



Bistrița

Integrated Action Plan



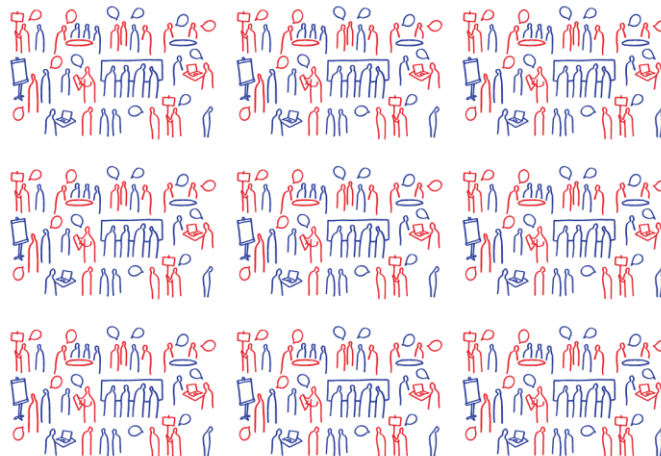
June 2022

Bistrița



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Why do we work on participatory democracy?

In Romania, and namely in Bistrița, public authorities do not have a culture of participation, not even in the way they function internally. Citizen participation is not so much present in the DNA of the administrative and political culture in general. In the same time, it is not a tradition for citizens to get actively involved in the life of the city.

Although the governing is done by the people and for the people, usually the decision-making process is very little related with the random citizens. Participatory democracy is concerned with ensuring that citizens are afforded an opportunity to directly participate, or otherwise be involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

In the past years, efforts have been made for citizens to be involved in different issues: local budget, public debates on urbanism, public debates on specific topics, still, due to the above-mentioned reason, of not being traditionally in their behaviour, citizens lack the motivation to be a part of the decision-making process.

Also, what we learnt during years and years of project implementation is that working with people is the hardest thing to do. Everyone is unique, everyone is concerned about their well-being at first, and then of the others. Which is not always bad, because if everyone is happy with their life, then the whole society is. But in reality, things are not that easy. There are the society gaps that are not easy to surpass, and usually, the same persons are getting actively involved in voluntary activities for the others' wellbeing. The aim of doing participatory democracy is to show that everyone has a say, everyone has a voice.

Usually, there is a given number of people that are getting involved or volunteering on anything, and they are known for their "activism".

The reason for being part of this project is to involve as many citizens possible, not only the usual "suspects", and to create the belief that their voice is listened to, and they are a force that can change things.

The city of Bistrița, especially after 2007 - the year of European accession, has been engaged in a steady and ample process of urban transformation and, more significantly, in search for a new identity under the new social, political and economic conditions. On the one hand the city has aspired to emulate the accelerated development of bigger Transylvanian cities such as Cluj Napoca and Oradea. On the other hand, the city, the local government and the citizens – a consensus seems to be found here – has strived to maintain its Saxon heritage and identity remarkably recognizable in the Historic Center. The major challenge is to thus to realize the



complex equilibrium between the necessary development accommodating the social and economic mobility of the urban population (including the constant influx of rural population) and the historical memory inscribed into the old buildings of the Old Town conferring a strong sense of identity.

Some politicians view participatory democracy as a threat. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Participatory democracy can supplement, if not complement, representative democracy. But in order to make the two coexist, conditions need to be met and a cultural shift must take place in our democratic institutions, one that favours transparency and openness and acknowledges the relevance of public opinion. This remains a major challenge for many democratic institutions and their representatives.

Although in the beginning of the project we started with some concrete ideas on what we will do during this project, as usual, we discovered that the beginning and the end rarely coincide. But in the same time, we must not forget the unexpected and huge surprise that we encountered, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, which definitely changed every citizen's life, the work that we were supposed to do simply stopped, and involving citizens in doing nothing...is quite hard.

SOME DATA ABOUT BISTRIȚA

Country = Romania

Region = North West

Province = Transylvania

County = Bistrița-Năsăud

Area = 145,47 km²

Population = 75 076 inhabitants

Population density = 646,34 inhabitants/ sqkm

Demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity) : average age 39.5yrs, 48.59% men, 51.41% women; romanian (85,05%). hungarian (5,14%) and roma (2,18%)

Economy profile (per capita GDP, key local industry/employment sectors): 7900

E/capita region; products for automotive industry, plastics industry, Leoni Wiring System, Teraplast, Rombat, Comelf.

Employment levels : 2.5% unemployment rate

Functional Urban Area : Small urban area

Political situation : Mayor : Ioan Turc (political party/affiliation: PNL Partidul Național Liberal) for the first mandate, elected in 2020



Vision: In 2030, Bistrița will be the most modern burg in Transylvania, a European city with a competitive, diversified and innovative economy, which sustainably capitalizes on the area's resources, attractive for tourists looking for the treasures of the past, but also for investors who seize opportunities present, with a high quality of life for its inhabitants, educated and healthy, attached to their community and actively involved in its development, in harmony with nature, with leaders able to respond to change and be responsible in building the future.



Where we were in 2019?

CITIZENS' RELATION TO GOVERNANCE

As mentioned in the baseline study written by Christophe Gouache in 2019, the cases of good citizen participation or participatory democracy were not so numerous and widespread in Romania. However, things are evolving and we can observe a growing desire for more participatory practices, both from the citizens' side as well as the politics who acknowledge the need for more participatory processes and greater citizen engagement.

Even though there is not a rich and long history of citizen participation things are evolving. Indeed, both active citizens, and elected officials have demonstrated their will for greater collaboration between citizens and city administration. Amongst the many perspectives, it appears there could be some interesting opportunities to explore around the training of students and volunteer citizens and civil servants on the citizen participation topic. Future experiments could be done on the topic of culture in Bistrița, but also further youth involvement or participatory urbanism.

All in all, one cannot underestimate the ramifications of this tension for the decision-making in the domain of urban policies. More important, for understanding the deeper layers of issues of civic participation and active citizenship, is the fact that this aspiration for equilibrium and for resolving this tension one way or another, has started to define a more elusive cultural attitude, a mixture of intrepidity and prudence, of discouragement and radicalism characterizing large parts of urban population as well as local governance. This, eventually, easily can fall back into political frustration and civic passivity. Even in a short conversation with a taxi driver about the current urban issues, that sense of an "impossible" situation can quickly pop up. Moreover, beyond this ordinary context, one can recognize that the urban policies of different local governments are marked by the same tension between hesitant and radical solutions.



OPENING UP THE CONVERSATION WITH CITIZENS ABOUT URBAN PLANNING CHOICES [CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN CITY-MAKING, URBAN PLANNING]

We consider that this is the starting for approaching and designing new strategies for developing a culture of participation in Bistrița: the development of a systematic, consistent, and learned participatory urbanism that is capable of creatively engaging the core conundrum of post-socialist Bistrița. In Bistrița a strong sense of citizenship is essentially connected to the (non)adherence to the historical heritage of the city. In socialist times an authoritarian government could decide the demolition of large parts of the Old Town in order to make space for new socialist projects (The New Civic Center). Today, besides this diffuse sense of identity (acquired even by the new inhabitants of the city) there is in place an entire legal system that protects the historical heritage.

This brief evocation of an underlying urban attitude formed during the troubled years of post-socialism was meant to frame the issue of developing a culture of participation in the case of Bistrița's citizens. Having taken this into consideration one can fairly argue that in the case of Bistrița any future understanding and practicing of active citizenship will be marked by a profound engagement with the historical heritage and its future revitalization and integration into a process of urban development. The question of its historical material and immaterial heritage can be found at the core any future attempt at urban planning. On the one hand, Bistrița is too small a city so that the presence of the Old Town will be unavoidable but on the other, on the fringes of the city, the economic and social developments have carved up a new and expanded urban landscape. Nevertheless, for example, in terms of urbanism, one notices that the lack of a polycentric approach to these new urban neighborhoods indicates the massive symbolic and material presence of the Old Town. The social, economic and cultural developments of the city are, for better or worse, embedded into this urban reality. We argue, thus, that the tension we described is not a simple infrastructural issue. It involves deeper layers of civic identity.

Who are the stakeholders?

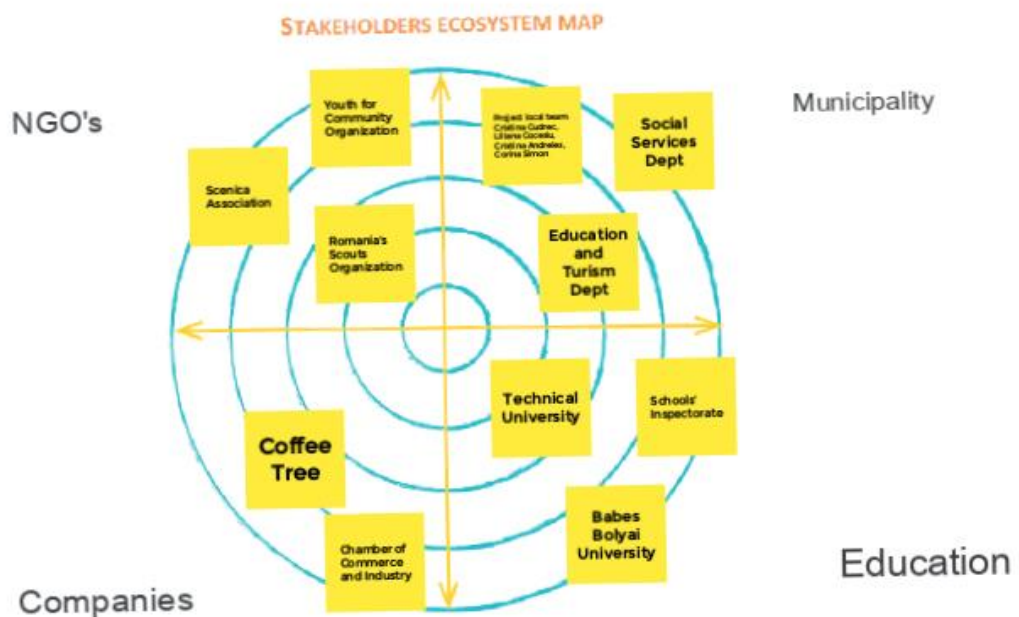
In Active Citizens the real stakeholders are all the citizens of the municipality.

The stakeholders targeted directly when joining this project are both the usual people that get involved, but also, we are thinking of new people, the ones that do not get involved for different reasons: lack of experience, lack of expertise, lack of interest, lack of time.

Last, but not least, the reason for joining the project was to trigger a change of political behavior, which, we can be proud to say that both at city and county level is seen in the past year.

As a concrete example, starting with the year 2021, at the level of Bistrița Municipality and Bistrița-Năsăud County, the participatory budgeting process has been initiated, a process of democratic deliberation and decision-making, which allows citizens to identify, discuss and give priority to public investment projects and gives them the power to make decisions about how the money is spent.

The participatory budgeting process is a democratic exercise with major benefits for the community, where voting takes place for projects initiated by citizens. It is an online budgeting process open to all citizens, the mayor's office will implement the projects that accumulate the highest number of votes from the community, within the budget allocated for this process.





Setting up an Urbact Local Group

An URBACT Local Group is a group of local stakeholders, directly involved in the implementation of the project, who co-produce the outputs of the project together with the city administration.

The URBACT Local Group is a key component of the URBACT method and it presumes that each city partner sets up a group of individuals representing a diverse set of associations and institutions. It includes both civil servants from different departments of the municipality, NGOs, public agencies, academics, companies, local shop owners, etc. It is quite difficult to gather the civil society: citizens-inhabitants, as the ones that traditionally participate at decision-making processes have their own agenda.

We tried to gather all the parties who have some expertise, interest or knowledge. In the same time, we thought of involving all range of citizens: young, mature, elderly, male and female, just to ensure an equal representation within the Group. At local level, the municipality is responsible for its own project management and coordination, as well as local activities through our ULGs. This is the area which has been most disrupted by the pandemic, as we found it difficult to organize online meetings for the ULG, for a variety of reasons. However, we kept in touch with ULG members on an individual basis, and where circumstances have allowed, we begun to meet in person again.

So far, the members of the ULG expressed their wish to continue beyond the end of the Network.

From the wider experience of previous URBACT projects, we know that an Urbact Local Group is dynamic, is changing during the life of the project. Some of the persons/associations we considered fit in the beginning proved to be not interested, others emerged later on. As



concrete example, in the last part of the project, the Group was enhanced by adding the Municipal Culture Department, whose representatives have a lot of great ideas, that eventually will be transformed into Small Scale Actions.

Also, in the last part of the project we discovered new Active Citizens willing to get involved, teachers of local schools and a Foundation that is working on preserving the historical heritage of the city by giving it new urbanistic meaning and use for the citizens.

The greatest challenge was the pandemic situation, which especially for this project that was based on active participation, thus created some very serious challenges.

Also, we discovered that at times, it is best to have as local champion – Group facilitator, project spokesperson – someone who does not represent the municipality. The municipality itself, as institution is seen by the inhabitants/stakeholders as something that, on one hand is deemed to solve every problem, and on the other hand is the places where we pay the taxes, and nothing is solved. This is the reason for keeping the elected members in the shadow: backing up the project, but not being the main interface with the Group.

The ULG initially consisted of:

- **The Youth and Education department within the municipality**
- **Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj Napoca, Bistrița Branch**
- **The County Chamber of Commerce and Industry**
- **The Social Services Department within the municipality**
- **Youth for Community NGO**
- **Scenica Association NGO**
- **County School's Inspectorate**
- **Oscar Skrabel Scouts Organization Bistrița**
- **The Coffee Tree Association**
- **Citizens, their representative is the facilitator of the Group**
- **Elected members – they usually back up all the projects, and if invited participate at the meetings, but we do not sign a formal agreement with them. In this project's case, there is a special situation where the head of the School's Inspectorate is also a Local Council**



The representatives of Babeş Bolyai University participated at the Transnational Meeting held in Dinslaken, and they could see firsthand what a transnational project is about.

One of the most important things in URBACT networks is actually the possibility to take members of the ULG to transnational projects. Unfortunately, the pandemic stole this away from us too.



The ULG added also the new members:

- **Municipal Culture Department**
- **Andrei Muresanu High School**
- **Petrus Italus Trust Foundation**
- **Stefan cel Mare secondary school**
- **Fine Arts HighSchool**



The people namely active in the ULG are:

- **Liliana Cocișiu**
- **Cristina Cudrec**
- **Corina Șimon**
- **Camelia Tabără**
- **Vasile Duda**
- **Cornel Ban**
- **Monica Mureșan**
- **Cristina Hangea**
- **Monica Buboly**
- **Monica Lupuți**
- **Simion Pop**
- **Mircea Lupuți**
- **Loredana Chiș**
- **Corneliu Făgărășan**
- **Claudiu Vidican**
- **Radu Rus**
- **Cristina Andreieș**
- **Radu Dreptate**
- **Adriana Vermeșan**
- **Nicoleta Macarie**
- **Gavril Țarmure**
- **Adriana Antoneac**



The 9 Active Citizens' challenges

During the first six months of the network, the lead expert of the project went on field visits in all partners cities in order to build a state of the art as well as draw each city profile. The results were put together in a document called the Baseline study. **In Active Citizens, the baseline study identified 9 challenges regarding participatory democracy:**

1. Developing a culture of participation
2. Enlarging and diversifying active citizens
3. Co-creating solutions city & citizens together
4. Building trust
5. Developing participatory urban planning
6. Bridging the gap between elected representatives and citizens
7. Listening to citizens and asking their opinions
8. Supporting lively neighborhood
9. Co-deciding upon public budget allocation

The challenges chosen by Bistrita

01 Developing a culture of participation

As mentioned before, the local active participation is made by the same people/NGO's all the time, and some of them even have a niche approach. So far, we have not developed a real culture of participation, for the sake of the involvement. We have started in 2021 to involve citizens in participatory budgeting, asking them to propose specific local development projects, that are going to be implemented using municipal funds.



02 Enlarging and diversifying active citizens

Extremely related to the first challenge, this one is about the difficulties in reaching out to a diverse and large crowd of citizens. Truth is that we tend to acknowledge participation through the creation of councils or consultative bodies, and not necessarily to the random citizen.

03 Building trust

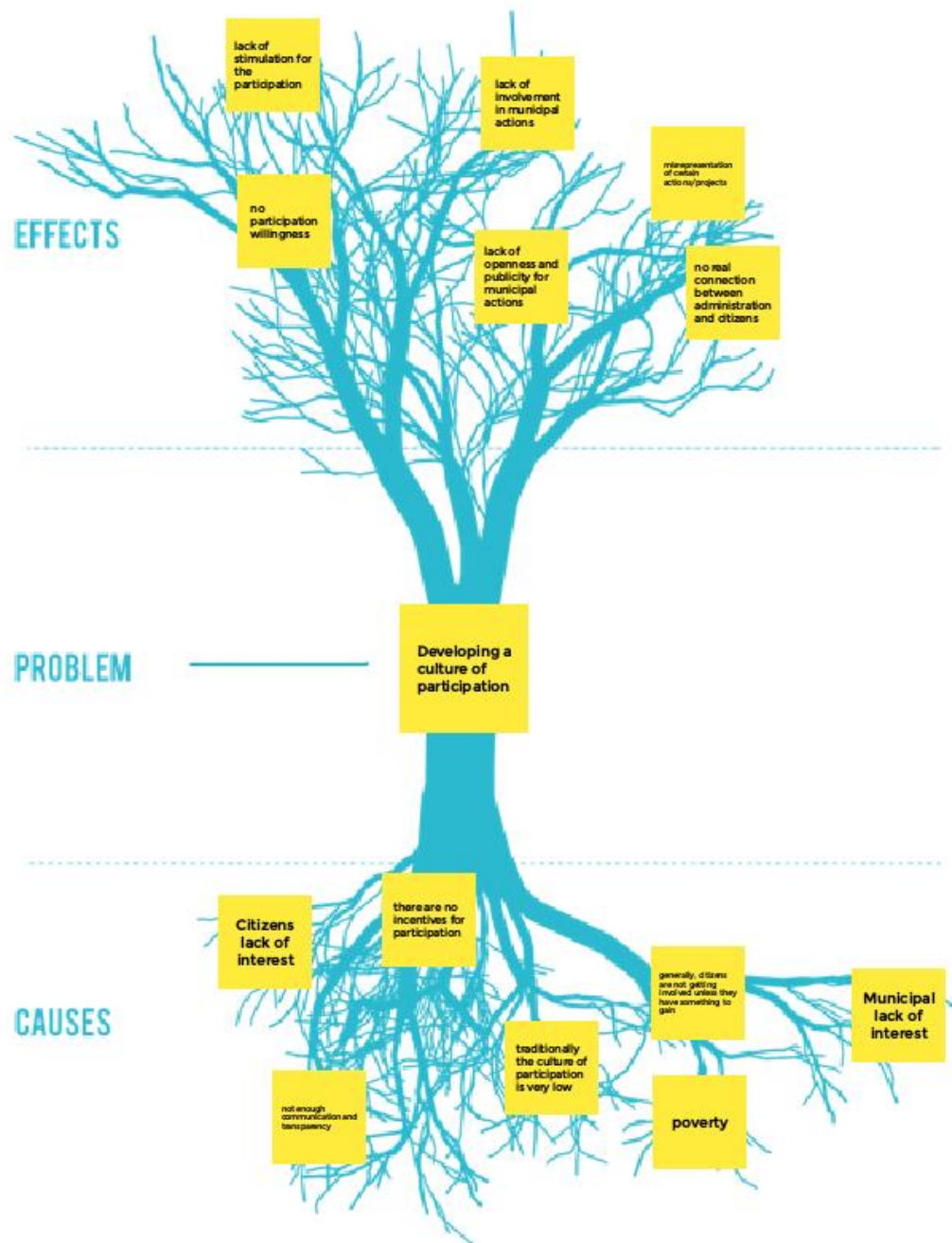
It is, most likely the hardest one to achieve. It is something of national behavior as well, a reminiscence of the communist era, where you could not trust anybody, nevertheless a public institution. Still, we have done quite a lot in terms of transparency measures. We provide access to decisions making process, follow up on the ones which were taken, approval of city budgets, etc. but transparency is not enough to build trust. Trust also comes with the actual involvement in decision making process, a common knowledge of citizens and city authority, and sometimes interpersonal relations.

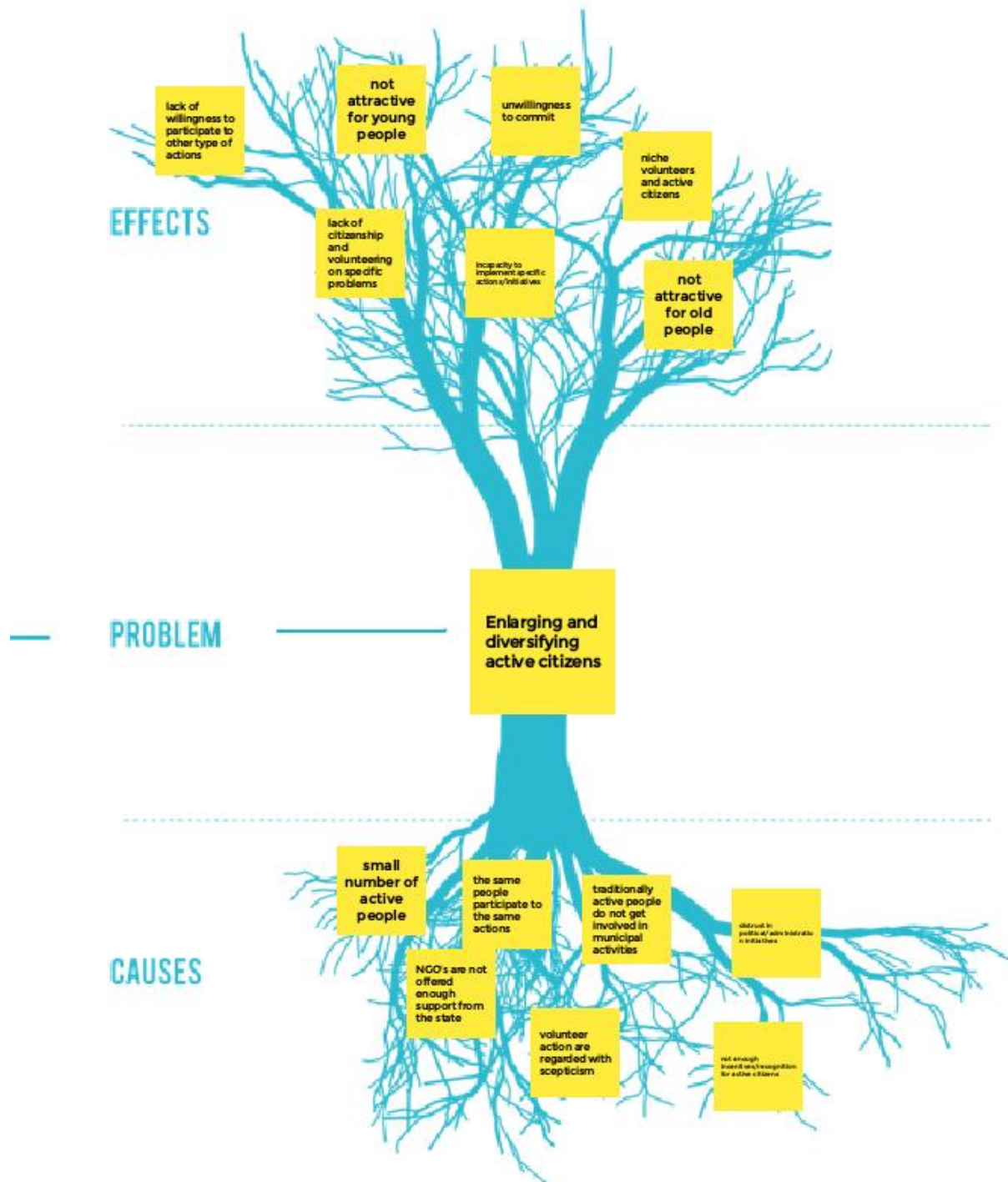
04 Bridging the gap between elected representatives and citizens

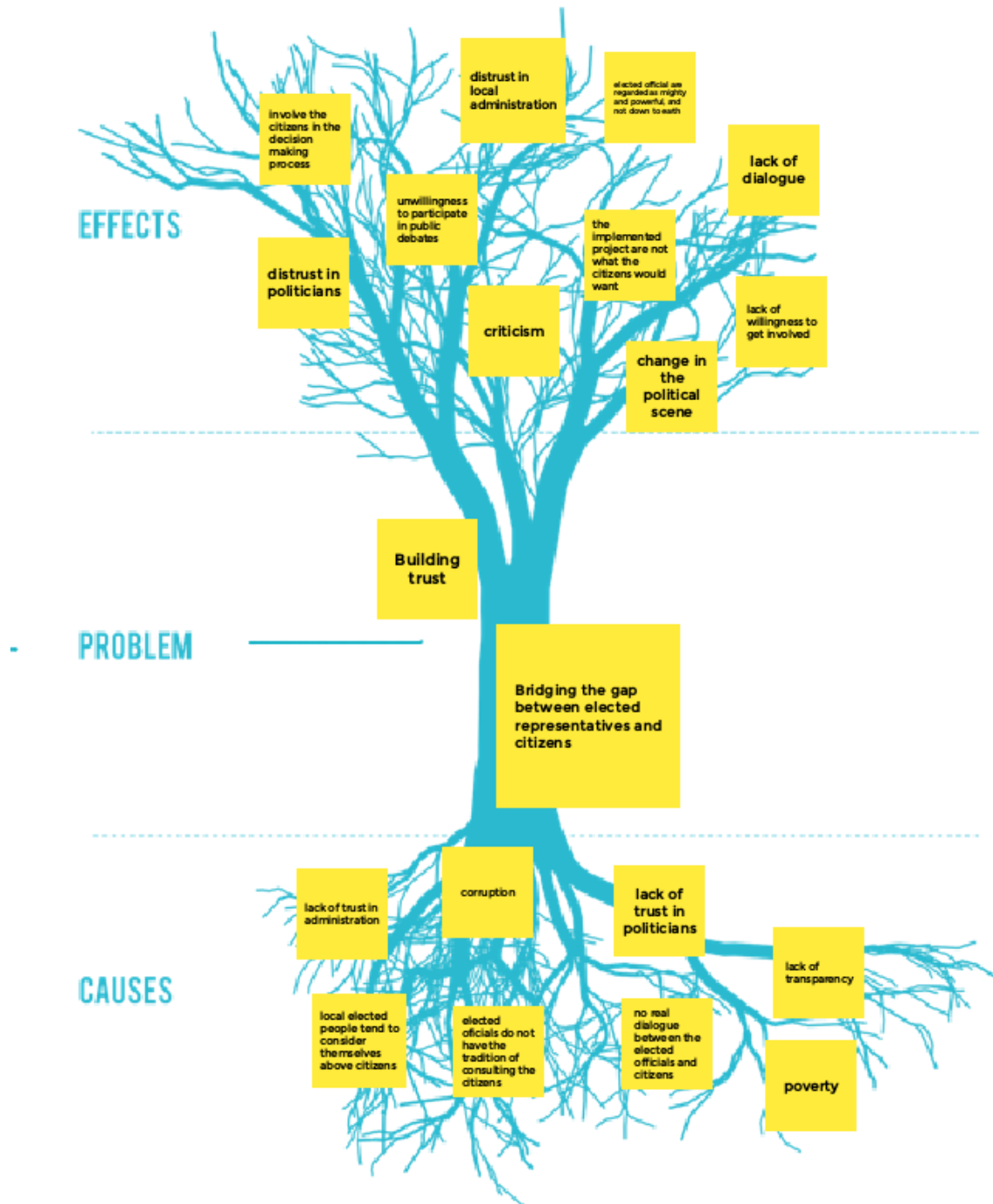
The traditional approach is that elected officials are intangible, and that citizens are somewhat beneath them. Although the elected officials have, constant direct contact with citizens, either in the street, in events, through phone, emails, etc. it appears that this does not really solve the problem of the gap-feeling there is in between citizens and elected officials. This is even more a problem since the pandemic situation emerged.

Analyzing the problems

In the framework of the ULG meetings organized online, on e-mail and on the phone, we decided on how our problem trees should be like. There were times when we all agreed on problems/solutions, but there were times when we argued about it. Just like every active citizen, we wanted our voice to be heard and why not, listed on a sticky note in a problem tree, whether as a problem or a solution.







What do we want?

We consider that this is the starting for approaching and designing new strategies for developing a culture of participation in Bistrița: the development of a systematic, consistent, and learned participatory urbanism that is capable of creatively engaging the core conundrum of post-socialist Bistrița. In Bistrița a strong sense of citizenship is essentially connected to the (non)adherence to the historical heritage of the city. In socialist times an authoritarian government could decide the demolition of large parts of the Old Town in order to make space for new socialist projects (The New Civic Center). Today, besides this diffuse sense of identity (acquired even by the new inhabitants of the city) there is in place an entire legal system that protects the historical heritage.

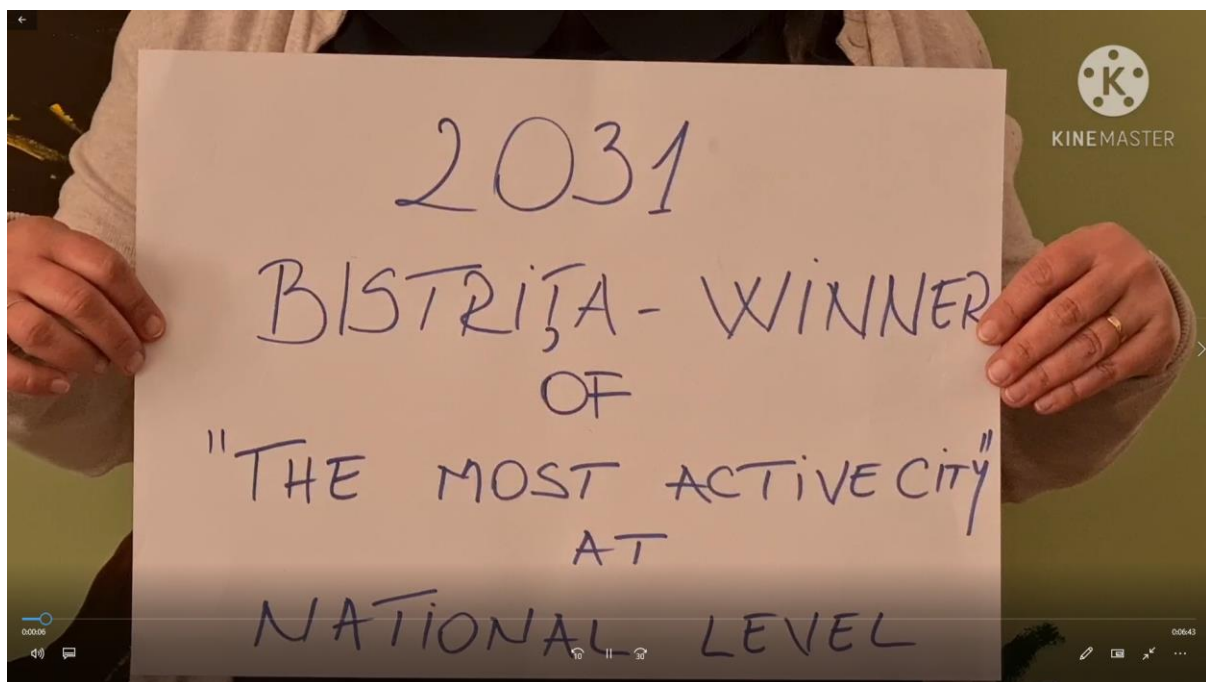
New opportunities for civic engagement and active citizenship are, thus, in a sense depending on the ways the local government, the urban stakeholders and the citizens are able to articulate forms of participatory urbanism that would then allow for further strategies of civic and political participation. We understand participatory urbanism to be more than the engagement of new media technology in decision-making concerning urban planning as certain research literature does. Participatory urbanism is, in our approach, a more encompassing activity capable of activating different dimensions of the city life, integrating social, economic and cultural issues and shaping the type of civic engagement, both in institutional and non-institutional terms. For example, the participatory urbanism could evince an everyday and informal quality that should be enabled and nurtured among citizens by those in the position of creating opportunities for active citizenship. Participatory urbanism promotes new styles and methods for individual citizens and groups to become proactive in their involvement with their city, neighborhood, and urban self-reflexivity. However, participatory urbanism represents not only a specific, procedural way of participating in decision-making with regard to urban policies but also in itself could be more than that and create the enabling concrete conditions of a culture of participation. There seems to be a strong connection between the sense of urban landscape, symbolic as well as material and the possibilities of civic engagement and participation.

Nonetheless, apart from the work of identifying and fleshing out this fundamental presupposition that state participatory urbanism as an essential ingredient in any strategy, based on that, we have to proceed to a more enlarging and diversifying notion of active citizenship. After pondering the situation in Bistrița, we have come to the conclusion that the strategic social group to be taken into account for any solid investment in active citizenship in connection to participatory urbanism are the youth of Bistrița. Because of historical and

cultural reasons (they encompass generations born after the fall of communism) the youth of Bistrița are prone to experience in inarticulate ways the tension we tried to describe at the beginning. Most of the time this sense of an unaccomplished identity in relations to their native town triggers in them a strong reaction to older generation hesitation between the new and the old city, sort to say. Many times, this means leaving behind their native town for new urban adventures. In moderate cases it feeds the indifference and passivity with regard to the city life and its challenges. On an everyday basis, most of the young people, belonging to all walks of life, manage to avoid engaging issues concerning the future of the city. Of course, this attitude, although encompassing, is marked by social, psychological and even political divides. But the fact remains that young people seem not to have the needed space to imagine, experience and practice a more articulated form of participatory urbanism and they don't know how to handle effectively the reality of an Old-New City.

In trying to find out what do we really want, we also worked with the ULG, who proposed different actions that will eventually involve more citizens.

In this regard, we created 2 short movies representing the Visions of what Active Citizens led to in the future.



The first one was about the heavy road that developed from 2021 to 2031, ten years' time of engaging with citizens starting from the point where just few people and few organizations were actively participating at the civic life, to the point where everybody is participating, how they can, to the community life, to decision making process, to implementation of targeted actions, which in the end led to the award of the most active city at national level.



The second visioning tried to answer the question of non-involvement: causes, actual state of facts, ways to improve it, etc. And in the end, the vision took us again to 2031, where all the problems were solved.

The conclusion of the visions?

The more people get involved, the happier they are, they feel like they are part of the process, they feel like they are the answer to a problem, they feel like part of something greater than just their own wellbeing.

A learning journey



About Action Planning Networks

URBACT supports European cities to develop sustainable integrated responses to the pressing challenges they face today. It offers them a unique opportunity to learn from other peers in Europe in order to improve the way cities are managed.

URBACT networks foster the exchange of experience and good practice across cities, building urban stakeholders' capacity to develop efficient solutions. One could say that URBACT is a European incubator for sustainable integrated urban development enabling cities to benefit from the tried and tested URBACT Method.

The main objective of Action Planning Networks is to bring together between 7 and 10 cities across Europe to exchange their experience in a particular thematic urban development challenge (in our case Participatory democracy) and to share their ideas about possible solutions, during a period of over 2 years. The Phase 1 (from late June 2019 to February 2020) focused on the development of baseline studies, city profiles and the production of the Application Form for Phase 2. Once approved for Phase 2, the network then focuses on achieving 2 key results, co-creating their Integrated Action Plan together with their Urbact local group (ULG) at the same time as experimenting Small Scale Actions (SSA).

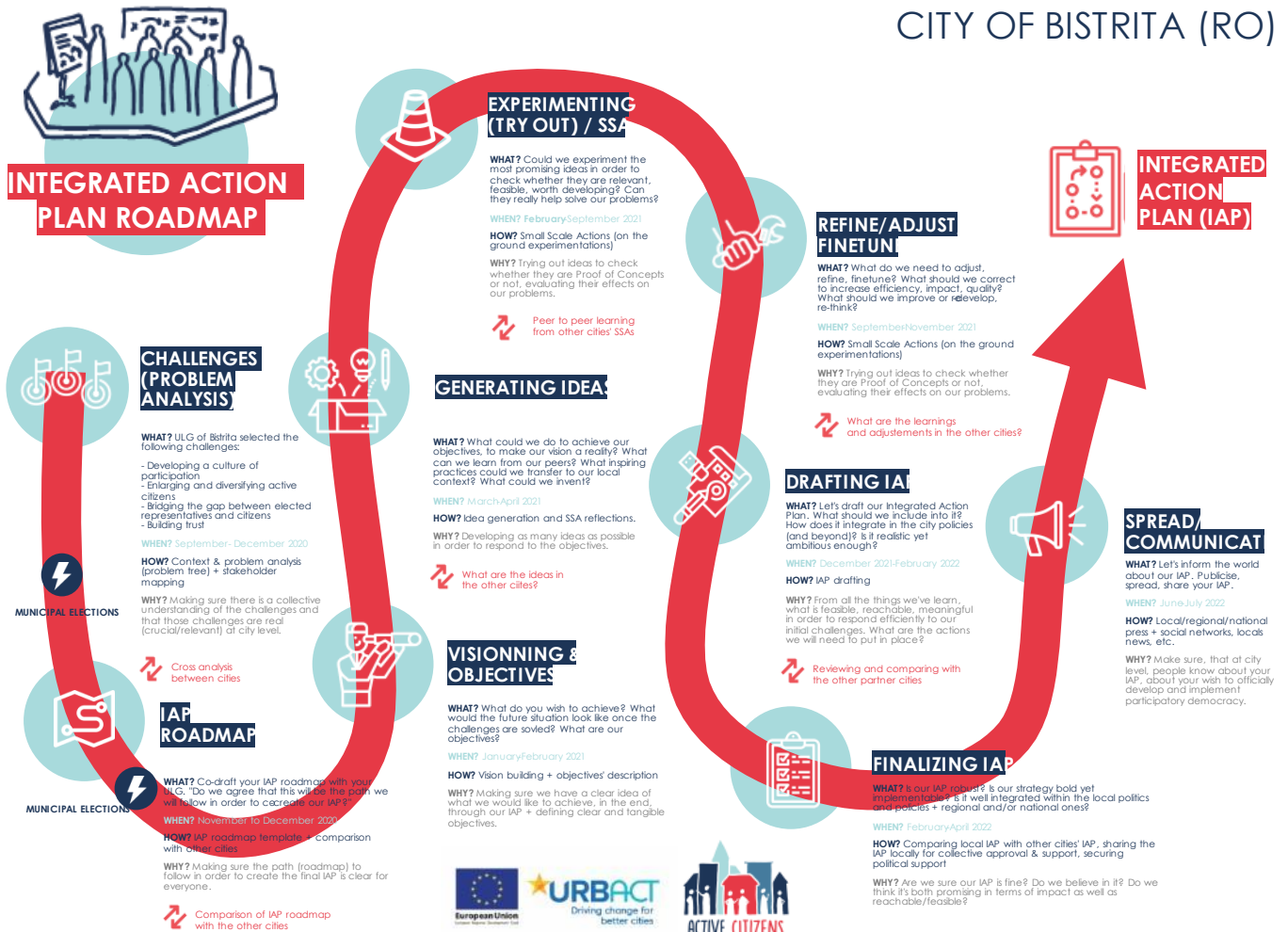
The whole Action Planning Network journey was therefore both an occasion for transnational exchange and learning in between different European cities at the same time as an occasion to explore, experiment and co-create an adhoc city strategy together with local stakeholders and citizens.

During that long and adventurous journey, Active Citizens' partner cities traveled around Europe 8 times, hosted the other cities in their own, experimented new ways of engaging citizens (Small Scale Actions) and built, locally, desirable visions of the future as well as co-created a concrete, ambitious, yet credible, action plan to implement greater participatory democracy locally.

Action plan

INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN ROADMAP

CITY OF BISTRITA (RO)



Actions Table

In our plan of action, we have decided to address this complex issue of participatory urbanism and to find ways of creating a meaningful alliance between institutions, organizations, groups in order to open up space of civic urban engagement for youth and to develop a culture of participation among young people. The expert documenting the case of Bistrița in the URBACT brochure made an interesting suggestion at the end of his contribution, namely that “future experiments could be done on the topic of culture in Bistrița, but also further youth involvement or participatory urbanism. Without proposing a systematic approach to the question at hand the expert intuitively and seminally connected the issues of culture, youth involvement and participatory urbanism.

Having assumed a more encompassing notion of participatory urbanism, we can now connect in a more systematic way those three realities: culture, youth participation and participatory urbanism. We have already suggested that the notion of participatory urbanism for Bistrița’s citizens touches more subtle issues of identity with all this affective and emotional load. Addressing and articulating issues of identity and also of participatory urbanism in relation to those issues, involve more than formal and institutional ways of engagement and participation. We argue that “culture”, “access to culture”, “cultural events” and acts provided by different actors in the city (including the municipal cultural institutions) in conjunction with a preoccupation for participatory urbanism can create and open up a more complex space for achieving participation in the case of young people. Without moralizing ineffectively “the lack of participation” among youth, “culture” can provide “tools” for exploring, probing and expressing identity issues embedded in the reality of urban dwelling. It can create new events, spaces, communities that allow a search for a new urban identity. Also, “cultural events” offer a more flexible space of active relationships, face-to-face interactions and embodied practices that could bridge social and urban divides and forge a more complex understanding of participation beyond formal and institutional instances. Fun, creativity, intimacy, caring, friendship and affectionate relationships among those who are engaged in cultural activities meant to enhance participatory urbanism are affective realities capable of sustaining participation. Human relationships, inter and intra-generational pedagogic, affective and intellectual relationships, as well as relations of leadership, counselling, support, love, esteem, trust, management are the flesh of lived participation and they can be well articulated in cultural activities and performances.

The rhetoric of participation is of course different from the practice of participation, but they also cannot be easily disconnected. Cultural event can mediate between these two and also can create opportunities for transforming the rhetoric of talking about into an active language of talking to youth. Through culture young people can learn to become agents and subjects



of participatory urbanism and even of an everyday participatory urbanism. Culture can thus offer new, unexpected infrastructures for active citizenships that are left out from a procedural and formal perspective on participation. Nevertheless, there are structural and environmental pressures and constraints that mark the development of civic engagement. Culture can offer a space of articulation and experimentation with limits, combining virtual and real spaces and times, for example, and more importantly can provide motivation and sustain participation in time across various levels just because democratic processes take time. Cultural events can also raise the awareness of the fact that patterns of participation, and especially of youth participation, in urban community vary in relation to cultural norms, history and geography. Culture makes clear that historical memory and local traditions are important for articulating participation but, nevertheless, can allow for transferring practices between diverse local and national contexts. All in all, the involvement of “culture” in developing a culture of participation can effectively revert a lot of talk today about the crisis of youth participation and turning into something articulated and reflected.

There is another important advantage in bringing “culture” into strategizing youth participation to urban life and to imagining new balanced urban policies, especially in the case of Bistrița. Because of the lack of infrastructure in the domain of culture such as opera, theater or philharmonic houses in Bistrița, the providers of cultural services have had to invest a lot in creating alternative activities, spaces, events that were able to fill this unfortunate situation. Unexpectedly this situation has also some advantages because has stimulated managerial creativity and further institutional and non-institutional collaboration.

In the following table there are enlisted some of the actions that within our ULG we considered them to be most likely implemented locally in the near future. However, it seems important to explain the reasons for choosing some of them.

The actions listed as book club and film club are, in our vision, related to participatory democracy as involve two important parts of everyday life: the children/youth and the seniors. Implementing these two actions we intend to teach the younger generation the concept of activism, of participation, of giving without expecting something in return. And in the same time, it is a way of honoring the seniors and learning from their experiences.

ACTION	CHALLENGE(S)	EXPECTED RESULTS IN TERMS OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY	LEADER OF THE ACTION	PARTNER	FEASIBILITY/ASSETS /BUDGET	TIMEFRAME
My Dream Neighbourhood	Developing a culture of participation	Direct involvement of the students in the activities of the association project The children are given the voice, the possibility to express their needs	Youth for community	Local Schools	Close collaboration network between NGO, schools and Municipality; The power of example by the SSA implemented by the School no.6 Later on, through a participatory budget, they will have the opportunity to access public funds to implement their ideas 3000 euro/year, total 9000 euro	Yearly /3 years
Digitalised Bistrita	Developing a culture of participation Enlarging and diversifying active citizens	Easier access for citizens, thus more possibilities to get involved. Less papers/more online Less bureaucracy	Municipality	Technical University	There have been some testing platforms, where people could inform the municipality about the different issues spotted in the city, but never a platform where they could ask for different papers. The citizens are asking for one, and we consider it a form of citizen participation 15.000 euro	1 year
Job Shadowing	Bridging the gap between elected representatives and citizens	Debate between students / citizens and local elected officials with the topic given on a significant day: children's rights day, etc.	Europe Direct	Local Universities Youth Local Council	To learn what administration is about It does not need financing, only voluntary activities 2000 euro/year. Total 6000 euro	3 years
Participatory	Enlarging and diversifying active citizens	Two years ago the municipality and the County	Municipality	All department in the	Inform the population about this new thing implemented.	yearly

budgeting	Developing a culture of participation	Council started to give the citizens a say in the way the budget is structured and on what it should be spent. Also it ensured an amount for projects of the citizens/NGO's to be implemented. It still is not a format that people trust, therefore we need to have an information campaign to convince people to participate		municipality NGO's	Create ad-hoc information points Use every occasion where people meet: festivals, celebrations, etc to spread flyers 200.000 euro/year, allocated by the municipality	
What do I know about the municipality?	Enlarging and diversifying active citizens	Questionnaires for pupils to see what they know about municipality	Local Schools	Youth Local Council	Finding the perfect mix of participatory and representative democracy. The kids will be asked to involve their parents as well No funding needed	Yearly Five years
Project contest	Enlarging and diversifying active citizens Developing a culture of participation	Every year, in the municipal budget, there is foreseen an amount for projects proposed by people or associations or NGO's. They have to fulfill some conditions and to write a project to propose actions that involve citizens	Municipality	Citizens Associations NGO's	Problem is that every year the same people/associations apply for funding. We need to have an information campaign to enlarge the number of stakeholders 70.000 euro yearly, allocated by the municipality	Yearly
Forum Theatre	Bridging the gap between elected representatives and citizens Building trust	Ad-hoc Role play between citizens and municipality representatives	Scenica NGO	Municipality	To learn how things are developed within the municipality. Give the citizens the opportunity to create ideas on the spot, and	Yearly 3 years

					give them one week to implement them, on a voluntary basis It does not need financing, only voluntary activities	
Book Club	Enlarging and diversifying active citizens Developing a culture of participation	A repetitive action where people must bring with them a person living in a shelter, an old person or a child, to whom they read the book in title and participate at the debate together.	Scouts Association	Municipality Social services	The less favored citizens will be actively involved in a regular activity, that will keep them motivated It does not need financing, only voluntary activities	Monthly 2 years
Film Club	Enlarging and diversifying active citizens Developing a culture of participation	A repetitive action where people must bring with them a person living in a shelter, an old person or a child, together they will watch a movie and participate at the debate together.	Scouts Association	Municipality Social services	The less favored citizens will be actively involved in a regular activity, that will keep them motivated It does not need financing, only voluntary activities	Monthly 2 years
Treasure Hunt	Enlarging and diversifying active citizens Developing a culture of participation	The citizens walking in the street will be involved in a treasure hunt action in which they will learn more about the city, the municipality, the participatory budgeting, etc	Scouts Association Schools	Municipality	To involve citizens in an action that will give them the opportunity to learn different things about the city Budget for prizes. Municipal funds 2000 euro/year 10.000 euro total	Twice a year 5 years

What do you know about your city's history	Enlarging and diversifying active citizens Developing a culture of participation	The citizens will see how the municipality is getting involved in preserving the local heritage	Petrus Italus NGO Arts School	Municipality	As a follow-up after the SSA with the inner court yard, the citizens are invited to see what can be done to preserve the medieval history of the city 2000 euro/year 6.000 euro total Municipal funds	Twice a year 3 years
My city	Bridging the gap between elected representatives and citizens Building trust	Primary school children are asked to say what they think the role of the municipality is, and an elected official/municipal officer will answer, on video.	2 Schools	Municipality	The footage will be used as a dissemination tool in all schools, and will be downloadable from the municipality's website. It does not need financing, only voluntary activities	Twice a year 2 years
Project partners follow up meetings	Enlarging and diversifying active citizens Developing a culture of participation	All the 8 project partners will meet twice a year to follow up the implementation of the action plan	Cities of: Agen Bistrita Cento Dinslaken Hradec Kralove Santa Maria da Feira Saint Quentin Tartu Vald	Municipality	16000 euro for all travels	Twice a year/4 years

Small Scale Actions

[SSA]

WHAT IS A SMALL-SCALE ACTION?

A Small-Scale Action is an experimentation. It is an idea or a concept, perhaps already tried in another city, which can be tested to check the relevance, feasibility and added value of its implementation in different local contexts.

The Small-Scale Actions are limited in time, scale and space and by their nature have the right to fail. Cities will be able to learn from these tests, measure the results and either adapt, upscale or reject actions to be included in the Integrated Action Plan based on this experience.

SMALL SCALE ACTIONS

Having provided several compelling reasons, our planned actions are oriented toward integrating “culture”, “participatory urbanism” and youth engagement. The pilot action organized as a round table is meant to bring together experts, stakeholders, representatives of local government in order to map out the complex reality of this integration. Based on the results of this first meeting, the second small scale action is actually a way of experiment with culturally informed participatory urbanism in the case of certain groups of young people. We intend to observe and experiment with a more complex notion of youth participation that is able to touch the deep seated issues of identity in the case of Bistrita.

The biggest challenge encountered was the actual core of the project Active Citizens, who proved to be impossible to be implemented in the two years of pandemic, therefore we needed to rush everything in the first months of 2022.

Initially we envisaged the small-scale actions as addressing to all range of citizens, no matter the age, sex, religion, background. But as we started to actually propose actions and their implementations, we discovered that such a mixture is very difficult to be managed, and also the results will be hard to be quantified.

Therefore, we created three different small-scale actions, targeted to different audience. The first one was addressed to youth participation in cultural urbanism, in the framework of a round table.

The second one was also connected to cultural urbanism, but targeted to a more practical aspect of it, namely the revival of historical inner courtyards for the use of all citizens.

The third one addressed the involvement of school children in different activities connected with active participation. Plus, they got to involve their parents as well, so we created a moment of bonding between school/children/family/parents/municipality.

Initially we imagined a project where all people would get involved in implementing the same actions, but after a while we realized it would be easier to address to targeted audience with targeted actions.

The feedback after the implementation of all the small-scale actions was very vivid. We reached our aim to involve the citizens, and after the events, other citizens who heard about the event, contacted us and asked how can they get involved and how can we replicate the events.

SMALL SCALE ACTION N°1



TITLE: The small city is slowly stealing you? The youth, the city and the culture of participation

Active Citizens challenge: Developing a culture of participation

Description: in the format of a round table, three experts, namely Miki Braniste, Dan Coman and Cornel Ban had an open debate with high school and university students. We started from the premise that what we call "culture" and "access to culture" can stimulate a lively, reflective, critical and committed way of imagining and practicing urban living and "good living" - with all the social, economic, ecological, infrastructure - in a city like Bistrița.

On the one hand, the events, actions and discourses of the "cultural sector" can stimulate the development of a participatory and inclusive urbanism. On the other hand, at the same time, we must be aware that very often the "cultural sector" through the type of conventional events it promotes misses the chance to stimulate the culture of participation among young people. We discussed with our guests this relationship between "urban culture", "youth culture", "cultural sector" and "urban housing" trying to imagine and propose without moralizing "lack of participation" but how too often new types of events, actions, spaces, communities in the culture of the city happen. It is time to reconsider the urban dynamics of

the centers and peripheries, of the "province", of the cultural policies and the urban heritage - material and intangible, in terms of new opportunities that must be used creatively. But for that we need to understand what these opportunities are.

Due to the pandemic situation, the organization of the event is hybrid, live and on-line.



The expert commenting on the current situation and the future perspectives for active citizenship in Bistrita mentioned in his concluding remarks that he identified three main domains for future experiments: the topic of culture, youth participation and participatory urbanism.

The first small scale action that we proposed in Bistrita was designed as a round table and, because of pandemic regulations, it was organized, on January 20, as a hybrid event, in-person in the main hall of the municipal cultural center, and online/live on social media. Apart from pandemic limitations we intended to experiment with the online capability of reaching out especially young people on social media. The topic that we put forward for open discussion with our guests and audience was the complex relationships between the cultural sector, participatory urbanism and youth civic and cultural engagement. Can one develop a flexible action concept for mapping out and for integrating these important dimensions of urban life? The stake of this round table as small-scale action was to open up a space for exploratory conversations between experts in the above-mentioned fields and the general public.



However, in our promotional effort before the event, we targeted especially the youth as the main segment of the audience. The round table was based on the premise that actually the complex relationships we wanted to address were mainly unexplored both in terms of collaborations between local institutions and more fundamentally, in conceptual and ideational terms. Why do we want to elaborate actual strategies of developing civic participation around culture events and participatory urbanism? Why do we think that the cultural sector can offer substantial opportunities to participatory urbanism and youth civic engagement? How do we have to understand these notions in order to develop a specific plan of action?

Event presentation/promotion: We were keen in the organization and promotion (textual and imagistic) of the event to emphasize that the event was not a meeting of experts talking their own specialized language but was meant for the general public, especially the young people, in a form of an open dialogue and conversation. For start we wanted to propose a “catchy” title and promotional image/poster that would realistically capture both the disillusion of many young people with their “provincial”, “small town” but also the aspirational opportunities of this city (see the poster). The title of event, as a “tongue-in cheek” move with a question mark, was a famous verse from a romantic Romanian poet expressing his laments about the condition of “small town” with no higher horizons: “The small city is slowly stealing you?” It refers to the fact that, for worse, the small, grey, provincial town is capable of sucking up your energy leaving you with no future opportunities. Many young persons with whom we talked before and after the event recognized the verse and the ironic move and joked about it by replacing “takes” with slang expression. The image of the poster was rather different presenting the aspirational, colorful opportunities of a city. We also organize the concrete space of the event in a manner that would display openness for dialogue on the part of audience and the invited guests.

Invited guests: We invited experts who had also experience with civic engagement and cultural participation. Cornel Ban, a researcher in international economy and associate professor (Copenhagen Business School), is a leading expert in his academic field and also runs an NGO dedicated to promotion of Bistrița’s built heritage of the Old Town. He coordinated several important actions of participatory urbanism in Bistrița involving young volunteers. Miki Braniște, a lecturer in cultural policy and cultural management at Babeș-Bolyai University, coordinates many projects of urban revitalization through culture in city of Cluj Napoca (a Transylvanian city that Bistrița looks up to). Dan Coman, high-school teacher and consecrated writer whoc organizes for more than 13 years a now famous international festival of poetry and has a vast experience of working with youth. Apart from our experts’ panel we invited also, the Mayor of Bistrița, Ioan Turc (in an online intervention) and the manager of the Municipal Cultural Center, Gavril Țărmure (on the spot) to address our audience and guests.



Audience: One of the most difficult tasks when discussing active citizenship is to realize the specific role of experts because civic participation is not for experts alone! However, the experts are important in proposing and discussing adequate and efficient ways of collaboration and engagement together with citizens. The engagement of the audience is thus very important for a round table that promotes conversation and open dialogue. 38 people participated in-person to our event: university and high-school students, teachers, representatives of local institutions and NGOs. After the intervention of each expert-guest we opened the floor for a general conversation. We had some meaningful interventions of young persons on the spot who mainly emphasize their (and their friends and colleagues) feeling that there are not enough opportunities in the city for collective civic engagement and cultural participation for youth especially in alternative spaces and locations. Because of an endemic suspicion with politics among young people, they also concurred in the necessary role of cultural events in promoting active citizenship. Apart from our in-person audience, we had a live online audience (average participation, 20). In the first week after the event there were 650 views and then in the first month, we had a total of 770 views on the Facebook page of the event.

Tested Concept: The round table was meant to test an integrative concept in an exploratory manner involving both experts, local decision-makers and citizens, especially young citizens. The limitation of this kind of events resides mainly in the fact that they “feel like”, for audience especially, very “discursive” with no “practical” consequences. We were well aware of this fact but nevertheless we wanted to emphasize the reality that without experimenting with ideas, concepts, hypothesis and bringing together actors in different fields of urban life many opportunities of integrative collaboration between and within different domains of city life are lost in terms of concrete action. Bridging, connecting and bringing together separated domains of urban life need an investment in envisioning new interactions, collaborations and opportunities. How to design new cultural events that could develop participatory urbanism and youth participation? The main idea behind this concept is the fact especially in the case of youth “culture” (and its informal and ad-hoc opportunities) can be more effective than “politics” (formal and institutional) in stimulating active citizenship. Today, “culture” has become a very important asset in developing urban life and creative place-making that is valorization of the city as a place of participation, especially for youth.

It can be followed here:

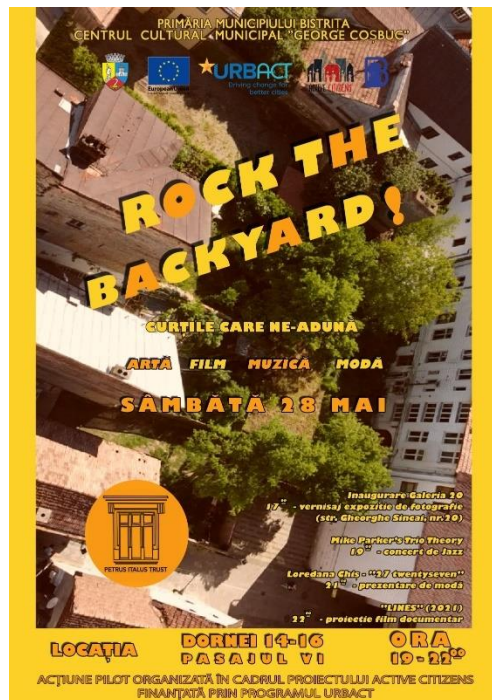
<https://www.facebook.com/events/479660373517374/?ref=newsfeed>

Date: 20th of January 2022

Budget: 900 euro

SMALL SCALE ACTION N°2

TITLE: The courtyards that gather us together. Rock the backyard!



Active Citizens challenge: Enlarging and diversifying active citizens

Description: In May 2022, Bistrița City Hall together with Petrus Italus Trust Bistrița Foundation implemented Small Action 2, whose objective is to organize activities relevant to the active participation of citizens, highlighting the underutilized community capital represented by the backyard's neighborhoods of past centuries. This attracted people who have expertise in various fields (urbanism, culture, ecology, legislation, entrepreneurship, etc.) and who have the time and motivation to get involved in the community to revitalize these spaces in a form of urban community capital. An art historian and an architect were also involved in setting up the proposal and implementation of the action.

In order to do that, there is the need to undertake a social and anthropological survey. The neighboring buildings have a complex social fabric, marked by forms of gentrification but especially by extreme social precariousness. Anthropologist Simion Pop and students from Liviu Rebreanu National College organized a social survey of this complicated context but also of the companies located near the courtyard. The purpose of the survey is to gather

information on the possibilities for public policy intervention leading to Community support for the long-term revitalization of yards.

The Small Scale Action had two main activities, connected together:

1. The creation of an exhibition place, in a small lobby. The idea is that an art space can exist anywhere, as long as we want it to. Lights and shadows were used to upgrade the lobby. To announce the existence of such a space, we used two methods. First, we organized a photography contest. The participants had to submit their photos via mail, and a jury awarded them. The winner had its photos exposed in the gallery. Second, the photos of two well-known photographs were also exposed in the same gallery.



2. A courtyard in the historical center was completely transformed overnight, from a deprived and unused space, into a place full of life. Decks were set up, to provide the necessary setting for a place where:
 - An orchestra played ambiental music
 - A documentary film was displayed
 - A fashion show was presented, with children from the Fine Arts Schools
 - Locally produced wine and cheese were available for tasting
 But in the end, the location was set up just to prove that there are places where people can meet adhoc. The proposal was that the location to be used in the future for film nights, every Saturday night.



This small-scale action experiments in more practical terms with the concept tested in the first small scale action: the role of culture in creative place-making and civic participation.



We transformed one of the courtyards of the Old Center in a creative place for cultural and civic activities. More often these courtyards are abandoned places, in disintegration and disorder, hidden from touristic gaze. The main idea behind this small-scale action is that a creative place can create new social relationship among citizens, and among the inhabitants of the Old Center and the larger community. Identifying the courtyards and discussing the possibilities with the inhabitants and owners and discovering the human resources to be involved in the actual revitalization action can stimulate forms of civic engagement.



Revitalization of one of these courtyards provides also a new, and more accessible, environment for cultural events (music, film screenings, visual arts). These events can develop among participants a sense of belonging and attachment to the built heritage of the Old Town apart from focusing only on famous local monument buildings. They also provide an opportunity for new social interactions among participants: first of all, volunteers participate in the effective transformation of the place and its revitalization and then the citizens can become engaged in proposing different kinds of events to take place there.





The event was highly disseminated in the local papers, on Facebook and the reviews afterwards were quite amazing. People said they never imagined such a thing to be created in a quite small courtyard, in the historical city centre. We want this to be only the first example, to find active citizens willing to make a public-private partnership and to allow wonderful things to happen in their backyard.

The links for media coverage are:

<https://timponline.ro/bistritenii-invitati-la-evenimentul-curtile-care-ne-aduna-concert-de-jazz-prezentare-de-moda-si-film-documentar/>

<https://www.bistriteanul.ro/curtea-unei-case-din-centrul-istoric-salvata-si-transformata-in-galerie-permanenta-de-arta-si-loc-pentru-spectacole/>

<https://timponline.ro/arta-jazz-moda-si-produse-traditionale-va-asteapta-sambata-la-evenimentul-curtile-care-ne-aduna/>

<https://timponline.ro/curtile-din-centrul-istoric-al-bistritei-au-adunat-oamenii-cu-muzica-buna-moda-si-film-foto/>

<https://timponline.ro/bistritenii-invitati-la-evenimentul-curtile-care-ne-aduna-concert-de-jazz-prezentare-de-moda-si-film-documentar/>

<https://www.bistriteanul.ro/foto-video-concertul-jazz-mike-parkers-trio-theory-parada-moda-elevi-liceu-corneliu-baba-bistrita/>

Date: 28 May 2022

Budget: 3500 euro

SMALL SCALE ACTION N°3



TITLE: activity 1: The happy way to school

Activity 2: The peace banks

Activity 3: Bistrița through the children's eyes, Drawing the soul of my city

Activity 4: Treasure hunt

Active Citizens challenge: Developing a culture of participation; Enlarging and diversifying active citizens

Description: "Stefan cel Mare" elementary school pupils, under the guidance of the teacher Monica Lupuți implemented the action is composed of several specific activities, whose objectives are:

- the promotion, by the students, of the information regarding the activities carried out by the Bistrița City Hall
- developing civic spirit among students
- stimulating the creativity of a number of 200-250 pupils from school
- the involvement of as many primary and secondary school students as possible in an incursion, in the form of a competition, to discover the values of Bistrita.

Activity 1: The happy way to school

A positive attitude, a morning that you start with joy and hope can be the premises of a good day! To help the student's well-being, we have empathetic and dedicated teachers and personalized classes that together create a climate of trust and safety for pupils.

But what if the school welcomed the student in a positive, cheerful, confident and colorful way from the alley, currently gray, in front of the school?



In the current pandemic and conflict context, we need to take care of the mental health of the little ones. And how beautiful it is when you can celebrate the world with colors, when

their eyes rejoice to see a magical alley, when smiles accompany their steps as they enter school.

Students, together with the coordinating teacher, through the brainstorming method and the Panel method, chose the quotes, phrases and statements that give them confidence, optimism, courage and joy when entering the school. Students painted the alley in the desired colors and then write the statements that received the most votes from the students.



The road to schools starts now with first class, and a very small tree, that grows as each step envisages the second class, then the third, and it ends with the eighth. In the section dedicated to each step, there is one word meant to make the pupil's day brighter, like: family, courage, patience, love...

Date: 19 May

Activity 2: The peace banks

In this current European context, we can be with the children who are suffering because of the war through several activities (we made donations, awareness videos, etc.). So we decided to paint the banks that are outside of school in joyful colors and write peace messages on them.

The banks of peace are a symbol of good in the world, of the innocence of children. Every time we see them in the city we will think about world peace, we will pray and our souls will be closer to those who suffer.



Also, the students, parents and community members who will participate in this action will interact, feel more involved and will be more united after this activity. They will become an example of good practice and together they will come up with new ideas to improve the community space. A city in which citizens are involved is a beloved city, in constant development.



The action is in relation with the first one.

Date: 19 may 2022

Activity 3: Bistrița through the children's eyes, Drawing the soul of my city

Drawing contest - the pupils who wanted to get involved in this project, designated a team of 3 students, who, on May 20, using teaching materials specific to a drawing class, drew the city of Bistrița, through their eyes, in a painting workshop entitled "Drawing the soul of my city!".



The drawings were judged by a team of students from the Art High School, and the children received money prizes.



Activity 4: Treasure hunt

General culture contest - Bistrița Active Citizens.



The teams were created of three students and an adult participated in a treasure hunt event that included several activities of citizen involvement: they answered a questionnaire related to our city, in the central area of the city, they participated in a cross/relay "Active citizens" and participated in a greening/sanitation action, in order to highlight each skill of the participants.



For each activity the teams were scored separately, and the team with the highest score was designated the winner. Teams in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place were awarded.

The children had to be fast and clever. In order to be recognized in the city we gave them all matching t-shirts. They had the opportunity to ask the citizens if they did not know the answer to a certain request, and thus to present the action and the project.



Both the children and their parents stated that they never knew that in our city there is a certain house, or that the municipality implements a certain action, that they had to identify during the treasure hunt. Actually, it is what they did, they discovered unknown treasures about their city, that they will never forget.

The Small-Scale Action 3 of the Active Citizens project highlighted the community and educational potential of the youngest citizens of Bistrița, which can be replicated later to highlight the importance of caring for local spaces around schools and the need for active involvement of citizens through concrete actions.

The link for media coverage is:

<https://timponline.ro/drumul-spre-scoala-gimnaziala-stefan-cel-mare-mult-mai-vesel-bancile-au-fost-pictate-in-culori-vii-foto/>

Date: 1st of June
Budget: 2400 euro

Potential risks



Whenever there is a new project, a new proposal, there are risks involved. Even if they are unknown at this date, as the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be for our Active Citizens project.

First, there is the issue of citizens involvement, the main objective of our project. At the submission of this IAP, the people involved had a certain position within the municipality/their organization, which can change in time. So, there is the matter of willingness to continue what the others did before.

Then, there is the question of changing the political status. The elected officials are aware of the fact that European projects existed before, they only need to endorse them as well, and see it as an opportunity to create a bridge with the citizens.

The change of property is also a risk. With regard to our proposed action, there are places that belong to the municipality now, but who knows in several years if they will still be. Also, if the locations are not now in the municipal property, we have agreements with their owners, but, also, who knows if in the future they will still own it, or if the new owners will still agree to it.

Of course, the biggest risk is the financial one, as in the Action Plan we cannot secure also the financing of the actions. We can only propose it, but we do not have any guarantees.

Integration level



"Vertical" integration

[meaning cooperation between all levels of government and local players]

By implementing the small scale actions financed by the Municipality, but actually realized by citizens, we ensure that there is a real vertical integration within the action. There is truly a cooperation between citizens and municipality also within the ULG, and as all decisions were taken after a process of co-decision, in which all levels of government were present: municipal, regional and local players: NGO's and active citizens.

Also it can be seen in the participatory processes initiated by the municipality: public debates on budget or urbanism; or call for proposals for projects implemented with municipal money.

All associations are recognized by the municipality and by the county.

The IAP will be endorsed by the local council, as soon as it will be approved by the URBACT secretariat, and it will be a proof of cooperation between local authority and the citizens.



"Horizontal" integration

[meaning cooperation across different policy areas and departments of a municipality]

Traditionally, within the municipality, the project team is composed of representatives of different departments. Active Citizens is no different. Other departments are members of the ULG and are constantly involved in all project activities.

They had the opportunity to participate at transnational meetings and were involved in the Small Scale Actions proposals and implementation.



"Territorial" integration

[meaning cooperation between
neighbouring municipalities]

As Bistrița is the capital of Bistrița-Năsăud County we are constantly cooperating with the other cities around us.

Nevertheless, we also have a strong connection with cities that are not so close, but which are also experienced in implementing URBACT and transnational projects. At least once a year we have a meeting where we exchange ideas and good practices, and it proved to be very beneficial at national level.



"Resources" integration

[between 'hard' (physical) investments and
'soft' (social) investments]

The experience taught us that hard projects work better endorsed by soft projects, and in the same time, the soft projects need the hard projects infrastructure to work.

Within the Municipality, we search all the time for a connection between the two. The soft projects provide the plan of action, while the hard ones provide the financing.

Within Active Citizens we identified little actions that can be financed in the framework of bigger strategies already adopted at local level, but in the same time, we opened a wishlist for those who have not yet a clear way of funding.