

Working Together. How to Effectively Share the Polish Experience in Transformation

A handbook for study tour organizers

Kraków 2014

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Introduction

This handbook has been written as part of a project called *Working Together. How to Effectively Share the Polish Experience in Transformation*, funded by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation through the open grant programme *RITA: Region in Transition*.

We invited two Ukrainian experts (an NGO specialist and a local self-government representative) to visit Kraków between 24 and 28 October 2011 to meet with members of the ZNAK Foundation and consultants from local self-governments working in collaboration with Ukraine. We wanted to talk about effective ways of sharing the Polish experience in transformation.

This handbook outlines and explores practical and efficient ways to share the Polish experience with partners from Ukraine and other post-Soviet states through a variety of thematically diverse study tours and meetings.

It is not our intention to point out weaknesses or mistakes. We do, however, hold considerable experience in hosting and organizing study tours, training programmes and meetings with many visitors from beyond the eastern borders. From our perspective, issues discussed in this book are of particular value and importance. We hope that, with the help of professional wisdom and practical tips, the readers will be able to plan and organize similar events with maximum benefit for the participants. In order to be able to convey Poland's experience in an effective, compelling way, we have to make it coherent and relatable to visitors from a particular country or region. Also, in choosing the subject matter to be addressed, we must bear in mind that knowledge about our own or, more generally, European ideas of the democratic state and civil society need not be universal. This makes certain elements less amenable to adaptation than we might wish and hope them to be.

Most of you use public subsidies, the money essentially contributed by and belonging to Poland's citizens. Assistance programmes and projects should

therefore be organized with particular care and attention to avoid wasting resources and make sure that tours to Poland bring benefits extending beyond sightseeing value.

In drafting this handbook we hoped to address the various points and elements without which any study tour would miss its original purpose (how to work with partners from abroad, professional interpreters, volunteer interpreters, etc.). The important elements of the process have been addressed from various perspectives. We have looked through the eyes of the organizer and those institutions that most frequently host groups coming to Poland (NGOs, institutions at various levels of local self-government).

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the District Starosty in Będzin, the Commune of Radziejowice, the Municipal Office in Miechów, the Polish Humanitarian Action and the Villa Decius Association for their significant contribution to this handbook.

We hope that our ideas and suggestions will help you in organizing aid projects.

*Sylvia Gajownik
Project Coordinator
Board Secretary
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Working together. How to effectively share the Polish experience in transformation

Grzegorz Demel

The idea for this project – a project, which saw its ultimate fruition in this handbook – germinated among its authors over the years of various programmes and mutual efforts put into their organization. After five projects' worth of training programmes on study tours to Poland, discussions and debates, feedback and evaluation, we thought about writing a handbook – a “guide” to our experience, insight and mistakes.

It was a conscious decision to put together a book based on our experience in working with our eastern neighbours. Unwilling to draw solely on insight and feedback derived in the form of side notes from our main project work, we set up an experiment, arranging meetings between experts, representatives of local self-government bodies, and NGOs. Those meetings to a certain extent mimicked our typical study tours, partly devoted to discussions on ways to convey the Polish experience in transformation. We have referred to them provisionally as “laboratories”. We were interested not so much in *what* is shown to our guests from abroad as in *how*, and how effectively it is done. To what extent are the suggestions and ideas we present interesting and relevant?

We involved all parties potentially interested in the endeavour: members of foreign delegations, Polish and foreign organizing teams, institutions hosting study tours, the interpreter. After some time we stopped calling them visitors, organizers and professionals. They all became partners and we saw that the full involvement of every side of this particular equation plays an equally crucial role.

With this handbook we would like to help various organizations and institutions already working or planning to work with Ukrainian partners. Also, we would be very happy to facilitate similar partnerships with other post-Soviet states. We are not going to argue that the doors to all those countries and their many regions may be opened with the same key: a key to the illusory realm of the “Former Soviet Union”. The chapter written by our Ukrainian experts proves that Ukraine itself is widely diversified and it is important not to see its heterogeneity through the prism of the bicoloured election maps depicting voter preferences in the Orange Revolution. True, this publication focuses chiefly on Ukraine; our experts are Ukrainian. They wrote a chapter on Ukraine, its character and the expectations shared by people coming from that country. We chose Ukraine because Ukraine is our most active partner. Incidentally, the same is true for other Polish institutions if we spare a glance at the lists of partners collaborating with Polish local self-governments or grants awarded in cross-border programmes. Our joint projects with the Foundation for Local Initiatives in Donetsk Oblast (FLID) have been the best experiences in genuine partnership and a truly productive collaboration.

Our Ukrainian experts – Alona Dolia, project coordinator at FLID, and Artem Sabadash, secretary to the municipal council in the town of Awdijewka, Donetsk Oblast – had been to Poland before and Alona understands Polish although she doesn’t speak it. This familiarity may have proven to be a trap as, arguably, more shortcomings could come to light in the presence of people who – just like most participants of our study tours – know little about Poland and refuse to move past certain issues, for example administrative divisions). On the other hand (and those arguments outweighed any doubts we may have had), we wanted somebody who would be less focused on novelty and more capable of passing cool judgement on the content and form of the study tour arranged by the hosts.

Following thorough website research of every local self-government in Małopolska, we gained some idea about institutions collaborating with our eastern neighbours. We checked whether their websites were up to date. We attempted to assess whether joint efforts extended beyond signing partnership agreements. Where applicable, we looked at different language versions of relevant pages. Finally, we invited the District Starosty in Będzin, the Municipal Office in Miechów and Commune Office in Radziejowice to join our project. This was the first time we worked with these institutions.

We used a different key to select non-governmental organizations. Our choice included institutions celebrated for international cooperation: the Villa Decius Association and the Kraków office of the Polish Humanitarian Action. The two organizations we had not known before were KRAINA and RACIECHOWICE 2005 (both from Raciechowice). We met with their representatives in the Commune Office to bring attention to the specific model of collaboration between an NGO and a local self-government. This model (and the way it was presented) was of particular interest to our Ukrainian visitors.

We sent a letter to selected institutions and NGOs, in which we made it clear that we would not be asking them to host a standard study tour or receive a delegation. Our idea was to organize a workshop, a training exercise that would require an open mind for discussion and perhaps even some criticism from all the participants: the Ukrainian experts, the hosting team, the Polish organizers and the interpreter. In fact, we were surprised to find that all recipients expressed ready willingness to participate in this joint experiment.

All the participants (including the hosting institutions) realized that, with the specific makeup of the group and the objectives of the project, it would be impossible to hope for “natural” conditions on any side of the equation. Nobody would expect that all hosts pretend with equal commitment and conviction to be hosting a standard group. The easiest job, relatively speaking, was that of the interpreter, who did what he always does for most of the time and had to come out of his standard role only for the final discussion. We focused on problems and details overlooked during study tours. We certainly used to overlook them and you have probably done so too. As it turns out, however, they are important in order for the study tour to effectively meet its objectives. For the sake of learning, we decided to work through situations which we all, to the best of our knowledge, regard as poorly planned or executed.

During the first meeting held at the District Starosty in Będzin, we heard a presentation originally prepared for a Polish audience. We used this as an opportunity to discuss the problem of delivery and perception. We catalogued our conclusions regarding the form of presentation, its content, length, and relevance to the knowledge or, at least, geographical perception of the audience. Our conclusions will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters. We improvised an experiment in role-reversal: our Ukrainian guests gave their own presentation full of minute Cyrillic script. We agreed that a multimedia presentation burdened with unintelligible text loses its value. Realistically, the audience receives only the content delivered by the interpreter. We discussed

problems related to administrative and legislative differences between the two countries; we analysed the respective roles and functions of the host, the organizer and the interpreter. We found a good example when discussing the role of the Polish local self-government in health care. We found that when we focused on the Starosty's responsibilities in sustaining hospitals or clinics, we almost forgot to mention the role of Polish National Health Fund in financing health care. Poles take this information for granted, whereas guests from abroad have no such knowledge.

The authorities in Raciechowice invited us for a meeting held by the Commune Council. The session lasted a little over two hours. We found that the key interest lies in that which is alive, practical, and observable in its "natural" environment. Consecutive interpreting was out of the question, but whispered interpreting proved satisfactory. The interpreter talked about what was happening at any given moment; he explained causes, results, and what the next steps might be. After the session, the President of the Council and the Mayor were happy to talk to our Ukrainian experts and explain all the procedural complexities and practices. Later on we saw a presentation on a joint project between the Commune and its partners from Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz partners were invited to explore a pioneering environmental project – a project innovative also in the Polish context. We met with members of local associations housed in rooms provided by the Commune Office. We talked about collaboration between local self-governments and NGOs, as well as ways of sharing these experiences. We visited an exhibition called *Faraway Nearby: Polish-Kyrgyz bridges of friendship*. It was held at the Commune Office and financed from a grant awarded in the *RITA: Region in Transition* programme. The Mayor, focused on practicalities and pragmatic action, provoked reflection on the very nature of international partnerships. Raciechowice first had an idea for a joint project and only later signed more formal declarations. That day we managed to catalogue and organize our most crucial observations and comments regarding the use of practical examples in the process of sharing knowledge and experience; we were particularly interested in the tangibility of the solutions demonstrated to guests from abroad.

At the Municipal Office in Miechów we saw a presentation on the town's partnership with its Ukrainian twin town. Most efforts so far have been put into cultural projects and events; at present both towns are working on joint economic initiatives. We discussed the role of local leaders, many of whom are true enthusiasts able to use their personal contact networks and interests

to initiate and strengthen cooperation (provided they have the goodwill and support of the appropriate institutions). The Mayor had an excellent idea – and it is an important lesson to be included in this book – to invite both the person responsible for managing partner relations within the Municipal Office as well as professionals involved in specific projects within areas of their competence: a headmistress collaborating with a partner school in Ukraine and a town councillor responsible for direct contact with members of the Ukrainian self-government.

The Villa Decius Association has been our long-time friend and partner. It was ready to take up the challenge in the specific nature of our visit. Its premises provided an excellent context for testing both the right and wrong ways of hosting a study tour. We looked at reactions our guests may have to gifts and materials printed only in Polish; we analysed their response to a theoretical lecture on issues which may have been demonstrated in practice in a room next door. We improvised a situation in which a discussion became so detailed that the level of intricacy excluded some participants (chiefly those less acquainted with NGOs and their activities). It was an interesting experience to see a general discussion transform into a conversation between two people who were not only the ones most interested in the topic, but also had known one another for a long time. They monopolized the debate, excluding all the remaining participants, and made it impossible for the interpreter to do his job properly.

At the Kraków Office of the Polish Humanitarian Action, we concluded our discussions on the best form of multimedia presentation (we looked at many visual and linguistic versions). Again, we spoke about the necessity of informing people coming from abroad about Polish specificities, only this time we focused on NGOs (e.g. Poles can allocate 1% of their annual income tax to a public benefit institution of their choice). We also talked about working with non-professional interpreters.

The results of this field experiment not only enriched, but also confirmed our conclusions, intuitions and impressions. Most importantly, we were able to organize them into the handbook you are reading right now.

What we expect from tours to Poland: the Ukrainian perspective

**Alona Dolia,
Artem Sabadash**

*You have two hands, one for helping yourself,
the other for helping others.*

Audrey Hepburn

Why the Polish Experience in Development and Progress is Important to Ukraine

Ukraine has declared its intention to prepare for EU integration. Most Ukrainian politicians would like to use effective European solutions and adopt European strategies, modifying them to suit local needs and contexts.

Our present challenge is to plan and implement a comprehensive reform of regional authorities and local self-governments. These structures are closest to the people, who tend to judge government efficiency based on their competence. EU integration requires developing and implementing a model of regional government in keeping with the principles of EU regional policy. The new model should favour new forms of cooperation between the central government and the regions¹.

An important step undertaken by EU institutions to improve the system of governance (one of four strategic objectives defined by the European

¹ [Translator's footnote:] Speech delivered by the Ukrainian President during a public hearing on the "Development of Good Governance on Local and Regional Levels" in Kiev, 2011.

Commission) is to increase the involvement of civil society in policy-making at the EU level (procedures for the consultation and participation of citizens in state and local policies).

Borrowing experience from EU countries, Ukraine is – as it happens – chiefly interested in Polish developments. Poland was the first to recognize Ukraine as an independent state on 2 December 1991. Bilateral relations between the two countries gained momentum after 25 June 1996, when the Joint Declaration was signed between the President of the Republic of Poland and the President of Ukraine, defining the nature of this strategic partnership.

The two countries are geographical neighbours and, as former members of the Eastern Bloc, share a host of similar problems. Also, in historical terms, Poland began its work on civil society and the new system of local government only recently, with all the processes still ongoing. Representatives of Ukrainian local governments and social benefit organizations see many parallels between Poland and the current situation in Ukraine, and believe that the Polish experience in transformation, modified to accommodate specific realities, can be utilized at the local community level in Ukraine.

Western Ukraine and Eastern Ukraine: Why Is This Distinction Important?

One should be mindful of historical, cultural and religious differences between eastern and western parts of Ukraine. For a long time Ukraine did not exist as a sovereign, unified state. With its individual parts belonging to different countries, it was evident that their unification would reveal cultural and social diversity. Thus Ukraine as a state spans over differing geo-cultural regions.

Two parallel processes well-established in civil society – democratization and modernization – came to Ukraine from opposite directions. Democratization arrived from the West to parts of today's Ukraine located within the boundaries of Austria-Hungary and Poland. Modernization came from the East, together with Russian influence, especially at the time of the Soviet Union. Under the rule of Austria-Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia, western provinces gained some, albeit rudimentary, experience in the development of civil society. This is a cross-border region, where the influence of western political traditions is still very much alive; where the notion of state-building, the idea of autonomy, and the specific Ukrainian spirituality

are far more entrenched than in the East. People inhabiting western provinces hold values derived from Greek and Roman Catholicism. They place more confidence in state structures than in other people. The opposite is true for Eastern Ukraine; here people place their trust in other people rather than state institutions.

People came to live in the eastern regions with the development of industry and the rise of major industrial centres: mines, production plants, chemical plants, etc. Settlement planning, water and heat supply, energy flow, road and rail infrastructure have always reflected and served the needs of the industry. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, entire branches of the economy collapsed; the communities in major cities, smaller towns and villages faced dire circumstances. After shutting down companies that had hitherto fed local budgets and financed schools, preschools, cultural centres and community infrastructure (roads, heat and water supply), many cities and towns, and even bigger administrative units, essentially disintegrated. Today such communities are based solely on state and district funding, unable to produce resources necessary for growth. The Donets Basin (Donbas) faced very specific problems due to its economic profile limited almost exclusively to the coal industry. Hence the urgent need to retrain people in this region in new, useable skills. It is in the mining towns of Donbas that social policy becomes the topmost priority.

There is another idiosyncrasy to the administrative division of Eastern Ukraine. Settlements around industrial plants were so densely populated that the levels of local government resemble a *matryoshka* doll. There are several levels of self-government, each effectively subordinated to the next in the hierarchy, although formally autonomous. *Novoazovsk Raion*, a district located within Donetsk Oblast, is a good example of this form of administrative segmentation. Its administrative centre, the town of Novoazovsk, has its own Municipal Council. And although formally the Municipal Council of Novoazovsk is autonomous, in reality it is subordinate to the *raion* administration. Thus all strategic decisions, including budget planning, must be consulted and coordinated with government structures at two levels: *oblast* and *raion*.

We Represent Ukrainian Local Governments and NGOs. What Would We Like to Learn During Study Tours in Poland?

First of all, we should start by explaining the Ukrainian understanding of local government and social benefit organization, not entirely compatible with Polish definitions:

Legal definition of local self-government (Constitution of Ukraine adopted on 28 June 1996; Chapter XI, Article 140)²:

The local self-government is the right of a territorial community – the residents of a village or residents from several villages, a settlement or city, voluntarily united as one village community – to independently resolve issues of a local character within the limits of the Constitution and the laws of Ukraine.

Admittedly, the organization of the local self-government in Ukraine remains a product of the Soviet era. The administrative division is made up of the following units: *selo* (village), *selyshe* (rural settlement), *misto* (city), *raion* (district), *raion in misto* (district-in-city) and *oblast* (region). In the southern and eastern parts of the country territorial divisions differ from administrative units in the West and North. Therefore, while the western Oblasts of Lviv and Volyn encompass *raiony* made up of villages, rural settlements and smaller towns, Donetsk Oblast in Eastern Ukraine spans over *raiony*, cities with special status (administratively equivalent to an *oblast*) and even one district-in-city. Major cities are also divided into *raiony* subordinated to the municipal authorities. There are some unwarranted exceptions. The City of Donetsk, for example, includes nine *raiony*, each of which has its own council of deputies subordinated to the municipal council. One such *raion* encompasses another city with its own council and a subordinate *selyshe* (which has its own council).

² [Translator's footnote:] Source: http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Ukraine,_1996 (accessed on 26 September 2014).

For over a decade, deputies of the Ukrainian Parliament have been trying to pass a new law on local self-government and implement administrative reforms. Unfortunately, local governments are continuously dealing with the difficult situation we have just described.

Social benefit organization – an association of citizens, a voluntary social formation based on the recognition of common interest, set up to implement and exercise their common rights.

Social benefit organizations and philanthropic foundations constitute the fundamental part of civil society organizations in Ukraine. Legislation precisely defines the territorial scope of their activity. Civil society organizations may therefore operate within a *raion*, an *oblast*, or the entire country. For over five years the Ukrainian Parliament has been working on new laws regulating the sector upon request by the Council of Europe. Even though new legislation has not been passed yet, people involved in social benefit organizations are very much invested in this reform. They are trying to find ways of redeveloping the relationship between the authorities and the people, improving mutual relations, and working together to solve the most pressing problems.

► What are members of Social Benefit Organizations interested In?

During our first visit to Poland in 2006 we were left with many questions after almost every meeting. We did not fully comprehend the idea of a social benefit organization and its relationship with local authorities. Our first impressions were limited to a simple observation: „We can't believe how simple all this is". Organizations seemed to have enough money, the authorities were happy to collaborate with local communities, people took active part in policy-making processes in their towns and communes. "There are no problems," we would hear at virtually every meeting. „Poland is one happy family". It was only later, thanks to our Polish partners and our interpreter, that we found out how this efficient system developed.

Upon coming to Poland, members of Ukrainian social benefit organizations (well familiar with their own country) usually look for answers to the following questions:

- What is the role of social benefit organizations in the local government system in Poland? How is this sector formally/legislatively regulated at the state and local levels?
 - Legislation (state and local); who initiated the process to propose and pass new laws? How are these put into practice?
- How was the partnership between authorities and social benefit organizations established?
 - Who initiated the process? Who partook in it? How long was the process? What are the formal and informal procedures in establishing partnerships?
- What is the role of social benefit organizations in decision-making and problem-solving processes at the local level?
 - How is this reflected in local legislation? How does it work in practice? What are the effects of this participation?
- How are social benefit organizations financed in Poland?
 - What are the legal regulations? What are the main sources of funding in specific towns, districts, communes?
- In what ways can social benefit organizations monitor authorities?
 - Which documents regulate this process? How does this work in practice? What are the best practices?
- What are the ways to motivate members of the community to actively partake in matters of local self-government? (Share successes and failures.)
 - Give realistic examples. Even a catalogue of mistakes is of great value to Ukrainian guests!

- When organizing meetings, many a time we have had to deal with situations in which participants asked about problems only to hear from the people representing the authorities that there were none, because everything was running smoothly.
- Examples of successful and failed initiatives in which representatives of the self-government and members of the community worked together to solve local problems.
 - A common perspective on both sides of this partnership will be perceived as the most reliable!

When authorities speak of success, people always listen with disbelief. On the other hand, when opinions expressed by social benefit organizations remain unsupported by similar declarations from the government, they often come across as unwarranted boasting.

► What are the representatives of Local Self-governments interested In?

Many Ukrainians, especially in the eastern parts of the country, still hold the popular belief that the people in power come from a different sort to “us mere mortals”. Buildings hosting municipal councils or state administration are commonly referred to as the „White House”.

Members of Polish local self-governments do not understand the specifics of the Ukrainian system and vice versa. Many issues that are obvious and straightforward in Poland, need a detailed explanation in Ukraine.

Therefore, when Ukrainian representatives of local self-governments or state structures visit their Polish colleagues for the first time, there are many questions and conflicting emotions. Why do public officials face no problems in Poland? How can the system work so well? There is money in local budgets, people generally respect local authorities and are happy to cooperate. I remember how astonished one Ukrainian guest was after sitting in a work session held by members of a local self-government. Decisions crucial for the whole region were discussed and made in a friendly, almost informal atmosphere.

Representatives of Ukrainian Self-governments Find Study Tours in Poland Interesting Because:

Each official is interested in a range of very specific questions and assumes they will be able to find the relevant answers. We usually address a wide variety of issues (from sewage collection and disposal systems to investments in education), and it is enough of an incentive to participate in tours to Poland.

A study tour to Poland is a visit to a “new” country with a “new” democracy: a democracy centred around people, voters. As representatives of local government structures, we would like to find a universal cure for all our complaints, even though we often do not understand our own illness (our true problems). We do not always see what needs to be changed, as well as how or when. And, first and foremost, we do not always know where to find the money to pay for the changes. We are quite sure, however, that no money means no change. And then we travel to a country with an administrative structure that we basically do not know. We know next to nothing about its administrative division, cash flow regulations, health care or education system.

We project new information onto our assumptions instead of verifying it against reality. The key lesson would be for us to understand that we can start reforms ourselves – we do not have to wait for the Parliament to pass new laws. In Ukraine most reforms do not introduce radical changes; usually their aim is to improve the existing systems. For example, although public services offered in local governments have been well described, they are not published under one document (Charter of Public Services). Local structures have websites but they lack practical information for citizens. Every week they hold meetings with members of the local community, but few people know about these meetings and nothing gets documented. In Poland all of this gets done, because there are established standards of communication with citizens.

How can we obtain the necessary knowledge at the beginning of our journey toward change?

Understanding context and terminology is of paramount importance.

Representatives of Ukrainian self-governments want to know about:

- general rules governing relations between EU Member States;
- the administrative system in Poland (commune-district-province);
- areas of competence in administrative bodies and their financial interdependence;
- the system of appointment for government bodies and their interdependence;
- the tax system;
- the education system;
- the health care system;
- public utility services;
- public participation in policy-making at the local level;
- social benefit organizations in a given city/region;
- cooperation of NGOs with local authorities;
- joint efforts between NGOs and authorities in projects and programmes;
- examples of innovative projects and investments in the area;
- problems encountered in the process of implementing reforms.

If participants receive the relevant answers, they may get the right idea both about Poland, as well as relations between Member States.

How to Plan Study Tours: Practical Guidelines for Polish Hosts and Organizers

Since 2006, I have visited over twenty Polish communes and met with people from more than thirty NGOs. I have supervised many groups with members recruited from social benefit organizations and local government bodies. I partook in a number of delegations. Drawing on my experience and many conversations I had with other guests, I would like to bring attention to what, in my opinion, is important in the process of preparing and organizing study tours.

NOTE:

For a meeting to be successful, it needs to be prepared in advance with attention to all relevant details and the overall context of the tour schedule.

Every meeting (and every study tour in particular) has very specific objectives (subject matter); the parties involved should always meet because of and with mutual interest.

I would say that, in order to meet all expectations, the organizers planning the tour should know where their guests come from and which Ukrainian organizations, cities, and regions they represent. Also, it is important for them to realize what benefits they gain from hosting the group.

Every study tour needs to be planned in terms of content and logistics. There are some key points, which should be always taken into account:

I remember a meeting between a Ukrainian group (city mayors, members of social benefit organizations and local leaders) and Polish representatives of local authorities in 2010. One of the Ukrainian mayors was interested in municipal service management, because this is one of the most pressing problems of the local communities in Ukraine. He wanted to know how energy is produced from waste and how municipal wastewater is treated and disposed, even though these questions went beyond the thematic scope of the tour. Incidentally, one of the Polish participants worked at the municipal office and specialized in these domains. He was very happy to demonstrate the Polish solutions and explain relevant details. An extra trip was organized for the few interested, in which all group members had to participate. To avoid such situations, a detailed agenda needs to be prepared well in advance.

Study Tour: Content and Themes

Study tours have specific objectives. It is important to define the subject matter and the range of issues to be addressed.

Participants should be informed about the thematic scope of the tour in advance so that they can prepare the relevant questions.

Meeting Locations

Meetings usually take place in facilities provided by institutions and organizations hosting the tour (or their partners). Sometimes all parties meet on neutral ground. All this, of course, depends on the specific circumstances.

I would say that during the tours in which I participated locations were well selected, although exceptions do happen. In one of the Polish towns, the mayor and his officials met with a Ukrainian delegation outside of the municipal office. During their presentation they talked a lot about their highly efficient information office. They mentioned that their building also hosts social benefit organizations. Unfortunately, their Ukrainian guests were unable to see that or fully comprehend the ways in which the theory they heard was put to practice.

Another example was a meeting held by a social benefit organization at its offices located in the historical building of a museum. Our hosts talked about their projects, gave out brochures printed in Polish, and asked if there were any questions. After that the meeting was over. The group left the building disappointed. They didn't understand much of what had been said and they were very sorry that they had not been given a chance to visit the museum. The long presentation on its fascinating collection had not been illustrated with an actual tour.

Experience shows that most successful meetings take place in locations where the topics and issues discussed can be demonstrated in more practical terms. If, let's say, the "charter of public services" is discussed, but the hosts fail to show it, fail to take the group to the stand where the charters are displayed, do not hand them out, do not let the guest see for themselves, the guests will not get the right idea, even if the charter is vividly demonstrated and explained in a multimedia presentation.

Meeting Duration

The first step towards success is to choose the right time for the meeting. Both the day of the week and the duration of the meeting are important. The schedule should be discussed, settled and then strictly observed.

Ukrainian guests are interested in everything. Our Polish partners are sometimes kind enough to organize an extra trip, discuss unplanned topics, find time to answer new questions. This kindness, however, often leads to a change in plans. The group is unable to follow the schedule, they are late for meetings. It is best to set up a clear timeframe at the very beginning of the tour and maintain it.

Number of Participants. What Institutions Do They Represent?

In setting up a meeting it is also important that the number of participants be determined. For the meeting to be a success, the hosts should obtain some information about their guests. They should know what institutions they represent, what they do, etc. This information should be supplied in advance.

Knowing the group helps the hosting institutions prepare for meetings. They will be able to select relevant topics, plan the discussion, anticipate questions.

Topics Discussed in Meetings

Meetings require preparation: presentations, promotional materials, talks delivered by specialists or members of relevant organizations, etc.

I took part in tours during which participants had to listen to 30-minute talks delivered by the mayor's secretary (who showed slides written in Polish) about the town, its inhabitants, and history. After 15 minutes everybody was bored. The interpreter had no other choice but to interpret the slides on display, explain specialist terms (if possible) or talk in general about the specificity of the Polish local self-government system. When anyone asked a question about the budget or infrastructure, they would hear that the answer would be provided by a relevant specialist at a later date, via e-mail. And that this did not really matter, as all the relevant information could be found on the official website. I highly doubt if, upon their return home, any of the guests remembered the town and was willing to look for any additional information on its Polish website.

In our opinion, the meeting should open with **a short presentation of the town: the number of inhabitants, the location of the region on the country**

map (not limited to the province), important places, places of interest, other information, which the hosts deem of value. The same goes for organizations (objectives, tasks, structure, major successes and problems).

A PowerPoint presentation is generally a good idea, as visual aids enhance perception. **This part of the meeting should not be longer than 10 minutes.** Watching and reading slides should not cause discomfort, so it is important to avoid some common errors:

- Do not put too much Polish text on a single slide.
- Avoid using too many numbers and proper names.
- Do not address several diverse issues on a single slide.
- Do not overload slides with graphics (text, photos, graphic symbols in one slide).

After the presentation, when the tour participants have a general idea of the place they have come to visit, there is time for expert talks, presentations delivered by members of relevant organizations, discussions on specific topics, walks around town, scheduled visits at different organizations and institutions.

Summary

In this chapter we have attempted to explain what the Polish experience means for Ukraine. In our opinion joint study tours with representatives of Ukrainian local governments and members of social benefit organizations are an opportunity to learn about the Polish path to effective self-government. After their return, they can establish a dialogue between Ukrainian authorities and citizens working together to solve local problems.

We have described some Ukrainian idiosyncrasies and differences between the western and eastern parts of the country. We thought it important to stress that, in Western Ukraine, people trust state structures more than they trust other people, while the opposite is true for Eastern Ukraine. In the East, more faith is placed in people than in institutions.

We have been collaborating with the ZNAK Christian Culture Foundation, our Polish partner, for six years now. Based on this experience, we have put together a catalogue of the most important topics of interest for Ukrainian visitors.

We realize that most people working in administrative structures and NGOs have extensive experience in organizing study tours. However, most of their Ukrainian visitors come from the western parts of the country. They are usually well acquainted with processes evolving in Poland; they have access to Polish television channels; they often originate from places involved in joint collaboration with Polish partners. In this chapter we have attempted to define issues of interest and importance to representatives of local self-governments and social benefit organizations in Eastern Ukraine. In eastern regions of the country, partnerships with Polish twin towns and institutions still prove to be the exception rather than the rule.

Poland has had a lot of good experience and the Polish people are happy to share it, while in Ukraine there are many enthusiasts willing to implement their solutions.

Organizing Study Tours: The Polish Perspective

Sylwia Gajownik,
Ewa Skoczkowa

Introduction

Suggestions and guidelines described in this chapter are lessons learned from many years of experience in organizing study tours for visitors chiefly from Ukraine and Belarus, but also from Russia, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan.

We have gained invaluable knowledge through organizing study tours as part of the *Working Together. How to Effectively Share the Polish Experience in Transformation* project subsidized by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation through an open grant programme called *RITA: Region in Transition*.

We sincerely hope that our insights and suggestions prove useful to readers organizing a study tour or planning to hold a meeting with visitors from post-Soviet states.

Before the group comes to Poland

Content and Themes

1) Thematic Scope

Generally speaking, when the thematic scope of the tour is too broad (e.g. “Democracy in Poland”, “Birth and Growth of Civil Society in Poland”, “Civil Society in Poland: the Current State of Affairs”), the project is rarely successful. The introduction to everything becomes in fact an introduction to nothing.

If you plan to address a broad range of issues, because you want your guests to see a country organized according to different principles than their own (which, for example, in the case of Belarus, is a legitimate objective), you need to realize that you are facing an extremely difficult task.

As organizers you need to present a very general idea (be it democracy or civil society) in such a way so as to cover its key aspects. You are responsible for the thematic scope of the tour, so if you are planning discussions on democracy in Poland, you may:

- present the system of public administration in Poland (emphasizing the role and structure of local self-governments);
- talk about the role of NGOs and their involvement in solving local and social problems;
- discuss limits to the freedom of speech and the principles of free media.

We would suggest keeping this order of meetings and discussions as it gives our guests the best opportunity to understand our country and its system.

Several years ago we organized study tours for social leaders from Belarus as part of a broad initiative to support the idea of civil society in their country. Having to deal with a very broad thematic range, we chose to focus on several important points (described above) and we used them as key for selecting institutions and experts. We were careful to keep the suggested order of presentations: self-government – NGOs – media. While arranging the visits, we asked each hosting institution to present a specific topic. We invited our guests to commune and district offices so that they could get an idea of what a local self-government is, and of its competence (we tried to show the extent of its budget and legislative autonomy within the state). We met with members of an NGO to talk about the scope of its activity, its real influence on the life of the community, its collaboration with self-governments in working on public tasks (looking for financial support, project management). We met with journalists who talked about the principle of free speech in practice. While organizing the first tour, we failed to define the precise scope of topics. In consequence, several meetings featured inconsistencies between the actual presentations and the intended subject matter, although most of the speakers were very well prepared. Next time we paid special attention to defining the thematic scope in very precise terms. When we asked tour participants for feedback, we found that they appreciated the order and content of the meetings. They pointed

out that it was a good idea to begin the tour the way we had: with a presentation of the local self-government. Having a clear idea of Poland's administrative division and of the relationship between the authorities and the non-profit sector, they were able to quickly understand Polish solutions in those areas.

NOTE:

The more detailed arrangements regarding the programme that you make with the person hosting the meeting (the hosting institution), the more certain you can be that their presentations will address the intended issues. In fact, it may be best to discuss or write down a detailed scenario for the whole meeting.

Hosting institutions find these hints and suggestions very helpful. They can easily limit the wide array of topics and activities to those of real interest to a particular group. They don't need to make tentative inquiries during the actual meeting. They know what's important, so they don't run the risk of discouraging anybody.

This applies first and foremost to large institutions and organizations. Here, the person meeting the guests is unable to cover all the relevant aspects of structure and activity. There may be a problem if the thematic scope defined by the organizers is too broad or too general. With a more detailed agenda, institutions hosting meetings may involve people with the right area of expertise.

As a member of the ZNAK Foundation I often host meetings with various groups from Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and Moldova. I have encountered a number of recurring problems. First, there are situations in which I do not know the general theme of the tour and I know nothing about the participants. Organizers ask me (again in very general terms) to talk about our Foundation, its activities and the third sector in Poland. I don't know what to say to make my presentation relevant or interesting to that particular set of guests. And so when the meeting starts I always ask them to briefly introduce themselves and the institutions they represent. I also ask what they expect from the visit to my organization. This is my improvised attempt at adapting my presentation to the needs of the participants.

Another important problem to point out would be no or little support from the appointed interpreter. People asked to interpret meetings often lack adequate

training to deal with the issues addressed at our meetings (for some organizers it's enough if they know Polish; they are usually students of Russian Language and Literature). When this happens, participants are either bored or visibly surprised at whatever I tell them. I know enough Russian to know when an interpreter not only fails to convey the message, but also misrepresents what I am saying. Many non-professional interpreters ask me to explain issues they are struggling with (e.g. what a public benefit organization actually is), because they lack basic knowledge in that field. If that is the case, they really struggle with the process, unable to provide an adequate interpretation.

We always manage to save the day; our participants are intensely curious and very open. Both sides always go to great lengths to communicate and understand one another. But can we really say that we are sharing knowledge or experience? These meetings turn into pleasant conversations about Poland and the countries our guests come from. They are very interesting, but the tour is reduced to a trip with some didactic content. It falls short of a real study tour, whose objective is to explore the Polish experience in transformation.

2) Selecting participants

Planning a schedule is easier with homogenous groups (representatives of self-governments and NGOs, journalists and professionals all specializing in a given field). You can set up a meeting between members of the non-profit sector and self-government officials involved in collaboration with NGOs. A group of self-government officials can meet with journalists interested in local policy-making and solving local issues.

The situation becomes far more complex in projects where you bring together people from different fields and sectors. This means a lot of work and effort for both the organizers and the institution hosting the meeting.

While organizing study tours we had to accommodate people from a wide range of fields. A sailor, an artist, an opposition activist, sovhoz workers (incidentally, from the sovhoz run by Lukashenko before he moved to Minsk), a small business owner, a pensioner, university students, teachers, librarians, a medical doctor: they all came on the tour to observe civil society in the Polish context. Every single person was interested in issues close to their area of expertise or their life situation. We faced an extremely difficult task in maintaining that interest alive in all the sites we were to visit. Still, the first and often only question asked involved wages, usually followed by the comment: "In Belarus we will have to wait 100 years to have

this". We had a fairly good idea of what the group was interested in, and we realized that we needed to define the theme of every meeting in very precise terms. It was necessary to be able to tailor the programme to specific expectations.

When planning the first project carried out in 2006 as part of an assistance package to Ukraine, we had the idea to invite participants interested in the same issues. Working in close collaboration with our Ukrainian partner, we try to obtain as much information about our guests as possible well before the tour starts.

In spite of careful planning, there is always the risk that one of the participants may wish to focus on the more recreational aspects of the tour, which may negatively influence the entire group. To avoid this, we have to work closely with our partners responsible for the makeup of the group (this usually means the coordinator appointed to work with the Polish side). Ideally, the coordinator comes on the tour as the group leader; if this is not possible, they should appoint a leader. Having a group leader helps us avoid many misunderstandings and unpleasant situations.

While working on our first project financed as part of the Polish Foreign Aid programme run by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2006 (this was also our first joint collaboration with our Ukrainian partner, an institution we had not previously known), we had to deal with an unfortunate situation and inappropriate behaviour from one of the participants. Our Ukrainian partners appointed one of their employees to lead the group. However, from the very beginning, this person seemed uninterested in the purpose of the tour and unwilling to collaborate with us. She refused to rise to her responsibility as group leader, which resulted in some unacceptable behaviour from another participant, who made loud comments during presentations, left meetings to take a walk, distracted other participants, criticized our suggestions, and made complaints about the interpreter working in Ukrainian instead of Russian. We repeatedly attempted to mollify the situation, but to no avail. It was impossible to seek support from the group leader, as she was one of the few people who enjoyed the company of this man. After two days the situation suddenly changed. The man radically altered his behaviour and we were able to successfully complete all the points on our schedule. At the end of the tour the man was openly friendly; he heartily thanked the interpreter for his work and praised us for our efforts as organizers. We were quite at a loss. Later on we found out that the other participants had successfully staged their own "intervention". They were embarrassed by this man's behaviour; this was not the impression they

wanted to make on their hosts and organizers. This time it was the group leader who had failed; the other participants were willing to take over her role, but such situations should not occur.

3) Partners in Poland and Partners Abroad: Joint Collaboration

Institutions funding programmes for international collaboration (e.g., the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its *Polish Development Assistance*) require their applicants to have partners from the country with which they plan to collaborate.

Institutions frequently search for partners via the Internet. You receive a Partnership Letter (one of the formal requirements for the grant programme), but the fact remains that you have not worked with this organization or institution before. You may later find out that they have a different vision of your partnership. They want to limit their role to that of a subcontractor whose only task is to assemble the group and bring them to Poland.

NOTE:

Naturally, even with long-term partners there has to be a first time. The Web is a good place to search; today it is one of the most efficient ways to find partner institutions from abroad. We have to remember, however, that we need to define their role in every project. This refers to both first-time collaborators and long-term partners. They need to realize that their share is as important as our own; they are an equal partner and not a subcontractor, and this is what they get paid for. If they do not have a clear idea of our expectations, the partnership will be difficult.

To the extent in which this is possible, we should communicate with our partner organizations **in their language** instead of in English, which (especially in the East) poses certain problems and leads to misunderstandings. If we communicate in English, our partners may put off replying to our letters/emails because they cannot understand our request or locate a person able to word a reply in that language. This truly complicates the communication process.

Many organizations make the common mistake of not consulting their ideas with partners from abroad. Incidentally, this is also true for already established

relationships. From our perspective this is of utmost importance, a prerequisite to success. Of course not all problems are solved right away. Sometimes partners don't object because they do not understand their role in the project and complete appointed tasks only to satisfy the Polish organizers.

Unequal balance is detrimental to the process. If the choice of participants is random or ill-advised, it will be difficult to determine their needs and areas of interest. Partners aware of their role in the project can prepare participants for the tour and inform them of relevant differences between the two countries.

All the points discussed above have a direct impact on the result of our efforts. A study tour is not a trip to a foreign country but an opportunity for the participants to learn how to use the Polish experience and implement relevant solutions in their own country (and this is the crucial objective of the whole project).

NOTE:

Your partners from abroad play a key role in planning the makeup of the group. The better prepared you are at this stage, the more certain you can be of the final success (in terms of content and issues addressed during the tour).

Usually, the participant selection criteria must be defined already in the application for funding. They should be consulted with partners from abroad. Your partners know their country better and know their actual needs, so they are able to suggest optimal ideas and solutions.

If you base the plan solely on your own ideas, you may encounter problems during the execution stage, which make it impossible to select participants according to the defined criteria. When that happens, your guests may have no interest in the issues addressed during the tour.

Logistics

1) Preparing the Visit

- **Visas.** You need to prepare for this step well in advance, because visa application procedures are time consuming. Visas will be issued free of charge if you send a formal invitation (detailing the purpose of the visit

and the source of funding) to the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland. You may include the cost of a two-way trip for the visas in the budget as this expense is directly linked to the execution of the project.

NOTE:

Arranging study tours: planning the schedule and number of meetings per day. We suggest planning fewer meetings per day so that they can be prolonged (if the parties get along and the hosts are willing to give you more time). This is a better strategy than having to cut the meeting short so that you are not late for the next event on the schedule. It is more productive to allow more time for one meeting than plan one-hour visits to several places. With longer meetings, tour participants will be able to acquire new information, ask relevant questions, and explore the presented material in more depth. It is impossible to absorb too much information and productively visit too many places in such a short time.

- **Language of the tour.** Sometimes the official language of a given country is not the appropriate choice. You should consult this matter with your partners from abroad and find an interpreter.

When organizing study tours for groups from Belarus, we assumed that Belarusian would be the language of their choice. There were no major problems with understanding our interpreter, but when we asked for feedback at the end of the tour the interpreter had to help our guests fill in forms phrased in Belarusian. People in Belarus generally speak Russian and, more to the point, write in Russian. Despite our best intentions, we caused unnecessary difficulties. Some participants gave us evaluation forms filled in in Russian, apologizing for not being able to complete them in Belarusian.

- **Prepare brief information about the most important differences** between the two countries in terms of their administrative divisions, competence of respective institutions, education and health care systems, etc. Polish organizers should **know enough about the other country** to be able to assess what the group may find different or difficult to un-

derstand. You should send this information to your partner abroad, so that the group has a chance to read it in advance and prepare questions.

Often, after the first meeting at the Marshall's Office in Małopolska, and a simple presentation on Poland's administrative system and the division of competences between authorities, our guests would tell us that they had no problems with understanding new information. However, during the very next meeting they would ask questions about the same issues. Ultimately, we concluded that the Polish system is so different from the reality of the other countries that our guests need to prepare in advance. We saw this as the only way to save time previously spent on repetitions and explanations. The degree of novelty is too high to assimilate new information quickly.

The Execution Phase

This part is relevant to both the organizers and the hosting institutions.

The success of the study tour also depends on the hosting institutions being suitably prepared. While planning a visit, it is a good idea to ask organizers for detailed information about the participants, their areas of interest, and issues they wish to address.

Ukrainian guests would often ask about failed projects, corruption (the topic we often address on our study tours) or other negative examples. One of the officials they met, when asked about corruption, replied: "We don't have this problem. There were some rumours sometime in the past, but we know nothing about it. It wasn't us". When asked about failures, they replied: "Well, we managed to succeed in everything we had planned. There were no problems. There was something wrong somewhere in the past, but it wasn't us". Later on we asked the participants to evaluate the programme. They said: "If you encourage us to avoid your mistakes in our transformation, then we should have been able to see these mistakes and discuss them". Success stories only instruct them to follow Poland's example and they are simply not enough.

NOTE:

Study tour participants are neither voters (for self-governments) nor inspectors sent by funding organizations (for NGOs). You should talk openly about your problems, failures and mistakes, because this is what your visitors expect. They will appreciate being treated like partners and not a target audience.

In the Course of the Meeting

1) Not everybody knows Poland.

We cannot assume that a guest from abroad will find everything as obvious as it is to us. The Polish administrative system and the division of power, education and health care systems, rules for funding NGOs, etc., need not be clear for everybody. Often speakers go beyond the key issues addressed in their presentations. Listeners usually have problems with understanding these digressions, so it is important to provide relevant explanations. This may be done by the speaker, a representative of the hosting institution, or the host of the meeting (the Polish organizer). Participants less interested in a given topic may even say that they understand what is being said, because they want the meeting to end faster. Sometimes the lack of interest in an issue and the wish to end a meeting are the only reasons why guests say that they do not need interpreting.

During many study tours, especially in meetings held at self-government offices, we would hear: "We are one big Slavic family, we can understand one another without interpreters. We speak similar languages and share similar experiences, so there's no need for extra effort. I'm sure it is the same here for you." "So these guests are from Ukraine? Then I'm sure they know exactly what's going on here". Many Polish self-governments have established relations with their counterparts in Western Ukraine. When you live near the border, it is easy to follow the developments in Poland or travel to Poland. Many representatives of local governments from Western Ukraine know the Polish language and alphabet. This is not true for Eastern Ukraine, but, try as we might, we find it extremely difficult to explain that people living near the Russian border may have a different experience. We always

use this argument and are invariably met with disbelief. Surely, Ukraine is not so big and doesn't stretch that far away from Poland? Smiles and nods do not have to mean understanding, usually they are a sign of politeness. Guests from Eastern Ukraine, hundreds of kilometres away from Poland, know nothing or next to nothing about our country. They find the Polish language and alphabet as foreign as Turkish is foreign to us. And for this reason you need to provide simple, clear explanations, so as not to discourage your guests with too much data and information. Do not assume that you are dealing with colleagues interested in the same issues and sharing the same knowledge.

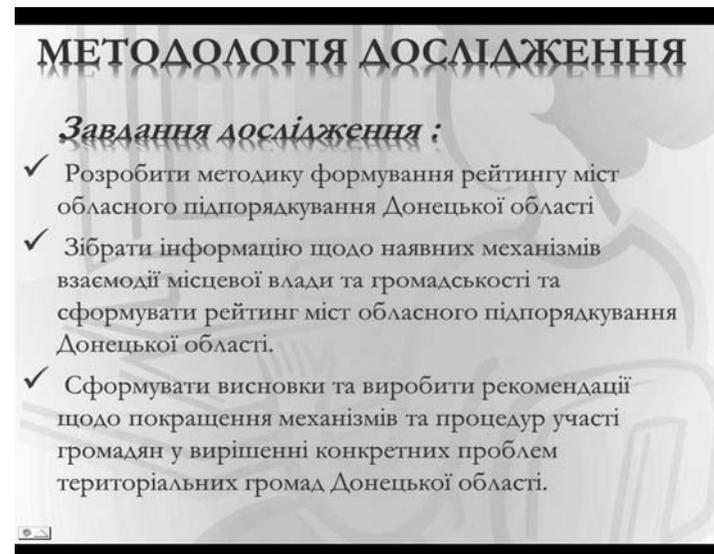
2) Preparing a presentation (if you must)

The only person who may find a presentation prepared in Polish of any material use is the interpreter who interprets what is being said (or, as it often happens, read) by the speaker.

Most presentations are fairly general (prepared in advance for various events including meetings with foreign delegations). The overwhelming majority are written in Polish and contain too much unnecessary information. The speaker reads the text, which is faithfully interpreted, even though the audience does not stand much of a chance to understand the general idea. Only Polish participants can read and follow the entire presentation.

“Our Ukrainian guests were so enthusiastic about our presentation! Everybody was smiling and nodding. And when, three days later, we delivered it to a Spanish delegation, everybody fell asleep”. This is what we heard in a Polish city hosting one of our study tours in 2010. I might add that a single slide contained a full standard page of text with no margins; every single word was read out during the meeting.

To illustrate that experience from the Ukrainian perspective, we have provided the slide below. Read it fast, as slides during most presentations are changed in pace with the speaker. This shows how difficult it is to make use of information presented in such a way:



NOTE:

If possible, you should prepare a presentation specifically for a particular group of guests. Do not recycle presentations given at other meetings.

You should not use multimedia presentations to impress the audience with technical advancements. All materials and aids should serve a single purpose: to convey knowledge and experience. If you do want to use a presentation, do not forget that you are working with an interpreter. This is the person who conveys your message to the guests.

It is important to display slides long enough for the interpreter to finish speaking.

Usually slides are changed when speakers finish discussing or reading them. Some speakers gesture for a slide to be changed, forgetting that the audience are waiting for the interpreter to convey the message. This task becomes truly daunting if there is a lot of information to interpret.

The interpreter is the only person who can make use of a presentation overflowing with data. This is the only person who can make sure that your guests understand the message.

Our guests will have great problems with understanding a slide presentation in which there is too much text and no clear context (often obscure due to structural differences between countries). The text displayed should be short and to the point. Slides should contain more visual illustrations. If you want to show photos, there should be a maximum of two photos per slide.

Visual aids should **supplement** the talk, it is never a good idea to just read the text from your slides.

You should also avoid using too many acronyms that are well-known in Poland but make no sense to guests from abroad (like NFZ, which stands for National Health Fund). Acronyms complicate an already complex message.

Meetings with representatives of local self-government structures:

Speakers in these institutions usually use maps of various administrative divisions. Polish participants will know where a given region is located in Poland because they know their country. Maps are far less legible to guests from abroad.

Regional maps should always be shown against the background of the whole country. This is the only way for guests to get a general idea of the size of a given town/commune, its location with respect to major cities, railway lines, borders. This is important for people unfamiliar with the region.

Do not provide detailed information about history, do not name too many towns or people in authority. You lose time when listing all this data, because it will require explanations and interpreting (and will be forgotten in a flash). It is better to provide a general introduction.

In our region (show the region highlighted against the map of Poland) there are five communes and two major towns. The nearest international airport is located 50 km away from [a selected location], etc.

It may seem counterintuitive, but general introductions are much more interesting and informative than a set of complicated names or historical dates and events (these are often clear only to people well acquainted with Polish history).

The correct image to text ratio makes it easier for the listeners to understand and remember relevant information. If your slides contain little text, you can translate it into Russian or Ukrainian. With little cost and effort you can make your presentation much more accessible.

If a presentation is prepared and delivered with the above guidelines in mind, participants are able not only to understand and remember new information, but also to listen with real interest and actively participate in the meeting, asking relevant questions. They have a real opportunity to explore our experience. Such meetings turn into lively discussions; participants do not feel they are watching a promotional film.

An example of a slide illustrating a speech:



3) During a study tour or expert workshop, **one of the Polish organizers (the content supervisor or the tour coordinator) should host the meeting:** monitor its course, content, and timing, make sure everybody is interested in whatever is happening at the moment, prevent part of the group from excluding other participants from the discussion (if they are less interested in a given issue).

4) **Interpreting: the joint effort between the host and the interpreter.** In meetings with international groups interpreting is the key factor. You mustn't assume (especially when dealing with your closest neighbours) that Slavs "will always find a way to communicate". You should choose your interpreter based on the profile of the tour. It is not enough to know a language to be able to interpret. Interpreters must be familiar with the terminology used in meetings. A degree in philology is not synonymous with the more specialized knowledge of professional jargon used in administration or the non-profit sector.

NOTE:

To avoid confusion, it is always a good idea to warn speakers (before the meetings and workshops begin) that you may have to interrupt them. If the representative of the hosting institution/speaker/expert for some reason fails to realize that what they are saying may be too difficult for the audience to grasp, the person hosting the meeting should intervene (see pt. 3).

If the project team does not include a content supervisor and the tour coordinator is responsible for both the logistics and content supervision, they should host and monitor meetings. Interpreters cannot be responsible for content supervision.

Many organizers, however, place such expectations on interpreters. An interpreter is forced to not only interpret what is being said, but also to monitor the content and make sure that the audience understands new information. Sometimes interpreters are able to do this quite fluently (they interpret and add the necessary footnotes); usually, however, this leads to unsought confusion on both sides, especially if the interpreter hired for the given meeting is an amateur.

Over the many years of organizing study tours, only once (while working with a group from Belarus) did I meet an amateur interpreter who explained the more difficult points while interpreting. His performance was so skillful that he was able to follow the speaker without having to ask him to repeat parts of his speech. He was able to discern the more difficult or obscure elements and provide relevant explanations. He knew enough about Poland and Belarus to provide a very fluent rendition. This was the only time, however, that I met such a proficient amateur interpreter. In my opinion, while working with non-professional interpreters, you should not burden them with additional responsibilities. Interpreting what is being said is enough of a task. Not everybody has skills equal to the protagonist of my anecdote.

NOTE:

Every interpreter (both professional and non-professional) must be informed in advance about the details of each visit (location, topics and issues to be addressed). They need to be given an opportunity to prepare for the meeting; they need to study the context, subject matter, and terminology. Ideally, the interpreter should know quite a lot about both countries (administrative structure and organization, education system, etc.), and be prepared to interpret speeches about issues that the audience will find difficult to understand (and which the group coordinator/meeting host knows). When a commune official talks about "roads in the district" or an NGO representative talks about "1% [tax on annual income] for public benefit organizations", the host can supply the missing explanation or ask the speaker to do so.

5) **Not every meeting with guests from abroad must end in a partnership agreement or joint projects.** If you are interested in joint collaboration, then tell your guests about this; if you are not, then turn their offer down. It is better to give a direct refusal than to declare your willingness to collaborate in the long run and then, when your guests take more definitive steps, ignore their efforts.

We remember a situation in which representatives of a local self-government enthusiastically assured our visitors of their willingness to collaborate, so the representatives

of the Ukrainian cities and towns prepared the relevant documents, while the ZNAK Foundation supplied their translation. We handed the documents over to the representatives of the self-government and we are still waiting for a reply even though a whole year has passed. The Ukrainian officials are disappointed and we feel embarrassed. This experience was clearly a waste of time and money.

Study Tour in Progress: How to Keep Your Guests Happy

Hotel and Food

When organizing study tours we always make sure that the hotel and restaurant/ eatery (if not located in the same building) are in close vicinity. In Kraków we try to book facilities close to the town centre. This is possible even with fairly limited budgets. Tour participants always commend us for this arrangement; usually after one day they feel comfortable enough to visit the town on their own, especially if there is some time between the last meeting of the day and dinner. Our guests can spend their free time on activities of their choice; they know there is a beautiful Old Town in close vicinity and they will not lose their way. Also, we never plan big meals during the day, especially if we are going on a long tour to a given location. Eateries or canteens should be quiet and peaceful with no crowds filing in and out. We can eat dinner, stay a bit longer and talk. We know that our guests really appreciate these informal conversations, as this is what they always emphasize when the tour is finished and we ask for their feedback.

Finding accommodation in the vicinity of the Main Market Square in Kraków (not more than 20 minutes' walk away) is a good idea for one more reason. Tour participants can run errands and walk around the town in their own free time. An official meeting in the town centre (and many meetings take place in various locations around town) is no longer the only opportunity to do this.

In 2006 one of the groups stayed at a hotel that was very far away from the town centre. There was quite a lot of free time after meetings and tours, but the journey to the hotel took so long that the participants were too tired to venture anywhere on their own. They tried to squeeze time for short errands in between meetings and that often made us late as we had to wait for the whole group to assemble.

Sightseeing: Free Time

We always invite our guests on sightseeing tours before meetings and visits begin. We can satisfy their curiosity about a historical town and they can find their bearings in a new place, locate shops and services. We are happy to accompany the group in their free time, but only if they are willing to share it with us. If we notice that tour participants would prefer to be left to their own devices, we try not to impose. We know our guests have maps and guides with all the necessary information. They stay near the Old Town, so they can get around on their own. For the entire duration of the study tour they can contact a member of the organizing team who speaks Ukrainian.

NOTE:

We are happy to provide help with practicalities: check currency exchange rates, direct participants to the nearest or best exchange office, explain the VAT refund policy on purchases, provide information on the local transportation system, and explain common rules of conduct in public places (smoking and drinking regulations, etc.). This is important as there are big differences between countries in this respect.

Materials for Tour Participants

You can put together a **short brochure** with the most important information: organizers' contact details, Polish emergency phone numbers, contact details for the relevant consulate, the hotel and eating facilities (if applicable). Remember about the appropriate language versions.

In bigger towns and cities it is a good idea to include a map with the important locations marked out (hotel, restaurant, lecture hall for workshops). The printed programme to be handed out should be detailed and include information on the types of meetings and the required dress code, addresses of hosting institutions and organizations (particularly useful when a participant is late or has to get to the meeting on their own). Address details should be printed in Polish, so that tour participants can ask for directions in the street.

If you do not have access to city guides and leaflets in the appropriate language versions, you can include the most important information in your brochure. The most practical and economical are computer printouts formatted and cut into small pocket-size booklets that can be carried at all times with little effort.

More often than not we have asked tour participants to mark changes in the schedule on their programmes only to find that they do not have the printouts. The standard A4 format turned out to be too cumbersome as most of our guests wanted to keep it unfolded. Our experience also tells us that it is a good idea to prepare for FAQs. There are many frequently asked questions, which are difficult to answer without some research: average wage, wages in some professions (medical doctor, teacher, policeman, clerk, factory worker), average home and land prices in the area, average service and utility charges and bills, prices for consumer staples, USD and EUR currency exchange rates. Guests from beyond our eastern border usually assume these things are obvious to us.

Summary

As we stressed in the introduction to this handbook, it was not our intention to highlight mistakes. We wanted to draw special attention to what is important in the process of planning, organizing and executing a study tour. Our tips and guidelines will help you ensure that participants understand topics and issues addressed during meetings. This may bring very real results (in the practical application of knowledge and experience explored on the tour) and motivate participants to take action.

We realize that many of our comments and suggestions may seem too obvious to deserve attention. But, as our own experience shows, many important details get lost in the midst of organizational chaos. Even veteran organizers may forget about things or leave out details that their own experience tells them are unnecessary.

You should also bear in mind that the general impression your visitors get during the tour may later be translated into very concrete activities planned in the project. Also, if the experience is positive, Poland will be remembered as a friendly place. Tour participants will be motivated to further explore the Polish experience in transformation and tailor it to the needs of their country. A successful study tour helps build Poland's positive image abroad.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERPRETER

Piotr Kuspys

In the era of globalization and international relations in all possible spheres of human activity, interpreters play an important role. As a person who speaks both the language of the speaker and the language of the audience, an interpreter becomes the key link in the communication process. As such, he or she should meet the challenge: be competent and efficient. Realistically, if our aim is to truly collaborate with our partners (local self-governments, NGOs, business entities) – rather than establish friendly relations – this will be difficult to achieve without a professional interpreter.

In the early stages of planning and informal consultations, basic working knowledge of a language is often enough; you can always ask someone more proficient for help. But later on, when the “real action” begins – during study tours, workshops, specialist discussions (business, legal, etc.) – a person who knows the language but is not a trained interpreter often encounters difficulties. For interpreters and translators, knowing a language is a starting point in the process of professional education. It is a prerequisite for admission to any specialist course in translation or interpreting. This can never be stressed enough; there are simply too many misunderstandings when an interpretation or translation is done by someone lacking not only the necessary theoretical background and practical skills, but also the crucial professional experience.

Do You Really Need to Hire a Professional Interpreter?

After my few introductory remarks the answer to this question seems obvious. I would like to clarify and justify this claim. Many reasons are clear; one,

however, seems to stand out: This is the only way to guarantee quality service. While teachers teach, the task of an interpreter is to facilitate communication. This means that, apart from advanced linguistic competence and proficient knowledge of a language, the interpreter takes the message from one linguistic and cultural context and translates it into another.

This requires profound knowledge of not only the terminology, but also customs, culture, specific disposition. A very good command of a language – and this includes bilingualism (when a person uses two languages with equal fluency such as a foreigner with a native-like command of Polish) – is simply not enough and does not equal the ability to interpret/translate. Specialist vocabulary in many areas is so vast and specific that even an eminent linguist may have problems with understanding a text, let alone interpreting it into another language, if they do not know the subject matter

It is not my intention to go into details regarding this job and the skills it requires. I do want to stress, however, that an interpreter's task is to build understanding between people and nations. It is our ability to communicate, our specialist knowledge in many areas, and our skillful use of professional technique that guarantee a top quality product.

The Interpreter as an Intermediary

Since we now know the difference between an interpreter and someone who knows a foreign language, we can look at what the former really does. Interpreters should interpret and yet they are often perceived as assistants.

This is not much of a problem as long as all the additional responsibilities do not hinder the main task. It should be noted, however, that an interpreter, even when assisting, must not be partial to any of the parties. Interpreters by definition stay neutral in the process of transferring thought; this is the only way in which they can remain professional and credible. They are not allowed to comment on or supplement the speeches they are interpreting.

We are venturing into the realm of professional ethics and the art of interpreting, but my only objective is to demonstrate what the interpreter really does. The suggestion that s/he may supply explanations and additional information while interpreting is simply not plausible.

NOTE:

The interpreter is an intermediary, a crucial link in the communication process, but s/he is neither the sender nor the recipient of the message. And this is something that all parties (the speaker, the audience and the interpreter themselves) need to understand. Often speakers, instead of addressing the audience, address the interpreters beginning with “Tell them that...”, while in fact the speaker should address the audience.

The interpreter's task is to “tell them”. The speaker needs to maintain eye contact with the audience (the visitors), observe their reactions, communicate on a non-verbal level. And the interpreter mustn't disrupt this process. When the time comes for the interpreter to speak, the speaker can gather their thoughts and prepare for the next segment.

Before the Delegation Arrives

Every speech requires preparation. When a delegation visits a district office, a commune office, a school or an NGO, you gather the information you want to convey, prepare a presentation, plan the schedule. In the organizational fervour many people forget about the interpreter. This is not surprising since s/he usually arrives with the delegation and is rarely seen before. Even when they do acknowledge his or her presence, it is usually with an additional chair. They assume that the interpreter is ready to interpret any text or utterance at any time and on the spot.

Professional interpreters will be able to deal with any situation, even though realistically they cannot be walking encyclopedias and cannot have specialist knowledge in all areas. Every speech and meeting is different in terms of subject matter, mode of presentation and audience/participants. The same issue will be discussed differently with various groups of people and in different contexts. Self-government officials talk about finances in a specific manner, while accountants use an entirely different vocabulary. It is true, however, that no matter what, both the mayor and the chief accountant will prepare for the meeting, especially if they are meeting with a delegation from another country. And if the hosts need time to prepare, even though they deal with certain matters every day, the same certainly goes for the interpreter.

NOTE:

Knowing the subject matter is different from knowing a language. Every speech requiring interpreting resembles an exam for which you need to study. Sometimes several hours' worth of interpreting call for several days of preparation: exploring the subject matter and mastering the terminology. This is the only way to do a solid job: interpreting not only words and ideas, but also whatever lies in between the lines.

Non-verbal communication and body language carry a lot of information; they can convey more meaning than words. The interpreter is able to transmit the full message, so that the final product conveys the speaker's intentions. In order to be able to do this, they should receive all materials and presentations well in advance.

In the case of specialist or expert speeches, this is in fact a prerequisite. It lies in the responsibility of the organizer (an NGO or local self-government member involved in international cooperation) to supply a complete set of materials to the interpreter. If the organizer uses a translation agency, it is the agency's responsibility to make sure that the relevant materials are supplied.

All parties involved in international collaboration should realize that supplying relevant materials for interpreters lies in their best interest. The more an interpreter knows about a given topic, the better they are prepared to deliver a high quality product. And this is precisely what matters to all sides of this particular equation: the organizers, the visitors and the interpreter themselves.

Interpreter's Placement

Interpreters usually know where they should stand or sit. Other participants may, however, unintentionally take their place. Interpreters obviously do not need to be honoured, but they do need some space to be able to work.

NOTE:

It would be best to provide a place near the speaker. According to international standards, interpreters stand or sit next to speakers on their left. The reasons for such placement are both pragmatic and psychological. You may have noticed that when world leaders meet, the interpreter always stands right next to the president or prime minister, even though international delegations include many ministers and high-ranking officials.

This principle should apply also to other meetings in which interpreters are present, irrespective of their international status. With such an arrangement we guarantee that both the interpreter and the audience can hear well so that the meeting goes smoothly. The guests do not have to turn their heads between the speaker and the interpreter seated on opposite sides of the table. This also ensures good eye contact between the speaker and the audience, the interpreter and the audience, and the speaker and the interpreter.

If the interpreter stands or sits next to the speaker, everybody can comfortably look at the materials presented during the meeting. Often speakers sit with their faces turned towards the screen and the interpreter is seated with the screen facing his or her side or even back. Interpreters need to look at the screen from time to time to follow the speaker's train of thought. If they must turn in order to do this, they lose eye contact with the speaker and the audience. This happens primarily in meetings with tables arranged for standard negotiations, when delegations sit facing one another. During presentations displayed on the screen the best idea would be to arrange tables to form a U.

Interpreting

During study tours, in meetings where participants share knowledge and experience or hold other international discussions, we use consecutive interpretation: the speaker pauses after several sentences so that the interpreter can interpret them.

NOTE:

More often than not the speaker forgets about the interpreter, delivering a very fast, verbose, uninterrupted speech. When the audience nods their heads, s/he takes it as a sign that they understand what is being said so there is no need to interpret it. In reality, both interpreting and frequent pauses are necessary. This is not about the interpreter's comfort. A professional interpreter will deal with long speeches. For this very reason we have notepads, pens, special abbreviations and symbols for note-taking. More importantly, you do not want to give your audience a reason to get bored or impatient: you want to hold their attention. It is a good idea to share your knowledge in a compelling way and that deserves special attention when you are preparing your speech. While planning a presentation, you should double the time needed to deliver it, as half will be used for interpreting.

When you participate in a meeting with an interpreter present, there is one useful guideline to remember: **take turns** and avoid situations in which several people talk over one another. People interested in a given issue start brainstorming ideas. Everybody wants to talk and to be interpreted. Interpreters have the skill of divided attention, but there are limits to their abilities.

NOTE:

The person hosting the meeting (the speaker or a member of the organizing team) should realize the above and intervene when necessary. The interpreter can also let the speaker know of a problem; this, however, needs to be done very tactfully.

When interest in a given topic peaks, many participants want to know as much as possible and ask the interpreter questions while s/he is interpreting. In the fervour of discussion they do not realize that they are impeding the communication process.

Listening to speeches, questions and comments during tours in the field or visits to factories is a great challenge for any interpreter; it requires enormous

effort and focus. Questions and distractions have a detrimental effect on the quality of the interpreter's performance. Faced with a barrage of questions, the interpreter may have to ask the speaker to repeat parts of the presentation because they were too distracted to follow the train of thought or hear some parts of the speech. These situations are not uncommon, although participants do not do these things out of spite. They simply do not realize the problem, so it is important to point it out. Everybody can have a moment to disengage, look away and let their thoughts stray. The interpreter is the only person at the meeting who cannot do this.

Useful Tips and Guidelines

Wishing to make a good impression, many institutions and organizations make promotional films. This would not be a problem if they included subtitles or dubbing. Unfortunately, many films are shown in Polish. Hosting institutions assume that the interpreter will be able to provide the relevant interpretation. And yet audiovisual translation is an entirely different discipline to interpreting meetings and discussions. It requires professional skill, preparation and equipment for simultaneous interpreting. We miss the point if we have to watch a film and pause it from time to time in order to listen to the interpreter. A common rule says that an interpreter must agree to interpret a film. They can refuse such request if they have not been given an opportunity to study the materials beforehand. This is not done on a whim or out of spite; an interpreter is invoking the code of professional ethics. S/he is the only person fully responsible for the product they offer. If they feel they are not up to the challenge, they should refuse the request.

NOTE:

When you plan to read your speech, you should give the text to the interpreter several days in advance. The same pertains to multimedia presentations containing a lot of text, which will be read out word for word. This may not be an ideal way to deliver a presentation, but many speakers do read their speeches.

When speakers read their presentations, the audience often finds them boring and difficult to understand. Such speeches are also notoriously difficult to interpret. Sentences in a written text are longer, more technical, phrased in ambiguous legal or official jargon. Understanding, processing and interpreting them takes much longer than a few seconds. And a few seconds is the maximum that the interpreter gets.

Standards of Good Practice When Working With an Interpreter

NOTE:

1. Provide the following materials several days before the meeting: presentations, written speeches, information about the meeting, its participants, topics for discussion, objectives. Professional interpreters are obligated to maintain strict confidentiality at every stage of the project.
2. Set the stage before the meeting starts (table arrangement, presentation of visual aids, etc.).
3. Address the audience and not the interpreter. Maintain eye contact with all participants in the meeting.
4. Always finish your sentences. Sometimes speakers pause in the middle of a sentence, not finishing their thought. Interpreters convey the meaning of an utterance and the speaker's intention. We do not translate word for word.
5. When using presentation slides, which include numbers, proper nouns, names and definitions, make sure to change the slide only after the interpreter stops speaking. That way s/he will be able to use the data displayed on the screen.
6. Do not direct questions to the interpreter when they are speaking. Wait until they finish.
7. Make sure the interpreter gets a break from time to time. Meeting participants often ask interpreters to assist them in informal discussions during breaks. In consequence the interpreter works all the time, which is exhausting and may have detrimental effects on the quality of their performance.

Summary

Reading all my comments on the role of the interpreter in meetings held by Polish institutions to share knowledge and experience, readers may feel that our position as interpreters is somehow privileged. After all, I have suggested best practices in working with interpreters but I never said a word about what the actual product of their efforts should be. If indeed I have made such an impression, it could not be further from the truth.

I have intentionally avoided any reflection on the nature of our work or tools of the trade. I wanted to focus on the relationships between the various participants of the meeting, not the activities themselves. Writing from the point of view of the interpreters, I tried to show their perspective.

This introduction is by no means exhaustive; I merely wanted to shed some light on the important aspects of interpersonal communication assisted by an interpreter. This is the first "User's Manual to Interpreters" written for a very specific context.

With these suggestions and a modicum of goodwill you can make sure that all participants in an act of international communication get what they hope for: mutual understanding, an opportunity to share and explore experiences, and satisfaction from the meeting.

About the authors

Grzegorz Demel is a specialist in Cultural and Ukrainian studies, translator and published author. He has published a dozen or so academic papers on Ukraine. Since 2001, he has collaborated with local self-governments, universities, NGOs and their Ukrainian partners as an expert, translator/interpreter and coordinator. He has worked with the ZNAK Foundation for the last ten years. Associated with the Congress of National Minorities of Ukraine. He is interested in the theory and practice of multiculturalism, ethnic issues in Ukraine, as well as the history and culture of the Polish-Ukrainian border. He is an active mountain guide.

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Sylwia Gajownik is an ethnologist. For over a decade she has prepared, coordinated and supervised many projects run by the ZNAK Foundation. Between 2006 and 2010 she coordinated the *Polish Foreign Aid* projects financed by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She worked as a coordinator on various projects and initiatives on global education (2009, 2010), multiculturalism (2002-2010) and public libraries (2007-2008). Since 2003 she has coordinated the *Bridges to the East Institute*, a project set up by the ZNAK

Foundation to promote intercultural dialogue and cross-border collaboration. She organizes internships and study tours for young opposition activists from Belarus. She has co-authored publications on public libraries and youth's activity on the Internet.

Piotr Kuspys holds a PhD in political science. He is a diplomatic translator and interpreter of Ukrainian and Russian. He has authored many academic papers, press commentaries and a book on Polish-Ukrainian relations in the years 1991-2006. He is a commentator and analyst for the Ukrainian section of the BBC World Service, and an expert in international policy at the Amicus Europae Foundation and Pułaski Foundation. He lectures at the UNESCO Chair for Translation Studies and Intercultural Communication at the Jagiellonian University. As an expert and interpreter, he has collaborated with the ZNAK Foundation on many projects in foreign aid financed by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Artem Sabadasz has served as a deputy at the Municipal Council of Avdijevka (Donetsk Oblast) since 2002, where he vice-chaired a standing committee on education, youth, culture and sport. In 2006 he was appointed Secretary of the Council. He has been responsible for the implementation of the Good Governance programme, the ISO system, and various projects on European integration. He collaborates with NGOs and runs the Council website. In 2004 he became president of the Avdijevka Office of THE All-Ukrainian Youth Public Organization. He has organized many local and international conferences, seminars and contests. In 2008 he won the Young Politician category in the Youth of the Year contest.

Ewa Skoczkowa is the Head of the Centre for Social Integration at the Regional Public Library in Kraków; former Head of the Department of Education at the Foundation for Local Democracy (Małopolska Institute of Local Government and Administration in Kraków) and lecturer at the Institute of Social Sciences (Pedagogical University of Kraków). She has worked as a coach, mentor, tutor, and expert on various projects for local leaders, NGOs, public administration structures, and cultural institutions. Between 2006-2010, she collaborated with the ZNAK Foundation as an expert on aid projects funded by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She has taught at many workshops

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About the Znak Foundation

The ZNAK Foundation for Christian Culture was established in 1992 in Kraków by the *Spółeczny Instytut Wydawniczy ZNAK sp. z o.o.* publishing house as a forum for dialogue between culture and religion.

Our key objectives are to promote and strengthen the philosophy of Christian humanism; to promote tolerance, genuine dialogue, mutuality between religions, and cooperation between nations for common benefit and the expression of values; to promote and expand our knowledge of other countries and their cultures (especially those immediately beyond the Polish borders); to promote human rights to self-development and culture by initiating and supporting relevant projects.

Since 2003, the ZNAK Foundation has been working on projects related to Ukraine and, two years later, began its partnership with institutions in Belarus.

- The *Bridges to the East Institute* (2003-2007) was a project in which we organized three international conferences on cross-border cooperation, human rights and citizen rights, as well as workshops for journalists on human rights, visa policy, health care, forest protection and utilization, former state-owned farms and reforms in the state sector of agriculture, agro-tourism, independent media coverage of parliamentary elections, and a case study on the communal problems of a Polish town.
- A conference for representatives of local self-governments from Poland and Ukraine.
- Co-organizing the Academy of Young Diplomats from Poland and Ukraine.
- Sending journalists to the second round of ballots during the Ukrainian Presidential Elections in 2004.

- Internships in campaigns and elections for activists from Belarus.
- Co-organizing internships and study tours for representatives of Belarusian local self-governments (with Polish self-government structures and NGOs)

Between 2006 and 2010 the ZNAK Foundation implemented aid projects financed by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

- 2006: *Ukraine Should Be Transparent* – a series of workshops for local leaders and journalists from Eastern Ukraine on the Polish experience in organizing anti-corruption campaigns and promoting transparency in public life.
- 2007: Ukraine: *Transparent and Accountable Governance as a Key to European Integration*; Belarus: *Internet Providing a Chance to Develop Young Civil Society*.
- 2008: Ukraine: *Implementing Transparency in Local Self-governments in Eastern Ukraine*; Belarus: *www.susvet.info – Young People Report From Around the World*.
- 2010: Ukraine: *Cooperation Between Sectors as Part of Good Governance*.

For more information on our activities, visit www.fundacja.znak.org.pl

