

Land use management for sustainable European cities

>> Interview with Mircea DOLHA Vice Mayor of Baia Mare, Romania

Interview



Mircea DOLHA Vice Mayor of Baia Mare

1. Mr. Dolha, could you describe in one sentence the Local Action Plan of Baia Mare?

An Urban Strategic Plan, area based, which aims to give to Municipality of Baia Mare policies and tools capable to regenerate environmentally degraded industrial areas and recover them in the benefit of community – transformation of brown fields into tourist, landscape and cultural corridor.

2. What are the real problems, needs or challenges that the LAP addresses?

Eliminating pollution (lead/soil, water and air contamination), transforming a closed mine into

a mining museum complemented with accommodation location (in order to maintain the landscape's beauty and launch new local economic, cultural and social activities)

3. What are the specific features of the context that have shaped the LAP?

First thing to be considered was the fact that we had no land use strategy, but rather a collection of Urban Plans: General Urban Plan (PUG), several Zone Urban Plans (PUZ) and Detail Urban Plans (PUD). The first approach was to have a strategic vision, so that our first step was to upgrade the Strategy of our Municipality together with an Integrated Urban Development Plan: so that, after three years of investing in town planning initiatives, Baia Mare has a proper strategic plan and a PIDU (Integrated Urban Development Plan). As a consequence, the LUMASEC LAP had to be correlated with this new strategy developed by the Municipality of Baia Mare in which we stated:

- Closing the polluting enterprises, promoting transparent public policies to fight against health risks and establishing viable functions of the territory, is to remain compatible with the principles of sustainable development,
- Transformation into reality the aim (also expressed into the new strategy), to create the tourist and cultural corridor Ferneziu – Firiza - Valea Neagra – Blidari - Izvoare resort,
- Urban Regeneration of degraded areas (five different areas within the city boundaries) and recovering them in the benefit of community – the neighbourhood of Ferneziu has to be seen as an example to be used also for other neighbourhoods in Baia Mare and Maramures,
- Historical and active pollution still represents a problem for the city

4. What are the key aims of the LAP and in what way do they contribute or add something to what is already being done in the city?

The key aim of the LAP is to try to have a land use strategy as a pilot to be used and integrated in the city's approach, especially if we consider that we have to issue a new General Urban Plan (PUG) which has to incorporate some main topics,





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as stated in the STRATEGIC MANIFESTO FOR BAIAMARE.

In this respect we address following topics:

a) Environment under the logo "LET'S PROMOTE A CLEAN AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR CITY!" - The Local Council intends to support the necessary correlations between the Strategy for the city (The Urban Strategic Plan, the Poster Plan) and the General Urban Plan (PUG), by promoting:

- Options for residential, commercial, industrial locations and public services shall fit to the long term strategic vision, and ensure that no danger is in place for local communities.
- Choices made between alternative development options shall assure a sound, sustainable and coherent urban development.
- Protection and valuation of biodiversity and not improper real estate development
- Eliminating pollution of Sasa river (which represents, inter alia, a major risk for health)
- Continuation of the consolidation of the Sasa river banks down to Decebal bridge
- Solving the issues regarding property over security area on both sides of Sasa river
- Maintaining and developing the green areas within the Municipality

b) Mobility and Public Space under the logo "LET'S ARRANGE FOR QUALITY PUBLIC SPACE!" – Local Council's priorities:

The approval of the actualized PUG and of a new Urban Regulation is to ensure:

- Local understanding and solutions for "abandoned buildings" and of "degraded buildings" and administrative solutions for the situations which put at danger the public safety and affect the image of the city;
- Local understanding and solutions for of "social housing";
- Local understanding and solutions for "public space";
- Administrative answers, improving local governance, for solving the problem of moving in the category of "public space" those spaces which are absolutely necessary for achieving urban sustainable development;
- Proper designing the functional zones support-

ing land use management within the municipality - residential, green areas, service areas, protected areas where is not allowed to build or building is possible with restrictions (historical centre), respect areas to let free on both sides of the river according to the current legislation;

- Defining the directions and urban functions (Industrial, Commercial, Touristic, Residential) of expansion areas in Baia Mare;
- Defining, within the perimeter of the historical centre and of other neighbourhoods the mandatory materials, colors (plan of colors, for protecting buildings owning to historical heritage, but also to initiate urban landscape protection and renewal) and the possibility of the town hall to issue mandatory decisions regarding the forms and volumes proposed for buildings, based on a landscape study elaborated under the PUG, in order to preserve the cultural and architectural heritage;
- Negotiating with private owners in order the keep properties in accord to Urban Regulations: defining Sanctions and other consequences in case of not respecting agreed rules.
- Raising the importance of diminishing the negative effects of mines closure
- Planning of Capital Investment (PCI) – Investment decisions should be carefully evaluated as regarding the "location" and "functionality", within the time horizon for investment.

c) Education and training, Social actions, Labour Force empowerment, Citizens Involvement, Building and Increasing Administrative Capacity under the logo "LET'S SUPPORT THE DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES!" - Local Council's Priorities:

- Extension of the approach of the "Urban Observatories", that is defining the concept of the Urban Observatory (UO) in respect Baia Mare Municipality's activities; establishing the organisational and financial framework and the elaboration for an (UO) Action Plan.
- Correlating the Urban Observatory with the CIVIC Initiative
- Initiating Neighbourhood contracts for urban requalification
- Debates on Multi-annual Capital Investment

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Plans, before of their approval

- Involvement of youth in planning the Municipality future development
- Increasing Administrative Capacity through development of Local Action Groups attracting public and private sectors
- Ensuring the proper framework for training the personnel from public and private Institutions in those fields that can result strategic for the future development of the Municipality, that is urban development, economic investments, financial pacts/agreements, IT design and implementation.

d) Touristic and Cultural Patrimony under the logo "WE ARE PROUD OF MARAMURES CULTURAL VALUES AND BEAUTY!" - Local Council's Priorities:

- Promoting projects linked to the mining identity and Baia Mare as Maramures capital city
- Including the Sasar river into a urban touristic circuit through adequate refurbishments – connecting the river with areas of public interest (Gold Plaza, University Cultural Centre, Millennium Market and the confluence with Firiza river) and connecting it to the touristic corridor Ferneziu-Firiza-Valea Neagra-Blidari-Izvoare resort
- Development of leisure, entertainment areas, and fields for sport
- Requalification and regeneration of degraded urban and peri-urban areas and recovering them in the benefit of community (e.g. the neighbourhood Ferneziu, residues deposits from Bozanta, and the confluence with rivers Sasar)
- Rehabilitation of historical centre, museums and archaeological sites and introducing them and of local touristic sites into national and international circuits
- Amplifying the cultural attractions and of the special events – Chestnut Holyday
- Establishing of an office / department especially dedicated to the promotion of the touristic potential
- Regional and Cross-Border Approach – through establishing a regional network (both in North West Region and Upper Tisa Basin).

5. What are the key components, measures or actions in the LAP? Would you be so kind to focus on more detail stressing the distinctive aspects?

The local action plan is, in its final version, based

on a new Zonal Urban Plan (ZUP) – service contract: this has been the key measure taken by the municipality in order to face the definition of the LAP.

This ZUP aims to structure a new approach for the infrastructure of the district's old center.

After starting the LUMASEC project, and after several meetings with both our staff from the Municipality and the Community, we have decided to add to the above mentioned Zone Urban Plan an additional area to include the objectives of LUMASEC – the two polluted area, occupied now by the Lead factory "ROMPLUMB", and the closed Mine "Herja".

A number of actions have been taken, among them it is worth remembering:

- The individuation of a local team of experts elaborating strategies and plans
- The organization of a number of local events and meetings involving local communities
- The promotion and disseminations of the ideas and solutions achieved through the LAP process

6. At city level what were the origins for the ideas in the LAP? When do they date back to? When did the actions sparked off by the LAP start? When did they end or are they still ongoing?

Everything started in 2007 when we decided to upgrade our strategy. The final proposal for the ZUP (Zone Urban Plan) was submitted in august this year and we are going to finalize it into a project proposal for Jessica. In fact, it is a major intention of the Baia Mare Municipality to use this Urban regeneration Tool in order to face the urban issues individuate by the Strategic Plan, graphically fixed in the Poster Plan and politically disseminated through our Strategic Manifesto. How you can see the approach is still ongoing.

7. What were the key stages of implementation? What were the set backs and obstacles faced? How were they overcome? At what stage is the LAP at this moment?

We still have not started the implementation of the LAP, we designed the plan trough a participative process. At this moment we have the approval of the Local Council for the Zone Urban Plan and we are in negotiation with the Regional Environmental Agency in order to obtain the Environmental Agreement (the process

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started last year in November). I honestly must tell you that there is a general pressure coming from the Government in order to keep the polluters within our city (here I mean not only Rom-Plumb which is subject of LUMASEC approach but also Gold waste processing using cyaniding processes (a plant located within the city along the Sasar river and which was responsible for the accident in 2000 on Tisza). We overcome partially these problems two weeks ago with the Local Council decision of blocking all building permits in these 2 areas (Fernezium and Sasar River), until we will receive the environmental agreement for the two Zone Urban Plans. In the same time we have in mind to start a referendum for stopping pollution within the city. Another instrument we will use is based on a second URBACT project "BHC", where we will try to define the environmental indicators at local level establishing also infringement methods for the ones who are not respecting them. However, it is a long process but we consider that the main voice is represented by the local community and not the central powers in Bucharest. I am however very glad that now I have the support of the local community in this approach (eliminating pollution), even if at the beginning we have been only some citizens who have this planning processes in mind.

8. How did the group learn from URBACT exchanges and network partners? Describe the links between the LAP and the process of transnational exchange. What methods were used, what was learned and how was it incorporated into the LAP?

URBACT has been for the Baia Mare working team a relevant experience, especially in terms of networking and content making (new/innovative ideas, internationalisation of planning procedures, integration of new languages (codes) and reflecting into the local debate on town planning and so on).

We have experienced what other cities have done in similar situations, and of course URBACT gave us more negotiation power in order to make pressure/to discuss with the central level (Ministry in Bucharest). We still have to fight with the Government who is not willing to give the decision at local level, even if we are the ones affected by pollution. One of the major difficulties has been to obtaining the support of the local politicians,

EU policies still need in the Romanian context to be local rooted. The perception that land use is a challenge is, still only at the beginning and we still need support from politicians and technicians. However, I think that the work done by the Local Support Group permitted to develop a certain amount of expertise, of tools proposals, and that the entire local administration and the citizens are aware about the importance of this. It is now time for them to take decisions and engagements to formalize a strategic policy. A further step, after the LUMASEC final event, will be a political debate on the decision level, to see how this project will be developed and implemented in terms of strategy, tools, resources and citizens mobilization.

9. Who had the main idea, who was the initiator, and who were the main players?

The Local Administration with the Mayor, us the 2 vice mayors and the technical executives (Director of the Technical Department, Director of Economic Department, Director of Strategy Department) supported also by the consultant's team. The Municipality of Baia Mare was interested in this topic, because this subject was of importance and because Baia Mare wants to change the image of a polluter city and going towards completely different development models, locally shaped and not imposed by the central state, as in the past.

Unfortunately the Local Support Group is working more on internal level together with local institutions only and not with the regional and/or central ones. This governance mechanism is definitively to improve in the next months!

10. Who brought the group together, called meetings and provided the animation?

Myself together with the Mayor of the city, with the Technical Director, with the Strategy Director, with the Chief of Urban Department and the designer of our strategic plan, Dr. Pietro Elisei (Urbact Thematic Expert). Local planning practices are, as usual, connected to the effort of few convinced persons capable to involve people, different local interests and networks (both local and global), especially when problems are not so easy to solve and not so easy to sell on the market of politics.

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11. How were managing authorities involved? What problems arose? What was learned? Have you had separate meetings with them to discuss the LAP(s)? Have they participated in the LSG at all? Have any provisional indications been given in respect of possible funding?

Managing Authorities have been implied only at the final moment of the Zone Urban Plan and unfortunately their contribution is rather in opposition. With this occasion we learned that there must be a shift from the central to the local and regional decision level in order to answer to the real problems arises by the citizens and to assure a sustainable development at local and regional level. We had no separate meetings with MAs to discuss the LAP. Their point of view was debated (through representatives – the Regional Environmental Agency) only in the Local Group established as a debate group for obtaining the Environmental Agreement. As stated before, they did not participate directly in the LSG. As regarding the funding they are supporting mainly the polluters (Rom Plumb in our case) disregarding the wish of the Local Authority and of the citizens.

12. How were the residents or users (primary stakeholders or target groups) involved? What problems arose? What was learned?

The citizens and the stakeholders have been invited to several debates (The ULSG was inquired based on several meetings with the local community (The so called CIVIC meeting-Last year we had about 14 such meetings, but also with several meetings with the Maramures Architect Order). Main problems of citizens can be summarized as referring to different difficulties directly linkable the highest level of pollution present in Baia Mare and to the lack of a consistent (sustainable and qualitative) demand on the market labour. A very interesting thing happened as a result of the LUMASEC project. It was the first time, at least in Baia Mare, and I suppose also in Romania, when an Urban Plan has been developed in a step by step cooperation with a project and with a strategy. Actually the ZUP (which is the bone of our LAP) has been developed in a dynamic way linked to the project. Furthermore, the implication of the citizens has increased after

seeing that the Local Authority is ready to fight with all necessary actions and tools in order to assure a healthy environment for the city. The turning point was the meeting in May (The meeting of the Committee of regions) when we first presented in public our vision for the future of the Ferneziu district.

13. What was the dynamic between the actors? How did different departments, different agencies and different types of stakeholder coordinate among themselves?

Not very well at the beginning but we succeeded during the process to coordinate the actions at local level. Internal and local governance of complex planning processes definitively remain an issue to face!

14. Were any tools like stakeholder analysis used to check that all relevant partners had been included?

We did not use tools like stakeholders analysis, but we have a programme called CIVIC (a local initiative involving main local actors in discussing political decision making) that is running since about ten Years. We monitor and stay in touch with the different stake holders through the meetings, yearly organised, in the context of CIVIC. Moreover, we are starting the URBAN OBSERVATORIES at neighbourhood scale.

15. What has changed in the city as a result of the work done in through the local action plan? For example, have new departments or stakeholders been brought on board? Have recommendations been adopted into city policy? Have city funds been allocated to the actions? Have funds been attracted from outside the city? Have certain actions been implemented or launched?

The LAP did not determine the definition of a new department, but it strengthened the town planning and strategic departments. The main achievement through the URBACT initiative, and the LAP, was that the city council definitively took the decision of closing the ROMPLUMP: a very pollutant state industry, a heritage of the communist and industrial era, no more easily convertible, no adequate for the new sustainable development strategies pursued by our Muni-

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ciality. In this respect our Main Objective will be to probe how this variety of new neighbourhoods provides for the turn to the new knowledge economy. Such neighbourhoods appear to be the key element of the creative and innovative development. Most of the rehabilitation process aimed to city centres, brown fields or derelict lands are instrumental to strategies of economic development. Furthermore, the variety that can be seen in new (or transformed) neighbourhoods derives from different ways of transforming the neighbourhoods themselves.

16. Were there any unplanned results that came about because of the work of the LAP?

- Change from individual and sectoral to transversal approach, we achieved to have more complex internal governance within the municipality. Taking into consideration the education process
- Use of indicators to measure the impact but also to define the required intervention.
- Local consensus (citizens and Local Council) as regarding the stop of pollution in Baia Mare, it started from Ferneziu (LUMASEC area) and spread to the entire town.

17. Can you measure the impacts at local level of the LAP? What kinds of ways has there been an impact? (New partnerships? New ideas? Re-thinking policy?, Etc). Has the target group or target area experienced improvements?

In the past, Baia Mare worked on land use, but only on the detail and zone level within the city. The LAP has permitted to develop a transversal approach and to think on the urban scale (in an integrated way) and at regional scale (I mean here the approach proposed by Baia Mare to establish a partnership along the upper Tisza river basin – between North-West Romani, Hungary and Ukraine). It was the first time that we discussed the land use topic related to economic development, housing, or nature preservation. This dimension of integrated approach was inexistent before.

18. Does the LSG continue to meet and oversee implementation?

Yes, the LSG will meet until the final implementation of the foreseen projects, even if not all

implementation steps still need to be properly financed.

19. How has the action changed the way things are organised or done in the city?

First of all we combined the bottom-up and top-down methods of analysing the land use management. Second, the use of indicators at a district level have defined the need of establishing an own Urban Observatory department. Further, now we have a methodology and some tools to coordinate the activity for the wellbeing of all citizens.

20. Has the approach developed in the project become a mainstream aspect of delivery of services at local, regional or national level?

Yes, especially if we think of the future sub-regional development where environmental aspects are essentially. More at local and regional level, the central level and the managing authorities have been not so present in this process.

21. Lessons learnt: What were the key factors that led to success?

- A technical, citizens and political mobilization at the local level.
- There is a need to accumulate knowledge, method, and arrive to leave sectorial approaches.
- It is important that the technical support should be located on a decision level considering the economy, the housing and environment, therefore at a general level of direction.
- It is necessary to work and have the tools, so to be able to overtake the sectorial dimension, including at the same time the actors.
- Land use and urban development have to be considered in a chain, which starts with planning, followed by action of “watching” and land use keeping around projects with some priorities, and finally using tools for the operational action.
- The city should control land use in order to improve its management. To do this we need to issue new land use policies based on a proper land use strategy in order to avoid speculation and uncontrolled initiative taken by big investors

22. What are the results and experiences related to the three levels of LUMASEC Spatial Patterns / Data, Governance and Capacity building (or other

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topics like Brownfields and Urban Sprawl)?

Both of all three aspects have been pillars in the definition of the LAP. Results are:

- The new local strategic design for the Ferneziu area,
- The definition of a new local urban observatory for the area,
- As stated before, a more integrated approach in town planning issues.

23. Are the lessons capable of transfer to another situation?

Maybe, in other Eastern Europe cities having so a relevant number of brownfields (and environmental pollution) remaining as a heritage of the communistic industrial ways of production. It helps the possibility given by LUMASEC of considering the problems in a more territorial integrated way!

24. What issues are still unresolved? e.g. sustainability of funding, maintaining involvement of the partnership etc?

Many issues:

- Sustainability of funding for the LAP because at this moment there are no funding sources available in the Regional Operational Program at this amount (over 100 millions EURO). So that we have few available funding sources such as EBI or PPP. As a consequence we must have real dialogues with the central authorities in order to define the background for such approaches, including tax decentralisation.
- Convincing the Government that the decisions regarding the pollution lie at the local level and not at the central one. As a consequence we must have real dialogues with the central authorities in order to define the indicators to measure the pollution and to define infringements for the actors who do not respect our wish to have a clean and health city.
- Maintaining the involvement of the partnership because when nothing will happen in short time the partnership will split.
- There is still a lack of data at urban scale level
- Urban areas with aggregation of social disadvantaged categories
- Unemployment, continuous training and reconversion of the labor force, provocations of the

world financial crisis

- Quality of life versus the individual incomes within the community
- Education system not serving at best the labor market
- The need to restructure the public spaces within the districts
- Effects of theeconomic crise - there is no response towards the proposals arising from the EU as possible measures to reduce the effects of the economic and social crises
- There is no fiscal decentralization so that we have no tools for attracting new investments in our cities
- The Government has blocked the possibility of hiring new staff for the vacant positions within the Local Institutions, does not allow the pay for supplementary working hours and has diminished also the budgetary salaries – all these can affect the projects implementation (A EC report suggests that the local governments are understaffed and staff underpaid)
- There is no or little help from the Government for important projects which will help attracting new investments – to name only some: infrastructure projects as the ones to link our city and county to the rest of the Europe; reducing the co-financing rate for economic infrastructure project; easing the recovery of VAT or even non paying VAT for several major projects, no action against the main polluters who render unattractive our city
- The legislation on ROP is largely incomplete and there is a general gap on the possibility of public-public partnerships (which is surely not encouraged under Operational Programmes, irrespective of “forma;” statements!) which are often treated by Romanian legislation as “non governmental associations”. Of course if this type of partnership is hampered, very few genuinely integrated projects shall be promoted
- Technical assistance: badly designed technical assistance projects; consultancy inputs recruited through the “lowest price” criterion (quality/ competence seems not to be an issue...). However the EC report highlights the key problem: when the technical assistance is contracted by Ministries, the Ministries are the beneficiaries, not the local governments
- Spatial planning / Integrated Projects. The current design of Operational Programmes - In Romania does not allow for implementation of mu-

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municipal spatial planning and integrated projects. The matter is not the quality of strategies and plans (some of which are indeed very good), but 1) the one-fund concept (EU matter); 2) lack of coordination between Operational Programmes (Romanian and EU matters); 3) the scope of eligible projects/expenditure (Romanian matter); 4) the public-public partnership issue (Romanian matter); 5) lack of guidance (influence) of Ministry of Regional Development -fost MLPAT directorate, on other directorates in the same Ministries, as well as on other Ministries (Romanian matter); 6) for growth poles, the fact that sources of funding are different for urban and rural areas

- Quality of public investment projects is multifaceted: in the first instance it relates to the identified project itself, the impact it could have, the private investment it could mobilise, the way it could fit to spatial policies; secondly, it relates to the quality of technical documents. In Romania, the latter is what is mostly considered

25. What makes this case interesting from an external perspective?

There are different points that could make the Baia Mare's case interesting; among these it is worth remembering:

- How to design a local town planning process in a still very centralistic political system (state driven) like that ruling Romania.
- How to create local participation and integration in a governance context used to work very sectorial and with top down decision making
- How to regenerate industrial areas having a very high level of soil, water and air contamination
- How to completely redefine the economic pillars of a city, passing from an economy based on metallurgic industry to a post-industrial situation.

Characteristics

Name of the LAP

"ECOMURES - Environment, Community, Observatories in Movement for Urban Regeneration and Sustainability"

City – Region

MUNICIPALITY OF BAIAMARE – NORTH-WEST REGION

Who was the grant recipient, who did the work?

MUNICIPALITY OF BAIAMARE

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Involved persons in the LAP

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Istvan LUDESCHER – VICE MAYOR

MIRCEA DOLHA – VICE MAYOR

Dorin MICLAUS – Strategy director

Traian FLOREA – Technical director

Rodica PANDI - Head of Urbanism and Territory Arrangement Department

Cristian IEREMIA - Head of International Financed Project Department

Paul PECE - Director of Baia Mare Urban System

Radu BOLCHIS – Local Development director

Anca RAT - Head of Communication Department

Petro ELISEI – Town and Regional Planner (URBACT thematic expert)

S.C. ARCHITEL – Zone Urban Plan

