

SCENARIO 2: INDUSTRIAL RUSTAVI

Rustavi has continued its growth based on the metallurgical industry, investing considerable resources in keeping this branch of local development alive, while at the same time neglecting other key areas, including education.

Rustavi in 2050 is larger in terms of population than it used to be in 2018. Or at least it is during the day, when workers from the region come to the city only to leave it as soon as their shift is over.

Given limited demand for free time activities, mainly city-funded institutions like theatre or cinema are still operating. Commercial offer is limited to mass consumption and basic entertainment (i.e. sports bars). This, together with dire conditions of the local environment works as a deterrent for people who would consider moving to Rustavi. They prefer places outside of the city, where they would enjoy higher quality of air and water and at the same time be in a relatively close distance from Tbilisi, where they can benefit from a vast cultural and leisure offer.

One thing, though, is clear - whoever wants to find job in Rustavi, can easily do that and enjoy a decent wage (the money though rarely stays in the city). The municipality has invested in a free economic zone, providing favourable conditions to all entrepreneurs willing to move or set up their businesses in Rustavi. Local companies, with considerable help from the municipality, are bringing industry experts from other parts of the country. Few workers, however, are being trained locally, even for the entry-level jobs.

Some of the more socially responsible companies are trying to bridge this gap by creating training programmes in partnerships with local schools and developing projects that address some of the major local challenges. In the end, the cost of worker rotation is higher than the cost of taking on some of the main issues causing the quality of life in Rustavi to deteriorate.

At the same time the model of local economy that is dependant on external workforce, has put considerable pressure on the city to invest in fast and easy transportation options connecting it to other cities, Tbilisi in particular. It came at a cost to the quality of living in Rustavi, making it crowded and noisy in peak hours, but then almost vacant in the evening.

Local environment has suffered a great deal. Not only is the air polluted, but many green spaces have been transferred into parking lots or construction sites. The river bank is neglected, as people prefer to travel outside of the city to enjoy water and nature. Waste management has been technologically improved, however the consumer/producer side of the equation still suffers due to lack of adequate awareness.

Since many of the most active people leave Rustavi straight after work, the NGO sector is struggling. Very few people find time to get engaged in solving local challenges and they don't really see the point. The public sector has mainly explored relations with private companies in this regard.

The municipality has also invested in smart solutions making public services more efficient and accessible. This was in big part forced by the companies that have already seen these smart solutions elsewhere and wanted them in Rustavi as well.

