modern city became apparent. This new city was supposed to be built in place of initially proposed cottages for numerous miners from the entire Yugoslavia. Under the leadership of then director of Rudnik Velenje Mr Nestl Žgank, design engineers of Slovenija project, Ljubljana led by architect Janez Treznar, started developing plans for a modern city with approximately 30,000 residents. Žgank’s motto that “... the dwell-



ing places of miners, who spend half of the day underground, should be filled with light and sunshine...” resulted in a contemporary, modernistic city with free-standing structures situated in large, green areas. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons later city planners did not continue this concept. Nevertheless, they managed to preserve the late modernistic character of the city centre, which makes it one of only a few in Europe. Unprecedented expansion of the settlement with more than 20 large buildings having been built in only two years in late 1960s astonished the entire country, which awarded Velenje city rights on **20 September 1959**, the day when Mestna občina Velenje now celebrates its municipal holiday.

In the present time, the city has reached the outer skirts of its planned development. On this anniversary we look back in wonder at how far we have come: that our parents, with hard work and dedication, and by taking advantage of the political climate, succeeded in integrating a few modest settlements, scattered across the eastern part of the Šaleška dolina valley, into what has become the **fifth largest city in Slovenia**.

Despite the natural position of the city squeezed between the hills and the valleys, and partial degradation of the valley due to surface depressions caused by coalmining, Velenje offers numerous residential options to the local residents and interested parties from out of city.

The already adopted planning documents and ongoing development of new city plans and zoning plans provide for utility-serviced lots approved for the construction of buildings for the purposes of cottage industry, factories, shops as well as individual investors. Rehabilitation of surface depressions along the lakes and other areas, however, offers a range of attractive options to potential investors for the construction of tourist facilities, and facilities for recreation and entertainment.

The completion of the proposed national highway cross and the planned construction of the motorway bypass past Velenje will bring the city closer to other parts of Slovenia which is bound to make the municipality one of the more desirable settlement options in the country. In addition, Mestna občina Velenje presently makes available – and will continue to do so in the future – about 50 low-income and non-profit housing units to its residents every year.



## City Municipality of Nova Gorica

Nova Gorica, the heart of the city municipality of Nova Gorica, is a young city, built after 1948 when the Paris Peace Treaty established a new border between Yugoslavia and Italy, leaving nearby Gorizia outside the borders of Yugoslavia, thus cutting off the Soča Valley, Vipava Valley, and the northwestern Karst Plateau from their traditional regional centre. Nova Gorica is the principal urban centre of the traditional region of Goriška in the Slovenian Littoral (Primorska).

It would be wrong to infer that people did not live in the Nova Gorica area before the new city was built after the World War 2. The population in the extensive surroundings of the present-day city started many thousands of years ago, which is proven by a number of significant archaeological sites.

However, the idea of a new centre of the Goriška area started to turn into reality in autumn of the year 1947 by the agency of a special com-

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City of Nova Gorica



mittee led by Minister Ivan Maček. The urban plan for the new city was elaborated by the architect and city planner Edo Ravnikar. **The foundation stone for the construction was laid on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1948.** Youth work brigades from all over Yugoslavia started to build the new city. Six blocks of flats, the so called »Russian blocks«, the City hall and the multistorey building known as »Nebotičnik - Sky-scraper« were the first buildings of the city. Gradually bigger housing areas, other new buildings, the Nova Gorica Cultural Centre and the department store »Trgovska hiša«, as well as the social centre of the city of Nova Gorica developed.

The name *Nova Gorica* literally means 'New Gorizia'. However, most people from the area simply call the city *Gorica* (i.e., 'Gorizia'), while they refer to the neighboring Italian city as "Old Gorizia" (Slovene: *stara Gorica*). This use is also reflected in Slovenian license plates (*GO* for Gorica), the name of the local football club and the local student association. Although the word *gorica* is a diminutive form of the Slovenian




word *gora* 'hill' but also denotes a vineyard of which there are plenty in the area.

The architect Edvard Ravnikar's original idea and design of the city have been frequently challenged changed during the fast expansion process. Of the initial plan of a »City in a park« only about two hundred species of local and exotic trees and shrubs are preserved, which is without any doubt a noteworthy peculiarity.

When it comes to the preservation and revitalisation of the buildings from his era, the results are mixed: new architectural styles can be found next to Ravnikar's, there is a lot of influence from Italy (e.g. fake Toscana style, colour pollution). However, the heart of the city remains the same and it is sometimes very difficult to know whether one is looking at a photo of Velenje or Nova Gorica because the vistas – dependent on the angle – are quite similar.



## Selected indicators for Slovenia, City Municipality of Velenje and City Municipality of Nova Gorica

Indicator	Slovenia 	Velenje 	Nova Gorica 
Total area (km <sup>2</sup> )	20,273	84	280
Average flat surface (in m <sup>2</sup> )	77	74	80
Population on 1.1.2012	2,055,496	32,869	32,000
Population density (persons per km <sup>2</sup> ) on 1.1.2012	101	391	114
Average age (years) on 1.1.2012	41.9	41.0	43.6
Natural increase (per 1000 population) in 2010	1.8	3.3	1.4
Migratory increase (per 1000 population) in 2010	- 0.3	- 14.2	- 1.3
Children (1-5 years of age) in kindergartens (%) in 2010	74	78	73
Students per 1000 population in 2010	52	57	47
Average monthly gross wage (EUR) in 2010	1,495	1,394	1,594
Average monthly rate of unemployment (registered) in 2010	10.7	12.4	8.5
Social support recipients (per 1000 population) in 2009	42.8	74.2	24.8
Nr. of self-employed in 2010	87,845	928	1,470
Total annual income of business entities (in 1000 EUR) in 2009	83,060,213	1,533,233	1,189,538
Cars / 100 population in 2009	52	49	64
Garbage (kg / person / year 2009)	404	540	573

Source: SI-STAT Online Database, Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia.



## Methodology of Market Research in Slovenia

Methodology that was used in the market research process is based on three survey questionnaires for three key groups of local stakeholders:

- Experts whose activities include issues related to urban planning and socialist heritage preservation as well as revitalisation.
- Entrepreneurs whose businesses are located in a given city municipality.
- Residents.

An online survey in combination with snowball sampling was used and a total of 130 respondents included in the research process.



## Summary of Findings

### Experts

In comparison, the experts from Velenje seem to be much happier with the past and present developments in both their city as well as their city municipality than their counterparts from Nova Gorica.


While both groups acknowledge the same main reason why do people choose to move into a city (workplace proximity) the identified problems and measures to improve the quality of life in both cities differ. Velenje's main problem is energy inefficiency of socialist buildings. In order to increase the quality of life it should try to add value to existing green areas by introducing relevant activities, and should build a network of bike paths. Nova Gorica's main problem are traffic arrangements.

All in all, in Velenje the urban heritage of socialism is not perceived as a burden but something to nurture, enjoy (local population) and exploit (in terms of tourism development). In Nova Gorica, to the contrary, the urban heritage of socialism is perceived as a burden especially from the viewpoint of the present traffic arrangements.

### Entrepreneurs and small business operators

While the majority of obstacles that entrepreneurs and small business operators from Velenje listed resemble those listed by their counterparts from Nova Gorica, two major differences have to be mentioned:

The first one has to deal with characteristics of entrepreneurs and small business operators from both city municipalities: those in Velenje are



distinctly younger and more B2B oriented. That might have to do with differences in the general focus (Velenje an important industrial, Nova Gorica an important service industry centre).

The second one has to do with evaluations of quality of life and conditions for business development: in case of Nova Gorica entrepreneurs and small business operators these are distinctly lower than those of their Velenje counterparts.

Entrepreneurs and small business operators in both cities seem to have some unrealistic expectations related to the services which should be provided to them by their municipalities. On the other hand they seem not to really know at which contact point within the municipality administration they are supposed to find help in the first place so an information leaflet is recommendable as the first remedy of this situation.

## Residents

In comparison, the best evaluated services in both cities are those of kindergartens and primary schools – this is one of the positive remains of the socialist education system. The worst services in both cities are those of garbage collection.

The daily use of public spaces in Velenje is much higher than that of Nova Gorica. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that residents of Nova Gorica give priority to development of green spaces whereas in Velenje the number one item on the list is better social life with more cultural events, balls, etc.

The network of bike paths – like in Velenje – also emerged in Nova Gorica as something which would hugely improve the quality of life of Nova Gorica city and Nova Gorica city municipality residents.

Similarly to Velenje, most respondents in Nova Gorica think they have enough opportunities to express their opinions in discussions with local authorities. The fact that they rarely make use of them is not something that could be blamed on the local authorities.

When asked whether they would consider moving, people in Nova Gorica indicated this to be a somewhat sensitive issue whereas most of our Velenje respondents believe they will remain living where they are now.

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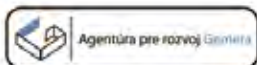
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