

INTRODUCTION

Urban Planning and Local Economic Development Program (UPLED)

Responding to the challenges of local economic development during the economic transition in Romania requires a proactive approach to urban planning and management. The Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and The Harvard University Graduate School of Design (HGSD) and are working with the cities of Oradea, Focsani and Iasi to develop stronger and more supportive linkages between urban planning and management and economic development. This assistance is provided through USAID Local Government Assistance Program.

UPLED Program Structure

The participating cities appointed an interdisciplinary team from the government, NGOs and/or the private sector to work with the RTI/HGSD team over the course of a year. The city teams, along with other invited participants, are exchanging experiences through three capacity building seminars held in the three cities. In between the seminars, the RTI/HGSD teams are providing inter-disciplinary technical assistance on specific issues.

The first seminar, held in Oradea in September 2000, focused on improving the capacity of the city teams to identify and prioritize key urban and economic development challenges facing local government authorities. The city teams identified the following key issues linking their economic development strategies with urban management and land use planning:

1. The importance of a City Development Strategy.
2. The need to support the development strategies through a Capital Investment Program integrated in the City Financial Management Procedures.
3. Institutional structures and procedures within City Hall and between City Hall and outside agencies to open lines of communication.
4. Streamlining the urban planning and regulatory process and relationships among the public and private sector to support an economic development strategy
5. Structuring public/private partnerships.
6. Structuring a community outreach process to open channels of communication between city hall and residents.

In response to these priorities, the focus of subsequent seminars in Iasi and Focsani, as well as the capacity building assistance is concentrating on four key areas:

1. Structuring a Development Strategy
2. Financial Management and Economic Policies
3. Improving the Effectiveness of Local Government
4. Urban Planning Legislation

Second UPLED Seminar

The Second UPLED Seminar was co-hosted the City of Iasi and HGSD in Association with RTI from March 20 to March 23, 2001 in the City Council Chambers of City Hall. The Seminar focused on the work the cities have done in structuring their development strategy and supportive financial mechanisms to implement the strategy. The case studies developed for the seminar illustrated innovative approaches to urban planning and

management and public private partnerships to support economic development and improve the attractiveness of city as a place to live and conduct business. The proceedings will be disseminated through the Romanian Planners Association web page.

Oradea. Mayor Petru Phillip presented the City Development Strategy, approved by the City Council in 2000. Many elements of the strategy are being implemented and incorporated into the capital investment program including the rehabilitation of the main street district, housing and social programs.

The local economy has been growing and there is continued interest in new manufacturing activities by outside investors. Unemployment is estimated a 5% and there is increasing labor mobility in the local economy. Mayor Phillip indicated Oradea's interest in updating the city's local economic development strategy and creating an economic advisory group that would include city hall and businesses to update the strategy. Oradea would also like assistance in setting up cooperative relations between Oradea and the neighboring seven communes. A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the Mayors.

The two case studies were on: the rehabilitation of mixed-use and mixed- ownership buildings in partnership with the existing tenants and owners; and a land exchange, based on a market assessment, with a private owner to consolidate the privately held and city owned parcels to allow both parties to better utilize the land.

Focsani. The Development Strategy started with Oradea Seminar in September 2000. After the seminar, the Mayor proposed, and City Council approved the formation of a Strategy Department located within the Urban Planning Department. An Advisory Group has been working, with the assistance of HGSD and Citizen participation component to elaborate the strategy. The presentation by the City Team in Focsani illustrated that the City Strategy and the Capital Investment Program are being integrated. A Draft Strategy will be completed by June with the final strategy to be submitted to the City Council in September 2001. The two case studies were on: the new city market financed by a three-year commercial loan; and a new housing project with rental and ownership units.

Iasi. The City presented the first stage of its Strategy for Economic and Social Development for Iasi developed as part of Agenda 21. The Strategy presented by the City Team was approved by the City Council on March 22, the second stage, will focus on developing action plans. Regarding the streamlining of the planning and approval process, Iasi has been in the forefront of creating a favorable business climate for business development. The City received the five star designations for the US Embassy and is very proud of it. The City has also been active in its efforts to negotiate with commercial companies to work out payments for delayed taxes.

The case studies were on: Land readjustment with private owners to create a space for a public park; and the reconfiguration of small commercial shops as part of a larger project for a mall developed in partnerships with the University and a private developer.