

Better cities, with culture

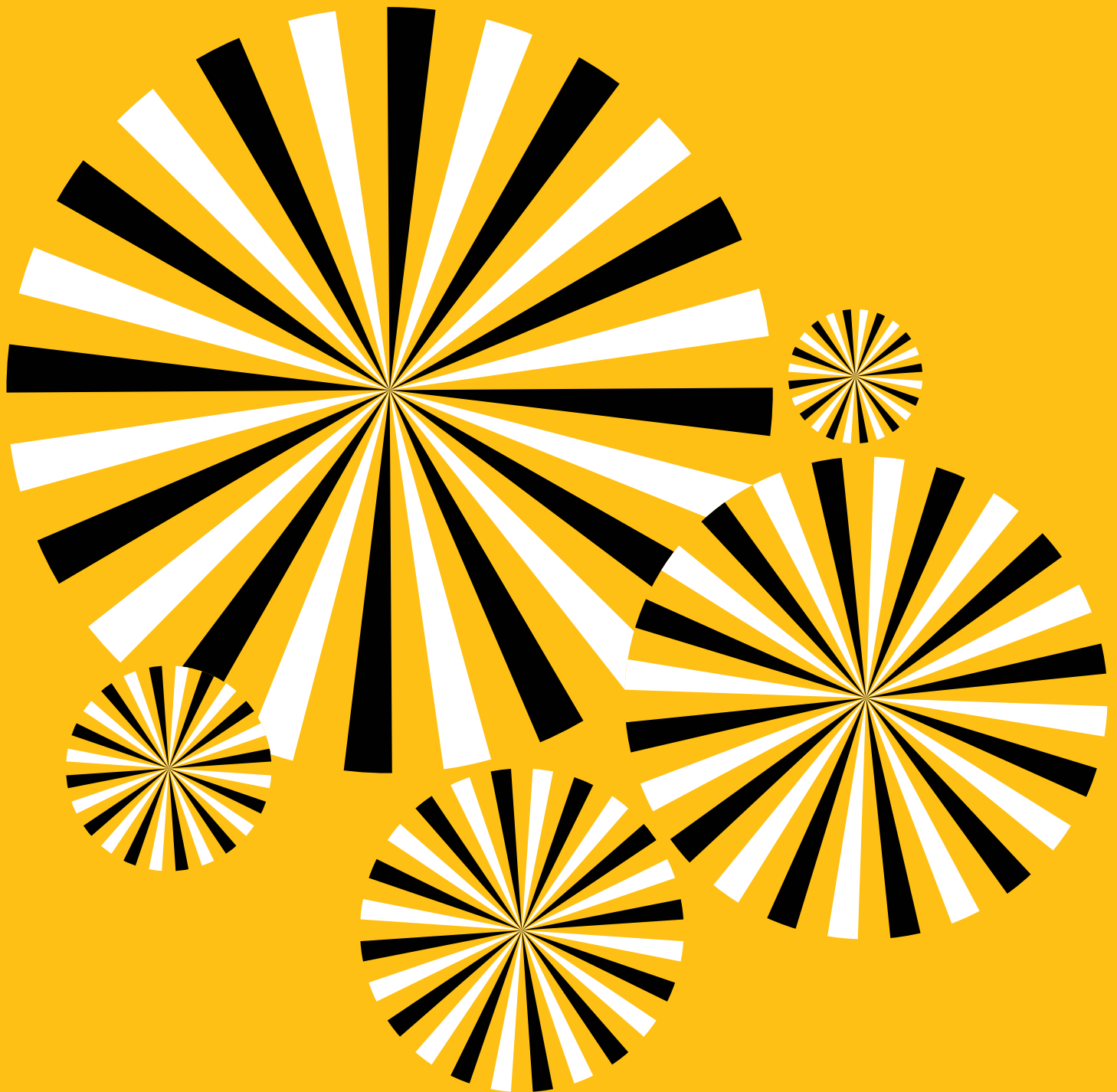
Good practice exchange between
Timișoara and the Republic of Moldova

11 – 18 October 2023, Timișoara

2023
Timișoara 2023
European Capital of Culture



Power
Station



**7 inspirational ideas from
the European Capital of Culture 2023
for integrated urban development**

An interdisciplinary team from the Republic of Moldova, constituted of representatives of the 6 growth poles cities and the capital Chisinau, four Regional Development Agencies, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development, as well as cultural NGOs and activists, had the great opportunity to explore Timisoara, Romania, for one week in October.

The study visit was aimed to enable representatives with key roles in the development of urban public policies and programmes to learn from one another, with special focus on the role of culture in urban development and urban transformation. The initiative started from the newly founded Timisoara Project Centre (Centrul de Proiecte) as main implementor of the European Capital of Culture 2023 Programme and was organised with the support of the "Strong Businesses and Communities for Moldova" project, funded by the German government and implemented by GIZ, and with the support of the Solidarity Fund PL in Moldova.

Here are the 7 key findings, considered by the participants as inspirations for the cities and institutions from the Republic of Moldova:

1

The impact of culture on city attractiveness and infrastructure development

Context

In 2023, the city of Timisoara is designated as the European Capital of Culture. This was a good opportunity to show the role of culture in enhancing the attractiveness of the city and the development of cultural and urban infrastructure.

Key Findings

Culture plays a crucial role in urban development, making significant contributions to the identity of a city and its attractiveness to residents and tourists. Diverse cultural events, such as festivals, exhibitions, and performances, have a positive impact on the vitality of the city, animating public spaces and promoting social cohesion. Investments in cultural infrastructure, such as museums, cinemas, and cultural centres, not only provide resources for artistic expression but also stimulate the economic development of urban areas. Culture is a catalyst for urban regeneration, facilitating interaction between different communities and generating an environment conducive to the exchange of ideas and innovation. By integrating culture into urban development strategies, Timisoara becomes an example of a city balanced and connected to the diverse needs and aspirations of its inhabitants.

Figure 1. Pepiniera 1306 is a project within the European Capital of Culture 2023, based on the concept of the Spanish architecture office Studio Maio (ES)



2

Nature-based solutions in urban areas

Context

As part of the 'Look at the city' programme, the temporary project 'Pepiniera. 1306 plante pentru Timișoara' ('Tree Nursery. 1306 Plants for Timisoara') offers various new experiences of one of the places with the greatest symbolic and emotional significance in Timișoara: point 0 of the city - Piața Victoriei. 'Pepiniera' even won the National Architecture Biennale price and is nominated for the EU Mies van der Rohe Price!

Key Findings

The project, although temporary, redefines the relation between inhabitants and visitors in relation to this highly symbolic urban square where the revolution of 1989 started in Romania as the last of the countries in the Soviet dominated eastern block, reconnecting them to local history and making them co-creators of identity by offering a new and unique place for a shared experience. This project helped the participants at the study visit to better understand what can be practically done to adapt to climate change by introducing green surfaces in urban spaces, and in the process reconnect citizens to nature as part of an urban experience designed and delivered by an international team of landscape planners, gardeners, engineers, and architects.

3

Urban Regeneration as community building process and awareness of the city's history and specifics

Context

Moldova has the urban revitalisation tool as part of the National Programme for Growth Pole Cities Development. Especially for neglected neighbourhoods, urban revitalisation is a chance to integrate private and publicly financed economic, social and infrastructure measures with great impact without doing harm. Combining financial policies with mobility and urban design as well as social policies in a coordinated manner offers opportunities for citizens and businesses in neighbourhoods. We set out to see how Timișoara, who benefited from GIZ support on revitalisation of historic areas from 2007 to 2010, is doing.

Key Findings

In this regard, FABER is an example for the value of former industrial sites in inner city locations. FABER is an independent cultural centre, founded by an interdisciplinary group of local entrepreneurs. Confidence in the potential of Timișoara and the desire to contribute to the consolidation of the creative industry in the city brought them together in 2017, when they decided to purchase the industrial warehouse in the AZUR complex and transform it into the FABER building. At FABER, we could find out the results of an in-depth study of the local economy production and innovation ecosystem, uniquely mixing economic analysis with an exhibition format display. 'Turn Signals - Design is not a Dashboard' is an exhibition within the Bright Cityscapes Programme about the industry of Timișoara, the main economic force of the city, for over 200 years. Analysing the impressive examples, the group could reflect on how the private and civic sector are contributing to transformation of an area and how culture is a defining factor for community building in a city with an explicitly technical and science-oriented heritage that generates a vibrant production and research economy.



Figure 2. Reshaping urban space offers more green infrastructure and pedestrian facilities



Figure 3. The Turn Signals - Design is not a dashboard exhibition offers an insight in Timișoaras production and industrial research and design ecosystem



Figure 4. The winning solution,
Studio Arca (RO)

4

Cooperation with professional communities for better public spaces

Context

Timisoara just completed the architectural competition for its most symbolic and important square, Piata Victoriei. Using competitions is a usual process in EU countries, but less usual in Romania or the Republic of Moldova. The competition was organised following UIA International Union of Architects standards by the Romanian Chamber of Architects, ensuring the highest level.

Key Findings

During the study visit, the team had the opportunity to observe the competition process in the practical way, being also part of a historical moment in Timisoara when one of 30 architectural solutions was selected as competition winner. The selection of the winning proposal was announced publicly after an intensive 3-day long deliberation. The international jury had to decide between 30 proposals on how the biggest public space infrastructure project in the last 30 years best responds to climate change, economic transformation, and local identity representation.

We agreed that deciding upon an architectural or urban solution for specific places via competition promotes creativity and ensures quality of public investments. Due to the international jury made up from professionals and public consultations already at the stage of writing the competition brief, needs of citizens find specifically tailored solutions.

Partnership with professional associations like the Chamber of Architects brings the much-needed attractivity for minds from all over Europe to develop creative and unique solutions.



Figure 5. The mayor of Timișoara Dominic Fritz announcing the winners of the competition for Piața Victoriei Square

5

Citizens empowerment through practical participatory tools

Context

Through participatory budgeting, residents of the city can propose ideas and projects aimed at improving the quality of life, urban infrastructure, or other important aspects for the community. Besides the fact that citizens can submit project proposals they also can decide by vote the projects to be implemented following the campaign 'Timișoara Decide!'. The Participatory Budget involves citizen consultation and transfer to citizens of decision-making responsibility for a total amount of approximately 850 000 EUR for financing up to 15 projects per year.

Key Findings

Participatory budget in Timișoara is an innovative approach to the management of local financial resources, offering citizens the opportunity to make direct decisions on the allocation of a part of the city budget. Local authorities are responsible for facilitating this process and for implementing decisions taken by the community regarding the allocation of financial resources. Participatory budgeting contributes to building trust between citizens and authorities, demonstrating that administrative decisions can be taken in collaboration with the community.

6

Digital transformation of the city as a cross-cutting principle of the local public authority activity

Context

'Smart City' in Timișoara refers firstly to the mindset of the local public authority team, both within the inside communication framework, but also in service delivery to citizens and external communication. The objective of this initiative is to stimulate, explore and capitalise on the knowledge resources of the city, through an organic, transparent, intensively consultative, clearly structured, predictable, and measurable process.

Key Findings

'Smart City' started with one simple objective: to have a paperless administration where information is transparent and freely accessible to every citizen. Inwards a new workflow and platforms ensure that paper consumption is already cut in half while the citizens have access to all public information available in a structured way. All invoices are monthly published and will soon be published in real time. Participatory decision making is transparently supported on the platform: decidem.primariatm.ro, on which the participatory budgeting is ensured as well. The overarching goal is to foster a new public administration working culture, with open data and secure digital identities aimed at simplifying interaction between citizens and administration.

7

Strong teams thinking outside the box

Context

A general key-finding that the group from the Republic of Moldova discussed on is the importance of building a strong local team of dedicated professionals in key-positions at the local level. Building a culture of teamwork should be a priority for local public organisations as they strategize mission success. Developing a team-oriented office might take a little effort, especially because doing so means changing the culture and mindset, attitudes, and behaviours.

Key Findings

Inspiration The team from the Republic of Moldova had the opportunity to discover and analyze in a practical way two interesting and special roles for the context of urban development, namely:

City manager: this function exists since 2006, being introduced in Romania through the Law no. 286/2006 and most mayors choose to appoint a city manager. In

Timișoara the city manager was selected in a competitive procedure, specific for private companies, something that is unusual and led to a high application number of more than 250 candidates. The participants at the study visit consider that this type of position can guarantee the transparency, efficiency, and correctness in local public administration, so as the city manager is not a political actor and often comes from the private sector bringing with her or him a more agile work culture.

Neighbourhood managers: ensure the link between the City Hall and the problems and change initiatives of those who live, work, have businesses or volunteer in the neighbourhoods of Timișoara. Each of them is responsible for two or three neighbourhoods, and knows their problems, development projects, urban plans and mediates the dialogue between citizens and the various structures of the City Hall. They are recruited by competition and salaried by the City Hall.



Figure 6. Delegation team from the Republic of Moldova with Matei Creiveanu – city manager of Timișoara municipality

Conclusions

At the final reflection session, the team from the Republic of Moldova concluded that these seven particularly interesting practices discovered in Timișoara can certainly serve as inspiration for our country, both at the policy level and as projects, initiatives and development activities urban with an emphasis on the role of the culture.

2023
Timișoara 2023
European Capital of Culture



**Power
Station**