

Community-Led Urban Strategies in Historic Towns (COMUS)

Soroca, Republic of Moldova



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Funded
by the European Union
and the Council of Europe



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COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The COMUS project - “Community-led Urban Strategies in Historic Towns” is a joint Council of Europe and European Union project building upon policy priorities in the context of the Eastern Partnership Programme (2015-2020), targeting multilateral cooperation activities with Armenia, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus. It is being implemented in 9 historic towns specifically focusing on integrated urban rehabilitation and heritage conservation.

Soroca is the Pilot town selected in Moldova to test and implement integrated urban policies and concrete rehabilitation projects, accompanied by several community-involvement activities aimed at generating community-wide ownership.



BACKGROUND OF THE CITY

Soroca is a historic town located in the north-eastern part of the Republic of Moldova, on the border with Ukraine, 160 km from the country capital. It is situated on the western bank of the river Nistru (Dniester) where a meander forms abrupt banks which suited for defence in the past.

It is well-known for its Medieval Fortress, one of the Moldovan border fortifications preserved until today.

Soroca is the city with the greatest Roma minority in Moldova (almost 6% of the total population). Other major minorities include Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz, Bulgarians, Jews and Poles. The ethnic specificities and the richness of historic events make Soroca one of the most colourful and culturally diverse city of the country.



SHARED VISION AND DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

From the COMUS perspective, the main challenge of the Soroca municipality is to increase the role of cultural heritage in the urban policies, as well as promoting it as a resource for attractiveness and social and economic development. The Shared Vision is defined by stakeholders and the local community:

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.

While targeting the City Hall and the District Council as main local actors, COMUS also mobilized cultural institutions, local NGOs, the inhabitants of Soroca and the academic sector in order to raise awareness about the importance of heritage among communities. Five specific development objectives were defined:

- ▶ ***Integrated conservation of tangible, intangible cultural and natural urban heritage***
- ▶ ***Reaffirming the city's role as cultural and touristic regional centre***
- ▶ ***A multicultural city attractive for living and working***
- ▶ ***A competitive economy sustained by diverse activities***
- ▶ ***Civic participation and increased ownership among inhabitants***

ACTIONS

Through a series of consultations and working sessions involving local stakeholders and the community, the city has selected two 34 actions in support for the implementation of the objectives. **Two priority rehabilitation projects** which are foreseen to increase the attractiveness of the city and to have beneficial impact on local development were proposed for further implementation.





REHABILITATION OF THE “MIHAI EMINESCU” COLLEGE

The project targets the biggest educational complex in the city, with a particular focus on its main historic building – the former “Domnita Ruxandra” gymnasium for girls. This building is an emblematic landmark for the city, one of the preserved pieces of classical eclectic architecture. The project implies, on one side, the rehabilitation of the heritage and physical infrastructure of the college, and on the other, functional adaptation of some of its rooms / facilities by attracting new specializations. The main foreseen proposal for the future is the organization of a life-long educational and adult skills training centre, serving the Soroca district and other localities in the region and beyond. The project also explores opportunities to attract complementary uses related to culture and education from which a wider community could benefit, such as:

- ▶ *Centre for continuous training for the teaching staff;*
- ▶ *Media library with the capacity to serve people from inside and outside the college;*
- ▶ *Hosting small and large-scale cultural events (dance, theatre, music, concerts)*
- ▶ *Conference halls to be used by the college and by the whole community;*
- ▶ *Exchange of experience, academic residence;*
- ▶ *Research and laboratories, experimental and traditional arts and crafts;*
- ▶ *Regional sports competitions;*
- ▶ *Co-working space.*

Estimated costs for the rehabilitation of the “Domnita Ruxandra” site: 2,604,000.00 Euro

Estimated costs for the rehabilitation of the whole complex: 4,083,000.00 Euro

Foreseen impact:

- *positive social impact on local communities, especially on the young generation*
- *development of cultural and creative activities, social innovation*
- *increased quality of the education experience*
- *increased social responsibility, reduced emigration from Soroca*
- *attraction of foreign investments*
- *development of local tourism*

REHABILITATION OF THE NISTRU RIVERBANK

The project focuses on one of the most intensely used public spaces Soroca, a site composed of the street “Malul Nistrului” (The Nistru Riverbank) and the open spaces along it. The site is an emblematic landmark of the city, which together with the Medieval Fortress at its centre, have a unique historic and identity significance, offering opportunities for social uses and sustainable development. The main scope of the project is to enhance the bank of the river in order to provide a vibrant and attractive public space for the inhabitants and for the visitors of Soroca. The regeneration concept takes into consideration specific possible uses in the future such as:

- ▶ *Open-air cultural and social events, performances, festivals*
- ▶ *Sports competitions and events, including water sports, games*
- ▶ *Seasonal fairs and commercial activities, recreational activities, catering*
- ▶ *Workshops with local traditional craftsmen*
- ▶ *Camping, fishing, walking*

The process implies a wide range of visibility and community-involvement actions aimed at identifying the needs and expectations of the citizens, who will contribute to the final configuration of the space. The action will imply constant communication and visibility.

Estimated costs for the rehabilitation project: 1,802,200.00 EUR

Estimated duration of implementation: four years

Foreseen impact:

- *positive impact on local development and on communities in Soroca*
- *increased participation, inclusion and ownership among the citizens*
- *improved public infrastructure*
- *attracting local and foreign investors*
- *development of economic activities*
- *improved image of the city at national and international level*
- *development of touristic activities*
- *a better living environment, reduced emigration*



PARTICIPANTS/PEOPLE INVOLVED

COMUS promotes public participation and involvement of different levels of authorities. It is overseen local and national stakeholders who work together in defining common goals:

- ▶ **Moldovan National authorities and institutions:** The Ministry of Culture, The Ministry of Economy, The Ministry of Regional Development and Construction.
- ▶ **Local authority departments** of different levels:
 - Public administration of the first level - the Soroca City Hall
 - Public administration of the second level - Soroca District
- ▶ **Elected representatives** of different levels of administration and political parties: municipal and district counsellors, political leaders;
- ▶ **The third sector:** “Dacia”, “Soarta” NGOs
- ▶ **The cultural sector:** the “Veniamin Apostol” theatre, the Museum of History and Ethnography
- ▶ **Local press:** the “Observatorul de Nord” and “Ziarul Nostru” newspapers
- ▶ **The local and national academic sector:** the “Mihai Eminescu” and “Nicolae Botgros” college from Soroca, the Technical University of Moldova
- ▶ The private sector, citizens, local libraries, young people, children, residents of the project area

AWARENESS / VISIBILITY

Awareness raising activities are organized in parallel with the technical steps in Soroca. More than 100 people were involved locally in the process by actively organizing or by participating on our activities over two years. Among technical activities, promotional activities were organized in order to generate awareness and visibility of the actions:

- Conferences, workshops and public debates were organized nationally in Chisinau or locally in Soroca in order to promote the COMUS approach and methodology;
- Academic research and presentations were organized in Soroca focusing on identifying local challenges;
- Visibility actions such as heritage walks or competitions for children were organized together with the local communities and targeting people of different occupations and age.





Some Heritage Walks were organized in the framework of COMUS in Soroca. These walks aimed to popularize historic places in the city and consisted in guided walking tours in different parts of the historic town.

For instance, the walk in April took place in the modern part of the town and brought together around 20 participants, mostly people between 20 and 35 years old. These events are important because they help mobilize the community and promote heritage values among inhabitants.

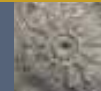


Creative contests were organized in order to promote heritage values and the local history among the younger generation. In this sense, the “Cultural Landmarks of Soroca”, organized during September 2016, was a drawings and paintings contest for children, focusing on emblematic places from the city.

The action ended with the exhibition inaugurated during the European Heritage Days, hosted by a local college of arts. 24 participants exhibited their paintings and the best works were awarded. The event helped to promote the COMUS activities and to increase the visibility of the project among schools.

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