


Swiss-Ukrainian project
DESPRO
Decentralization Support in Ukraine

 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

skat Swiss Resource Centre and
Consultancies for Development

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Kyiv, 2021

The Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Project DESPRO is an international assistance project working in the reform of local self-governance (or “decentralization”) in Ukraine. DESPRO is funded by the Swiss Confederation via the Swiss Cooperation Office and implemented by Skat, and has been active since 2007.

1 Introduction

The ability of local authorities to develop effective solutions and manage projects is the basis for the providing quality public services in the context of decentralization of power. Lack of knowledge and skills in project management is one of the reasons for the failure of economic and social development in communities. In 2010–2011, DESPRO conducted various assessments which concluded that: the State funds aimed at developing local self-government did not receive project proposals that would lead to systemic transformations for

regional development; the community leaders had difficulties trying to mobilize the communities to solve their problems, both due to lack of funding and indifference on the part of the inhabitants. Considering the above, DESPRO made the decision to launch a national-scale distance learning facility for representatives of local self-government bodies and executive authorities. The online platform of the Community of Practice for Sustainable Development has been developed since, and is currently available at <https://udl.despro.org.ua>

2 Achievements

The Community of Practice (CoP) was initiated in 2012 as an online platform for exchanging knowledge and sharing best practice among participants and graduates of the e-courses organized by the DESPRO Project, the State Foundation for Local Self-Governance Support and the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA). Back then, entitled “Innovations and Best Practices in Local Self-Governance”, the CoP’s key topic and activity was in relation to project management at local level. Nowadays, the e-course “Project Management for Local Development” remains the course with the highest demand, open to all interested with usually around 1,000 participants enrolling, and 200 to 300 persons graduating.

Since 2015, upon closure of the State Foundation for Local Self-Governance Support, the CoP expanded thematically: in addition to the project management thematic area, e-courses were developed and conducted on numerous topics related to the decentralization reform agenda (local budgets, anti-corruption, decentralization reform, local economic development), the themes the DESPRO Project works on to promote (rural water supply, solid waste management, gender policy), and governmental partners’ specific requests.

The CoP is being administered by the DESPRO Project as a system for knowledge management in local development, thus fulfilling the project’s mission of strengthening the capacity of local

authorities in the context of decentralization of power. The CoP was initially called Innovations and Best Practices in the Local Self-Government CoP, then Local Development CoP, and finally Sustainable Development CoP, to reflect the evolving context and the actual membership.

The virtual learning environment, which was created both for conducting e-courses and for expanding the Community of Practice, is actively used by faculty staff of the NAPA regional institutes for tutoring of their e-courses. Dozens of faculty staff at the Regional Institutes from Dnipro and Lviv have gained relevant practical skills and experience and are now able to independently organise e-courses in their curricula in Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree Programs for the public sphere, using various eLearning platforms.

From 2015 onwards, NAPA regional institutes started to offer the Community of Practice as a platform for organizing professional retraining. A number of courses were requested and co-funded by the oblast level authorities (Luhansk, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv, Zaporizhia, and Ivano-Frankivsk oblasts). The participants of these courses, who successfully completed the training, received certificates of professional training completion.

One of the requirements for the completion of such professional retraining program was also the attendance of face-to-face training events. It



Professional retraining completion certificates by NAPA Lviv regional institute (2019)

was possible to organize this at the oblast level, but not at the national level due to the number of participants of the all-Ukrainian e-courses. It was only in 2020, due to the Covid19-related lockdown and most educational activities moving online, that the DESPRO Project succeeded in obtaining certification of the program of the Project Management e-course at the national level by adding extra activities like webinars and online conferences. Thus, all successful graduates of the program received certificates on the professional training completion from the Ukrainian School of Governance & DESPRO with 1 ECTS-credit.

International TA projects and aid programs have gradually begun to use the Sustainable Development CoP as a means to organise their e-courses (e.g. EGAP in 2017, OSCE and Hanns Seidel Foundation in 2020).

From 2017 onwards, cooperation with the National Agency of Ukraine on Civil Service (NAUCS) intensified. DESPRO provided a number of capacity development trainings to the Agency's staff on work with the instruments the platform has, thus the Agency's staff led a range of knowledge and



Certificates of professional training completion from the Ukrainian School of Governance & DESPRO (2020)

information management services on the issues of KPIs for monitoring staff performance in the civil service, performance appraisal of civil servants, HR management and others. There is an agreement reached between DESPRO and the NAUCS that these services would be transferred to the Agency's online resources by the end of 2021.



Presentation of training opportunities for civil servants and signing of the Memorandum of Understanding by DESPRO and NAUCS (2018)

3 Process/Methodology

- From the beginning, the CoP was based upon integration of two knowledge management techniques – CoP and eLearning. The uniqueness of this approach is that (1) e-courses are especially tailored to meet the CoP's needs, (2) there is a clear understanding among the learners of the e-course goals (objectives), (3) the level of challenge of learning tasks corresponds to the level of knowledge and skills of the CoP participants, and (4) participants receive timely feedback to performed tasks.
- The activities of the CoP were focused around the development of:
 - (1) a tutors' network (mostly lecturers and professors of the National Academy for Public Administration),
 - (2) an experts' network (people having expertise in the specific areas relating to local self-governance and able and willing to be engaged into online knowledge exchange),
 - (3) a facilitators' network (active participants



eLearning workshop (2011)

were invited to attend additional trainings and then join the CoP as facilitators).

- While at the beginning, the focus was upon expanding tutors' network with sometimes up to 10 tutors working simultaneously during large online events, later the focus changed towards expanding the facilitators' network with facilitators being active participants of the earlier trainings. Typically now 2-3 tutors work with the program, and facilitators work directly with the participants.
- At the start of the CoP and due to its innovative nature in Ukraine, there were numerous face-to-face trainings and other public events conducted to "launch, promote and involve" during early years; subsequently most activities went online and were organized remotely.
- While most courses are open to all interested, the CoP also conducts a so-called regional format which gives authorities at the oblast level the opportunity to organize educational programs. In this case, participation is typically limited to a list of participants submitted by the responsible person, and co-funding is provided from the oblast budget and paid to DESPRO's partner institution licensed to provide educational services. Upon completion of these courses, the participants receive State-recognized certificates on professional training.
- A significant change in organizing tutored courses was a shift from teamwork to peer-review as the main practical assignment. Having at some points 40 teams working simultaneously on case studies made it difficult to expand and manage the communications and coordination needs. Thus, from 2016 onwards, the participants' practical work during the tutored courses is based on a peer-review method, which is more flexible and less human

resource-intensive. Each participant of the Project Management e-course typically reviews 3 local development projects on the basis of the review criteria. Importantly, the quality of the review is also rated at the end of the exercise by tutors. Overall, the number of submitted works for peer-review during these years is close to 2,000.

- Since 2017, special criteria and indicators have been introduced to monitor the development of the CoP. Over these years, we observed that participants' perception of the CoP as a source of new knowledge gained through interaction, as an accumulated "knowledge base" to which they can turn at any time, has grown by almost 20 percent. More than half of all CoP participants (57-60%) believe that the Community is successful in translating the principles and values of project management into implemented policies and practices. A significant number of participants enroll in the Project Management e-course on a regular basis, as they view the CoP as the best place to share accomplishments, develop new ideas and make connections for future projects.
- The overall yearly budget for activities by the CoP is around 120,000 CHF with 3 persons involved on regular basis (coordinator, administrator, methodologist). Up to 20 people can work within the larger training events (tutors, experts, facilitators).
- The online platform operates on the MOODLE open software. The software was chosen for the variety of available IT-solutions and possibilities for customized work with participants: tutors and facilitators can work individually with participants if required.

Courses

- The Community of Practice builds on the experience of a series of e-courses that had been carried out jointly with the higher educational institutions, local self-governance associations, regional training centres, and State institutions for different audiences. Overall, the CoP has run nearly 100 e-courses, with around 6,000 participants completing them successfully.
- The CoP offers tutored e-courses (with the tutors involved at certain times, usually during 4 to 5 weeks) and self-study modules that are available for enrolment at any time. Self-study modules typically show significantly smaller graduation rates (meaning fewer users complete the courses' program comparing to tutored courses). All courses are available for people to

access on desktop or mobile phone.

- Some information is organised at the CoP in the format of the information services (e.g. for the topic of rural water supply) with no interaction with users foreseen.

Participation

- The overall active membership of the CoP reached 13,000 participants in 2020 and represents a variety of stakeholders in local development.

The representation structure of participants of the CoP as of the end of 2020 year is demonstrated in the diagram below.

- In addition to representatives of local authorities (the key audience of the CoP from the start), a growing representation of educational institutions has been observed, showing the multiplicative effect of the CoP. Lecturers and professors are now regular participants of these educational activities, often asking permission to use the materials provided for their courses, which is actually encouraged by the CoP since the aim is to promote materials for their further active usage.
- While the membership of the CoP reached 13,000 participants the actual number of all users from the start of system's operation is over 25,000, which is due to the administrator deleting accounts that were inactive during the previous year.
- Around 75% of the CoP participants are women.

Impact

- The substantial experience of Community of Practice proved useful and reliable during continuous and tight cooperation of DESPRO with the National Academy of Public Administration and the National Agency of Ukraine for Civil Service. The number of e-courses, developed as part of this cooperation, were not only useful for their content, but also provided course credit in programs for civil servants and local self-government officials. This has brought the Community of Practice to a new level: the effective and timely knowledge management online services were integrated in existing educational programs for civil servants and local self-government officials.
- A number of PhD studies were defended on the basis of the CoP activities and by the CoP experts and participants: numerous articles were published in Ukrainian about the activities of the CoP (around 50 articles), and in English (see below).
- The Community has become a space for translating knowledge into actionable learning, building capacity to implement change and scaling up innovative solutions.
- DESPRO, through the CoP, has created a market which responds to customers' needs, rather than focusing on competitive advantage over other providers of educational services and attracting as many users as possible.
- Finally, the CoP as the online platform that is open to all interested became a tool to drive meaningful citizen engagement to make local communities more sustainable and livable.



- local self-government officials 42%
- civil servants 19%
- NGOs representatives 14%
- university faculty staff & students 10%
- teachers, doctors, cultural professionals 7%
- entrepreneurs 4%
- other 4%

4 Lessons learned

- Realistic expectations on course enrolment and participation: around 20% of registered participants actually complete the course. Smaller courses (with around 100–200 participants) have a better finish rates (50–60%). It is challenging to find a balance between the workload of the participants and workload of the coordinators.
- Behaviour change: participants became more open to online learning and knowledge exchange in recent years, compared to the early years of the CoP functioning. This happened in part thanks to the work of eLearning facilitators and tutors, but also due to broader cultural changes. This meant that practitioners now feel empowered to start the discussions they want, and tutors and experts no longer have to lead and facilitate the discussions.
- On many occasions, DESPRO presented the CoP platform to other donors and technical assistance projects working in the decentralization sector, inviting them to contribute with their materials and reach their target audience efficiently, but with little success. There were relatively few successful examples of such cooperation.
- Institutional partnerships: the experience with the State Foundation for Local Self-Governance Support, the National Academy of Public Administration and the National Agency of Ukraine on Civil Service shows that such partnerships are very much at the mercy of institutional uncertainties. During its 9-years “history”, the CoP functioning underwent changes linked to the closure of one institutional partner, and interruption of the cooperation due to a human resources reshuffle in the others, which led to a temporary loss of momentum for the work of the CoP.

Annexes (links to publications)

1. Maryana Kulya, Bertha Camacho (2012) Integrating KM in the Ukrainian Public Administration - Some Lessons Learnt, <https://www.sdc-learningandnetworking-blog.admin.ch/2012/02/14/integrating-km-in-the-ukrainian-public-administration-%E2%80%93-some-lessons-learnt/>
2. Udod Y, Mamatova T. (2015) Methodological bases of pilot e-course “Local government reform and decentralization” [http://www.dbuapa.dp.ua/vidavnictvo/2015/2015_04\(27\)/32_english.pdf](http://www.dbuapa.dp.ua/vidavnictvo/2015/2015_04(27)/32_english.pdf)
3. Katernyak I, Loboda V, Garnets O, Kulya M. (2016) Knowledge management and the effect of immersion in virtual learning environments. In Proceedings of Global Learn, Apr 28, 2016 in Limerick, Ireland. Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE), 234–239. https://www.academia.edu/26091430/Knowledge_Management_and_effect_of_immersion_in_virtual_learning_environments
4. Borysenko Y. (2017) Local development networks in Ukraine: the participants' Competence Formation / YuriyBorysenko // Legeașiviata. Publicațieștiintifico-practică. – 2017. – № 6/2 (306). – pp. 16 – 20. URL: <http://www.legeasiviata.in.ua/archive/2017/6-2/6-2.pdf>
5. Katernyak, I., Loboda, V. and Kulya, M. (2018), “eLearning within the Community of Practice for sustainable development”, Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 312–322. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-03-2018-0030>
6. Attracting funding for local development: the case of Bilovodsk community in Luhansk oblast (2020) <https://despro.org.ua/upload/medialibrary/db2/Impact-story-CoP-eng.pdf>

