

BISTRITA

City baseline

Population: Bistrita has currently 75 000 inhabitants (2011 census); however in the 2015 city file based on inhabitants counted by domicile, the population of Bistrita was of 92 063 inhabitants.

Bistrita is the centre of the province and therefore, has suburbs, a university, good train connections and attracts a wider population for employment. Historically part of the Austrian-Hungarian empire, the historic monuments and the medieval centre are still the witness of a rich past.

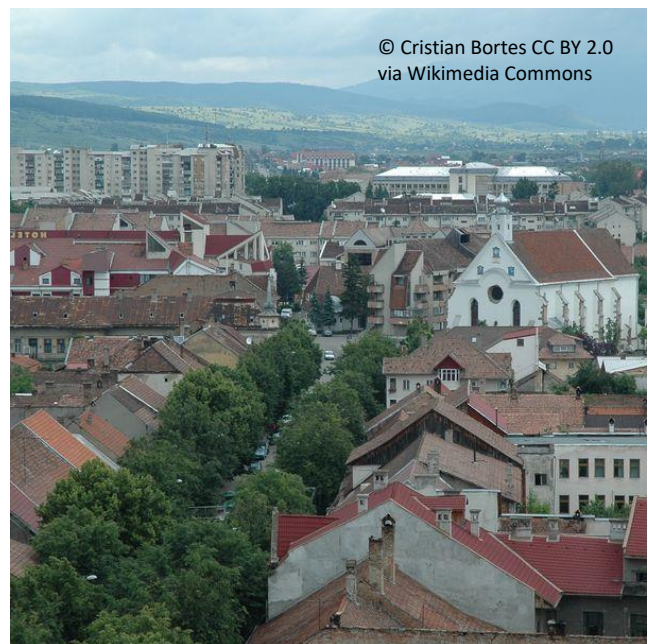
Location: Bistrița is the capital city of Bistrița-Năsăud County, in northern Transylvania, Romania, with an area of 14 547 ha. It is situated on the Bistrița River. It is on the touristic road of “Dracula” castle and mountains. Most importantly, it is one of the entry doors to Europe from Ukraine; not too far from Slovakian, Hungarian and Polish borders.



Municipiul Bistrita

Economic indicators: There is low unemployment, on the contrary, one of the obstacles to the transition, in particular when it comes to housing refurbishment is the lack of skilled workers. In comparison with south Romania, Bistrita’s citizens have an above average income. Bistrita has a university and therefore a young population during the week and winter time. Citizens have strong links with the rural areas next to the city, whether for gardening and food production or for recreational activities in the mountains.

Energy and Climate: Unlike most of EU cities, Bistrita’s climate footprint two decades ago was of less than 2 tons of CO₂ per inhabitant; thus, it only could increase since then. Likewise, Romania and Bulgaria are the only countries which were authorised to increase their GHG emissions between 2010 and 2020 under the so called “Burden-sharing” directives which divided the effort of EU countries to include fairness between the less and the most developed regions. Nevertheless, Bistrita committed to decrease by 20% its GHG emissions between 2008 and 2020.



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General context

Bistrita developed a 2050 energy vision with supporting strategic documents, such as the Action Plan for Climate and Energy 2030 and the Local Development City Strategy 2010-2030.

In 2014, the average carbon footprint in Bistrita was of 1.5t CO₂ per inhabitant per year (not including the local industries though), Bistrita being thus compatible with the Paris Agreement before the COP21. However, rapid urban sprawl and economic growth have worsened a lot this carbon footprint.

Bistrita did a very good prioritisation of Structural Funds in their fight against energy waste: they refurbished 30% of the housing stock older than 1990, reaching the best renovation rate in Romania.

Bistrita managed to mobilise condominiums, however the driver for change was comfort, not climate change fight. A lot of planning was required to reach such a level of massive refurbishment, so the city is well prepared for large scale planning programmes.

The residential area of Bistrita is divided into two areas:

- *The Urban Area* with individual and collective dwellings neighbourhoods (apartment buildings built between 1960 and 1990), with a high density of buildings in the centre.
- *The new residential areas* were built after 1990, at the city limits, mainly in the North, South and West. They mostly include individual dwellings, with ground floor and one or two stories. The new residential areas do not have complex functional characteristics, i.e. they do not have schools, kindergartens, churches or cultural centres. Another major problem faced by these neighbourhoods is the absence or the low quality of streets network and the public utilities network (water supply-sewerage-gas supply).
- The rural area of the municipality – is made up by over 883 hectares of built-up area (34.5% of the total built-up area). In addition to the private real estate investments, the authorities made some public investments in the rural area of the municipality, that fostered its development: nine social apartment buildings of 180 apartments built by Bistrita City Hall.

Bistrita is currently starting to use the ERDF for mobility issues: 45 km of bike lanes are planned to be constructed until 2023.

The Green Line is a pilot project under preparation, establishing a new local public transport line that crosses Bistrița city through the historical centre (so it also has a tourist character), using a dedicated priority lane for electric buses. The use of this lane will be free of charge during 5 years, ensuring a real modal shift from the private car to the public transport. It represents a single solution that responds to several challenges: reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, urban mobility and tourist accessibility.

In 2020, Bistrita will develop a strategy for the city's heating and cooling system, on medium and long term. Since 95% of the fuel used to heat buildings in Bistrita is natural gas and most houses have individual boilers, it is necessary to consider the transition to renewable individual heating systems. Although cooling was not a problem for Bistrita, the last summers' high temperatures are raising more and more questions related to the need for cooling systems, in particular for non-residential buildings.

Bistrita is active on citizen engagement. In 2004, the municipality set up the Green School, an Ecological Education and Information Centre for pre-schoolers and schoolchildren. The centre is also focusing on sustainable energy and climate change. All primary schools have at least 3 awareness sessions a year. In 2012, Bistrita was also offered the Earth Hour Award by the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) Association. Indeed, each year the municipality turns off the public lighting for an hour to raise the awareness about the exaggerated consumption of energy produced from non-renewable resources, producing GHG emissions.

Institutional context

The City Hall of Bistrita is led by the Mayor, 2 Vice Mayors, the City Secretary, directors, department and office chiefs.

There is no local energy utility the whole district heating system was closed decades ago to have individual gas boilers.

There is a local environment protection agency, producing an annual report on the main polluters at local level.

On energy and climate policies

➤ Local

The climate change fight is not yet an issue for local politics nor for local newspaper. The adaptation is not an issue either, as the city is not subject to major risks (winters are milder and unlike in the south of the country, summer is hotter, but still not too hot), therefore no air conditioning is being installed. For the moment the changes are not visible for the local agriculture either.

Local public authorities (municipalities) can implement local projects / actions / policies that derive and do not exceed the national legislation in the field of energy and climate change. These can be examples of good practice at regional and national level, but they influence to a very small extent the specific national legislation in the area of climate change.

➤ Regional

The region has borders with non-EU countries (Moldova, Ukraine) and a lot of trade comes into the city through a single main road.

The national legislation is applied at local and regional level by decentralized national authorities that are subordinated to the national government and that have local representation - the Environmental Protection Agency, the Water Management Service etc.

➤ National

After Bulgaria, where no reduction of GHG is required in the non ETS sector between 2005 and 2030, Romania is the second EU country with the lowest target for GHG emission reductions (-2%) for 2030 (2005/ Directive for the effort sharing mechanism including all national emissions not covered by the ETS sector (energy and industry)). The reason for this lower share of the reduction is due to the current energy mix and energy intensity which is much lower than in industrial countries such as the UK where the reduction shall be of -37% for the same period.

Therefore, it is difficult to foster the development of Renewables even though renewable energy potential might be quite high, but seems completely untapped. Large electricity production is coming from coal power plant, which is at national level one of the main challenges (as with the ETS directive, Romania should phase out coal).

Important aspects of climate and energy planning

The SECAP 2030 with the commitment of 40% CO₂ reduction was approved by the City Council in December 2019.

Bistrița also has a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) for 2015-2030.

The local Integrated Strategy for Urban Development (ISUD), Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP) and Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) are usually updated every 2 years

Past projects to build on

Bistrița benefitted of over EUR 92 million of EU projects/ Funds.

- It is possible to build on the IMAGINE INTERREG project which finished in 2014 with a roadmap towards 2050 for a “low carbon city with high quality of life”
- Bistrița is currently partner of the HotMaps project (H2020) to identify the heat wasted and draft a local heating and cooling strategy by 2020. Bistrița is using the Hotmaps tool to understand better a large part of their energy demand and to develop future scenarios.
- The chamber of Commerce is involved in an INTERREG funded project focusing on circular economy.

- Two URBACT projects focusing on retaining retail market in the city centre and on active citizens.

The URBACT Local Group

The Chamber of Commerce, the County Council, the University, the Environmental Protection Agency are core partners for the URBACT local group and already well informed about the project.

In addition, during the phase 1 city visits, Bistrita identified the following local stakeholders to be involved in the second phase: activist NGOs, faith community, schools, potential polluters, a cluster of enterprises called the Environmental Cluster.

Local media and cultural centres are not specifically relevant given the climate focus.

In the URBACT ZCC Phase 2, Bistrita will start with individual interviews of these groups to shape the planning processes.

Initial SWOT

<p>Strengths</p> <p>Good experience on large scale condominium refurbishment Green school Citizen involvement and awareness raising programmes</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p> <p>Although Bistrita has a very high rate of housing refurbishment, there is no upgrade of the workforce and high demand of skills unmet Lack of knowledge/ culture on the energy mix: renewable potential, energy largely absent of the debates. Most of the housing are connected to gas, individual boilers, or heat from burning wood</p>
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Alternative Mobility: fostering cycling culture: the appetite might need some help to flourish and it could be a good driver for mobilisation; the driver for change would be more about sports, family comfort (easier to drop kids by bike then using the car) Clear potential to use the current education/ public awareness programmes to reinforce them, expand them (University, Chamber of Commerce, Green school) Work on the food culture Build upon the other URBACT networks which Bistrita is/was engaged, especially for local groups.</p>	<p>Threats</p> <p>Decoupling growth: A need to rethink the growth of population and link to growth of infrastructure, congestion (e.g. municipality plans a transport belt far away from the city to allow the expansion of the city, which might be questioned)</p>

How Bistrita wants to use the ZCC project?

In Bistrita the “zero carbon” concept is very far from the reality of the citizens, of the current economic situation of the city; therefore, a “resources protection” approach or an approach around “quality of life” could be better understood and valued by the local stakeholders.

Before being able to transpose the carbon budget approach, some steps on educating on carbon literacy are needed. In phase 2, Bistrita could work specifically on integrating climate issues in the budget process with the resources tracker which can be developed by experts.

A zero carbon city image could be good to retain and attract young professionals, which is very important for the dynamism of the city.

In Bistrița there is a 2.5% of unemployment. It is a very active region with a great potential for “*slow-tourism*”, for which a clear zero carbon identity could help.

Sources:

Interviews with:

External Working Session

- Mrs. Monica Mureșan, General Secretary, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Bistrița-Năsăud
- Mrs. Adina Rațiu, Head of Environmental Department, Comelf SA (industry sector)
- Mrs. Joanitta Câmpeanu, Commissioner, Environment National Guard – Bistrița -Năsăud Commissariat
- Mrs. Oana Ștețco, Head of the Monitoring and Laboratories Service, Bistrița-Năsăud Environmental Protection Agency
- Mrs. Angela Cordoș, Counselor at the Monitoring and Laboratories Service, Bistrița-Năsăud Environmental Protection Agency
- Mr. Ioan Bîca, Resercher, Babeș-Bolyai University - Bistrița branch
- Mrs. Iulia Strugariu, Counselor - Environment Office, Bistrița – Năsăud County Council
- Mrs. Lavinia Lăpușan, Counselor - Environment Office, Bistrița – Năsăud County Council

Internal Working Session - Bistrița Municipality

- Mrs. Liliana Cocișiu, Executive Director, European Integration Department
- Mrs. Iulia Popârțac, Inspector, Project Management Service (European Integration Department)
- Mrs. Corina Șimon, Specialist, Project Management Service
- Mr. Marius Mărincean, Inspector, Project Management Service
- Mrs. Daniela Zanca, Counselor, Project Management Service
- Mrs. Simona Mic, Counselor, Environmental Protection Compartment
- Mrs. Cristina Andreieș, Legal Adviser, Legal Public Administration Department
- Mr. Ioan Papoi, Counselor, Technical Department
- Mr. Ion Bradea, Counselor, Communication Department
- Mrs. Sorina Roman, Counselor, responsible for the “Green School” - Ecological education and Information Center