

CITIES OF TOMORROW – COMPLETELY VIRTUAL, BUT MORE INTERESTING THAN EVER



The virtual exhibition area of "Cities of Tomorrow", where companies as well as cities and regions could present themselves.

The traditional date for the conference "Cities of Tomorrow", organised by the German-Romanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Bukarest, was the end of March. This year, the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic had thwarted all plans. Now, in September, the conference took place completely virtually and was worth attending not only for Romanians.

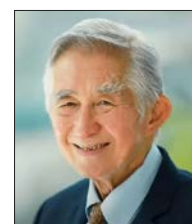
As early as February it became apparent that the conference "Cities of Tomorrow" would not be able to take place in its planned form at the end of March. Very quickly the organizers, the AHK Rumänien (German-Romanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry), adapted to the changed conditions and planned the

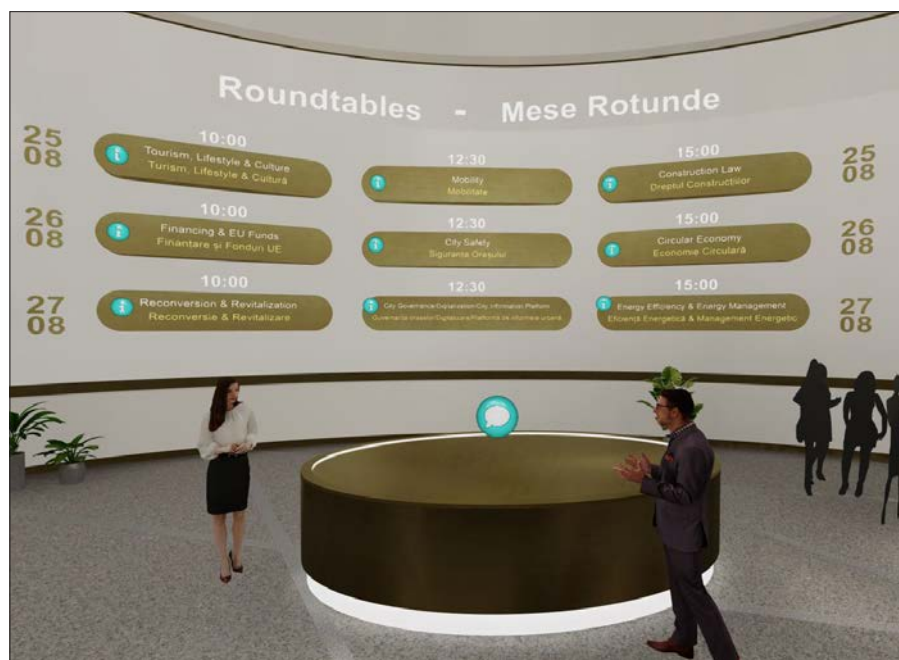
plenary session for 1 September 2020. The nine round tables, an integral part of the conference, took place during three days end of August – every day three of them consecutively – , so everyone had the opportunity to participate in more than only one round table, an opportunity not given during the 'real' conferences in former times.

To come to the main point: the virtual version had much more participants and offered in parts also different qualities than the real show. The presentation of Romanian cities and companies, a further component of "Cities of Tomorrow", was also not to be missed. There was a virtual exhibition hall where one could visit the individual stands, watch presentations and find contacts.

Traditionally linked with "Cities of Tomorrow" is a Project Competition for the categories 'Public Administration', 'Business Environment' and 'Civil Society'. The nine finalists could be viewed in the virtual event hall with one click. A jury decided on these projects. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the organizers decided to add still another category which has gained importance: 'Healthcare & Citizen Safety'. The virtual visitors of the event hall could vote on these 13 projects.

In short: no part of "Cities of Tomorrow" was missing. And still something more became possible by the virtual event: a higher de-





gree of internationality. Dr. Liu Thai Ker, Architect, former CEO and Chief Planner of the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore, would hardly have made the long journey from Singapore to Bucharest to take part in the event. But digitally connected, he was keynote speaker of the round table about 'Reconversion & Revitalisation' explaining the transformation of Singapore between 1965 and 1989 into a modern, economically successful city-state. Furthermore by his remarks he wrote many a thing or two into the logbook of planners, architects and politicians.

According to Dr. Liu planners are servants, not masters. They have to serve what people and land need, not to arbitrary impose fancy ideas.



The "Father of Singapore" as he is often named is an advocate of an integrated urban concept that takes into account all areas and functions of a city and harmonises and coordinates their development. It is important to look at reality and identify and anticipate needs and problems before developing a long-term master plan that can and should be adapted over and over again, but ultimately gives all stakeholders certainty about where the journey is headed, Dr. Liu explained.



Basically, there are four fundamental functions that need to be kept in mind during planning: Earth and Esteem, Economy, Education and Environment. A city has to be liveable, scalable and replicable. He conceded that planning is a very multifaceted and complex process, but the result speaks for itself: "Well planned – eternally blessed. Poorly planned – eternal misery", Dr. Liu summarised the consequences.

However, he also added that political support is needed to implement urban development and renewal plans. That may have been a little easier in Singapore than it would be in Bucharest and other European cities where there is private land ownership. For, as Dr. Liu also explained, where the government has no

Virtual exhibition, a plenary session in which all took part online, and a studio from where the organizers could address the event's participants.

control over land ownership, conditions are more difficult and uncontrolled growth often occurs. However, the experienced planner does not throw in the towel in this case either, but recommended first of all to convince those who own a lot of land. Because even if only a fraction of the master plan is realised, it is still better than nothing.

It was Gratiu Mihailescu, founder of UrbanizeHub, collaborator of World Bank, the Government of Romania and the Assembly of European Regions, who pointed out during the discussion that it is precisely the small and medium-sized towns in Romania that have changed for the better – often with EU funding – and are now offering a higher quality of life. He confirmed Dr. Liu's statements regarding the role of politicians and public authorities by emphasising that it is mainly committed mayors and urban leaders who have driven and continue to drive development forward.

Mutual consent was also given about the fact that good planning is more important than the much-cited 'smart' that cities like to adorn themselves. Dr. Liu defines smart technology as a "vitamin that the body needs", Gratiu Mihailescu makes it even clearer: "it is not the driver, just a tool, not a goal in itself."

The discussion of the virtual round table 'Reconversion & Revitalisation', which was moderated by Andreas Lier, Managing Director of BASF Romania – he also established the contact with Dr. Liu –, was continued in the general discussion about 'Cities in Dialogue: Magnet vs. Shrinking'.

The keynote speech was given by the Mayor of Dortmund Ullrich Sierau, but still more revealing was the following discussion with Dr. Emil Boc, Mayor of Cluj-Napoca, Marcel Ionescu-Heroiu, Senior Urban Development Specialist at The World Bank, and Ilinca Paun Constantinescu, Architect and Teaching Assistant at the Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urban Planning in Bucharest.

Cities of Tomorrow



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BASF Roundtable: Reconversion and Revitalization of Cities

Andreas Lier, Managing Director BASF Romania



The virtual format of the round tables offered also the possibility to show files.

Ilinca Paun Constantinescu took up the issue of real estate ownership. In Petrila, which she has been working on for ten years, it is precisely this ownership issue that is causing difficulties in the revitalisation of the mining town of Petrila, as the town only owns one of the former industrial properties.

As an example of main impetus coming from public authorities she pointed to Resita. In general, however, she prefers the bottom-up principle, that initiatives and impulses come from the civil society. And she added: Only cooperation enables solutions that lead to an improvement in the quality of life of the people in the city. And improvement of quality of life has to be the main goal.

Marcel Ionescu-Heroiu, too, pleaded for a broad consensus among all parties involved and appealed in particular to the political parties not to misuse urban development issues for election campaign purposes. He sees the greatest danger for cities in uncontrolled developments, especially in the suburbs. "There, they build a lot, but without serious planning or thinking. This ends up in a really poor neighbourhood."

Cluj-Napoca stands for the example of successful urban renewal. The potential

of the university city in western Romania is talents, young and qualified people. The aim is therefore "to keep the talents in the city and bring back those who left for elsewhere. Because talents brings money and money brings talents," Dr. Emil Boc explained. His goal: good quality of life and well-paid jobs. And so far, the mayor's bill seems to have worked out.

Asked about the beginnings and the conversion of brownfield sites the first step in Cluj-Napoca was to consider "how to use the potential". As mayor of the city Dr. Emil Boc attributes a central role in the process to the City Hall. "The vision has to come from the City. But open administration needs a central rule."

For Cluj-Napoca this means: an urban zoning plan that also includes private property. The top priority must always be the quality of life of the citizens. He admits that there are often problems with the owners, but then you have to explain and discuss. He recommended a 3D model: Debate, Decision, Discipline.

His brief summary for a successful urban development was not only agreed by all participants of the discussion, but also applies everywhere, far beyond Romania and for all stakeholders: "Eco-system, not ego-system." | **Marianne Schulze**