

YOUTH: THE MOTOR OF REDEVELOPMENT IN MID-SIZED POST-INDUSTRIAL TOWNS

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ABSTRACT: *This article builds on the results of a transnational project to reveal the importance of the youth in the redevelopment process of a post-industrial region. The introduction to the region and to collaborative planning is elaborated on the basis of two surveys performed in the Zasavje region and its central town of Trbovlje, in which the youth evaluated the state of the region and gave proposals for future development. The discussion focuses on the challenges and added value of the collaborative process for the development of the region and is then generalised to similar areas across Central Europe.*

Keywords: *youth, regional development, collaborative planning, middle-size towns, post-industrial regions, transnational projects*

JEL Classification: R11

1. INTRODUCTION

As seen from the URBACT program (Connecting cities, Building success), the prevailing form of settlement in Europe is the mid-sized town (ERDF 2014). More than half of the 732 European settlements that suit a city definition are categorised as medium-sized, and have populations of 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants. This type of settlement is especially sensitive to recent economic changes, including the transformation from a socialist- to a market-oriented economy, as argued by different authors (Lintz, Müller & Finka, 2005; Parysek 2005; Zuzanska-Zyško, 2005; Sucháček & Petersen, 2010; Lux, 2013). When the competing market is no longer regional or national, but global, the entities that built their booming economic activity on local sources, like coal, are forced to look for alternatives, since thinking in terms of economies of scale is not an easy task. The transnational project called ReSource (Harfst, Bieberstein, & Wirth, 2010a; Harfst, Wirth, Lintz & Bieberstein, 2010b), which was financed through the Central Europe program of territorial cooperation, addressed this challenge and elaborated on the potential of the post-industrial areas. Project partners tried to suggest new uses and ideas for a smoother transformation process (e.g., in Vaishar, Lipovská & Štátná, 2012 or in Harst & Marot, 2013). This strategy making, which was among one of the project outputs, was based on participative effort to integrate as many relevant actors as possible and make the process remarkably more legitimate (Osebik, Harfst & Marot, 2011).

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The regions in question were the selected post-mining regions of Central Europe. Hereby, the focus will be on the Slovenian Zasavje region of approximately 43.000 inhabitants (SORS, 2014) and its centre municipality, a town called Trbovlje. The three municipalities of the region (the smallest of the twelve Slovenian regions) are considered a so-called conurbation. Both the region and the town have faced population decline in the last five years - the whole of the region by 4% (1.767 people) and the town by 5% (917 people, making the current population 16.628 inhabitants). The region is now recognised as the most-aged region of Slovenia (the regional ageing index² of 139,5 was above the national figure of 116,8 in 2011). Another problem has been negative demographics, such as a high level of unemployment, problems with housing provisions and a lack of cooperation among the actors in regional development. These issues directly affect the youth. Last year, in addition to the regional transformation process in the frame of the ReSource project, strategy making also took place in the central town of the region (Obcina Trbovlje, 2014); this process can serve as a policy-making example on the micro and local level.

This strategy making seems to happen without taking into consideration the needs of the youth, who are often seen as a marginal group in society and, according to Fischer (2011) and Kurth-Schai (1998), represent unused potential in regional development planning. Several researchers have tried to clarify the problem of why the youth are not recognised as more important, despite the promotion of their participation in planning over the past three decades (Checkoway, Pothukuchi, & Finn, 1995; Adams & Ingham 1998; Knowles-Yánez, 2005; Jentsch, 2006). Lynch (1977) was the first to acknowledge young people as important actors in development by stressing how youth comprehend and are affected by the territories in which they live. Furthermore, political documents, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), the Rio Declaration (UN, 1992b) and Agenda 21 (UN, 1992a), all argue that youth should participate actively in all relevant levels of decision making, because such decision making affects their current lives, and has clear implications for their futures. Later, The Aarhus Convention (UNECE, 1998) helped to set the ground for the branch of spatial planning called collaborative planning (Healey, 2003; Innes & Booher, 1999), which should also have implications for policy making. Although relatively established in the Western countries, in Slovenia, the policy making process has only recently included more public and more creative techniques, such as focus groups. Similarly, round tables are used in addition to official public hearings, which correspond to only the informative or consultative level of the public participation measurement scale (International Association of Public Participation; Marot, 2010).

According to current practice, the regional strategy prepared on the basis of the Promotion of Balanced Regional Development Act (1999), which consists of strategic guidelines and objectives and an implementation plan with project proposals, is the result of a consultation involving a broad range of regional actors. Though this is true in practice, the group of stakeholders (representatives of companies, municipalities, NGOs, etc.) does

2 The ageing index is the ratio between the old population (aged 65 years or older) and the young population (aged 0 to 14 years), multiplied by 100 (SORS, 2012).

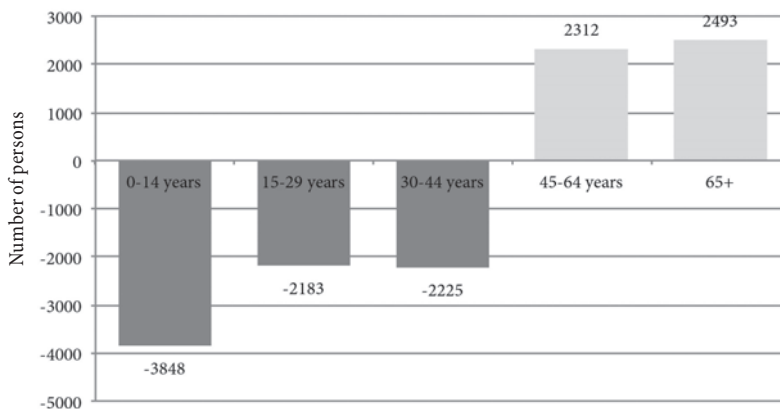
not include representatives of the youth. To overcome this problem, the ReSource project established the alternate participative process (Osebik et al., 2011), in which one output was based solely on the youth's view of the region. This experience was then taken into account during the local strategy preparation, during which the youth gained a role equal to that of the other actors, and had their own representative in the director of the local youth centre.

This article is aimed at presenting both cases of strategy making and at revealing both the role the youth can play in the policy making process and the added value of their integration. The introduction is followed by the methodology section. The results are organised thematically - first, the presentation of the regional identity of the youth; second, the motivation for participation and the types of engagement; and third, the knowledge created by the process. The article concludes by illuminating the value of youth participation and the youth's knowledge regarding the redevelopment of mid-sized towns.

2. METHODS

The first step in defining the method was deciding on the meaning of the “youth category”—that is, what the category of “youth” means to us. The very broad definition accepted by the National Statistical Office (14 to 29 years; SORS 2011) and the EU Youth in Action Programme (13 to 30 years; European Commission, 2012) was adopted and modified, and the resulting definition encompassed the population aged 15 to 30 years. This covers both adolescents and active job seekers between 26 and 30 who might want to take part in local and regional development. When the survey was conducted, youth represented one-fifth of the Slovenian population (406.910 youth; 2011). The figure for the region Zasavje (19%, 8.463 youth) is comparable to the national and EU averages (20% for the age group of 15 to 29 years, 2007), but is considerably lower than averages in the “youngest” EU nations - such as Slovakia and Poland - which have the highest proportions (24%) of young people (European Commission, 2009). What could be worrisome is that, in the decade from 2001 to 2011, the number of young people in Slovenia declined by 12%. The change in the ten years prior to year 2011 (see Figure 1) clearly indicates that the population is ageing, and that the number of youth is in decline.

Figure 1: Demographic change by age groups in period 1991-2011



The major inquiry method for both studies was a survey. The first one was performed on the regional level, and the second was performed on the local level. Since the first survey was targeted only towards the youth, a web survey was selected as the appropriate method. Using the on-line questionnaire, individuals who would otherwise be difficult to contact or locate could be reached (Frippiat & Marquis, 2010; Wright, 2006). This difficulty in reaching the target population was exacerbated because the survey was conducted in June 2011, a holiday period during the academic year. Furthermore, the age range of the sample did not allow a unified collection of data, because it included high school students, university students and people already at work. The questionnaire was structured in three parts and with a total of 22 questions. It was distributed in several ways: through Zasavje youth organization member mailing lists, by publication on the Regional Development Centre web site, through personal contacts, and through two existing high schools (although the last channel was very limited due to the holiday period).

Each of the questionnaire's parts was thematically focused: the seven questions of the first part were dedicated to the regional identity and recognition of the region; the second and most extensive (11 questions) part inquired about current and future regional development; and the third (4 questions) sought basic information about the participants. Altogether, 92 people participated (1% of the total age population in the region), of whom 73 (with an average age of 25) answered all questions. The territorial dispersion of respondents corresponds to the population size in each of three Zasavje municipalities. The low response rate might have resulted from the length and difficulty of the research, the time period of the survey and the predicted share of this age group's population that could be reached by this method—53 to 73% (Frippiat & Marquis 2010). More specifically, Funkl (2010) argues, it is difficult to pose questions that appeal to both 15-year-olds and 30-year-olds.

The largest group was students (37%); employed persons followed with 36%; 17% were high school pupils; and 10% were unemployed (the regional figure for unemployment

was 19% in March 2014; SORS, 2014). With regard to education, 44% of the respondents had finished high school, 24% university, and 14% grammar school. In addition, 14% had graduated from a two- to three-year college program, and 10% had a master's degree or PhD. With regard to the daily commuting phenomenon typical for the region, of the 26 employed respondents, approximately half (48%) had a job outside the region (mainly in the capital city Ljubljana). The most common sector of employment was services (37%), followed by industry and administration (10%). The sectors of information technology, education, research and art each employed 7%, while construction, environmental science, and catering followed, employing 4% each.

The second survey was part of the local strategy preparation process. The municipality of Trbovlje decided on two different techniques for integrating the youth (Občina Trbovlje, 2014). The first one included the formation of a consultancy board of local experts, who were organised into four thematic groups (economy, environment and planning, society and human resources) and then went through a multi-step process. In this process, the board elaborated on the analysis; proposed guidelines and measures for the future; and, finally, evaluated these guidelines and measures by priority. In parallel, a survey was carried out, the purpose of which was to gather the opinions of the general public regarding the current state of the infrastructure, services, public transport, quality of environment and future development of Trbovlje. Since the survey was targeted towards the whole population of Trbovlje, it was available as both an on-line form and a printed-out version, which was distributed at public service locations (health centre, youth centre, library, retirement home and the municipality). Moreover, it was also sent out with one of the municipal magazine issues to all the households in the municipality. What makes this survey relevant for this article is the average age of the respondent (34 years) and the fact that more than half of the respondents (239 out of 554) belonged to the category of youth. The youth also prevailed in the short survey, which accompanied this one and was only sent out to non-residents who came to the municipality for services. Non-residents were asked to reveal their needs and how they perceived the town of Trbovlje.

What was of interest to us, in these two attempts to examine the role of the youth in development, were the following elements: the regional identity of the youth, their forms of participation (existing and proposed), the institutional framework with activities and the created knowledge.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Regional Identity

Blotevogel (1996) argued that regional identity is a prerequisite to successful development. Schielewenz (2010) exposed the issues of the regional identities of mining regions in particular by stating that fixation on the past can hinder such regions from exploring new development paths. Regional identity in the Zasavje region has been investigated in

previous research studies (Marot, 2005; Murn & Skrinar, 2009), in which it was shown that young people had positive attitudes towards the region, but were more negative regarding the economic future and regional development. These are areas where the youth could step in, since they were born at a time when mining was coming to an end and, thus, failed to closely adopt the regional identity, or to focus exclusively on mining (Marot, 2005).

In the newer survey, attachment to the region was confirmed by a majority: 34% considered themselves significantly attached to the region, 44% attached, 9% undecided and 12% did not express any attachment to Zasavje. Since mining has been present in the region since 1755, the follow-up question asked about the meaning of mining and its tradition for respondents. For the highest percentage of respondents (40%), the mining tradition was neither very important nor unimportant. For 33%, mining meant a lot; for 19%, a little; and for 8%, very little.

Besides directly evaluating the attachment of young people to the region, the survey asked respondents to name characteristics of the region as reported by people from outside. A negative image of the region was confirmed, with the highest scores for categories like pollution (51), cement industry (24), “heavy” dialect³ (21), old basic industry (5), and backwardness (2), which all imply an industrial past. Neutral categories followed: dialect, narrow valley and unfavourable relief, artists, physical features and politicians. Mining was mentioned 52 times, which confirms that mining remains the dominant characteristic of the region. In addition, respondents evaluated a pre-set list of attributes to describe the region. The only positive connotation was that of adjacent green areas; otherwise, the region was considered undeveloped (66%), lagging behind (63%), without perspectives (54%) and averse to immigration.

A similar exercise was performed on the local level, where the most common associations for the town of Trbovlje were pollution and related connotations (polluted air, poor maintenance and prevention measures). Then, visual characteristics of the municipality followed, such as beautiful, green and little, which can be recognised as positive associations and which represent a deviation from the prevailing image of the region. What is of interest for this article is that, while the mining and the mine did appear; they did not appear as frequently as in the regional data. More common were the appearances of words and word formations representing the consequences of the closure of the mine, like degradation, unemployment, lagging behind, lack of jobs, stagnation and others.

Some connotations can be also derived from the exercise (a survey question) in which participants made up their own slogans for the town’s promotion. The most common response was to create a slogan that included words like “future” or “going forward,” but some also based their versions on tradition or on the combining of past and future. In comparison to the regional situation, mining played an important role here and was

3 People from Zasavje have a nationwide reputation of speaking a very “heavy” dialect, something they perhaps have in common with other European industrial regions.

mentioned in associations such as “From black, back to green!” “From the mining past, to the green future!” and “From the dark shafts, to the green every day!” Respondents also very commonly integrated the word for “Good luck,” which is a typical greeting for miners before they go to the mine. The opinions of the visitors (who were prevalingly students) differ in comparison to the opinions of the inhabitants. To the visitors, pollution was still in first place; however, mining came in second, which brings forward the typical picture people outside of the town have of Trbovlje. The other opinions were similar to those of previous groups of respondents.

3.2 Motivation for Participation and Types of the Engagement

In the section of the questionnaire on regional identity, one question investigated differences between youths and adults as future and present decision makers. The attributes describing personal character were evaluated separately for youth and adults. Overall, young people saw themselves more positively than they did the “older generation,” meaning that they considered themselves more educated, active, connected, successful and progressive—and thus, one could possibly conclude, capable of the decision making. This is a one-sided evaluation, since adults did not participate in the survey.

The types of engagement represent an important element regarding whether, and how, the youth has participated, or would participate, and, moreover, which techniques of participation would yield the most results and should be facilitated by the decision makers. Firstly, we tailored a multiple-choice question concerning how young people best communicate and realise their ideas⁴. The easiest channel was the local youth centre (mentioned in 58% cases), followed by educational institutions (48%) and student clubs (47%). In only 17% of cases could youth be successful in delivering their ideas through active political engagement (e.g., organization of protests scored lowest (13%)).

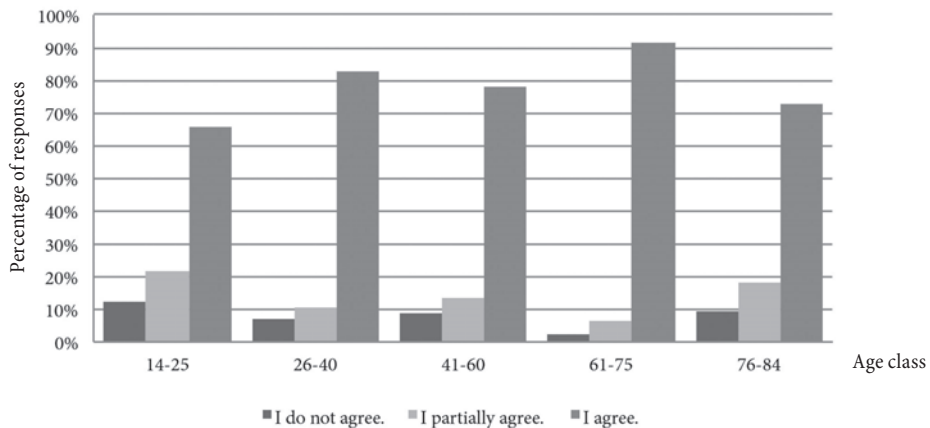
The vast majority (92%) of respondents believed that there were opportunities for youth to participate in the development and implementation of different projects. However, despite this high score, only 51% of young people had actually utilised these opportunities, mostly through youth clubs or through the youth divisions of political parties. In their free time, most young people took part in projects like sporting events, concerts, and workshops, and were not overly concerned with political life. The youth also participated in heritage preservation projects. With regard to potential participation, a majority of respondents (84%) were interested in cooperating in regional development. The most favoured form of participation was the workshop or working group (68%) in which regional strategies are drafted. Half of participants would ambitiously take over leadership of the project, 48% would like a vote on final decisions regarding development, and 47% would engage in project development and implementation with friends. The least popular option for participation was responding to calls for innovative ideas in the region (35%) or becoming involved with public hearings on development policy (30%).

4 Multiple choices were possible.

The latter is currently the most common form of participation, which is usually ignored by the public, except in cases of the “not-in-my-backyard” effect.

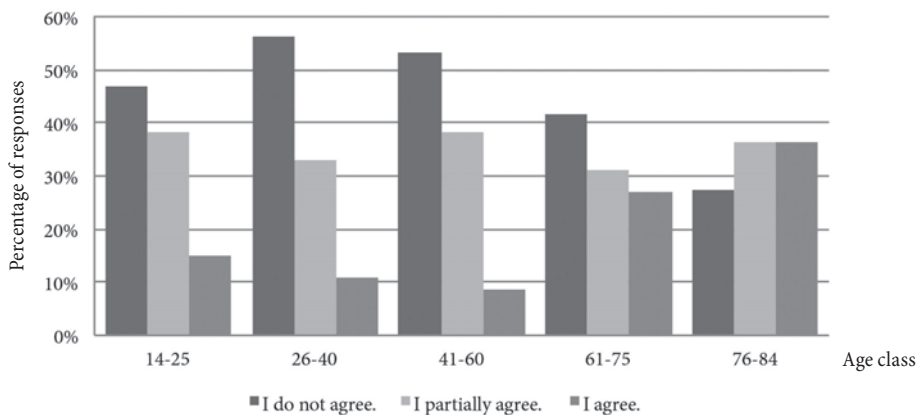
The analysis on the local level also looked at the social and political climate in which the public participation takes place, and examined the difference in the comprehension of this environment between the youth and the elderly. As the results show, the attachment to the locality is of similar levels for respondents in different age groups, with a slight distinction between the youth and the elderly. Altogether, 75% of participants claimed to be attached to the locality (see Figure 2). However, the elderly were more likely to agree with the statement (“I am attached to the town of Trbovlje”). Among the youth, the attachment was valid for only two-thirds of respondents, which might be due to social changes and, in part, to the fact that youth between 14 and 25 years old are still developing their identity and, consequently, becoming attached to their region.

Figure 2: *Level of agreement with the statement: “I am attached to the town of Trbovlje”*



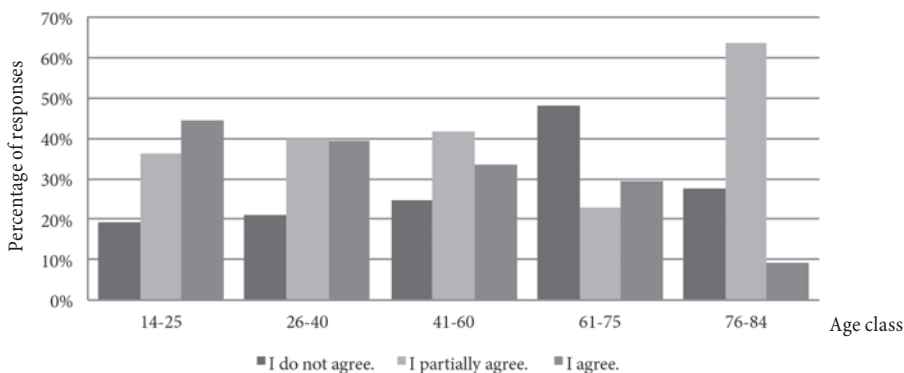
The age differential also holds true for the statements about the community’s interconnectivity (see Figure 3). Half of the respondents agreed that the local community was not connected at all, and only 14% of respondents were positive about it. The most negative feeling about the community’s connectedness came from the active population (people between 26 and 60 years old), which should be the most engaged in their community. The elderly were more positive, which may be because the elderly were more dependent on one another and on other members of community; therefore, they are required to be more linked. On the other hand, the phenomenon of individualization was more obvious in the group of youth respondents. The elderly were also more positive about links to neighbours and the sentiment that the community’s social life is varied and fulfilling.

Figure 3: *Level of agreement with the statement: “The local community of Trbovlje is well integrated.”*



n terms of political will, most of the respondents were not prepared to let the development be led only by political parties; instead, they would open the process to the general public. Surprisingly, the most positive group regarding the role of the politics was the youth, who still had expectations for decision makers. The desire for citizen control of decision making—or at least decision making done in partnership—was expressed by three quarters of respondents; only five per cent of participants were strictly against such a change. The most eager was the working population aged 26 to 40, and the least eager was the youth population aged 14 to 25. People were very positive about the statement that the future is in the hands of the local population (80% confirmation), but the youth were the most sceptical. Further, though respondents were very positive about participation, only two-thirds would really want to be more actively engaged. Of these, the youth had the most negative inclinations towards active engagement. This was proven at the follow-up event, which gathered relevant stakeholders to reveal that, in practice, only a small percentage of youth actually takes part in the process. The problem has been attracting the rest of the youth population, since events are usually visited by the same group of people.

Figure 4: Agreement with the statement: “The older population does not consider the opinions and needs of the youth.”



The opinions regarding the relations between different groups of residents were contradictory. While the youth thought that the future of the municipality is hindered by conflicts between social groups, and that the elderly do not consider the youth's opinions; the elderly stated just the opposite.

No generalizations could be made regarding the statement that “*future development is hindered by the conflicts between the social groups*” - one-quarter disagreed, one-third was undecided, and two-fifths agreed. Again, the youth were more affirmative than the older population. Moreover, more than half of the respondents also said that the elderly do not consider the opinions and needs of the youth population, which clearly shows the intergenerational gaps (see Figure 4). Agreement with the statement “*The older population does not consider the opinions and needs of the youth*” is age-dependent and decreases with the age.

What is positive about these results is that the youth are interested in more active forms of participation, and are no longer content with merely being informed. This shows a move away from the current average practice in Slovenia, which acknowledges the prevalence of passive forms of participation.

3.3 Existing Institutions Supporting the Youth Participation

Current projects initiated by youth organizations - such as the construction of a youth centre and hostel in Trbovlje, international student exchanges and a summer school developing tourist routes of mining attractions organised by the ReSource project - have shown that young people can be creative and are an inexhaustible source of ideas. There are four types of organisations⁵ for young people in Zasavje who engage youth in different kinds of activities:

- **Two youth centres:** Youth centers involve young people in projects about specific topics (e.g., European Week of Mobility, Let's Clean Slovenia, etc.), international exchanges, the organization of cultural events and daily activities (e.g., sports, study

⁵ The organizations' activities have been derived from their web sites and annual reports.

support, consultations for youth and young families, etc.). The centres in Trbovlje and Zagorje focus mainly on high school students.

- **Three student clubs:** Each municipality has a student club, which provides cultural events (e.g., an annual cultural festival, concerts, a New Year's concert, a celebration of Midsummer Eve, thematic events, travelogues), language and skills courses, excursions, sport activities, concerts and evening classes for adults.
- **Three high school educational institutions:** In addition to their regular programmes, Zasavje high schools organise supplementary afternoon activities for pupils, such as sport activities, interest clubs (e.g., for maths, logic, physics, etc.), bands, international exchanges, projects to reduce the drop-out rate or promote business, events to attract the local community (e.g., farmers markets, charity benefits, poetry evenings) and others.
- **Other organisations:** Youth can also participate in organisations established by various interest groups or with specific purposes.

Last year, the youth centre in Trbovlje also established an initiative, with the real estate management company for public housing in Trbovlje, to engage the youth in an *ad hoc* action for the re-use of dilapidated housing. Youth were given such properties for low rent and, in return, they were to invest in the renovations.

Besides youth institutions, youth also evaluated other stakeholders who they believed should engage in local and regional development. They recognised municipalities as the most important organizations (82%), followed by larger companies (72%) and small firms (67%). Also significant were various associations (66%). Around two-thirds of participants recognised government (61%) and educational institutions (60%) as important, and nearly the same level of importance (58%) was assigned to the regional development agency. Surprisingly, financial institutions were considered the least important organizations for regional development, with an average score of moderate importance (45%).

3.4 Overview of Produced Knowledge

The knowledge that was generated by the survey has multiple dimensions. Firstly, it is important for the validation of the analysis of the current situation, and secondly and more importantly, it presents ideas about future development, both overall and on an individual project basis. In the framework of regional analysis, the following topics were covered:

- analysis of the current offering of services and the general quality of life;
- analysis of the development problems (structured into five topics: politics and development, economy, environment and territory, labour market and education and regional mentality);
- evaluation of the development scenario options;
- analysis of the current daily commuting figures;
- development of a list of the major development goals;
- development of a list and descriptions of ideas for projects and investments;
- prediction of future demographic trends (e.g., tensions and push factors for migration).

Some of the major results are worth presenting to better illustrate the economic and political conditions that influence youth. Also important are the ideas generated for future development.

With regard to the evaluation of the current situation, the youth listed numerous development issues in Zasavje. For easier comprehension, these were grouped into five headings: mentality, environment, labour market, education, economy, and policy and development. Among the most frequently mentioned problems was pollution, followed by the narrowness of peoples' views hampering regional and local development. These findings might be seen as a confirmation of the distance between the youth and the elderly. Development was also seen as limited by poor transport links with other parts of Slovenia (e.g., the distance to the nearest highway junction). In particular, the lack of jobs requiring qualified staff and professional knowledge was shown as a crucial problem (Table 1).

Table 1: *Major problems of regional development in Zasavje, clustered by topic*

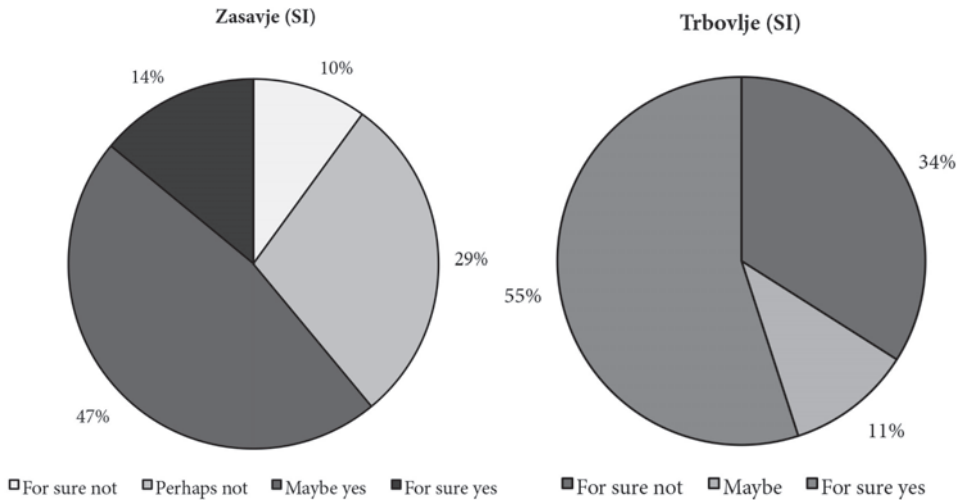
Politics and development	Economy
Centralised decision making in cases of energy and regional policy	Too-slow transformation from an old industrial into a post-industrial region
Lack of a sound plan for project implementation	Decline of mining activity and closure of industry and other larger companies
Proximity to Ljubljana limiting options for regional development	Lack of new investment
Polarity of interests: industry vs. tourism	Non-utilised cultural heritage
Inefficient youth and student organizations	
Lack of funds	
Lack of fresh ideas	
Environment and territory	Labour market and education
Unfavorable physical conditions (location of settlements, further construction of infrastructure)	Lack of jobs
Pollution and degraded environment	Brain drain and emigration of youth
Poor transport connections with the rest of the country	Ageing of the population
Dilapidation of old industrial and housing buildings	Poor working conditions
Lack of attraction for youth to live in the region	Unskilled work force
	Mixed ethnic structure as a consequence of former work immigration from Southern parts of Yugoslavia
	Lack of motivation to prevent brain drain
	No university education opportunities in the region
Regional mentality	
Narrow-mindedness	
Lack of will to cooperate in decision making	
Reluctance to change	
Apathy and pessimism	

The quality of life in the region was evaluated in greater detail on the basis of eleven

elements. Opportunities for sport and recreation scored highest (3.5 on a scale of 5; very satisfied), while the quality of the environment had the lowest score of 2.6 (moderately satisfied). Regarding satisfaction with living conditions, an average score was given for the availability of green areas (3.3), health services (3.3), childcare (3.3; note: only 70% of participants had experience with the service), educational opportunities (3.2) and shopping (3.2). Young people were less enthusiastic about the state of the transport network, public transport, entertainment and shopping. Additional statements referred to individual local environments, such as better health care provisions in Trbovlje or a cycle path in Zagorje, but in general, more shopping opportunities and more entertainment, such as concerts for all age groups, were wanted.

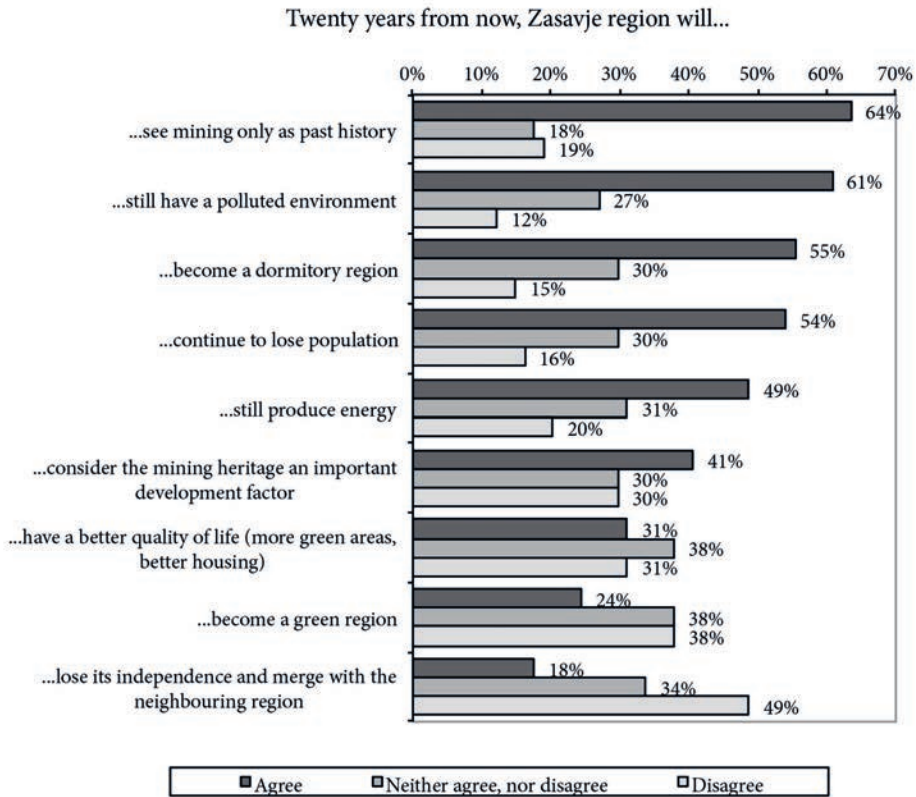
Important knowledge that the survey created regarded the tendency of youth to migrate away from the region (see Figures 5a and 5b). This information is important because regional development relies on human resources, including the youth. The probability of young people leaving the region was examined: 39% answered that there was a chance of their leaving, 34% were most likely to stay, 16% would certainly be leaving, and 4% would be staying in the region. 7% had not yet considered the idea.

Figures 5a in 5b: *Tendency to leave the Zasavje region / town of Trbovlje.*



Regarding future development, the youth first commented on the scenarios (see Figure 6), prioritised the goals and developed/listed project ideas. The scenario for the development of Zasavje was formulated on the basis of ten statements and evaluated on a five-point scale showing the level of agreement of respondents regarding each statement. As Figure 4 shows, more than half of the respondents agreed that mining would remain an economic activity of the past that the environment would remain polluted, and that population would decrease, making Zasavje a dormitory region.

Figure 6: Evaluation of the regional development scenarios



The mining heritage was recognised as an important element in the future development of the region by 40% of respondents. They were uncertain about whether the quality of living would improve and whether Zasavje would become a “green” region. There was the least agreement with the statement that the Zasavje region would lose its independence and be incorporated into the Ljubljana urban region (49%). Even though negative statements dominated, more than half of respondents agreed with the statement that “Zasavje has a future.”

On the local level, respondents from the survey were of opinion that some of the competitive elements of the town included its events for the youth (and also the elderly), its swimming pool, its catering and its schools. For the future, the prospects were different and varied; from seeing the town as a better place with more jobs, green areas and more environmentally friendly industry, to seeing a worsened situation with higher unemployment and a more polluted environment. Very pessimistic respondents even stated that the town would become an abandoned city. Regarding the most important pull-in factor, jobs or a favourable real estate market offer were mentioned. The type of town Trbovlje will be restructured into depends on how future politics work, how the

attitudes of the local people towards the town develop, whether the road infrastructure is improved (which would bring faster connections to Ljubljana and Celje) and whether the emigration trend stops.

After providing their opinions on the regional development scenario, each respondent was asked to state three major goals the region should adopt. The ten most frequently mentioned were:

1. Decrease environmental pollution and provide a healthy and clean environment.
2. Create new jobs.
3. Develop tourism (including hiking, tourist farms, centres of education, leisure activities and the utilization of mining heritage).
4. Provide green and recreational areas to support sport activities.
5. Establish support for existing and emerging businesses.
6. Improve transport links with other parts of Slovenia (highway junction).
7. Green the industry and close production facilities classified as major polluters.
8. Create jobs for the young, educated workforce, reduce unemployment and improve social and living conditions.
9. Re-launch industrial activities in the region.
10. Educate young people and establish colleges and universities.

Other specific objectives directly related to mining were mentioned and expanded the goal under point three (which covered the tourism sector). These included improving the stereotypic image of the region as highly polluted and, thus, unattractive; changing local mentalities; transitioning economically to the tertiary sector; preserving and renewing the mining heritage; and increasing the region's role in national energy production through the construction of a hydropower plant chain on the river Sava.

The creativity of young people was explored through a question on how they would spend €500.000 if they could use it for the regional project of their choice. The resulting project ideas could be categorised under the headings of business, tourism, infrastructure and housing, services, and others. The most frequent proposal was to support small businesses through subsidies and, thus, provide new jobs, with a focus on companies that would employ young people. Tourism was one of the sectors for which development ideas were described in the greatest detail. Money would be invested in better promotion and an appealing trademark, the renewal of mountain huts, the establishment of cycle paths and a centre for educational and sporting activities, the development of tourist farms, the implementation of rafting and related activities, the re-establishment of the closed and dilapidated spa centre of Medijske Toplice, and events that would utilise the mining heritage and preserve the region's mining tradition.

The next cluster of projects worth investing €500.000 in could be classified into the groups of landscape design and infrastructure and housing. Respondents felt that more investments should be made in environment quality and that public and green spaces should be renovated or newly established to provide recreation facilities and playgrounds

for children. The infrastructure should be improved, together with public transport. In the field of housing, substantial efforts should be devoted to renewing former miners' housing. In direct connection with mining, the closure of the mine was also considered a suitable project.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article shows two examples of how youth can participate in strategy making and the outputs that can be expected from such processes. This is especially true in the town of Trbovlje, where the youth population has a responsible spokeswoman in the form of the vice-mayor (who can be classified as a representative of the youth population) and a source of action in the now well-established youth centre. In comparison to the established actors, who have attempted to find solutions in the existing energy and basic industry economy sectors, the youth present an unburdened, refreshing view that can contribute new ideas and a will to do more for less. While older decision makers are often entrenched in existing decision-making practices (Maier, 2012), youth are capable of seeing the other side of the coin and stepping away from traditional tracks. In economies like this one - where the factories, who employed a vast number of people were closed almost overnight and the mine, which served as a carrier of the town's identity and economy for 200 years, stopped - unorthodox solutions are necessary.

One example of such a solution is the youth centre that now serves Trbovlje as a motor of social and cultural activities, and as a "bridge to the world". The international exchanges attract students from all around Europe, and serve as a platform to exchange knowledge. Their projects integrate mining as a long-standing tradition, but they also dare to propose new concepts. The youth are especially active in converting degraded areas and promoting public spaces; however, this is limited by ownership rights and several legal issues.

The participation of the youth is also valuable for enlarging administrative and knowledge capacity, since this has proven generally low in previous studies. In comparison to the older generation, the youth possess knowledge of foreign languages and can, thus, exchange information worldwide. They are also more open to innovative ideas, to which established politicians might be resistant (in favour of long-established practices). The youth, as is the case of the mayor, also open up the processes to the rest of the public, since they understand what it feels like to be eliminated from policy-making. This type of elimination is especially typical of the traditional mono-structural entities, which have been working in the same way for a long time (Kirk, Contrepois, & Jefferys, 2012; Pallagst, 2006). However positive, the power of youth's impact on actual decision making remains limited and is conditioned by several factors: the actual openness of the planning or policy making process (with regard to existing legislation and practices), the flexibility of local politicians, available financial sources, and the time available for the whole process. One of the weaknesses, as expressed by a local facilitator, was that only a certain (low) percentage of the youth population is actually willing to participate and express its ideas. Therefore, the opinions gathered by this survey are not necessarily

representative of those of the whole population. Moreover, while the collected ideas might be varied, they are only partially deliverable; thus, some reluctance by the policy makers is noticeable.

All in all, the youth should certainly be present as important stakeholders in defining and carrying out the future development of post-industrial, mid-sized towns, especially if we want to limit emigration and prepare localities for a period of joint development that is supported and delivered by different age groups. If adequate financial and human resources are provided (including political support), youth involvement can contribute significantly to regional development and the attractiveness of localities.

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