



Visions from the City Representatives

Robert Negoită, Mayor of Bucharest-3rd District (RO)

Making choices on priority areas as well as multi-level governance are key aspects of the smart specialisation approach. So, getting strong backing from elected representatives and other top policy decision-makers specially matters when boosting the local economic agenda through the lens of this policy concept. This is a series of short interviews conducted by TASO principal Miguel Rivas to Mayors, City Councillors and top executives in the context of the URBACT network InFocus-Smart Specialisation at City Level.

MR: Thanks Mister Mayor for accepting this short interview. First of all, I´d like to congratulate you for the active participation of district 3 Bucharest in URBACT-InFocus. Smart Specialisation is about an economic development policy-mix with a focus on a short range of priority domains, which is governed and feedback in a collaborative way. What are your priority domains here in Bucharest-3?

RN: First of all let me thank you also for this opportunity of presenting our city and our vision of

a smart specialisation approach here in the 3rd District of Bucharest. It is important to talk about our involvement in the InFocus network of the URBACT programme and about the work we've done so far with the help of the stakeholders that joined the URBACT Local Group (ULG) of the 3rd District.

Secondly, I would like to give the readers a short description of the 3rd District in order for them to better understand our unique situation and the challenges that we've faced. The 3rd District is one

of the 6 districts of Bucharest, the capital city of Romania, and in terms of demographics it is the most populous, with an estimated population of almost half a million. Each district has its own mayor and local council which are subordinated to the general mayoralty and the general council of Bucharest, the latter being responsible for the city wide affairs. Furthermore, when it comes to the regional level, Bucharest is part of Bucharest-Ilfov Developing Region, the most developed region in Romania. It is worth noting that there is no RIS3 at the regional level and it is difficult for us to get direct access to EU funds.

Having all of this in mind, with the help of our ULG members and within the framework of the InFocus network, we've started working on the smart specialisation strategy of the 3rd District without a sound regional background. Thus we've looked at our Local Development Strategy for 2014-2020 for guidance in selecting the priority domains: Creative Economy, Digital Economy and Innovative Retailing.

We've chosen these domains because of their growth potential in the district. It is a known fact that Romania is one of the most attractive markets in Europe for technology investment and outsourcing, with a highly skilled and diversified workforce, competitive costs and a stimulating business environment. This is also true in Bucharest, where major players like Microsoft, Oracle, HP, KPMG etc. have opened offices. The major companies have invested massively in the northern part of Bucharest (District 1), but that area is starting to get overcrowded so we want to offer an alternative to the investors. We want to make the 3rd District as attractive as possible as a business environment.

In addition to this, in Bucharest-Ilfov region there is a low absorption rate of young people with higher education on the labour market - approx. 40% annually, and because of this many youngsters have chosen to start their own businesses. As a consequence, in the last few years, we've witnessed a growth of startups in the creative economy sectors. All of this, correlated with the fact that more than 50% of the turnover of all companies located in the 3rd District is generated from

commerce, have influenced us in choosing our priority domains.

MR: As you have commented, Bucharest-3 is mobilizing a significant number of stakeholders in many of the activities organized at network level, from cluster organizations to the University. How do you foresee to keep such close involvement with the private sector and other key stakeholders on working in a near future, beyond the URBACT-Infocus project?

RN: Indeed we've managed to get a few important stakeholders involved in our ULG. Organisations like Bucharest-Ilfov Region Development Agency, Different Angle Cluster or the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies. It will be a challenge to keep their interest alive beyond the URBACT-Infocus project. So far, with some of our ULG members we have signed collaboration protocols that will be active beyond the InFocus framework.

It is my strong wish to do more for the businesses in the 3rd District and this will be one of my main goals in the years to come. In order to ensure a close connection with the private sector and other key stakeholders in the future, we've started taking a few steps.

Inspired by the collaborative model of the ULG, we have established an office that deals exclusively with NGOs in order to get them involved in the co-decision process when it comes to projects that have a great impact on the local community. Further, we plan to open a department that will work exclusively for and with the business ecosystem, in order to offer support to small and medium-sized businesses, to facilitate their access to COSME funds and other sources of financing, for instance.

We have also started a series of meetings with representatives of the local entrepreneurship environment in order to interact directly with those willing to work alongside us in developing the local economy. Now, we are setting the scene for future thematic meetings in order to discuss the concrete problems of the SMEs in the district and find solutions through a collaborative way.

MR: Different Angle is Bucharest's first IT cluster that was born in 2014 with the mission to promote smart city initiatives. I know them because they have participated in some activities within URBACT-InFocus. Is there any joint agenda between a business cluster like Different Angle and the 3rd district municipality?

RN: As a direct result of the work done within the URBACT Local Group, the Municipality of the 3rd District became a member of Different Angle Cluster (DAC). This has strengthened the process of interaction between the private and public sector, promoting also the flow of information between the municipality and the cluster's companies.

So far, the municipality and DACs members have jointly developed an App that offers detailed information about public services in the 3rd District. I mean information regarding the local schools, daycare centers, hospitals and so on. It is a first step in developing an App that will provide the citizens with information about the entire local administration and public services in Bucharest and we want to encourage the other districts to work with DAC in order to reach this goal. The 3rd District is also one of the partners of "Different City-Smart City", an annual event that is organised by DAC with the help of the Embassy of the Netherlands, which brings together smart cities specialist, the academia, private stakeholders and central and local authorities.

MR: Hala Laminor is a former inner city-located industrial site that is called to be a major brownfield regeneration project, even an opportunity to address a new type of urban innovation spaces. What's the concrete view for this site?

RN: The Laminor project will be beneficial for the local community. We want to transform this brownfield that spreads on over 68.000 m² in order to revitalize the former industrial area of Faur-Republica, one of the most disadvantaged areas in the district. The project will develop a number of multi-functional spaces that will cover, among others, Bucharest's deficit of cultural spaces. It will also incorporate spaces for commercial use and a

space dedicated exclusively to the interaction between citizens and the local government. We want to bring under one roof all the public services in the district, to create a "mall" of services easily accessible by everyone, simple citizens or businesses representatives.

But above all, with the Laminor project we want to address the local entrepreneurs. To that aim, a business incubator is under consideration together with a co-working space, with the idea to offer residence and consultancy to local start-ups. Furthermore, we want the Laminor project to be a business aggregator that will encourage the creation and the development of some other cluster initiatives.

MR: The governance model in Bucharest - I mean the 6 district municipalities with their own local representatives and governing structures that you have mentioned above- is usually perceived as a barrier to deliver a local economic development strategy able to encompass the whole city. What do you think about this issue? What could be done better?

RN: Certainly, the governance model in Bucharest makes it hard for the districts to implement common actions and to collaborate, especially when the elected representatives have different backgrounds and different political views. But, I believe, it all comes down to communicating and putting the citizens interests first. We have a good relation with the General Mayoralty and we are offering our full support for the city wide projects.

Being in my second term, I have implemented different projects in the field of urban development and most of the time I was the first to do so in Bucharest. Time has showed me that the valuable and sustainable projects that have worked in the 3rd District have been transferred successfully to other districts. Therefore I could state that my solution for an integrated development of the Capital City has been that of assuring the 3rd District's capacity of developing high quality projects that also have a high transferability rate.