

## ***Improving the Governance Process in Ukraine***

***By Orest Zakydalsky***

My internship with the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) was with the Canada-Ukraine Partnership Project for Regional Governance and Development (RGD). The RGD Project works in two Ukrainian regions – called oblasts – Zaporizhzhia and Zakarpattya. I was based in Zaporizhzhia from September 2007 to March 2008.

One of the biggest problems in the socio-economic development of Ukraine in her seventeen years of independence is the high level of centralization in the governance process. The Soviet command-administrative system has left its mark on the government and bureaucracy. These problems are particularly acute in Zaporizhzhia, home to about 2.5 million people. Zaporizhzhia is one of the most heavily industrialized regions in the country, and Zaporizhzhia city is home to the largest hydro-electric dam in Europe. The region is also one of the leading producers of steel in Ukraine, and since the late 1990s, when the Ukrainian economy began to grow again after the collapse of the USSR, Zaporizhzhia has once again become one of the most prosperous regions in the country.



Paradoxically, Zaporizhzhia's greatest strength – its industrial potential – has also created one of the region's main challenges. As one of the most heavily polluted regions in Europe, the environmental conditions in Zaporizhzhia are leading to serious, deleterious effects on the health of the population. Regional problems such as these are best solved at the regional, not the national, level. By supporting community involvement in the governance process at the local and oblast levels, the RGD Project seeks to increase the capacity of oblast and local governments to influence the central government to the benefit of their region. RGD also helps community and non-governmental organizations to enhance their impact on the regional policymaking process.

### ***A New Multi-Stakeholder Approach***

During my time in Zaporizhzhia, the RGD Project supported and facilitated the development of a Regional Development Strategy in Zaporizhzhia oblast. The goal was to involve business, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the government in a dialogue to create an economic development strategy for the region that would take into account the interests of the widest possible group of stakeholders. We held numerous seminars, with the help of both Ukrainian and international experts, which focused on strategic planning, plan implementation, and effective monitoring. As a result of this work, three priorities were chosen for the development strategy – tourism, innovative investment and ecological protection. Currently the draft strategy is being discussed by the Oblast Council, the elected body at the regional level, and should be ratified by May 2008.

### ***Local Initiatives Achieving Regional Goals***

Most of my work in Zaporizhzhia focused on the selection, planning and implementation of "local initiatives" – partnership projects between the oblast government, businesses and NGOs. These local initiatives aim to contribute to achieving the strategic goals for the development of the oblast that are outlined in the strategy. The RGD Project assists, facilitates, and advises on the implementation of the local initiatives; however, it is the local

partners who are responsible for the actual development of the initiative plans, their implementation and monitoring. During my time in Zaporizhzhia, we supported two initiatives – the establishment of a tourism information centre in Melitopol raion – a district in Zaporizhzhia oblast – and the establishment of an interactive, Internet-based tourism map of Zaporizhzhia oblast.



I very much enjoyed my internship with CUI. I found the people I worked with to be very interesting, engaging and driven. In addition to enjoying my experience, I also learned a great deal about the governance process, strategic planning, capacity building, and relations between the government and non-governmental sectors.

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### ***Growing Government-Community Trust***

While at times working with Ukrainian government structures can be frustrating, I can say that the situation is improving with every passing year. I had worked in Ukraine previously, in 2001, and the level of citizen involvement in the governance process has increased dramatically. The government, at all levels, is increasingly interested and receptive to the ideas and interests of community and business structures. As a result, the government has become more accountable and more effective in the delivery of services and in policymaking. Projects such as RGD have had a very positive impact on these processes in Ukraine.