



RGD – Making a Difference

Pilot Districts Take Off!

Local Governments Learning to Listen to Their Constituents & Work Together

RGD's approach to its entire work in the field of regional development in Ukraine is based on the belief that the best and most innovative ideas come 'from below', and that it is the role of regional and national levels of government to provide the necessary enabling legislative and financial framework to make this possible. It is local communities and the municipal and district governments that serve them, who know best what the needs and priorities are. And the primary task of a good regional development strategy is to be a catalyst for local governments, small and larger enterprises, community organisations, schools, churches and other local institutions to come together to find practical ways to make their towns and villages a better place for them to live and more attractive for others to invest in.

Based on this approach, in the summer of 2007 the RGD project and the Zaporizhzhia Oblast Administration organised a competition to see which 3 municipalities or districts could come up with the best proposals for ambitious partnerships of this kind with their citizens. The winners would be supported by the RGD team in the preparation of a local development strategy and action plan and, more importantly, in putting it into practice. Their successes, and the lessons learned, would serve as a model and a positive experience for other towns and rural districts in the region. The three that were selected - **Energodar, Tokmak** and **Primorsk**— are characteristically different from each other, but each in its own way has turned out to be a 'pilot' for others, not only in Zaporizhzhia region, but also for similar towns and districts all over the country. Particularly interesting is how each has developed imaginative and innovative forms of working partnerships, whether between local governments and the communities they serve or among the structures of local government themselves.

Energodar: Energodar is a city of around 65,000 residents on the shores of the river Dnipro. It is best known for its nuclear power station, one of the largest in Europe when it was built in the 1980s. The plant is the major source of the city's budget and Energodar is today one of Zaporizhzhia region's better-off small municipalities.

The imaginative and far-sighted city authority, under the leadership of the city Mayor, recognises that there are often high environmental costs to be paid for being a small and successful industrialised town. It is also understood very clearly that when the budget of the town is overwhelmingly dependent on one source of income and employment, the future prosperity of the town is far from guaranteed. Creating a safer and more attractive environment and diversifying the local economy became major pillars of Energodar's development strategy, prepared with advice from RGD experts and adopted by the City Council in July 2008. The City Council followed this step by integrating the strategy with its so-called 'general plan', based on which key decisions about land use are made. This ensured that the strategy would be much more than a paper document abandoned on a shelf.

Since then, again with intensive RGD support and advice from regional expert *Vladimir Nazarenko*, city officials have worked with the local community to design and implement (with city budget and other financing) a wide variety of projects from the action programmes of the strategy. These include, among others, a mini-plant for recycling waste, 2

water supply projects, a city information centre for local and incoming business, with computerized systems to speed up business registration and provide details of land available for development, and many more.

Perhaps most interesting of all, the City Council has set itself a demanding programme of regular public hearings to receive community feedback on how the development strategy implementation is going, which would be regarded as an excellent practice by any local authority in the European Union.



A new river-side walk in the Energodar downtown centre.



Tokmak: Economically, Tokmak municipality is in complete contrast to Energodar. A smaller town of about 30,000 population, surrounded by a rural district of the same name, the town has seen the vegetable processing plant



Primorsk: The Primorsk region encompasses a 250 km stretch of Azov sea coastline in the south of the Zaporizhzhia region. The area is administered by 4 separate district councils: Berdyansk, Primorsk, Priazovsk and Akimovsk.

Primorsk countryside

Tokmak traditional clothing which was once its major source of employment all but cease operation because of the decline in production from the formerly rich agricultural land of Tokmak district. This is due partly to the widespread decline in agricultural production in Ukraine following the break-up of the collective farm system, but is mainly the result of the silting up of the river Molochna which flows through the town and district, and the catastrophic impact of this on land irrigation. Today, Tokmak is a net importer of fruit and vegetables from other regions and, by the criteria of the new State law on Depressed Regions, has been identified by the Ministry of Economy as one of Ukraine's poorest towns.

With active support from the RGD project, a significant and common problem in regional development has been addressed. It is almost always the case that relations between locally elected town councils and state appointed district administrations are at best strained and often overtly antagonistic. But in Tokmak's case both authorities, with encouragement from RGD, realised that the issue of their future development had to be addressed together and that at its heart lay the condition of the river Molochna. As a result of joint town-district working groups and participation in RGD training, a major project for de-silting the river has been designed. The project's result will be additional recreation space in the town centre, irrigation of the surrounding farmland and ultimately new contracts and a new future for the vegetable processing plant. This project has been identified as a priority by the oblast administration and the oblast budget for 2010.

Originally, RGD was to support the Berdyansk district in the preparation of a development strategy, but it was quickly realized that a different approach was more beneficial. The four councils recognised that when it comes to economic development, which for the Primorsk region means above all a reinvigoration of the declining tourism industry, administrative boundaries between local governments often hinder more than they help. As a result, they decided to co-operate rather than compete with one another and to set up joint working groups on strategic common themes of tourism development with a view to pooling budget resources for implementation. This was a bold decision, not least because of the complexities of Ukraine's legislation on the powers and operation of local government. With the help of RGD, the four districts have found a legal mechanism for combining their resources. Also, the Heads of District Administration have recently signed a joint memorandum of cooperation, followed by each of the four district councils' approval of a shared strategy for development. The ultimate goal is to set up joint institutions to make cooperation sustainable in the long term. To this end, RGD regional expert *Vladimir Nazarenko* delivered a workshop for leading managers and specialists from the four districts to disseminate the methodology of project design and management pioneered in the RGD project and to give advice on securing funding sources. Follow-up advice and mentoring is also being provided by former trainees in the RGD programme.

An Example for Others

Smaller town towns in Ukraine generally be characterized as being predominantly one-industry driven and having infrastructure that is in a state of collapse. Surely, these present serious challenges for regional policy in Ukraine. Up till now, policymakers have still to find a solution to either. It is therefore not surprising that national ministries and other regions have been taking a close interest in what RGD and its partners have been achieving in Zaporizhzhia's pilot districts of Energodar, Tokmak, and Primorsk.

Project Information

The Regional Governance and Development (RGD) Project is a five-year (2005-2010) cooperation project of the Canadian Urban Institute, supported by the Canadian International Development Agency. The Project promotes civic engagement in regional governance, providing opportunities for Ukrainian citizens and communities to shape their common future and to put their region on the path towards sustainable development.

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