Interreg Danube Region

Co-funded by the European Union

ReInd-BBG

Pilot plan for pilot location Students' city, Vratsa

Individual pilot plan

Content

1. Context Analysis

The former Students' City in Vratsa, Bulgaria is undergoing redevelopment to establish a Centre for Energy Development and New Sciences. Currently, the buildings are vacant, with abundant vegetation and some invasive species present. A technical survey has been commissioned to assess the structural integrity and sustainability of the site. This survey will provide crucial insights into the necessary steps for modernization, ensuring compliance with safety regulations and sustainable development goals.

Additionally, preliminary environmental assessments indicate that there are no significant sources of pollution within the site, making it an ideal candidate for sustainable urban renewal. However, infrastructure improvements, including road access, power supply, and water distribution, must be considered to fully support the intended transformation into an educational and research hub. The Municipality of Vratsa has also initiated an urban renewal strategy to ensure that this redevelopment aligns with broader city infrastructure improvements.

2. Define SMART Objectives

- Carrying out a structural survey to determine the condition of the existing buildings by the end of 2025;
- An agreement to build a Centre for Energy Development and New Sciences signed by 12 institutions;
- Development of a promotional video for the target location;
- Organization of a stakeholder's workshop in Vratsa;
- Organization of a partner meeting in October 2025;
- Organization of a demonstration of pilot location in October 2025;
- Organization of a study visit in Rešica for exchange of good practices in the further reindustrialization by the end of the project;
- Development of an investment profile of Vratsa;
- Dissemination activities through media and web publications, promotional materials and the idea for establishment of a Centre for Energy Development and New Sciences promotion during national and international events and meetings.

3. Stakeholder Mapping and Engagement Strategy

During the project implementation, several stakeholder groups were identified.

The first group consisted of **state institutions**, including the Vratsa Regional Administration, the Ministry of Science and Education, and various educational institutions such as Sofia University, secondary schools in the Vratsa Region, and the Technical University - Sofia.

Businesses in the region also participated as stakeholders, including Kozloduy NPP, MD Electronics, the Bulgarian Energy Cluster, Trolleybus Transport and others.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were represented by Open Vratsa and the Vratsa Software Society. Additionally, the Student Municipal Council contributed by sharing students' ideas and opinions, supporting information dissemination, and ensuring broad student participation.

Lastly, the **general public**, including the citizens of the Vratsa Region, was recognized as a key stakeholder group.

All these stakeholders took part in the Open Brownfield Days event at the pilot location. During the event, they were introduced to the REIND BBG project and the pilot site. Discussions were held, allowing each party to share their perspectives.

Community Engagement Levels

Community involvement is high, with meetings, surveys, and public discussions shaping the project's vision. Online platforms like cernn.bg provide updates and engagement opportunities. Several workshops and open forums have been conducted to ensure that citizens, students, and local businesses actively participate in shaping the redevelopment efforts.

A dedicated website has been developed in order to provide up-to-date information about the progress of the defined idea for the establishment of a Centre for Energy Development and New Sciences. The website is available at: https://cernn.bg/.

4. Governance and Institutional Setup

The Municipality of Vratsa leads the initiative with support from 12 institutions, including ministries, universities, and private sector organizations. A formal governance framework is in place, with decision-making overseen by the "Municipal Property" Department of the Municipality of Vratsa. The governance model includes regular reporting mechanisms to ensure accountability and transparency in decision-making processes.

The local government has also initiated collaborations with the European Union and national agencies to align the redevelopment with broader regional development strategies. By leveraging these partnerships, the Municipality aims to enhance investment attractiveness and ensure long-term sustainability. A governance review process will be conducted annually to assess the effectiveness of decision-making structures and make necessary adjustments.

5. Assessment and Baseline Data Collection

- Conduct a technical survey to assess building conditions, sustainability, and safety, ensuring compliance with energy efficiency and environmental impact standards.
- Utilize standardized economic, social, and environmental assessment tools to establish benchmarks and guide decision-making processes.
- Establish key performance indicators (KPIs) for measuring project impact on the local economy, employment rates, and community well-being.
- Integrate real-time data collection methods to track environmental and economic changes.

6. Scenario Planning and Risk Assessment

Possible Redevelopment Trajectories

- **High-Tech Educational Hub:** Development of a dual-education high school specializing in ICT and energy sciences, supported by industry partnerships.
- **Renewable Energy Innovation Center:** Integration of solar panels, energy storage solutions, and AI-driven smart grids for sustainable infrastructure.
- **Community & Business Incubator:** Creation of flexible co-working spaces, startup accelerators, and mentorship programs to foster entrepreneurship.
- **Mixed-Use Development:** Combining residential, commercial, and educational facilities to create a vibrant, self-sustaining community.

Risk Mitigation Strategies

- **Financial Risks:** Diversify funding sources beyond government grants, engaging private investors and EU development funds.
- **Regulatory Delays:** Maintain compliance with national and EU regulations, with proactive policy alignment strategies.
- **Community Resistance:** Strengthen public engagement through workshops, informational campaigns, and direct consultation processes.
- **Environmental Risks:** Implement sustainable construction practices and conduct continuous impact assessments.

7. Implementation Roadmap

The redevelopment plan for the target area has been outlined, and a partnership agreement has been signed among key organizations to establish a Centre for Energy Development and New Sciences. While regular updates are provided to the public, these efforts mark only the project's initial phase. Securing additional funding is essential for its full realization.

Funding sources include national programs, the Regions Development Programme, and cross-border cooperation initiatives. An initial budget of €77,000 has been allocated for preliminary surveys. Beyond public funding, discussions are underway with private investors and international donors to secure additional resources for large-scale infrastructure projects and innovation-driven development.

The investment strategy aims to attract businesses by offering incentives to those willing to establish operations in the area, fostering a technology-driven economy. This approach is designed to stimulate job creation and ensure the region's long-term economic resilience. Additionally, the Municipality of Vratsa is exploring tax incentives and fast-track permits for businesses and startups contributing to the regional innovation ecosystem.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation Metrics

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework for the Vratsa Basic Roll-Out Plan follows a simple one-phase approach to track progress and ensure project success. It focuses on key performance indicators (KPIs) that measure governance, community engagement, pilot project success, and long-term impact.

Carrying out a structural survey to determine the condition of the existing buildings by the end of 2025:

- Number of buildings assessed with a detailed report on their condition;
- Survey completed within End of 2025;
- Number of issues identified based on the survey results;

An agreement to build a Centre for Energy Development and New Sciences signed by 12 institutions:

- Number of institutions that have signed the agreement;
- Number of meetings and discussions held with potential signatories;

Development of a promotional video for the target location:

- Number of views, shares, or interactions on the video across various platforms;
- Feedback or ratings from viewers or stakeholders.
- Video finalized and launched within the project ending.

Organization of a stakeholder's workshop in Vratsa:

- Number of stakeholders attending the workshop;
- Stakeholder satisfaction based on post-event surveys;
- Workshop organized by the end of 2025.

Organization of a partner meeting in October 2025:

- Number of partners attending;
- Number of action points or agreements made during the meeting;
- Feedback from participants on the usefulness of the meeting;
- Meeting conducted as planned in October 2025.

Organization of a demonstration of the pilot location in October 2025:

- Number of participants attending;
- Demonstration conducted as planned in October 2025.

Organization of a study visit in Rešica for exchange of good practices in further reindustrialization by the end of the project:

- Number of participants attending the study visit;
- Number of best practices or lessons learned shared between participants;
- Visit conducted within the project timeline.

Development of an investment profile of Vratsa:

- Number of stakeholders or potential investors consulted during the profile development;
- Feedback on the comprehensiveness and usefulness of the investment profile from target users;
- Investment profile developed and disseminated within the project timeline.

Dissemination activities through media and web publications, promotional materials, and promotion during national and international events and meetings:

- Number of media publications;
- Number of national/international events where the project is p resented;
- Number promotional materials distributed.