



Success Stories #ChangingCities

Municipal Development through the Strengthening of Knowledge and Governance Skills: the case of the City of **Khmilnyk**

Since 2015, the city of Khmilnyk has been one of the partner cities of the PLEDDG Project. Over the years of cooperation, Khmilnyk Mayor Serhiy Redchyk benefited from a series of educational opportunities offered by PLEDDG. Trainings strengthened both the mayor's managerial potential and the capacity of his team, while the expertise and skills acquired by them yielded effective solutions for pressing problems facing the community.

During two study tours to Poland arranged by PLEDDG, Serhiy Redchyk learned some of the best international practices in open governance and economic growth. Over the course of the first two-week tour, Mayor Redchyk met with representatives of Polish municipalities and learned about the local practices of participatory budgeting, strategic planning, support of small and medium enterprises, and investment attraction. The other tour focused on experience sharing in open governance, marketing and branding of cities.

In addition, leaders of partner cities of the PLEDDG Project went on a study tour to Canada and the Mayor of Khmilnyk joined the delegation, alongside representatives of seven other Ukrainian cities. The program focused on the study of Canadian experiences with inter-municipal cooperation, as well as regional and local economic development. PLEDDG regularly arranges such trips to Canada for representatives of partner cities with a view to facilitating the sharing of best Canadian practices in local economic development and open governance, and establishing cooperation between Ukrainian and Canadian cities.

“ ‘What matters most to me in education is for it to be applied and result-oriented. Once completed, it should enable you to achieve your goals more effectively. Various formats of education are tools of an integrated approach: each one of them has its own advantages and can be appropriate at various stages. Needless to say, it is important to have access to practical examples. They enable you to better experience the theoretical knowledge acquired during a workshop or conference. After completing my studies, I can confirm that every trip and participation in a conference or other event yielded its own good results that have resulted in specific actions at the level of our community’, **Serhiy Redchyk** stated.

After witnessing the positive experience of local economic development in other countries and discussing practical aspects with colleagues, Mayor Redchyk is convinced that the local authorities have to be open to dialogue, hear the voices of all segments of the population and consider them in planning the development of cities. With the backing of PLEDDG, the authorities of Khmilnyk drew up the ‘Program to Improve the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Businesses for 2018-2022’. The program is being implemented by creating conditions conducive to private enterprise. The local authorities extend targeted aid to enterprises and offer simplified access to various business development tools. The city mayor said that it was of critical importance for him to establish a constructive dialogue with local entrepreneurs.

“ ‘The fact that we managed to unite and find common ground with local entrepreneurs is in many ways thanks to PLEDDG. It is owing to the support of experts who initiated and expertly guided our discussions that representatives of the business community have gained a deeper understanding of the actual processes and learned to trust the authorities more. During our discussions, we found win-win and balanced solutions, and entrepreneurs believed that it is possible to cooperate with the authorities effectively. Since we are developing the tourist industry in Khmilnyk, there is a need for new tourist destinations. We have prepared all the necessary documentation to start the process of the Buh River cleaning and it would be interesting to launch tourist rides. For this purpose, we have bought kayaks, catamarans and a pleasure boat and we still have plans to buy other equipment. In partnership with PLEDDG project, PRAVO NGO and other tourist and recreation oriented NGOs, we are implementing two important projects: Tourist Khmilnyk: Making First Steps; and, New Modern Tourist and Resort City Development Model. Cooperation with the business community is indispensable because the authorities are unable to bring such ideas to life on their own. We meet them halfway, we can provide partial funding, but business people need to further develop these lines of business in the community on their own’, says **Mayor Redchyk**.

Mayor Redchyk also devotes a great deal of attention to keeping the public informed about the activities of the municipal authorities. Experience gleaned from international training programs enhanced his recognition of the importance of quality communication with the public. The city, in collaboration with PLEDDG, created the City Communications Strategy with a view to instituting systemic interactions with the public and promoting public activism.

“ ‘When it comes to developing professional knowledge and skills, in the immediate future I would like to develop the skill set essential to preparing properties for work with new investors. We have plots of land ready and we need to know how to promote them more effectively. Perhaps we should present them more actively at the nationwide level in order to attract investors more successfully. We are looking to implement communications expertly to attract investments. After all, Khmilnyk is an appealing area, a resort destination of national importance, but we currently feel that the city’s potential is not being realized fully’, the **Mayor** said.

A series of crisis communication workshops was held in May 2020, with PLEDDG local government representatives from partner cities, their media services, and the communications offices of city councils. The training program comprised three modules and covered community outreach, mass media relations, and social network communications during a crisis. Among others, representatives of the information and public communications department of Khmilnyk City Council attended the training.

“ ‘I particularly liked the practical assignments during the training. Despite a packed daily schedule, I completed them with satisfaction. I took a great interest in the topic of how to deal with fake news that can often be harmful, including to the reputation of the city authorities. PLEDDG webinars helped us figure out how soon we need to make decisions, how to respond to a particular situation, how exactly we should respond in order to disprove fake news as being absurd, what is the best course of action to follow, and how to do a better job disseminating the official position of the city authorities. Ultimately, it is important for truthful information to become accessible and understandable to a rank-and-file citizen, as well as trusted.

It’s not the first time that we’ve been learning communication competencies: while implementing the communications strategy, in 2019 we held a cycle of trainings for public servants, community representatives, NGO representatives, and young people. The feedback from participants was exceptionally good, so we plan to carry on in the same vein in the second half of 2020. We will also invite representatives of village councils that will be joining our municipal community because of administrative reform. One of the new topics will deal with crisis communications. I will share my experience with colleagues’, says **Natalia Mazur, Head of the Information and Public Communications Department of the Khmilnyk City Council**.

Nowadays it is not merely useful, but rather essential, to possess crisis communication knowledge and skills, and doubly so in the context of the COVID-2019 pandemic. The training helped the local authorities to be at the top of their game and remain organized in the face of the crisis, effectively cooperating with both the mass media and the community.

“ ‘After the webinars, we consulted PRAVO NGO experts and jointly looked for ways to improve communications with the community. As you know, the Khmilnyk United Territorial Community will be joined soon by a whole

range of rural territories. This will most likely complicate effective communications and will require organizational units to look for and implement alternative means of communication. I find it extremely important for community members to take an interest in the city's life, know about pressing issues, achievements and success stories. We must do a better job informing the citizens, initiate meetings, engage them in a dialogue, promote cooperation with NGOs, and communicate with young people on equal terms. We must also use different communication channels available to our residents. A shortage of information gives rise to questions, guesswork, criticism and, ultimately, a lack of comprehension. We decided to expand the channels of communication with the community by launching a Telegram channel and a Viber community. We have begun to make gradual changes to city council communications and shift the focus to social media. We previously focused on the city's official website, but now understand that it extremely important to keep abreast of the times in order to stay relevant and maintain contact with the community', **Mayor Redchyk** adds.

Khmilnyk-based officials also enhanced their knowledge of local economic development through training under a dedicated program developed by PLEDDG jointly with the National Academy of Public Administration, under the President of Ukraine. The list of training and reskilling programs is mandatory for public officials. Over the past four years, over 380 local officials from partner cities completed this training under the auspices of PLEDDG. Enhancing the institutional capacity of local government through training of officials and government leaders is an important component of PLEDDG activities. A higher level of professional development of city mayors contributes to more effective governance and economic development in the regions and in the country in general.

“ ‘The PLEDDG Project has a strong educational focus in many aspects: democratic governance, decentralization, local economic development, investments and exports, broadening of interagency dialogue, etc. Effective local economic development requires qualified human resources. We train them through our educational programs. In addition to workshops and trainings, the PLEDDG Project offers professional development for officials through educational visits, online training and web conferences, as well as authoring of training methods. We gage the effect of educational programs by looking at specific products that cities are capable of generating on their own: such as a development strategy or an investment portfolio. We help local officials develop their capacity to work under the new competitive conditions of decentralization and develop their city. It is worth mentioning that several types of ratings are being compiled now and there are various systems for assessing the performance of cities, but, whatever the method, partner cities of the PLEDDG Project always land in the top spots. Their growth is attributed to education, among other things’, says **Oleksandr Ignatenko, PLEDDG's Senior Expert on Interagency Cooperation and Economic Development**.

The success of the continued development of territorial communities in Ukraine and transformational processes largely depend on human resources, in terms of both their professionalism and worldview, to work under the new conditions. And, it is important to stay up to date on the latest technologies for managing local economic growth and know how to apply this knowledge to the conditions of a specific community. The PLEDDG Project consistently helps partner cities to competently build cooperation between different levels of government, and strengthens the potential of the municipal sector in Ukraine. A broader interagency dialogue, integrated planning of local economic development and strengthening the capacity of officials through training programs, are tools essential to the effective implementation of decentralization reform in Ukraine.



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The series of success stories #ChangingCities demonstrate successful examples and innovative approaches to democratic governance and local economic development in Zaporizhzhia, Vinnytsia, Poltava and Ivano-Frankivsk oblasts in Ukraine, that have resulted from the efforts of the international technical assistance project “Partnership for Local Economic Development and Democratic Governance” (PLEDDG) which is being implemented by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and funded by Global Affairs Canada.

