



## Visions by the City Representatives

### Tomáš Macura, Mayor of the City of Ostrava (CZ)

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.- It is a great pleasure talking to you again after our two meetings in 2016. It's been about two years now since Ostrava has joined the URBACT-InFocus network and we already know that your Action Plan within this framework is pretty well-focused on talent attraction. Why this choice?**

Tomáš Macura: The City of Ostrava experiences historic economic growth and nowadays, we have the best opportunity to invest in new ideas and technologies. Local companies and foreign investors are optimistic and they invest in new research capacities and innovations, the unemployment rates are extremely low.

On the other hand, we have been facing the so-called 'brain drain' in recent years, when talented and qualified people move for better salaries or opportunities to other cities in the Czech Republic, like Prague or Brno, or to other places in Europe. The firms lack skilled and qualified labour force. There is also low entrepreneurship level in the region. Universities lack more innovative researchers and innovators and talented students. It becomes very hard to go against the flow and attract highly educated people (scientists, engineers, etc.) to come over and work in here. We want to change that. Attraction of the talent

management therefore has thus become an essential part of the new Ostrava City Strategic Development Plan (2017-2023) as well as the creation of the friendly city environment attracting talented people. Among main priorities, there is also a strong emphasis on a better image and coherent brand management and the marketing strategy of the city and the region, and the attraction of new investments, but also a workers and young people.

**MR- So, regarding qualified labour force in some specific activities, you intend to target young people... even from Italy or Spain, to find their first jobs in Ostrava, which stands out of the conventional way. What could Ostrava offer to these qualified youngsters from regions with higher unemployment rates at the beginning of their careers?**

Tomáš Macura: In Ostrava, we can offer them a lot of vacant jobs by attractive employers, especially in the industry. Because of one the lowest ratios of unemployment in EU, there is a hunger for qualified technical skilled or educated people. There are many international companies as well, offering start jobs with a lot of international colleagues, e.g. in the IT sector, and growing start-ups scene. For many people, Ostrava could be the city, where their new stories will begin.

What is very attractive in Ostrava for many visitors or newcomers is our industrial heritage combined with creativity, culture and famous events (Colours of Ostrava, Golden Spike, NATO days), communities and possibilities for leisure - many sport facilities and events prepared for children, as well as clubs, bars, restaurants with traditional food and the best beer in the world.

In many city districts, there is very affordable housing (high standard of living for very convenient prizes), which makes Ostrava - together with modern public transport system, easy accessible health services and feeling of safety - really high quality place for living.

Ostrava is closer to people with its open society, friendly inhabitants and beautiful girls. With local stakeholders involved in the In Focus project, we are now preparing activities for welcoming and soft-

landing of newcomers to this region. Ostrava is close to nature with a lot of greenery, trees, forests, parks, water areas in the city, and mountains an hour away. And Ostrava is close to the world with good connections to highways, top quality and fast railway connections to the capital city of Prague and other cities and airports in the heart of Europe.

**MR.- Ostrava is the administrative capital of Moravian-Silesian Region, which has a smart specialization strategy in place. MSIC, the Moravian-Silesian Innovation Centre, has just opened its doors in Ostrava in July 2017. I guess, we call it playing a catalyst role in your current transition from the let's say old industrialism to an advanced knowledge-based economy within the EU context. What are the concrete vision and plan for this new facility?**

Tomáš Macura: We would like to put Ostrava and the Moravian-Silesian region on the world map and become easily recognized for our great potential. We believe in our firms, engineers and scientists in the region and MSIC should help to connect the world of their innovative and ambitious ideas with the investments and the growing markets around the world. The innovation centre aims, with its specialized and tailor-made services, at ambitious small and medium-size growing companies with a high degree of specialization. Its vision is to become a respected partner for private and academic research and development organizations and to help strengthening the innovation ecosystem through a variety of services – coaching, networking, finance, etc.

**MR- To what extent the smart specialisation approach and RIS3-MSR in particular can be helpful for your work on talent attraction? Can you please give us some concrete example?**

Tomáš Macura: We need a focussed cooperation in the main domains of the economy, where the gap between the demand and supply of skilled and qualified labour force is the biggest – advanced manufacturing, automotive industry, ICT sector, energy, etc. RIS3 approach, applied through partnership of MSIC and the local innovation

ecosystem will help focussing on specific needs of the companies which are looking for new human resources, especially talented people. Combining the partnership within the URBACT project and the newly formed community within the Moravian-Silesian Innovation Centre helps when searching for the best suited projects and services, while guaranteeing that the programme and the planned projects will be implemented and sustainable in the future.

**MR.- Brno and Ostrava are the second and third largest cities in the Czech Republic respectively. Both are joining efforts when showcasing themselves as business locations at real estate big shows like MIPIM-Cannes or EXPO REAL-Munich. We usually consider them as competing cities. How do you envisage that rivalry vs. the cooperative relationship?**

Tomáš Macura: Generally in Ostrava, we prefer to talk about where we can benefit, not how we compete.

In the concept of joint exhibitions, we have been inspired by several trade fairs in other cities and regions, such as Polish or German ones. It turns out that a joint presentation, not only together with Brno, but also with Prague and the regions, is beneficial for Ostrava in several aspects. This demonstrates an increasing interest in our presentations. The combined stand is naturally more popular, which increases the effect of the entire presentation. The organization of the first two combined stands was organized by Ostrava, and this year we have passed the organizational relay to Prague and Brno.

For visitors of trade fairs, it is practical that they can attend several meetings in a single place. We also have a positive response to the joint presentation by Czech investors, developers and other consultancy and law firms which regularly participate in the fairs as co-exhibitors. Some of them are competing with each other, yet they are with us within a combined stand.