

Creating a context for innovation

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It's almost 6pm in Dubai and while an amazing sunset is just happening, I am struggling to finish my Eisenhower Fellowships Youth Leader project report, while competing in the world's most important competition for solar houses and trying to finish something to make household energy production in Romania a reality for as many people as possible.

“One year has passed since the Malaga conference in Spain with Eisenhower Fellowships, I just turned 27 a few days ago and my life has never been more interesting.”

For the past few months I have tried to make a video compilation of my last year. I find forgetting very frustrating and this is really a year I wouldn't want to forget for so many different reasons, for all the failures and things I did well. Ironically, I have been too busy to finish the video detailing how busy I am. But I will finish it soon!

I am Mihai, 27, born in a small town in Romania, and now living in Bucharest. I believe in social change through smart design—incorporating architecture, engineering and sustainability. I love to create not just products, but experiences and communities to make people's lives healthier, happier and more productive. In the last 8 years, I have participated in 3 editions of this competition, designing and building 3 multi-awarded houses and I have also changed a law.

It all started in 2010, by luck

When I was 18, due to my sister's recommendation, I joined the first group of what came to become the [PRISPA](#) team. In 2010 I learnt how to dream, but more important, I've seen dreams becoming reality – Romania's participation in the world's most important competition for solar homes 'Solar Decathlon'. Back then it was a challenge so big and so unexpected for our country that that only crazy people like the PRISPA team could think of it. Their craziness inspired and transformed me.



Being part of an interdisciplinary team unified by a single goal, to design and build an amazing solar house was a life-changing experience for me. I learned that passion can overcome knowledge. To a point.

It was 2010 and we started from scratch, we had to design, to fundraise and build with our own hands the house in Romania. After two months of

testing and visiting, we had to dis-assemble it, transport it 2500 km to Madrid and reassemble it in just 14 days and participate in the competition with other teams that brought their houses to Madrid, the meeting point for more than 600 students across the world.

After 2 beautiful years of complete madness I've learned something more important, that a dream could die as well. Due to financial constraints, we had to sell the PRISPA house to be able to participate in the competition so when we returned home, we rebuilt the house for the owner and the project died. I then realised that sometimes people could live together even with different dreams. PRISPA's dream was to reach the competition, while my own, personal dream was to make it a long lasting experience for others, to change others as it changed me.

That moment was crucial in the trajectory of my life, how everything I've done so far is influenced by the decisions I took when I was 18 and 20. I've experienced the domino effect on my own, the best of it.

I really felt that participating in the next Solar Decathlon was a responsibility, to create a context for innovation for others as others created that for me.

2012 – the birth of a bigger dream

As PRISPA died something new had to be born and along with a few old colleagues from the team, we created what came to become EFdeN – today one of Romania's most important NGOs in sustainability, having more than

10 projects so far and actually changing a law. We created a context for innovation, a place where students and young people could meet, inspire each other, create a common dream and start building it. I am still fascinated how powerful this strategy can be.

Give people the tools, and they will build anything. Give people context and they will realise amazing things. Therefore creating tools and context becomes both a priority and a responsibility.



2016 – The transforming power of frustration.

In 2014 we come back with the house and in 2015 our house became Romania's first research center for comfort conditions. After trying to use all the energy we were producing, we become frustrated – why it is impossible

to feed-in the energy and **we decided to tackle this problem as well even if that meant to change a law.**

If EFdeN was a project for a big team that consumed a lot of time, the reality was that in EFdeN there were two of us, with some member help from time to time. As we did not have time or money, we had to create a context for change, to crowdsource. How we did that is a longer story for another time but we used the same domino approach we always did, the Pareto principle: the small rock that can move a mountain.

2017 – The Future of Work Conference in Malaga, the moment I got really scared

I got scared for my country's future. And I mean really scared. Automation, digitalisation and AI will lift productivity and economic growth, but millions of people worldwide may need to switch occupations or upgrade skills. In the next 25 years around 47% of today's jobs will disappear according to Oxford, anything that is routine or repetitive will be automated.

Furthermore a research by Dell told us that 85% of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't even been invented yet.

No country is prepared for the 4th industrial revolution, but while some have already started to address the challenge, Romania is still in denial.

Romania's educational system is a mess, we have the biggest percentage of emigration in the world, in a time of peace. It looks like everyone is

abandoning the sinking ship and robots will make all this worse. Low skilled labour will be almost completely replaced and people with high skills are leaving the country, tired of fighting against corruption, living in a country with a bad health and social infrastructure, tired of spending their life in traffic (Bucharest is the world's 3rd most congested city) and for many other reasons.

Back to EFdeN and the magic behind this project

I love technology and as fire was used to change the world for the better it can also be used for bad things. Technology is a tool and it is our responsibility to use it wisely. Our mission at EFdeN in the past few years was to create a context for innovation, a place where people with energy could meet and learn that they have the power to transform their ideas into reality, to get all the resources they need.

Our mission at [EFdeN](#) has always been to create sustainable homes and lifestyle in order to have better cities and happier people. We are doing this by empowering the youth to dream, design and build products involving organisations and institutions in an interdisciplinary and practical collaborative experience. We believe that we have a responsibility in creating the future we want, we do not simply wait for it to happen.

We are now in Dubai where 15 countries from 11 countries are open for visits until 29th of November.

Put yourself in the right context

In 2015 I was invited to COP21, in 2016 in the European Parliament and 2017 to One Planet Summit and in 2018 I attended World Urban Forum – four experiences that have had a profound impact on my life, that made me want to get involved in protecting climate change by changing the built environment.

My goal is to create better living by creating affordable houses that proudly represent the 21st century. Houses that are Safe, Gorgeous, Sustainable, Intelligent and offer an amazing User Experience.