

Community-led Urban Strategies in Historic Towns (COMUS)

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COMUS Pilot Town Analysis Report Soroca, Republic of Moldova



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A. ANALYSIS REPORT

1. Level of Influence of the Pilot town

Historical and geographical landmarks of the built cultural heritage

Soroca is a historic town located in the north-eastern part of Moldova on the right bank of the Nistru (Dniester) river, a distance of 160km (2 hours by car) from Chişinău, on the border with Ukraine. Soroca is the capital of the district of the same name and is the second city of size and importance in the north region of the country. With a population of 37,500 inhabitants and an area of 13.11km², the city is a regional urban pole and a cultural center of national importance.



Panorama of Soroca over the Nistru river from southeast.

Soroca's history spans almost seven centuries, with complex phases of urban, social, economic and cultural development. Due to its strategic geographical location on the bank of the Nistru river and along the medieval trade route linking various south-eastern European regions, the city always had an important administrative, economic and military role. The fortress on the Nistru river is one of the four major Moldovan border fortifications (the other three being Tighina, Hotin and Cetatea Alba, the last two are now situated in Ukraine). Soroca first obtained its status of city in 1835 and the status of municipality in 1836, when it became the centre of the county, this title was later abolished.

From the perspective of social cultural diversity, there is one neighbourhood worthy of mention– Roma Hill. This was built recently (in the 1990s) by the Roma community and has very large oriental-style villas which give the area a very unique character.

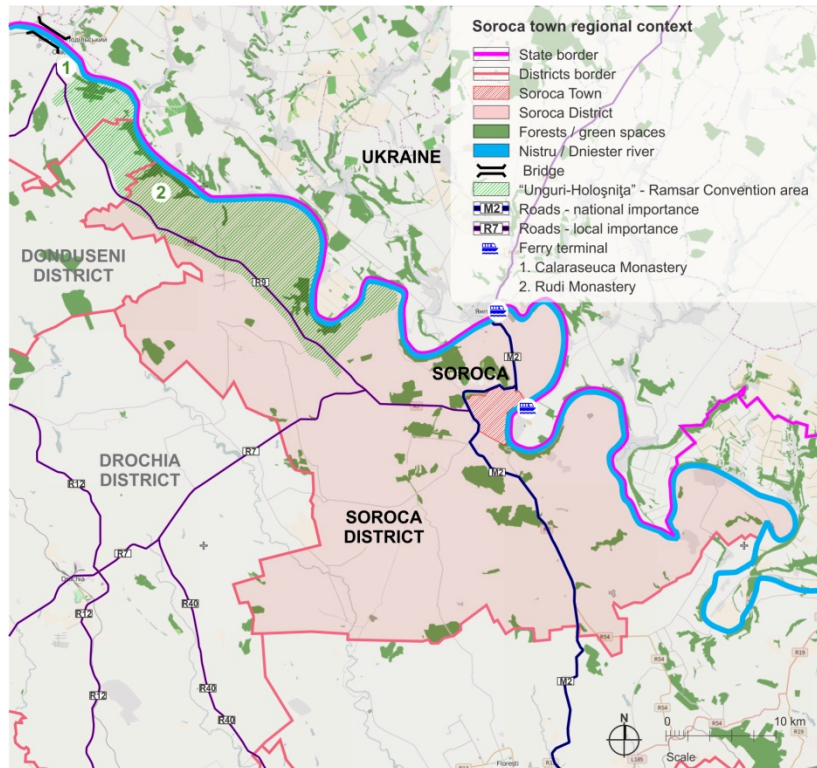
Accessibility and connections to transport infrastructure

The city has a good accessibility from the south due to its proximity to the M2 route, a road of national importance which connects the capital Chişinău to the Ukrainian border through Cosăuţi to Vinnitsa. The Soroca junction of this road was recently upgraded, as was the city's ring road to Cosăuţi. Within the city, the road to Ukraine is still in a poor state. In the Orhei-Chişinău direction, the route's importance is continuously growing as it is being used for both international transport and local daily commuting from neighbouring villages to the cities.

In the west-east direction, the city is connected to the national R7 road which starts in Soroca and links various cities to the eastern border of Romania through Costeşti. This road is also in poor physical condition. The R7 national road (Soroca-Arioneşti-Podolisc) connects the cities in the north of the country.

Cosăuţi (in Moldova) and Yampil (in Ukraine) cities are located north of Soroca on both banks of the Nistru. Cosăuţi is famous for its stonemasonry traditions.

Soroca is not linked to the rail network. The nearest railway station is in Floresti, 50km to the south. The nearest bridge over the Nistru is between Otaci and Mohyliv-Podil's'kyi, 42 km northwest. In Soroca there is a ferry terminal customs point which transports vehicles and passengers from the left river bank to Ukraine. The nearest operational airport is in Bălți, and the nearest international airport is in Chișinău.



Soroca is part of the development region Siret – Nistru – Prut. Its geographic location very important, providing the ideal opportunity to develop improved communication networks, over both land and waterways, to other cities in the country and also to major cities of the wider region in Romania and Ukraine.

Demographic features

Soroca has a population of 37,441 inhabitants (2015). It has always been a multinational city, although the ethnic structure of the population has undergone substantial changes in the last two decades. Today the population structure by nationality is as follows: 69% Moldavians, 15% Ukrainians, 12% Russians and 4% Roma and other ethnicities. The majority of the population is of Christian Orthodox religion. The main spoken languages are Romanian (72%), Russian (20%) and Roma (2%).

The Jewish and Armenian communities were very large during the interwar period. In 1930 there were 5,462 Jewish inhabitants (36.3% of the total population). Both communities were destroyed during WWII and the survivors immigrated after the '90s. Today, besides the Roma population (1525 people), other minorities include the Jewish people (64), Bulgarian (30) and Polish (17) populations.

There is no accurate statistical data on migration in the city. The census of 2004 indicates that at district level, about 20% of the population left for the capital or even abroad. A total of 95.7% of the migrants are of working age. The main reasons for migrating are looking for a job or for studies. Common destinations are Russia, Italy, Greece, Romania and Ukraine.

Cross-border cooperation

As the capital of the district and as a member of the Northern Development Region of Moldova, Soroca has managed to develop effective partnerships both with the communities within the Region, and with cities in Romania and Ukraine, within the Euro regions "Siret - Prut - Nistru" and "Nistru". There are partnership agreements with the regions: Iași, Vaslui, Botoșani, Suceava, Prahova (Romania), Vinnitsa (Ukraine).

Between 2011-2014, a series of regional, cross-border and transnational co-operation programmes and projects were implemented. The main objectives of these programmes targeted performance management, administrative capacity building, social assistance, efficient internal audit, development of road infrastructure, cultural and educational development. The "Medieval Pearls" project, which was run in Hotin, Soroca and Suceava is the most significant recent cultural cross-border project. Its impact in terms of raising awareness on cultural heritage and on development of tourism services, was high.

Natural, cultural and archaeological heritage

Both Soroca city and its district are areas rich in natural, cultural and archaeological heritage. One of the three wetland natural areas of Moldova, namely the "Unguri-Holoșnita" area, is partly located in Soroca and partly in Ocnita and Dondușeni districts. This area includes water basins located along the Soroca-Otaci road and along the state border. It extends from northwest of the village Calaraseuca to Holoșnita in the southeast.



Rudi-part of the Unguri-Holosnita natural area

The region contains rocky slopes resulting from subsidence extending down to the Nistru river, and the narrow meadow on its right bank. The variety of natural conditions in these places has led to a great diversity of ecosystems, including 6 types of aquatic ecosystems and 11 different types of land and transition ecosystems. The area hosts a large number of species of plants

and wild animals, many of which are protected by the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats of Europe, which has also been ratified by Moldova.

Soroca and its neighbouring territories are recognized as having a valuable combination of built and intangible cultural heritage. There are over 60 geological, paleontological and archaeological



monuments in this area, including landscape reserves and ruins of ancient fortifications.

As regards its rich natural, cultural and archaeological heritage, the area has several points of interest that may be included in cultural tourist routes, including sites over on the other bank of the Nistru river in Tsekynivka.

Recommendations for strengthening the level of influence of Soroca in a wider regional context include:

- **harnessing local natural, cultural and archaeological resources in order to increase attractiveness and quality of life of the city;**
- **improving transport infrastructure and connections with nearby cities to maintain and increase regional and international co-operation;**

Rock monastery Bechir's Cave at the town entry, X-XIIIth centuries

2. The relationship between the defined project area and the functional urban area

The project area comprises the historic centre of Soroca. It is important to consider that

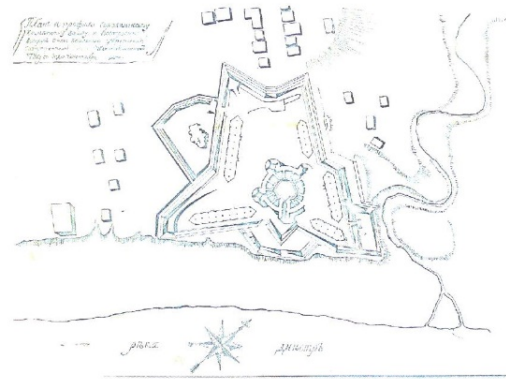


The historic centre and the protected zone

at the time of the elaboration of the present report (January to March 2016), the limits of the historic area are yet to be approved by the competent authorities, which means that the final project configuration may be different from the one shown in this analysis. The buffer zone coincides with the protection zone, in accordance with the Regulation on Natural and built Protected Areas, it is 100 meters around the historic area in urban settlements. This delimitation, again, may be amended upon approval of Moldovan Parliament's decision of establishing of the historic protected area in Soroca. The project area is 121.7 ha and contains 58 buildings listed on the National Register of monuments of architecture. Of these, seven are protected using the national level category. Together with the

buffer zone, the entire project area is 186.3 ha. The historic centre is located between the Nistru River and the higher hills to the west, which are suburban in character. The road network consists of an irregular zone north of the fortress, and another rectangular grid plan that was laid out and built during the Russian Tsarist regime in the 19th century. Both areas have a particular importance for the town's identity and require a careful approach.

In terms of land use and the building stock, this area coincides with the public centre of the town. Most of the city's administrative, commercial and cultural buildings are concentrated here, including the headquarters of the local public administration. The dwellings, most of them one-storey traditional houses or urban villas, occupy about two-thirds of the area. Next to the fortress, a neighbourhood with multi-storey apartment buildings was built during Soviet times. This is a very specific component of the existing urban fabric, contrasting strongly with the rest of the urban area.



The town in the 16th century. The fortress was preserved until today, while the outer fortifications no longer exist.

In terms of historic evolution, the quality and configuration of the built environment in the central area and entire town was determined by clear geographical factors as well as the urban policies of the different regimes that controlled the area:

- *Development of the medieval town around the fortress and along the natural axis created by the Nistru river in the east.* A stone fortress was built at the beginning of the 16th century serving a defensive purpose and as a border control point, replacing an old wooden fortification. The steep bank of the Nistru was a natural barrier against the frequent attacks from the east. The configuration of the medieval town was influenced by two major roads crossing the city: the old road, which connects the city and the former capital of the country, Suceava (today Decebal strada) and a street running parallel to the river.

- *The presence of two small rivers Țechinăuca and Racovăț, with steep banks limited the development of the city to the north (the border of the medieval expansion was also here). The high hills in the west were another natural barrier to the expansion of the town.*

- *The development of the regular modern city after the annexation to the Russian Empire in 1812.* By the mid-19th century, when the first urban plans were developed, the city was expanded to the south and the street network was partially modified in the north. The medieval road network changed less, while the old city near the fortress was totally rebuilt.

- *The evolution of the urban environment in the inter-war times, during the Romanian period.* During this period several buildings in neoclassical and neo-Romanian style were built and public improvement works were initiated, most of which were abandoned in 1944.

- *The evolution of the street network configuration and of the urban fabric during Soviet times,* when the historic character of the town was heavily damaged by buildings of differing scale and typology. Many of the old buildings were demolished and replaced by apartment buildings or high trees that



Changing of the urban image in Soviet times: multistory blocks (right) are divergent from the traditional scale (left) and close the view towards the fortress.

blocked the view towards the central part of town. Traffic infrastructure interventions (Stefan cel Mare strada) isolated some houses, which lost their access to the main street. Also during this period, big residential and industrial complexes were built in various parts of the city.

- *The extension of the town, incorporating the village Bujerăuca*
- *Recent urban evolution.* Financial limitations and lack of sound regulations following



Example of intervention on a historic building on street M. Kogalniceanu, - the facade was painted in inadequate colors, the original carpentry has been replaced with PVC windows; part of the facade is covered with billboards

the formation of the Republic of Moldova in 1991 led to significant changes to the urban historic environment in Soroca. Some monuments were demolished; others suffered inappropriate interventions such as poor quality repairs, constructions and extensions, none of which are appropriate to the original alignment of the buildings. The new buildings are of a poor architectural quality and detract from the authentic character of the historic town.

There are serious aesthetic and functional discrepancies both within the historic centre and the surrounding areas. The presence of two commercial markets along the main road – Independentei Street – creates confusion, pollution and traffic. The new additions, including apartment buildings within the historical centre, are not in keeping with the original urban scale and typology, and are of bad quality. The road infrastructure development has led in many cases to negative effects on existing buildings and related public spaces.

The large green area at the entrance to the city in the north-west is an advantage. This area is very rich in natural and archaeological monuments such as the cave and the bridge of Bechir, the ancient fortress and the hill of Bechir; a natural monument. Together with the picturesque view to the eastern bank of Nistru, they add value to the historic zone and can be included in touristic routes.



Elements of urban structure and historic evolution of the city

Conclusions and recommendations

The lack of continuity and sustainability of urban policies during different periods has led to chaotic developments and an ambiguous understanding of local values. It is recommended that the idea of heritage is redefined in a wider context and ownership of these values is promoted among inhabitants and policy makers.

3. The position of heritage in the urban development context (conservation, transformation, new use patterns without compromising authenticity and intrinsic value)

The project area contains 58 buildings listed as architectural monuments, seven of them protected at a National level. Like the rest of the Republic of Moldova, these buildings are regulated by the Law on Public Monuments adopted in 1993, soon to be replaced by the Law of Protection of Historical Monuments (architectural and urbanistic), which is currently being developed. Until the official establishment of the Protected Historical Area in Soroca is finalized by the Ministry of Culture (in collaboration with the competent state institutions), no special regulation is in place for the historic centre. Currently there is no effective system of conservation and restoration of historic monuments. According to the existing legislation, owners and managers of immovable cultural heritage assets, including religious authorities in Moldova are obliged to maintain and protect these assets. However, some provisions of the legislation are consciously ignored, others are vague, allowing various interpretations. Consequently, there are very few positive examples of conservation of monuments, most of the interventions are disastrous and often irreversible.

The pressure from the private sector, the lack of regulations and the needs for functional conversion of buildings have led to significant changes to their original appearance. Much of the renovation works were done with inadequate materials of a poor quality, and without consideration or respect for the original architecture of the building.



New insertion near the Museum of History and Ethnography (left), strada Independentei. The quality and the design of the new building is inappropriate. The buildings of the museum (centre, right) suffered changes to their original appearance.

There are lots of examples of changes, annexes, supra construction or extensions that



have a negative impact not only on the building itself, but also on the quality of urban landscape. In many cases, new extensions have modified the original street fronts.

Many buildings, especially commercial facilities, have their facades covered with advertising billboards. Currently there is no regulation for placing billboards on buildings and in the public space. This issue should therefore be considered in future policies.

In Moldova, there is currently no protection system in *Annex to a house in strada Constantin Stere*



Traditional Moldovan house in Bujerăuca, XIXth century. This type of house is not listed as a monument and very few of them remain



place for urban areas, except the historic centre of Chisinau. In Soroca only separate listed buildings are protected, and the effectiveness of this protection system is almost nil, first of all because the local authorities have no control measures, and secondly because owners and users generally do not respect the official approval procedure for intervention on monuments.

Another important risk factor is the illegal privatization of many historic buildings belonging or under the management of state or local authorities.

There are several buildings, streets and even neighbourhoods which are very old and of particular importance to identity which are not listed as monuments because the vernacular houses were not considered remarkable monumental architecture. These houses are usually inhabited by the very poor who lack the finances to renovate them, or the know-how to make any economic gain from them. It is important, therefore, for these urban areas to be preserved and considered when developing future urban policies. Although there are attempts to regulate the activities and land use in the central area and throughout the city, at the moment there is no integrated urban planning in Soroca.



Decebal Street, the oldest in the city. Residential blocks in the immediate vicinity of one-level houses.



In many cases the owners of historical buildings do not have the financial means to carry out reconstructions of high quality. Both at national and local level, there are no financing mechanisms available to support private initiatives for rehabilitation. The local authority has limited opportunities and capacities for management of built cultural heritage. For example, in the City Hall there is no specialized unit responsible for management of built cultural heritage, nor is there a special fund for these purposes. None of the recently adopted policies contain provisions for integrated rehabilitation of the historic centre. The General Urban Plans previously developed stipulated total destruction of the city's historic area, with the exception of the fortress and several religious buildings. Instead they saw the addition of residential neighbourhoods with multi-level buildings and large public spaces of modern construction typologies as desirable. In 2011 another General Urban Plan was developed, this also does lack the opportunity for regeneration and enhancement of existing buildings. It keeps buildings listed as historic monuments, but replaces the rest with large modern buildings. Therefore, the document puts the historic centre at risk.

In 2015, Soroca's City Council adopted its socio-economic development strategy for 2015-2020. Its vision gives increased importance to the city as a cultural and historic centre for the nation. The strategy lays out that touristic attractions and activities be increased, with increased investment and housing. It proposes measures for the development and improvement of tourism and transport infrastructure, promoting cultural activities and the protection of national tourist heritage. However, it is noteworthy that there extremely low significance is accorded to the conservation and enhancement of built cultural heritage in relation to infrastructure development. Other strategic documents adopted for Soroca, such as the "National Strategy for Regional Development", "The regional development strategy of the North region", "Strategy of socio-economic development of Soroca (2012-2020)", do not contain special provisions for developing the cultural sectors, including built heritage conservation. Considering the fragile situation of the built cultural heritage, any uncontrolled development of tourism infrastructure, and increased pressure from the commercial sector, may represent significant risks. It is advisable, therefore, to increase the importance of integrated conservation of the central area within local economic development policies and to raise awareness among the local population, owners or users of historic buildings.

*Soroca Urban General Plan, 2011.
The center of the city is to be built
with standardized collective blocks.*

A series of urgent recommendations are necessary for stopping the destruction of the historic centre in Soroca and for building an efficient system for its protection:

- **to establish a local structure responsible for the management of protected areas, including the historic centre (drafting of regulations, development of local registers, supervision of interventions on monuments etc.);**
- **to create and train the staff within the City Hall in the field of cultural heritage to enhance the capacity of the institutions of managing heritage-led projects;**
- **to establish a Local Heritage Fund to ensure financial resources are available to support urban regeneration initiatives;**
- **to complete the process of obtaining the status of historical city (protected historic centre) for Soroca;**

- to encourage co-financing programmes for the rehabilitation of historic buildings and sites for supporting private initiatives for the rehabilitation of monuments; to promote the concept of integrated rehabilitation and conservation among the local population and authorities through various actions to raise visibility and awareness.

4. Urban Functions

The COMUS area contains most of the city's buildings that have socio-cultural, administrative and communal use. Local and district government headquarters are located here in a four-floor building dating from the Soviet era. Following changing needs and social developments over the last two decades, the functionality of buildings has modified.



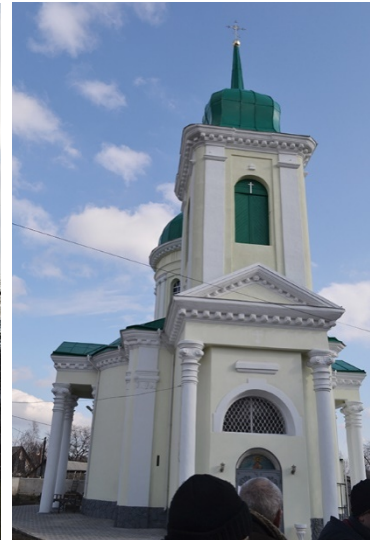
The Soroca City Hall and District Council

Religious buildings



The wooden church Sf. Martiri Brâncoveneni

The most representative religious buildings in the city are the Orthodox churches and the synagogue. The church Sf. Dumitru was built in 1827 in Bujereuca village, now part of the city. The church combines local ecclesiastical architecture with elements of Baroque.



The Synagogue, 1906-1907

In 1840-1842 the Cathedral "Adormirea Maicii Domnului" was built based on a design by the architect Antoine Weissman. The Church of Sf. Theodor Stratilat was built in 1914-1916 in the new part of the town and is the only

The cathedral "Adormirea Maicii Domnului"

Sf. Dumitru Church

church in Moldova to be built in the modern style. The Synagogue (1906-1907) on street Bănulescu G. Bodoni 16, is one of the few buildings that survived the demolition of the Soviet period and is currently operational. In 2009, the wooden church Sf. Martiri Brâncoveneni was inaugurated, built in Maramures style.

Culture, Entertainment

Besides the famous medieval fortress, which is the main tourist attraction of the city, Soroca has a number of important buildings which are either already cultural destinations or have the potential to accommodate cultural activities.

The Zemstvo Administrative Palace (1869-1875), built in the spirit of the Italian Renaissance, has an exceptional location high on a natural pedestal and has an open view of the Nistru river from the side of M. Eminescu Street. The building and the small park that belongs to it are in an poor condition and even present a high risk of injury for the local population.

The Dacia Cinema was constructed in 1962 by the architect V. A. Voițehovshi. It was the most important social edifice of post-war Soroca, but is no longer in use.



Dacia Cinema

The former pharmacy, dating from 1934 on Independence strada, is a romantic style building that together with an adjacent urban villa, houses the Museum of History and Ethnography. The Palace of Culture was built in Soviet times and now hosts most of the city's cultural activities. The Bessarabia Library is a branch of the county library Vasile Voiculescu in Buzau, Romania and lies at the intersection of Independence and Eminescu street.

Education



Pedagogical College "Mihai Eminescu", the former building of the Girls' Gymnasium (1902-1910)



Agricultural Technical College, 1907

There are 10 kindergartens in Soroca, three of which are located in the project area. The high school "Alexander Pushkin" is also located here. Soroca is considered to be an important cultural and educational centre for the northeast of the country. The Pedagogic College "Mihai Eminescu" is a higher education institution located in the building of the former secondary school for girls (1902-1910). This is an iconic building, designed in an eclectic style with traditional plan in a "T" shape. The Agricultural Technical College is a specialized secondary educational institution with a history of over a century, built in 1907 on the initiative of Zemstvo of Soroca County. Several schools are active in the field of professional secondary education: The Vocational School "Domnita Ruxandra"; the Vocational School Nr. 4; and, the Co-operative Vocational School, the latter provides the best developmental opportunities because it has a large block and three dormitories which are currently not in active use. At regional level it could support the secondary education of students from several towns in the north-east of the country.

Several extracurricular institutions operate in the city (the City Sports School, the School of Arts "E. Coca", the School of Fine Arts and Creative Home for Children within the Palace of Culture) which organize sports programs, artistic and educational activities.

Trade, services

Most commercial activities take place in the centre of the city. The headquarters of several media companies, including the television "Sor-TV", the independent newspaper "Observatorul de Nord", the newspaper "Realitatea Plus" and the publication "Ziarul Nostru" are located here. The central part of the town accommodates many commercial and manufacturing establishments, pharmacies, shops, cafes and restaurants. Most of them are located in one-story buildings that until recently served as dwellings. The modifications to many of these buildings to accommodate their new



The former city Post Office, end of XIXth century, today a private barber's shop. Both facades of the building are partially covered with advertising billboards.

functions were negative. In general, the quality of services provided in these units does not meet all of the current requirements. Compared to other neighbourhoods in the city, this area benefits from being accessible and as such it has a high development potential. It has many points in that contribute to a potential diversification in its services and factors that may increase their quality, however, the damaged urban image may detract investors and tourists.

In March 2016 Soroca was declared the most attractive tourist city in Moldova. Tourism is a development priority mentioned in most strategic documents adopted by Moldova. However, the tourism infrastructure is far below international quality standards. The three accommodation units "Hotel Central", hotel "Nistru" and "Vila de Nord" have a total capacity for 70 guests and their services are very limited. In addition, there is no supply of alternative accommodation, such as hostels, rural-type rental or apartment renting.

Mobility and Accessibility

The historic area of Soroca is crossed by the national road M2 (strada Independentei), from north to south and is used as an inter-urban transit route. This creates major traffic problems as there is a growing number of personal cars. The two city markets are also located on this street. On Sundays the citizens of Soroca and its neighbouring villages and towns come to the market and create huge traffic congestion both on the strada Independentei, impacting on adjacent neighbourhoods. Other problems include a lack of parking and increased traffic-pollution.

Decebal Street, the oldest in the city, previously linked Soroca and Suceava, which was Moldova's capital city. It is currently one of the most intense traffic circulation routes. The reconstruction of the ring road has taken over a proportion of the city transit traffic, but there is still a large amount of through-traffic, causing considerable discomfort to local residents.

The pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is almost non-existent. The street's sidewalks are usually in poor physical condition and are illegally congested with cars and billboards. At local government level there is no policy to promote soft traffic (pedestrian and cycling) modes in the historic centre; for example, there are no established pedestrian areas. The promenade of Nistru river has a great potential to become one of the main pedestrian areas in the city, with access to the fortress and a picturesque view over the river, but it is currently not properly equipped and the view towards Nistru is blocked by a concrete wall. Public transportation comprises several minibus routes that connect various parts of the city, but the quality of the service is very unsatisfactory. Recent construction works have further degraded the situation, with chaotic pedestrian crossings, poorly located transport termini and traffic markings which are of a bad design and cause accidents.



Billboard placed on a sidewalk

Green areas and public spaces

Soroca has large green areas and public spaces across the entire historic centre area. They can potentially attract new functions such as services, leisure, culture and commerce, and have a positive impact on the local community. At present, they are generally abandoned,



A kiosk in a green space on Independentei street across the Museum of History



The square in front of the former Zemstvo building is deteriorated and used as parking

unused and poorly maintained.

The public parks (Grigore Vieru, M. Eminescu) are in a poor physical condition. They are not maintained, their infrastructure provision are obsolete, there are no public toilets and the trees uncared for. Some unauthorized constructions and kiosks occupy public spaces in parks. The Zemstvo Palace Park is insalubrious, and many other wastelands are underused but could become important local resources. The Piata Libertatii Square in front of the City Hall is an important space which has the potential to become an open urban space. At present, it is ill-equipped for any activity and indeed is sometimes used for car parking. The most common problem for Soroca's green areas include improper use, pollution and unauthorized storage in public places. These insanitary, abandoned spaces lack street lighting, all factors which contribute to criminal behaviour.

Industrial Areas

The largest industrial area in the historic centre, the former factory "Dana International" occupies the entire perimeter of the neighbourhood lying at the intersection of the streets Independentei, M. Kogalniceanu, B.P. Haşdeu and Stefan cel Mare. This was previously one of the largest textile factories in the country. Later it was reorganized into a joint stock company, which has declared itself bankrupt. The land and the buildings are now used as offices, storage, housing, etc.

The area is dirty and requires appropriate intervention, especially due to its location adjacent to the Museum of History. The buildings could be included in a possible register of industrial heritage and adapted to new functions and needs. Other industrial or storage areas sprung up within neighbourhoods following land-use change including; small workshops, warehouses, gas stations, etc. These units detract from the heritage value of the area.



Industrial building belonging to the former textile factory "Dana International" Industrial area used as storage on strada Independentei

Health facilities

The historic area is home to one of the most important protected buildings of the city, Soroca District Hospital. It is located in the former county hospital complex, consisting of several buildings, and was built between 1891-1893. Another building that has both a medical purpose and heritage value is Vila Aleinikov, built in 1912. It belonged to the descendants of the earlier owners of the city. At present, the Tuberculosis Dispensary is located here, but this is soon to be evacuated. There are other ambulatory medical



The Soroca District Hospital (1891-1893)



Vila Aleinikov, 1912



Family medical centre

institutions, clinics, pharmacies, a public, and several private, dental clinics. The capacity, quality and diversity of the services provided is generally below current standards. One of the city's development priorities, as stated in the Soroca Social-Economic Development Strategy, is to upgrade the district hospital, enlarging the capacity of clinics and to rehabilitate the city's health care institutions.



Mapping of the main buildings in the historic centre

Recommendations for an improved integration of urban functions:

- **Facilitating the adaptation of buildings to new uses (policies and projects);**
- **guaranteeing a high quality of services in line with international standards;**
- **development and implementation of traffic policies that include the promotion of soft traffic in the historic centre;**
- **Enhancing public spaces and creating pedestrian infrastructure;**
- **Creating conditions for the development of small business.**

5. Housing

Dwellings represent the majority of the building stock of Soroca. These are mostly individual or collective houses with 1, 2 or 3 levels with the main facades located on the street. Many of these houses are protected historical monuments. The physical condition of the buildings may vary depending on the ownership and on the owners' possibility of intervention. The



Collective house from postwar period, str. Alexandru cel Bun

most common problems encountered include: poor conditions; poor quality of construction works; and, the use of cheap materials. Many of the houses are urban villas which were nationalized and subdivided during the Soviet period to accommodate more families. In such cases, the apartments created may well lack access to basic infrastructure and face sanitation problems. Some such problems have been partially solved; in some cases, extensions to these dwellings have been built, altering the original architecture of the houses.

North of the historic centre, in the former village Bujerăuca, most houses are individual and, with some exceptions, in a poor state. The construction of the Stefan cel Mare street over



Extending Stefan cel Mare street over the brook Racovăț left existing houses at a lower level without road access. Many of them are ruined or abandoned.

the brook Racovăț left all the adjacent houses at a lower level, cutting off their access to the main road. This is one of the reasons that homes in this area have been abandoned and are now ruined.

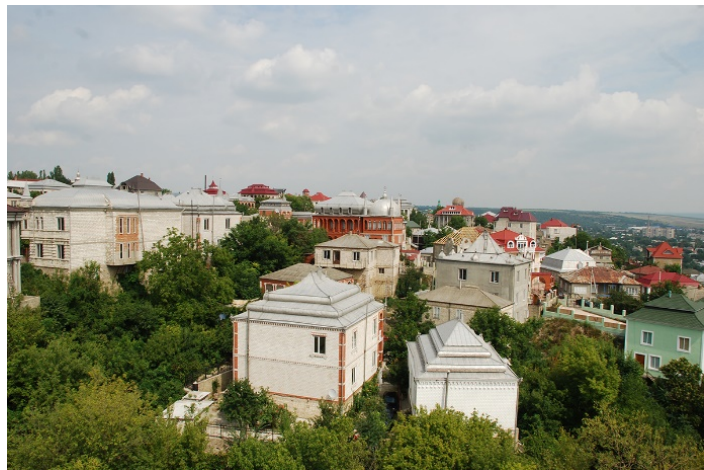
Near the fortress, in Soviet times, in the neighbourhood delimited by the streets Stefan cel Mare, Decebal, Independentei and Bolintineanu, several apartments blocks were built. They are better connected to the municipal infrastructure and public facilities, but are obviously at variance to the historic urban landscape. According to former and present urban development policies, the whole historic centre should consist of such tower blocks.



Blocks of apartments built in the historical center, view from the "Roma Hill"

Multi-level blocks have maintenance and sanitation problems, exacerbated by low levels of education and a lack of community spirit. They show a history of uncoordinated interventions on roofs, doors and windows, painting or partial repair of the facades, extensions, etc. Their courtyards are used inappropriately (many are used for storage, or are wastelands).

The neighbourhood called "Roma Hill" was developed spontaneously by the Roma community after the '90s. It is a residential area with a very specific character, the buildings are very large eclectic-oriental style individual villas, mostly uninhabited. Instead, residents live in smaller houses built in their courtyards. This area is very unique in the urban landscape and is may even be a touristic attraction. However, in terms of access and urban infrastructure, there is practically no potential. The houses are not equipped and connected to utility networks and the only access, by road, is very bad. There are community facilities, such as schools, shops or healthcare institutions.



View of the "Roma Hill"

Some social problems may arise within residential neighbourhoods, such as vandalism on playgrounds or crime in public courtyards.

Finding solutions to such issues is hindered by the lack of funding. Attempts to rehabilitate collective blocks prove extremely expensive, and there are no local policies to

enhance housing stock. In the case of collective houses, there are no owner associations able to manage living space efficiently or come up with concrete proposals and solutions. In the case of individual houses, rehabilitation is extremely difficult given that not only are there no programmes for co-financing, but there are no other support mechanisms available to owners. It is thus recommended that clear and coherent policies for improvement of the existing housing stock and support of its rehabilitation are formulated.

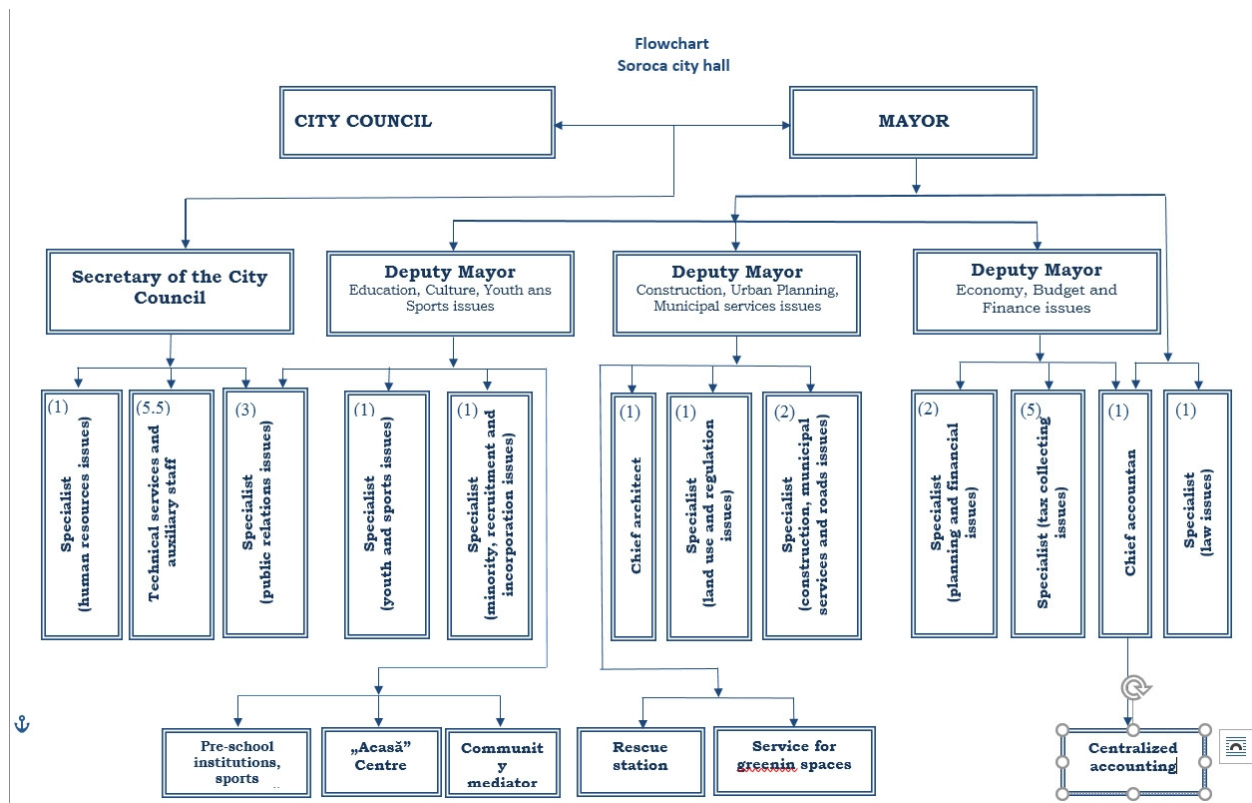
Recommendations for improvement of the housing stock:

- **Creating local policies for housing enhancement and securing local and external funds for implementing these policies;**
- **Setting up tenants associations in collective blocks to take on responsibility for managing specific internal issues;**
- **Ensuring utilities, sanitation and street lighting in common yards;**
- **Additional monitoring and security measures for preventing and eliminating crime in public courtyards and collective blocks.**

6. Capacity of intervention

The approved local budget for Soroca in 2016 is 40.5296 million lei (€1.835 million). None of this amount has been ring-marked for the rehabilitation of cultural heritage or other heritage-led projects. The budgeting options for sustaining cultural heritage are therefore non-existent until a sustainable financial policy is promoted and implemented for this purpose.

The current organizational structure of the town hall does not contain a subdivision that manages the built cultural heritage. Therefore, a local structure responsible for managing built protected areas (drafting regulations, creating local registers, supervision of interventions on monuments, elaboration of permits for interventions in special protected areas or on historic buildings) should be established in order to ensure that integrated heritage policies are developed (see Chapter 3. Position of cultural heritage in the context of urban development).



The capacity of local authorities to tackle culture and heritage issues should be strengthened, particularly those specialists in the City Hall who manage issues related to urban planning, construction and land use. Currently, the local capacity to support and implement integrated heritage rehabilitation projects is very limited. At a local authority level, several shortcomings should be mentioned. These can be addressed and improved as part of the COMUS project:

- The perception of the value of cultural heritage for economic and social development is ambiguous, built cultural heritage is not perceived as a resource, but as an obstacle to development. It is mandatory to redefine the concept of cultural urban heritage in the context of a sustainable and integrated approach towards urban development.
- There are serious transparency and communication issues between various local and national stakeholders, public or individual persons. Fostering dialogue and involvement is important to solve management problems.
- The civil society and the private sector are not consulted enough when developing programmes and urban development projects. Consultation is still formal in character.
- Both society and the authorities show a lack of interest in cultural heritage resources, particularly as regards public property. Efforts should be made to instil a sense of ownership and the community spirit in order to improve the share available of local resources for heritage.

Therefore, a series of necessary measures can be highlighted to remedy these deficiencies, which can be addressed through the provision of training and support of international expertise:

- **Technical assistance** for administrative reorganization so as to streamline the integrated urban management process;
- **Training programmes** for local and national experts that are based on good practice in the field (including examples from cities comparable to Soroca);
- **Study visits** with representatives of the local authorities and specialists to COMUS partner cities, aiming to ensure transfer of competencies and knowledge from other experiences.

Synthesis report

As the COMUS pilot town in Moldova, Soroca should develop and test a new planning model based on heritage protection. This will help to integrate cultural heritage into local development policies. In terms of size, Soroca is the sixth city in the country and is an important urban centre in the northern region. Its strategic location on the western bank of the Nistru river on the border with Ukraine is also important. Its history spans almost seven centuries, during which major events and political regimes have shaped the urban fabric we experience today. The town's specific heritage results from its role throughout the ages: The Middle Ages; the Tsarist regime; the Interwar period; the Soviet period; and, the period following Independence.

Much of the built heritage suffered during the Second World War and the subsequent post-war reconstruction. Many old houses were replaced with multi-storey apartment buildings. These caused serious damage to the historic urban texture and the existing landscape with the older buildings isolated and cut off from the road. Several General Urban Plans developed for Soroca stipulated the total destruction of the built heritage, except for the cathedral and the fortress, and its replacement with new standardized buildings. In 2011, another General Plan was developed, without any specific provisions for historic areas, except for the listed monuments. Today the town's built heritage faces several challenges, including the need to:

- emphasize the role of heritage in urban development policies;
- set up the historic protected area including special conditions for interventions;
- promote heritage as a resource both in terms of its attractiveness and potential for economic development;
- define new partnerships between local stakeholders for the development of regeneration projects;
- increase the sense of ownership of heritage among inhabitants and civil society.

SWOT analysis

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Heritage enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High cultural and tourism potential • Good geographic location and connections to national transport infrastructure • Rich cultural, natural and archaeological heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The historic area has not yet officially been established • Poor understanding of cultural heritage values (only punctual buildings are considered as heritage) • Lack of integrated heritage rehabilitation policies • Illegal demolitions and poorly conceived, badly executed interventions on monuments • Lack of efficient control mechanisms • Lack of financial mechanisms to sustain conservation and rehabilitation • Weak sense of ownership among inhabitants and authorities • Institutional and professional capacity issues • Lack of political involvement and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize the establishment of the historic area of Soroca • Establishing a local register of historic monuments and sites to complement the existing national classification which will include other categories of protected buildings (for example industrial heritage or old traditional houses). • Creating an administrative substructure within the town hall to manage cultural heritage rehabilitation and conservation • Strengthening local capacity of experts and representatives from the public administration in the area of heritage management • Creating local financial tools for sustaining private rehabilitation initiatives • Promoting the concept of sustainable and integrated conservation among citizen through visibility and awareness campaigns • International funding / grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of political will and/or continuity after new elections • Pressures from the private sector (citizen, the business sector) • Financial issues – failure to secure local funds for heritage management
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied and sufficient housing stock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of necessary utilities and infrastructure in some neighbourhoods • Migration of the population to the capital or to other countries, abandoned houses • Sanitation problems in multi-story apartments block • Unauthorized interventions on buildings (carpentry, roofing, extensions, painting of the facades, etc.) • Poor physical condition of buildings • Poor management, no tenants associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating local policies for housing enhancement • Creating tenants associations in apartments blocks • Ensuring utilities and sanitation in common courtyards, enhancing street lighting • Monitoring and eliminating crime in public yards and in collective blocks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of ownership of tenants in collective buildings • Financial issues

Social concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and cultural diversity, the city with the biggest Roma community in the country • No major ethnic conflicts or discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of employment opportunities for the young, migration • Poverty • Lack of civic engagement • Lack of participation in civic life from the Roma community • Illiteracy and crime among the Roma population • Crime and insecurity in public spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing information programmes and campaigns for raising public awareness and participation • Reducing crime and securing public spaces • Enhancing education programmes 	<p>The Roma population is not motivated to send their children to school</p>
Traffic management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good accessibility and connections within the historic centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big traffic jams and insecure (road safety) street design • Two markets located along the main street in the historic centre (strada. Independentei) • Lack of parking spaces in the central area • Lack of pedestrian streets and cycling infrastructure • No policy to favour “soft” traffic and public transportation • Poor quality of public transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redirecting the car traffic from the city centre • Imposing speed limits and other policies to discourage transit through the historic area • Developing the pedestrian infrastructure, enhancing the cliff of Nistru as main pedestrian street • Enhancing street design (pedestrian crossings, traffic markings, location of stops of public transportation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor street design and quality of construction • No integrated policy for traffic management throughout the town centre
Commercial and services activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair supply of commercial and services facilities • Good accessibility and development potential of commercial and service activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of major entertainment centres • No affordable and quality accommodation facilities, underdeveloped rural tourism • No programmes for sustaining small and medium business and tourism activities • Lack of diverse and quality services • Poor quality of infrastructure • Unattractive environment for investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing sustainable tourism policies • Programmes for sustaining small business and services sector • Ensuring necessary infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncontrolled tourism development and economic activities may bring damage to the sensitive urban heritage
Green areas and public spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large green areas and parks in the city centre • Beautiful landscape and rich natural resources close to the historic area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor physical condition of parks and squares • Abusive private interventions in public spaces: kiosks, unauthorized buildings, etc. • Abandoned and insanitary wastelands resulting from demolition or improper care of parcels/properties • Car parking in squares and on sidewalks, pollution • Crime in public spaces • Poor respect for green spaces and cleanliness of public areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing of public spaces can create comfort and security for local communities • Promoting civic engagement and improving behaviour in public spaces • Promoting outdoor activities • Increased control and penalties for disturbing public order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to secure funds for the enhancement of public spaces • Failure to co-operate with the private sector (for example when demolishing kiosks from squares) • Lack of civic spirit of inhabitants

B. SHARED VISION

Soroca – the cultural capital of the North

In 2025, Soroca is an attractive and inclusive regional cultural and touristic centre, capitalizing on a picturesque historic urban landscape and creative activities.

To achieve the desired vision, the following specific guiding **objectives** will be met:

O1 – Integrated conservation of tangible, intangible cultural and natural urban heritage

Integrated conservation of immovable cultural heritage is key to ensuring its sustainable use. While pilot rehabilitation projects are crucial for fostering a common understating of the importance of local resources, these kinds of initiatives should be sustained by complementing urban policies. The City of Soroca (in co-operation with other level of authorities and with relevant stakeholders) should develop and implement efficient instruments to protect and enhance the architectural heritage and to guarantee proper restoration works. Administrative capacity should be ensured for this purpose. New architecture will fit in with the historic landscape, and such developments should be strictly regulated.

The protection of natural urban heritage is also important and should be considered together with the measures of protection for architectural heritage. The City of Soroca must ensure, through appropriate instruments and policies, the visual integrity of the urban and natural landscape and the provision of opportunities for balanced development.

The sustainable use of architectural heritage should be guaranteed. Historical buildings should not only accommodate compatible uses which do not damage their original aspect, but also highlight their identity and value.

The city will have an *effective documentation and monitoring* of the building stock. Modern inventory methods can be used to continuously monitor and update data information on historic buildings for both local administration or for the wider public.

Necessary funds for restorations will be secured through innovative *financial instruments*. The city will detect and use various financing resources and will develop co-financing policies in support of the small private heritage-led initiatives.

O2 – Reaffirming the city's role as cultural and touristic regional centre

Cultural activities make an important contribution to the city's attractiveness. The diversification of such activities, especially when intangible heritage resources are integrated, can bring important added value, increasing the city's livability, attracting tourists to the area. Cultural events will be developed, particularly for the young, in order to strengthen local identity and attract temporary visitors.

Artistic activities in the public space will be promoted. Traditional or modern crafts or events have a wider impact when accessible to a greater public and also contribute to

strengthening local communities. These activities will be organized with respect for the local inhabitants and for the fragile historic environment.

The development of the tourism infrastructure will strengthen the city's touristic profile and will boost local economic activities. The accommodation offer will be increased, particularly in terms of providing larger capacity and higher quality. The tourism facilities will be diversified by promoting affordable rents and alternative means of accommodation by functional conversion and adaptation of old buildings.

The development of tourism services should go hand-in-hand with *good management* of these services. Creating a pleasant environment for visitors includes easy orientation and accessibility of main attractions in the city. New touristic routes should be created to connect cultural places and activities. The visitors' duration of stay should be increased by providing additional high quality commercial and leisure services.

Cultural tourism services must be developed in accordance with *modern quality standards*. Service providers should be required to adapt to international requirements in order to ensure comfortable stays and develop a good image of the city.

O3 – A multicultural city attractive for living and working

Soroca hosts many ethnicities who speak different languages. The city's ambition is to ensure *a good social cohesion* by supporting the participation of representatives from all ethnicities in public life. The authorities must find ways of encouraging minorities to take an interest, making sure that a balanced participation in the decision-making process is maintained.

The image of the historic centre and of the whole city will be improved. *The quality of urban public spaces and road infrastructure should be increased* by taking into account the history of the location. Good design and safety of roads and pedestrian spaces will ensure easy access and will favour walking and public transportation over car driving. Urban mobility will be regulated through specific policies in order to discourage car transit through the central area and favour "soft" traffic.

The housing stock will be properly managed through sustainable instruments. While the many kinds of dwellings all face different problems, the residential function in the historic area should be secured and protected from the threats caused by excessive commercial and tourism development. The differentiation of residential forms, particularly family-friendly ones, should be protected and promoted. The residential environment and infrastructure should be improved, especially in collective blocks. Good care of courtyards and play zones, as well as shared spaces in buildings should be guaranteed through the common efforts of residents and owners.

Employment is a key factor in attracting and keeping citizens in a town, especially the young. *A diversified and stable employment offer* will reduce emigration of the working population and will favour a dynamic social life. The city will support activities which create new job opportunities after school or college graduation.

Soroca will seek and develop *new ways of spending leisure time*. A varied leisure and entertainment offer will keep the young population in the city and will attract new people for permanent or temporary stays.

O4 – A competitive economy sustained by diverse activities

The variety and quality of services will be improved. Soroca will strengthen its position as a regional commercial and retail site by enhancing the range of offers. Suppliers and services will be of the highest quality.

Community feeling will be promoted and sustained. Favouring common economic activities will increase the feeling of ownership and local pride. Various stakeholders will be encouraged to work together and produce goods and services that will strengthen the local brand even outside of the city.

The city will support *local start-ups and new small businesses*. The economy will be sustained through owner-run businesses which promote local values: gastronomy; culture; traditional customs; crafts; etc. Special facilities will be provided, especially for activities that focus on the urban and architectural heritage context.

Public-private partnerships and innovative co-operation will be encouraged. The city will investigate and implement alternative funding methods to restore cultural heritage and will involve the private and civic sectors in the rehabilitation process. Additional external funding will be sought for rehabilitation projects, secured by the local administration through the creation of specific policies.

O5 – Civic participation and increased ownership among inhabitants

Increased awareness among the local population and public actors is key to ensuring an inclusive and balanced urban development. A sense of ownership will be strengthened by implementing ongoing information and visibility activities to promote sustainable development and explain the benefits of historic assets for citizens and the community as a whole.

The city will improve public participation in the decision-making process. People will be informed in advance about urban development issues and will be given the chance to contribute to the evolution of the city. Participation of all social and ethnic groups will be increased. Public, private and civic actors will decide together on local issues so as to find the most suitable solutions.

Local cultural values should be shared with the young people of the city, who should be encouraged to promote them. Special *activities and educational programmes* will be designed for children and students, aiming to convey and promote cultural values to the young. Modern interactive tools can be used for this goal.

Researchers and academic institutions will be encouraged to initiate *research projects on the sustainable conservation of architectural heritage*. For this purpose, local collaboration with the national institutions will be encouraged, increasing familiarity with international academic good practice.

The information on built cultural heritage will be digitized and constantly updated. The city will create databases containing a range of information which will be available to the wider public and used for various purposes.

C. Actions

List of Reference Plan Actions corresponding to the specific Objectives

O1 – Integrated conservation of tangible, intangible cultural and natural urban heritage

- A1. Setting up the historic area of the city and the heritage buffer zone (ongoing registration procedure)
- A2. Setting up a heritage unit within the city hall
- A3. Setting up local registers of monuments
- A4. Creating the local Heritage Fund
- A5. Revitalization of the Decebal area between Stefan cel Mare and Maria Cebotari streets
- A6. Rehabilitation of the Museum of History and ethnography of Soroca
- A7. Rehabilitation of the College “Mihai Eminescu” building, former “Domnita Ruxanda” gymnasium for girls
- A8. Rehabilitation of the “Zemstvo Palace”
- A9. Rehabilitation of the District Hospital Complex
- A10. Rehabilitation of the Aleinikov Villa with conversion to cultural / entertainment centre

O2 – Reaffirming the city’s role as cultural and touristic regional centre

- A11. Refurbishment of the “Mihail Sadoveanu” library
- A12. Placing informative boards on historic buildings
- A13. Pilot project for refurbishment of an old Moldovan house
- A14. Placing multilingual orientation boards in public spaces
- A15. Creation of a centre for tourist information
- A16. Organization of new tourist routes
- A17. Organization of the “Roma” festival

O3 – A multicultural city attractive for living and working

- A18. Ensuring an inclusive governance of the city
- A19. Rehabilitation of the bank of Nistru and its adjacent public space as a pedestrian broadwalk
- A20. Rehabilitation of the “Piata Libertatii” as a pedestrian square
- A21. Rehabilitation of the Square of the Palace of Culture
- A22. Landscape improvement of the six streams
- A23. Elaboration of a mobility plan for the central area of the city
- A24. Installing surveillance cameras in public spaces

O4 – A competitive economy sustained by diverse activities

- A25. Elaboration of a local policy to support owner-run businesses
- A26. Rehabilitation of the “Dana” factory
- A27. Elaboration of a co-financing policy for heritage restoration
- A28. Rehabilitation of the “Dacia” cinema
- A29. Rehabilitation of the former “Urban Hotel” as tourist accommodation

O5 – Civic participation and increased ownership among inhabitants

- A30. Organization of a Round Table with owners of historic monuments and local authorities
- A31. Organization workshops and short educational programmes in schools and colleges to promote cultural heritage
- A32. Creating digital databases on cultural heritage
- A33. Research on the cultural heritage
- A34. Elaboration of a local housing policy

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