

Actopolis: mayor for ten minutes

text by Iuliana Dumitru

I grew up in a small village and since I was 15 years old my dream was to move to Bucharest. From far away the city had this wonderful glow – with all its museums, cinemas and clubs and it offered so much possibilities – good schools, more prepared teachers, libraries. At 20 I moved here to go to University and finally my love story with the city began. It has its ups and downs like any other love story but the city made room for me, Bucharest offered me a place where I found and improved myself. I found places that I can call my second home, tranzit.ro/Bucuresti being one of them, and I have friends in almost all neighborhoods- except Pantelimon, and sometimes I enjoy this mix between urban and rural, it gives the city a certain vibe and gives you the exact freedom you need to plant a pine tree in front of your apartment building.

A few years ago I was part of a project, Actopolis – Bucharest-South, where we proposed to people from the south part of Bucharest to be mayors for 10 minutes. We had a designed pavilion where there was the mayor office, we had a desk, flowers, a stamp, an oath and lots of papers to fill in. One of the sheets asked them to imagine the future city of Bucharest South.

At the beginning of the project, I had this megalomaniac idea of a futuristic and smart amusement park where you could connect with your phone and have a tailored-made experiences. But in reality the people who decided to play along and be mayors in our project wished for grounded things, things like more buses with the time schedule, good infrastructure, safe hospitals, more parks, nothing utopic, nothing from the science fiction

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movies, as I thought they would. It was the moment when I realized that before dreams can start the basics things need to work.

Understanding this in relation to the Bucharest art world I would say that we need good spaces, on the ground, spaces that do not collapse on you, spaces that last more than a season or two. Funding is much needed too, in other words stability is what we want and need. But in my opinion, most of all, I think we need healthy human relationships, real conversations, honest talks, where we know more about what is behind someone's interests, why they are doing research, what keeps them going.

I felt that human relationships are the DNA of every good project that can happen. Now I see the city as an organism, a sick body, with only a few working organs, that do their job but nothing more. For this body to survive and thrive, the organs need to start working together, to go a little bit further then "this is my job, it starts here and ends here", we need to think and work like a whole.

As I'm a social researcher and my favourite thing to do is ask other people what they think, I've asked some friends, from different fields, what is their One Thing to Wish from / for Bucharest, so here are some answers:

Cristina, 32. PR

Screaming phone booths. A white box where you can go inside and scream without anybody hearing you.

Walking arm-in-arm hour. Every day from Unirii Square to Romana Square people can walk holding arms. Another way to connect to people.

Viorica, 66, Retired Chemist

To fill the holes from the roads with flowers, then we will have meadows instead of roads.

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Eugen, 32, Philosopher

This city is in a basic way, like a house without a foundation. I can only think of practical stuff: subway from the airport, subway for all the neighborhoods, something to mirror the identity of the city.

Miruna, 37, Travel blogger

I would like for Bucharest to be surrounded by forest, once again, how Codrii Vlasiei used to be. More green in the city and of course more bikes.

Marian, 36, Energetic healer

More colour in the city and works of art with a positive message. Most of all artists should try to wake the conscience in others and send good vibes through their art. And of course people to stop using their car horns.

Rucsandra, 42, Writer and Researcher

Bucharest- like most of the big cities- is a place where most people live at the surface-not knowing the history of the city, not knowing their neighbours or not even knowing the other parts of the city. I dream of a Bucharest where people regain their sense of belonging and reclaim their power to change things.

Bucharest is a beast that needs to be tamed – through arts, through civic engagement, through research and through love.

Matei, 17, High School student

I would like to wish to the city to forgive us, because we could do much more for it but we are crocs, we do not leave our comfort zone and we find excuses not to make a better society. Admit and acknowledge our mistakes can be the first step to make it better and try to solve its problems.