



CREATIVE TOWNS AND REGIONS INITIATIVE: REPORT FOR SVETLOGORSK

Margarita Lazarenkova



The Programme is funded
by the European Union



NATIONAL
CENTRE FOR
CULTURE
POLAND



The Programme is implemented by a consortium led by the British Council, in partnership with the Soros Foundation Moldova, the National Center for Culture of Poland and the Goethe-Institut

The report is developed with the assistance of the EU-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme.

The content of this report does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the report lies entirely with the author.

The report was published in September 2017.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	4
2. Overview of Svetlogorsk	4
3. Creative Towns and Regions Initiative in Svetlogorsk	6
3.1. <i>Project Schedule</i>	6
3.2. <i>Project Team and Stakeholders</i>	7
3.3. <i>Svetlogorsk Creative Map</i>	8
3.4. <i>Svetlogorsk Urban DNA</i>	9
3.5. <i>Svetlogorsk's Cultural Infrastructure and Vitality</i>	12
4. General recommendations for developing Svetlogorsk's Creative potential	13
4.1. <i>Vision 2025</i>	13
4.2. <i>Priorities for development</i>	13
4.3. <i>Action Plan for 2017-2020</i>	14

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme launched the Creative Towns and Regions Initiative in 2016 to highlight the importance of culture and creativity in small and medium sized towns and regions. The Initiative introduces a practical approach for towns and regions in the Eastern Partnership countries to use the local cultural and creative potential for social and economic development.

The aim of the initiative is to raise awareness of all key stakeholders of the potential of cultural and creative sectors, to collect data on local cultural and creative resources and to propose concrete action plans for developing the cultural and creative industries potential, including development of local cultural landscape, building clusters with local businesses, increasing the quality of offer of the tourism sector and build stronger networks with similar towns and regions in other countries.

As a result of the initiative, the Programme published a document "Making the Most of Cultural and Creative Resources: The Mapping and Strategy Building Handbook for Creative Towns and Regions"¹, which is available for free download and could provide practical tools and recommendations for towns and regions to develop their local resources.

2. OVERVIEW OF SVETLOGORSK

In Belarus, Svetlogorsk was chosen as a pilot city for the Creative Towns and Regions Initiative. Comparing to other pilots from Eastern Partnership region, Svetlogorsk seems to be rather controversial choice at first sight. This middle-sized town in the South-East of Belarus, with population around 69,000 people, has neither rich cultural heritage, like in Kosiv (Ukraine), nor unique nature landscape, as for example in Sisian (Armenia). Nevertheless, this is just a superficial conclusion. When you get closer to the city, you can find many of its hidden cultural and creative treasures.

Svetlogorsk appeared on Belarusian map in 1961 and is rightly considered as the youngest city of Belarus. Nevertheless, while the official establishment of the city is recent, the history of the town is not so modest, because it was founded on the site of the settlement of Shatilki with its own ancient and interesting history dating back to the 5-6th century AD. Shatilki was named after Belarusian nobleman Raman Shatila, who had had family estate here. In 2006, during town birthday celebration, the monument for the town historic founder was installed on the main square of Svetlogorsk.



Monument to Raman Shatila, 2006

¹ <https://www.culturepartnership.eu/en/article/mapping-and-strategy-building-handbook>

As Shatilki played the role of similar to customs point in ancient times, numerous artefacts were found during archaeological excavations: knives, many tubes for smoking tobacco, coins and many different jewellerys. All these finds are kept right now in Svetlogorsk Museum of History. Originally, Shatilki was mostly Catholic town. In 1638, first wooden Catholic church was built in Shatilki. After several reconstructions and total destruction by Soviet authorities, it was rebuilt in 1997, and now adorns embankment of Berezina river and became a visit card of Svetlogorsk.

In the 1920-ies, local residents opened the "Krasny Sudostroitel" (Red Shipbuilder) artel in Shatilki, which afterwards turned into a shipyard. At that time Shatilki was a vivid multinational township with several Jewish streets, which unfortunately were destroyed with its inhabitants during the Second World War. After the war, in 1961, Shatilki was renamed as Svetlogorsk with the hope for bright ("svetlyj" in Russian) Soviet future of Polesse region. The population of the town grew at a fast pace, young specialists came here willingly, mostly those, who were interested in working in large enterprises like "Svetlogorsk Pulp and Board Plant" and OJSC "SvetlogorskKhimvolokno".

In 1960-70ies, the image of Svetlogorsk was expressed as city of builders, city of power engineers, city of chemists, and city of youth. In mid 1990ies, when the first cases of HIV infection were revealed, the image of the town changed dramatically. Instead of "the city of youth and hopes," Svetlogorsk became associated with drug addiction and HIV infection. However, due to the fact that city community, including local media, took a serious part in resolving the problems, finally level of HIV positive people stabilized and became average in Belarus.



Monument to Svetlogorsk on the entrance to the town, 1970

The image of the town has changed significantly during the past 50 years and today Svetlogorsk strongly needs rebranding and new positioning on the map of Belarus. To overcome past negative connotations, the town needs to unite its institutional, governmental and cultural resources in forming its new contemporary image. Understanding contemporary Svetlogorsk Urban DNA can be the first step in creating new town image.

3. CREATIVE TOWNS AND REGIONS INITIATIVE IN SVETLOGORSK

Svetlogorsk local administration applied for becoming a pilot town within the Creative Towns and Regions Initiative for the main following reasons:

- > Discovering what steps should be taken for the revival of a worthy image and cultural attractiveness of Svetlogorsk.
- > Mobilizing its cultural assets and organizations and involving citizens to reveal creative potential of the town.

3.1. Project Schedule

January 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9 Belarusian towns and regions applied for the call
February 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Svetlogorsk and 5 more towns and regions from EaP countries have been selected as pilots
March 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Desk study of the strategies, documents and online resources
April 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Launch of the project, open guest lecture with Ragnar Siil, briefing of stakeholders
May 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Networking of 6 partner towns at Creative Regions forum in Moldova
May 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Field trip, visiting the venues, 5 focus groups (media-company, museum, festival, culture activists, department of culture)
June 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analysis of the collected materials, development of the recommendations
August 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opening of the first creative space in town - media-hub Cherdak, public discussions about the initiative
September 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation of the final report and methodology to the applicants from Belarus in Minsk

3.2. Project Team and Stakeholders

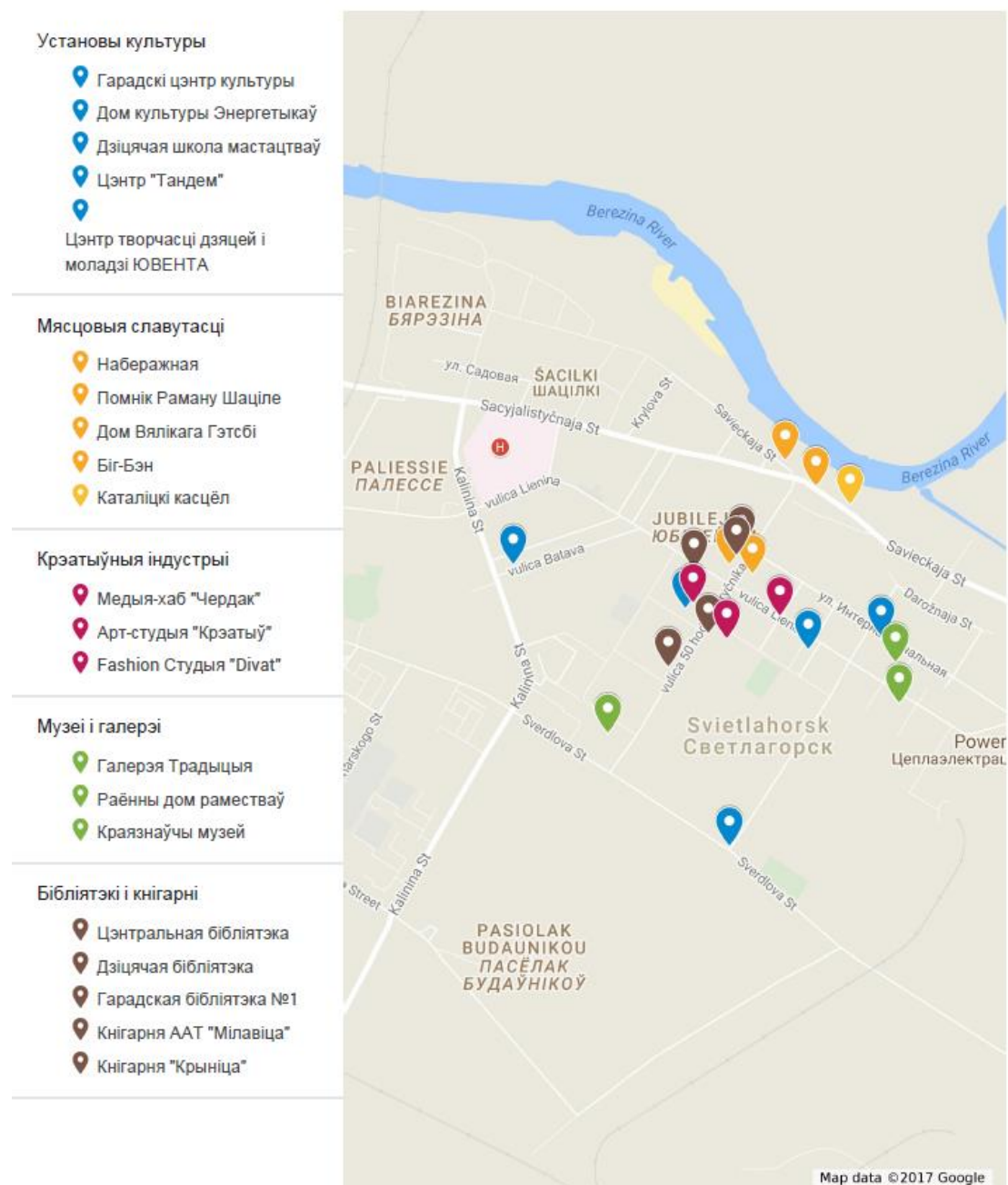
Project Core Team

- > **Lia Ghilardi** (UK), Senior Expert for Creative Towns and Regions Initiative.
- > **Margarita Lazarenkova** (Belarus), Junior Expert in Belarus for Creative Towns and Regions Initiative.
- > **Ragnar Siil** (Estonia), Key Expert of EU-EaP Culture and Creativity Programme.
- > **Alina Dzeravianka** (Belarus), Belarus Country Coordinator for EU-EaP Culture and Creativity Programme.
- > **Anton Kashlikov** (Belarus), Project Coordinator in Svetlogorsk.

Participants of the Research:

- > **Local authority:** Petrovsky Konsantin Valeryevich - Deputy Chairman of the Svetlogorsk District Executive Committee. Supervises questions of ideological work, education, culture, physical culture, sports and tourism, preservation and maintenance of historical and cultural heritage, international partnerships, work with youth, medical services, social protection, mass media, community work, public organizations.
- > **Department of Culture:** Mankevich Alla Viktorovna - Head of the Department of Ideological Work, Culture and Youth Affairs of the Svetlogorsk District Executive Committee. Ensuring the holding of events involving cultural organizations, creative collectives, public and youth organizations.
- > **Media:** Vazhnyovets Vadim Arkadevich - Editor-in-Chief of the media company "Ranak". PR, communication, information support. Development of information and creative projects. Announcements in the media of planned events, competent coverage of the project and its results at all stages of the work.
- > **Business:** Kashlikov Igor Vasilievich - Director of the media company "Ranak". Functions of cultural management and coordination center. Provision of technical and financial resources: local TV channels, FM radio station, newspaper, broadband data network (Internet, cable TV), Internet resources, outdoor advertising network, technical service.
- > **Public organizations:** Butyrin Yuri Vasilievich – the Chairman of the Council of the Youth Public Association "Real World". Involvement of creatively active young people and public organizations in the implementation of the initiative. Participation in the development of creative projects. Coordination of the implementation of activities.

3.3. Svetlogorsk Creative Map



Cultural life is located mainly at the town centre: main culture and art points, like gallery "Tradicia" and Museum of History, are situated here, as well as main nature attraction – embankment of Berezina river. Chain of local state libraries and several bookshops are also situated mainly in central part of the town.

In August 2017, after several meetings with local stakeholders in terms of Creative Towns and Regions Initiative, the first creative space was established - media-hub "Cherdak" ("Attic"). Media-hub "Cherdak" is a private initiative of media-company RANAK and is located in the attic of their building. Inside there is a space for exhibitions, a lecture room for 50 visitors, a separate room for round tables or other brainstorming and a cosy kitchenette for coffee breaks. Truly unique opportunities are created here for the Belarusian media: the lecture hall is equipped with video and audio equipment, which allows any event to be broadcasted live on [YouTube-channel](#) or documented for later use.



3.4. Svetlogorsk Urban DNA

Having analysed Svetlogorsk cultural infrastructure and its cultural vitality, it becomes evident, that Svetlogorsk is at the beginning of developing its local creative economy potential. The level of activity related to creative industries is seen mostly in:

1. **Media and advertising** (besides media-company RANAK with its own regional TV, radio and web-portal, which makes huge impact on place making, networking and connectivity, there are also two high-quality Internet-media portals in Svetlogorsk),
2. **Amateur theatre** (institutions of culture provide youth with numerous courses in various directions: painting, singing, choreography, etc., but what makes Svetlogorsk different from other regional centres is that there are 7 theatre studios here, beginning with theatre kindergarten "Vasilek" and ending with amateur theatre for adults "Avantura"),
3. **Fashion design** (formal fashion design education in Svetlogorsk State Industrial College and fashion studio "Divat", which provides informal education in this sphere and holds fashion show in Svetlogorsk)
4. There are also several **local creative businesses**, who are making positive impact on city development, for example event-agency PARK, who has organised first private Summer Festival "Jasmin" in Svetlogorsk.

Main challenges and opportunities of culture and creative sector, which shape Svetlogorsk Urban DNA, are illustrated below:



The main asset of the town is, of course, people. From one side, Svetlogorsk is lucky to have progressive and open-minded authorities, who cooperate with businesses and NGOs in improving their town. For several years, Svetlogorsk municipality has been organising an art-residency for sculptors and now the result of this project – numerous small architectural forms – decorate the town. From the other side, citizens themselves are actively engaged and there are several bottom-up initiatives, which make “creative buzz” in Svetlogorsk, for example, open courses of Belarusian language “Mova Nanova” curated by young activist Denis Runets, or project “Rodnae.Svae”, launched by private media-company Ranak.

Svetlogorsk has quite active local art community - there are more than 40 artists in the region. 12 of them participate in annual collaborative art-exhibition “Svetlogorski Vernisazh” organized by local art gallery “Tradicia”. Moreover, Svetlogorsk has a wide audience for all the culture and creative events – around 12 000 kids and youth under 18 live here and actively participate in numerous art and creative clubs and courses in town. Thus, the town has all the potential to become a regional centre for youth creativity.

The next asset, which can be used for Svetlogorsk creative development, is a list of inspiring public spaces, which ideally suit for hosting festivals, street art-exhibitions

and open-air, for example, beautiful embankment of Berezina River, where people like to walk and spend their free time, or Central Square with local "Big Ben". These places are already becoming alive, for example, during state festival on a city birthday. Yet, there is still a lot of space for development of Svetlogorsk public places during the rest of the year, both in summer and winter season.

From the touristic point of view, Svetlogorsk is very green city, in which, when building, each tree was treated carefully. Thanks to this, it possesses relaxing atmosphere, citizens call Svetlogorsk as a "forest-town" and proud to have possibility to pick up berries right in front of their flat building. There is also a town beach on Berezina River, which can be used for recreational activities and eco-tourism development.

The main challenges for Svetlogorsk lie in the economical and institutional spheres. The major city-forming state enterprises experience economic difficulties, there is no institution of higher education in the town and, although there is quite developed system of informal education in arts (9 state institutions of culture and 7 state libraries), their activities are based on a rather traditional approach to culture, arts and crafts.

Nevertheless, these challenges can be observed as opportunities. In economic sphere, there is a potential for development of entrepreneurship: there are more than 1500 individual entrepreneurs and around 450 SMEs in town. With support and right actions aimed at fostering the entrepreneurial activity in town, some free market niches could be developed with private sector, which would, in its turn, have positive impact in city development. For example, HORECA (hotels, restaurants, cafés) sphere is undeveloped in Svetlogorsk: there are only 2 more or less functioning hotels, one coffee-station in the supermarket, no "coffee-shop culture", small number of bars and cafes. All these provide possibilities for entrepreneurs to develop in future.

Institutional sphere also lacks private initiatives in Svetlogorsk. While state institutions of culture are focused on traditional approach to arts, there is a space for development of informal education in creative industries for youth audience, which could be done on a private basis in partnership with developed state culture infrastructure with all their facilities. There are already some successful examples appearing, like experimental theatre studio "Vozhyk v tymane" ("Hedgehog in the fog") which uses innovative methods of youth education on the basis of Svetlogorsk State Children's School of Arts.

To sum up, Svetlogorsk is a vibrant town with high creative potential, hidden in the chain of soviet-style panel houses. Its urban DNA consists of such strong assets as large number of young audiences and inspiring public spaces. Combining these resources together, institutional and economic challenges can be solved, as well as new image of the town can be formed and promoted.

3.5. Svetlogorsk's Cultural Infrastructure and Vitality

Number of...	
<i>...concert halls</i>	3
<i>...performances per year</i>	around 160
<i>...museums and galleries</i>	2 galleries and 1 museum Gallery Tradicia Dom remesel Svetlogorsk's History Museum
<i>...bookshops</i>	3
<i>...libraries</i>	7
<i>...local media channels</i>	1 private media-company (RANAK - TV, radio, newspaper) 1 state local newspaper and Internet-media (N.sn.by) 2 local Internet-media (Ranak.by, Lovesun.by)
<i>...cultural heritage objects</i>	1 - painting "The Land of Svetlogorsk"
<i>...festivals</i>	5 local festivals Youth talent festival "Provinciya" State festivals on City Birthday Open-air festival on a town beach "Na volne" Private summer festival "Jasmin"
<i>...night clubs</i>	1 night club "Jaguar"
<i>...bars and cafes</i>	6
<i>...informal meeting places</i>	2 (Media-hub Cherdak and NGO "Realnyj mir")
<i>...incoming young specialists</i>	220 graduates
<i>...theatre initiatives</i>	7 local theatre initiatives Theatre kindergarten Vasilek Music theatre "Paper Fantasy" Operetta studio "Rampa" Experimental theatre studio "Vozhyk v tymane" Theatre kids' studio "Igolochki" Peoples theatre "Spadchyna" Amateur theatre "Avantura"

4. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING SVETLOGORSK'S CREATIVE POTENTIAL

4.1. Vision 2025

- > *Svetlogorsk is known in Belarus as “youngest town of Belarus” and regional youth creativity centre.*

Indicators: number of references in mass media, growing number of informal arts and creative education courses, surveys on public opinion, number of visitors of youth arts festivals and contests

- > *Svetlogorsk has favourable environment for developing creative entrepreneurship.*

Indicators: the number of creative businesses, the number of HORECA (Hotels, Restaurants and Cafés) businesses, the number of jobs in creative sector and media production, the volume of revenues (tax income) to the local budget

- > *Svetlogorsk is open and healthy - green town with focus on green economy.*

Indicators: migration indicators, youth employment rates, HIV-screening results, the number of public eco-initiatives, the number of green-economy initiatives in industry and energy, the level of community involvement in ecology of the town.

4.2. Priorities for development

1. Developing youth culture

- 1.1. **Establishment of Youth Cultural Department**, creation of a working group of people aged 12-18 years for development and implementation of different initiatives and events in the field of culture and creative industries.
- 1.2. **Launching support programs for youth arts festivals**, key priorities: amateur theatre, media, fashion.
- 1.3. **Involving youth in urban development**: launching initiatives like European Youth Parliament, inviting youth for creation media-programs and blogs about Svetlogorsk, etc.

2. Rebranding of Svetlogorsk on Belarus map

- 2.1. **Participatory city branding**: launching open contest for creation of new logotype of Svetlogorsk dedicated to the town birthday to support local designers and artists.
- 2.2. **Public spaces design**: involving local artistic community, develop creative design solutions, street-art initiatives for Svetlogorsk embankment, central square, etc. during events for different seasons.

- 2.3. **PR-campaign about the town:** collaboration with Belarusian and international media, promoting Svetlogorsk as a creative and healthy city, with a good quality of life and wellbeing facilities accessible to all.

3. Support for creative entrepreneurship

- 3.1. **Establishing local business-incubator:** providing local entrepreneurs and SMEs with a space for development.
- 3.2. **Providing capacity building opportunities** for creative entrepreneurship and **launching business-education** offer, based on one of the colleges in Svetlogorsk.
- 3.3. **Support for private initiatives** in culture and creative industries (creation of a list of existing objects and services that they provide; compiling a list of real estate objects that can be used for the needs of the local SMES; search for investors, which are interested in the region).

4.3. Action Plan for 2017-2020

- 1. **Launch theatre festival and/or amateur theatre contest.** Establish a working group on launching Svetlogorsk Theatre Festival; develop the concept, priorities of activities, and action plan for the first year. Start with fundraising and partnerships.
- 2. **Establish Youth Cultural Department.** Launch first group of young activists, who willing to participate in cultural life of Svetlogorsk and improve it, using their creative and innovative ideas. Start with short-period working group on summer season.
- 3. **Design visual identity of the town.** Establish an open contest for the new logotype of Svetlogorsk dedicated to the town birthday to support local designers and artists.
- 4. **Collaboration with Belarusian and European media.** Establish partnership with Belarusian and international media in two main directions: 1. Promotion of Svetlogorsk as a creative town, 2. Collaboration in terms of future Youth Media School, which is going to be launched in Media-Hub Cherdak.



NOTE

The report is developed with the assistance of the EU-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme. The content of this report does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the report lies entirely with the author.

The purpose of the EU-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme is to support the cultural and creative sectors' contribution to sustainable humanitarian, social and economic development in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.



The Programme is funded by
the European Union