



Study visit to Poland of specialists of local government and NGOs from Moldova

Business Consulting Institute and the PAUCI Foundation have organized a new study visit to Poland, during 3-7 February, 2014. The visit is part of the project „*Promoting PPI as an efficient mechanism for community empowerment and sustainable local development*”.

This EU project comes to strengthen the capacities of non-state actors and local authorities for cooperation and sustainable development. It promotes the concept of *participatory planning and implementation*, which is new in Moldova.

Experts of local government and NGOs were invited to participate to this study visit, where they learned from the Polish experience of *participatory planning and implementation*.

After 1989, Poland has enjoyed profound reforms; decentralization was among the first ones. Poland became a NATO member in 1999 and joined the European Union in 2004.

Programs and projects for cooperation and social participation

The Rural Development Program, which has the financial support of the European Union, improves living conditions in rural areas. It offers support to local action groups and in the implementation of local development strategies.

The program covers more than 90% of the country. In its earlier phase, 2007-2013, Poland received funds in amount of 787.5 million Euro.

Its main actors are local leaders, which cooperate culturally, economically and territorially. Citizens have an essential role in implemented projects and participate to decision-making processes.

The experience of many countries shows that citizen participation in public decision-making is a prerequisite for the quality of governance. *The Local Activity Support Center* (Warsaw) cooperates with local government institutions and helps them improve their work. One of their projects, named "*Let's decide together*", aims to involve local communities in decision-making. The project has as beneficiary 60 communes (*gmina*) and counties (*powiat*), which have formed therein eight subregions.

Through this project, the communities and citizens can understand the impact of local authorities' activity, while the governments perceive better existing problems and are able

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to define acceptable strategies.

Polish municipalities , models of local development

80% of investments made in **Wyszogrod** come from funds of the European Union. This *gmina* offers high living conditions and access to education, health services etc. Its strengths are tourism and agriculture, having 40.000 jobs in the last one.

This *gmina* is beneficiary of the project "*Let's decide together.*"

Lubicz is the largest commune in Torun County. Its local action group (formed with EU financial support) has an annual budget of 239 187 Euro and supports local authorities' cooperation, joint projects, infrastructure development, promotion of cultural heritage etc.

Sopot is the richest *gmina* and the most important Polish resort.

It is the first Polish municipality having implemented the participatory budget. The term designates a model of civic engagement in which citizens decide what happens with a part of the local budget and are able to define public projects.

The current participatory budget of Sopot is 956,748 Euro.

Local action groups: cooperation for development

Within this study visit the participants were also invited to the *Association of Communal Development Center*, in Kutno, to the *Eco-Initiative Association*, in Kwidzyn, to "*No for skyscrapers*", in Gdansk.

These associations, which are juridical persons, apply three principles in their activity: *volunteering, equality, partnership*. They know that "*unity is strength*" and that their chance to obtain European funding is directly proportional with the size of their associations and the number of beneficiary residents.

The work of local action groups is supported by local self-governments and the European Union.

Conclusions of the study visit

The participants to the study visit took cognizance of activities in rural areas and EU support; citizens' participation to public decision-making; local action groups and their role in local development; aspects of environmental management; participatory budget etc.

The visit held out genuine development models and valuable lessons. The experts were invited to cooperate with the Polish party and expressed their willingness to launch common projects in the near future.