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CONNECTIVE CITIES

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COVID-19 RECOVERY SOLUTIONS AT MUNICIPAL LEVEL IN THE AREAS OF DIGITALIZATION AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN THE SOUTHEAST EUROPEAN REGION (SEE)

Partners of Connective Cities

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ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL
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with its
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COMMUNITIES IN ONE WORLD

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the activities developed under the project "The Development of COVID-19 Recovery Solutions at Municipal Level in the Areas of Digitalization and Crisis Management." The project covered Southeast Europe and was conducted from September 2021 until December 2021.

The objectives of the project were as follows:

OBJECTIVE 1 - Supporting cities' resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing capacity-building, learning activities and supporting the development of small urban projects (in each group) in:

- Digitalization; and
- Crisis management.

OBJECTIVE 2 - Promoting the Connective Cities Network's development through encouraging more active and practical involvement of members.

Thus, the report is divided into two parts. Part I describes in detail the learning and capacity-building processes conducted to support municipal resilience within the working groups of digitalization and crisis management, as well as the selected prototypes of small urban initiatives that were developed together with the chosen cities. Part II on the other hand summarizes the activities developed to support the expansion of the Connective Cities Network.

The project was commissioned and supervised by Connective Cities - the International Community of Practice for Sustainable Urban Development, which is a multi-stakeholder project involving the German Association of Cities, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and Engagement Global/Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW), commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Its goal is to support cities in Germany and other parts of the world in their mutual learning about and development of innovative projects pursuant to sustainable urban development.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under Objective 1, to support Cities' resilience toward the pandemic in the direction of crisis management and digitalization, a series of actions were implemented that included the following steps:

1. Identification of possible workgroup members and topics of special interests by conducting in-depth interviews and online desk research. Results: 33 interviews in total (in SEE region countries);

2. Finalization of member selection to form working groups. Results: 2 working group, 30 members in total (16 in the direction of Digitalization and 14 in Crisis Management).

3. Development of action plans for each group to envision future activities and provide expert guidance on identified topics of interest;

4. Conducting workshops and capacity building activities, during which challenges initiatives, good practices and solutions were identified. Results: Each workgroup had an online kick-off meeting and 4 online workshops guided and facilitated by relevant experts. 5 challenges, 5 initiatives, 5 good practices and 2 solutions were identified and developed in a collaborative manner in each workgroup.

5. Implementation of a small urban initiative in one city from each workgroup - by carefully developing selection criteria to support one city from each workgroup and implement a small initiative/solution, Yerevan (Armenia) was selected form the Crisis Management and Drohobych (Ukraine), from the Digitalization workgroup. Results: from November till December, the experts have worked with individual cities and a crisis communication procurement document was developed for Yerevan, as for Drohobych, the existing virtual Citizen Chamber was refined by conducting diversified user tests.

As for supporting the implementation of the objective 2 - Promoting the Connective Cities Network's development through encouraging more active and practical involvement of members – the following steps were taken:

1. New Connective Cities active members were identified. Results: up to 70 new members registered and joined the platform;

2. Two virtual events were held. Results: The first virtual event was held on the 12th of November on the topic of Crisis Management and Digitalization. The second virtual event was held on the 13th of December, under the title - Municipal green recovery practices and importance of renewable energy.

The processes and steps undertaken under each activity are described in details in the report under relevant chapters.

3 METHODOLOGY

To support cities' resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing capacity-building activities in crisis management and digitalization the following methodology was used:

- Forming thematic working groups

Under the guidance of PMCG experts and in coordination with the Connective Cities team, at the initial stage of the project two working groups were formed inside the following two thematic clusters: digitalization; and crisis management.

To identify potential members of working groups, desk research was undertaken. Courtesy of such research, cities with good practices/experiences were picked out. The PMCG team contacted representatives of all of the chosen cities to ask if they would be interested in becoming involved in the project. Thereafter, in-depth interviews were conducted with the representatives of cities who have expressed an interest in the project. The aim of the in-depth interviews was to study cities' practices in detail, and to learn of the challenges they had faced.

In total, 33 in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of different cities during 1-15 September. The full list of respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: List of respondents

Country	City
Armenia	Yerevan
Albania	Roskovec
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Prijedor
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Doboj
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Travnik
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Banja Luka
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ljubuški
Bulgaria	Plovdiv
Georgia	Keda
Georgia	Kutaisi
Georgia	Oni
Georgia	Tbilisi
Kosovo	Kamenica
Moldova	Laloveni
Moldova	Straseni
Montenegro	Kotor
Montenegro	Pljevlja
North Macedonia	Veles

North Macedonia	Prilep
North Macedonia	Skopje
Serbia	Mionica
Serbia	Novi Pazar
Serbia	Leskovak
Serbia	Vranje
Serbia	Cacak
Ukraine	Kamenets-Podolsky
Ukraine	Sambir
Ukraine	Drohobych
Ukraine	Kharkiv
Ukraine	Lviv
Ukraine	Melitopol
Ukraine	Novovolynsk
Ukraine	Poltava

Based on these interviews, the cities considered to have the most interesting practices and the most promising ideas for development in the areas of crisis management and digitalization during the COVID-19 pandemic were invited to join the two working groups. The crisis management working group consisted of representatives from 14 cities from 9 different countries of SEE region, while the digitalization working group consisted of representatives from 16 cities from 8 different countries of SEE region (for the lists of cities see Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2: Composition of the **crisis management** working group

Country	City
Armenia	Yerevan
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Prijedor
Bulgaria	Plovdiv
Georgia	Keda
Georgia	Kutaisi
Georgia	Oni
Georgia	Tbilisi
Kosovo	Kamenica
Moldova	Straseni
Montenegro	Kotor
Serbia	Mionica
Serbia	Novi Pazar
Ukraine	Kamenets-Podolsky
Ukraine	Sambir

Table 3: Composition of the **digitalization** working group

Country	City
Albania	Roskovec
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Doboj
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Travnik
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ljubuški
Georgia	Keda
Georgia	Kutaisi
Moldova	Laloveni
Montenegro	Pljevlja
North Macedonia	Veles
North Macedonia	Prilep
North Macedonia	Skopje
Serbia	Leskovak
Serbia	Vranje
Ukraine	Drohobych
Ukraine	Kharkiv
Ukraine	Lviv

- Developing action plans for working groups

PMCG developed action plans in collaboration with field experts based on both the research to have identified needs/challenges and urban initiatives, as well as the discussions held with working group members.

At the first stage, action plans were drafted and then presented to working group members at kick-off meetings, where discussions took place and action plans were finalized. The kick-off meetings were conducted in September, with the crisis management working group's kick-off meeting held on September 20, and the digitalization working group's kick-off meeting held on September 21. The finalized versions of the action plans can be found in **Annexes 1** and **Annexes 2.**

- Conducting capacity building activities and supporting the development of prototypes/solutions for working group members

In the course of the project, two workgroup activities on two different topics (digitalization and crisis management) were conducted for working group members. Each had two phases: 1. thematic workshops and 2. capacity building activities to develop prototypes/solutions.

The workshops promoted peer-to-peer learning, supported the active involvement of participating cities, and boosted their interest in participating in such events. During this activity, the challenges faced by cities were identified, and the good practices implemented by the cities were reviewed.

During the second phase (developing prototypes/solutions), ideas/initiatives were accumulated and developed on possible joint step-up projects while areas of possible support were actively discussed with Connective Cities Network members.

From the developed initiatives and ideas, two ideas were chosen and from these, one project idea was developed in the selected city (Yerevan, Armenia).

4 DESCRIPTION OF WORKGROUP ACTIVITIES - DIGITALIZATION IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

4.1 CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES

To support digital capacity building in cities, four intensive workshops were conducted with city representatives throughout the month of October. Each of the workshops consisted of two parts: a learning activity, followed by collective work. These events took place online, using Miro and video conference tools, with 2-4 facilitators.

During the first half, relevant design experiences were shared together with various design methods with a particular focus on projects for the public sector, on the importance of considering and understanding a system in its entirety, and co-design. From the responses, the latter point (co-design) seemed to spark the most interest from the selected cities. It was also noticeable that co-design activities inspired the cities, many of which have added the conducting of workshops, user testing, and user interviews to their future plans.

The second part of each workshop was designed based on information collected during the previous week through surveys and required the active participation of the cities.

At the first workshop, the cities presented the challenges they are facing regarding their services (digital or otherwise), after which followed a group activity to analyze how the challenges related to the system around them, and finished with an interpretation of those challenges as innovation opportunities.

At the second workshop, the participants presented existing and future initiatives. Split into groups, a simple mental exercise was prepared to break down problems and to understand their root causes. The workshop closed with a short activity to stimulate thinking about possible ways of addressing the identified root causes.

During the third workshop, the facilitators grouped the surfacing ideas into two clusters, each with 4-5 sub-clusters, and proposed a series of examples of projects.

The fourth workshop started with participants proposing projects which could be realized quickly (i.e. within one month) and/or represent a defined step of a bigger innovation process. Two template documents were then filled on the spot: one containing specific questions about their project ideas, to achieve a higher level of detail; and the other where the project process was to be broken down over a four-week period. At the end of each part, the facilitators encouraged collaboration, where every city provided suggestions for the other cities' presented ideas/projects.

Due to various language barriers, different backgrounds, and cultural differences among the participants, fostering a fluid and open collaboration was quite challenging. Nevertheless, facilitators still managed to create moments of exchange, particularly during the last workshop where the straightforward and useful comments given to each other were much appreciated.

An additional challenge concerned the rigidity some participants had with respect to their own ideas. A significant effort was made to try to make participants question their own assumptions and open up to possible alternative approaches.

4.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY CITIES

The challenges fell into two main topics: digital literacy and access; and digitization of public services (aiming toward a virtual municipality).

Digital literacy and access

- *Digital literacy of municipality staff*. In particular, older public servants were resistant to the usage of digital tools, thereby slowing down internal and external processes and the digitization of service offerings. The representatives of Doboj and Kharkiv were especially interested in this topic.
- *Digital literacy of the population*. An overall low level of skills in using digital tools was observed among whole populations, and the elderly in particular. This caused some representatives frustration, as it seemed to make attempts to digitize public services futile. From the other perspective, in some cases the user-friendliness of the digital tools was questioned. Such challenges are widespread with representatives of Doboj, Lviv, Kharkiv, and Drohobych all expressing interest in this topic.
- *Digital divide*. Uneven access to needed technologies such as computers, smartphones, or internet connections. This issue that is generally more evident in rural areas, where the physical distances from public offices exacerbates the issue. Representatives of Leskovac and Doboj discussed the issue, while Vranje's representatives proposed an idea of creating terminals around the city to tackle the access issue.
- *Lack of trust in the security and effectiveness of digital services among the population and staff.* Much of the population demonstrate resistance to learning new tools and habits, while staff fear losing jobs to computers. Representatives of Doboj and Kharkiv stated this was a particular issue among municipality staff.

Digitization of public services (virtual municipality)

Most participating cities are already on the path toward digitizing part or all of their services and could present existing examples of their own success in this regard. Meanwhile, the challenges faced here concerned specific methods and processes to kick-start the digitization or tackle more systemic challenges. The lines between cities' specific challenges and the wider topics are somewhat blurry here. Representatives of Skopje, Veles, Pljevlja, and Drogobych are working on a "classic" digitization of existing services; other cities are at different stages or have more specific goals. The need for digitization has been highlighted with the pandemic, where having people queuing in crowded public offices became dangerous, as well as inefficient.

- *Internal workflow for document digitization.* The cities of Doboj and Roskovec are a step behind here, but are starting processes of scanning and digitizing documents, to create a paperless, more agile, connected, and secure database.
- *Improving the usability of online services*. This was suggested by the facilitators, as a means of turning the tables on participants. Specifically, representatives of cities had to ask themselves whether their services could be more user-friendly, thus requiring less explanation for users.
- *Understanding users' needs.* Similar to the previous topic, the facilitators, using lectures, encouraged participants to better involve all final users in the design and implementation. This was appreciated by every participant by the end of the series of workshops, and all recognized that improvements needed to be made in this area.
- *Communication and explanation of digital services.* If e-services are well-designed, and if a significant part of the population can access them, the given municipality needs to communicate their existence, efficacy, and mechanisms to the public.

4.3 SMALL URBAN INITIATIVES

Development of an "Electronic cabinet for residents" - a unified digital database (Drohobych)

The city of Drohobych (Ukraine) is currently working on developing an electronic cabinet for residents, to provides municipal services to its' citizens on an online platform. The main functionalities of such a cabinet would be:

- *appealing to the given city council;*
- *requests for public information;*
- *electronic registration to apply for housing;*
- *online queues;*
- *submission of applications for city institutions;*
- *social assistance;*
- *submitting anonymous complaints (i. e. about corruption or unethical behavior).*

The development process could benefit from external help, especially highlighting the importance of citizen engagement and co-design activities through workshops as well as user testing of the website prototype to achieve optimal results. Such additional initiative would serve as an example for future projects and act as a transmissible system to systematically improve digital platforms.

Terminals to access public services in the Department of Child Protection and Care (Vranje)

The ongoing initiative of the city of Vranje (Serbia) is the installation of self-service terminals in offices to substitute human contact with staff, to minimize infection/transmission and to make services more accessible beyond working hours.

The process is quite complex and ambitious due to the hardware components involved. One of the soft measures that could be applied to the next phase of development could imply some validation initiatives to understand citizens' readiness to interact with self-service terminals or to find better ways of solving problems.

Training of staff to assist citizens to ensure equal usability opportunities is recommended, along with the refinement of the system application to make the user experience as much easy and understandable as possible is recommended.

Digitization of paper documents (Doboj, as well as Roskovec)

Both the municipality of Doboj (Republika Srpska) and Roskovec (Albania) are currently working on developing a workflow to digitize archived paper documents starting from the veteran's department.

The initiative entails - mapping the process and roles, analyzing the types of document that need to be scanned, defining the procedure and proper software, and setting up the necessary workflow. Moreover, training for senior staff members on the benefits of digitization to increase trust in it and overcome their resistance is planned and regarded as one of the crucial components to ensure smooth transition to digitalized systems.

External support or collaboration opportunity for the ongoing project could include supporting training procedures, as well as defining some formats for staff involvement (i.e. workshops) to analyze their work and propose improvements thereto.

Access to tax payment services in one step to achieve a completely virtual municipality (Veles)

The municipality of Veles (North Macedonia) is currently working on developing a fully virtual municipality - single access point to interact easily and securely with local public services, directly from your computer or smartphone.

The process involves analyzing the ecosystem of services and defining how to structure work to achieve a fully digital municipality from the early stages of development, as well as ascertaining how to structure and organize the process better.

The city is determined to work in a very large-scale, multi-disciplinary format and approach it all at once without creating any pilots or tests. Although, the municipal staff could benefit from special trainings to use the software; how to use the platform professionally and effectively to prepare and/or give the needed answer and/or request to the consumer.

Improve communication channels between the municipality and citizens, connected to the existing document management system (DMS) (Pljevlja)

In order to act transparently and efficiently as possible, the ongoing initiative of Pljevlja (Montenegro) is to improve the existing DMS through the creation of various software components that increase the quality of communication between self-government authorities and citizens and legal entities, such as web portals, SMS services, and a call center.

The new service will enable citizens to get updated on the status of submitted requests and follow the course of movement to resolving their case. The application will be available in multiple modalities and process monitoring can be carried out additionally via SMS and E-mail.

This initiative could benefit from citizen engagement for testing as well as workshops and other formats engaging the municipality's staff to improve the workflow.

City in the Palm of Your Hand (Leskovac)

The city of Leskovac (Serbia) is currently working on systematizing and unifying electronic services into one database for the benefit of its' citizens. Interestingly, the initiative also includes the installation of video surveillance cameras at the most important points in the city, as well as remote relocations to have a real, on-time view of the city – from which the project name derives "City in the Palm of Your Hand".

The project additional introduces internet checkpoints with specialized software for citizens who are not able to directly access the services that already exist on the city's website or on national portals. Specialized touch-sensitive screens will be installed with clearly defined needs for citizens, especially the elderly, to be able to easily send a request or even scan a city service document and receive an adequate response in a timely manner.

Training of staff to assist citizens to ensure equal usability opportunities is recommended, along with the refinement of the system application to make the user experience as much easy and understandable as possible is recommended.

Citizens Engagement App (Skopje)

To support decentralization and increase citizen engagement locally, Skopje (North Macedonia) is developing a CE App. This application is an interactive channel/tool for communication with the citizens – a virtual place to share service information, to report problems and gather public opinion. The tool is a module within the Skopje Smart City V 1.0 project. It enables citizens to be informed on time and in one click about all service the city institutions provide, as well as offering interactive tool for problem reporting, campaigns and polls.

Public-private entities are also involved in the project - Telekom, technology providers, public utility companies, citizens, public administration etc. which adds to the complexity of the project but supports the sustainability in the long term.

The project could benefit from consultations and staff trainings on interoperability process mapping and data and information management.

4.4 PROTOTYPES

Prototype for Guiding the Validation Process for Self-service Terminals

Understanding citizens' perceptions of the initiative and involving them in the evaluation of new self-service terminals' usability

The issue of a digital divide is quite common in the SEE region, and therefore uneven access to needed technologies such as computers, smartphones, or internet here is a widely discussed topic. This issue is generally more pronounced in rural areas, where the physical distances from public buildings exacerbate the problem. To tackle this, the idea of creating self-service terminals for public use has been broadly discussed, taken into consideration, and even implemented in some places.

As such, the proposed idea also covers the need to substitute human contact options in administrative offices with digital tools that create a contactless experience for citizens, as this was one of the main problems faced by municipalities when COVID-19 spread around staff.

When discussing the installation of self-service terminals, the following factors must be taken into consideration:

- Equal Urban Accessibility to Infrastructure - The terminals must be installed in public spaces that are reachable for the majority. The scope of service access could be determined according to transport mobility and walkability data. The service points could also be identified, taking into consideration especially vulnerable areas in terms of social conditions, where citizens have less access to needed technologies.
- Hardware Support and Adequate Network Infrastructure – Needless to say, such initiatives must be supported by relevant infrastructure in the form of terminals, as well as infrastructure in municipal administrations for management purposes. Hardware support could include one server and a certain number of PCs, as well as card readers integrated into the terminals.
- Supporting Terminal Accessibility by Training Citizens – The municipality must take into consideration the employment of staff members that would be on-hand to train citizens and guide them through procedures.
- Software Development to Enable Remote Services – Special software must be developed to enable such processes. The software should be easy to use and fitted to match citizens' digital skills level. This could be achieved by:
    - Usability assessment of the software – It must be borne in mind that the terminals would be accessed by citizens with different digital skillsets. Therefore, guiding citizens' engagement via tests or workshops to better understand their needs is one of the most crucial parts of the process.
    - UX refinement – After analyzing the data from engagement tests and workshops, feasible actions should be taken to refine the software and make it more easily accessible for the general public.

Prototype for co-designing a digital cabinet for citizens

Evaluating the beta version with citizens to refine it before publishing, and understanding which other services should be prioritized for digitization.

Most countries in the SEE region are already on the path toward digitization at the national level, as well as at local and municipal levels. The challenges faced in this regard are generally common across the board including a lack of specific methods and processes to kick-start digitization or to tackle more systemic challenges. Some municipalities pursue "classic" digitization of existing services, while other cities have more specific goals. Nevertheless, there is unified agreement on the need for digitization in general, especially given the pandemic, where having people queuing in crowded public buildings became dangerous, as well as inefficient.

It has to be noted here that, in most cases, bigger municipalities have well-developed websites, where many electronic services are available to citizens. However, as the digitization processes are still at the beginning stage in the region, management responsibilities are shifting from central government to local entities. Therefore, the services that were previously provided by government are now to be taken up by municipalities that might not have the same level of competence when it comes to managing digital platforms.

The proposed prototype approaches are supposed to explain the main steps necessary to effectively refine and continue the management of electronic cabinets for residents to make it publicly accessible:

- Defining a Service Catalogue – Establish a clear catalogue of services that should be digitized. The objective here is to identify needed resources and steps to digitize each specific service in the catalogue.
- Testing Processes at the Local Level – A beta version of the website should be made available first and foremost for the use of municipal staff and relevant responsible departments, to identify weak points from a website management perspective. The usability should be customized according to local staff requirements.
- Training of Staff – To ensure effective management of the platform, staff should be trained to be able to provide relevant services to citizens.
- Usability Testing for the General Public and Refinement of Services - Guiding citizens' engagement via tests or workshops to improve interaction flows, which could be achieved through the following steps:
    - Defining recruitment criteria for usability testing - Establishing clear selection criteria for participant testing. It would be advisable to segment test participants according to certain characteristics like age, gender, location (city or rural area), and technical proficiency to make sure diverse and suitable samples are available to choose from when refining the online platform
    - Discussion guide development – A discussion guide for testing should be carefully developed to identify the main insights. The discussion should be user-friendly to help citizens to articulate their needs, however it should cover all topics of interest to help with UX refinement as well.
    - Evaluating results – The most interesting insights could be turned into action items simply by using an evaluation matrix, measuring the impact and effort for each refinement.
    - Defining future steps for action – After the evaluation process, the municipality could define the needed procedures for UX refinement and could start the implementation process.

4.5 SELECTION CRITERIA FOR PROTOTYPE DEVELOPMENT

Selection criteria for prototype development

To select cities and corresponding solutions to be further supported, the facilitators developed the following selection criteria:

- *Solution feasibility: chances of being implemented within six weeks;*
- *Expertise fit: the extent to which co-designing would be helpful;*
- *Learning effect for other cities: how much other cities can learn from its example;*
- *City's active participation: the extent of the city's role during the overall process; and*
- *Communication / language efficiency: ease of communication.*

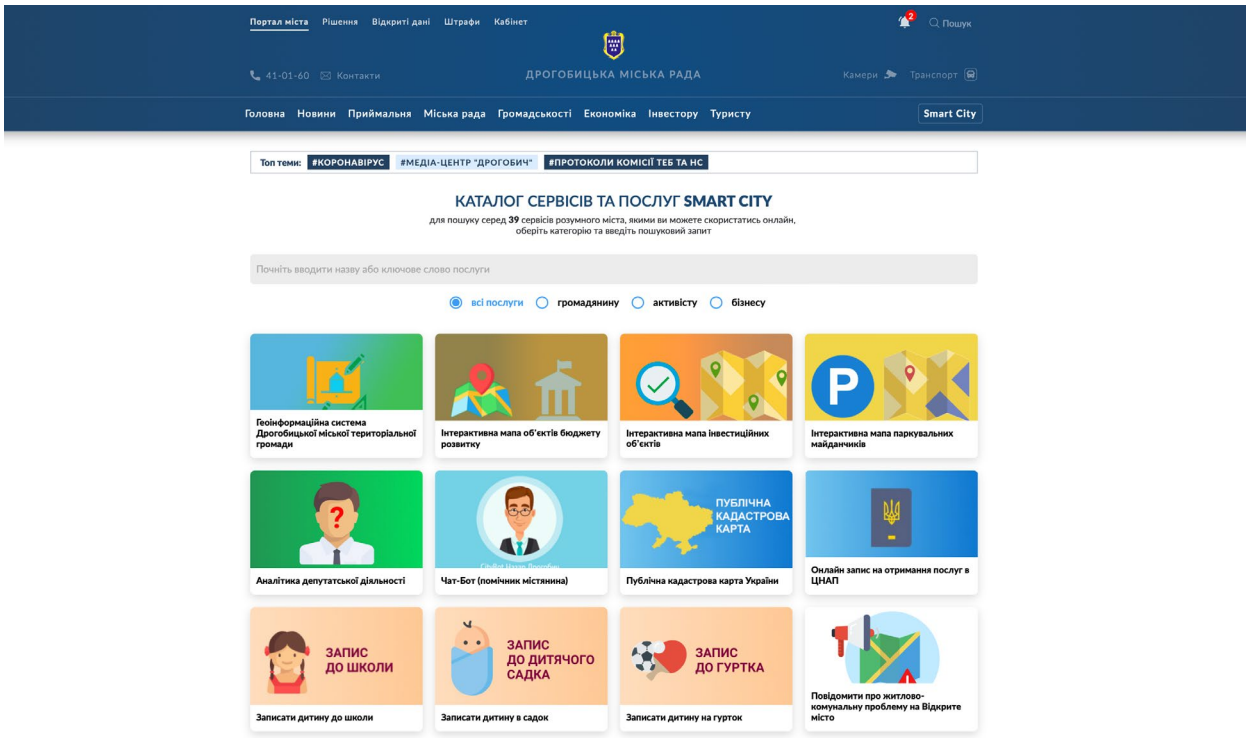
With these in mind, the city of Drohobych was selected for the development of a digital cabinet for citizens.

4.6 FINAL PRODUCT OF THE SELECTED SMALL URBAN INITIATIVE

4.6.1 Setting the Context

Drohobych municipality has a well-developed website of the city council with a separate part of the smart city, where there are many electronic services for residents that for now includes only "generic" services that do not request user authentication.

https://drohobych-rada.gov.ua/smart-city/



Until recently, the city has used a platform provided by the state, where there was a module of the electronic cabinet of the resident. However, the state has stopped supporting the platform, and the city residents complained about the inability of using some electronic services, especially during the coronavirus pandemic, when ordering services without leaving home and standing in line at the city council was proven to be crucial.

The opportunity to provide modern and high-quality electronic services is also extremely important for the employees of the city council and administration in order to facilitate their work, as well as raise the prestige of the city council.

Consequently, the city management gave the task to Drohobych IT department to develop a cabinet for the residents, which is currently in development and testing for a beta version, but only involving internal employees and IT department, not citizens.

4.6.2. Definition of Objective

The objective of the city was to develop a solid version of the electronic cabinet for the residents, testing it both with citizens and the department, and make it available to all citizens in a short time.

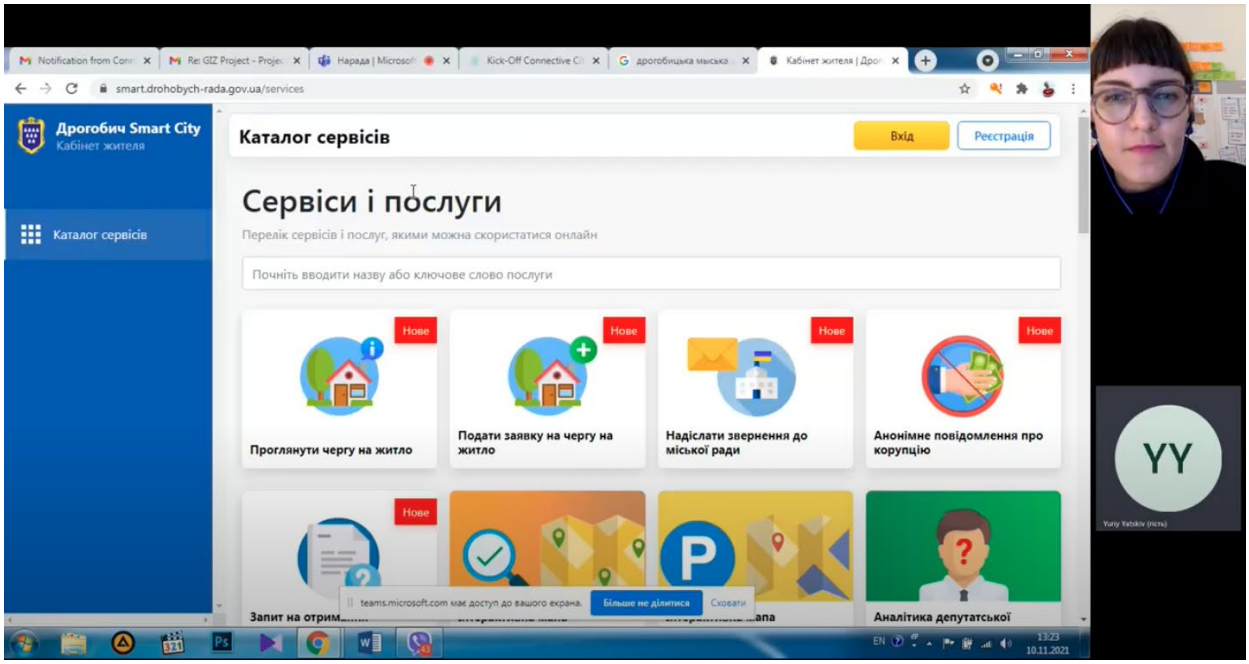
To do that, the municipality of Drohobych needed support to learn how to design and conduct usability tests with users and staff members to detect usability issues and improve the overall user experience of their service catalogue. Thus, the facilitators provided relevant expertise to support the initiated objective of the city.

4.6.3 Project Design and Implementation (Methodology and Workflow)

Below are described specific steps taken by the facilitators, together with the municipality representatives to meet set goals.

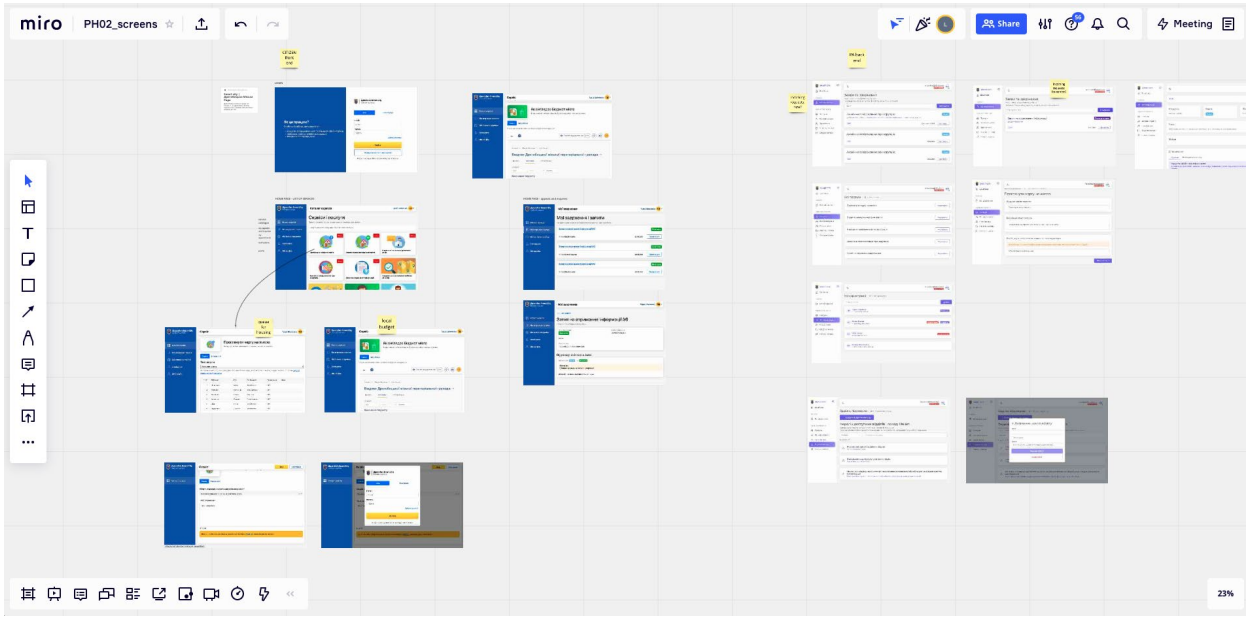
4.6.3.1. Kick-off and co-design workshop

To initiate the process, a kick off meeting was set with the project contacts from the IT department to understand what they already had developed for the beta version of the electronic cabinet and what are the most valuable entities to be tested by sharing the current state of the website and the new sections they would like to test with users. A discussion was also initiated about how many people to involve and which kind of criteria to use for recruitment.



Before starting the actual preparation of the usability tests, it was crucial to deepen the topic and understand how to really structure the usability tests, therefore, the city was asked to provide a list of all the services and the reference screens to prepare the analysis.

A Miro board was set to visually collect specific information on the existing screens together with the referents from the IT department, and to get a general overview of the main issues and sections. Access to the website was granted (through ad-hoc credentials) in order to analyze the interactions more closely and set the foundation to define the main flows for testing. This way expert review of the flows could be performed and the facilitators could easily understand the main steps for testing.

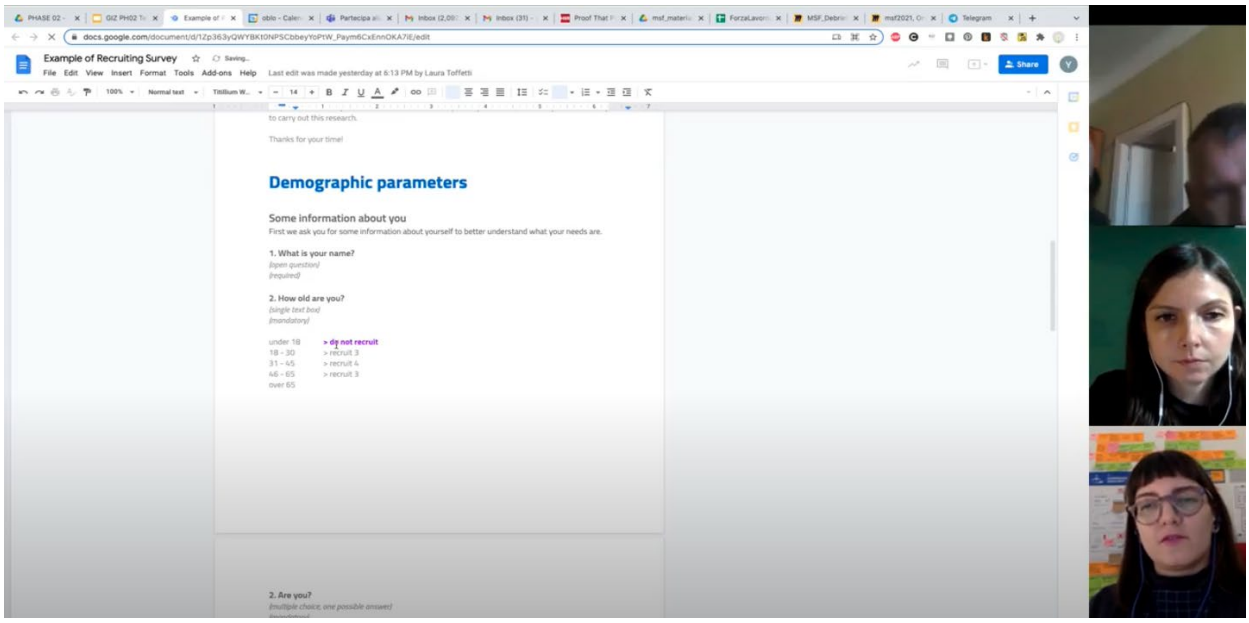


4.6.3.2. Work sprint 1

Test participants recruitment

Once the website structure, its typical users and what was likely to be tested was clarified, the group started the first work sprint by establishing clear selection criteria for test participants. It was suggested to segment test participants according to certain characteristics like age, gender, location (city or rural area) and technical proficiency to make sure to have diverse and right samples to choose from.

Explaining how to develop the selection criteria was fundamental to allow Drohobych referents to define the right questions to be asked in the recruiting survey.



The recruiting survey was easily set up through Google Form by the Drohobych IT department, while the experts gave the support to review the questions before sharing it. Once the first answers were collected, the staff was trained on how to select the right participants based on the defined criteria.

The IT team immediately understood the approach and independently proceeded with the recruiting of the participants.

Test procedure definition

The experts created the first draft of the usability test protocol to highlight timing and the main tasks to be asked during the test.

The usability test was structured in the following way:

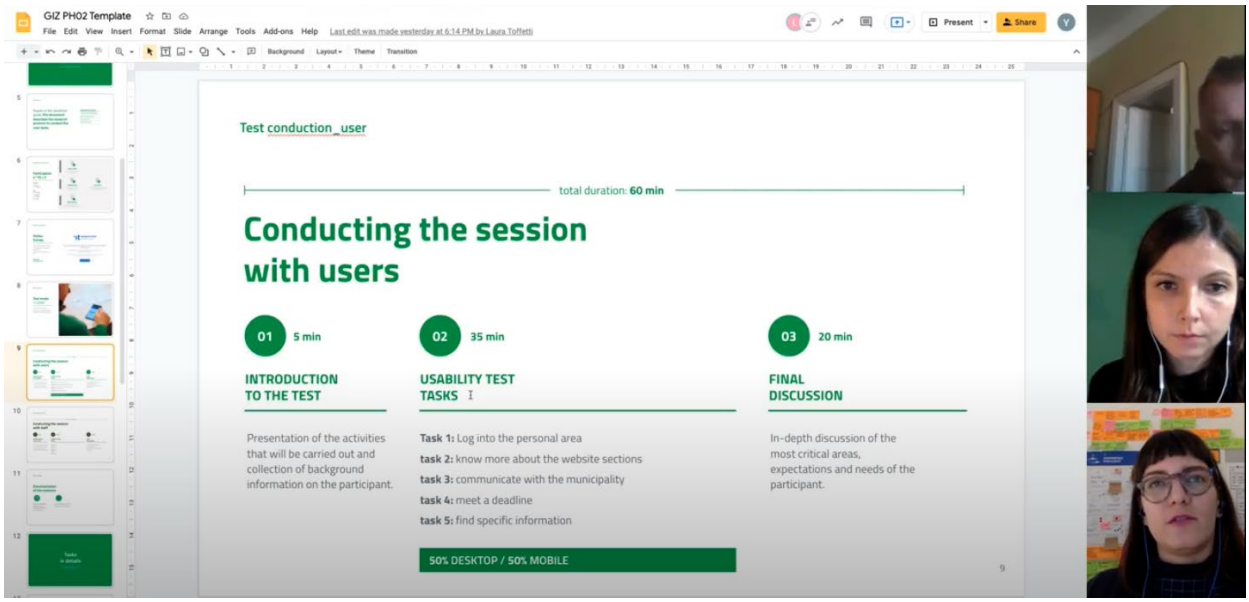
5 min: introduction to the test

35 min: usability test tasks

- Task 1: Log into the platform
- Task 2: Platform exploration
- Task 3: Send an appeal
- Task 4: Send a request
- Task 5: Report a problem
- Task 6: Book an appointment
- Task 7: Explore profile section

20 min: final discussion

Once the drafted structure of the test was defined, a Google slide document was shared to the Drohobych team to review and confirm together each single task. Then, the specific sections that absolutely needed to be fixed to allow the test to be successful was suggested by the facilitators.



Discussion guide definition

The next step was to define an in-depth discussion guide. A first draft version of this document with the questions to show how such discussions are structured was developed by the facilitators. Then, the document was modified by the city representatives according to their specific needs and to translated to their mother tongue.

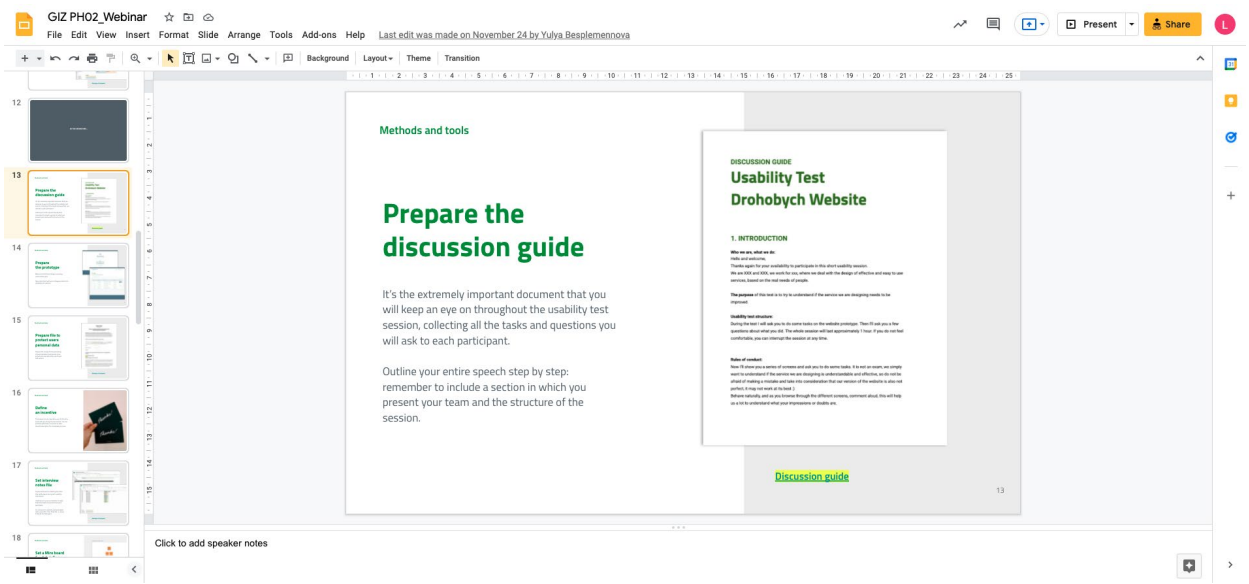
It has to be noted, that the communication with the Drohobych team has always been very smooth, without any particular problem. The team has always been responsive the expert's stimuli, preparing the materials in the shortest possible time and staying in touch with a Telegram channel in case of need.

4.6.3.3. Work sprint 2

Remote test guidance and webinar

The second work sprint was directed to the preparation to run a usability test remotely, due to the ongoing pandemic. An hour-long webinar was organized to show and explain step by step the whole process the experts usually use to set up a usability test session remotely, with a specific focus on moderation and tech aspects (e.g software for taking notes and audio-video recording).

Link to the webinar document



The webinar went through the following topics:

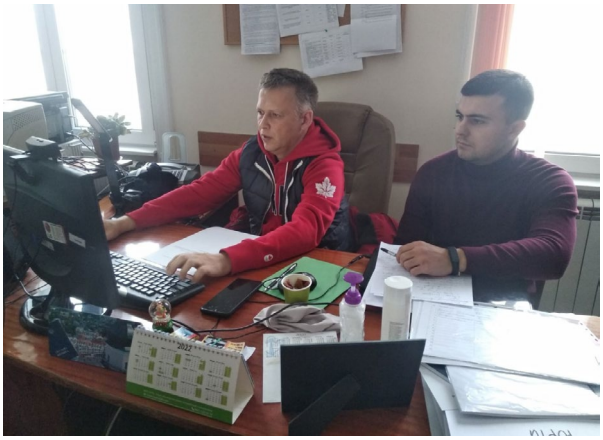
- Prepare the discussion guide; - Set the prototype; - Prepare file to protect user's personal data; - Define an incentive; - Set interview notes file - Set a Miro board for debriefing - Define roles - Welcome and introduce your team - Record audio and video	- Guide the session - Take detailed notes - Take pictures - Thanks and greetings - Debrief each session - Identify the main insights - Collect the insights in a research report - Prioritize the refinements

The municipality of Drohobych followed very closely and prepared all materials by following the provided guidelines; additionally, the last little bugs were fixed on the prototype to allow the proper conduct of the session.

A few days before the first usability session, a dry-run was conducted to make sure everything worked perfectly.

Test sessions

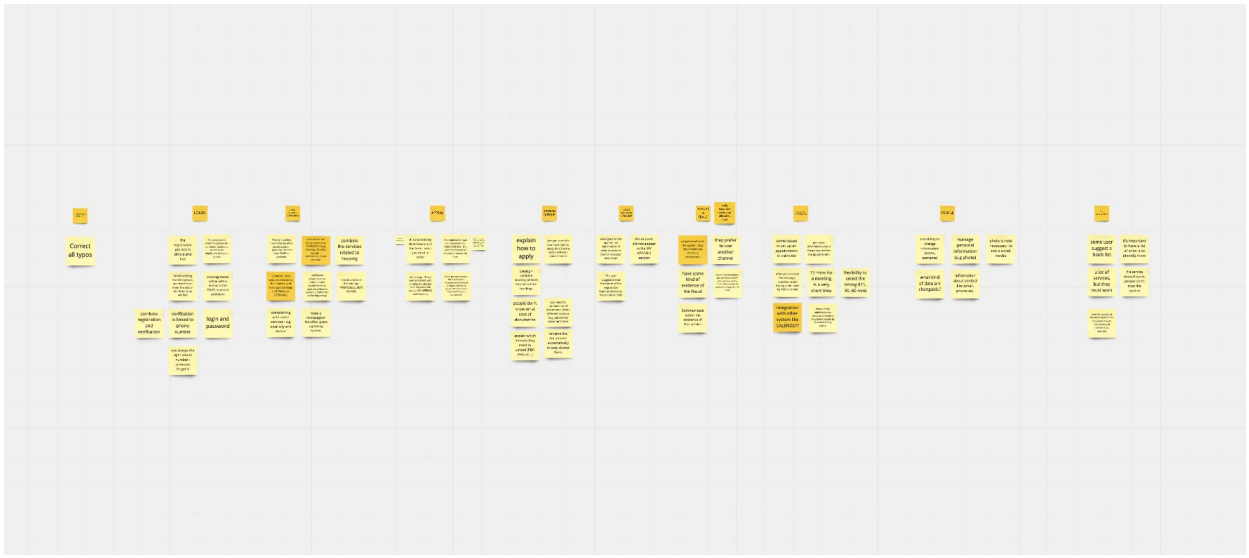
The test sessions were carried out autonomously by the Drohobych team, without any particular problems. The preferences were to follow the guidelines by documenting each session with notes, pictures and video recording. The insights collected during the various sessions were placed inside a Miro board to let every member of the team get an overview of the emerged insights and simplify the following clusterization process.



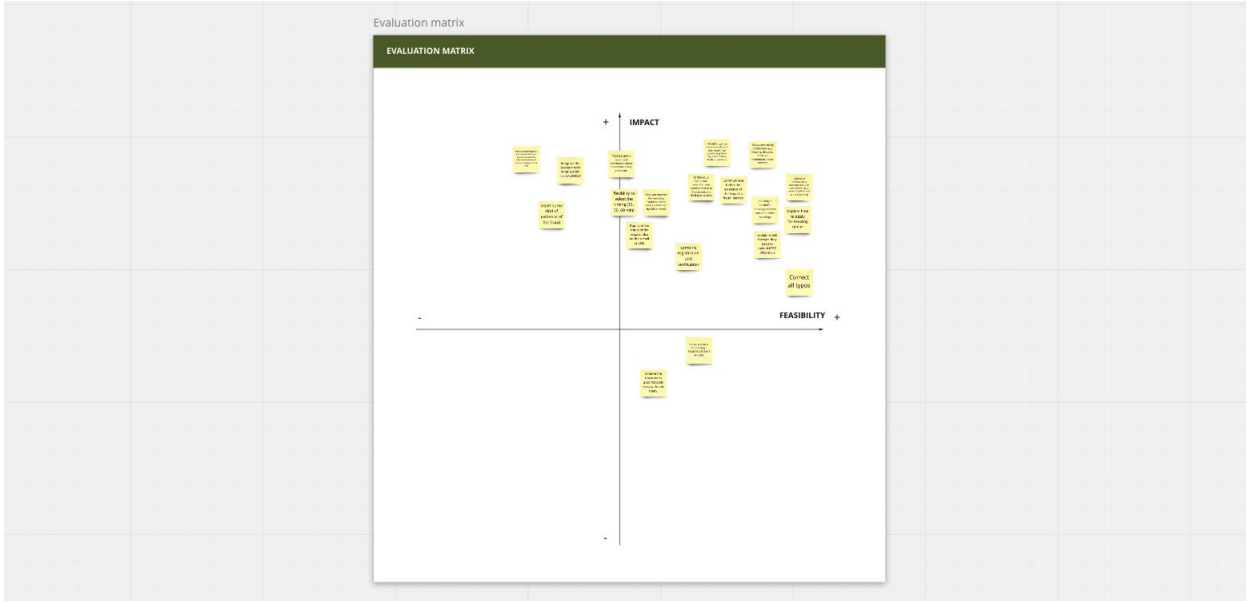
4.6.3.4. Validation sprint

While the tests went on, the facilitators had the opportunity to live check the emerging insights thanks to the shared Miro board and notes about the most interesting and feasible insights for them, directly into the virtual space.

This proved to be a useful asynchronous mode of communication for the Drohobych team that allowed them to deeply understand the process.



Once the tests were completed, the experts had a synthesis session together to talk about the most interesting insights and turn them into action items by using an evaluation matrix measuring impact and effort for each refinement.



4.6.4 Outcomes and impact

The expected outcome at the end of this journey is a list of feasible action items that can be applied efficiently, whithout any additional human or economic resources, to make the website experience smooth and more useful for all the citizens and staff members.

On the one hand, the usability testing method could be seen as a tool to achieve desirable goals in a short-term manner as the methodology is designed to be simple and clear for both sides (tester and testing subjects). On the other hand, the replicable nature of the action allows the process to develop into a sustainable testing system. Therefore, the knowledge that was transmitted can be reused in the future to constantly improve not only the usability of Drohobych municipality web-site, but also other digital platforms and therefore, support the development of processes in the long-run.

4.7 GOOD PRACTICES

Centers for access to digital opportunities, KHARKIV, UKRAINE

Technically-equipped workplaces with consultants where any citizen can learn about the municipality's digital services and access them as well as take a digital literacy course online.

Background: The Municipality of Kharkiv is implementing several initiatives to increase digital literacy and overcome the digital divide among its citizens, one of which is the Centers for Access to Digital Opportunities. The program especially focuses on the elderlies and low-income population - groups that mostly do not possess the skills to follow-up the rapidly developing digitalization processes. The project has been operating since 2020, and at the moment there are about 20 centers and more than 600 visitors using them. For off-site consultations, educational programs/videos are provided on the national platform "Action. Digital education".

Service: Each center is a technically- and informationally-equipped workplace (headphones, computers, electronic and paper materials, etc.), allowing people to:

- Learn how to use city services;
- Increase one's level of digital literacy by watching educational series on the national platform entitled "Action. Digital education";
- Take a test to assess one's level of digital skills and obtain a certificate as a result;
- Access on-the-spot advice about the material that visitors heard and practiced; and
- Sign up for an offline urban digital literacy course in the following three areas: computers from scratch, smartphones from scratch, and Google accounts and their capabilities.

Each center has its own operating schedule, within which each user can contact a consultant to get help with particular functions. To systematize all information on a computer, a special software has been developed containing links to all needed electronic services and easily-accessible instructions for different areas.

Each consultant / mentor is advised to check the Digital Education platform to view an educational series on digital literacy, as well as the following specially prepared materials:

- Consultant's instructions on how to guide the process
- Introduction to the Diya platform of the Ukrainian Government
- Various Instructions for different services use
- Organizational issues

There is also an information sheet about the centers located in different parts of the city and in partners' organizations.

Public: Such centers will be relevant to the following:

- Those that do not have a digital device or an Internet connection to receive online services;
- Those that do not know what online services exist; and
- Those that know there is an opportunity to get an online service, but do not know how it works.

The program is especially beneficial to the elderlies in Kharkiv region, where approx. 20% of the population is above 60[1].

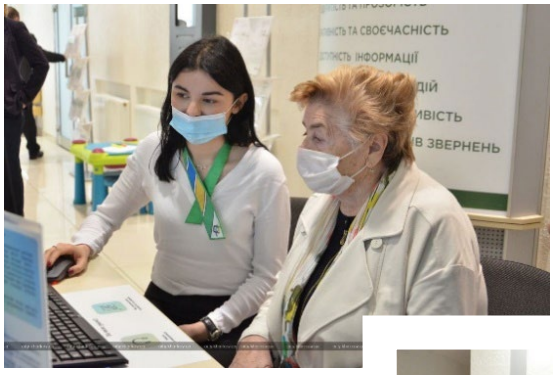
[1] Source: http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/age/Kharkiv/

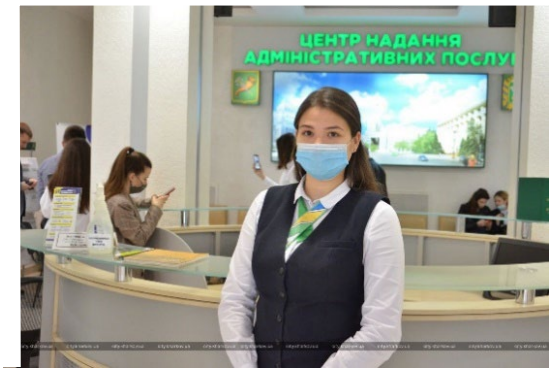
Outcomes: As the program has proved itself successful and the target groups have reacted positively on the initiative, the city is planning to scale-up the project so that every district would have such centers. With this in mind, they have prepared instructions for the implementation of such a center for partners (both public and private)[2]. The involvement of the private sector will increase the sustainability of the system in the long-run and provide additional development possibilities introducing new partner organizations to the project and benefit the evolution of the digitalization systems in the region.

Lessons learned and transfer of practice: The project would serve as an example to municipalities interested in increasing and accelerating the digitalization process locally to ensure timely transition to smart technologies. The challenge is to identify the most vulnerable groups, understand their needs by engagement activities and tailor responses to their requirements.

The successfulness of the program is mainly depending on the diversity of support packages that will one the one hand – address the digital literacy issue by providing educational platforms and on the other hand – help overcome digital divides by providing special centers equipped with relevant infrastructures for those in needs.

Pictures:





Leveraging Digital Services in Smart City, POZNAN, POLAND

Digitization for Social Good

Background: Poznan is one of Poland's biggest urban centers, attracting a growing number of people and companies each year. Therefore, it has had to prepare itself for the needs of the 21st century.

Since 2019, Smart City Team, an interdisciplinary group of professionals, has been working to make Poznan more future-focused. The first task in this process was to conduct a complex analysis of potential options, while taking into account local conditions, to create a smart city

[2] https://www.city.kharkov.ua/ru/news/u-kharkovi-vidkrili-tsentr-dostupu-do-tsifrovikh-mozhlivostey-44732.html

model. Six distinct areas of potential change in Poznan were highlighted: Digital City, Living, Environment, Mobility, Economy, and Community.

Key factors in Poznan's smart city model include quality, savings of time, energy, or space, and pragmatics. Moreover, the implemented innovations must benefit all social groups, providing them a space for integration and ensuring easy access.

Objectives: The main objective of Smart City Team is to introduce projects fulfilling at least two of the following criteria: making use of technological tools; innovative character; integration of data; and inclusivity for entities from outside City Hall. Projects are divided between the six distinct areas, listed in the previous paragraph. Each of the areas are assigned to a corresponding task group, operating inside Smart City Team. If a project affects two or more highlighted areas, groups are working together to find appropriate solutions and to implement these in the most effective way.

Activities: One of the projects created by Smart City Team is the Smart City Poznań App. Implemented in 2020, it is a complex mobile tool designed for communication between the residents of Poznan and City Hall. While the app forwards important information to citizens, for example about weather warnings, roadworks, or announcements for seniors, it also enables users to report issues observed in their local area and submit their initiatives. It allows City Hall to quickly acknowledge problems and deploy adequate solutions.

The Smart City Poznan App works on devices operating on Android and IOS. It was developed in open-source Flutter software, making it flexible for further improvements and changes, according to the changing needs of residents.

Outcomes: The project turned out to be a success, with numbers of new users growing each day. One of the key factors behind the project's success was system integrations as well as the work undertaken between City Hall's departments and supporting entities on internal communication. The project facilitates communication between city authorities and residents, while the app encourages greater participation of residents. Through the app, users can take advantage of other services offered by the city such as booking an appointment at City Hall, filling in the waste declaration and other e-services.

The Smart City Poznań App is a most distinctive example of good working outcomes, and each group working on an assigned smart city model area has recorded its own successes. More information about them is available in the Smart City Poznan summary, at the following address: https://www.poznan.pl/mim/smartcity/smart-city,p,25877.html

Conclusion / Lessons Learned/Transfer of practices: The Poznan Smart City model has been created using existing or previous experience from other cities, upgrading and adjusting this to fit unique local conditions. Continuous implementation of new projects and refinement of existing ones ensures residents that Poznan City Hall has an active influence in the process of enhancing their quality of life. Furthermore, Poznan values the voice of its residents and their involvement thanks to the consistent work of City Hall employees and the internal cooperation of its departments and units.

Any City on the path to SMART CITY transition would benefit from the example. The model can be tailored to the relevant settlements according to the main strategic development priorities that the city would like to base the urban indicator system on. Urban indicators are basically a data system, based on which data is collected to report on progress in key areas that the city aims to develop and wants to have reliable information. This will support the data-based city-management and decision-making process and support the effectiveness and positive impact of each future initiative.

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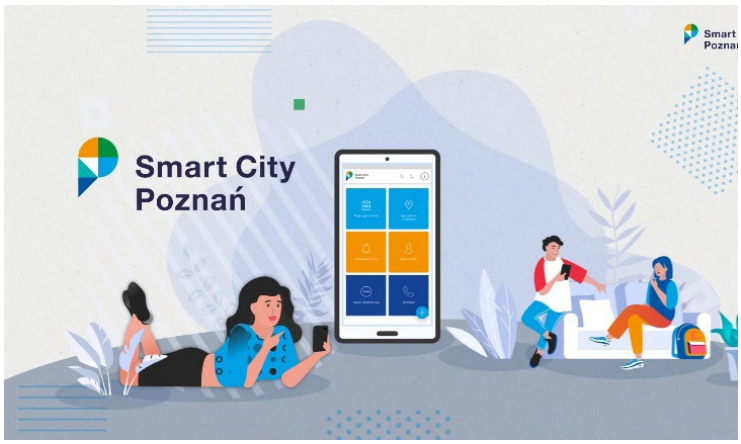

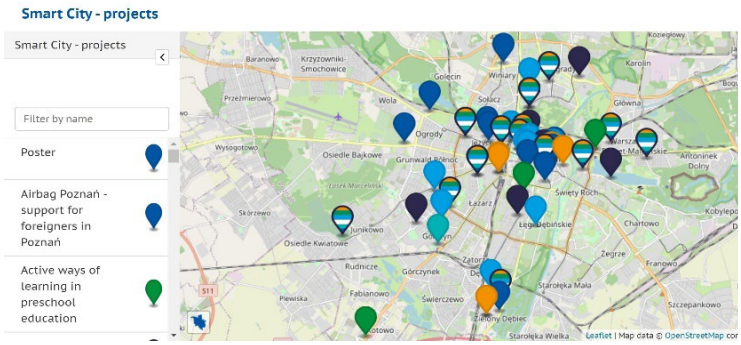

BelgradeGets.digital, BELGRADE, SERBIA

In an effort to attract more digital nomads to establish or pass-by in the city, Belgrade created a platform to promote and help settle this category of professionals.

Background: Belgrade's IT sector and international population has been growing in recent years, especially during the pandemic period, when so-called digital nomads - people who are location-independent and use technology to perform their job - are passing through the Serbian capital. The city has sought to take advantage of this trend, offering tailored services attractive to such professionals.

Service: BelgradeGets.digital is a website promoting Belgrade as a living and working destination for digital nomads and other digital professionals from all over the world. The importance of being recognized as a possible hub for this growing category of workers is seen both as an opportunity to attract new talent to boost the growing IT sector, and to invert the migration trend too, keeping younger, educated professionals inside the country. The service has been developed by the Digital Serbia initiative and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), with the collaboration of the GRAD Cultural Center.

According to the "UNDP in Serbia" article "The BelgradeGets.digital is a platform built on an earlier initiative to position Belgrade on the global digital map, led by Nova Iskra, the SHARE Foundation, and Startit. The platform provides practical information and advice on getting to Belgrade, choosing a place to stay and a place to work, as well as discovering pleasant environments for relaxing."

The development of the platform was informed by research activities engaging digital nomads, only some of who had been to Belgrade. The participation of actual users is outlined in the ambassadors section too where four expats offer their help to new nomads to settle into the city.

Outcome: BelgradeGets.digital seems to act as a well-designed "cabinet" with information provided, suggestions offered, and the city's qualities promoted. Two services add value to this initiative: the already-mentioned ambassadors, and a "support voucher" which conveys an "hour of free consultations with a lawyer and accountant on all you need to know in order to live in and work from Serbia."

The project has also been compared to similar initiatives in Europe and around the world, with its success mostly depending on the competitive advantage the city of Belgrade and country of Serbia have compared to other alternatives. Among Serbia's competitors, Estonia boasts ease of access to public services (such as opening a business) and a rich startup scene, Czech Republic has a recognized touristic appeal and accommodates many international companies; while Costa Rica and the Bahamas have attractive landscapes to offer. The Serbian capital meanwhile emphasizes a good work-life balance, low cost of living, and a rising tech community, and time will tell if it can compete with its international rivals.

Lessons learned and transfer of practice: The project is both an effort to promote the city's actual strengths (existing network, quality of life, low price of living, IT sector, etc.) and to create new services to be further attractive. The providers have wisely involved final users both in the process of research and in the final solution itself[3].

The project could serve as an example to other cities, especially those who have already embarked upon the path towards SMART transition and who are looking to attract additional resources, new talent to boost the growing IT sector. The feasibility and replicability of the project is mostly depending on good publicity and branding strategies, in order to spotlight the city in the relevant manner and attract incomers on regional and international scale.

Pictures:

[3] https://belgradegets.digital/

Simbioza Genesis, LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

As part of its e-services, the Municipality of Ljubljana offers a platform through which to pay for several of their public services, licenses, and fees.

Background: The challenge of digital literacy is not specific to Ljubljana or Slovenia as it is a quite common issue especially in countries where the transition to digital technologies is still in the initial development stage. Younger generations must be ready for a more digital workplace and learn responsible digital consumption. Meanwhile, older generations can be left out from an increasingly digital and complex society. While tackling this issue, the Simbioza project tries to "kill two birds with one stone" by engaging the whole population, especially the elderly, in learning opportunities and teaching youth the rewards and importance of taking a responsible role in their own communities.

Service: The city addressed the main challenge - delays in learning minimum tech skills made it impossible for public administrations to make the most of their digitization, as a significant part of the senior population could not and/or refused to shift from physical to online services. This problem has been, of course, hardened by the recent pandemic as those most vulnerable to infection are those most likely to obtain services physically, thus visiting public offices in person.

To tackle the issue, Simbioza organizes lectures and courses, delivered by volunteer teachers, on digital skills for different parts of the population to address digital literacy issues. This social enterprise is especially interesting for a specific offering, namely ICT classes for 55+ citizens, boosting the digital literacy of the elderly population, which is a transversal theme for every participating city.

The mentors for the elderly population are "underprivileged youth", youngsters from especially low-income families, on the verge of living wage, for whom Simbioza claims to present "unique employment, networking and mutual learning opportunities." [4] The project simply combined both age groups through voluntarism and organized nationwide awareness-raising initiative for e-literacy for seniors, where young people were teaching seniors how to use computers and get online free of charge. Using locations with existing infrastructure (schools, libraries, homes for senior citizens, municipalities, faculties, etc.) the project managed to connect over 9 thousand people within 5 days on over 300 locations across the country annually[5].

Outcome: The first desired outcome of this project is to promote digital literacy through the population, along with the following positive outcomes that can come therefrom: more skilled young citizens; elderly people being more connected to (digital) society and therefore more independent; and more efficient services delivered through the digitization of parts that can be digitized. A secondary (important) goal is to also create a tighter community and build bridges between generations[6]. Surprisingly, over 100.000 participants attended Simbioza activities within the last 8 years up to today[7]. The involvement statistics were gradually increasing every year, for example - last year over 70.000 people connected within 4 years of Simbioza Moves, the ratio being 60:40 for young people and seniors respectively. The participants are from various background and even more diverse age groups, ranging from the youngest – 7 years up to the oldest participants 99 years.

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4 (quotes from Simbioza's LinkedIn profil https://www.linkedin.com/in/simbiozagenesis/?originalSubdomain=si)

5 Source: https://www.forbes.com/sites/ninaangelovska/2018/10/11/in-slovenia-this-project-lets-kid-experts-teach-adults-how-to-use-technology/?sh=49b6fcf83bb6

6 https://simbioza.eu/o-nas

7 Source: https://www.forbes.com/sites/ninaangelovska/2018/10/11/in-slovenia-this-project-lets-kid-experts-teach-adults-how-to-use-technology/?sh=49b6fcf83bb6

Lessons learned and transfer of practice: What makes Simbiosa project unique but at the same time – universal is the flexible system on which it is based – volunteering. Therefore, the dependence of the program on financing is quite minimal on the local scale and the project itself is quite interesting to attract private organization for potential scale-up. The project can be implemented in any city where close communities exist and therefore – the age gap does not impose challenges.

The main focus of the municipality or any NGO organization implementing such project locally would be to attract and motivate individuals to create a self-sustainable system – on the one hand – groups that are motivated to learn digital skills and on the other hand – volunteers ready to provide guidance. Therefore, core staff for mentoring and training the volunteer teams must be in place.

The process should be evaluated and monitored. Workshops should be based on evaluations – of the participants and of the volunteers that are done after every training is completed. This will create the possibility to follow statistics, improve our programs and scale activities if needed.

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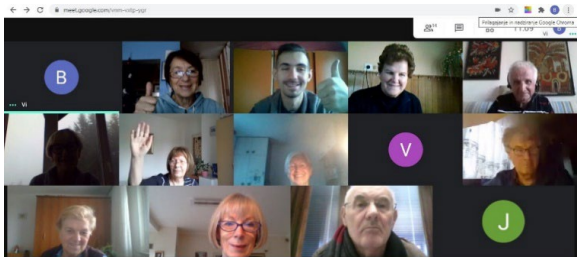

Online payment platform for the city of SZCZECIN, POLAND

As part of its e-services, the Municipality of Szczecin offers a platform through which several of their public services, licenses, and fees can be paid for.

Background: The city of Szczecin has provided its' citizens with e-services and accelerated the digitalization process during the pandemic to support a fully digitalized e-municipality for the population. To address accessibility issues, especially concerning issues of digital literacy, the city has additionally delivered explanations for how to access public services.

Such basic but frequently used services includes: booking appointments, services linked to citizens' waste management, and customer service through online chat. One section describes the status of the website's development ("Stan realizacji sprawy") giving an honest overview of missing parts and parts-in-progress related to national regulations, with an explanation provided for each.

One of these services is a payment platform, which provides a simple solution to a practical problem. Through the link, citizens can pay for different services and fees. The service has been developed in collaboration with Blue Media, a private company which handles online payment processes.

Service: The structure of the platform is not overly complex, with options at the same level for both business owners and citizens (for example, fees for permits to sell alcohol, or registration of a new vehicle). The simplicity of this allows the users to perform tasks quite easily, and can select their reason for payment, the amount to be paid, and the method for online payment. This kind of e-service is simple for citizens to interact with, but obviously also requires readiness to archive, manage, and protect the data (both in the form of digital literacy of municipality staff and the presence of appropriate digital tools).

Outcomes: The payment platform grants several advantages for public administration, some of which have been amplified during the pandemic. It allows citizens to manage tasks without needing to go physically to public offices. The service enables streamlining of the process for more efficient delivery, leaving staff to focus on less repetitive and more complex services for citizens.

In the meantime, even if the developed system might look quite basic, the solution itself was to start the digitalization process with primary, simple services, easier to understand and therefore – act as a trampling/acceleration point for future, more complex projects.

Lessons learned: For smaller cities, which have fewer human, economic, and technical resources, this payment service can be a bright example of partial but successful digitization of public services. Instead of a costly process where every aspect of the municipality is digitized at the same time, starting with smaller steps (such as focusing on a platform for online payments) can bring change in a short time and can make the challenge more manageable, mostly with the support of private companies already managing these activities on a daily basis. It can also allow citizens, staff, and administrators to witness and buy-in in the advantages of the digitization process[8].

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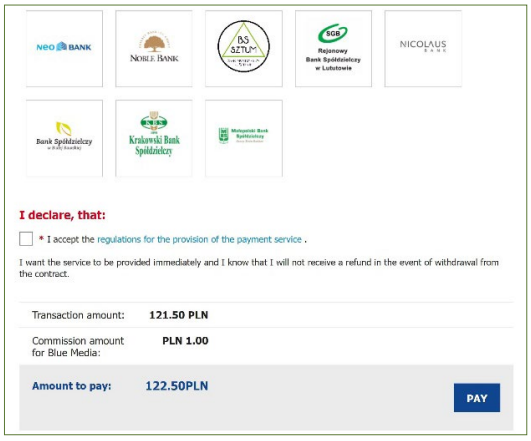
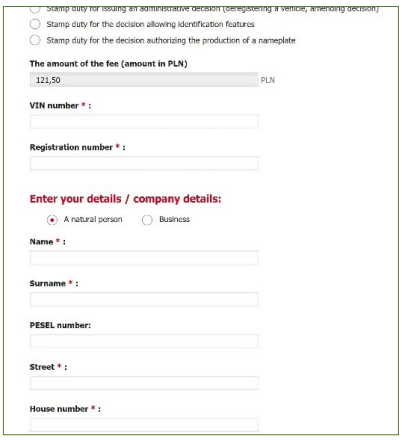
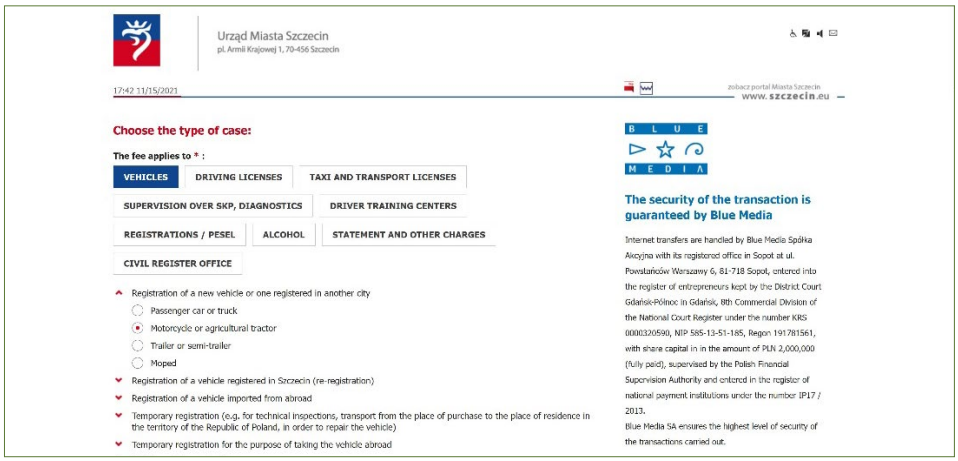






8 https://szczecin.oplatyurzedowe.pl/

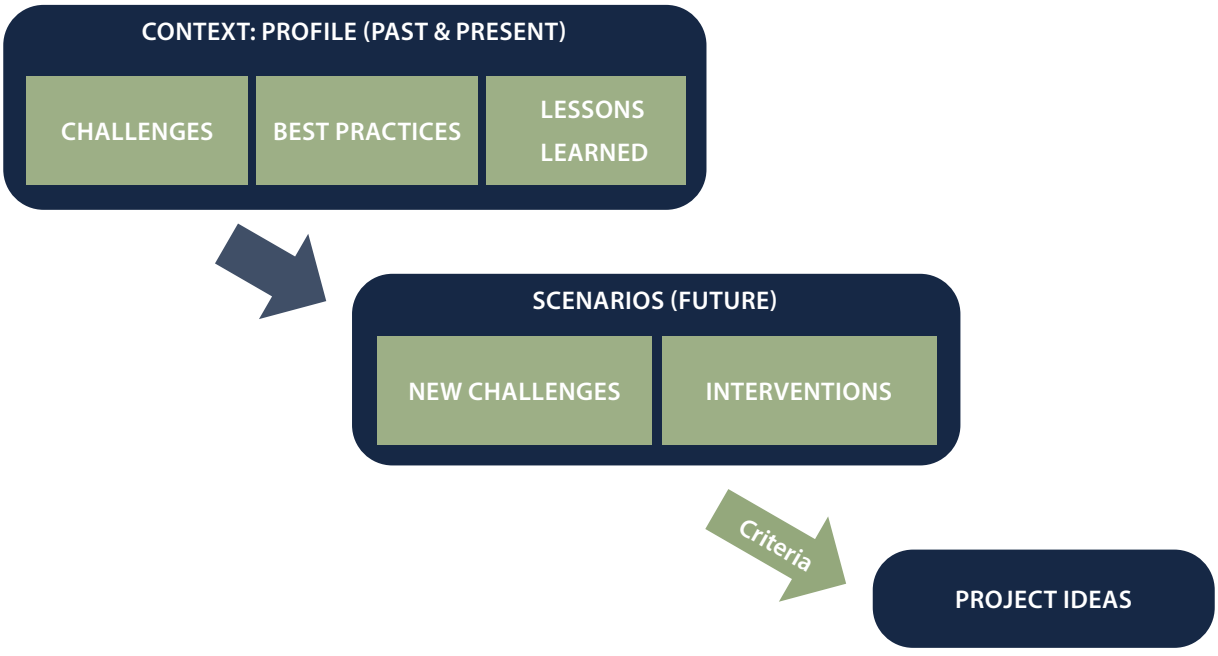
5 DESCRIPTION OF WORKGROUP ACTIVITIES - CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE (SEE)

5.1 CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES

The general method of the workshops entailed providing the working group with the necessary tools and supporting them in their usage. The tools applied were: 1) a step-by-step approach stemming from a general understanding of the problems to arise during the response to the pandemic towards establishing a well-defined program with at least one initiative; 2) knowledge and skills for analysis and building resilience; and 3) impact analysis in the prioritization of effective resilience interventions.

In practical terms, after establishing the working group, five events were organized for the working group (a kick-off event and four workshops) and a final round of consultation by email. These events enabled experts to provide bilateral support.

The four workshops involved a combination of knowledge transfer and stepwise work towards a program of projects covering the following aspects of the crisis management cycle – prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. First, the COVID-19 responses of the selected cities were discussed, while best practices were identified and lessons were learned. This process fueled further project ideas. The selected cities were tasked with envisaging scenarios regarding how the COVID-19 crisis could evolve in the short and long term. The scenarios imagined revealed new challenges as well as new possibilities to intervene in the course of the events. The interventions and new challenges envisaged formed the basis for short project descriptions which had to be described according to the SMART methodology (see the figure below for a schematic flow).



The four workshops follow the above flow. In the first workshop, present and past issues were discussed and methods for assessing crisis management were presented. This allowed the cities to create an overview of how they had performed in their COVID-19 response so far, within the context of their country and given the characteristics of their municipality. In the second and third workshops, scenario-thinking was introduced as a way of foreseeing future actions. Corresponding actions or interventions were developed by the selected cities and presented, and then judged according to the previously mentioned criteria.

A total of 11 participants[9] from Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and Ukraine were involved in the crisis management workshops, which took place during October-November 2021.

5.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY CITIES

Non-existence of anti-crisis department at City Hall of Tbilisi, Georgia

The formation and implementation of an emergency management policy is the prerogative of the central government in Georgia, and the municipal authorities of the capital city Tbilisi participate only in the implementation of measures developed by the central government. Currently at the municipal level there is no anti-crisis council or related department.

For the municipality, this kind of formation is challenging as in order to effectively respond to disasters and crises, the municipality requires an emergency infrastructure and sufficient funds.

Non-existence of emergency/contingency plans for SMEs in Tbilisi, Georgia

While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare systems has been substantial for Tbilisi, it is also having a significant negative effect on the private sector and especially on SMEs in Tbilisi. Working under strict lockdowns and amid uncertain circumstances, SMEs have faced many challenges and have had to make changes to their existing approaches to survive. Currently, in Tbilisi there are no emergency/contingency plans to support SMEs during the pandemic.

Challenges regarding effective dissemination of information to the public in Kutaisi, Georgia

Kutaisi municipality has developed various remote services and interventions to give citizens access to necessary services during the pandemic. However, increasing the effectiveness of the dissemination of information to the public regarding COVID-19, including rules and regulations and health issues, still represents a challenge. Indeed, the municipality needs to introduce innovative technologies to ease the situation in this regard.

Lack of digital literacy among citizens of Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina

In 2020 and 2021, the city of Prijedor introduced new software and applications to embrace the need for digital transformation. However, its citizens are thus far insufficiently educated to take full advantage of digitalization.

Lack of knowledge among citizens about the use of software reduces the number of citizens involved in digital transformation and hinders effective communication between citizens and the municipal government, and citizens' participation in decision-making processes.

[9] Other participants were not able to participate in all workshops due to some emergency situations because of COVID-19 pandemic.

Informal settlements in Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina

There are informal settlements located in Prijedor consisting mainly of refugees. Since the 1990s, various negative factors spawned the development of such informal settlements including:

- Wars and political tension, which created swathes of refugees, who had to be accommodated hurriedly; and
- Periods of political change, in which the legal base for urban development control was weak or non-existent.

Most inhabitants of these settlements do not receive any income, and their settlements are not legalized, which prevents them from starting small businesses. Currently, infrastructure in the informal settlements in Prijedor is arbitrary, and without proper planning there can be no assurances of asphalt roads, telephone lines, safe water, or sewage systems. Some of these settlements encounter serious and frequent problems with flooding.

The number of patients living in these settlements is approximately 50% higher than elsewhere in the city, largely due to the unsanitary and insecure conditions in which these settlements' residents live.

Challenges of the private sector in Kotor, Montenegro

Strict lockdowns in response to COVID-19, resulted in some SMEs ceasing to function in Kotor. As a result of this, investment dropped, while unemployment and acute poverty rose.

The tourism and hospitality sector as well as agriculture witnessed a decline in activity. In particular, activities related to tourism and hospitality declined, such as souvenir and gift shops which had to close during lockdown. Furthermore, service providers such as hairdressers, fitness centers, and beauty salons closed. Meanwhile, as the gift shops and other tourism-related activities are not recognized by the government as economic activities in danger and therefore did not receive national support as the country sought to address more pressing health-related issues.

Moreover, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, seafarers found themselves at the forefront of the global response but in difficult working conditions including uncertainty and difficulties in port access, supply, crew change, and repatriation.

Nonexistence of a strategy/action plan towards building a joint response to the crisis in Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Vulnerable groups in Plovdiv have been especially at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has hindered the normal functioning of social work by the municipality as large proportions of the teams have had to quarantine.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed the municipality with problems regarding exhausted resources, especially shortcomings in human resources, threatening the collapse of health systems. In this regard, Plovdiv has bene facing a social and humanitarian crisis.

There is no strategy/action plan in place in Plovdiv towards building a joint response to the crisis, that would provide an additional reserve of resources, especially in the social domain.

Threats posed by flooding and an underdeveloped drainage system in Mionica, Serbia

Mionica has abundant mineral water springs, but excessive river flows pose a constant flood threat, especially after snow melts in spring and during rainy months. The drainage system here is underdeveloped and this can have catastrophic consequences. Flooding can have a bad impact on the economy, agricultural production can be severely damaged, while polluted land and water can cause deterioration in crop quality and a subsequent shortage of food can result in prices increasing.

Lack of coordination and communication mechanisms to support displaced people in Yerevan, Armenia

Thousands of people have fled their homes in recent years to find safe shelter in Yerevan due to war in Nagorno-Karabakh. There is a lack of information about the displaced people and their needs, and they struggle to access healthcare and other services. Indeed, thousands of people have bene left without anywhere to live, they face challenges regarding access to food, water, clothing, and hygiene. Understandably, these people are under significant stress and in poor psychological condition.

In the municipality, coordination and communication mechanisms are lacking. Indeed, various groups are providing help to these people but without coherent coordination.

Lack of funds for investment and development in Straseni, Moldova

In the municipality of Straseni there is a need for a more strategic approach to economic growth and poverty reduction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the minimal resources available at municipal level, local budgets are primarily used to finance immediate expenditures rather than investments and developments for the future.

5.3 SMALL URBAN INITIATIVES

Modernly-equipped COVID-19 hotline in Kutaisi, Georgia

Kutaisi City Hall has undertaken an initiative to have a modernly equipped hotline center primarily for COVID-19 issues but also for other matters. The hotline will serve not only citizens of Kutaisi but also citizens of the wider Imereti region.

Moreover, there is a high need for staff to be trained in soft skills and personal attitude development. For the idea to succeed, human resources and other investments will be crucial.

Urban integration of informal settlements in Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina

The municipality of Prijedor is pursuing an initiative to establish procedures for interventions and preparing a mechanism to address health issues for the informal settlements of Prijedor. The mechanisms will include telephone helplines, open-source applications, and refinement of the communication strategy. The aim of the initiative is to increase accessibility to services and equitability for the local community.

Furthermore, there is a plan to establish an intervention team for the informal settlements, where the team might consist of nurses, volunteers, doctors, and/or psychiatrists.

Establishment of a financial program by the local government to help private investors (seafarers) to invest in their own businesses in Kotor, Montenegro

The municipality of Kotor is currently developing a program to support investments in start-ups owned by women. The goal here is to start an investment cycle among seafarers in a way that funds are invested in the development of local businesses that will then be sustainable so that the local economy reduces its dependence on tourism, and this enabling the local economy to withstand the pandemic. The project's desired result is to change habits from spending to instead making investments supporting the development of startups.

The project aims to have a long-term impact and will require support in preparing calls for projects as well as in enhancing organizational capacities.

Creation of a resilience platform in Mionica, Serbia

The municipality of Mionica is pursuing an initiative to create a network (resilience platform) to provide people with all information relevant to the crisis, including finding instruments and resources to solve problems of different kinds including those related to medical care, recovery from flooding, shelter, food, and equipment.

The aim of creating such a network is to resolve current crises and to prevent future crises by improving mechanisms of informing citizens about locally relevant issues. Social distancing measures to mitigate the pandemic have damaged the social behavior of citizens and through the establishment of this network connections and communication between citizens will be revived and improved.

Establishment of communication and coordination procedure in Yerevan, Armenia

The municipality of Yerevan has put in place an initiative to develop crisis communication procedure. The aim of the initiative is to support displaced persons who have sought safe shelter in Yerevan due to war and natural disasters during the COVID-19 pandemic. The procedure will specify how the assistance is to be provided. Moreover, the organization and operation of the task force, communication, coordination channels, as well as monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms will be described. The procedure will also cover epidemiological measures for COVID-19 including testing, hospitalization, and foster care services for children and the elderly left without care.

Establishment of another format of activity for tourism industry in Sambir, Ukraine

In the central part of the city of Sambir, there are architectural monuments of national and local significance, close to tourist cities (Lviv, Truskavets, Polish border), thus the city is very attractive to tourists who also enjoy the national cuisine of Ukraine. The initiative is to develop a set of instructions for the introduction of a new form of activity for enterprises (local form of ownership and private form of ownership).

The Program of actions for advertising of the enterprises can be developed (Music school, national house, hall of organ and chamber music, cafe, restaurants) and the proposed activities will include the introduction of audio tours, concerts, music lessons, accessibility in 3-d format. These visits will allow travelers to check many travel details within the comfort of their homes, saving time and exploring the offers online.

Involvement of volunteers in managing COVID-19 crisis in Plovdiv, Bulgaria

The Municipality of Plovdiv has always been open to cooperate with the non-governmental sector and the civil society for the benefit of the neediest, as well as with the representatives of the local branches of the legally registered religions on the territory of the city of Plovdiv. The Social Services Act allows any civil society organization, including church organizations registered as foundations and associations, to be licensed and to provide social services accordingly. The key in this case is to have church organizations and to be willing to provide professional social services. However, unfortunately currently Orthodox church is not actively involved in provision of social services.

The church expresses its solidarity with hospitals and authorities facing the worst situation caused by the pandemic so far and appreciates the efforts of doctors and all medical staff who are fighting to save the lives of seriously ill patients, the statement said. The church to be actively involved in provision of social services together with local government a proactive strategy of local authorities towards building a joint response to the crisis together with the Orthodox church has to be created.

5.4 PROTOTYPES

Prototype for establishment of crisis communication procedures

Cities in the SEE region commonly face many crisis situations, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated this reality. However, most cities in the region do not have crisis communication procedures to be followed during crisis situations. There is thus a need in most SEE cities to establish communication and coordination procedures which will help to organize assistance as required for people in need, to ensure timely and smooth service provision, to avoid overlaps, and to minimize miscommunication.

The organization and operation of a task force, communication and coordination channels, and monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms has to therefore be described in detail in a clear crisis communication procedures. The procedures will also have to cover epidemiological measures for COVID-19 including testing, hospitalization, and foster care services for children and the elderly left without care.

The procedures have to be developed in accordance with state legislation and ethical standards, promoting cooperation and coordination among different types of stakeholders.

The developed procedures will be followed during a crisis situation, whenever one arises. The procedures must be publicly available, except for security-related provisions, so that all stakeholders, especially non-state actors, can find ways to engage in assistance provision and obtain relevant reports.

To establish crisis communication procedures, the following steps have to be taken:

- Set Up Crisis Communication Goals – Each municipality has to develop the goals they would like to achieve through crisis communication procedures.
- Defining Institutions Involved in Crisis Communication – As a first step, each city will define the institutions to be involved in crisis communication. This can include mayors and deputy mayors; Fractions of City council; Department of Public Relations; Department of External Affairs; Department of Education; Department of Health; Department of Children and Social Protection; Agencies and organizations operating under Municipality depending on the nature of the disaster (educational, healthcare, cultural institutions and etc.); ministries; NGOs; international organizations, etc.
- Set Up a Crisis Communication Team in the Municipality – A communication team composed of representatives of different departments should be established.
- Define the Equipment Needed for the Crisis Communication Team – The tools and equipment required by the crisis communication team must be defined and provided.
- Define the Responsibilities of the Crisis Communication Team – The responsibilities of the crisis communication team, including management, must be defined before a crisis (disaster) and during a crisis (disaster).
- Define Tasks of the Crisis Communication Team – Specific tasks must be defined for the crisis communication team.

Prototype for development of an integrated disaster risk reduction structure with resilience building

In some of the municipalities of the SEE region, crisis headquarters function well in response to emergencies, but there are still challenges when it comes to effective communication with citizens. In particular, social distancing measures have had a damaging effect on citizens' social lives and behavior. Specifically, people have lacked a communication channel to which they could turn during a crisis.

Establishing a communication channel (or a resilience platform) making use of social media, local TV stations, and radio programs, could make a big difference in this regard. The aim behind establishing a communication channel is primarily to mitigate current crises and to prevent future crises by improving the mechanisms through which citizens are informed about locally relevant issues and developments.

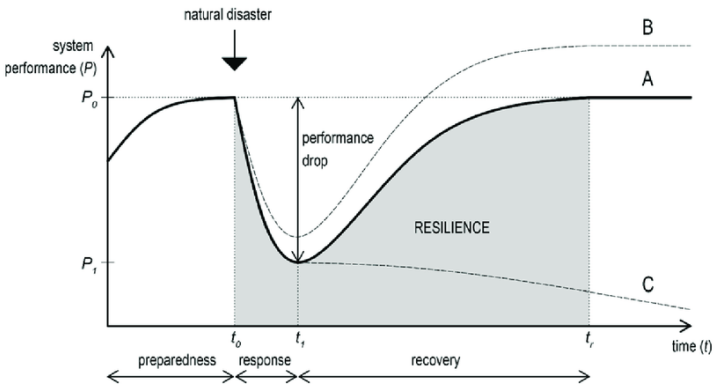
Ideally, a team of young volunteers and professionals would take charge of collecting all service information and would be open 24/7. They would also send reports to TV and radio outlets and spread news via social media. The emergency line would always be on hand for users, thus making it easier for them to resolve problems of any kind including those concerning medical care, transport, cattle salvation, shelter, food, and equipment.

Developing a step-by-step approach to establish the resilience platform would also help significantly, as would structuring priorities and immediate tasks, and keeping all relevant stakeholders involved.

It would also be beneficial to create a disaster risk reduction platform, paving the way for the introduction of disaster risk reduction strategies, in the course of which key stakeholders would meet, discuss, agree on, and implement activities in different areas to reduce risks, raise awareness, as well as prepare for and avoid future emergencies. Such a step would go hand-in-hand with a global approach toward reducing disaster risks. Indeed, some activities would include an analysis of countries' legal systems and stakeholder mapping, as well as drafting a road map and key tasks for the platform, and preparing strategies.

For the development of an integrated disaster risk reduction structure with resilience building in SEE, the following steps have to be taken:

- **Awareness Creation** – This would entail spreading the word about the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), and demonstrating the connection between prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery as well as showing the roles of different disciplines in DRR and resilience. Moreover, it would be necessary to acknowledge that crisis management entails more than the work of first responders.



- **Joint Disaster/Crisis Risk Assessment** – During this step, the following questions would have to be answered: What can disturb the functioning of local society? How likely are the possible scenarios and what impact would they have? In addition, meetings with all stakeholders (governmental and non-governmental) would need to be organized.
- **Using the Experience of the DRA to Create a Relevant Structure** – It should be borne in mind that first responders are not always the most efficient or skilled when it comes to policy-making and determining what it necessary for preventive and mitigative measures, and that policy-makers are not always most effective in tactical and operational decision-making (during a crisis).

Example of the structure: When there is no crisis, the policy-making part of the DRR is dominant. During a crisis, the crisis management staff dominate. Local resilience teams are the 'eyes and ears' of crisis staff and the DRR policy-makers. They know best whether something works or not. The communication section would be responsible for coherent communication with citizens based on information from partners in the DRR platform.

A clear decision-making model based on subsidiarity (with decisions made at the lowest level possible) should be implemented with appropriate training also provided.

- E**quip and Ensure Financial Sustainability of IT and Communication Systems** – The needed equipment and resources must be identified and provided.
- **Train Personnel** - The personnel have to be trained in document drafting, stress management, risk Assessment and other aspects.
- **Implementation** - Put procedures into practice and apply the knowledge acquired from risk assessments to support decision-making and crisis communication.

5.5 SELECTION CRITERIA FOR PROTOTYPE DEVELOPMENT

The two types of criteria for the selection of project idea for phase 2 was developed. The first type concentrates on the quality of the project idea itself. The second type is an expert assessment of the capabilities of the city and the capabilities of the expert to support.

Quality of project idea	Capabilities of city and experts
Effectiveness *will it solve the problem?*	City: shown **understanding** of crisis management
Used resources *are the used resources balanced with effectiveness?*	City: Shown **capability** to run the project idea.
Sustainability *will it last over the duration of the effort?*	City: **duration** of project idea within limits of this project.
Transferability (to other cities) *is it usable for other cities? Can it be a best practice?*	Experts: subject of project idea falling in **knowledge and experience.**
Ethical and diversity *Is the project idea ethically responsible and address diversity and gender equality?*	Experts: assessed workload for support of project idea within **available capacity**
SMART *Is the project idea described in according to the SMART methodology?*	Experts: assessed the project idea in accordance to **SMART** methodology

Based on the selection criteria the initiative of Yerevan (Armenia) was chosen for the prototype development.

5.6 FINAL PRODUCT OF THE SELECTED SMALL URBAN INITIATIVE

5.6.1. Strategic context

5.6.1.1. Local context / framework of the project

The chosen project for the city of Yerevan was selected based on risk assessment, scenario building, selection criteria, and discussions between GIZ, PMCG, experts and representatives of Yerevan (Armenia).

Initially, the municipal authorities in Yerevan expressed an interest in and commitment to work with the Connective Cities initiative, and to support the elaboration of a crisis communication procedure.

The project has been developing at an impressive pace while actual implementation and meaningful outcomes arising from the crisis communication procedure are expected to be seen from early 2022.

5.6.1.2. Background

Due to war and natural disasters, thousands of people across Armenia including the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh have had to flee their homes to seek safe shelter in Yerevan during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the burden for local response agencies, state authorities, and municipality has been immensely challenging. Influenced by the Connective Cities initiative, the project's aim is to develop a legal act codifying a crisis communication procedure which will specify how assistance is to be provided and arranged during crisis situations.

The procedure will be generic but also designed in a way that helps to address anti-epidemic/anti-pandemic measures such as testing, hospitalization, and foster care services for children and the elderly.

Armenia is prone to several natural hazards and disasters, like earthquake, wildfires, and strong winds, while its critical infrastructure often toils to withstand mass influxes of displaced people.

The existing poverty and polarization within society cause many issues needing to be tackled by the local municipality and its services. If crisis communication and information sharing is scattered, fragmented, and not united by stakeholders then the negative effects may be long and far-reaching.

5.6.1.3. Target population

The crisis communication procedure targets all of the affected people in the municipality, especially vulnerable groups. The crisis communication should in fact pay extra attention to these groups as they are harder to reach out to. Meanwhile, the procedure will complement the existing procedures and activities of the municipality.

5.6.1.4. Definition of objectives

The crisis communication procedure will stipulate how assistance is provided to displaced people, ensuring timely and smooth service provision, avoiding overlaps, and minimizing miscommunication. The developed procedure is to be followed during crisis situations and will be able to adapt to some degree to the specifics of the given crisis. It will also be possible to transfer the procedure to other cities, especially those in the same country or those in countries with a more or less similar regulatory framework. The procedure will be made public, except for security-related provisions, so that all stakeholders, especially non-state actors, can see how they are supposed to join in with the provision of assistance and access to reports, among other things.

The objectives of the project is the following:

- Short-term objective – Elaboration of crisis management procedure in Yerevan, Armenia
- Medium-term objective – Approval of crisis management procedure at legislative level in Yerevan, Armenia
- Long-term objective – Implement crisis management procedure in Yerevan, Armenia

The expected outcome of the project is an implemented crisis management procedure with a list of feasible action items that can be applied efficiently during any crisis situation. With the help of this procedure the damage and effect of crisis on citizens of Yerevan will be minimized.

5.6.2. Project design and implementation

5.6.2.1. Project description

A road map with key milestones for the procedure was produced, including the necessary substantial material. In particular, the organization and operation of the task force, communication, coordination channels, and monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms are described.

The described crisis communication procedure includes:

- Institutions involved in crisis communication;
- Crisis communication management;
- Equipment needed for the crisis communication team;
- Crisis communication goals;
- Responsibilities of the crisis communication manager before a crisis (disaster);
- Responsibilities of the crisis communication manager during a crisis (disaster); and
- Tasks of the crisis communication team.

5.6.2.2. Methodology

The project is based on general principles of policymaking. Therefore, problem identification, stakeholder involvement, solution creation, and consultation have all been addressed. In terms of content, the crisis communication procedure will be based on internationally accepted communication strategies and practical international examples.

International best practices and suggestions have been shared based on EU Member States' experience in dealing with crisis communication. These have provided a good basis for Yerevan to establish and adopt a crisis communication procedure.

Several activities and features of the procedure's development are detailed below:

1. A background study was undertaken on what is actually in place in the municipality, including emergency management plans;
2. For working purposes, English was used for communication and reporting, but the procedure itself will be in Armenian;
3. International experts looked into international best practices and shared these with Yerevan;
4. The local experts and representatives looked into existing legal frameworks and procedures;
5. A constant email exchange was ensured and online meetings were called as necessary;

6. Some key elements to be included in the procedure were discussed and further researched, elaborated, and shaped including: stakeholder analysis; media relations and public relations in general; risk assessment; possible templates; and key structural elements/content.
7. The project envisages delivering a crisis communication procedure for Yerevan, the actual implementation of which will take place in the future should a crisis arise; and
8. The involvement of international experts will continue after the project ends, as there are still challenges envisaged after the procedure is in place.

5.7 GOOD PRACTICES

Fundraising campaign for medical institutions in Straseni, Moldova

Municipality of Straseni supporting the medical institutions with various types of donations to foster uninterrupted work of the medics

Background: In the municipality of Straseni, due to the epidemiological situation, the hospitalizations of patients increased, creating a heavy burden for health institutions. During 2020 a total of 295 people were hospitalized out of a total of 1197 infected, while in the first quarter of 2021, 196 people were hospitalized out of a total of 740 infected people. In addition, together with the increased number of COVID-19 patients, the number of patients suffering from pulmonary complications and requiring oxygen also increased.

Accordingly, at the request of the administrators of the relevant health institutions, the City Hall of Straseni decided to support medical institutions during COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure active involvement of different stakeholders (including local government representatives, diaspora) in this process. The municipality has worked and continuing working in this direction.

Objectives: The main goal of the Straseni municipality was to protect the health of patients admitted to hospital in the municipality. To achieve the goal the municipality of Straseni intended to support medical institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic and to reduce the number of patients suffering from major pulmonary complications.

Activities: To achieve the above-mentioned objectives and to tackle COVID-19 related challenges in the health sector the municipality launched a fundraising campaign for medical institutions with a slogan "Involve in the battle with the Covid-19 pandemic". The municipality created campaign team, define its goals what they wanted to achieve and define the timeframe. They developed the content for fundraising campaign to engage target audience.

About 25% of Moldova's population lives abroad, therefore the municipality decided to engage migrants in the process of supporting medical institutions. The members of diaspora actively took participation in the campaign and provided necessary funds. Together with supporting medical institutions, this campaign also ensured the synergy between the diaspora and the communities back home.

Moreover, municipal councilors transferred resources amounting to 8670 MDL to an open account to support the health institutions in Straseni, for citizens needing oxygen treatment and also 316 employers from the municipality of Straseni (kindergartens, school of arts, library, etc.) donated their salaries to health institutions.

Effects: Due to the fundraising campaign, access to medical care for patients to have suffered from pulmonary complications after COVID-19 increased, and the number of patients suffering from pulmonary complications has reduced. The municipality of Straseni is going

to maintain this program during pandemic to further support medical institutions and patients suffering from major pulmonary complications after COVID-19.

Learned and transfer of practice: The project could serve as an example to other cities, especially those who are searching for support during pandemic and have strong ties with diaspora. Diasporas can make significant contributions to and have great potential for supporting humanitarian action in their countries of origin.

Cities to manage engagement of diaspora in crisis situations are recommended to establish coordination and dialogue mechanisms with diaspora to address the existing disparities in coordination between diasporas and cities of origin.

Pictures:

Volunteering to help elderly people in Mionica, Serbia

As part of its support during COVID-19 pandemic, the Municipality of Mionica established a volunteering center to support elderly people in the municipality during the pandemic.

Background: The population in the rural areas of Mionica municipality is mainly old, and the lockdown brought them many challenges by requirements to spend more time at home and lack of contact with family members.

Due to a lack of younger people in the surroundings to help them to buy necessary household supplies, old people in Mionica municipality lack access to the necessary services and products during the pandemic. Moreover, elderly people in the municipality of Mionica faced challenge to visit vaccination centers. The local government, to support the elderly, established a volunteering center in the municipality.

Objectives: The aim of establishment of a volunteering center in the municipality by the local government is to support elderly people in Mionica during the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing their access to all necessary services and products and to increase the vaccination rates among elderly people.

Activities: The municipality disseminated information among young people regarding its idea to establish volunteering center and after receiving applications the selection process was started. The municipality selected volunteers based on the applications received, the main selection criteria was potential volunteer's readiness to be actively involved in the activities planned by the municipality on the long term. The volunteers were equipped with the necessary knowledge, the city hall conducted thematic information and educational sessions with them to increase the knowledge and skills of young people. Currently the volunteering center is operated by more than 20 young people (volunteers) from Mionica municipality.

The volunteers visit all remotely situated houses in the municipality, asking old people about the problems and challenges they face due to the restrictions imposed and social distancing during COVID-19. After mapping the challenges elderly people face, volunteers find ways

to support them. Local government is also actively involved in this process. Among others, the tasks of volunteers include going to green markets, drug stores, and supermarkets to do shopping for old people. Moreover, volunteers collect pensions for old people. In addition, volunteers support elderly people in vaccination by ensuring safe transportation of them to the vaccination centers.

Effects: With the help of the volunteering center, the municipality managed to provide care to elderly people (more than 1000 people) during the pandemic. The access to services and products for old people in the municipality of Mionica during the COVID-19 has increased. Moreover, the vaccination rates among old people have increased.

After the lockdown ended and the abovementioned activities became obsolete, volunteers still continued to visit the same old people, providing them with free vitamin and fruit packages (financed by the municipality) as a way of increasing resistance to the virus and limiting its spread. Moreover, they still support elderly people to visit vaccination centers. The municipality of Mionica is going to maintain this service during the COVID-19 pandemic and is open to share their experience with other municipalities as well.

Lessons learned and transfer of practice: The project could serve as an example to other cities, especially those who have challenges to manage crisis situations and are in need of external help. While establishing volunteering center it is crucially important the city to have a plan for responding community needs. It is recommended for cities who are aiming establishing volunteer Center to have a manager of the center who will organize, recruit and communicate with volunteers during the whole process. It is important the tasks of volunteers to be clearly communicated.

Pictures:

Supporting entrepreneurship during the COVID-19 crisis in Kotor, Montenegro

As part of its support during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Municipality of Kotor adopted a set of measures to support private sector and citizens suffering due to the consequences caused by the pandemic.

Background: The tourism and hospitality sector, and the activities related to these sectors (like souvenir and gift shops), as well as the agriculture sector have witnessed a decline in activity during the COVID-19 pandemic in the municipality of Kotor. Many businesses in these spheres closed due to the lockdowns and other restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to overcome the crisis caused by the virus, the municipality of Kotor adopted a set of measures to support businessmen and citizens suffering due to the consequences caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objectives: The initiated measures by the municipality of Kotor aimed to support private sector companies during the COVID-19 crisis and to develop support measures through consultations and discussions with entrepreneurs.

Activities: The support measures initiated by the municipality included the following:

- Legal entities, entrepreneurs, and natural persons who use business premises under municipal ownership were relieved of their obligation to pay rent;
- Legal entities, entrepreneurs, and natural persons were exempted from paying local utility fees for the use of public areas;
- A 50% reduction in 2021 in the payment of obligations for all legal entities, entrepreneurs, and individuals on the basis of fees for the use of municipal and uncategorized roads in the municipality of Kotor;
- The Secretariat for Culture, Sports, and Social Activities of the Municipality of Kotor, in cooperation with the Public Institution Cultural Center, organized a series of forums entitled "Kotor 2020 - Consequences and Recovery after Covid–19." including discussions, round tables, and meetings with representatives of local businesses in order to find ways for businesses to survive the crisis. All the support measures developed by the municipality to help the entrepreneurs (mentioned above) were discussed and planned during this forum.

Effects: The decisions made, and measures taken by the local government of the municipality of Kotor to support the private sector during the COVID-19 pandemic were successful. Measures have supported businesses to survive, to continue functioning and to prevent job losses.

Moreover, the municipality analyzed the role and importance of working together with different stakeholders (including different local government agencies, national government representtaives, donors, entrepreneurs) during crisis situations to find the best solutions. The municipality maintains strong ties with private sector companies and is ready to support them in crisis situations. The municipality has decided to regularly coordinate with different stakeholders (mentioned above), to have consultations with them and based on these consultations to plan and develop needed measures in the future also.

Lessons learned and transfer of practice: The measures taken by the municipality of Kotor could serve as an example to other cities, especially those who are intended to support their entrepreneurs during COVID-19 crisis.

Cities are recommended to establish coordination and dialogue mechanisms with different stakeholders, including local and national government agencies, international organizations and private sector to cooperatively plan and discuss the possible solutions and adjust support measures to the needs of private sector during crisis situations.

Pictures:

Social housing for the socially disadvantaged in Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Supporting socially disadvantaged and homeless people in Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Background: Plovdiv municipality has a separate shelter for homeless people and a center for temporary accommodation of persons and families. The shelter and center accommodate homeless people and/or those in extremely poor living conditions (e.g. people at risk of poverty and social exclusion).

However, hundreds of people are in need of social housing in the municipality. They live in dwellings that do not meet the legal standards for housing construction and design, electricity is not provided and there is no access to drinking water, or sewage. Part of large families, children with poor health live in poverty and social exclusion.

To support homeless people, in September 2020 the municipality of Plovdiv started to implement the project entitled "Construction of social housing in the town of Plovdiv" with the financial support of the operational program "Growing Regions 2014-2020," co-financed by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund.

Objectives: The main objective of the implemented project by the municipality of Plovdiv "Construction of social housing in the town of Plovdiv" is to increase the well-being of socially disadvantaged and homeless residents of the municipality of Plovdiv by providing socially disadvantaged and homeless residents with housing and necessary services for their living.

Activities: To achieve the objectives under the project a nine-story block will be built for socially disadvantaged people containing 74 apartments (40 one-bedroom, 22 two-bedroom, 8 two-bedroom, and 4 four-bedroom) and 18 parking spaces, as well as common auxiliary rooms. The apartments will be fully furnished. Moreover, an elevator will be provided for people with limited mobility.

Between 124 and 200 poor and homeless Plovdiv residents will inhabit in a brand-new apartment block. It will be located on Vladaya Street and over BGN 7 million will be invested in its construction.

Beneficiaries of the project will be obliged to pay their bills, their children to go to school, to take advantage of the services of the Labor Office - jobs, retraining courses and more. In addition, a social worker will be hired to assist the project beneficiaries with their reintegration into society.

Effects: The construction of houses will support socially disadvantaged people in Plovdiv municipality, the project itself is expected to increase the integration of targeted people into society. Moreover, their access to important services (education, jobs, etc.) is expected to increase.

Lessons learned and transfer of practice: The project could serve as an example to other cities, especially those who have challenges to manage housing inequality in their communities. Social housing represents an important part of the affordable housing solution in many cities to provide affordable housing to socially disadvantaged and homeless people.

Cities who are aiming to solve the problem of housing inequality are recommended firstly to map and identify housing problems in their communities, elaborate the programs adjusted to the needs of their societies and to manage involvement of international organizations and experts in the process of implementation of policies and relevant projects.

Pictures:

Support for vulnerable groups in Tbilisi, Georgia

As part of its support during COVID-19 pandemic, Tbilisi adopted a set of measures to support vulnerable groups during the pandemic.

Background: The coronavirus pandemic has been a shock to the Georgian economy, the pandemic especially affected the elderly and socially vulnerable people in Tbilisi, capital of Georgia. During COVID-19 the access to essential products and services for socially vulnerable people and old people was limited duo to the pandemic, as together with lockdowns and imposed restrictions, food and medicine prices increased. Also, COVID-19 pandemic affected children in Tbilisi, as the kindergartens were closed.

The local government of Tbilisi to support children, socially vulnerable and old people decided to allocate budget in this direction and to involve local businesses in the support campaign.

Objectives: The objective of the allocation budget and involving local private sector in the support campaign was to support socially vulnerable people, children and elderly people during the pandemic by increasing their access to all necessary products and services.

Activities: To achieve its goal the municipality of Tbilisi started development different projects. One of such project was "Social project for kindergartens", after the announcement of the holidays in kindergartens due to the coronavirus pandemic, food items for 60,000 children (the children who were going to kindergartens) have been given to parents twice in Tbilisi.

Moreover, another project to support vulnerable, lonely, elderly people was initiated by the municipality, under that 1.2 million GEL were allocated from the city budget to support the socially unprotected citizens of Tbilisi. Within the scope of this support the city hall purchased food products, sweets and the essentials worth of 500 thousand GEL and have handed them to all socially unprotected citizens of Tbilisi.The municipal government urged businesses to join the campaign for socially unprotected citizens and more than 25 companies have since joined the campaign and actively took participation, they provided the city hall with production to be distributed with socially unprotected people.

Moreover, Tbilisi City Hall established cooperation withRed Cross to support socially vulnerable people during pandemic. Under this projecte packages full of products were delivered to vulnerable groups in Tbilisi.

These processes were done with the help of volunteers, Tbilisi City Hall provide retraining of volunteers and analysis of all the processes and assessment of the situation, which was a given at that time. Currently Tbilisi has hundreds of volunteers trained by the Red Cross Society to carry out such tasks.

Effects: With the help of Tbilisi City Hall, the access to products/services for old and socially vulnerable people during the COVID-19 pandemic has increased in Tbilisi. The municipality analyzes the role of social projects and intends to increase the variety of such projects in the future also.

Lessons learned and transfer of practice: The measures taken by Tbilisi could serve as an example to other cities, especially those who are intended to support their socially vulnerable people during COVID-19 crisis. Involvement of private sector and humanitarian organizations in managing crisis situations could make significant contributions to support socially vulnerable people during crisis.

Cities are recommended to establish coordination and dialogue mechanisms with private sector companies and humanitarian organizations to cooperatively plan and discuss the possible solutions and adjust support measures to the needs of socially vulnerable people during crisis situations.

Pictures:

6 OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTED ACTIONS

To support and strengthen the existing Connective Cities Regional Network, PMCG has assessed the Regional Network Roadmap and elaborated a vision to better engage new members and increase their involvement and participation within the network.

PMCG's working team has facilitated the workflow pertaining to the network's transition to ensure a smooth passage toward a self-sustainable system by:

- Contributing to the growth of the network quantitatively and qualitatively, in order to foster cooperation among stakeholders/field experts/urban practitioners engaged in or affected by municipal activities;
- Stimulating members' interest/motivation by elaborating on the potential of such exchanges and sharing details of the developed projects/initiatives that their cities could benefit from; and
- Proposing topics of global interest, providing international experience, and disseminating good practices that are most applicable/shareable for other cities.

Moreover, the following activities were pursuant to meeting the aims set for the network's transition:

- Invitations seeking to recruit new members were disseminated among the contact bases created in the course of the project (approx. 600 municipal contacts). Moreover, additional resources were used to contact urban practitioners/stakeholders/experts identified by PMCG along with company partners through an earlier collaborative project.
- A virtual event on 12November 2021 conducted on the topic of "crisis management and digitalization of services, with the aim of presenting the results of the working groups" (for more information, see chapter 7).
- A second virtual event on 13 December 2021, tackling the themes of renewable energy and green recovery, which are two of the most discussed and funded topics across the covered region (for more information, see chapter 6).
- Assessment of the Connective Cities SEE Regional Charter and Roadmap - As the activities of Connective Cities were prolonged to August 2022, PMCG has developed, as a form of recommendation, a roadmap to help the regional network to expand and become more active (for more information, see chapter 6).

7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONNECTIVE CITIES SEE REGIONAL NETWORK CHARTER AND ROADMAP DEVELOPMENT

Introduction - The goal of the measures and activities outlined in the roadmap was, beginning from March 2021, to strengthen the already-existing Connective Cities Regional Network "Southeast Europe and Caucasus" by activating new members, boosting the network's presence and increasing its engagement with its members, as well as empowering its members to take on active roles and responsibilities within the network in order to eventually enable a transition into a self-sustainable network by March 2022.

The roadmap outlines different activities regarding the platform, as well as different events, and suggests when these will take place and how the different actors are expected to engage. Actors' involvement varies from phase to phase, broken down as follows:

- Initialization (March – May 2021)
- Empowerment (June – September 2021)
- Transition (October 2021 – February 2022)
- New Ownership (March 2022 – undefined)

The proposition is to facilitate the transition to the new ownership phase starting from March 2022 to support the sustainability of the network and to ensure smooth conveyance of responsibilities from GIZ to new leaders. This new phase is described as the "Stabilization" period.

Unlike the previous phases, the main goal of stabilization phase is to support new leaders to keep the momentum going and maintain the activity level reached by March 2022.

As such, the role of the main actors will be as follows:

- MEMBERS

  Actively informing others about ongoing urban initiatives and needed support / special topics of interest.

  Our experience has shown that cities react particularly actively when discussing their ongoing/planned projects and sharing some issues and challenges encountered on the way. By sharing their experience, they expect from the exchange facilitators and other group members to brainstorm on possible solutions. Therefore, one of the first priority steps of members is to inform other group members about ongoing processes. This strengthens bottom-up communication and allows for a clearer understanding of the trending topics and areas of intervention.

- LEADERS

  Ensuring self-sustainability of the network by identifying topics of interest/possible intervention points and managing the platform

  After March 2022, Multipliers, who are thought to be the most active members, in charge of disseminating information and participating in activities, will take on the ownership of the network and emerge as new leaders. Their primary motivation should be to act independently in aims to continue managing the exchange processes, ensure peer-to-peer communication and thus, guarantee a smooth ownership transition. Their role will be to facilitate communication between cities and accordingly envision/plan future activities topics. Thus, at the initial

stage, surveys and polling should be developed in a collaborative manner to help network members articulate about their initiatives and needed support. After that, the received data must be analyzed and clustered by topic/sub-topic (there is a possibility that new topics will be based on the survey/polling results). Each topic/sub-topic could then be converted into new Group Channels on the platform where relevant capacity building activities and events will be held. If needed, the leaders could then identify multipliers to help them keep-up the activity level on the platform.

- CONTRACTORS

  Facilitating exchange processes and providing capacity-building/learning opportunities

  At the initial stage, contactors should work closely with the leaders and multipliers, and gain a better understanding of the cities' points of interest and support needs. If needed, the contractors could continue with surveying and polling (in each cluster individually) to break down even further the identified issues (for example: cluster – digitalization; topic – virtual municipality; sub-topics - internal workflow for document digitization, improving the usability of online services, understanding users' needs; and communication and explanation of digital services, etc.). It should be noted that detailed information on possible areas of intervention are described in previous project reports[10]. The assessment of such documents would significantly help in the identification process of the topics/sub-topics, as well as the development of survey questions.

  The next step would be to plan and organize (together with the leaders) active workshops on the focus on peer-to-peer exchange and capacity building, concentrating on the identified sub-topics and facilitating communication between cities and relevant experts to brainstorm on possible solutions.

  Additional recommendations are to:

  - Strive to create groups with more or less homogenous language skills;
  - Consider adding offline activities as part of the overall learning process;
  - Experiment with more intense formats with several days of workshops in a row;
  - Pair cities with similar challenges but at different stages of development for more peer-to-peer learning;
  - Pair cities with different challenges and different skillsets who are ready to exchange their "skills" by providing each other capacity-building activities;
  - Actively provide information about good practices that could be shareable examples in developing solutions; and
  - Gain information about international funding opportunities or other alternative support possibilities to be shared with network members.

- GIZ

  The role of GIZ will be primarily to guarantee the process workflow, to make sure that responsibilities are assumed appropriately, and to systematically interfere to motivate members to actively participate in the planned workshops and events.

  The participation of GIZ in the decision-making process is crucial, as the identified points of interest from the cities should then be agreed with GIZ, who should provide feedback if these topics are within the framework of Connective Cities, and articulate their preferences in doing so.

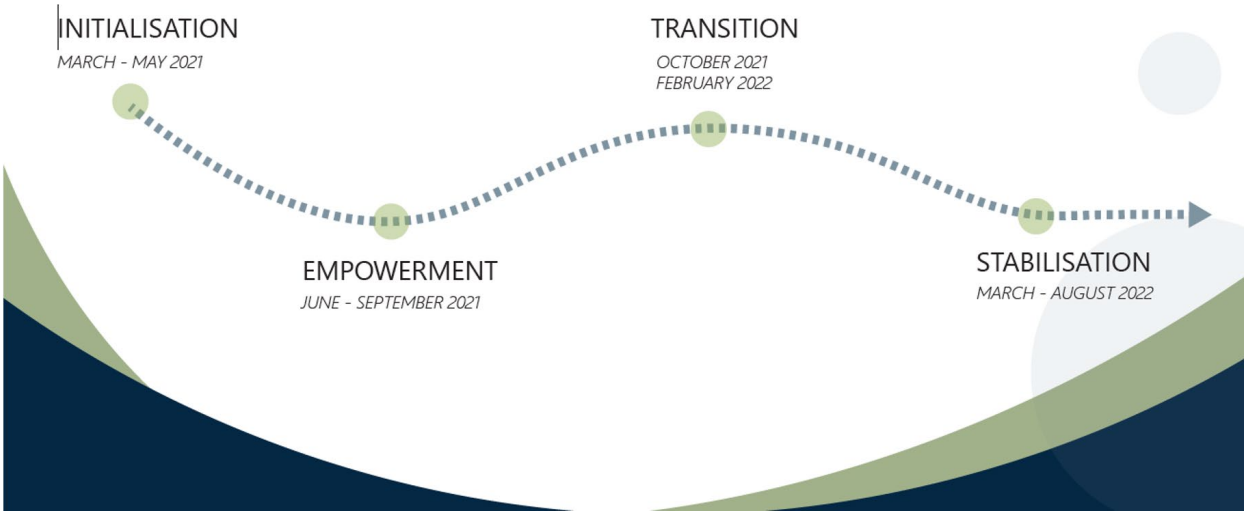
[10] References: "Research of good practices on the subject of health, business and governance at municipal level during the COVID-19 pandemic"; "Municipal Response to COVID-19 for Sustainable Urban Development"

GIZ should also actively disseminate information on ongoing processes and achieved results through the network and social media. Information about identified good practices can be clustered by topic and shared in each network channel accordingly.

By the end of August, collaborative opportunities should be outlined (some of them implemented) and the cities should be motivated to act independently, acknowledging the platform as a tool for potential support in their challenges and continued collaboration without the need for facilitators.

REGIONAL NETWORK ROADMAP - PHASES AND TIMELINE

March 2021 - August 2022



		2021										2022								
		March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	
		Initialisation			Empowerment				Transition						Stabilization					
Platform (and Social Media)	Members	Visit	Read and engage with other networks members						Post actively and engage with other network members						Inform about ongoing urban initiatives and needed support / special topics of interest					
	Multipliers	Visit	Post actively and engage with other network members						Start to assume responsibility with posts and community management		Assume responsibility with posts and community management			Generalize cities feedback (manage poking, online surveying etc.) and support cities in identifying potential intervention oportunities			Cluster cities in relevant groups (judging by their similar interests or collaboration willingness)			
	GIZ and contractors	Creat posts and engage with community (community management)							Assist with posts and community management					Observe, assist if needed	Assist with posts and community management		Creat posts and engage with community. Provide relevant info in each cluster (Good practices, examples, identifyied challenges and possible solutions)			
		Adopt platform (to new needs) and create social media channels if wanted																		
Activities and events			Launch Event		Event I		Event II		Capacity building/learning processes	Event III	Event IV		Event V		Event VI		Event VII	Capacity building/learning processes	Event 0	
	Format		Key-note speech, presentation Roadmap, Conceptualisation Charter, thematic groups		Webinar / Exchange Session / Workshop		Webinar / Exchange Session / Workshop		Exchange Sessions / Workshops	Webinar	Webinar		Webinar / Exchange Session / Workshop		Webinar / Exchange Session / Workshop		Webinar / Exchange Session / Workshop	Exchange Session / Workshop	Webinar / Exchange Session / Workshop	
	Idea for theme / occasion				3 June: World Bicycle Day / 5 June: World Environment Day		12 August: International Youth Day		Whole month	12-Nov	13-Dec		20 February: Wold Day of Social Justice		April 7: World Health Day / April 22: World Earth Day		5 June: World Environment Day	Whole month	August 19: World humanitarian day	
	Members	Receive invitation and register	Attend event		Attend event		Attend event		Co-create events and actively participate in them						Co-create events and actively participate in them					
			Establish charter								Redesign Charter if needed				Redesign Charter if needed					
			Start forming thematic groups		Specify thematic groups, start working in thematic groups		Work in thematic groups		Work in thematic groups and contribute to network platform and activities via thematic groups						Work in thematic groups and contribute to network platform and activities, especially concentrating on needed support/experience exchange possibility					
			Take part in survey												Take part in survey and polling		Provide feedback on ongoing processes (posting, participating in serveys etc.)			
	Multipliers	Multiply invitation for launch event	Take an active role in event						Eventually assume leadership role in event organisation and facilitation					Assume leadership role	Support leaders. Provide help in next steps identification and activation of member's engagement		Actively observe, assist leaders			
				Help building thematic groups					Eventually assume leadership role in thematic groups											
				Work actively in thematic groups																
	GIZ and contractors	Define internal / external communication flows												Define internal / external communication flows						
		Define responsibilities within team												Define responsibilities within team						
		Elaborate profile / self-portrayal of the network												Elaborate survey						
		Organise and communicate launch event; keynote speaker, process to elaborate charta network information	Prepare, facilitate and document event	Organise and communicate event	Prepare, facilitate and document event	Organise and communicate event	Prepare, facilitate and document event	Organise and communicate event	Prepare, facilitate and document event	Observe, assist if needed				Organise and communicate event	Prepare, facilitate and document event	Organise and communicate event	Prepare, facilitate and document event	Organise and communicate event	Prepare, facilitate and document event	
		Elaborate survey	Conduct and evaluate survey	Draw conclusions of the survey results and discuss with multipliers / thematic groups	Organise and communicate event									Conduct and evaluate survey	Draw conclusions of the survey results and discuss with multipliers / thematic groups		Help create focused workshops/capacity building and learning events			
		Ideas about thematic groups	Help create thematic groups	Facilitate thematic groups			Assist thematic groups							Ideas about thematic sub-topics	Assist thematic groups					

8 SUMMARIES OF VIRTUAL GLOBAL EXCHANGES

8.1 VIRTUAL GLOBAL EXCHANGE ON CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND DIGITALIZATION

Date: 12 November 2021

Duration: 2.5 hours

Number of speakers: 12

Number of audience members: up to 50

The web-seminar was devoted to supporting peer-to-peer exchange and gathering municipal representatives, as well as field experts, to discuss crisis management and digitalization experiences, existing challenges, and to explore how scale-up strategies could be enhanced to meet crisis-induced demands.

To cover the above-mentioned topics, the event was divided into the following three parts:

First part: The keynote speech about COVID-19 and territorial policy was delivered by Neli Georgieva, a research associate at the European Policies Research Centre.

Second part: Cases of municipal responses to COVID-19 in terms of digitalization and crisis management were presented from Melitopol (Ukraine) by Mr. Oleksandr Saienko, Head of ICT and Information Protection Division at Melitopol City Hall, from Tbilisi (Georgia) by Ms. Mariam Pruidze, Chief Specialist at the Economic Development Department at Tbilisi City Hall, and from Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina) by Ms. Kristina Bevanda, Medical Epidemiologist and Acting Director of the Health Centre Mostar.

Third part: A panel discussion about the importance of digitalization for efficient crisis management at local governance level amid COVID-19 (including challenges, visions, and peer-to-peer exchange). The discussion was moderated by Ms. Nino Samvelidze, Program Manager for Digital Economy, Youth and Culture, EU Delegation to Georgia and the participants on the panel were Dr. Ife Fashoro (Researcher, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa), Ms. Elba Fuster Figuerola (Technical Expert, Smart Cities and Digitalization, UNDP), and Ms. Teona Turashvili (Local Government / Internet and Innovations Directions Head, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information).

8.2 VIRTUAL GLOBAL EXCHANGE ON MUNICIPAL GREEN RECOVERY PRACTICES AND IMPORTANCE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

Date: 13 December 2021

Duration: 2.5 hours

Number of speakers: 9

Number of audience members: up to 40

The event explored the crisis management mechanisms that cities employed and ways in which they envision green recovery especially on the bases of introducing the use of renewable energy. The pandemic tested the robustness and remorsefulness of mostly all municipal services, from transportation and waste management to recreation and food supply. Pandemic-centered protocols set new behavioral patterns - many of which were quite stressful for urban economies. On the contrary, others - such as raised environmental awareness - made both city leaders and citizens rethink the status-quo regarding sustainability, resilience and in overall - stressed the importance of accelerating previous commitments and striving for even more.

To cover the above-mentioned topics, the event was divided into the following three parts:

First part: the activities of the Connective Cities Network, the SEE Regional Charter and Timeline was shared with the participants by Dr. Irakli Samkharadze (GIZ Connective Cities Regional Coordinator) to better depict the goals of the network and insinuate on future collaboration possibilities.

The presentation was proceeded by a keynote presentation focused on the Investment Policy of Cities as an Instrument of Realization of the Green Deal. It highlighted the implications of the Green Deal for introducing renewable energy use as a bases for green recovery, especially stressing on the local scale

Second part: The case of municipal responses to COVID-19 of Bursa (Turkey) was shared as a good example of a smart and green energy city transition. Special attention was paid to the use and importance of renewable energy, specifically – solar power, that proved to be successful for the city.

Third part: the event was finalized by an interactive panel, tackling the funding opportunities and alternative actions to support green recovery on the local scale (including challenges, visions, and peer-to-peer exchange). The panel discussion was moderated by Mr. Lasha Nakashidze (WFD Georgia Country Representative) between the Mr. George Nanobashvili (UNDP representative of Georgia, Head of Economic Development Department) and Mr. Max Van der Sleen (Project Manager, Innovating together for Green Growth at Ethical Growth Strategies B.V., Netherlands).

ANNEX 1 – THE ACTION PLAN OF THE DIGITALIZATION WORKING GROUP

1. **Name of the Group - Digitalization in Response to the COVID-19 Crisis**
2. **Led by expert: Yulya Besplemennova together with Oblo Design members**[11]
3. **Composition of the Group - Participating Cities**

Country	City
Albania	Roskovec
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Doboj
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Travnik
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ljubuški
Georgia	Keda
Georgia	Kutaisi
Moldova	Laloveni
Montenegro	Pljevlja
North Macedonia	Veles
North Macedonia	Prilep
North Macedonia	Skopje
Serbia	Leskovak
Serbia	Vranje
Ukraine	Drohobych
Ukraine	Kharkiv
Ukraine	Lviv

4. **Objective - Supporting cities' resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing capacity-building activities concerning digitalization**

   To reach this objective, a working group has been formed with the following primary aims:

   - Improving the ability of member cities to establish public digital services using a design-driven, human-centered, and systemic approach;
   - Gathering the stakeholders' principles and engaging users in the design and validation processes and co-design practices; and
   - Stimulating peer-to-peer exchange and hands-on learning.

5. **Planned Outcomes**

   Outcome #1 – Working group on the basis of research and interest from cities established

   Outcome #2 – Action plan agreed and finalized by the working group

   Outcome #3 – Specific challenges and needs of working group member cities identified

   Outcome #4 – Capacity development actions delivered

   Outcome #5 – At least five future initiatives identified

[11] Official Website to Oblo Design and Group members - https://oblo.design/about

Outcome #6 – At least two ideas (solutions/prototypes) for possible step-up projects identified and presented to GIZ as a basis for future collaboration within the Connective Cities Network

Outcome #7 – At least one idea chosen and supported and/or further developed

Outcome #8 – On the basis of the work of PMCG and the working group at least five good practices are elaborated, documented, and disseminated.

6. Timeline

Phases	Milestones	September			October				November					December	
		13-17	20-24	27-1	4-8	11-15	18-22	25-29	1-5	8-12	15-19	22-26	29-3	6-10	13-17
Preliminary Phase	Working group established (Outcome #1)														
	Meeting with the project team and GIZ														
	Kick-off meeting with cities' representatives														
	Action plan agreed and finalized by the working Group (Outcome #2)														
Phase I	Work with cities to identify challenges (Outcome #3)														
	Organize a series of capacity-building/ learning-process activities (Outcome #4)														
	Work with cities to identify initiatives (Outcome #5)														
	Work with cities to identify ideas (solutions/prototypes) (Outcome #6)														
	Meeting with GIZ to present (short written description and PowerPoint presentation) the two most promising ideas, one of which is to be chosen for further development.														

Phase II	Work with the relevant city to develop the chosen idea with the highest demonstration effect (Outcome #7)														
	Support PMCG in its preparation of the report describing five good practices (Outcome #8)														
	Final meeting – presentation of the results of the working group (GIZ, cities' representatives, PMCG team)														

7. Method

PRELIMINARY PHASE

Working group established (Outcome #1) - collaboration with PMCG to define the number of participants and the criteria for selection.

Action plan agreed and finalized by the working group (Outcome #2) - discussion during kick-off meeting on the availability of cities' representatives.

PHASE I

1. Milestone: Work with cities to identify challenges (Outcome #3)

Activity: 4-hour workshop with participating cities (proposed date: 28th Sep 2021)

Prework: Cities to fill in a survey to gather some of their challenges as well as their reflections thereon (survey distributed from Sep 23, to be filled in and returned by Sep 27)

Main Content:

1. Learning part:
    - Case-study presentation about the feasibility and impact of the design solutions, and determining the right scale to pursue; and
    - Introduction of the research principles, system, and stakeholder mapping to allow for analysis of the challenges from different perspectives.
2. Hands-on part:
    - Whole group discussion of high-level challenges each city has encountered, based on the survey responses, leading to the clusterization of challenges;
    - Division of the whole group into smaller groups according to the types of challenge encountered to enable more detailed discussions about the main barriers hindering digitalization; and
    - Final discussion with the whole group in which challenges are prioritized.

Follow-up: Possible one-on-one calls with representatives of some cities if they need more support to more precisely identify challenges.

Assignment for Cities: Finalize the list of challenges (if needed) and prepare a list of the best initiatives to then be shared (template to be shared to ensure uniformity of the outputs among cities).

2. Milestone: Work with cities to identify initiatives (Outcome #5)

Activity: 4-hour workshop with participating cities (proposed date: 7th Oct 2021)

Prework: Cities identify the best digitalization initiatives they have undertaken and fill in the predefined template by 5th Oct 2021

Main Content:

1. Presentation of good practices by the representatives of cities;
2. Discussion and sharing of comments among representatives of cities;
3. Cauterization of the proposed initiatives (based on the problems they address, implementation process, etc.);
4. Division of the whole group into smaller groups of applying or considering similar initiatives and identifying possible directions for improvement; and
5. Final discussion and prioritization of initiatives based on their impact and feasibility.

Follow-up: Sessions with the cities to have presented the selected initiatives to discover more about them and thus inform the following report.

3. Milestone: Work with cities to identify ideas (solutions/opportunities) (Outcome #6)

Activity: Two 4-hour workshops with all cities (proposed dates: 28th Sep 2021 and 7th Oct 2021)

Workshop 1: Ideation (28th September, 10:00 CET)

Main Content:

1. Learning part:
    - Presentation of a case study about ethnographic research on municipal services, explaining the approach taken to identify citizens' needs; and
    - Introduction to human-centered design methodology, user personas and journeys.
2. Hands-on activities:
    - Division of the whole group into smaller groups based on the previously defined challenges faced by cities and the initiatives they have put in place, followed by a brainstorming session within each group. Selection of the most promising ideas within groups.
    - Whole group discussion of the ideas to have emerged from the sessions, and the prioritization thereof.

Assignment for Cities: Selecting one main idea from the initial list that can be more feasibly applied in their context and/or aligns with some initiatives that are already in place (template or list of questions TBD.)

Workshop 2: Consolidation (7th October, 10:00 CET)

Main Content:

1. Learning part:
    - Presentation of a case study about the co-design processes and validation with users; and
    - Introduction to the principles of engagement of stakeholders and users in the design process.

2. Hands-on activities:
    - Division of the group into smaller groups in which cities brainstorm ways to improve one selected idea for each city, and help each other to identify possible steps for implementation and adaptation to suit the different users they are working with; and
    - Final discussion of the improved ideas, and a vote held on the most promising ideas.

Follow-up: Selection and preparation of the presentation of the two finally selected ideas.

4. Milestone: Organization of a series of capacity-building/learning-process activities (Outcome #4)

The activities are integrated into the previously-described workshops (see the "Learning part" for each workshop) with cities including presentations of key studies and corresponding design methodologies covering the topics of identifying citizens' profiles and needs, stakeholder and system mapping and analyzing the problematics involved, and developing co-design initiatives to actively engage users in the delivery of better digital services.

5. Milestone: Meeting with GIZ to present the two most promising ideas, one of which is to be chosen for further development

Proposed date: 27th Oct 2021

Background activity: PMCG and the digitalization expert evaluate proposed ideas based on the feasibility of their development in the second phase and the potential impact for the city, as well as preparation of the presentation of the two selected ideas.

PHASE II

1. Milestone: Work with the relevant city to further develop the chosen idea with the highest demonstration effect (Outcome #7)

Activity:

Preparation

- Assessment of the selected idea and determining ways to improve it; and
- Research of applicable international good practices related to the selected idea.

Kick-off & Co-design Workshop (4 hours), proposed date: 4th Nov 2021

- Launching the activity with the city's representatives, discussing their first idea and defining the necessary actions to be taken to improve it in the following weeks (and forming a working group in the relevant city).

Work Sprint 1

- **4-hour Workshop, proposed date: 9th Nov 2021**

Assisting the first work sprint to establish a viable product that aligns with the selected solution, assessing the results achieved, and defining further improvements.

- Follow-up sessions with the city during the week after the workshop to guide the production of the selected solution.

Work Sprint 2

- **4-hour workshop, proposed date: 16th Nov 2021**
- Refining the work based on assessments and developing a second iteration, to be shared with selected stakeholders/users (and identifying those to be further involved).

- Follow-up sessions with the relevant city during the week after the workshop to guide the second iteration of work on the selected solution.

Validation Sprint

- **4-hour Workshop, proposed date: 23rd Nov 2021**
- Identification of the validation methods and tests to be run with the identified stakeholders/users, assessing the results, and proposing further refinements.
- **Follow-up sessions** with the relevant city during the week after the workshop to guide the validation process.

Final Refinement of the Idea by 30th Nov 2021

- Implementation of refinements needed after the validation, followed by the preparation of the final presentation.

2. Milestone: Supporting PMCG in its preparation of the report describing five good practices (Outcome #8)

Work with PMCG on the report from November 29 to December 10.

3. Final Meeting – presentation of the results of the working group (GIZ, cities' representatives, PMCG team)

Preparing a presentation reviewing the overall work process and the final outcomes.

Proposed date: 15th Dec 2021

ANNEX 2 - THE ACTION PLAN OF THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

1. **Name of the Group** - Crisis Management & COVID-19 Resilience Building
2. **Led by experts:** Edmunds Akitis and Sjirk Meijer
3. **Composition of the Group** - Participating Cities

Country	City
Armenia	Yerevan
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Prijedor
Bulgaria	Plovdiv
Georgia	Keda
Georgia	Kutaisi
Georgia	Oni
Georgia	Tbilisi
Kosovo	Kamenica
Moldova	Straseni
Montenegro	Kotor
Serbia	Mionica
Serbia	Novi Pazar
Ukraine	Kamenets-Podolsky
Ukraine	Sambir

4. **Objective** - Supporting cities' resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic through the provision of capacity-building activities concerning crisis management

   To reach this objective, a working group has been formed with the following primary aims:

   1. Identifying crisis management, resilience, and COVID-19 response challenges;
   2. Analyzing and defining the relevant challenges based on experiences, knowledge transfer, and international discussion;
   3. Prioritization and solutions scan, assessment of resources and
   4. Developing a program with projects (actions).

   The secondary aims of the working group are:

   1. Network building for future challenges; and
   2. Contributing to long-term strategic planning.

5. **Planned Outcomes**

   Outcome #1 - Working group established and previous studies capitalized on.

   Outcome #2 - Action plan agreed and finalized by the working group.

   Outcome #3 - Specific challenges and needs of the working group members' cities identified, with prototypes developed based on the given city's challenges. Identification for Urban setting approach application in different countries and different levels.

   Outcome #4 – Capacity-building actions delivered.

Outcome #5 - At least five future initiatives identified based on the discussions and findings of the working group.

Outcome #6 - At least two ideas (solutions/prototypes) for possible step-up projects identified and presented to GIZ as a basis for future collaboration within the Connective Cities Network.

Outcome #7 – At least one idea chosen and supported and/or further developed.

Outcome #8 - On the basis of the work of PMCG and outcomes of the work within working group, at least five good practices elaborated, documented, and disseminated.

6. Timeline

Phases	Milestones	September			October				November					December	
		13-17	20-24	27-1	4-8	11-15	18-22	25-29	1-5	8-12	15-19	22-26	29-3	6-10	13-17
Preliminary Phase	Working group established (Outcome #1)														
	Meeting with the project team and GIZ														
	Kick-off meeting with cities' representatives														
	Action plan agreed and finalized by the working group (Outcome #2)														
Phase I	Work with cities to identify challenges (Outcome #3)														
	Organize a series of capacity-building actions/learning-process activities (Outcome #4)														
	Work with cities to identify initiatives (Outcome #5)														
	Work with cities to identify ideas (solutions/prototypes) (Outcome #6)														
	Meeting with GIZ to present (short written description and PowerPoint presentation) the two most promising ideas, one of which is to be chosen for further development (short written description and ppt presentation) – decision														

Phase II	Work with the relevant city to develop the chosen idea with the highest demonstration effect (Outcome #7)														
	Support PMCG in its preparation of a report describing five good practices (Outcome #8)														
	Final meeting – presentation of the results of the working group (GIZ, cities, PMCG team)														

7. Method

The general method entails providing the working group with the necessary tools and supporting it to use them. The specific tools here are: 1) a stepwise approach informed by a general understanding of problems to arise during the pandemic response, with a well-defined program including at least one initiative; 2) knowledge and skills in analysis and building resilience; and 3) impact analysis to ensure the most effective resilience interventions are prioritized.

In practical terms, in Phase I, after establishing the working group, four interactive events (a kick-off meeting and three workshops), and a final round of consultation (by email). In the periods between these events/activities, cities will receive bilateral support from experts.

The three workshops (in which ideas and good practices are presented in a roundtable format) combine knowledge transfer and a stepwise approach to the program of projects underpinned by the crisis management cycle – prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. The exercises in the workshops are designed to directly deliver inputs contributing to the desired end result. Indeed, the workshops will end with the establishment of a program of possible actions, at least one of which will be expanded upon in Phase II. In the workshops, discussion between the representatives participating cities will be maximized. After each workshop, intermediate results will be available to assist participating cities in their further elaboration and internal consultations within municipalities.

The capacities of the member cities will be built by leveraging different methodologies to prepare them for future crises, including boosting their risk assessment and analytical capacities.

PHASE I

Step 1: Establishing the working group.

Step 2: Kick-off meeting (2 hours) with the working group covering the following topics (milestone 1):

1. Objectives and aims of the project;
2. Introduction of the member cities;
3. Presentation of actions and corresponding aims;
4. First presentation of initial findings; and
5. Question for further (background) info.

Step 3: Background information collection, desk review, and preparation for workshops; pre-selection of possible topics; drafting of the action plan; and preparing methodologies for capacity building.

Step 4: Execution of the workshops: after each workshop, the experts will write-up a document covering what was accomplished in the given workshop to be disseminated to each of the participants. Moreover, the workshops will begin by reflecting on the results and outcomes of the previous workshop. The actual length/duration of each workshop is to be discussed and agreed in advance (Outcome #4).

6. Workshop 1 (6 hours, 28th September, 10:00 CET): identification of crisis management, resilience, and COVID-19 response challenges (Outcome #3)
    a. Sharing experiences up to that point using predefined presentations (template);
    b. Examples from outside the member cities (emergency plans, business continuity plans, communication plans, volunteer management, etc.);
    c. Theory and practice in scenario-thinking; and
    d. Identification of challenges and possible scenarios.
7. Workshop 2 (6 hours, 8th October, 10:00 CET): analysis and definition of challenges based on experiences, knowledge transfer, and international discussion (Outcome #3)
    a. Recap challenges and scenarios (after internal consultations);
    b. Theory and practice of analysis of challenges (e.g. SWOT and POETE);
    c. Examples from outside the member cities (emergency plans, business continuity plans, communication plans, volunteer management, etc.);
    d. Theory and practice regarding intervention in scenarios/decision-making and coordination mechanism; and
    e. Delving deeper into challenges and possible interventions/scenario planning/recovery planning.
8. Workshop 3 (22nd October, 10:00 CET): prioritization and solutions scan, identification of cities' future initiatives, assessment of resources, prioritization of solutions, and development of a program with projects (actions) (Outcome #5).
    a. Recap of challenges and possible interventions (after internal consultations);
    b. Project design (objectives, SMART, resources);
    c. Building projects and prioritization;
    d. Working on two possible projects/initiatives; and
    e. Agreement on way to build agreement after internal consultation.

Step 5: Consultation leading to an agreement on the final version (online) (Outcome #6).

Step 6: Meeting with GIZ to present (short written description and PowerPoint presentation) the two most promising ideas, one of which is to be chosen for further development – decision. (Outcome #6).

End of Phase I

PHASE II

Re-examine Phase I workshop preparation material and derive five good practices therefrom; review, organize, and prepare the outcomes of the working group for the final report; and prepare for final presentation to the cities, GIZ, and the PMCG team.

Work with the relevant city to further develop the chosen idea with the highest demonstration effect (Outcome #7); meetings (online or in person) (due to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 imposed restrictions and travel restrictions) held and emails exchanged to support the development of the idea; and methodological support provided while progress made to this point reviewed.

The most suitable tools will be determined after the particular idea has been chosen.

End of Phase II

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