

IMPLEMENTING DEMOCRATIC INNOVATIONS DURING WARTIME AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

THE CONGRESS



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COUNCIL OF EUROPE

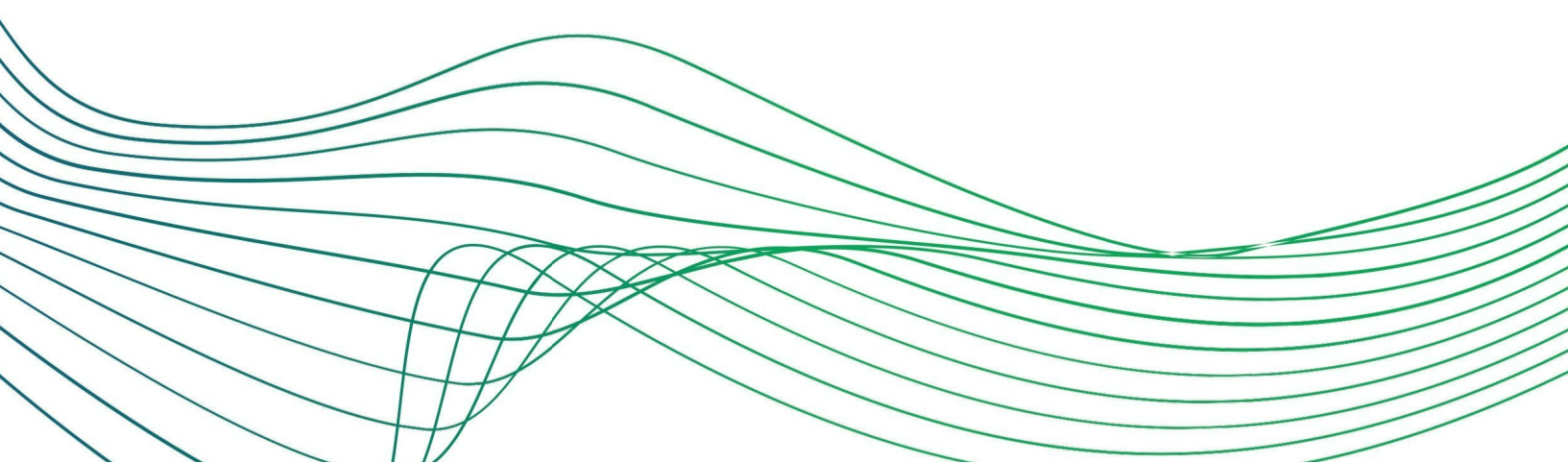


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INTRODUCTION

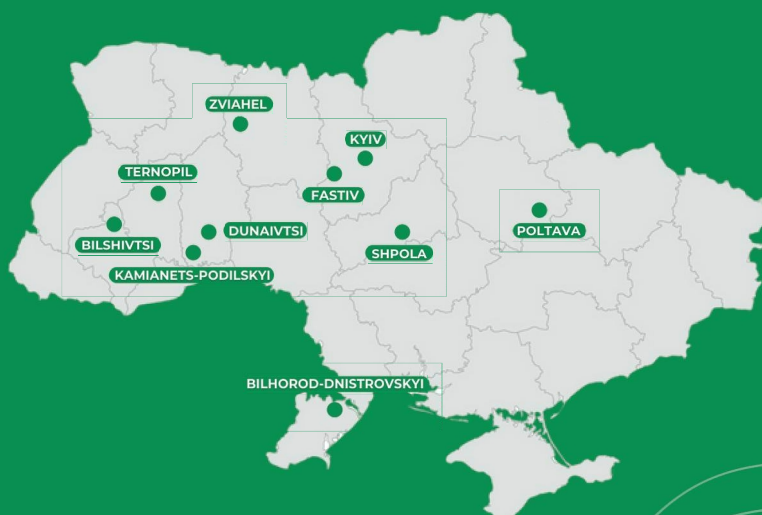
In the context of the full-scale war of aggression waged by the Russian Federation, Ukraine is experiencing challenges and changes in the local governance system, demonstrating resilience and a desire for democratic innovation. The participation of local governments in the EU accession process is of great importance, as local authorities provide a quick and effective response to the needs of communities: they organise humanitarian aid, support social cohesion, and promote the implementation of European standards that help strengthen democratic institutions and ensure stability in the regions. In this way, local self-government plays an important role in the country's recovery and development, providing the basis for further EU integration.

In the framework of the project "Strengthening multi-level governance, democracy, and human rights at local level in Ukraine", the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe provided support to 10 Ukrainian communities from eight regions. Thanks to this support, the municipalities of Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy, Bilshivtsi, Dunaivtsi, Fastiv, Kamianets Podilskiy, Kyiv, Poltava, Shpola, Ternopil, and Zviahel are implementing new approaches to address the challenges caused by the war. Their work intends to reinforce local democracy by engaging citizens in decision-making, promoting human rights at the local level and strengthening civil society.

With the help of expert and financial support from the Congress, communities have developed and implemented innovative approaches to engage youth, veterans, and internally displaced persons in decision making. The new practices are based on a human rights-based approach and open governance principles, which include transparency, participation, and accountability in local policy making. These efforts not only respond to citizens' basic rights and needs, but also establish best practices of democratic innovation that can provide new opportunities for the country's recovery.

This brochure presents implemented initiatives which demonstrate how, despite difficulties caused by the war, Ukrainian communities united around the values of local democracy can become a models for others.

The showcased local initiatives were implemented within the above-mentioned Congress project, which aims at strengthening dialogue, partnership and consultation between different levels of government. It also intends to enhance participatory governance and citizen engagement in accordance with the principles of local democracy and open governance, as well as promote and guarantee the right to equality and non-discrimination at the local level for the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine. The project is a contribution to the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine for 2023-2026 "Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction".



BILHOROD-DNISTROVSKYI CITY CENTRE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi, like the rest of the Odesa region, is under constant threat of rocket attacks, but continues to defend itself and its citizens' right to life. The community is actively developing, gaining new knowledge and skills, which proves useful in managing the city in difficult times. The municipality launched the City Centre for Civil Rights in 2024, aiming not only to create a space where citizens can obtain information relating to their daily life, but also up-to-date knowledge about their rights and freedoms. In this view, the Centre organises seminars and events. One of its main tasks is also to provide legal assistance to citizens. All in all, the municipality established the Centre to promote democratic values, strengthen citizens' rights and develop civil society.

Olha Tsipulenko, Director of the Department of Economy and Infrastructure Development of Bilhorod Dnistrovskyi City Council, emphasised that it is important to introduce new forms of communication with the population and build a transparent dialogue between residents and local authorities. The initiative also provides an opportunity for the City Council's employees to gain knowledge and experience in managing grants, and interacting with the public.

"Fleeing from the war, people started building their lives from scratch in a new community. And it is important for us to unite everyone. Such initiatives provide an opportunity to raise awareness on rights and opportunities among city residents, internally displaced persons, youth, women and socially vulnerable groups living in Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi. All this enables residents to increase their participation in public life and make important municipal decisions," explained Olha Tsipulenko.



BILSHIVTSI

THE “OPEN ACCESS” INITIATIVE

Since 2016, the village of Bilshivtsi in the Ivano-Frankivsk region has become the centre of a local territorial community comprising 16 settlements. In 2024, the community presented the results of the successfully implemented “Open Access” initiative. This initiative focused on the provision of services and interaction with citizens through open access to information. “Open Access” is an e-governance tool which increases the transparency of local decisions and engages residents in public processes.

Installing the electronic voting system “Golos” was one of the initiative’s components. The system automated the full cycle of work of the Bilshivtsi Village Council – that is, preparing and holding meetings, publishing results, and analysing the Council’s work. In addition, thanks to the Congress’ support, the municipality was able to improve the structure and functionality of its website, making it more accessible to people with visual impairment. Besides, community staff created an official Facebook page of the Bilshivtsi Village Council and updated its YouTube channel. For such a small community, this can be considered a great step in implementing innovative e-governance and e-democracy tools.

Despite the fact that young people make up a small proportion of the population in the Bilshivtsi community, the deputy head of the village, Mariya Boichuk, hopes that the introduction of electronic governance tools will encourage all residents, including young people, to participate more actively in local decision making.

"Before the full-scale war, we had experience with participatory budgeting, which allowed the community members to implement projects. We however did not have electronic democracy tools, so voting on participatory budget projects was done in paper form," said Mariya Boichuk. Now, thanks to the support of the Council of Europe, the Bilshivtsi community has its own profile on the Edem e-democracy portal, which enables residents to vote electronically on participatory budgets. Besides, the platform has other functionalities such as submitting a petition to local authorities, and conducting local polls.



DUNAIVTSI

CO-CREATION CENTRE “ANTHILL”

The town of Dunaivtsi in the Khmelnytskyi region has successfully implemented an initiative to establish the co-creation centre “Anthill”. The name “Anthill” symbolises new social connections and an increased civic engagement within the municipality. This accessible space is designed for various social groups, such as children, internally displaced persons and veterans with their families, as well as other community members. The centre is intended at becoming a place of meeting and co-operation, where residents can fulfil their potential.

Since the beginning of the war, Dunaivtsi has become a humanitarian community which has hosted about 12 000 internally displaced persons. With such a large number of newcomers, the community realised that it needed a space to hold events to ease their integration. Thanks to the support of the Council of Europe, the Centre was renovated and equipped with modern furniture and tools, and professional mentors were engaged to conduct training activities.

The Centre holds daily activities, attracting about 10-15 people to each event. It is located in the public school's library, which also houses a resilience centre which provides psychological support to residents, in particular by conducting art therapy classes and seminars for parents. The Centre also hosts events for the City Council's advisory bodies, including meetings of the councils of internally displaced persons, the honorary council, and the youth council. Other cultural events, such as meetings with writers and thematic workshops for children and adults are also held at the premises.

"The biggest resource and potential of a community is its residents. We must create conditions for everyone to have the opportunity to develop and join an initiative group. That is why the Centre has become a real anthill in our community, where life is in full swing today. The Centre hosts events and involves different categories of residents. The cohesion of people in the community is a great and powerful force, and we understand this," stressed Velina Zaiats, Mayor of the Dunaivtsi territorial community.



ZVIAHEL

INCLUSIVE SPACE "YOUTH ACTS"

In order to actively engage young people in the community's life, the municipality of Zviahel created the youth-inclusive space "Youth Acts". It took inspiration from a similar initiative in the library of Velykyi Molodkiv village. The initiative, which active youth from the locality steered, aims at encouraging youth, internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups to participate in community life, as well as promoting social activism.

The inclusive space "Youth Acts" is an important platform providing opportunities to younger generations to plan and implement ideas, thereby strengthening the ties between the rural population and local authorities. One of the projects launched within the youth space related to school budgeting: young people were given the opportunity not only to vote for projects to be implemented, but also to contribute with their ideas to participate in their development. Altogether, the activities organised contribute to increasing trust in local authorities, as well as improving the residents' emotional state and well-being.

"Thanks to spaces such as "Youth Acts", young people are engaged, their initiatives are generated, and the community is united," said Iryna Hudz, Deputy Mayor of Zviahel.

The community plans to create a Community Centre, which will become a place for community development, and include a congress hall, a veterans' hub, and a modern library. The Centre will also provide information platforms for young people and veterans, promoting residents' active participation in community and economic life.



KAMIANETS- PODILSKYI CREATIVE SPACE “BIBLIOTHECA”

Kamianets-Podilskyi is the second largest city in the Khmelnytskyi region. With a population of over 100 000 people, it strives to become a comfortable place to live and realise its residents' potential. The municipality created the creative space “Bibliotheca” within the city library to provide citizens and government officials with a platform of communication to ensure an open dialogue between them, as well as foster co-operation and partnership building.

The renovated and re-equipped space is used for educational and cultural events. Thanks to the new 3D printers, users can materialise their creative ideas, such as prototypes of souvenirs. Approximately 300 people have already joined the activities organised as part of this initiative, and the municipality is confident to increase public involvement in future events on topics including participatory budgeting, online consultations, e-petitions, etc.

"I think that the biggest achievement is that we were able to change the perception of the library across different age groups. Now the reading room is not a place where one just sits quietly and reads books, but a space where residents can spend time comfortably, watching the video archive, or playing board games. We can already see young people uniting within the new space, which revitalises it," said Deputy Mayor Vadym Mendohralo.

Vadym Mendohralo added that thanks to the quality selection of books and its staff's work, the library attracts new visitors and regularly receives students as part of educational excursions. The library network, which includes 14 libraries, is becoming an important meeting place for the community, including internally displaced persons.



KYIV

YOUTH EDUCATIONAL CENTRE

The Kyiv City Council launched an initiative to create the "Educational Centre" aimed at engaging the least represented groups, such as youth and internally displaced persons, in local policy and decision making. The centre will help strengthen the dialogue between residents and local authorities.

"The Educational Centre brings together young people from different parts of Ukraine, creating opportunities for exchange of experience and co-operation. The young people who participate in this initiative are already actively influencing the future of the country through their volunteer and community initiatives. Their activities demonstrate the importance of youth participation in social and political life," said Volodymyr Bondarenko, Deputy Mayor and Secretary of the Kyiv City Council.

The establishment of the centre is an important step towards expanding opportunities for Kyiv residents to participate in the development of the capital. The centre has become a reliable and modern communication platform to strengthen the role of youth and internally displaced persons in decision making and the implementation of projects in the city. It is worth noting that this initiative not only increases the level of participation of various groups in decision making, but also creates new opportunities for the development of the community as a whole.

"We have ambitious plans to develop co-operation between the youth of Kyiv and internally displaced persons. To this end, a number of partnership initiatives have already been launched to strengthen co-operation and have a long-term impact on youth policy in Ukraine. In turn, the annual Ukrainian Youth Forum promises to bring new ideas and innovations that will positively affect the social and political life in the capital and regions, contributing to the development of these initiatives and strengthening cross-sectoral co-operation," emphasised Volodymyr Bondarenko.



POLTAVA

VETERANS' CENTRE

Currently, one of the most pressing problems in Ukraine is the high social isolation of war veterans, which makes them feel alienated from civilian life. Therefore, in June 2024, the Poltava City Council established the “Poltava Veterans' centre” to address issues related to veterans' social integration and return to civilian life.

The main goal of the “Poltava Veterans' Centre” is to create the necessary conditions for the successful reintegration of women and men veterans, providing access to various resources and services, including psychological and rehabilitation support, counselling, trainings, vocational education, and social integration. This is one of Poltava City Council's most important initiatives to improve present and former armed forces members' situation and quality of life, as well as to comprehensively promote their social and professional rehabilitation. The institution in fact not only provides assistance to war veterans, but also to current servicepersons, their relatives, and the families of the fallen defenders of Ukraine.

“Currently, our centre employs nine specialists involved in the veteran community. These are former or active military personnel, veterans or women whose relatives serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Our platform operates on a peer-to-peer basis and is based on an individual approach, meaning that our specialists receive a request and accompany a person to solve their problem,” explained Valeriy Parkhomenko, First Deputy Mayor of the city.

The City of Poltava plans to build a sports and rehabilitation centre for women and men veterans in the near future. To this aim, it has already allocated a land plot and developed a project blueprint and feasibility studies. The local authorities are making significant efforts to ensure that the activities of the Veterans' Centre contribute to strengthening co-operation between the military and the local community.



TERNOPIL

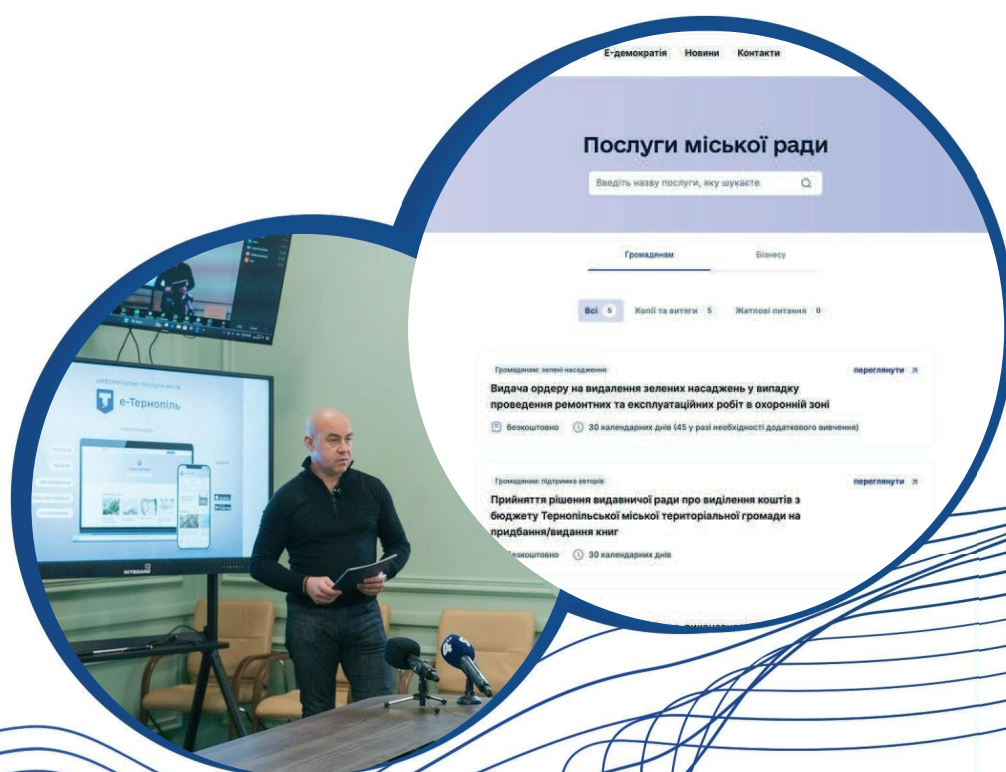
UPGRADING THE E-TERNOPIL MOBILE APP

The Ternopil community has introduced a modernised and improved information platform in the e-Ternopil mobile app. Called the “Citizens' portal”, the platform promotes e-democracy and provides residents with online access to a range of municipal services.

Ternopil residents have expressed great interest in this initiative, which supports the digitalisation of administrative services. Easing access to social, housing and communal services such as the issuance of extracts from the State Register of Civil Status Acts, the e-Ternopil app also allows residents to submit documents online without unnecessary bureaucracy and using an electronic signature, track changes in the status of their application, seek information, as well as participate in online surveys and consultations. Services are provided to both business representatives and citizens.

The app also offers interactive maps, notifications on important events or emergencies, and the ability to track public transport in real time.

“Before implementing this initiative, Ternopil already had a Residents' portal, which was however not fully functional. We completely redesigned it to make it user-friendly and visually appealing. We updated the platform to enable users to access municipal services, submit documents and receive a response online. Thanks to the initiative, we have also developed an e-democracy tool to help residents make decisions on the city's main issues, and understand that their opinion is of utmost importance,” underlined Maryana Zvarych, Head of Digital Transformation and Media Relations at Ternopil City Council.



FASTIV

EFFECTIVE SELF-GOVERNANCE WITHOUT CORRUPTION

The Fastiv community, which is located in the Kyiv region, launched an initiative entitled "Building the community of the future: effective self-governance without corruption". The project, which is aimed at improving transparency in local government, in particular consisted in devising an Anti-corruption Code, and creating the dedicated online chatbot "Anti-Kor" to allow residents to quickly and anonymously report alleged cases of corruption. Both processes will, in turn, contribute to reduce corruption risks and increase public trust.

The initiative also included training events to present anti-corruption methods and whistleblower protection mechanisms. During these events, participants gained knowledge to change their perception and understanding of corruption, which is often used to discredit the state institutions and authorities at all levels, especially in the context of the Russian Federation's war of aggression.

The Fastiv community's approach to fighting corruption is an example of how local authorities can implement effective anti-corruption mechanisms. Mayor Mykhailo Netiazhuk plans to share the successful experience with other Ukrainian communities and develop partnerships with them, further contributing to Ukraine's recovery and path towards EU integration.

"We are definitely not going to rest on our laurels. We will continue to work to accelerate the EU accession process, so that our community becomes more European. Our next plans include sharing our experience with other communities. We have already had such study visits, when colleagues from other regions of Ukraine came and studied our experience in order to replicate it in their communities. Therefore, I think that together, as a team, we will overcome all the challenges and ensure Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration," said Mykhailo Netiazhuk, Mayor of Fastiv.



SHPOLA

SCHOOL OF SOLIDARITY: PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

The town of Shpola, in the Cherkasy region, established the "School of Solidarity: Public Governance" to uphold and promote human rights, including those of women, and involve internally displaced persons and youth in community decision making. The "School of Solidarity" organises lectures, seminars and workshops to familiarise population groups with their rights and opportunities, and acts as a platform of communication and co-operation with the local government.

The "School of Solidarity" attempts to ensure that its activities are accessible to people with disabilities. It notably adapted trainings, lectures, and consultations to participants with hearing impairment.

"Since the level of youth participation has decreased during the war, and internally displaced persons are almost not involved in community activities in their new place of residence, we decided to promote open public governance by engaging more actively the women and young people who live in the community," said Oleh Koshovyi, Acting Head of the Shpola City Council.

The "School of Solidarity" places a special emphasis on young people. It contributed to identifying new leaders among students and encourages youth to play an active role within the community. In this vein, the municipality introduced a school participatory budget and supported the relaunch of the Youth Council, an advisory body whose members will contribute to developing and implementing youth policy at the local level.



This brochure was developed as part of the project “Strengthening multilevel governance, democracy and human rights at local level in Ukraine” (2023-2025).

The project addresses the needs voiced by local and regional authorities, and their national associations, and supports them in building resilience to multiple challenges provoked by the Russian Federation’s war of aggression against Ukraine. It promotes multilevel governance, open government and a human-rights based approach at local level, upholding local self- government principles and contributing to Ukraine’s recovery and reconstruction.

The project is implemented by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities within the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine “Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction” for 2023-2026.

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