

Foundational element: Capacity Building at local level



Why this focus area?

The lack of local capacity is often sighted across Bulgaria and the European Union (EU) as a reason for slow absorption rates or slow progress toward development results. Local government capacity is essential for achieving development objectives because this is the level responsible for implementing and delivering many of the basic services that communities need to thrive, including basic infrastructure. Strong local government capacity means that a local government has the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to plan, implement, and manage these services effectively. Local governments in Bulgaria operate in a very complex planning, financing, and delivery, and this places an even heavier burden on the local level to operate within the legal boundaries of the system while meeting the needs of local residents.

What is capacity?

Capacity does not have a single meaning and does not refer to a single challenge; it can take the form of administrative capacity (the ability to carry out administrative tasks efficiently and effectively), human resource capacity (having the correct number and quality of staff), financial capacity (ability to generate revenue, manage budgets, and access funding), and legal and regulatory capacity (ability to understand and comply with a legal framework and make local regulations within that framework). Pursuing a compact cities approach requires a range of capacities from the local government and its officials. This underpins the multidisciplinary approach adopted in this project from identifying tools, content, to the selection and invitation of specific participants to learning events.

Approach adopted in this project

The World Bank team aimed to deliver a pragmatic, hands-on, capacity-building program that regularly convened local and other key stakeholders to learn through practice. Workshops offered a balanced combination of presentations and group work, in which participants could explore the application of best practices by engaging in creative discussions on selected case studies from the host city. Site visits were an integral part of each workshop and were designed to utilize the sites as a canvas for application of newly introduced tools and approaches and to enable more informal interactions and peer learning.

Learning materials were presented in a manner that was accessible to a wide audience and included a high number of practical examples of best practice from Bulgaria and globally.

The presentation of each specific tool, in addition to its detailed description, included a rationale for its selection as well as good practices for its implementation.

Various facilitated and small group discussion formats were utilized in each workshop. Specifically the World Café approach is an easy-to-implement method that helps create a living space for collaborative dialogue around important work topics and issues. The presumptions of the World Café are that the necessary knowledge and wisdom are already available in the group, and collective ideas are born when we give space for individual sharing, connecting different opinions, active listening, and discovering common themes and questions.

Figure 1. Principles in World Café discussions



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Participants confirmed the effectiveness of the chosen approach for conducting the workshops and rated the events very high in the post-events feedback survey.

- "I am impressed by the attention to the participants and the extremely hospitable hosts. Recommendation—let there be more such seminars!"
- "Very good seminar! Different, interesting, current, having potential and future. All of us who participated in this project are looking forward to a new meeting with friendships already made and new challenges to come. We hope that at least a small part of our project [ideas] will be realized in the future."

The overall framework for A Compact City approach and other pillars, as well as tools and techniques utilized and developed during this project, are discussed in more detail in the other knowledge notes in this series.