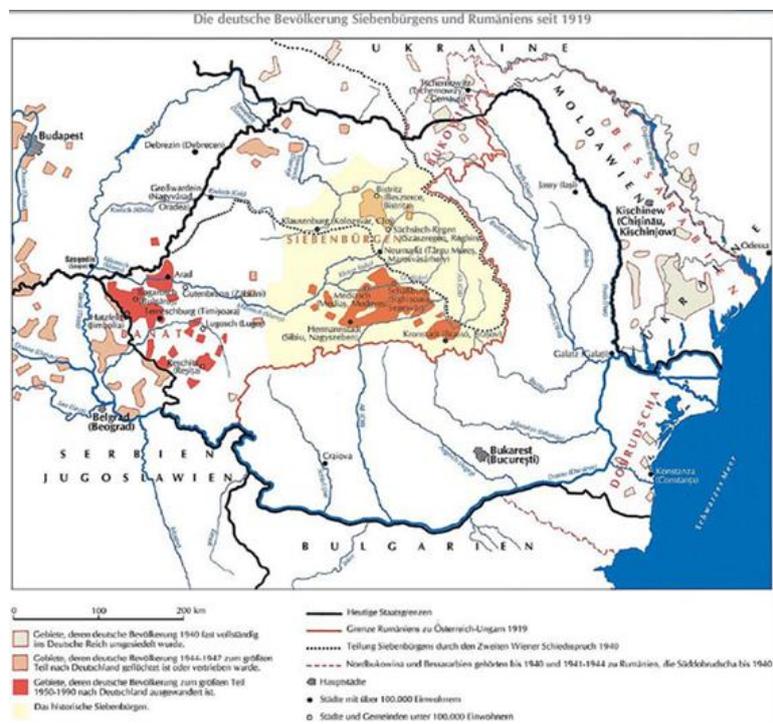


Bistrița centre shops

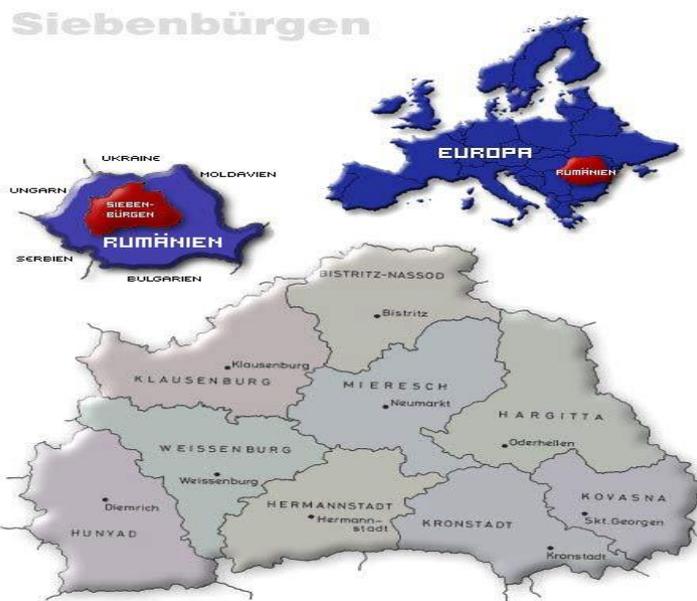
1. The project context

The region of North West Romania, where the city of Bistrița is situated has development indicators above the national average. The city of Bistrița is part of the seven traditional historical cities of the region, with well established cultural and traditional heritage including a German one. Economically, Bistrița is above the national average, but below the average of other major cities in the region. The challenge for Bistrița is mainly to position itself with a strong specific identity while also using the much stronger brand of the old Transylvanian seven cities.



Competitiveness analysis of traditional Transylvanian cities

City	Population	History and cultural heritage	Economy	Connectivity (roads, railway, airports)
Cluj	XXXX	XXXX	XXXXX	XXXX
Sibiu	XXX	XXXX	XXXX	XXXX
Brașov	XXX	XXXX	XXX	XXXX
Bistrița	XX	XX	XX	XX
Medias	X	XX	X	XXX
Sebes	X	XX	X	XXX
Orăștie	X	XX	X	XXX
Sighișoara	X	XXXXX	XX	XX



From the connectivity point of view, Bistrița is 2 hours' drive from Cluj, the regional capital where there is an international airport, 4-5 hours' drive from the borders and 9 hours' drive from the capital city Bucharest. The railway links are also indirect and even longer, while other similar cities have much better connections. This relative isolation will continue or even increase in the near future, because currently planned highways will bypass Bistrița and will ensure better connections for other similar cities, while much larger cities (Brasov, Cluj, Sibiu) are already well linked to international corridors of business and trade. In 2016, only 3 % of the tourists spending nights in accommodation in the region chose Bistrița.

At the national level, in Romania, there is an increasing gap between the cities and the regions benefitting from structural changes and those losing population and influence. Bistrița is among the latter.

Major urban centers, such as the capital Bucharest, or the North West capital Cluj are attracting the most active and dynamic jobs, but also tourists and public events (shows, music, sport, exhibitions etc). Their airports make them attractive also to residents of smaller cities, such as Bistrița and contribute to the dynamic of concentration of active consumers. Upper middle class from Bistrița are spending more time in Cluj than before, and of course more money.

The city of Bistrița, located in a beautiful natural environment, surrounded by mountains, has an organic link with neighbouring communities, nature and a rural traditional area. While many communist era industries have declined, the city itself is hosting now new enterprises (modern) and gathering work force and attracting residents from neighbouring rural areas.

1. The retail sector in Bistrița is constrained by these major demographic and institutional/infrastructure trends. The downtown area (old city) retail is suffering from consumers migrating to shopping malls or larger cities, and some merchants are looking for short-term solutions which are not viable or sustainable (cheap products, looking for parking areas for retail etc).



The vision for the development of Bistrița is built around the framework of general objectives for development of the region for 2014-2020. Bistrița 2030 vision is a modern city, with a competitive and innovative economy, making good use of the historical and environmental resources of the cities, with a high quality of life for citizens and supported by a vibrant and involved community of citizens. The activities required to reach the operational objectives are diverse and systemic, from new rules for public events, enhanced urban furniture, development of road map for social media and other promotion, models and support for street design, new urban action plan update etc.



2. The plan

During the work group meetings, the local action group has analysed:

- the research done in 2016 on the development of the retail sector
- various statistical data available from the city and the regional documents

We involved the local retailers in each meeting, asking them to pitch in with ideas that are feasible to be included in the plan. Also they were involved in organizing the local final event of the project. The event takes place all March, with a highlight on the 31st. It is what we hope the first retailers' common event, that will replicate in the future years, an annual retailers' Fair.

During the last years, both the local retailers and the public authorities have taken important measures to regenerate the trading and urban life in the Bistrița. Without these measures, the city centre would now be a "dead area"(like in many similar sized towns). These measures must continue to be integrated with a systemic approach.

A general assessment of what needs to be done was pursued and a number of priority objectives were selected. There is now a reasonably established consensus both for the vision and the practical actions supporting the objectives.



These objectives have been tailored to be compatible with the general strategy and vision desired "Bistrița 2030".

The objectives are:

- Continued care for the natural environment and good quality of life
- Development of the city while maintaining its genuine character
- Urban refurbishment
- Support for the central pedestrian commercial area development
- Development of thematic corridors: cultural, economic, gastronomic etc
- Integration in the regional touristic network
- Retailers support (training for retailers, local and national regulations)

In order to reach these objectives, the following key municipal areas (policies) are involved

Urban planning – some of the reforms cannot be completed without changes and investments in urban furniture/planning (design, accessibility, and regulations)

The current urban planning program until 2018 will be prolonged for another 5 years and will include measures reaching all the objectives

Communication – the local action group will communicate with the local authorities to find out the impact of the current measures.

Investments – technical directorate – the current investments and refurbishment will continue. Some of the buildings down town are abandoned and their image has a negative impact on the entire zone – with sound public policies these buildings can be bought and recreated as common goods and symbolic milestones of assuming the genuine character history of the city

Other local institutions which may be involved in this consultative process are the Chamber of Commerce, the Regional office for SME etc.



For the future we propose the following methodology:

- A systematic consultative approach for new activities
- Segmentation of involvement (different levels)
- Constant flow of communication
- Identification of critical milestones requesting public policies shift

In terms of transferability and innovation we suggest:

- Remodelling the urban furniture to make it compatible with the good quality of life but also with the environment
- The bold process of framing Bistrița and including it in a regional promotion package (the trend is your friend). It is important to point out that the local action group has realistic expectations of what can be done and some modern evolutions are not compatible with maintaining the “old ways” - they anticipate by promoting these changes
- The actions foreseen are:
 - Organizing an annual Retailer Fair, starting this year. This year it will be organized in the framework of the Retail Project, in March, in the historical city center area. And the intent is to make it grow every year.
 - Promotion of retail sector. We started already with the commercial map created within the project.
 - Creation of a retailer’s association. The idea was born already within the ULG meetings, and hopefully will find a proper status in the future, to engage as many retailers possible and represent their needs and wishes.

3. Lessons learned from RetailLink

The following trends have been observed:

- The local partners involvement in international exchanges is beneficial for sharing experience
- The best option to encourage involvement and fight reluctance or hostility of some local partners is to give them a deadline until which they can come with alternative proposal
- The level of involvement of local partners varies up and down during a certain period.

- The only method which seems to offer a predictable level of partnership is one in which the local action group has several options for level of commitment (from simply being informed to requiring an action by a certain date)

4. Contact information

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5. Roadmap

Objective	Action	Delivery lead/team	Key partners involved	Time	Resources / Assets	Output indicator
Objective 1 Care for environment and quality of life						
	New rules for public events New urban furniture Thematic days	City hall, Local action group	NGOs, local action group, Chamber of commerce, NGOS	1-3 years	Impact study, public funds, urban redesign, grunts, reglementations	Environmental, usage satisfaction, participation, popularity
Objective 2 Support for retail						
	Retail map & other publicity, promotion of city in regional program. Events. Model for street designs, new association support	Private contractor	Local action group, NGOs etc	1 y-3 years	Money, info, urban redesign	Distribution participation popularity
Objective 3 Regional integration						
	Promotion of city in regional programs	Local action group	Other regional partners	Regular	Info, money	Tourists, visibility etc
Objective 4 Thematical corridors						
	Organisation of thematic days, thematic days	Local action group	Chamber of commerce, NGO s etc	Regular	Urban redesign Grants, partners	Participation, popularity
Objective 5 Genuine character						
	New urban action plan	City hall	Local action group	5 years	Public funds, regulations, other	Urban development indicators, environment etc
Objective 6 Buildings refurbishment						

	New urban action plan New model for streets & shops design	City hall	Local action group	5 years	Public funds, regulations, other	Urban development indicators, environment etc
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