

THE CITY AS A LIVING ENVIRONMENT AND DRIVING FORCE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Moldova Republic Experience: Capital Chisinau Case Study

Constantin Andrusceac
The Agency for Regional Development of the Republic of Moldova
andrusceac@mail.ru

Moldova faced a difficult economic and social environment following during the transition period. Economic growth resumed in 2001 and the government initiated a series of public sector reform, including functional decentralization of services to local government. The country adopted the Council of Europe Charter on Local Self Government and the subsidiarity principle in its decentralization process.

Chisinau, the capital, is the largest and richest city in Moldova with the most promising potential to lead the development of the country and to provide example for secondary cities. Almost 60% of GDP is produced in Chisinau. At the same time, Chisinau has a unique complicated set of circumstances due to its position as the capital with almost quarter of the population of the country. Smaller local governments have received considerable technical assistance from international donors in developing local participatory strategies. While some of the technical assistance was nation-wide, Chisinau did not receive the focused attention it deserves. A visit to Chisinau can clearly demonstrate that the city needs a focused approach to reach its potential as the capital of Moldova.

The capital of Moldova republic is the major engine of the national economy. This splits the planning aspects in two actions: one is to cope with the city growth, the second is to create alternative development pole within the country. This paper is dealing with the first aspect.

I. CHALLENGES THAT CHISINAU CURRENTLY FACE

A. Urban trends and problems

The city faced in the last decade serious problems which are listed below:

- serious backlogs in human capital and knowledge
- rather weak local institutional capacities/skills
- little investments in infrastructure/services
- lack of a diversified economy

It is important to know that Moldova is for the first time in its history in the position to govern independence. This asks for a new governance system, for new administrative machinery able to face both new demand of Moldovan citizens, and the international economic and political changes. As an exogenous factor, a positive one, the European transport corridors, and the regional corridors, will connect Moldova and its capital to European economy.

II. A NEW APPROACH TO PLANNING

The city of Chisinau is in the process of designing its first development strategy after 1991. Politicians, public servants, and professional planners, local and international, have to position the city into the European cities network, and to assess the added value of the city within the regional cooperation.

After more than 10 years of un-planned development, in 2002 the Chisinau Mayorality in partnership with the Government of Moldova and with the support of UNDP launched the project "Mesmerizing Moldova", the main objective of which consisting in assisting Chisinau Municipality in designing its first post-soviet Development Strategy.

There has been designed (with the assistance of IHS Rotterdam) the guides for (i) elaboration of Development Strategy and (ii) Zoning Regulation – Chisinau Pilot Project - based on Moldovan legislation and European experiences. The representatives of the main national and local institutions dealing with urban planning have been trained, based on new methodological approach in designing development strategies and master plans.

The new approach in comparison with the old one is rather based on participatory mechanisms, with involvement of main stakeholders from public administration, public sector and civil society.

National Agency for Regional Development is promoting nation-wide replication of the methodological procedures piloted in Chisinau, and the first small town (assisted by RDA and UNDP) is to approve a new generation development strategy and master plan in June 2006.

1. What is the plan we need?

The type of plan needed for the existing context was designed as an alliance of three complementary values: technical, administrative and political. The plan which will succeed in practice should respond to the existing type of urban changes and to the institutional set up for all arrangements in relation with who gives consent to changes and who can object to changes.

It is important that the plan should respond to the opportunities and risks related to EU enlargement (Moldova to have border with EU in 2007), West – East business migration and East – West labour force migration.

In fact, the new philosophy of plan elaboration is shifting from "putting investments on the map" to "map generating investments"

2. Who owns the city plan?

It was important for the planners to clarify the difference between the old fashion planning and the contemporary one. The decision was to shift from normative society to democratic values. As a consequence, the planning legal framework has been design so far to enhance the civic participation. These days the Chisinau Municipal Council approved the management framework to ensure the partnership for the city development plan.

The new created Strategic Committee for City Sustainable Development encompasses elected and appointed officials, business community, NGOs, and community leaders. The Committee is discussing the various sections of the plan and through the Public Debate task force launches these days the plan to the public.

Probably one of the most important and difficult task will be the improving of the city governance, through increasing the accountability of local public administration and increasing the involvement of the community in promoting city development objectives, as well as building trust between administration, private sector and community organization.

3. How the plan may respond to the market and to the democratic features?

In partnership with UNDP Moldova, central and local public administration with international assistance search for more effective way of planning. The Municipality Development Concept, the Development Plan sustained by democratic administrative procedure, and land-use control instruments are in place. Training sessions helped the planning partners to share the same vision and objectives to planning.

Based on these activities the City Hall is ready to started designing the planning for real process. By the end of the year, the first draft of the Strategic Development Plan for Chisinau municipality accompanied by the land-use control instruments should be ready. Each phase of the plan, from vision to administrative procedure related to zoning regulation will be discussed with the community. In the first quarter of 2007 the planners will be in the street to discuss with citizens about their common plan.

Challenges that are facing Chisinau imply active national and local policies in developing inter-urban relationships at national and European levels. Chisinau is currently involved in the process of establishing of Moldovan Association of Municipalities and Cities. The participation of Chisinau in international urban networks is to be developed in future and especially taking into consideration the role of city in pan-European transport corridors and knowledge transfer economy.