In 2014, Ukrainians fought for greater democracy in the so-called Euromaidan Revolution. People from all sections of society took to the streets together to demand their right to self-determination. Since then, Ukraine has been investing in decentralisation and in strengthening local self-government. Ukrainian cities and municipalities are being encouraged to structure and manage their own processes in line with the model of their Western European counterparts. However, some cities are growing rapidly – and so are the tasks and challenges.

Local authority staff are often unprepared for taking on their new duties. They are expected to balance financial and environmental considerations for their cities while simultaneously tackling demographic problems. Rather than being confined to a single sector, processes are now being designed holistically in an approach that experts call integrated urban development. Plans that follow this strategy promote sustainable development, social balance and diversity in society, while facilitating investment in technical and social infrastructure. If this fails, enhanced cultural and structural quality and economic growth will prove extremely hard to come by.

The challenge: areas of potential remain untapped

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Our approach: performing new tasks better

On behalf of the German government and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, the project is working to improve living conditions in the Ukrainian cities of Vinnytsia, Chernivtsi, Poltava, Zhytomyr, Kyiv and Liviv as well as in Podil, the historical centre of Kyiv. Together with national and international experts, GIZ is evaluating areas such as the transport sector, energy supply, the land registry system and waste management in the cities. Its findings serve as a basis for the partners to develop technical plans for structural improvement and lay the groundwork for implementing them, complete with sustainable mechanisms for integrated urban development. Locals are being involved every step of the way. In Zhytomyr, for instance, the city’s defining landmark – an old water tower – is being repurposed as a lively community centre. Meanwhile, in Vinnytsia, a new tram line is helping to create a modern urban space that combines living, working and leisure. Residents are benefiting from a better quality of life and cities are maturing into growth hubs, fostering a Ukraine that is strong both economically and democratically.
The project is helping its partner cities do their bit to uphold international agreements. In 2015, all 193 UN member states signed up to the 2030 Agenda, committing themselves to making cities inclusive, safe and sustainable. The following year, Ukraine also signed an agreement to implement the so-called Leipzig Charter, the EU’s guidelines on sustainable urban development. To be able to deliver the necessary reforms, local authority staff are being trained in how to address the many new requirements of their roles in a professional manner and improve their teamwork. With support from GIZ, the cities are regularly sharing their experiences with the competent ministry, thus helping to advance the reform process at national level. Amongst other things, the project has laid sound foundations for a new urban planning law.

Our results: tens of thousands of people are getting involved

Since 2016, GIZ has been implementing the training programme „Qualification 2030“ Within two years, nearly 1,800 local authority staff from four of the six partner cities took part in one of 200 seminars. These courses enhance interdisciplinary working skills, thus improving cooperation, communication and coordination in city councils. As many as 99 per cent of participants said that the training was important for their day-to-day work. They learned more about the links between integrated urban development and investment in infrastructure, for example. The city of Lviv, for instance, is now planning a new tram line. The planning documents are based on integrated urban development strategies and involve the transport, energy and environment sectors in equal measure, a key prerequisite if the transport project is to attract financing from an international bank in the future.

Working together with GIZ, the cities are creating participatory structures and are inviting a vibrant civil society to help shape them: locals can visit citizen information centres for urban development to find out about initiatives and join with the city authorities in setting priorities. And demand is high: within just two years, 20,000 people took part in around 150 events. This enables public service planning to be better aligned with people’s needs and makes them happier to be living in their home town.

Training opportunities for urban planners are also much improved. Alongside new courses for city planners in Ukraine, an international exchange semester for urban development students at a German university of applied sciences will be launched in 2018.

Mykola Kostrytsia: „A transformation in city management“

Mykola Kostrytsia is Director of the Department of Economic Development of Zhytomyr City Council. He has been working with GIZ on the issue of urban development since early 2016 and describes what has changed since then:

„For me, the project „Integrated urban development in Ukraine“ is a transformation of consciousness, approaches and actions in city management, where interaction and involvement in decision-making processes of many stakeholders are at the forefront. This is the most systematic project for the transformation of Ukrainian cities and people involved in this process. It gives a chance to development and strategic changes, the value of which will be appreciated only later, over the years, but at the same time it brings to life modern European urban practices of management and participation process.”