



DGIV/CULT/IC(2008)06

26 March 2008

INTERCULTURAL CITIES

Joint action of the Council of Europe and the European Commission

Melitopol, Ukraine

March 2008

Background

Melitopol in the Ukraine has some 158000 inhabitants and, according to the census of 2001, there are 93 nationalities and ethnical groups represented in city population, including Ukrainians (87750), Russians (62050), Bulgarians (2910), Tartars (1510), Belorussians (1060), Roma (480), Armenians (435) Crimean Tartars (380), Hebrews (360), Greeks (320), Germans (220), Poles (205), Moldavians (200), Czechs (150), Georgians (135). There are also other small ethnic populations that are not represented in these statistics.

Melitopol sees itself a unique city, emerging from an ancient agricultural civilization. Different ethno-cultural groups are seen as living peacefully here, showing a pattern of peaceful co-existence and ethnic tolerance. The importance of the relative harmony achieved cannot be overestimated, taking into account that within a few hundreds kilometers there have been constant conflicts between Tartars and the local population of the Crimea. Melitopol has not had any significant ethnic tension and violence during the past 200 years.

With the support of local authorities there have been established more than 20 nation-cultural communities in the city, united under the Association of Melitopol nation-cultural communities. The local authorities have contributed to the creating of favourable conditions for National Minorities' free expression, for the development of their ethnic cultures, religious distinctiveness. The most active communities and the Association of national communities have taken appropriate rooms on a long lease provided free by the public authorities. All the national minorities have equal political, economic, social, spiritual and cultural rights.

The regional budget provides financing for the “Support Program for National minorities development” and is annually worked out to improve activity of the nation-cultural communities. Under the initiative of local authorities the Co-ordinating Council of the nation-cultural communities representatives is organised. The Council addresses urgent questions relating to the preservation of historical and cultural heritage, creating favourable conditions for development of the national culture in the city are discussed, as well as the work resumes of every community for the month and year.

In the year 2006 a department to address questions relating to religion, migration and national minorities was organised. It was established by the town council for maintaining and developing contacts between authorities and national minorities. The department is taking forward the training and development of officials who are known as ‘cultural transformers’ in the development of the city.

In the last year due to the financial support of the state regional administration and the town authorities the following measures were financed: tailoring of national costumes, head-dresses and choreographic shoes; publication of books, booklets and badges; visiting of different festivals. Some 19 national societies are officially registered and there has been a history of working with embassies and consulates to make sure documentation and materials are made available to children to explore their heritage, culture, and language learning. These are accommodated in a ‘palaces of culture’.

The local authorities and community are looking to celebrate the Common Day of nation-cultural communities of Melitopol, that could become an international festival of nation-cultural communities of Ukraine. There is a strong tradition of engaging with the food, culture and festivals of minorities. Many national minorities are represented in political and commercial life. The Mayor characterised the essence of the city as ‘tolerant, pragmatic and entrepreneurial.’

During last three years Melitopol has close relations with a partner organization, the Development Centre “Democracy through Culture” led by Olexandr Butsenko. The Centre provides city authorities, public and non-governmental local organizations with consulting, training, coaching and researching services. Due to Centre activities, Melitopol has now support at the central public authority level of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Ukraine.

Future prospects

One of the key themes underpinning development is ‘revitalisation’ – a rediscovery of the national memory given the experience of occupation and the need to recover and showcase distinctive strands of Ukrainian culture and history.

Melitopol sees itself as the ‘gateway’ to the Crimea and a crossroads for towns and regions. Some 40,000 people pass through the city per day during tourist seasons (from May to October). The ‘Stone Grave’ just outside the city, one of the earliest known locations for

human civilization and the historic monument of the national significance, attracts some 50,000 visitors in summer.

The city has an economic development strategy, which meets US Aid requirements and a framework for cultural policy. With taxation at 13% there are limited public resources for development and limited charitable or philanthropic resources.

There are strong links between the public authority and the two local higher education institutions, including the teacher training college. An open session with the students demonstrated a vibrant and passionate young population willing to both criticize the administration on issues and commit to undertaking work to support intercultural development.

There are also two sports schools / colleges.

In media terms there are 3 TV stations, 8 radio stations, and 5/6 local newspapers. They showed an active interest in the visit and will be vital partners in any programme for developing the city image and brand.

Some of the significant issues for the city include;

- Budgetary pressures – budgets are held at regional level and released after discussion / negotiation. This presents issues in terms of autonomy and scope for action in the city – at present only city salaries are being paid.
- Transport links – at present the only link to the city from Kiev is an overnight train, which has relatively basic facilities. Signposting of cultural assets and for tourists is poor.
- The city does not have an international profile as yet.
- There is a danger that the small Roma presence is marginalised while significant work is going on in relation to integration and development support to all other national minorities.
- Language provision is clearly large in scale and makes significant demands on the public authority. Those training teachers are keen to know how this is being approached elsewhere and how this can be best resourced.

Some of the ways forward for the city include:

- Developing an understanding of how the cultural diversity and strengths of the city can be used to leverage overall social and economic development – to add value to the economic development strategy, to reduce the risk that it comes to be seen as a vital but expensive use of resources.
- The focus of the city on the food, culture and festivals of minorities and distinctive history is a valuable tool for integration and tolerance. At the same

time there is a need to define characteristics that are unique only to the area – whether textile design, local crafts, production of honey, the cherry tree, the stone grave, availability of national cuisines – to develop tourist trails that are easily accessible and signposted. A key has to be retain the huge number of people who transit through Melitopol on any given day.

- The authorities need to focus on what is distinctive and unique about Melitopol in order to project its distinctiveness internationally. As a model of a ‘united nations’ of communities able to live without conflict and violence there is a need for authorities to understand and articulate why this is the case and project this distinctiveness.
- While sports activities did not form a focus for the visit, the facilities available and whether there is scope for developing centres of excellence in distinctive sports should be explored.
- It is also important that in taking forward intercultural development the Roma community is not marginalised or excluded.
- There is a need for a forward looking and ambitious city vision that is articulated with confidence based on a belief that as well as having much to learn from other cities Melitopol has a huge amount to offer. This vision should include addressing the need in the medium term for the city to be accessible by air.
- While it is important given the history of the region for Melitopol to retrieve and document its history, a focus on cultural forms of the past should not be at the cost of also focusing on the development of the new. Preservation of that which is valuable from the past needs to be balanced with innovation and the development of the new that will contribute to Melitopol’s future.

SWOT analysis of the situation in Melitopol with regard to its participation in the Intercultural Cities (ICC) programme

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The historical presence of over 100 ethnic groups and nationalities, some of which represent very small populations of less than 1000 people left in the world, for comparatively small number of population • Interculturality is an underlying thread of much of the cultural and social life in the city • The local administrative team has a good understanding of the potential of intercultural city branding and the Deputy Mayor, especially, is capable of mobilising energies around the project • Strong desire for international networking and exchange • Trustful relations between local authorities and cultural associations • Authentic and good relations between the generations, slightly patriarchal but respectful of young people (pre-capitalism, pre-globalisation type of social culture). • Two universities ranking around the middle in the Ukrainian league table • Historical cross-road of civilizations and cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massive tourist streams through the city in summer (40.000 people a day on average) whose strong economic potential is still to be captured. • Everybody speaks Russian as well as Ukrainian which are the languages of the overwhelming majority of tourists • The citizens and the leadership understand the concept of city branding and are ready to develop ideas and a business plan based on cultural diversity • Mushrooming enterprises, a handful of “progressive” entrepreneurs who care about the city and social values • The window of opportunity and the direction for Melitopol in the context of the programme seems clear so progress could be rather quick • Availability of excellent methodological help by the Kyiv Institute “Democracy through culture”. • Potential support from regional and central agencies in developing inter-sectoral local development strategy
Weaknesses	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The tourist and cultural infrastructure is poor (no airport (10 hours by train from Kyiv), no theatre or modern exhibition buildings, very few hotels and restaurants. • Culture is largely associated with folk or classical art and heritage activities, not many opportunities for youth culture and leisure. • Very few people (except among the young) speak English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the city is unable to ensure support and funding by the central authorities, the implementation of its future intercultural strategy may be difficult • Possible deviation towards more ordinary, less daring and spectacular ideas for city development, which may seem more feasible but will damage the potential competitive edge of the city. • The remoteness of the city and language

- Poor information infrastructure (no web sites in English on Melitopol, no massive internet penetration)

issues make it difficult to provide international expertise on a regular basis so to keep the focus and energy of the local people high.