

Ep.3.20 - Roberta Dall'Olio

Mon, Jun 12, 2023 1:18PM 27:28

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

development, policies, roberta, michigan, bologna, european, european union, activity, big, support, opportunity, agencies, economic development, state, created, level, territorial, work, order, countries

SPEAKERS

Roberta Dall'Olio, Announcer, Ed Clemente

A Announcer 00:01

Welcome to The Michigan Opportunity, an economic development podcast featuring candid conversations with business leaders across Michigan. You'll hear firsthand accounts from Michigan business leaders and innovators about how the state is driving job growth and business investment, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, building vibrant communities and helping to attract and retain one of the most diverse and significant workforces in the nation.

E Ed Clemente 00:29

Hello, I'm Ed Clemente, your host. And today we're very fortunate to have Roberta Dall'Olio. I know I messed it up. But you are the director for EURADA, which is the European Association of Development Agencies, correct?

R Roberta Dall'Olio 00:46

Yeah. It's EURADA. [Yeah.] The European Association of Development Agencies. Yeah, you're right. And my name, my surname is Dall'Olio.

E Ed Clemente 01:00

If my mom and dad were alive, they'd be mad at me for not saying it right. But I appreciate it, and I'm really want to thank you for doing this podcast Roberta, because you're in Trento. And you are actually six hours ahead of us. So it's like 9:30 there, or whatever time, pretty late at night. And we really appreciate you doing this. And why don't you explain just a little bit what the organization does and what you're trying to accomplish? Because you're part of the European Union, right? Isn't this a division of it? Or something like that?

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 01:42

Yes. So let me give you some data and info about EURADA, what we are, what we do and why we have been created in 1992. First of all, I'd like to thank you for this opportunity. I'm really excited to do this kind of exercise, and I really hope to explain in the right way what we do. And this is difficult, because I often have problems when I try to explain to my parents what I do, which is my job. And when you need more than three words, in order to explain what you do, you always see in the faces a question mark. So this is my destiny, and I have to accept it. Anyway, so let's go back to EURADA. EURADA is a European association, which has been created in 1992 by Christian Saublens, he was a former functionary of the European Commission, and he was very fond of local development. And at the time, when European Commission started the process of looking more carefully at local development in respect of national development or taking care about what is local development, territorial development, and which is how much is important to take into consideration the needs at territorial level and local level and the potential answers to that need which can be orchestrated better by local actors, of course, in agreement also with the national level and the other different layers of government. So going back to EURADA. EURADA is an association of more or less 70 regional development agencies or metropolitan development agencies, agencies located in 20 European countries and also in Turkey and in the Balkan countries, we call them these countries that pre-access from countries like Serbia and other countries which are not yet inside the European Union. Why EURADA has been created, it was created because there was the need of the supporting the development of policies, which could better respond to the needs and sub-national level. And at the moment, let's say that we can synthesize our work with six P's, we would like to say six P's. Like the following, policy that is, we have to be careful to analyze, which are the policy trends for territorial development at a European but also at global level, which are the key issues for RDAs and their stakeholders in order to create the conditions for anticipating these policies, and maybe also influence the development of these policies and defuse and share information on funding opportunities. Then processes, we try to gather in the network by a kind of peer exercise to observe and facilitate and share the processes of development among the different regional development agencies on the other topics which deal with the innovation, investment attraction, territorial management, Europe regeneration, scaling, creation of startup clusters and ecosystem coordination. Then performance. So all this is done in order to enhance the performance of RDAs, which have to work together with local governments in order to assure a smooth and an efficient implementation of different policies in different economic and social areas. So we tried to share these tools for the policy implementation together, we try to monitor the effect of the policies and to gather data and to make confrontation of the different data and on the impact of our activities. Then the other P is project development. So on this basis, we try to develop common projects among Europe, at inter-regional level. And if we do this in the right way, we can assure, as an a network, the positioning of our members, and of their territories, on key topics of development, and on the different occasion of consultations, which are created by the European Union institutions. And then, of course, we also support the creation of partnership among RDAs at European level, but not only on the European scenario, but also at international level. So we have a lot of cooperation and collaboration activities with OACD, with the IEDC, and just yesterday at the meeting with the CEO of IEDC.

E

Ed Clemente 08:10

That's how we met actually was through Nathan Ollie, right?

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 08:14

With Nathan Ollie.

E

Ed Clemente 08:16

With the International Economic Development. Is it Council? I don't know the C.

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 08:22

International Economic Development Council, and we used to take parts actively, if possible, to their annual conference. Next conference will be in in Dallas in autumn in September. And we really hope in that occasion to contribute to the event, to this conference and to have the opportunity to network with the economic developers of the United States. IEDC is not only as members, not only the United States, but mainly the United States. So this is more or less what we do. And let's say that the main concern in this moment if we will want to go a little bit in deep on the main topics, which are, let's say the area of activity of regional development agencies. Do not forget that regional development agencies or metropolitan development agencies have been created or are created usually by public, local or regional public authorities, and they are the result in a certain sense of an act among different stakeholders in the territory. This means that often, regional development agencies support the public administration and the regional ecosystem in trying to develop activities and innovation. And in the coordination and animation of these ecosystem, the ecosystem are made by the clusters, which are association of private companies, big and small companies, vocational and education and training organizations, academies and public administrations. So, the activity in a certain sense is a big contribution to the multi-level governance at local level for the sake of economic development. So, the area of activity, like I said, our talent attraction, for example, it was this demographic crisis in order to face the big demographic crisis that we assist in Europe, but not only Europe, and to tackle this demographic crisis and the need of rescaling and skilling, and to have people well-trained and well-educated and above all, in order to, to face the adjust and print and digital transition, which is our big concern. Try also to see immigration as an opportunity, and not nearly as a threat. In order to enhance investment in education, income and life-long learning. Then another tool on which we tried to work and we tried to defuse the methodologies is the strategic foresight. For example, so the European regeneration activities dealing with regenerative investment, for example. And, of course, all the classical activity of the economic development, which are investment attraction, territorial marketing. But also another interesting action is the peer learning that you rather support among the different economic developers at territorial level, in order to support public administration to manage the big crisis, which can be due to everyone's problem like we had with COVID. But also, disasters like earthquake, flooding, so managing all the actions that have to be taken before, during and after this event.

A

Announcer 12:52

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E

Ed Clemente 13:09

Let me ask a couple of questions. I would imagine, I've traveled to Europe quite a lot, so is the bigger challenge you have with the 20 countries and then 70 separate sort of autonomous economic development organizations, is that they're all different too, right? I mean, obviously, in America, our states are different, but you're working with different countries. So I would imagine different bureaucracies, different types of governments, does that make your job a little more challenging then, trying to coordinate them all?

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 13:43

Sure. It's not easy. It's not easy, even if belonging to the European Union. There are some rules which are common, of course, but we try to make a value of these differences. And, of course, there is also competition among the different states. That's for sure. And among the different regions, I think that in the future, we will have to take this aspect more seriously into consideration, at least at state level, because if you want to build a union, which is really a union, we have to give up to some-

E

Ed Clemente 14:34

Universal standard, right?

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 14:36

In favor of a union, in favor of a union.

E

Ed Clemente 14:40

I mean, how old is the EU now? I mean, I know it's been being developed since like, after World War Two sort of, but it's also really come into its own just in the last 20 years, right? It's really gotten more substantial in the last 20 years, with membership and all those kinds of things. Is that correct? Or am I off?

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 14:59

Yes, it is, in the sense that I am a convinced European fan, since I was at the university. And it's not by chance that I'm doing this kind of work. And I really support the cooperation among the countries belonging to the European Union, but I also support the global cooperation. And I really believe that we have a lot to learn one from each other. That's why I insist in working with the IEDC, and try to find ways to cooperate together with all the different regions. Because we really believe that we can, we have a lot to say, we have a lot to give, a lot to take, but also

a lot to give. And we can be a source of inspiration for many aspects. Mainly, if we think about our welfare policies, or if we think about our social economy. And our history, which is really, really important, and like yours.

E

Ed Clemente 15:59

You know, evolution is always a slow process. It's hard, even if you look at, I used to teach Michigan or US history, but even the banking system for the United States took a long time to get organized over many, many decades. And then it was always some kind of financial sort of recession or something that made the banking system stronger, because everybody had to give up things at the state level, at the federal level. I think one of the more interesting points you said, right in the beginning, is trying to explain to people what economic development is because it's a very complicated field. And it can mean something different almost from season to season, as it is from year to year and country to country. So you've got a huge, a big challenge you do. And I think it's got to be rewarding when you get your things. But also, I would imagine, you also learn a lot from your individual members too, as how they do best practices, right.

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 17:38

Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's, let's say, the economic development cannot go without other kind of development in the sense that, I believe that the base is education. The base is to have young people well-educated with the culture, with the deep understanding of where they are, and why and what can they do in order to support the development of the society in which they are leaving. So, I believe that economic development is just one aspect of development and you cannot have economic development if you do not have human development. So for me, economic development have to be seen, take into consideration all these aspects within kind of a holistic approach. Take into consideration all the different actors and the role that they can play, take into consideration the integration of the different policies, not only economic for economic, but economic for the development of human beings in general, or the development of human beings for white beings.

E

Ed Clemente 19:09

You were you're a professor, right, at Bologna? University of Bologna?

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 19:15

Now I've had the opportunity to teach sometimes at the University. Always teaching youth policies and programs, trying to transfer the scales in order to take part actively to international cooperation programs, for example, but I'm not a professor, I'm just a practitioner. I'm not a professor at all.

E

Ed Clemente 19:45

Did you go to the University of Bologna though yourself?

Did you go to the University of Bologna through yourself?

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 19:48

Yes, yes, yes. I studied law at the University of Bologna and graduated in international law. At the time, the European Union was not yet European Union because it was not yet time. But I was already fond of it.

E

Ed Clemente 20:10

Even though you're located, you know, workwise in Brussels. Obviously that's not a Brussels accent you have it's an Italian accent, because you're from Bologna-area. Do you speak other languages? Obviously, besides English? Do you have to know any other languages because of the EU?

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 20:30

I speak Spanish, French, and English. And I started German for three years, but I'm not able to talk in it. I think it's a wonderful language, but I cannot talk. I've been working a lot in Latin America, in the past, in Lebanon, in Libya. Now, in this moment, I have a cooperation project in Libya dealing with multi-level governance. And but of course, my big passion is Latin America. And I worked with great pleasure on multi-level governance and the creation of regional development agencies in Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia.

E

Ed Clemente 21:22

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I've been to all of them. They're beautiful, too, countries. Well, we're going to get here to the end a little bit. Last couple of questions for you. Is there any other future trends, you see maybe for your industry, or for your organization, somewhat?

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 21:43

Sure, the future trends are apart from all these, let's say, the the aerospace, technologies and the dual application of these technology in other areas, the hydrogen, so all the question of energy. But of course, I underline again, that we need new skills. And not only those technical skills, which are needed in order to compete with high-tech enterprises, we need also those soft skills like you have in the States. You have those serial entrepreneurs, we do not, we do not we want to cultivate them. Even if we are creating a laptop accelerator, we are working a lot on startups and innovation apps in different sectors. But I really believe that the center is always the person. So we have to concentrate more on trying to upskill or reskill people, and also to give the right importance to those soft skills, which are effectively needed. I understand now that often, the entrepreneurs are looking for employees, who are not necessarily very expert in a certain area, but who are able to understand fast and to behave in a complex organization,

which is an enterprise and to work, or alone or together with other workers in harmony. So I think that we should also take much more in consideration those soft skills than only the technical ones.

E

Ed Clemente 24:01

You know, and it's funny, too, that we have all those same issues in America. So I think you're right, I think we have way more in common with you as we transform into this new economy. And you sort of already answered part of this question, Roberta. But what other advice would you give yourself now? If you're just getting out of high school? What career would you tell yourself to get into today?

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 24:31

To me or to-

E

Ed Clemente 24:33

Like if you were 17 right now graduating from high school, what would you tell yourself?

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 24:39

If I were 17? I would suggest to me to make more effort in order to discover and follow my talent. So investing my time and energies on it. Something that I'm not sure I did, for example, and never forget, and this is something that I did, to be open, open to innovation, open to go out from our comfort zone if you feel able to do it because not everybody is able to do it. And be ready to change your path. And not to stick to an idea that you had of your future. But be more self confident, but not arrogant. And this is something that I often say to me, and then try to transmit it to my sons and try to be happy and make people happy. This is another very important thing that we often forget.

E

Ed Clemente 25:51

I wanted to thank you again, because I know you stayed up late for this. And I think you missed a good dinner maybe. But we appreciate you Roberta Dall'Olio. I think I still messed it up.

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 26:08

Better than before.

E

Ed Clemente 26:10

Give me five more times, and I'll get it. But you're the director for EURADA, which is the

European Association of Development Agencies, you have a very challenging job. But it's also a really fascinating and fantastic job. And anything we can do in Michigan to help you progress. I told you before, if you want me to help you with some podcast ideas, you just let me know. And I hope we stay in contact with each other. But thank you, Roberta.

R

Roberta Dall'Olio 26:40

Thank you. Thank you for this opportunity. And let's think about this project of making podcasts of European RDAs and to transmit their experience on your channels. Thank you so much. It has been a pleasure.

E

Ed Clemente 27:00

Make sure you join us next week where our guests will be Adam Tomasek. He is the managing director and deputy for the Private Sector Relationships Experience at USAID.

A

Announcer 27:11

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