

The Fantastic Funicular. The Last Year in Old Clothes

Street Delivery & UrbanEye Film Festival

Reșița Civic Center

July 26th – 28th, 2024

MKBT: Make Better and “ARTA in dialog” Association (organizers)

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The city of Reșița, historically recognized as a prominent industrial center, is currently undergoing a significant process of urban transformation. While its identity has traditionally been shaped by its steel mills and manufacturing infrastructure, the city is currently embracing a new identity, blending its rich industrial heritage with innovation and sustainable urban development.¹ This process positions Reșița as a compelling case study in post-industrial regeneration, emphasizing its potential as an attractive hub for economic diversification, cultural engagement and improved quality of life for residents and visitors alike.²

In recent years, Reșița has thus been focusing on redefining its strategic profile, striving for sustainable and harmonious development while addressing the complexities of transitioning from an industrial economy. As such, Reșița is committed to preserving the city's industrial identity, while also increasing the quality of all the interventions.

To this extent, the city of Reșița is currently focusing on updating its planning policies in order to limit the expansion within the surrounding territory, instead prioritizing sustainable and integrated development. Key efforts include enhancing urban-rural linkages through initiatives that leverage the area's potential for sustainable tourism, improving connections to the natural environment by promoting non-motorized infrastructure, and advancing urban regeneration processes that preserve the city's industrial heritage while elevating the quality of its public spaces. Additionally, the city is encouraging mixed-use developments by revitalizing brownfield sites, breathing new life into areas previously neglected within the urban fabric.

At the same time, the city of Reșița is placing significant emphasis on the quality of its physical interventions. This includes prioritizing the renovation and potential adaptive reuse of its existing building stock—both historical and residential—to preserve local identity. The city also focuses on urban infill projects to strategically densify underutilized land within the existing urban structure, thereby curbing urban sprawl. Furthermore, efforts are directed toward the rehabilitation of public spaces, both hardscaped and green, to enhance the overall quality of life for the community.

Last but, not least, the city of Reșița has been aiming to incorporate the New European Bauhaus principles into its plans and actions, seeking to achieve a beautiful, sustainable and inclusive urban environment for its citizens.³ To this extent, the municipality has been developing two particular projects that tackle objectives of outstanding value for the city. First, the rehabilitation of

1 Lorena Brează and Mugur Grosu, “Reșița. A City on the Move – Dossier,” *Zeppelin. Architecture. City. Society* 166 (summer 2022), accessed December 12, 2024, <https://e-zeppelin.ro/en/dossier-resita-a-city-on-the-move-i/>.

2 “Atelierul de Proiectare în Urbanism. Periurban postindustrial: contextul urban-rural” [Urban Planning Studio. Postindustrial Periurban: Urban-Rural Context], Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning Timișoara, accessed December 12, 2024, https://issuu.com/stefana.badescu/docs/atelier_re_i_a?fr=xKAE9_zU1NQ.

3 “New European Bauhaus Toolbox,” Ramboll and ICLEI, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/system/files/2024-01/NEB%20toolbox.pdf>.



Fig. 1: The industrial landscape of Reșița

the Minda industrial facility focuses on transforming a no longer used industrial building into a center for creative industries,⁴ thus facilitating the formation of a new urban attractor in the Eastern part of the city. Second, the reversion of the limestone funicular will give new life to a landmark of the city, utilizing it to create links between the urban fabric and the surrounding nature, as well as to increase the touristic potential.

The latter initiative drew a great deal of attention in the summer of 2024 when Reșița hosted the pilot edition of a two-fold event, dedicated to this historical landmark. Between July 26th-28th, the city hosted the first edition of the Reșița Street Delivery, as well as of the Urban Eye Film Festival, both part of “The Fantastic Funicular: The Last Year in Old Clothes” project.⁵

Organized by MKBT: Make Better and “ARTA în dialog” Associations, in partnership with local stakeholders (such as the “Banatul Montan” Community Foundation, the Amateur Film-maker Museum, the We Wilder Association, the Bike Attack Association, the D. Project Studio, the Encore Association, the Dash Film Commercial Society, the “De-a arhitectura” Initiative, the Salon of Art and Industry, as well as Urban Up) and with funding from the National Cultural Fund Administration and Reșița City Hall, this event invited the community to celebrate the funicular, while also promoting the project for its rehabilitation.

The event kicked off with a public roundtable, hosted at the City Hall, which brought together public authorities and local stakeholders to explore the transformation of the former funicular into a cycling and pedestrian trail. The discussion focused on how this project could enhance access to the hills surrounding Reșița, serving both recreational purposes and as a pedestrian and cycling transit route linking the city’s neighborhoods. Additionally, participants examined ways to connect Reșița with the sightseeing opportunities and tourist flows of the High Banat

4 “Hala Minda | Reșița,” Timișoara 2023, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://timisoara2023.eu/ro/lo-ca%C8%9Bii/hala-minda-resita/>.

5 “Fantasticul Funicular: ultimul an în străie vechi” [The Fantastic Funicular: The Last Year Wearing Old Clothes], MKBT: Make Better, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://mkbt.ro/project/fantasticul-funicular-ultimul-an-in-straiie-vechi/>.



Fig. 2: Film screening underneath the funicular

area, generate synergies with other future initiatives aimed at celebrating the city's industrial heritage, and establish an action plan fostering collaboration among institutional, civic, and private actors for the full revitalization of the funicular route.

The three days of activities were each further dedicated to a different perspective (or analysis scale), tackling issues such as the importance of the funicular as part of (1) the revitalization process of the city's industrial heritage, (2) the regional network of pedestrian connections within the surrounding nature, as well as (3) the collective memory of the community.

Each day offered two types of activities: guided tours during the mornings, and an agora, comprising a series of activities hosted in the public space, in the immediate vicinity of the limestone funicular, during the afternoons. As such, the program of the event included guided tours and urban explorations, informal educational activities for children, thematic workshops dedicated to industrial/architectural heritage, interactive workshops for the young, guided interventions by artists from all over the country, thematic exhibitions, as well as public debates. Organized in the afternoon, these debates in particular brought together representatives of the public authorities, the civil society, the academic environment, as well as the private sector, discussing the opportunity of the rehabilitation of the limestone funicular, as well as its potential impact for the community. Finally, each day ended with outdoor film screenings, followed by lively discussions with the members of the public. (Fig. 2)

Among the most appealing activities, one can count the guided tour coordinated by Bogdan Demetrescu (D. Project Studio), the architect in charge with the on-going project for the rehabilitation of the limestone funicular, as well as by Cătălin Gavrilă (Bike Attack Association), who has been actively promoting the importance of pedestrian and bike trails as a means to increase the attraction potential for Reșița, especially in connection to Via Transilvanica. This tour invited participants to follow the trail of the old funicular - starting from Golului Hill (and the emblematic metallic logo of the city) and continuing throughout the city's industrial quarters.

Another activity, particularly appealing for the local community, was an agora facilitated by

Alexandra Lulache (MKBT), which focused on highlighting stories from the city's industrial past. Bringing together two representatives of the local community, Ioan Mato Jr and Alexandru Borza (representatives of the local community), as well as Ilinca Păun Constantinescu ("Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest), this session was charged with emotion, as it emphasized the tremendous impact of industrial heritage upon the rhythms of the everyday lives for Reșița's citizens.

Finally, as part of this event, the Non-Formal Spatial Planning Studio, Timișoara, in collaboration with the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, Timișoara, coordinated a consultation process with the population. Conceived in the form of a game, this process aimed to identify how citizens relate to the funicular rehabilitation project (currently underway), as well as to the network of public spaces (mineral and green) that it connects and activates (in the immediate vicinity, at the urban scale and at the scale of the wider territory). In brief, the objective of these activities was to conduct a consultative study exploring the population's perception of the funicular's role within the city. The rationale behind this study was to develop a comprehensive database that could serve as foundational documentation for a future project aiming at activating the funicular route. To achieve this, an innovative and engaging approach was used, designing the study as an interactive game tailored to fit the format of a "street delivery" event.

The consultation process had two components: a quantitative assessment (in the form of surveying, with questions regarding the object scale, the scale of the settlement and the territorial scale), as well as a qualitative assessment (in the form of cognitive mapping). The conclusions of the study showcase that the position of the funicular in the city and the role it will play as a connector between the city center and the two hills will favor the development of this area (as emphasized by the citizens). They also lay the foundation for a series of priority activities, to be further developed by the city. (Fig. 3, 4)

To conclude, the two-fold event celebrating the funicular, hosted in Reșița during the summer of 2024, showcases the city's journey from an industrial hub to a beacon of sustainable urban regeneration, which serves as an inspiring model for cities navigating post-industrial transitions. By fostering connections between its industrial past, natural surroundings, and community aspirations, Reșița is poised to become a regional leader in post-industrial innovation and sustainable urban development.

But Reșița's urban regeneration stands out not only for its focus on industrial heritage and sustainable development but also for its dedication to community involvement. The participatory approach not only fosters a deeper connection between residents and their city's evolving identity but also sets a benchmark for collaborative urban planning. Reșița's commitment to inclusive dialogue thus ensures that its urban regeneration efforts remain both meaningful and sustainable, rooted in the needs and hopes of its people.

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ILLUSTRATION CREDITS:

Fig. 1: Photo: Ștefana Bădescu



Fig. 3, 4: The consultation process coordinated by the Non-Formal Spatial Planning Studio, Timișoara



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Cabo de Gata, photo by João Nunes

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