

IDEAS CAFÉS AND OPEN-AIR CLASSES: RECLAIMING PUBLIC SPACE

Key information

- Location: **Petrinja (Croatia)**
- Population: **15 480**
- Involved in URBACT network: **CityCentreDoctor**
- More information: <http://urbact.eu/citycentredoctor>



Karate demonstration, Urban Parkivity, May 2017



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A war-damaged city needed a renewed sense of civic life. With the help of URBACT, inclusive community events are reactivating public spaces and improving quality of life.

◆ Petrinja's struggle as a postwar city

Located in central Croatia, 60 km from the capital Zagreb, Petrinja has a long and complex history. A centre for the craft trade in the 18th century, it then became the nucleus of the meat trade after the country's leading salami factory, Gavrilović, headquartered there. In the Croatian war of 1991-1995, however, the town's social, economic and physical fabric suffered severely – and recovery has been slow. The city looked to the URBACT CityCentreDoctor network as a way to help improve the quality of life, and built environment, in Petrinja.

In 2016, thanks to their participation in URBACT, Petrinja set up a group of local stakeholders (URBACT Local Group) and carried out a place analysis and resident survey. They found that many citizens felt their city centre had underused public space, unused state-owned buildings, poor incentives for entrepreneurs, high traffic, a lack of facilities for children and young people, and lack of social events in public places.

◆ Restoring community spirit thanks to Urban Parkivity

The local group then decided to focus on supporting community activities as a way to mobilise interest in, and support for, an improved city centre. To this end, they planned a beta action – a low-cost prototype set up by each city partner involved in the CityCentreDoctor network to test potential future actions – to take place on the Strossmeyer

promenade. This central, park-like square was seen by citizens as the 'heart of the city', but it was in great need of revitalisation.

In March 2017, inspired by a similar successful technique in the partner city of Nort-sur-Erdre (FR), the group organised an ideas cafe to engage the community in looking for new ways to activate public space. Themes such as yoga, karate, eco-lifestyle and local produce emerged as priorities.

The group's intention was to encourage people to spend more time in Petrinja's open public spaces and associate them with healthy, inclusive, family-oriented activities. So, Urban Parkivity was organised on Strossmeyer in May 2017. For this buzzing morning of activities, the municipality made kiosks and stalls available for school and community groups to use. There were free yoga and dancing classes, and children from the local karate club demonstrated their skills. There were also dedicated stalls to engage the public and encourage them to sign a petition to improve the city centre. Members of the local group heard from many residents who were enthusiastic about improving Petrinja's buildings and public spaces. "We were overwhelmed by the response from people," says Vlasta Vuglec, Head of Town Planning for the municipality of Petrinja.

Urban Parkivity created new uses for the Strossmeyer promenade. "Because of the success of Urban Parkivity, residents of Petrinja see the URBACT programme as a way

to develop a better and healthier life in Petrinja," says Marko Stojanović, Communication Officer for the municipality of Petrinja. Inspired by the example of Urban Parkivity, the promenade is now a regular venue for concerts, exhibitions, and workshops, as well as public events marking occasions such as Europe Day, International Children's Day, and World Health Day.

◆ Exchanging with European cities: a success factor

Marko Zlonoga, an architect appointed by the municipality to work with the CityCentreDoctor network and support the local group, reflects on the experience: "I met lots of new and interesting people, enjoyed the international exchange and all the positive energy and ideas that came through this participatory process. These two years as part

of the CityCentreDoctor network brought a great deal of knowledge, experience, positive energy and hope to people in the City of Petrinja administration, members of the URBACT Local Group and other people involved."

"The opportunity to exchange knowledge, see work, and get in dialogue over similar problems with nine other cities across Europe meant a great deal for them and boosted their faith, reassuring them that they can succeed in implementing and finalising all those important projects for the City of Petrinja," adds Mr Zlonoga.

Marko Stojanović agrees: "Thanks to the CityCentreDoctor network, we got many interesting ideas and suggestions from other cities on how to create an attractive identity for Petrinja with a goal of revitalising life in the city centre."



Dancing at the Urban Parkivity, May 2017

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