

## 9. Stará Tržnica (Bratislava, Slovakia)



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## Executive summary

[Stará Tržnica](#) (Old Market Hall) is a historical building in the centre of Bratislava. The building closed down after years of unsuccessful attempts by the municipality to keep the market alive. Years later the market hall reopened with a redevelopment plan proposed by the Alianca Stará Tržnica (Old Market Hall Alliance), combining a food market every Saturday with cultural events on other days, as well as two cafés, a grocery shop, a cooking school and a soda water manufacture. Rethinking the opportunities of the Old Market Hall allows the organisation to run the building in an economically sustainable way, while gradually renovating it and creating a new event venue and meeting space in the heart of the city.



**Picture 1. The interior of the Old Market Hall. Photo (cc) Eutropian**



# 1 Timeline

1910 – Construction of the building

1960 – The building ceases to function as a market and it is turned into a TV warehouse and studio

1989 – The building goes empty

1996 – The municipality launches the building's renovation

1998 – The municipality rents out the renovated building that is used as a market

2004 – The market is in decline and underused

2008 – Following a long dispute, the municipality cancels the rental contract and the building goes empty again

2011 – Discussions about a new programme for the building begin

2012 – Establishment of the Old Market Hall Alliance

2012 – Proposal by the Old Market Hall Alliance to run the building

2013 – City Council votes to approve the Old Market Hall Alliance plan

2013 – Signature of the contracts

2013 – Old Market Hall Alliance begins to operate the building

2016 – The Old Market Hall Alliance begins its Living Square programme to revitalise the public spaces around the market

2017 – The Old Market Hall Alliance's investment breaks even

2018 – Matus Vallo, one of the founders of the Alliance becomes mayor of Bratislava. The Living Square programme becomes a key objective of the municipality

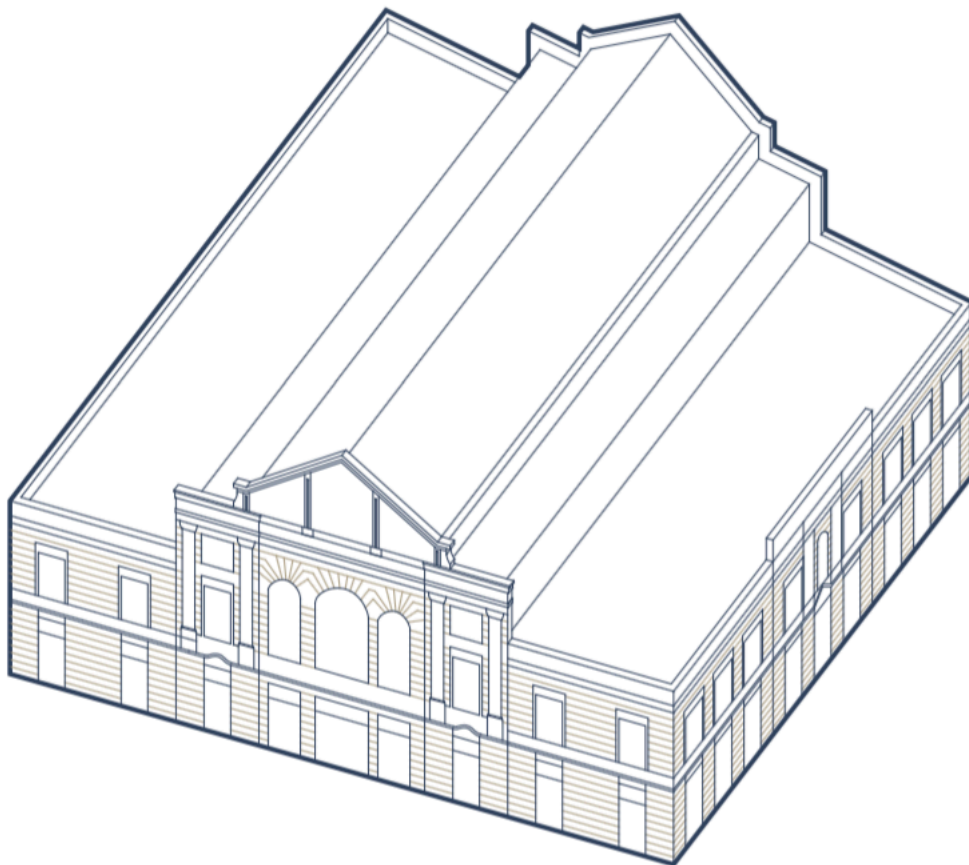
# 2 The story of the building

The Old Market Hall of Bratislava, designed by the city engineer Gyula Laubner, was completed on October 31, 1910. The building, situated at the edge of Bratislava's historical centre and built in connection with the old town's wall, was operating as a municipal marketplace until 1960. During the Communist times, the building's market function has gradually deteriorated. Between 1960 and 1989, the building hosted a television warehouse, studio and a variety of cultural productions. Between 1989 and 1996, the building stood empty, until in 1996 the municipality began its renovation. While the renovated building operated as a market between 1998 and 2008, small shops were built along its edges. The municipality's efforts to revive the building as a mono-functional market hall did not succeed: in the last years of the municipal management of the market, only six stalls were left open, all the others were closed. The remaining vendors, failing to compete with supermarkets, hardly provided any revenue for the market hall and the building generated significant losses for the municipality, about 30,000 euros a year. In the years following its closure in 2008, the market

hall was occasionally used as a stage set for TV show shootings and gala events. While it hosted around 15-20 private events a year, the building stood empty for the rest of the year, for around 350 days.

The original spaces of the building have been modified at various moments. In the 1990s, the Municipality renovated the market hall and small shops were built along its edges. In 2013, when the Old Market Hall Alliance gained access to the building, the market hall was fragmented into smaller spaces divided by walls, reminiscent of a badly functioning shopping mall. Besides these divisions, the building's new tenants faced many previously invisible problems. Besides the damaged floors and other surfaces, the building's infrastructure was also in a deteriorated state: the heating, cooling, air distribution functions did not function, neither did electricity work.

**"If you search for a concert hall in the city centre, this would be one of the top choices for you. If you want to make a conference, it is probably the best place in the city centre, especially if you would like to have some kind of community feeling, and don't want to go to a hotel. Practically you are left with no other choices." Jan Mazur**



**Picture 2. The Old Market Hall of Bratislava. Image by Jorge Mosquera**

### 3 The initiative

**“For years, there had been various initiatives that were seeking the support of politically influent groups to get their grip on the market hall. The fact that we made a public proposal and played in an open way made us less vulnerable to attacks and gave us a broad public support.” Gábor Bindics**

The Old Market Hall Alliance, an NGO established in order to elaborate a special programme for the building, was created by a team of experts, eleven people from different disciplines. The team was composed by people with real hands-on experience. One founding member of the Alliance had been running concerts for 20 years and knew everyone in the music fiend as well as all details related to running events; another member had been organising markets for years and was ready to bring this experience into the market hall.

At the time when the idea of rethinking the market hall emerged, Gábor Bindics, one of the founders had been running the cultural centre Dunaj for years. Dunaj was about 50 meters from the Old Market Hall, and Gábor and his colleagues passed by the vacant building every day. In the same time, many people were engaged in discussions about the fate of the market hall on a variety of forums. When the 11 people who later founded the Old Market Hall Alliance met each other, they all nurtured the same ambition to try to find a way to revive the market hall. The original idea was not to take over the management of the building but to create a project that looks into the history of the market hall and explores the reasons of its failure. By 2012, their ambition had gradually changed: they increasingly saw their role not only in creating a study but in developing the project itself. In 2012, the NGO Old Market Hall Alliance was established in order to elaborate a special programme for the building.

**“152 pages of the proposal were letters of interest, from corporations stating that they want to organise private events there, to embassies stating their interest in hiring space for events in the market hall. It gave us a lot of credibility that we could show that many people trust us.” Jan Mazur**

In 2012, the Alliance made a proposal to the Municipality for running the market hall, including a detailed economic offer and supported by many letters of interests from a variety of organisations. The proposal was to organise a weekly market on every Saturday, combined with other events on weekdays and renting out on a permanent basis the smaller spaces of the building to different services related to the market. The proposal also included a rental fee and detailed timing. The Alliance built up a broad public backing for the proposal. Support from various communities in the city helped the association convince the Municipality about the public interest of the proposal.

**“There were hundreds of people watching the assembly online so there was a kind of public pressure on politicians as well. An important part of our legitimacy was that we managed to communicate this project well: the public understood that this is a project that will serve their purpose.” Jan Mazur**

Despite discussions about the need of a public competition the Alliance convinced the Municipality to use a specific clause in the law that allows the municipality to

grant an exemption from competition to a strong proposal if it is approved by a vote in the City Council. The first vote took place in February 2013, but the agreement attracted criticism and legal attacks. Therefore, another City Council vote was needed in the Spring of 2013 that gave the final approval to the Alliance's plan. The Municipal Assembly vote also attracted a significant interest from the side of citizens – it was the most viewed assembly until then – and this pressure resulted in the Municipal Assembly voting in favour of the proposal. Due to the exemption of competition, there was no public procurement process to access the building, but a concession agreement.

**“In general, it is good to have open calls, but in the case of the Market Hall, no one has prepared any process for years, and the idea of public competition came up only when our proposal was put on the table. The place laid dormant for years and it needed initiative.” Illah Van Oljen**

The Old Market Hall Alliance received the keys to the building in September 2013. The first event, a food market was organised on September 22, and it was followed by regular market days, first once a month and twice a month after the first year. In 2014, the various spaces of the market hall were tested through pop-up uses, and these uses informed the renovations of these spaces in the following years. After a trial period and a temporary closure for renovations, the market hall reopened in March 2015. Since September 2015, the weekly Saturday market has been operating continuously, with other events gradually developed to complement it.



**Picture 3. Event in the Old Market Hall of Bratislava. Photo (cc) Eutropian**



## 4 Activities

**“What works is the blend of activities, multi-functionality, to combine functions of those activities that do not generate solid revenue with those that can generate revenue for you: this way you can subsidise the former.”**  
**Jan Mazur**

The Old Market Hall Alliance created a special programme with a flexible forum where one can put any content one wants according to one's needs and functions. During the week, when there is simply not enough critical mass to attend markets, the building is used as a concert hall, a ballroom for companies, a conference hall, or a workshop space. The most precious day, Saturday, when people have time, is reserved for a food market. As the market begins at 8am, this also means that there are no events on Friday night, otherwise there would be no enough time to clean up the hall before the market.

**“This is a really strong message that the most precious day is given to the public.”** Jan Mazur

The process of reviving the food market in the hall also coincided with the moment when people in Slovakia began to be interested in local food and locally produced goods: people were looking for alternatives. The farmers' market opened in the Old Market Hall just before alternative supermarkets selling local produce emerged. Reviving the food market required a lot of community organisation though. As the market organisers did not succeed in bringing back earlier vendors to the market, they had to find new vendors with less experience.

**“As the market hall was to function as a cultural centre and a market in the same time, we felt it was good to start with a monthly market first, to try out the space. The space was being reconstructed and rebuilt at the time: we had to build a whole market in a building that was changing every week.”** Illah van Oljen

The **food market** is at the core of the Old Market Hall. The food market component of the Old Market Hall Alliance came through Illah van Oljen, a Dutch urbanist who began organising local markets in Bratislava in 2011 by closing off streets, inviting producers and inviting neighbours. Together with Slow Food Bratislava, Illah wrote a plan on how to bring back the food market into the Old Market Hall and, emphasising the importance of gradual, organic growth. For the first half year, the market was organised once a month and it allowed the organisers to test different settings. In the following year, markets were organised twice a month, and a year and a half into the project, the market became a weekly event.

The food market was never meant to generate revenue for the Market Hall. It is the ultimate public event in the market hall: its objective was to attract visitors and make the market hall work. It was decided early on that Saturday would be kept for food markets and all other events have to find other days. The Saturday market organises children's theatre every week, there are dedicated spaces for kids and seniors with no obligation to consume anything. Minorities that live in the city are regularly invited to present their food and music in the market hall. The building has a used oil-collecting facility and soon will have a composter. Most transport to and from the building is organised by cargo bikes. There are

many educational events taking place in the building that also function as services.

The food market runs with about 20-30 vendors in the summer, and about 100 in winter. It is often combined a variety of events, pop-up stores, kids' events, design and antique markets, wine events, thematic markets. One of the biggest events of the year is the Christmas market that includes a food market and a street market outside the market hall, uniting the indoor and outdoor spaces. The Christmas market has over 20,000 visitors and more than 350 people apply for stands but the market can only host 116 of them.

The food market has also generated various synergies with other tenants and venues within the market hall: the café has an open door towards the market and plays music the whole morning; restaurants or the cooking school's kitchen buy the remaining vegetables to make sure vendors go home with no produce left. The bike sharing shop offers a courier service to deliver the groceries bought to one's doorstep.

**"It was always our big dream when we got this place, yes the inside is a public space but let's take the inside and outside as one. With the Christmas market we managed to bring this back." Illah van Oljen**

Spaces of the market hall that face the outside, looking at the neighbouring square and streets are rented out to permanent tenants. These are businesses that all contribute to the market hall's operation with their own means, with specific activities, resources or with opening hours and services adapted to the needs of more vulnerable groups. The spaces at the outer parts of the market hall have been used since 2014, first to test various uses and later rented out to regular tenants. The tenant structure has gradually changed in the project's first 5 years, as experiences helped the Alliance to adjust its rental structure.

**"The proportion between market and social projects depends on the price you charge per square meters. If you run a market price, then non-market participants obviously cannot take it if they don't have a subsidy. If there is no grant that could help them operate with market rents, then you have to go down if you want to create social value." Jan Mazur**

Originally, the Alliance began to develop its strategy of renting out spaces as the creation of a "portfolio of services" that members thought the market hall needed. The first open call for tenants of the market hall's spaces envisioned five functions for the building: a family space where we are where families can come and leave kids in the corner and have a coffee, a restaurant and café, a grocery store and a kitchen to be used by members for cooking classes and to cook food to be sold elsewhere. After the failure of some of the tenants from the first round, it took a few years to have all the businesses stabilise themselves.

**Lab** is a cafeteria on the ground floor but also a fabrication lab, a basement workshop with woodcutters, laser cutters, 3D printer and other tools where one can do digital fabrication. It works on a prepaid membership basis and contributes to an emerging community around the Lab. Next to it, there is also a **bike sharing shop** that has been very much in demand since its opening and that also offers delivery service for the market shoppers. Another tenant is **Foodstock**, a restaurant or canteen that composts all its organic waste, thus inspiring a planned waste system for the whole market and the neighbourhood. Foodstock also helps with the community kitchen organised on Saturdays where various minorities present their food and products. There is also a **grocery shop**: the idea was to create a locally sourced store where one can find food and products as local as possible. On the other side of the market, there is a **wine**

**bar** that is open all day long and offers local wines at affordable prices. Inside the market hall, there are other businesses: a **soda producer**, in which the Old Market Hall Alliance is also a small shareholder; and a **brewery** that takes care of the square in front of the market hall, its cleaning, new furniture and all related investments.



**Picture 4. Brewery in the basement of the Old Market Hall. Photo (cc) Eutropian**

**Dobre Dobré** is an organisation that works with homeless people. The Alliance invited the organisation to run a cafeteria inside the market hall building, a place that would connect with the ambiance of the market hall and employ homeless staff. Compared to the other venues inside the market hall, the Alliance estimated the value of the space as 2400 euros per month: given the social focus of the organisation, Dobre Dobré was offered a 560 euros rental fee. Despite this subsidised rent, Dobre Dobré could not develop into a sustainable business. The following business, a winery, received the space at the subsidised rent of 1600 euros, in exchange to have the venue open from the morning, offer authentic wines and allow people to spend time without continuously consuming.

Some tenants could not develop a sustainable economic model: a café operated by a social enterprise employing homeless people ended up producing deficits, and so did a kid's centre where families did not spend enough to help the place survive. Similarly, a cooking school formerly located in the inside of the building, that made food for kindergartens, sold to the neighbouring restaurants and also worked with refugees also left the market hall.

**"When we saw that some social businesses could not maintain themselves, we changed our strategy: instead of looking for a social project and**



**offering space to them, we look for a functioning business that we ask to provide some added value in exchange for lower rent.” Gábor Bindics**



**Picture 5. Dobre Dobré at the side of the Old Market Hall. Photo (cc) Eutropian**

## 5 Renovations

**“When we walked into the building we found many bad solutions, a big part of the technical equipment didn’t work. We knew that we cannot make the building work perfectly from the first day on.” Gábor Bindics**

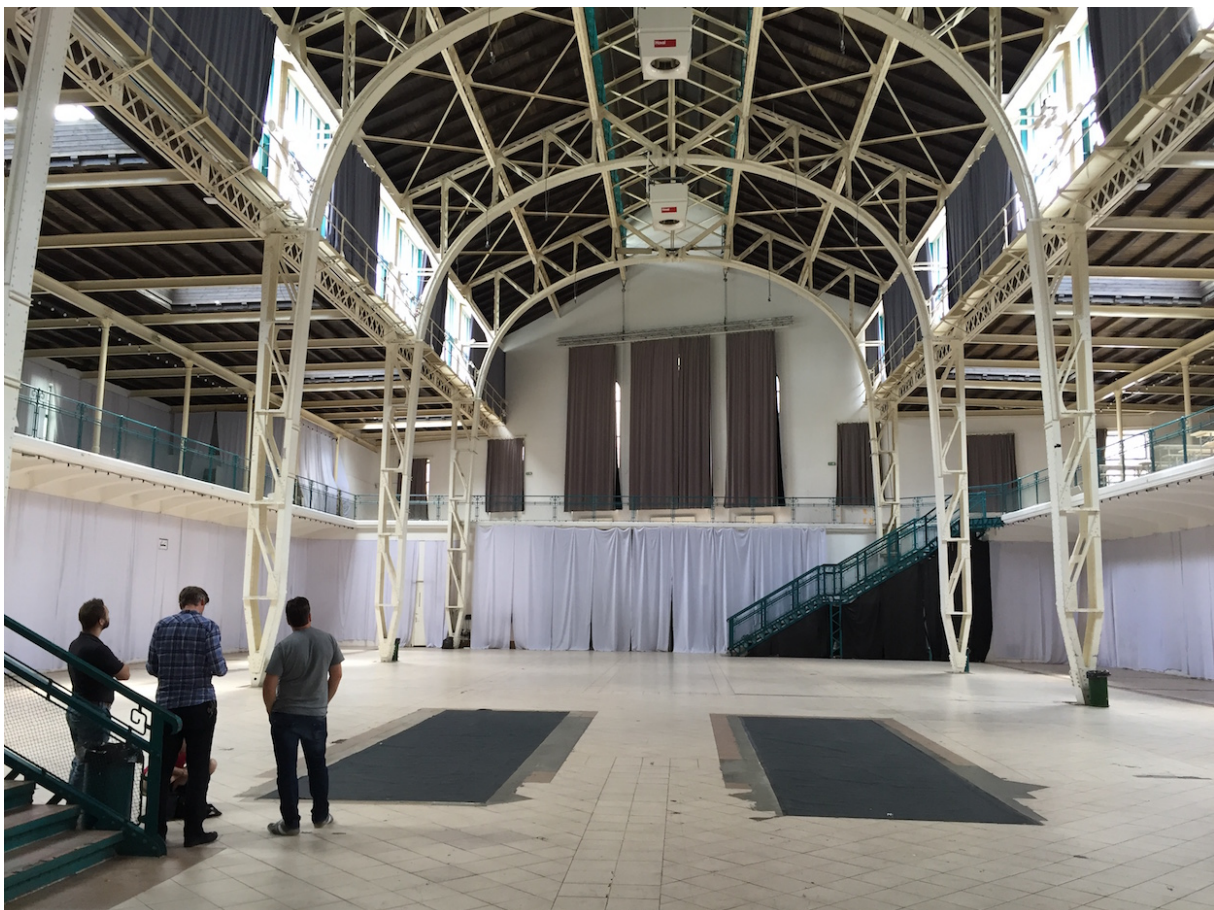
The main concept of rethinking the building was to create a space as multifunctional and flexible as possible, a large open space that can host various kinds of events, ranging from markets and conferences to concerts. In order to help the space adapt to different events, specific, versatile and easy-to-arrange tables were bought to support all these formats.

One of the biggest challenges in the reconstruction process was to coordinate the different phases of the renovation with activities like the market that had to adapt to new circumstances and new parts of the building at each edition. A month after the Alliance took charge of the building, a fire security control revealed 54 security issues. Complying with safety regulations was a costly process: only repainting some surfaces with fireproof paint costed 50,000 euros, while revising the fire safety system, installing a new lightning rod, new doors, fire-extinguishers, fire alarms and a regulated heating system costed around 100-150,000 euros.



After making the spaces secure, the following phase included renovating the shops and other street front spaces, fixing their water and electricity infrastructures so that they can be rented out. This was followed by the renovation of the toilets, the floors, the lights, important details that enable the individual operations. In some cases, the Alliance made an agreement with future tenants who would take care of the renovations and costs would be redacted from the rental fee.

**Sound** is a key challenge in all buildings whose business model depends on large events. When the Alliance took charge of the market hall, they measured the sound insulation of the building's walls and windows and it gave different results than official documents of the building that proved to be misleading. Following complaints from the neighbourhood, the association undertook a large process to insulate further the building's walls and windows facing residential buildings: this operation costed 50,000 euros. After the insulation, the market hall has been capable of accommodating slightly higher volume but cannot host larger concerts. With the limited authorised volume level, concerts are muted by the noise of the public: in the presence of 2000 people, the allowed music volume is not enough to satisfy the concert-goers.



Picture 6. The Market Hall's internal structure. Photo (cc) Eutropian

## 6 Heritage

**“When we first entered the market hall, its open space was fragmented by smaller structures, kiosks erected in the 1990s. We declared that our goal is not to build on all the layers that were added to this market hall, but to give back this space to the city. Our goal was to open the space physically and mentally. We also repainted the interiors to the original green colour, erasing the interventions of the 1990s. All our actions fit to the protected status of the building. We benefited from heritage protection: we wanted to make use of the advantages of the building as it was invented in 1910.”**  
**Gábor Bindics**

Bratislava’s Old Market Hall is a nationally protected cultural heritage building. The protection concerns the hall’s columns and the windows, as well as the outer appearance of the building. Therefore, there are no modifications allowed in the building, especially when they impact the outer look of the market hall. Outside the entire look of the building had to be kept, including the colours, doors and materials. For minor interventions, ranging from changing colours at the outside of the building to insulating windows, the Alliance needed permissions from the regional heritage office. In order to better insulate the building, for instance, an expensive solution was implemented: a second, thicker glass layer was built inside the market hall, in order to keep the original look of the building but adapt it to events that require heating in winter. Inside it was enough to maintain the appearance and colours of the skeleton structure but the association enjoyed relative freedom in rearranging the market inside the building.

**“We started by making a study about the market hall’s past. We found that in 1910, there was a soda manufacturer in the building: therefore, we established a new soda manufacturer. There was a grocery shop run by Ernő Dvorák: this is why we call our pub Ernő Dvorák, to point back to the past of the building.”** Gábor Bindics

Reopening the market hall as a food market was easy: building on the history of the building and the legacy of the street markets organised by Alliance members, the association had a significant public support in its endeavour.

**“It happened in the first few markets that people would come into the building, look up and look down and start crying. Overwhelmed with stories and histories around the market. The fact that this was historically for such a long time a market space, and this whole square was a market space basically gave a huge pat in the back for the whole project. We didn’t have to convince anyone.”** Illah van Oljen

## 7 Regulations and policies

**“The relationship with the municipality is good. It’s not always easy to explain or convince them, but the relationship is professional, we don’t argue over small things or even large things.”** Jan Mazur

Regulations concerning the renovation and operating of the building are not optimal. The market hall’s renovation by the association has met some legislative barriers. The previous renovation in 1996-98 carried out by the Municipality for the equivalent of 13 million euros today included many elements like an escalator in the basement that had never been used and did not correspond to the new uses of the building. This escalator was built so expensively in the 1990s

that after two decades, its value was still booked at 30,000 euros in the Municipality's accounts, making it bureaucratically complicated to remove the escalator and turning this into a 2-year procedure.

The Alliance's relationship with the municipality is professional and is based on cooperation. On a regular basis, the Alliance needs approval from the Municipality for the investments. The Alliance needs to communicate towards the Municipality all investments into the building as these investments, including newly purchased equipment will belong to the building owned by the city. Before each expenditure, the association needs to provide an investment plan to be reviewed by a specific body – consisting of three municipal officers and two-three people from the Old Market Hall Alliance – that convenes and goes through each item of the plan, before sending it further to a municipal vote. Besides this committee, there is also another contractual body created between the Alliance and the Municipality, consisting of four people from the Municipal Assembly, that reviews and supervises the activities of the association.

**“Most problems we encountered within the Municipality were not personal but structural. Municipalities are structured in a regulatory way. Municipal departments are not working pro-actively and they have difficulties in dealing with innovative ideas and helping those who come with a proposal to the city. The Market Hall gives a precedent to these structures in how to work with innovative proposals coming from the outside.” Gábor Bindics**

While the building used to be registered as a market hall, for a period starting in the 1960s, its destination of use was changed into cultural space. When the Alliance began to use the building as a market in 2013, the organisers needed permissions and it made the process more complicated. In the first months, markets were organised with specific permits. It took a year for the association to change the building's legal status into a market hall that made it easier to organise markets. In some cases, the market's legal status was not enough to support all the activities needed by a contemporary market. For instance, for cooking food inside a building, a chimney is needed; however, it is complicated to build a chimney without altering a heritage-protected building's appearance. Therefore, for a long period, the street food market was organised outside the market hall, before organisers found a technical solution to lead chimneys out the windows.

**Social enterprises:** despite its structure as an association, members of the Old Market Hall Alliance consider themselves as a social enterprise: they do not pay dividends or take out profit from the association for themselves. A new law about the functioning of social enterprises that includes incentives, investment money, equity and debt instruments is potentially interesting for the Alliance to adapt its organisational form.

## 8 The business model

**“It is important to convince people that we can think at the scale of millions of euros. With upscaling, the potentially available investment also grows. We can help initiatives with insights about what banks like to give money for and how much certain investments would cost.” Gábor Bindics**

Before engaging in the contract with the Municipality, the Alliance made an estimation of the renovation costs with the help of various experts. Without any high-tech equipment, renovating the floors, the windows as well as complying with all fire safety requirements was estimated to cost between 700,000 and 1 million euros, with at least 4-500,000 to make the building operational. After 5 years, a bit more than 1 million euros were spent on the building, making the market hall fully operating in the technical sense. By the second year, the Market Hall began to produce revenues and by the third year the economic model began to work. In March 2019, the initial bank loan was paid back and the Market Hall broke even. After the basic renovation items, the Alliance now begins investing in more value-related equipment like a composter and other extras.

**Rent-to-investment scheme:** the Alliance conceived the new market hall's model to be economically sustainable and financially separated from the Municipality, with no public subsidies involved. The 15-year (10 years + 5 years extension) contract signed between the Alliance and the Municipality states that the Alliance pays a symbolic 1 euro rent per year to the Municipality and has to invest 10.000 euros per month in the renovation of the market hall for the entire duration of the contract: this amounts to 120.000 euros per year and almost 2 million euros by the end of the contract. While the 10.000 euros monthly investment cannot include in-kind work, the investments of the tenants can be calculated as part of it. Each item of investment is overseen by a supervisory board that includes municipal officers and members of the association.

**"At the time, I began working for the Erste Bank as an advisor in the social bank division. From inside, I saw what makes a project suitable for a loan. By then the Market Hall had events, we had numbers, partners and rental contracts. All these helped us to get a loan from the social bank division while a standard bank would have seen us too risky." Gábor Bindics**

The renovations began with a loan from Erste Bank. At the time the bank opened a social banking division with about 10 million euros to support projects that would be considered too risky by traditional loan schemes. The Market Hall Alliance received a loan of about 200,000 euros with 4% interest. As the association was not the owner of the building, they could not put the market hall as a collateral to the loan: therefore members of the association needed to offer their own personal properties as a collateral to the bank.

**"Most banks have no other motivation than putting your organisation in their risk model and see how much interest they can give you. Social banks put their margins lower to allow more possibilities." Jan Mazur**

The Market Hall produces a variety of revenues. The marketing cooperations provide about 1/3 of the total revenue. Volkswagen and Orange contribute with about 50-60,000 euros annually, in cash or in services. With Orange, for instance, the financial support is minimal but the services have a high value that account to about 100,000 euros in the past years. Orange provided machines (worth 70,000 euros) for the FabLab, and installed internet in the whole building (worth 20,000 euros). Orange also provided big data to the association about people passing by the market hall, in order to understand better their needs.



Volkswagen contributes in a similar way, the company paid in part for the renovation of the square in front of the market hall.

Rental fees contribute to another third of the revenues. Besides the market hall's large open space, the building contains a variety of smaller venues, accessible from the neighbouring streets, that are rented out to a variety of tenants on a regular basis. The selection of tenants in the market hall is based on open calls, thematic connections, potential cooperation with other tenants as well as the social value created.

The last third of the revenues is provided by large events. Big part of the Market Hall's revenue comes from about 16 solely private events per year, which, combined with privately-organised public events, adds up to 60-70% of the total revenue. This revenue is distributed in a year quite unevenly: the top season is October to December, with many Christmas events, while there are practically no events in July and August. The rent for a private event can run into several thousands of euros, up to 6.000 euros for a day – for this the association provides many services, including setting up the space. The great demand for the space is due to a specific situation in Bratislava that does not have many event venues of this kind: The Old Market Hall is possibly the only event venue in the centre that is so large and well-positioned, with an easy access for cars and public transportation alike. On the other hand, with all the events and the community support around the Old Market Hall, it has become one of the hippest places for private events. The interruption of this revenue stream by noise limits imposed on the venue in 2017 forced the Alliance to seek for new kinds of events, daytime conferences and other functions that correspond to the building's dramaturgy and values. The success of this shift remains to be evaluated, together with other potential directions like attracting more marketing-related revenue or developing applications for funding.

With the great success of the Old Market Hall, more revenues were collected than expected. With these revenues, the Alliance has already invested 6 or 7 years upfront in the building's renovation. This is also justified by the uneven needs of the market hall where more investment was needed in the beginning of the building's use in order to make it suitable for events and other activities. Despite the early investments, the renovation is an ongoing process: a bank loan was taken to reconstruct the floor and renovate all the windows. Besides the renovation, the association also bought a variety of sound and light equipment, tables for the market and a podium to build the stage.

**“When we apply for cultural funding, everyone asks why we need money after investing a million euros into the building. We need such funding for the ‘dramaturgy’ we would like to reach, with an ideal constellation of public and private events.” Gábor Bindics**

Most of the market hall's operations can be maintained with the help of its revenues. Extra expenses can be financed by loans, as the Alliance by now has a good track record with banks, although funding of approximately 14,000 euros coming from EEA Grants also helped to make some investments in the building. Nevertheless, the organisation needs specific funding for specific projects like reorganising public spaces around the building. Although the Old Market Hall Alliance is not very successful in applying for public subsidies, the association took part in a Creative Europe project that helped the organisation with 120,000 euros to activate 700,000 euros from private investors and the city.

**“It’s a rare cultural heritage building and should be serving cultural functions. Increasing the rent beyond 10,000 euros a month would compromise the building’s public function.” Jan Mazur**

## 9 Governance and community

**“I always took it as my personal mission to conserve this community - based content and functioning of this building. I always designed it this way. Even the market is inside and technically it is private space, we will always set it up as a public space. Nobody has to buy anything. Homeless, travellers who are lost, we had travellers falling asleep on the bench, we were always open to any group of people who have the same right to sit inside as outside.” Illah van Oljen**

The Old Market Hall Alliance has been from the beginning an NGO, an association founded by 11 civic persons who joined to revive the market hall. The association since then has been expanded and now has active and advisory members. The Alliance is the main tenant of the market hall and has the 10+5 years contract with the Municipality, and in turn, it also rents out the building’s various spaces to businesses and events. The association has also invested in some of the activities in the building: for instance, it has 50% shares in one of the businesses in the Market Hall building, the soda manufacturer.

Volunteering work played an important role in building up the new market hall. Bringing forward their own initiative, members of the Old Market Hall Alliance had offered weeks and weeks of unpaid work, also supported by various forms of community involvement and institutional support. A diversity of cultural institutions and embassies also assured the Alliance about their support and this proved to be an important, if symbolic resource in gaining approval from the Municipality.

Some activities in the market hall do not generate much income but contribute to tying together the community: a regularly organised bazaar allows people to donate and sell things and the revenues go into the reconstruction of the building.

Although there is no formalised structure to **bring together the tenants** besides one-to-one contracts, the Old Market Hall Alliance organises regular meetings with the tenants to focus on how they can cooperate with one another in a mutually beneficial way. Some tenants began to cooperate without any matchmaking: the soda manufacturer provides soda to all the bars and restaurants, so does the brewery; the events communicate with the venues and the grocery store sources from our market vendors. Besides one-to-one cooperation, many tenants are also connected by joint projects. The new composting machine bought by the association will compost the organic waste of all tenants. The Alliance is also planning to establish a new association focusing on the public spaces around the market hall: the association, to be joined by all tenants of the market hall, will safeguard the public spaces and provide specific services such as cultural events. Furthermore, the new association will act as a platform to organise competitions and channel ideas and proposals towards the municipality.

## 10 Public space

Before being converted into TV and cultural production studios, Bratislava's Old Market Hall had always been a public space, connected to a large public square outside the building. After the 1960s, with the building converted into TV production studios, the square gradually lost its public role and was increasingly occupied by parking cars. For the Old Market Hall Alliance, opening the square and reconnecting it to the market hall creates public value and contributes to the building's economic model as well.

**"We started working with the square outside the market hall to bring it back into use: it was not inventing a new function but try to bring people back doing what they used to do before." Illah van Oljen**

The Old Market Hall Alliance has been engaged with the revitalisation of the neighbouring public spaces. Investment in the surrounding public spaces has created an important impact: with small interventions like 5000 euros invested in chairs and serving drinks, the square in front of the market hall has been filled with life, especially in Summer and Autumn, with hundreds of people. Allowing the Market Hall to use the public square in front of it required some legal arrangements. As it is not legal to drink alcohol in public spaces in the centre of Bratislava, except on terraces of bars, the Alliance made an agreement with the municipality that allows the association to create a public space and assure its maintenance and cleaning every day; in exchange the municipality tolerates people consuming alcohol on the square.

**"As we started to revitalise this small square which is right in front of the old market hall we wanted be involved also further as it connects us with other communities in the city." Veronika Hlinicanova**

In order to expand its impact on public spaces, the association began to work with various communities living in or using the area through events and focus groups, inquiring about their needs and barriers. The focus groups were followed by interviews with experts who gave their insights about the public spaces from the viewpoints of the green surfaces, mobility, lighting and other issues. Based on these inputs, the Alliance prepared a series of temporary interventions to make the spaces functional, lively and enjoyable. These events have all fed into the preparation of design competitions for the public spaces in the vicinity of the market hall. Besides the envisioned international design competition, the Alliance also plans to establish a new association with the participation of all the tenants of the market hall, with a focus on improving public spaces in the neighbouring area.

**"After two years, when the market hall began to be full of events, we understood that the impact of our events in the market is much smaller if the environment doesn't change. Therefore, we moved our focus to the surrounding area and think about how to create added values through our spaces. This focus on surrounding public spaces became the second foot of the Old Market hall Alliance." Gábor Bindics**

## 11 Impact

**"This constellation brings a direct benefit for the City, as it basically gets 10.000 euros of new investment into the building every month. Another**

**benefit for the City is that we created space for seven new businesses inside the Market Hall, and several more entrepreneurs benefit from the building in a way or another.” Jan Mazur**

When the Old Market Hall Alliance was founded, the market hall’s area was relatively neglected, with many closed shops and dead facades. Bringing new activities into the market hall had a strong impact on its surroundings: there are much more people using the area, small commerce has been flourishing in the neighbouring streets and the bars that used to serve only elderly men have also become popular with young people.

The Market Hall immediately enjoyed a high visibility and support: this is what enabled it to gain the approval of the City Council. This support was due to the founders’ credibility, reputation and track record: they were all trusted professionals known in the city. Social media, relatively fresh at the time of the market’s relaunch, were contributing to the high visibility of the Market Hall endeavour. In the same time, the need for a public venue organised in a different way was increasingly tangible: many services offered by the Market Hall were immediately embraced and used by the broader community.

**“The impact it has is that for many families going to the market has become a social activity, a fun activity, to be together and meet people which I think is very important. To create a social cohesion around food.” Illah van Oljen**

On a daily basis, the market hall accommodates about 90-100 people: that means a lot of workplaces, many of them new jobs that were born with the reopening of the building. In some cases, the market hall works as an incubator: a baker who rented a stall in the market later went on to open a bakery across the street. In others, the market, especially with its street food events, competes with other restaurants in the centre and takes away some of their clientele.

**“The market hall kicked off very quickly – as soon as we could equip the market hall, it was immediately populated with the market and other events. According to our calculations, around 40,000 people pass by the market hall every day. When the building was closed, it was perceived by people as a coulisse; once we opened it, people really enjoyed to have access to it and turned into a public space.” Gábor Bindics**

The Alliance, reassured about the positive effects of their intervention, went on to create proposals to the Municipality about how to develop, program, manage and administer the neighbouring areas and public spaces. In the meanwhile, the Alliance helped revitalising premises in the neighbouring streets, bringing in new tenants – shops for design, bikes and books – in the ground floor of a quite ruined building adjacent to the market hall.

The market hall has brought social impact to the city in a variety of ways. The Alliance developed a tool to measure social impact in a monetary way. According to the association’s calculations beyond the 10,000 euros monthly revenue required to be invested in the building, another 16-20,000 euros could be earned with purely commercial activities: the difference can be conceived as the social investment amount within the building’s balance sheet.

## 12 The model

The model of Stara Trznica is constituted by the reuse of an abandoned or underused building by the means of transparent communication, cooperation



between different professionals, multifunctional use with social benefits and the investment into the building deducted from the rental fee.

The contract developed between the Old Market Hall Alliance and the Municipality has created a precedent that is seen as an example by other initiatives, including projects run by developers. The model was first reused in the vicinity of the Market Hall: the previous owner of a neighbouring, long-time vacant building invited the Alliance to implement the same model used in the market building: to invite tenants who do not need to pay a commercial rent and who can act as catalysts for the area or for the building. Here the Alliance developed a mixed function for the building, including offices in the upper floors and small bookstores and designer shops in the ground floor – but only part of it was realised before a new owner with a different vision took charge of the building.

**“In some buildings around the market, we used the same principles: tenants invested themselves in the reconstruction and that was deducted from their rent. But it was a model for us to move towards a kind of a niche development: if there is a building where you need to put strong social value, community value, not only economic value, we can provide this.”**  
**Jan Mazur**

On a broader scale, the Stara Trznica model has been hugely inspiring for a variety of other initiatives across Slovakia. Recognising the value of the Stara Trznica model, the Alliance has been supporting a variety of organisations to build up their models: they helped with advice the team regenerating the Rožno Monastery as well and initiators of Nova Cvernovka in Bratislava. The Alliance has also been involved in establishing Lucerna terrace in Prague as well as in the regeneration of the Cloister in Brno. These places have been also building a network based on the exchange of experiences.

Politically, the model of the Old Market Hall serves as an example that proves that the civic-led management of publicly owned properties can be beneficial both to the municipality and the city’s communities: it is instrumental in convincing politicians and property owners to open up their buildings for civic uses. This model paved the way for several initiatives, from Nova Cvernovka in Bratislava to Kino Usmev in Kosice.

**“We don’t like being involved as advisors: once we leave a process and another team takes over, the risk that the overall concept changes and becomes too commercial is too high. It works better when we create a mechanism, find people who are active, build up a team and this team can organically lead the process and activate the building themselves: this is the key to success. Normally a municipality or an investor treats active people as a necessary bad thing that costs money. Instead, active people need to be part of the process from the beginning on as they can be the real engines of the transformation. Our role in this can be to accompany this process of negotiations.”** Gábor Bindics

## 13 Interviewees

Gábor Bindics, co-founder of the Old Market Hall Alliance

Veronika Hliničanová, responsible for the Old Market Hall Alliance’s public spaces programme

Jan Mazur, legal expert of the Old Market Hall Alliance

Illah van Oljen, co-founder of the Old Market Hall Alliance, formerly responsible for the food market

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