

Co-creative RETHINKing for **sustainable** cities



Urban trees in the Municipality of Novo mesto

The Slovenian Case Study

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Table of Contents

<i>Reduction of general waste in the municipality of Hveragerði</i>	0
The Icelandic Case Study.....	0
Authors: Association of Municipalities in South Iceland /SASS	0
Version history.....	1
Table of Contents	2
What are the Case Studies?	3
Introduction.....	4
The Process	4
Methodologies and Tools	8
Results and Tips for practitioners	11
Summary of the Project.....	14

What are the Case Studies?

These Case studies present under a methodological light the experiences of the local projects implemented by the Crethink project partners and their Change Agents. The idea is to use partners' experiences as testimonies, case-studies, practical examples of the application of co-creation methodologies in their different settings and with different targets. It's not just about telling the story of their project but also about providing a useful tool for other stakeholders who might want to adapt and use the same methodologies and/or work with similar targets.

Each case study includes an explanation of the processes triggered by the local project and of the methodologies and tools used, together with practical examples and/or templates as annex when available. Finally, they include recommendations and tips for practitioners who approach similar methodologies, contexts and/or target groups.

Introduction

The following summary outlines the process of the Slovenian project on implementing better care of urban trees among decision makers as well as the residents of Municipality of Novo mesto in the south-eastern part of Slovenia, what was done and what will be the afterlife of the project.

The Slovenian partners detected the problem regarding the state of urban trees in the local area:

- ❑ improper maintenance of urban trees in the past: mostly only removed, improper pruning (worst practice = topping), there are no plans for further planting of trees
...
- ❑ poorly developed municipal legal framework,
- ❑ the maintenance of existing and the planting of new green infrastructure, is not widely regarded (especially trees) as the most economical measure of climate change mitigation and adaptation
- ❑ theory vs. practice (implementation of the sustainable development strategy of Municipality of Novo mesto),

Partners joined the project Cre-think with an intention to improve the care of the local urban trees and to use the co-creation method to engage as many people as possible (professional and general public) and create a network of interested public.

The Process

Goal

The goal of the project was to improve the care of the local urban trees in Novo mesto.

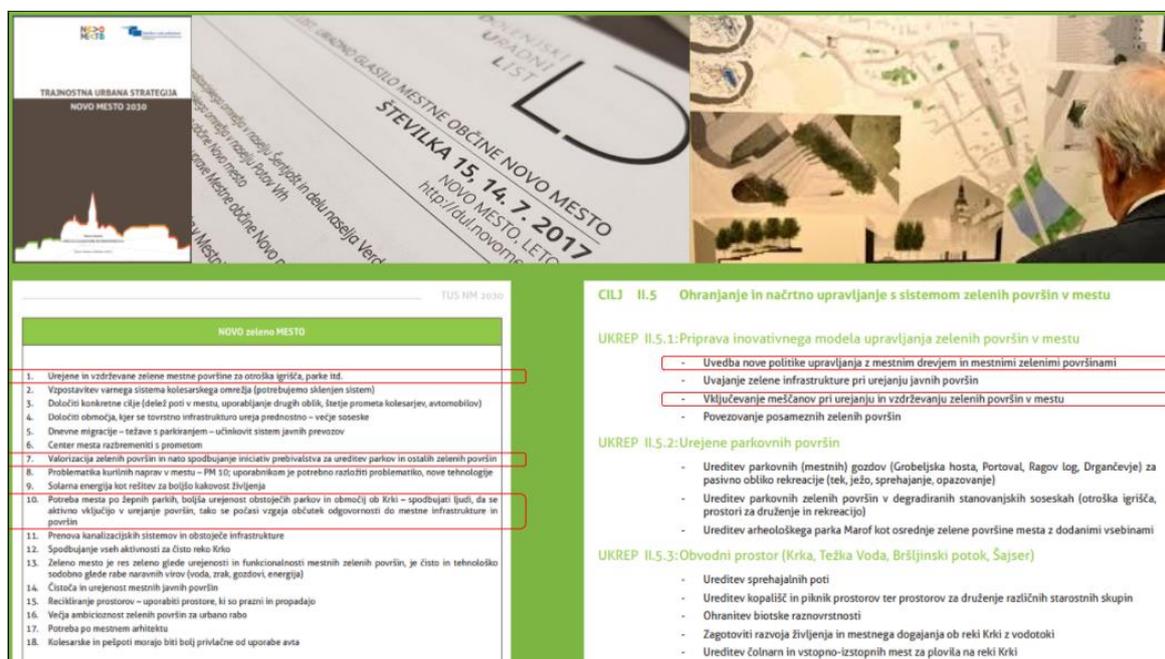
Target group

Changed Agents in Slovenia decided to include professional and general public in the process. The proposition at professional public level was proposal for updating the existing municipal decrees and adoption of guidelines for urban tree care and

management. The proposition at general public level was raising awareness of the importance of trees and green infrastructure.

Activities for professional public (key stakeholders)

The change agents reviewed good practices in other cities in Slovenia and abroad and researched for possibilities for updating the decree. Although changes of decree involves political process and are complicated. Suitable guidelines on planning, planting and care of trees in public areas were drafted on basis of similar Rules from Municipality of Maribor. The change agents identified stakeholders and organized workshop for key stakeholders on proper tree maintenance (as final event/local dissemination event).



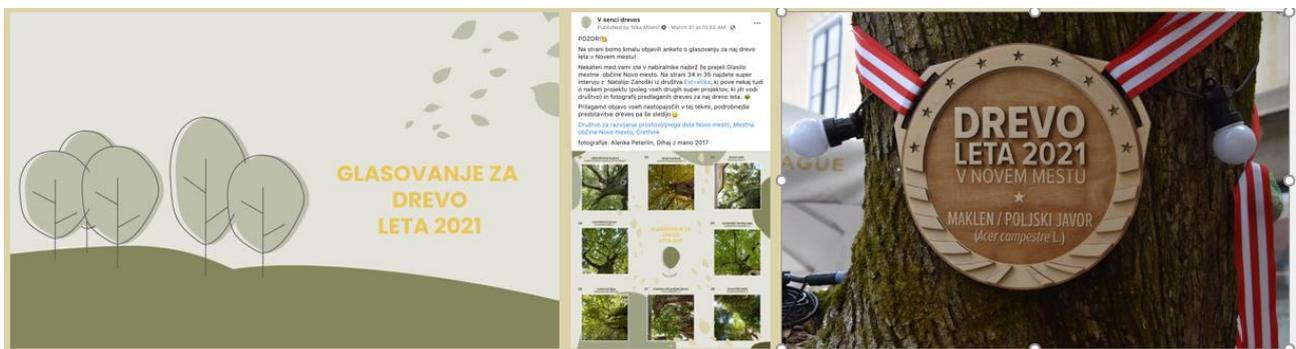
Activities for general public

The change agents launched Facebook (@vsencidreves) and Instagram (@vsencidreves) pages to interact with the public. Main goal was to educate, promote and discuss with the citizens of Novo mesto about urban trees. The campaign was launched in February 2021 and is slowly gaining followers.



The change agents launched the campaign for the selection of Tree of the year 2021 in Novo mesto.

Voting was closed on 22nd April, winner tree received medal on 27th April (Day of trees, World Wide Fund for Nature) and was presented on city posters and video. Residents were able to vote digitally through Google Forms (via FB and Instagram) and on location in the city (temporary mailbox).



During the project the team was expanded, and change agents connected with other activists on similar projects. The agents made connection with initiative Youth for Climate Fairness from Ljubljana to execute new project Tree on a bike in Ljubljana and Novo mesto, where people were able to hop on a tricycle with small tree in the basket to drive it around the city to raise awareness and point out the hotspots in both cities that would need more urban greening. Later the tree was planted in each of the city. The project also launched a website: <https://drevonakolo.si/>.



The change agents made an upgrade of the brochure Breathe with me, urban trees in Novo mesto 2017. Second edition includes selection of new trees on the selected footpath and further mapping of dendrological heritage.



Methodologies and Tools

The group of local change agents was divided into two groups: **first** with members working in public sector who were working on the issues in the system and the other and the **second** with members from private sector (local NGO, individuals etc.) who were working on how to engage general public. From the beginning all members attended most of the meetings (on-line due to covid-19 pandemic), so each had an overview of the process. During the first meetings the change agents set their activities, goals and time frame for their execution. Later meetings intention was to exchange up-to-date information on each of the activities, problems and concerns of the members. At all stages there was a possibility to re-define intended activities, especially as some of them were difficult to execute due to covid-19 pandemic.

Main activity for **professional public (as key stakeholders)** was a proposal of a Guidelines on planning, planting and care of trees in public areas in Municipality of Novo mesto. It was drafted on basis of similar guidelines of Municipality of Maribor. The change agents mainly from first group (working in public sector) prepared a draft of a decree. The draft was sent to the main author of the decree of Municipality of Maribor (dr. Lena Marion, arborist) in order to give a review of the prepared text. This document will be pushed through the local political process and hopefully will be accepted and implemented.

The second activity was the organization of workshop for key stakeholders on proper tree maintenance (as final event/local dissemination event). The change agents engaged local (professional, non-governmental etc.) groups in order to gain the widest audience that was interested in the topic.

The change agents prepared lots of activities to engage **general public**. The idea behind working on lots of various activities is to get the attention of the widest possible audience of various age, gender, backgrounds etc. The widest reach was gained by the launch of Facebook (@vsencidreves, 334 followers) and Instagram (@vsencidreves, 183 followers) pages in February 2021 mainly by the second group (local NGO, individuals). The main goal was to educate, promote and discuss with the citizens of Municipality of Novo mesto the value of the trees in the city. The sites are slowly gaining followers and the change agents are trying to use them also after the project's end.

Good success was also the launch of the campaign for the selection of Tree of the year 2021 in the Municipality of Novo mesto on the basis of the on-line project European Tree of the Year. The previous selection of 8 trees in the city was done on the basis of the brochure *Breathe with me*, 2017. Each of the tree was presented with basic information (species, age, location, short text) and two photographs. The campaign was launched virtually on Facebook and Instagram pages of the project (@vsencidreves) and physically in the city center (temporary mailbox) and was closed on 22nd April. During the campaign the change agents prepared an article in the local newspaper to encourage voters. The change agents received 147 votes. One voter was given a prize: a book with fairy tale of 200-years-old red oak (*Wishtree* by Katherine Applegate, 2017, translated in Slovenian language). The selected tree received a wooden medal and was presented on city posters and on video. The story of campaign was well covered by local media.

The brochure *Breathe with me*, urban trees in Novo mesto, from 2017 (no. 1) was upgraded in 2022 (no. 2) with the selection of new trees on the selected footpath in the Municipality of Novo mesto. The new selected trees had to be presented by information (species, location, age, trunk circumference, level of protection – if any, condition assessment, maintenance proposal and basic characteristic of the species), photograph and illustration. The brochure was printed in 200 copies and distributed amongst the local professional and general public.

Unplanned, the change agents received a proposal for cooperation on a project by initiative Youth for Climate Fairness from Ljubljana (the capital city of Slovenia): *Tree on a bike*. The idea was to build a tricycle with basket (DIY) in order to put in a small tree. The tree on a bike would be given to local residents (in Ljubljana and Novo mesto) to drive it around the city in order to find spots where they would like new trees planted. These locations were tracked and collected by GPS system and were later given to the city-managements in Ljubljana and Novo mesto as a manifest of the wish of the residents. Later the tree was planted in each of the city. This campaign was well covered by local and all major national media.

The change agents had many different ideas for activities for general public and some of them were impossible to execute for various reasons. Wish is that these would be executed even after the project ends.

The change agents **used various methodologies and tools** (explained above) in order to change the current state of affairs on topic of urban trees in local area. The most important part in selection of methodologies and tools was to detect true reasons behind the bad maintenance of the urban trees in municipality of Novo mesto. It was not the hardest task as most of the change agents were working on the issue before the start of the project. Together they could detect problems on two levels:

- ❑ professional public: non-existent but much needed Guidelines on planning, planting and care of trees in public areas in Municipality of Novo mesto,
- ❑ general public: residents are not fully aware of the importance of urban trees, especially in the predicted climate change scenarios for Slovenia with highest temperature rise in Europe

After detecting problems and the reasons behind them it was easier to choose methodologies and tools for execution of the project.

Results and Tips for practitioners

Lessons

- ❑ great advantage is that at least some of the change agents in the project knew each other from before,
- ❑ all included (have) had different expectations, backgrounds and knowledge; through co-working in project we all exchanged our views over the subject and learned from each other,
- ❑ the change agents made bonds and deepened their connections, which will have effect in future as they all would love to see local town enriched by properly maintained urban trees,
- ❑ it is necessary to start dealing with this topic (natural elements of the environment) at the planning and maintenance level.

Challenges

- ❑ the change agents tried to bring the theme of urban trees in the limelight and constant awareness on different levels: on one side of general public and of local government on the other side (with the company that takes care of urban greenery in local environment) as they will play very important role in our urban environment in the future as the temperatures rise; urban trees will be vital for the quality living or even survival of the inhabitants of the cities during summers in future,
- ❑ co-creation is a more complex process than it seems, it takes a lot of energy to get it going, but later needs less energy to maintain activities since all participants are more deeply involved in the process
- ❑ how to motivate key stakeholders to support the implementation of urban tree measures proposed by our project,
- ❑ with project the change agents did small steps and tried to bring awareness to general public and also to local government,
- ❑ thinking about how to provide more money in the municipal budget for landscaping with an emphasis on tree plantings,

- ❑ project was a part time activity for majority of involved participants -how to find extra time to be able to cooperate in the project,
- ❑ maintaining consistency in posts on established sites on social media networks (Fb, Instagram),
- ❑ how to prepare proper press release and use different tools to achieve goals,
- ❑ how to keep the existent project group in process after the end of this project: it is possible that the core group that has formed will be able to co-work in other similar projects,
- ❑ whether the act of regulation on the care of urban trees that we have proposed will be positively adopted by urban tree managers and that it would be put into practice,
- ❑ covid-19 reality made the change agents work more online than usual, whereas meeting in person can be much more productive.

Results

- ❑ the project managed to create a small local team with the same agenda and this team will continue to cooperate also after the project will be finished,
- ❑ through the project (more serious) conversation and media writing about urban trees in our city finally started,
- ❑ the establishment of regimes between maintainers and managers of urban trees,
- ❑ the change agents set new goals in the field of urban trees,
- ❑ extended version of brochure Breath with me, no. 2 can be useful for students (e.g. of landscape architecture, architecture, urbanism, urban forestry etc.) that are researching the green infrastructure of the local environment.

Success

- ❑ raised awareness of the importance of urban trees and well-maintained green urban areas,
- ❑ more appropriate maintenance of urban trees and thus prolonging the life of trees,
- ❑ this is the first bigger project on this topic in the Municipality of Novo mesto
- ❑ the continuation of the theme started in 2017: upgrade of the brochure Breath with me, no. 2 in 2022 that included more trees and green areas/parks,

- ❑ it was the first time the change agents collaborated with international partners and were able to visit good practices in Copenhagen, which was especially educational: it is different to read about the projects or to see them in person and even better to be guided through the project by the organizers or participants,
- ❑ the change agents have identified various shortcomings and holes in the system that make it impossible for all urban trees to be taken into account and treated in the way they deserve in return for the many social and ecological services they provide,
- ❑ the change agents realised that more can be accomplished by cooperation,
- ❑ the change agents became friends.

Tips for other practitioners

- ❑ co-creation is a complex and demanding process that requires a lot of coordination and regular coordination meetings, where the project team has to clearly set its goals,
- ❑ it is very important to be transparent, trust (in the project) and to create clear message (the goal of the project, the role of the people included etc.)
- ❑ it is important that the project is not an end in itself,
- ❑ when motivation of somebody drops, the members can help by encouraging each other,
- ❑ it is very useful to set precise deadlines for the implementation of the set tasks,
- ❑ if the project addresses the public interest, it is recommend to include in the process communication with all stakeholders who may be potentially interested in the topic and those who could contribute to the achievement of the objectives,
- ❑ it is important to find a local group of people with the same agenda that can cooperate long term on the subject so it can really bring change in the local environment.

Summary of the Project

The project "CRETHINK - Co-creative RETHINKing for sustainable cities" aims to promote sustainable practices in European cities through co-creation methodologies.

The project is a two-year Erasmus+ KA2 project which aims to foster citizens' active participation and influence in the local community and society. It achieves so by supporting adult learners within the public sector and the civil society in gaining competences, concrete methods and tools for co-creation and cross-sector cooperation towards sustainable development and complex problem solving.

With the UN SDG 11 as subject matter, the project is developing an online toolbox and recommendations on the use of co-creation methodologies, available on an open-access online platform. The toolbox contains training modules and curriculums, as well as sectors-specific guidelines and methodological documents, specifying how to implement the UN SDGs through co-creation and citizen participation. Its format allows individuals and groups to "self-learn" and implement the methods in their work or everyday activities.

Furthermore, in each partner country, local teams are implementing Pilot Projects that employ the aforementioned methodologies to create sustainable change in the urban environment. These projects are included as Case Studies in the project toolbox.

The project consortium comprises 5 partners from Denmark, Iceland, Slovenia and Italy. The project is coordinated by Vejle Kommune, which is the sixth largest municipality in the country and the capital region of South Denmark.



www.crethink.eu



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