

SCENARIO 4: GAME OVER

Having struggled for many years, Rustavi finally lost all of its industrial companies and failed to provide a competitive educational offer both for vocational training and academia.

Rustavi has shrunk considerably, with almost half of the population now past the retirement age. Young people left for Tbilisi and other big cities with attractive educational and living options. They visit their relatives in Rustavi every now and then, but in principle, they don't see themselves moving back anytime soon. Brain drain is thus one of the main long-term challenges the city is facing. The schools that still operate in Rustavi - especially vocational ones - are underfunded and lacking relevant relationships with the private sector, cutting short students' chances of a head start on the labor market.

People tend to be working several jobs just to make ends meet. Nepotism flourishes. Most prevalent forms of economic activity are street vendors and small shops. People are turning to individual gardens and small plots to produce their own food. In terms of entertainment, one cannot find many other options for a night out than games and drinking. This in turn translates into lifestyle diseases penetrating the local community.

The environment has suffered for negligence. Few NGOs that operate in the city focus on social support rather than environmental protection. Waste management, which has become a significant burden on both individual and municipal budgets is now in big part done in an unsustainable way; the sight of illegal waste dumps is nothing uncommon in Rustavi and surrounding areas, including the mountain sites nearby.

Since the local economy is struggling, the municipal budget faces considerable challenges. Giving the top priority to social support, local infrastructure is crumbling and public transportation contributes to environmental damage rather than alleviates it. At the same time, individual transport has improved a lot in terms of efficiency and ecological footprint, which in consequence generates additional pressure on the municipality to provide more parking spaces throughout the city.

