

FROM DERELICT MILITARY SITE TO NEW GREEN CENTRE

Key information

- Location: **Szombathely (Hungary)**
- Population: **79 000**
- Involved in URBACT network: **MAPS**
- More information: <http://www.urbact.eu/maps>



Despite decades of redevelopment attempts, Szombathely's former military barracks are mostly closed and the buildings deteriorating. The URBACT MAPS network sparked fresh ideas, clear decisions and locally-sourced solutions for transforming the site into a green, multi-functional city sub-centre.

A big empty space in the city

Szombathely, Hungary's tenth largest city, sits near the borders of Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Slovakia. Within the city centre is a closed-off, 21-hectare site: the former Hussar Barracks with old military housing, stables, hospital, kitchens and warehouses.

Built for the eleventh Hussar regiment in 1889, the site has fallen into disrepair since it was abandoned by Soviet troops in 1990. Only the main building has been renovated for use by cultural and educational NGOs, thanks to the local Apáczai Csere János Foundation.

Unfortunately, national heritage status granted in 2001 to protect the land and buildings from large commercial developments has made any renewal efforts more complicated. Meanwhile the city, sole owners of the site since 2006, faces heavy maintenance costs.

Searching for solutions, Ágnes Györffy, Project Manager for the Mayor's Office, discovered URBACT. Soon after, in 2015, Szombathely joined the MAPS network with other nine EU cities all building sustainable urban strategies to "redefine the function, social role and accessibility of former military heritage".

Ideas for turning the barracks into an organic part of the city

URBACT's methodology and expertise was ground-breaking for Szombathely. At the heart of this was the creation of group of local stakeholders, an URBACT Local Group, focused on reusing the Hussar Barracks. It included residents, urban experts, historians, municipality staff, local businesses, and the Apáczai Csere János Foundation.

The URBACT Local Group made the key decision to open the barracks temporarily to pedestrians and cyclists to raise awareness of the site and its hidden potentials. To enable this, it formed a technical group that analysed costs and presented a detailed proposal to the vice-mayor. With his backing, the URBACT Local Group refined their plans.



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Ágnes Györffy

Szombathely organised open days and guided tours, engaging hundreds of residents. This generated numerous ideas for the site, including housing government offices and hosting large thematic fairs. One entrepreneur proposed to refurbish a partially renovated venue to provide studios for rock and jazz bands.

In 2017, after years of requests culminating in a letter from the mayor, the heritage status was finally lifted from certain buildings. This paved the way for the municipality to demolish the worst of the ruins, and fund renovations by selling plots for housing. "The burden was taken away," says Ms Györffy.

The URBACT Local Group set to work on finalising its Integrated Action Plan for the site. It envisages re-purposing buildings to host community events, creative co-working spaces, an incubator for local organisations, offices and a history museum. Outside installations will include an open-air stage, outdoor market for local produce and hussar-themed playground. There will be a central park and residential area, along with sports facilities, community gardens, and routes for walking and cycling.

Thanks to MAPS, Szombathely now has a clear vision for renovating the Hussar Barracks over seven years. If approved by the City Council in late 2018, the plans will breathe life into the area, creating a new, green sub-centre for the city.

Success factors

The URBACT Local Group and its newly appointed manager, Tibor Polgár, of West Pannon's Regional Development Agency, benefited from URBACT tools and methods. Mr Polgár found the Stakeholders Analysis method particularly valuable in identifying key stakeholders and their linkages.



Hussar Barracks Open Day, May 2017

He continues to use it in other community-based planning projects.

MAPS Lead Expert, Luca Lanzoni, encouraged the city to explore realistic permanent – and temporary – uses and to develop these in a process of circular co-design. This meant the URBACT Local Group testing ideas, reviewing them with experts and the other eight MAPS partner cities and feeding the best ones into their plan.

Focusing on temporary use helped the flow of ideas and pointed towards a new multi-functional vision for the former barracks.

"If we hadn't joined MAPS... I think we'd still be searching for one big aim, one big new reuse of the whole territory. And instead, the area must be split up, and different uses must appear. I think we're now sure in the municipality that we've had the wrong approach over the past more than 20 years," says Ms Györffy.



Szombathely adopted a new participatory approach