Partnership as a key to innovative community development

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Local governments need an educated community with active civic engagement and social responsibility. In turn, educational institutions benefit from a practical foundation to implement their research and involve students in solving community challenges.

This article highlights three cases of collaboration between educational institutions and local communities in carrying out innovation. Cities with colleges or universities typically exhibit stable development. Higher education institutions generate employment opportunities, attract innovative projects, and serve as hubs for public engagement. Students equipped with innovative thinking skills are prepared to contribute to solving challenges within the local community.

Pereshchepyne is a small town in the Dnipropetrovsk region, located 200 km from the zone of active military actions, and has become a refuge for many forcibly displaced persons. The Center for Analytics and Business Modelling of Sustainable Development at the National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy worked with this community to develop a Strategy.

We noticed three important aspects:

- **Growth of entrepreneurial activity.** IDPs are opening new businesses in the service sector and small and medium-sized enterprises.
- **Fullness of kindergartens and schools.** Even in difficult circumstances, parents try to provide their children with a quality education.
- **Community activity in creating a better life.** People are willing to master new professions and adapt to changes.

The research team facilitated discussions on the strategy, engaging local authorities and the community in the decision-making process. As a result, the community received tools for developing strategic documents, implementing participatory decision-making mechanisms, and strengthening its capacity.

A digital course for seniors was organized in a municipal coworking space VCENTRI Hub in Kyiv. Students from the National Technical University "Kyiv Polytechnic Institute named after Sikorsky" conducted the courses as part of their practice.

Thanks to this initiative:

- ***Seniors learned to use digital services:*** pay utility bills, make doctor's appointments, and transfer meter readings.
- ***Students gained practical teaching experience.***

The community strengthened its digital skills and reduced digital discrimination.

Secondary School No. 5 in Zvyahel, Zhytomyr region, has implemented projects supporting education and environmental changes in the community. The California Miracle project introduced the city's first public composter with California worms, helping to reduce air pollution. The Eco-Furniture Workshop initiative fosters entrepreneurial skills among pupils by teaching them how to create eco-friendly furniture from repurposed materials.

These initiatives demonstrate how educational institutions can cultivate environmental thinking, develop entrepreneurial competencies in young learners, and drive positive ecological change within the community.

Local authorities should consider education as a long-term investment. Educational institutions contribute to economic development, innovation and social activism. Expanding the educational services for the community. It is necessary to support preschool and school education and develop adult education services, new technology, and digital skills.

Creating platforms for cooperation. Facilitation sessions, municipal co-working, and volunteer initiatives can help unite the efforts of students, businesses, and the community.

Partnerships between local authorities and educational institutions are a powerful tool for providing innovation in the community. Successful cases in Ukraine show that through cooperation, it is possible to improve educational opportunities and make communities stronger, resilient, socially responsible, and economically sustainable.